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ARISTOTLE ON THE ORIGINS OF COMEDY

ABSTRACT: Aristotle formulates two complementary theses (a ritual and a grammatological one) on the provenance of comic drama; both were forecast by the comic playwrights of the fifth century. On one hand, comedy is said to have originated from the leaders of phallic processions, a type of ceremony attested for Attica and other areas of Greece by philological and archaeological evidence. Already in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* (241–79), the main hero's phallic festival represents a small-scale "proto-comedy", by means of which the celebration of peace is set up as a kind of regress to the ultimate roots of the comic spectacle. Apart from the comic actors' phallic costume, which was declining in Aristotle's time, the aforementioned theory was chiefly inspired by a consciousness of the deeper phallic nature of comic drama, which traditionally ends with the hero's sexual triumph. On the other hand, Aristotle holds up iambic poetry as a grammatological and thematic precursor of comedy. Comic writers such as Cratinus and Aristophanes had exploited the same idea to fashion entire episodes of their plays (the finale of the *Peace*, Cratinus' *Archilochoi*). It is likely that fifth-century sophists and intellectuals had discussed these issues, and their opinions may have motivated the comic poets' phantasmagorical creations.

À LA RECHERCHE D'UN LIVRE PERDU

In 1924, the Greek intellectual, theosophist, and pioneer socialist Plato Drakoulis (1858–1942) published in Athens a strange little booklet of occult and spiritualist content, under the title *The Azure Isle, viz. The Post-*

* My long-time friend, colleague, and collaborator Stavros Tsitsiridis read the first draft of this essay and salvaged me from serious omissions and mistakes. He has also made available to me many indispensable works on the Aristotelian *Poetics*. To say merely that I thank him, would have been an understatement. Gratitude is a poor word to adequately express my debt to him. Obviously, it must not be assumed that he would agree with every thesis forwarded in my essay, and he must not be held accountable for the idiosyncratic views that I express.

Earthly Life (*Ἡ Κυανῆ Νῆσος, ἤτοι ὁ μεταγήινος βίος*). The text of the book consisted of reports supposedly sent from the beyond by the soul of the British journalist William Thomas Stead, who had been drowned in the notorious shipwreck of the "Titanic" in 1912. A decade after his untimely death, Stead's daughter made contact with her deceased father's spirit with the help of a well-known psychic medium in London. Through the medium's intervention, the late Stead dictated to his daughter a series of communications, describing in detail the conditions of the otherworld and the everyday life of the souls that have passed away and migrated there. Several universal *topoi* of eschatological literature —ranging from Plato and Dante to Madame Blavatsky— can be traced in Stead's pronouncements; they are sporadically intermingled with ideals of utopian socialism, which Drakoulis was one of the first to introduce in Greece.[1]

According to Stead's information, the ultimate destination of the deceased souls is a transcendental sphere at the remotest limits of space, the so-called "Real World"; our own, material reality of living creatures is only a shadowy reflection of that sublime order of being. The souls there exist in a state of unremitting alertness, intent on spiritual development and dedicated to the cultivation of love. However, before they reach that paradisiacal sphere, souls are required to spend some time in an intermediary place of preparation, where they find occasion to gradually detach themselves from the habits, desires, and sorrows of earthly life; only thus can they be liberated and acquire the ability to proceed to the final state of spiritual felicity. The intermediary location is the Azure Isle, a heavenly body in outer space, at a colossal distance from the Earth, where everything is plunged in an intense blue light. In the course of their purification at the isle, the souls may continue the noblest and most beneficial pursuits which they had cherished on earth. There are musical conservatories and concert chambers, playgrounds for sport, dance halls and ballrooms.[2] For the people of a literary and erudite disposition, there are also vast libraries, which store all the books that have ever been written; one may find on their shelves even lost works of inestimable value, which are no longer possible to read in the world of mortals.[3]

In spite of the enthusiasm demonstrated by illuminated spirits, from Conan Doyle and W. B. Yeats to E. R. Dodds, I retain a modicum of

1. On Drakoulis' work and personality, see Noutsos (1990) 163–83; Noutsos (1991) 265–90; Benakis (2000).
2. Drakoulis (1924) 32–64.
3. Drakoulis (1924) 44.

suspiciousness towards the reports of psychics regarding the topography of the beyond. Nevertheless, I feel strongly tempted by the idea of that universal collection of writings kept at the Azure Isle — a concept that resembles the Dantean Purgatory transfigured under the influence of Borges' Library of Babel. If such an all-comprehensive book repository exists in a transcendental dimension, we may imagine that some of its holdings will be exceedingly popular and sought after by the blessed souls. In particular, certain famous lost works will doubtless be requested by too many potential readers, and the waiting list for getting one's hands on them must be extremely long. The second book of Aristotle's *Poetics* is bound to be included among those well-coveted texts, together with Heraclitus' mysterious opus, the complete poems of Sappho, and the second part of the novel *Dead Souls*, which Nikolai Gogol burnt before his death.

Waiting through the endless span of time for his turn to come, the metaphysical reader may pass the long hours by studying other, undeniably interesting though less glorious writings, such as the *Arimaspean Epic* by Aristeas of Proconnesus, the comic dramas of Epicharmus, the *Periplus of India* by the seafarer Scylax of Caryanda, or the Persian fairytale compilation *Hazar Afsaneh*. Imagine, however, the magnitude of the elation, expectance, and exultation that would be experienced by the patient reader's soul, when the time comes for him or her to take into their hands, for example, the second book of the Aristotelian *Poetics*. It might be said that it is worth waiting a lifetime in order to read that work.

The only available testimonia expressly documenting the existence of the second book of the *Poetics* are found in the three extant ancient catalogues of Aristotle's writings. In the relevant chapter of Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Philosophers* (5.24, under no. 83), a *Treatise on the Art of Poetry* in two books (*Πραγματεία τέχνης ποιητικῆς α′ β′*) is recorded among the other titles. In the *Vita Aristotelis* from the *Onomatologus* compiled by the bibliographer Hesychius of Miletus, the corresponding lemma is given in the form *Art of Poetry, two volumes* (*Τέχνης ποιητικῆς β′*).[4] Similarly, the catalogue put together by a certain Ptolemy (possibly a Neoplatonist scholar of the fourth century CE), which is only transmitted in Arabic translation, lists "the book on the art of poetry, two volumes".[5] If these titles pertain, as is the opinion of the majority of scholars, to the known treatise *On Poetics*

4. Düring (1957) 85 (no. 75); Dorandi (2006) 100 (v. 97).
5. Düring (1957) 225; Hein (1985) 427. See more generally Moraux (1951) 102, 177–83; Tarán – Gutas (2012) 14–19. On the indirect and much later, Byzantine testimonium of

(*Περὶ ποιητικῆς*), the bibliographical information of the ancient catalogues indicates that there was also a second part of the work, following the concise text which survives today.

Furthermore, internal cross-references, made by Aristotle in one or another of his extant works, suggest that the original compendium *On Poetics* embraced more material and topics than can be traced in its present form. In the preserved text of the *Poetics*, the philosopher promises that he will discuss comedy "further below" (*ὕστερον*, 6.1449b 21–22); but this promise is never fulfilled in the known portions of the text, much to our disappointment. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle also refers three times to the extensive treatment of laughter and of the types of joke and wordplay, which he claims to have set out in his *Poetics* (1.11, 1371b 33–72a 2; 3.2, 1404b 37–1405a 6; 3.18, 1419b 5–6). In these cases, again, the themes brought up are not really investigated, except very peripherally and superficially, in the surviving chapters of the *Poetics*. Finally, a few later sources, such as the scholiast Simplicius (*In Aristotelis Categorias* 1a 6, *CAG* VIII, p. 36 Kalbfleisch) and the lexicographer known under the conventional name of the Antiatticist (*ϰ* 19 Valente), assign to the Aristotelian *Poetics* words or phrases which do not occur anywhere in the preserved text.[6]

It is thus evident that the treatise *On Poetics* must have included additional unknown parts, which would have treated *in extenso* the genre of comedy and its jokes and effects, but disappeared with the passage of the centuries. In the time of the grammarians and antiquarians of later antiquity, these lost portions would have constituted an entire second book or volume. In the original form of the work, that is, in the research notes and didactic memoranda that the philosopher would have drawn up for his lectures, at his school in the Lyceum or earlier, such a distinction into separate unities would not have been necessary.[7] The examination of comedy would have logically followed after the end of the extant text of the *Poetics*, which is dedicated to the study of tragedy and epic. However, for some indeterminable reason, the final part of the grand master's notes was broken off from the rest of the textual body and was completely excised from the manuscript tradition.

Eustratius of Nicaea, see below. The vague reference of Proclus, *In Platonis Rem Publicam Commentarii*, p. 49 Kroll, is too uncertain; see Hose (2023) 68–69, 403–404.

6. On the testimonia and indications of the second book of the *Poetics*, see Lucas (1968) xiii–xiv; Janko (1984) 63–66; Hose (2023) 78, 180–89, 403–11.

7. Cf. Cooper (1922) 8–10. The text of the *Poetics*, as we know it, may have its roots in Aristotle's years at the Platonic Academy, but must have taken its final form during the period of the Peripatos; see below on the question of dating.

It is impossible to fix exactly when this loss occurred. The latest witness in the Greek philological tradition is Eustratius of Nicaea, a Byzantine commentator of Aristotle, active from the middle of the eleventh century to around 1120. Eustratius excerpts a known statement of the surviving Aristotelian text regarding the humorous poem *Margites* (*Poet.* 4.1448b 34–38) and attributes it "to the first book of *On Poetics*" (*ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ Περὶ ποιητικῆς*; see *In Ethica Nicomachea VII* 1141a 9, *CAG* XX, p. 320 Heylbut). It is, however, unclear whether the Byzantine scholar had ever seen the second book of the work or was simply drawing conclusions, as we do nowadays, from the mention of two volumes in the lists of Diogenes Laertius and Hesychius of Miletus.

Richard Janko attempted to demonstrate that the so-called *Tractatus Coislinianus*, a brief and badly written treatise on the morphology of ancient comedy, transmitted in a miscellaneous codex of the tenth century (Parisinus Coislinianus 120), represents an abridgement and epitome of the second book of the *Poetics*.[8] Although his theory found a few supporters, it did not gain wide recognition. As shown by the investigations of more meticulous experts, the material of the *Tractatus Coislinianus* does go back to the Peripatetic tradition but consists rather of distorted, vulgarised, and clumsily simplified formulations of Aristotle, which have been interwoven with views of post-Aristotelian Peripatetics, from Theophrastus and Praxiphanes down to Demetrius the author of *On style* (*Περὶ ἑρμηνείας*) and other members of the Hellenistic school.[9] Today, forty years afterwards, Janko can be acknowledged to have produced one of the most exciting and forceful wrong-headed books of classical scholarship, alongside Reinhold Merkelbach's *Roman und Mysterium in der Antike*, Detlev Fehling's *Herodotus and his "Sources"*, Philip Velacott's *Ironic Drama*, and Luciano Canfora's *Il mistero Tucidide*.

The search for Aristotle's lost book went on. At about the same time, in the early 1980s, Umberto Eco published the chronicle of a certain Father Adso, prior of the Abbey of Melk.[10] In his manuscript, Adso declared to have discovered a copy of the second book of the *Poetics* in the library of a monastery of the Benedictine order, in the mountains of northern Italy,

8. See Janko (1984), who summarises also the judgements of earlier experts (from Cramer and Bernays to Rostagni) with regard to the *Tractatus*. Cf. Janko (1987) xxi, 47–55, 159–74, for a summary exposition. A preliminary form of the same thesis was already put forward by Cooper (1922) 10–18.

9. See especially the long and detailed criticism of Nesselrath (1990) 102–49, who collects the negative and incredulous reviews of Janko's monograph. See also Heath (1989) 344; Pennanech (2016) 101–104; Hose (2023) 403, 416, 504–506.

10. Eco (1980).

in the year 1327. Unfortunately, according to the chronicler's own statement, this copy was destroyed in a fire which eliminated the entire library of the monastery. The veracity and reliability of Adso's report were doubted immediately, given that his narrative is full of suspect, sensational, and fabulous elements, such as a blind librarian, a library built in the form of a labyrinth, and a codex with poisoned pages. Even worse, Eco himself was unable to produce the authentic manuscript of Adso's chronicle, which was allegedly the source of his publication. He claimed to have found no trace of the manuscript in the library of the Abbey of Melk, and to have relied only on a French translation of the original text, which he discovered in an antique shop at Prague, shortly before the Soviet invasion in the summer of 1968. Even so, Eco could not make available the volume containing the French translation, but confessed that he did not possess it any longer: as he claimed, his former mistress took the volume with her, when she ended their relationship abruptly and abandoned him without a warning in a hotel at the outskirts of Salzburg.[11] Under the burden of such exorbitant coincidences and shady points, some critics were quick to accuse Eco that he had fabricated wholesale the entire case: in other words, that he himself had invented the prior Adso and his narrative, in order to falsely authenticate his own theories, make a more sensational impression, and secure higher sales for his book — an outrageous charge and most certainly an unfair one.

In consequence, the main and most fruitful indications as to the contents of the lost second part of the *Poetics* are the references to the genre of comedy and the artifices of humour and laughter that are included in the preserved first part of this work, as well as in other writings of the Aristotelian corpus.[12] It may be assumed that many of the issues mentioned cursorily and offhand in these brief excursuses would have been treated more extensively, as central topics, in the book specially dedicated to them. In order to study the lost part of the *Poetics*, we must follow the method pioneered by Jorge Luis Borges, who often wondered why a man would bother to write large books and monographs, expounding to hundreds of pages ideas that might have been easily and most satisfactorily condensed in a few lines. As the Argentinian master said, it is preferable to imagine that those

11. Eco (1980) 11–13.

12. There have been several attempts to reconstruct the contents of the lost book on the basis of the references to comedy which occur in the extant text of the *Poetics* and other treatises of Aristotle: see Cooper (1922); Golden (1984); Watson (2012); Pennanech (2016); Mayhew (2016); cf. the survey of Janko (1984) 66–76.

books already exist and to write a review about them, a concise critical survey of their contents, or an informative preface addressed to busy readers.[13] We must therefore imagine that the second book of the *Poetics* survives and lies open before our eyes; on this premise, we may formulate thoughts and propositions concerning individual passages of the book, as though comments written with transparent ink on the margins of an unsubstantial codex.

In the present essay, I intend to focus on two closely related passages from the fourth chapter of the extant text of the *Poetics*, which refer to the roots and the literary-historical provenance of comic drama. One of them links the emergence of comedy to a type of ritual pageant, the phallic procession and its loose-tongued songs, which constituted a traditional custom in many regions of Greece, in the context of folk fertility cults. The other passage focuses on literary history and relates comic writing to the iambus, the Archaic poetic form of invective and mockery. Both these references to comedy are extremely brief; they look like shorthand notes of a professor with a heavy workload, who scribbles sketchy memoranda, so as to develop them by way of oral exposition in the course of his lectures. Behind these concise Aristotelian statements, as the reader may sense, lies a rich background of ancient thought and theory on the birth of comedy.

Aristotle would have doubtless expounded his ideas on these subjects at greater length in the course of his lectures at the Lyceum, perhaps also in the second part of his manual on the *Poetics*. Modern scholars have written many pages of analyses and discussions revolving around the two passages in question, and these would take up considerable time if one attempted to present them *in vivo* before an audience. Like many of us, I would ardently wish to have been among the philosopher's pupils at the Peripatos and have listened to his lectures on the art of poetry and drama. The present essay is a kind of substitute for that unfulfilled desire, which I share, no doubt, with many of my colleagues in the *Logeion*. We will have to satisfy ourselves with this, at least for as long as we are waiting for the invention of the celebrated time machine, which will offer us the possibility to be transported *in corpore* to the Peripatetic school in ancient Athens. Unless, of course, we acquire, through some blessing of Tyche, the analeptic abilities of Robert Graves, who was capable (according to his own statement) of mentally translocating to various periods and cultures of the past and following their events and evolution through time, as though a "remote viewer" of History.[14]

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13. Borges (1974) 429.
14. Graves (1946) 353–54; Graves (1961) 342–50.

THE *POETICS* AND THE BEGINNINGS OF COMEDY, I: THE RISING OF THE PHALLUS

As noted above, the two theories formulated in the extant text of Aristotle's *Poetics* with regard to the origins and genealogy of comedy are complementary and correlative; one of them places emphasis on the ritual side, the other concentrates on grammatology and the evolution of literary forms. The most interesting aspect is that in both cases the philosopher's views are not unprecedented or strikingly original. They were already foreshadowed, decades earlier, by the comic poets of the late fifth century. Analogous ideas were familiar to Aristophanes and other playwrights of the mature period of Old Comedy; they are reflected in those authors' plays, dramatised on stage as scenic conceptions and enlivened poetological metaphors. Such correspondences give rise to enticing questions about the sources of Aristotle's thought, the prehistory of his theories on comedy, and generally about the pre-Aristotelian criticism of drama.

In the fourth chapter of the *Poetics*, in which poetic creation is traced back to the natural tendency of humans towards imitation (*mimesis*), the philosopher puts forward axiomatically the thesis that both dramatic genres, tragedy and comedy, were born of improvisation, generated from age-old spectacles of the folk tradition. Tragedy, in this respect, is considered as an offshoot of primitive dithyramb, while comedy is stated to have grown out of the *phallika*, the phallic processions and ceremonies, which were kept alive in many areas of Greece in Aristotle's days, as they continue also in the modern era (4.1449a 9–13: *γενομένη δ' οὖν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς αὐτοσχεδιαστικῆς — καὶ αὐτὴ καὶ ἡ κωμῳδία, καὶ ἡ μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐξαρχόντων τὸν διθύραμβον, ἡ δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν τὰ φαλλικὰ ἃ ἔτι καὶ νῦν ἐν πολλαῖς τῶν πόλεων διαμένει νομιζόμενα*).[15] In earlier times, several scholars were in the habit of unreservedly rejecting and condemning this statement as a simple conjecture of Aristotle's, a product of his theoretical speculation, without grounding in solid factual data.[16] Nevertheless, it is wise to remember that Aristotle would have attended genuine phallic rituals in Attica and possibly also in other places,

15. On phallic festivities in Modern Greece, see Dawkins (1906) 195, 199; Puchner (2016) 187–88, 217–18; and the eccentric and amateurish, but nonetheless informative folkloristic work of Thanos Murray-Velloudios, which is documented with rare photographic material (Velloudios [1991], especially 92–94, 101–12 and phot. no. 7–18, 117, 121 and phot. no. 4, 127–29).

16. See e.g. Körte (1921) 1217–19; Norwood (1931) 8–10; Pickard-Cambridge (1962) 133–47.

and furthermore he had access to plentiful sources and traditions which have disappeared since. Many modern experts are willing to accept some genetic connection between phallic ceremonies and pristine comic drama.[17]

In particular, Aristotle specifies that comedy originated with the *ἐξάρχοντες* of the phallic songs (as tragedy did, correspondingly, with those of the dithyramb), that is, the leaders of the groups of performers who took part in the rite.[18] Apparently, the philosopher is envisaging an alternation of song between the *exarchon* and the rest of the participants: the *exarchon* began the song and delivered some verses in solo chant; the other performers responded collectively as a group, a primordial form of Chorus, and sang their own part in answer to their leader; they could have restricted themselves to a refrain or epode, but they might also have sung a more extensive lyric contribution, a kind of "antistrophe" counterbalancing the leader's "strophe".[19] In this way, a kind of sung dialogue took place between the *exarchon*, on one hand, and the group of his followers, on the other. This dialogic exchange might be considered as a primary dramatic element, a core of theatricality, from which the fully-fledged dramatic performance could eventually develop. One may imagine that the *exarchon*'s part might have entailed mimetic and impersonating elements, in the form of a reported speech (as in epic narrative and lyric poetry) or even of a proto-dramatic monologue delivered in character. However, Aristotle does not expand on the contents of the *exarchon*'s contribution; and, as will emerge from the presentation of the material below, the extant testimonia and information about the phallic rites in ancient Greece do not point to any element of impersonation, role-playing, or other properly dramatic aspect.

A number of additional sources help towards a mental reconstruction of the image and form of the *phallika* in the ancient Greek world. The earliest piece of evidence is the depiction of a phallic *pompe* on a black-figure cylix, today in the National Archaeological Museum of Florence (images 1–2).[20] The vase comes from Athens, the birthplace of classical comedy, and is

17. See e.g. Herter (1947) 9–39; Giangrande (1963) 2–21; Pohlenz (1965) 497–510; Sifakis (1975); Reckford (1987) 443–98; Bierl (2001) 303–306, 311–25, 346–50; Rusten (2006) 39, 54–57; Csapo – Miller (2007) 8–16; Depew (2007) 126–31, 138; Rothwell (2007) 22–27.

18. On the meaning of *exarchon*, see primarily Csapo (2006–2007); cf. Pickard-Cambridge (1962) 9, 86, 90–91; Janko (1987) 77; Ieranò (1997) 175–85; Zimmermann (2008) 21–25.

19. Cf. Comotti (1989) 115–16; Ieranò (1997) 179; Zimmermann (2008) 24.

20. On this vase-painting, see most notably Csapo (1997) 265–79; Iozzo (2009); Csapo (2015) 85–88.

IMAGES 1–2: Black-figure Attic cylix with pictures of phallic processions. Florence, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, 3897. The photographs are reproduced by kind courtesy of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze, Direzione regionale Musei della Toscana.[21]

dated around the mid-sixth century BCE — that is, more or less at the same time as other archaeological monuments which document the emergence of shows and spectacles of a proto-comic nature in Attica.[22]

The cylix depicts two phallic processions, one on each of its outer convex sides. In both images, a group of performers is illustrated upholding an oversized effigy of a phallus; the effigy rises sloping upwards, propped on a

21. I am grateful to the Directorate of the Archaeological Museum of Florence and to the colleagues of the Department of Greek Antiquities and the Department of Photography there, for their generous gift of the photographs of the cylix and for their permission to reproduce them as part of the present article.

22. For other Attic vases of the same era which similarly picture comic spectacles (performances of Choruses disguised into anthropomorphic animals or other creatures of the imagination), see Green (1985); Rusten (2006) 44–56; Rothwell (2007) 28–80; Konstantakos (2021b) 99–114.

horizontal crossbar which the men carry on their shoulders. The phallus is personified; eyes and mouth are painted on its fore end and a pair of horse ears is attached on it, so that its tip resembles the muzzle of an animal. Another figure of superhuman, gigantic dimensions is shown riding on the phallus: on one of the pictures, this figure is a satyr; on the other side, he is a "padded komast", a naked man with overblown belly and buttocks, as though wearing padding on the stomach and the rear, so as to look ridiculously fat. He is similar to the padded dancers portrayed on more or less contemporary vases from Corinth and other Doric areas (Boeotia, Laconia, Western Greece), which may also illustrate some form of Archaic mimic and comic spectacle.[23]

On the Attic cylix, at least, the padded phallus-rider is likely to represent (by analogy to the satyr of the other side) a kind of demon of nature, who symbolises in a hilarious manner, with his overstuffed belly and protruding buttocks, the natural abundance and the forces of fertility.[24] In any case, the inordinate dimensions of these figures, which are on a much greater scale than the bodies of the actual phallus-bearers, indicate that they are not human participants in masquerade. Rather, they must be dummies, like the "Carnival King" (Βασιλιάς Καρνάβαλος) of Modern Greek popular festivities; the dummies would presumably have been fabricated of light materials, so as not to overburden the bearers, who would have to carry them atop the phallus effigy.[25] Furthermore, on one of the sides of the cylix, the leader of the carriers' group is turning back and facing the others, as though addressing them. This must doubtless be the head Chorus-man, the *ἐξάρχων*, as Aristotle calls him (*Poet.* 4.1449a 11–12), the *Meistersinger* who initiates the song, and the rest of the troupe responds to him.[26]

It may be imagined that the members of these phallic *pompai* chanted a ribald, obscene song in honour of the deified phallus, glorifying the fertility god whose effigy they were bearing. In the spectacle including the *exarchon*, the song might have taken the form of an impromptu *amoibaion*, in other words, a musical dialogue or a recitative alternating between the leader and the rest of the Chorus. On one side of the cylix, a musician is pictured cavalcading on the satyr's dummy and blowing a crude horn or trumpet.

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23. On these Doric vases and the mimic and proto-comic shows depicted on them, see Pickard-Cambridge (1962) 169–74; Trendall – Webster (1971) 15–21; Seeberg (1995); Smith (1998); Steinhart (2004) 32–64; Rothwell (2007) 21–25; Csapo – Miller (2007) 12–21; Isler-Kerényi (2007); Green (2007); Steinhart (2007); Smith (2007); Smith (2010).
24. Cf. Iozzo (2009) 262.
25. Cf. Csapo (1997) 269–78; Iozzo (2009) 262.
26. Cf. Csapo (1997) 267–68; Csapo (2006–2007) 63–64; Iozzo (2009) 261–62.

He would have accompanied with his instrument the performance of the song, which was probably improvised, rudimentary, and unsophisticated, with regard to both music and words. Like its present-day descendant, this kind of primitive, one-piece trumpet (note the absence of keys) could have produced no more than three or four different notes, perhaps in intervals of a third.[27]

The phallic rituals remained alive and popular in the countryside of Attica. An inscription of ca. 440 BCE, from the Attic deme of Icarion, appears to attest a phallic song, presumably performed by a Chorus, as part of the procession at the local festival of the Rural Dionysia.[28] A similar kind of show is then described by Semus of Delos, an antiquarian writer of the late third or early second century BCE, in an excerpt from his treatise *On Paeans* (*FGrHist* 396 F 24), transmitted by Athenaeus the Deipnosophist (14.622a–d). Semus presumably refers to rituals and ceremonies performed in his own time, in the mature Hellenistic age, which took place in an official context, given that they were staged in the theatre of the *polis*. In essence, however, the form and layout of these spectacles are as simple and static as those that can be deduced from the pictures of the Archaic Attic cylix.[29] Semus refers to two distinct kinds of pageant, the performers of which are named respectively *ithyphalloi* and *phallophoroi*. Both these groups are adorned with variegated and multicoloured garments and wreaths, as would be proper for a peasant spring festival; they sing unsophisticated, folk-sounding odes, cast in simple metres and monotonous rhythm, in honour of the deified phallus or of Bacchus, another fertility god.

The element of *aischrologia*, indecency and obscenity, is patent, as would be expected in such popular festivities. The scabrous little song of the *ithyphalloi* describes the phallic divinity as being "erect and swollen", ready to penetrate into the crowd of the spectators (Semus, *loc. cit.* = *PMG* 851a, *ἀνάγετ', εὐρυχωρίαν / τῷ θεῷ ποιεῖτε· / θέλει γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ὀρθὸς ἐσφυδωμένος / διὰ μέσου βαδίζειν*). As for the *phallophoroi*, they move towards the audience, pick up individual spectators, and taunt them with personal invective (Athenaeus 14.622d, *εἶτα προστρέχοντες ἐτώθαζον οὓς [ἂν] προέλοιντο*). As in the pictures of the Attic cylix, the spontaneous revelry and merrymaking

27. Cf. West (1992) 118–21; Nordquist (1996).

28. See *IG* I^3 254.33–35: [*φαλλ*]*ικὸν ἄιδεν* [… / … *τ*]*ον τραγοιδ*[*ον* … / …]*ες τὸν χορὸ*[*ν* …], if Hiller's plausible supplement [*φαλλ*]*ικὸν* is accepted for v. 33. See Wilson (2015) 103, 107, 134–35.

29. On Semus' testimonium, see Pickard-Cambridge (1962) 140–47; Sifakis (1975); Bierl (2001) 303–50.

of the country festival are imprinted on Semus' performances. By contrast, it is impossible to trace any kind of narrative or dramatic aspect in them; there is nothing in these rites that might lead to the representation of a coherent storyline, a constructed plot, and by extension to the genesis of a theatrical genre. On the basis of the literary and archaeological testimonia surveyed so far, it remains a mystery how a complex dramaturgical creation, such as classical Greek comedy, could have developed out of such static, unmimetic, storyless rites.

Nevertheless, as it seems, Aristophanes also considered the phallic procession as the remotest precursor and root of comic drama. This is highlighted and showcased in a famous scene of his first extant comedy, the *Acharnians*, produced at the Lenaea of 425 BCE, many decades before the compilation of Aristotle's notes on the *Poetics*. The main hero of the Aristophanic play, the Athenian peasant Dicaeopolis, has grown weary of the long and damaging Peloponnesian War and decides to make a private peace treaty with the Spartans, reserved for himself and his family. As soon as he has secured the reconciliation with the enemies, Dicaeopolis is magically transported to his farm, in the countryside of Attica, which is now free from the fear of hostile invasions. He celebrates his newly-acquired peace precisely with a phallic procession (241–79). Two slaves of his household are recruited to act the role of the *phallophoroi*: they hold up the effigy of the erect phallus, apparently on a pole (243, 259–60, cf. the long beam supported by the troupe on the cylix at Florence). Dicaeopolis' young daughter carries in a basket the food offerings to the fertility god: a broad flat cake and a pot of pea soup, the humble and nourishing foodstuffs of the well-to-do peasant (242–46, 253–58). Dicaeopolis himself follows and closes the procession, chanting the song in honour of the deified phallus, full of ribald jests and sexual innuendo (261–79).

The episode of Dicaeopolis' phallic ceremony has a pivotal significance for the overall design of the plot of this Aristophanic comedy. As I have shown in another study, published in this same journal, the central theme and ideological core of the *Acharnians*, the contrast of war and peace, is represented through the intradramatic confrontation of the two capital theatrical genres, tragedy and comedy, as these are reflected within the dramatic fiction of the play.[30] The opposed worlds of war and peace are illustrated on stage by means of motifs and dramaturgical schemes drawn, respectively, from traditional tragic and comic practice. War and its calamities are

30. Konstantakos (2012) 149–61.

constantly associated with the scenic artifices, stylistic mannerisms, and poetic methods of tragedy, while peace and its pleasures are correlated with the corresponding ingredients of comedy. Within the frame of the Aristophanic fiction, of course, tragedy is registered in the form of paratragedy or tragic parody; this is the standard reflection of the grand tragic genre in the distorting mirror of comic dramaturgy. Thus, the reality and circumstances of war are enlivened on stage through paratragic sequences and mock-tragic routines: battle situations and representatives of the military are charged with intertextual references to tragic plays, parodies of episodes or passages from well-known tragedies, imitations of the high-flown style of tragic poetry, or characteristic motifs and techniques of tragic dramaturgy — from the messenger speech and the *agon* of rival speakers to the arming of the heroic warrior and the mourning lament.[31]

On the other hand, the image of peace is constructed by use of techniques and scenic routines typical of the comic tradition. Very often Aristophanes emblematises peacetime through motifs and jests taken from the simplest and most rudimentary forms of popular comic spectacle that were current in the ancient world: the folk farces of Doric Hellenism, which flourished in regions such as Laconia and Megara; the side-splitting, low-brow mimes and the coarse gimmicks of the buffoons; the comic substratum of slapstick and burlesque. Overburdened servants who complain of their heavy loads (*Ach.* 860–61); characters that pursue each other, run to and fro, and exchange blows and thrashings on stage (824–28); hungry poor devils who lose their dinner and remain famished (1071–1142, 1150–61); petty thieves that snatch delicacies from the cellar (809–10); gluttons who devour noisily their food (806–808); theriomorphic disguises (739–817); cunning artifices of deception and simple-minded ruses (738–817); scatological jests and flying turds (1162–73); vulgar gestures with large leather phalluses

31. See most characteristically *Ach.* 204–36 (the hero is persecuted by the warlike Chorus of Acharnians, as though in military pursuit over the battlefield, and the entire scene is based on the model of Orestes' persecution in the Aeschylean *Eumenides*); 325–46, 496–556 (Dicaeopolis holds a long harangue on the war and its causes, parodying analogous episodes and speeches from Euripides' *Telephus*); 572–77, 965 (the *strategos* Lamachus, commander of the Athenian forces and representative of the warmongering faction, is endowed with imitations of tragic style); 1069–1142 (Lamachus puts on his armour and weapons like a tragic hero, following the model of several scenes of arming in Greek tragedy); 1174–89 (a messenger, in imitation of a tragic *angelos*, describes in a long speech, full of tragic formulas and stylistic echoes, how Lamachus stumbled and injured himself in a skirmish with Boeotian invaders); 1190–1226 (the injured Lamachus wails in tragic tones, as though a wounded and dying Heracles or Hippolytus).

(1216–20) — all these staples of hearty popular laughter are adduced to embellish the world of peace and exalt the comic hero's celebrations.

The phallic procession belongs to the same thematic orientation of the plot: this is the first action that the hero carries out, immediately upon achieving his ceasefire agreement with the Spartans; it is the opening ceremony by which he inaugurates his new reality of peacetime. Dicaeopolis' rite, with the phallus-bearing *pompe* and its bawdy song, represents a return to the first and remotest roots of the comic genre, the very origins of the art of comedy. The world of peace is established and initiated through the recourse to the profoundest sources of the comic event. The phallic ceremony of the *Acharnians* is a small-scale proto-comedy, a miniature of a primordial comic spectacle introduced into the composite overall plot of the Aristophanic drama.[32]

In this respect, it is significant that the phallic procession is set up and presented as though a small play-within-the-play. Dicaeopolis is the leader of the troupe, the *didaskalos* and manager of the spectacle, the director and organiser of the show; it is he who gives instructions to the other members of the company (his daughter and the two slaves bearing the phallus effigy) concerning their actions, placement, and contribution to the show (242–44, 253–60).[33] He also participates himself as a performer and sings the phallic song, like the *exarchon* of the *phallika* mentioned by Aristotle.[34] The divinised phallus praised in the hero's lyric hymn is invoked from the beginning with the epithet *ξύγκωμε*, "companion in our *komoi*", "comrade in festivity" (265). By extension, Dicaeopolis' song, the ode (*ᾠδή*) to the *ξύγκωμος* phallus, is by definition a *ξυγ-κωμῳδία*, a miniature of comradely comic drama-making.

There is an apparent difference between the Aristophanic episode and the phallic processions illustrated on the cylix of Florence and described by Semus: Dicaeopolis' ceremony is not choral; it does not involve a sizeable group of performers who would operate collectively in the manner of a Chorus.[35] This is presumably a consequence (or side-effect) of the incorporation of the phallic rite into the particular plot of the *Acharnians*; the rite had to be adapted to the special requirements of the comic storyline at that

32. This has been repeatedly remarked: see e.g. Kugelmeier (1996) 152–54; Bierl (2001) 350–61; Kavoulaki (2010); and Konstantakos (2012) 151–54 with further bibliography.
33. Cf. Bierl (2001) 354–55; Slater (2002) 49, 253; Kavoulaki (2010) 239–41, 254–55.
34. Cf. Körte (1921) 1219; Herter (1947) 37; Csapo (1997) 268; Bierl (2001) 354.
35. On this point, cf. Wilson (2015) 134.

point of the action. The actual Chorus of Aristophanes' play was neither available nor apt for inclusion into Dicaeopolis' performance: it consisted of a group of enemies of the hero, the bellicose Acharnian charcoal-burners, who were vehement supporters of the continuation of the war; these Chorus-men were bound to appear on stage shortly afterwards, to interrupt the phallic celebration and attack Dicaeopolis as a traitor. Nevertheless, the pair of slaves, who carry the phallus effigy high on a pole, may be taken as a substitute of the Chorus of *phallophoroi*. These two slaves stand for the usual larger group of phallus-bearers by way of abridgement, as though a "miniature" Chorus — exactly as the entire scene is a "miniature" of a phallic ritual.[36]

Thus, due to the restrictions imposed by the needs of the comic plot, the traditional multi-member team of phallus-carriers has been cut down to only two participants. The effect is somewhat analogous to the illustrations of proto-comic shows on some Archaic Attic vase-paintings, which depict performers dressed up as animal figures, singing and dancing to the music of an *aulos*-player. Some of these paintings show only two or three performers, travestied e.g. as birds or horses; but these may be taken to represent summarily an entire Chorus of theriomorphic dancers. The limitation of their number is due again to plain and practical reasons of the craft: in this case, the restricted space that was available for decoration on the surface of the vase.[37]

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36. The same principle of "abridged" representation operates also in connection with other aspects of Dicaeopolis' phallic show. The hero's wife is commanded to watch the phallic procession from the roof of the farm house (262). She thus stands for the spectators, the populous audience that would be observing the phallic pageant in normal circumstances. In the present case, of course, because of the idiosyncratic situation of the comic plot (Dicaeopolis' private peace treaty, which only applies to himself and his household), the great number of onlookers, which would have been expected on a real festival occasion, has been reduced to a single one.

37. See the black-figure oenochoe at the British Museum (B 509) and the amphora at Berlin (Antikensammlung, F 1830), both dated ca. 500–490 BCE: each one of these paintings depicts two dancers in bird costumes, performing to the music of an *aulos*-player. The two dancers are doubtless meant to represent a larger Chorus, as a kind of visual abbreviation or synecdoche. In another amphora at Berlin (Antikensammlung, F 1697, ca. 540–530 BCE), three performers are shown dressed up as horses; each one of them carries another personage, in the guise of a warrior, on his back. Again, the three pairs of horse plus rider may signify, by synecdoche, a larger group of participants. On other vases of the same category, the group of depicted Chorus-men is considerably larger, consisting of five or six members: see e.g. the skyphos at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (20.18, ca. 490–480 BCE), which shows six African natives riding on ostriches on one side, and six warriors cavalcading on dolphins on the other; the amphora at Christchurch,

Under this light, Aristophanes seems to have been familiar with the idea of the generation of comedy from phallic festivities — some version of the theory which Aristotle will expressly reformulate many decades later, when he will derive comic drama from the *exarchontes* of the phallic songs. The figure of Dicaeopolis, who sings the ode to the deified phallus in the Aristophanic episode, corresponds closely enough to the role of the *exarchon* according to the Aristotelian scheme. Dicaeopolis begins the song, and if his ceremony were not abruptly terminated by the assault of the wrathful Acharnians (280ff.), he might have expected to get a response, in the form of an antistrophe or a refrain, from the other members of the *pompe*, like the Chorus-leader of a proper ritual. Obviously, the comic poet does not expound this idea with critical vocabulary and in a literary-historical manner, as he would have done if he were writing a poetological treatise. Rather, he reworks and transubstantiates the theoretical conception into scenic action; he enlivens the critical thesis on stage as a vivid and significant individual episode, integrated into the ideological programme and the thematic flow of the play's plot.

How did Aristophanes arrive at this conclusion? How did he come to conceive of the phallic rite as an archetypical proto-comedy? Was this an empirical deduction of his own, born of the autopsy of actual phallic celebrations of his homeland, which the poet might naturally have compared with his own comic productions, so as to trace common points and analogies? Was it the result of a creative artist's original meditation on his own craft and its distant roots? Or perhaps did Aristophanes receive some inspiration from the ideas of intellectuals and thinkers of his age, from theoretical views that were circulating and discussed in fifth-century Athens, and perhaps had also been set down in now lost critical and literary-historical treatises? For, in this latter case, Aristotle might also have had access to those earlier fifth-century sources and have drawn materials and insights from them.

New Zealand (James Logie Memorial Collection, University of Canterbury, 41/57, ca. 540–530), which portrays five fancifully dressed men walking on stilts; and the skyphos at the Museum of Thebes (B.E. 64.342, ca. 480 BCE) with six performers standing on their heads. On all these vases, see Konstantakos (2021b) 105–13, with illustrations and further bibliography.

THE *POETICS* AND THE BEGINNINGS OF COMEDY, II: GRANDFATHER IAMBUS

If the phallic procession were an isolated coincidence, a unique case of identification between Aristophanic stage practice and Aristotelian theory, it might be overlooked. However, there is another thesis of the Aristotelian *Poetics*, concerning again the literary genealogy of comedy, which has been forecast in the same way by the comic authors of Classical Athens. In the fourth chapter of the treatise, once again, shortly before the reference to the *phallika*, the philosopher examines the grammatological relationship between comedy and iambic poetry. According to the teleological scheme of evolution proposed in the *Poetics*, the iambus is put forward as a precursor of comedy, at least from a thematic point of view. According to Aristotle, poetic creation was distinguished into different genres from the very beginning, following the particular preferences and the peculiar character of the poets themselves. Those that had an innate vocation for the high-flown and the magnificent, undertook to compose praises and eulogies for the splendid acts of great heroes. Those poets cultivated at first epic poetry, which exalts the *klea andron*, the glorious deeds of men. Afterwards, in the same thematic domain, the more complex form of tragedy was developed; tragedy was more artful and more elaborate than the epic, and thus prevailed as the foremost poetic expression of the high and weighty.

The opposite grammatological pole, the poetry of the mundane and the ridiculous, underwent a similar kind of evolution; this type of poetry was taken up by authors who tended towards the satirical mood and were prone to ridicule the basest vices of mortals. In this domain, it was the mocking iambus that was cultivated at first. Then, by analogy to tragedy, the more complex and composite genre of comedy emerged; comedy replaced the simpler form of iambic poetry and was established as the central expression of the art of mockery (4.1448b 24–49a 6).[38]

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38. *διεσπάσθη δὲ κατὰ τὰ οἰκεῖα ἤθη ἡ ποίησις· οἱ μὲν γὰρ σεμνότεροι τὰς καλὰς ἐμιμοῦντο πράξεις καὶ τὰς τῶν τοιούτων, οἱ δὲ εὐτελέστεροι τὰς τῶν φαύλων, πρῶτον ψόγους ποιοῦντες, ὥσπερ ἕτεροι ὕμνους καὶ ἐγκώμια.* (...) *παραφανείσης δὲ τῆς τραγῳδίας καὶ κωμῳδίας οἱ ἐφ' ἑκατέραν τὴν ποίησιν ὁρμῶντες κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν φύσιν οἱ μὲν ἀντὶ τῶν ἰάμβων κωμῳδοποιοὶ ἐγένοντο, οἱ δὲ ἀντὶ τῶν ἐπῶν τραγῳδοδιδάσκαλοι, διὰ τὸ μείζω καὶ ἐντιμότερα τὰ σχήματα εἶναι ταῦτα ἐκείνων*, "Poetry was divided according to the characters of its creators: the more serious ones imitated the noble actions and those of such people, while the more vulgar ones reproduced the actions of the base, by composing,

By means of this scheme, Aristotle places iambus and comedy in a direct line of teleological evolution from the more elementary to the more complex and elaborate form: from the narrative monody of the iambus to the polyphonic structure of composite comic drama.[39] As some scholars have pointed out, this line of argument does not necessarily entail a genuine genealogical relation between iambic poetry and comic drama.[40] This latter thesis would have been indeed difficult to reconcile with the provenance of comedy from phallic rites, which Aristotle maintains a few lines later in his notes[41] — although, admittedly, absolute homogeneity and consistency of thought is not one of the virtues of the Aristotelian *Poetics*. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that exactly this theoretical scheme —the generation of comedy from iambus, a form of lyric poetry— would be very suitable as a parallel and counterpoise to Aristotle's complementary thesis about the origins of tragedy, which is similarly claimed to have grown out of a lyric genre, the song of dithyramb. In any case, the philosopher connects iambus and comedy very strongly with each other and clearly regards them as closely kindred genres, directly bound together by the same thematic orientation and by a common poetic intent. Even if the iambus was not the father of comedy, it was definitely its spiritual precursor and its conceptual predecessor.[42]

Once more, it is revealed that the comic authors of the fifth century had used the same grammatological idea as the core of episodes of their plays or even as the foundation of entire comic plots. In particular, the creators of satirical and politically engaged comedy, which targeted the leaders of the *polis* and thematised the affairs of the state, regarded Archaic iambography as a model of poetic art, because of its focus on mockery and invective. Cratinus, the initiator of large-scale and cohesive political satire in Athenian comic theatre, brought Archilochus on stage as a *dramatis persona* in his play titled *Archilochoi* ("Archilochus and Co."). An important, if not

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in the first place, invectives, just as the former ones produced hymns and eulogies. (...) And when tragedy and comedy had appeared, those who tended by their own nature towards the one or the other type of poetry, became respectively writers of comedies instead of iambics, or producers of tragedies instead of epics, because these newer forms were grander and more esteemed than the earlier ones".

39. On Aristotle's evolutionary and teleological scheme, see Heath (1989) 347–49; Halliwell (1998) 254–74; Depew (2007); Rotstein (2010) 69–97; Lennartz (2010) 385–97; Rosen (2013) 91–96; Pennanech (2016) 92–99.
40. See Bowie (2002); Lennartz (2010) 23–25, 310–38.
41. Cf. on this point Janko (1987) 76; Halliwell (1998) 256, 269; Hose (2023) 224–25.
42. See Rotstein (2010) 80–82, 104–11; Rosen (2013) 91–97; Mayhew (2016); Konstantakos (2022).

central place in the storyline of this comedy was occupied by a poetic contest between Archilochus and Homer, or between the supporters of epic poetry and the partisans of iambography.[43] In one fragment, the speaker directly addresses Archilochus, calling him *Θασίαν ἅλμην* ("the piquant brine of Thasos", fr. 6), and extols the glib-tongued and vehement answer which this iambic poet gave to the words of "the blind man".[44] The latter appellation, in this particular agonistic context, cannot refer to anyone other than the emblematic blind bard of Greek literary history, the epic poet Homer.

Apparently, both these great poets would have taken part in the action, perhaps each one accompanied by his own followers or disciples,[45] and would have competed for the primacy in poetry, as Homer and Hesiod did in popular legend, or as Aeschylus and Euripides would do later in Aristophanes' *Frogs*. Their competition would presumably revolve around the different qualities and powers of their two rival poetic genres, the sublime heroic epic and the mocking iambus. Very little of the original text of the play has been preserved, and this prevents a large-scale reconstruction of the storyline. We have to imagine, at least, that the side of the iambus and its poets would win in the end, and would thus highlight the value of humour and satire over the decorum of the Homeric epic. In other words, Cratinus must have already dramatised in his comedy the grammatological distinction which Aristotle later established from a theoretical and literary-historical point of view. The taunting iambus and the eulogistic heroic epic are presented, both in the *Archilochoi* and in the *Poetics*, as contrasted and counterbalancing poetic genres with diametrically opposed aims, cultivated by authors who are endowed with correspondingly distinct temperaments.

It is not implausible to assume that the bitter Archilochus would function, within the poetological fiction of the play, as a representative, an alias, an alter ego of Cratinus, the comic playwright himself. The acrid iambographer was a scenic incarnation of invective and aggressive blame, which Cratinus himself practiced in his scathing satirical plays, especially when

43. On Cratinus' *Archilochoi*, see most notably Pretagostini (1982); Rosen (1988) 42–49; Kugelmeier (1996) 178–89; Ornaghi (2004) 218–28; Rotstein (2010) 289–92; Bianchi (2016) 13–113.

44. *εἶδες τὴν Θασίαν ἅλμην, οἵ' ἄττα βαΰζει; / ὡς εὖ καὶ ταχέως ἀπετείσατο καὶ παραχρῆμα. / οὐ μέντοι παρὰ κωφὸν ὁ τυφλὸς ἔοικε λαλῆσαι*, "Did you see what things the Thasian brine barked? How well and quickly and instantly he paid the other back! Well, as it seems, the blind one did not speak to a deaf-and-mute man".

45. Two testimonia about Cratinus' play, provided by Diogenes Laertius (1.12) and Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 1.24.1–2), warrant that Homer and the other poets were surrounded by "sophists" (fr. 2).

he attacked his favourite target Pericles and his milieu. By introducing the topmost practitioner of the iambic tradition as an intradramatic personification of the comic poet, Cratinus would have taken *de facto* a position on the subject of the grammatological relation between the two corresponding genres: the iambus was put forward as a former grade or an archetypical anticipation of biting satirical comedy.[46]

Aristophanes —intellectually and artistically a disciple of Cratinus', as well as his most prominent successor in the cultivation of politically engaged comic drama— also looks back to Archilochus as a model of poetic composition. Like Cratinus before him, Aristophanes acknowledges iambography as a spiritual and generic precursor of comedy, and utilises Archilochus' verses in a creative and poetologically conscious manner in crucial passages of his scripts.[47] In the finale of the *Acharnians* (1227–34), the definitive triumph of Dicaeopolis, the hero of peace, is celebrated with a refrain from Archilochus' famous hymn in praise of Heracles (fr. 324 West): *τήνελλα καλλίνικος*, "param pam pam, what a fine victory!" The world of peace, in this particular Aristophanic play, had been inaugurated with Dicaeopolis' phallic procession, a regress to the remotest ritual roots of comedy; and it is completed, at the end, with an iambic chant, a tribute to the other main forerunner of the comic genre. Bridging the beginning of his plot with its final outcome, Aristophanes matches both the theories on the genealogy of comic drama which Aristotle will also mingle together within the same chapter of his *Poetics*. The Aristophanic script offers a metadramatic panorama of the various forms of comic art — a complete generic survey that sets off from the phallic pageant and concludes with Archilochean iambic poetry.

In the final scenes of the *Peace*, his next comedy on the theme of war, Aristophanes imitates and evolves the pattern of Cratinus' *Archilochoi* by staging yet another contest between epic and iambic composition. The *Peace* owes much, from a thematic and technical point of view, to its author's earlier "war and peace" play, the *Acharnians*, and is constructed along the same basic scheme:[48] in the interior of the scenic fiction, the two major theatrical genres, tragedy and comedy, are confronted with each other as intradramatic realisations of war and peace, respectively. The situations and purveyors of war are enlivened on stage by use of the artistic means of

46. Cf. Kugelmeier (1996) 181–89; Ornaghi (2004) 226–28; Bakola (2010) 18, 70–79; Rotstein (2010) 291.
47. See Rosen (1988) 17–34, 70–75; Kugelmeier (1996) 169–74, 192–94; Zanetto (2001).
48. See Konstantakos (2021a) 98–99, with many examples and further references.

paratragedy, through imitations and parodies of tragic scenes, motifs, and style. The opposite world of peace and its pleasures is outlined by means of the side-splitting artifices of broad popular farce.[49] This bipolar antithesis reaches a climax at the conclusion of the play, which dramatises a reversion to the generic archetypes and forerunners of these two major theatrical forms, namely epic and iambography.

Two boys, the sons of guests in the protagonist's dinner party for the newly-acquired peace, come out to rehearse the songs they will perform as part of the entertainment. One of these boys is the child of the warmongering general Lamachus; he therefore recites centos of hexameter verses from the *Iliad* and other poems of the epic cycle, which extol the battles and the arms of the Achaean warriors (1265–94). As in the old legend about the *agon* between Homer and Hesiod, Homer and the heroic epic are showcased as a kind of poetry suitable for war but discordant with the atmosphere of peacetime. Apart from embodying the spirit of warlike song, the Homeric epic was also widely regarded as a literary model and precursor of tragedy. The idea already emerges in Plato's *Republic* (10.595b–c, 607a) and is then reinforced and developed in Aristotle's *Poetics*, where it is also combined with the counterbalancing conception of iambus as an anticipation of comedy (4.1448b 34–49a 5). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the protagonist, the peacemaker Trygaeus, expels from his comic celebration the young *aoidos* of the warlike epic, which forestalls tragedy, the intradramatic manifestation of war within the fiction of the play. Neither of these poetic genres is in step with the interests of Aristophanic comedy, which castigates war and dramatises the struggle for peace and the festive jubilation for its success.

The second boy, the antagonist of the first one, introduces himself as the son of the notorious deserter Cleonymus, who is pilloried in many comedies for having, allegedly, thrown his shield in a battle and run away in cowardice. With predictable irony, this youngster recites Archilochus' provocative quatrain about the *rhipsaspis* soldier who abandoned his shield next to a bush to save his own life (*Peace* 1298–1301, Archilochus fr. 5 West). Of course, Cleonymus' son suffers many derisive taunts for his fight-dodging (1300–1304). In spite of these, however, Trygaeus accepts him in his banquet (1302), given that the iambic writer Archilochus, by contrast to Homer the epic bard, was considered as the archetypical ancestor of comedy. The iambic poetry of avoidance of war accords with the comic fiction of Aristophanes and its pro-peace programme.

49. See Konstantakos (2021a) for full analysis.

The poetic contest of the two boys represents the culmination of the rivalry between the tragedy of war and the comedy of peace, which runs through the play and constitutes the structural mainstay of the plot. The two opposed theatrical genres are traced back to their ultimate grammatological antecedents; they revert to their deepest roots, respectively the epic of combatant heroism and the iambic poetry of refusal of danger.[50] In this way, Aristophanes recalls, at first glance, the confrontation between epic and iambus in the *Archilochoi* of his master Cratinus, the founder and patriarch of Attic satirical comedy. And, on a second stage, he uses Cratinus' model drama as an intermediary link to connect his own comic production with its most distant origins in the jeering poetry of Archaic iambus. The establishment and glorification of peace, the patron deity of comic poets, is completed with a full retrospect on the grammatological history and the literary genealogy of the comic genre.

As transpires from the preceding examples, the positions advocated in the Aristotelian *Poetics* with regard to the provenance of comedy (both ritual and literary-historical) can already be found in a creative form, dramatised on stage and transformed into integral constituents of the storyline, in comic plays of the Golden Age of Classical Athens. A dilemma is thus clearly posed. Were these ideas authentically and directly conceived by the comic poets, who meditated on the roots of their art and transmogrified their thoughts into vivid scenic images — while Aristotle, later, expounded the same ideas in a theoretical manner, possibly with some inspiration from the works of the comic authors, which he knew in depth? Or, alternatively, was there some contemporary theoretical background behind the poetological phantasmagorias of the comic dramatists? In other words, could the comic poets themselves have been incited by the researches and explorations of intellectuals and critics active in the Athens of their own time? Among the versatile thinkers of that wonderful age, who had swarmed to the great cultural capital of Greece, there were several who delved into the study of poetry, literary history, and poetics and might have investigated the origins of drama much before Aristotle. Such intellectuals could have discerned the relation of comedy to phallic rites or its grammatological affinity with the iambus, and could have discussed these questions in relevant treatises. In that case, Aristophanes and Cratinus might be echoing the views of their

50. On the competition between epic and iambic poetry in the finale of the *Peace*, see the recent contributions by Telò (2013); Zogg (2014) 58–70, 130–55, 144–63; and Konstantakos (2021a) 110–12 with further bibliography.

contemporary thinkers and turning the theoretical abstractions of the latter into live theatrical action. Aristotle, in turn, would have drawn ideas from those earlier writings, both with regard to comedy and concerning other topics and thematic sections of the *Poetics*.[51]

The major fifth-century sophists who occupied themselves with the study of language and poetry, such as Protagoras, Prodicus, and Gorgias, chiefly focused on rhetoric and stylistics, on the construction of poetic discourse, its use and its effect on the human psyche.[52] These, however, were not the sole representatives of critical thought in Classical Greece. Other thinkers of that age also wrote treatises on literary subjects of broader interest and might have touched upon literary-historical and grammatological issues. For example, the polymath Democritus, in his book *On Poetry* (*Περὶ ποιήσιος*), examined the question of poetic inspiration, that is, the deeper anthropological roots of artistic creativity.[53] Glaucus of Rhegium, probably the most important literary critic of the Classical age, composed a comprehensive study *On the Ancient Poets and Musicians* (*Περὶ τῶν ἀρχαίων ποιητῶν τε καὶ μουσικῶν*), in which he treated extensively the history of lyric poetry. The same author also extended his researches to questions of epic poetry and tragic drama.[54]

The text of Aristotle's *Poetics* itself includes some vague references to pre-existent grammatological discussions of tragedy and comedy. In one passage, the philosopher mentions Megarian authorities and their claims on the origins of comic theatre: according to the Megarians, comedy first appeared at Megara at the time of democracy (3.1448a 29–b 2) — meaning presumably the period after the fall of the tyrant Theagenes, around 580 BCE.[55] The formulation and phraseology of this Aristotelian passage

51. Cf. Pohlenz (1965) 462–72; Lucas (1968) xiv–xx; Hose (2023) 7–13.

52. See Lanata (1963) 189–207; Pohlenz (1965) 436–72; Guthrie (1971) 176–225; Kerferd (1981) 68–82; Ford (2002) 161–87; Rademaker (2013). On the critical and poetological writings of the sophists, in general, see Lanata (1963) 185–225, 238–47; Ford (2002) 68–85, 139–57, 188–201; Morgan (2004) 94–101.

53. See Democritus 68 B 16a, 17, 18 Diels – Kranz. Other fragments of Democritus regard metric, grammar, and the criticism of Homeric poetry. See Lanata (1963) 252–69; Ford (2002) 145–56, 165–72; Leszl (2007) 38–40; Brancacci (2007); Enriques – Mazziotti (2016) 279–89.

54. See Lanata (1963) 270–81 and Gostoli (2015) for collection of and commentary on Glaucus' remains. See also Huxley (1968); Ford (2002) 139–42; Hose (2003) 7–8.

55. *διὸ καὶ ἀντιποιοῦνται τῆς τε τραγῳδίας καὶ τῆς κωμῳδίας οἱ Δωριεῖς (τῆς μὲν γὰρ κωμῳδίας οἱ Μεγαρεῖς οἵ τε ἐνταῦθα ὡς ἐπὶ τῆς παρ' αὐτοῖς δημοκρατίας γενομένης καὶ οἱ ἐκ Σικελίας [...]) ποιούμενοι τὰ ὀνόματα σημεῖον· αὐτοὶ μὲν γὰρ κώμας τὰς περιοικίδας καλεῖν φασιν, Ἀθηναίους δὲ δήμους, ὡς κωμῳδοὺς οὐκ ἀπὸ τοῦ κωμάζειν λεχθέντας ἀλλὰ τῇ κατὰ*

imply a kind of critical rivalry and literary polemics between Athenian and Megarian authorities with regard to the original and authentic cradle of the comic genre; each one of the two sides laid claim to the paternity of the art of comedy and tried to attribute it to its own homeland. It may be plausibly assumed that these polemical disputations would have been carried out, partly at least, through written works, in the form of treatises or pamphlets, in which the ultimate roots and genealogy of comic theatre would have been probed.[56] Writings of this kind might very well include theories about phallic rites, the relations between comedy and iambus, and other literary-historical issues; their theses would then have inspired on one hand the well-informed practitioners of the comic stage, and on the other hand subsequent intellectuals and critics, such as Aristotle.

THE PHALLIC MYTH OF COMEDY

The correlation of comedy with iambic poetry seems perfectly apt and justified. The two genres share many elements in common: biting mockery and invective against the powerful and the famous, rampant *aischrologia* and ribaldry, parody of serious poetry and myth, incorporation of various forms of popular discourse (proverbs, fables, folktales), and a large repertory of common themes, such as food, eroticism, and the symposium.[57] The other Aristotelian thesis, concerning the development of comedy from the phallic rites, is less than self-evident. Which particular connection is there between comic drama and phallic processions? Why should Aristophanes, Aristotle,

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κώμας πλάνῃ ἀτιμαζομένους ἐκ τοῦ ἄστεως· καὶ τὸ ποιεῖν αὐτοὶ μὲν δρᾶν, Ἀθηναίους δὲ πράττειν προσαγορεύειν, "therefore, the Dorians lay claim on tragedy and comedy (comedy is claimed by the Megarians, both those of the mainland here, who assert that it arose during their democracy, and the others from Sicily [...]); and they adduce the names as evidence. They say that they call the surrounding villages *komai*, while the Athenians call them *demoi*, assuming that comedians got their name not from revelling, *komazein*, but from wandering through villages because they were expelled from the city; and they also say that their own word for acting is *dran*, while the Athenians use the term *prattein*".

56. See Pickard-Cambridge (1962) 132, 178–79; Lucas (1968) xv–xvi; Piccirilli (1974); Piccirilli (1975) 141–50; Kerkhof (2001) 13–17, 48–50; Cohn (2016); Ornaghi (2016) 283–334. Hose (2023) 8 also admits that Aristotle's statement was based on sustained researches of Doric authorities, which must ultimately have been expressed in some kind of written form.

57. Comprehensive surveys of the similarities between comedy and iambus are offered by Degani (1993) 23–36 and Zanetto (2001).

and perhaps also other intellectuals seek the beginnings of the comic genre in those primordial fertility rituals?

The descriptions and portrayals of phallic ceremonies in ancient sources (Semus, the corresponding scene in the *Acharnians*) reveal that these were events of a purely processional character, simple celebratory rituals without any substantial theatricality and dramatic dimension. The participants in the *phallika* donned special clothing and accessories, but they did not enact roles: they did not impersonate characters different from themselves, they did not assume a proper dramatic identity, they did not represent the characters of a plot or storyline. Thus, their variegated garments were not theatrical costumes, but rather fancy uniforms or funny masquerading. The phallic songs and odes chanted by the participants, as far as can be seen from the short pieces cited by Semus and the hymn placed on Dicaeopolis' lips in the *Acharnians*, were also static lyrical compositions of a genuinely hymnic and descriptive nature. The extant specimens do not tell a story, they do not construct a storyline or narrative arc, they do not enliven personages or episodes; they include no storytelling or representational element which might be developed so as to support a dramatic plot.[58]

In this respect, there is a great difference between the phallic ceremonies and the other type of primitive pageant which is usually connected with the origins of comedy: namely, the theriomorphic or fantastically disguised Choruses depicted on a number of Archaic Attic vases, from the mid-sixth to the early fifth century BCE. The performers portrayed on those vase-paintings are elaborately disguised in order to impersonate particular characters, endowed with a clear-cut fictional identity: they represent anthropomorphic animals, which sing and dance, or various figures of the popular imaginary (dwarfs, giants, mixed monsters, warriors riding on dolphins, natives of strange exotic lands). Their full-length fancy robes and specially constructed masks and headgear may therefore be regarded as dramatically charged and operative theatrical costumes. They are essential accessories for playing

58. Cf. Körte (1921) 1218–19; Pickard-Cambridge (1962) 142–44; Csapo (2015) 106–108. Modern scholars focus mainly on the similarities between the songs of the *ithyphalloi* and *phallophoroi*, as reported by Semus, and the morphology of the parabasis or other choral parts of Aristophanic comedies. See Herter (1947) 31–32; Giangrande (1963) 5, 17–18; Pohlenz (1965) 502–503; Sifakis (1975); Reckford (1987) 487–89; Bierl (2001) 305–306, 315–16, 323–25, 346–50. However, the nature of the comparanda highlights precisely the peculiar focus of the parallelism: the parabasis and the choral parts are static components, which do not forward the dramatic action and the evolution of the plot. A sequence of parabaseis and choral songs, on its own, would have no cohesive narration and no dramatic substance, and hence it would not constitute a drama.

a specific role in a show. In other words, the participants in those spectacles are acting out in costume the parts of other personages, different from the performers themselves. These elements of impersonation, theatrical costuming, and role-playing constitute the core of the concept of drama, as it has been diachronically perceived and defined in western cultures.

Furthermore, the peculiar and occasionally weird situations depicted on the vase-paintings (for example, birds covered with long, ankle-length tunics; exotically dressed Negroid men mounted on ostriches; armed warriors riding dolphins; men in fancy clothing walking on stilts; men standing upside down etc.) point to some kind of fictitious scenario, which would be required to explain the background and meaning of these idiosyncratic images. It seems, therefore, that the spectacles illustrated on these vases would have dramatised a certain storyline or narrative situation and employed a number of performers to impersonate its characters.[59] In every aspect, these spectacles appear to have been dramatic in essence and are a far cry from the phallic rituals reported in the ancient sources. The latter, as already pointed out, included no element of fiction and narrative, no role-playing, no representation of particular characters, and no enlivened dramatic identity. In fact, there is nothing in the phallic rituals *per se* that could be seen as an antecedent or forestaller of genuine drama; not a single element in them can be regarded as a germ of true theatricality, from which a work of dramatic poetry might bud and flourish.

What could the thinkers and poets of the Classical world have perceived in those rudimentary folk festivals of the phallus, so as to single them out as the precedents of the genre of comedy? There is, at first glance, an obvious, though external and elementary analogy: the phallic appearance of the actors of Attic comic theatre. Throughout the Classical age, until the last decades of the fourth century, a long leather effigy of a phallus was a stock component of the comic actors' costume. The performers of Old and Middle Comedy, for the entire duration of the performance, wore a full-length undergarment, covering their entire body, which was equipped with padding on the belly and the buttocks and with the artificial leather phallus, sewn at the corresponding point, so as to prominently stick out under their short *chiton*.[60] The emblematic phallus-bearing of the comic actors might

59. On the spectacles depicted on these vase-paintings and their dramatic elements, see Konstantakos (2021a) 99–114 and the rest of the bibliography cited above in n. 22.

60. On the standard costume of the actors in Classical Greek comedy, see Foley (2000); Hughes (2012) 180–89; Compton-Engle (2015) 17–45.

have been interpreted, by the ancient authors and intellectuals, as a remnant or a bequest from phallic pageants that constituted the remote origins of the comic genre. Of course, as shown by the archaeological monuments and the literary testimonia, in the phallic ceremonies the deified phallus was represented by a single (usually oversized) effigy, which was carried by the participants on a beam or a pole; this phallus model did not form part of the performers' costume, as in comic theatre. Nonetheless, at least the phallus-bearers depicted on one side of the Attic cylix of Florence wear erect phalluses on their bodies; these can be discerned on the vase-painting, coloured in red.

In this respect, indeed, Aristotle became a witness of an important development in the morphology of comic costume, in the course of his long experience as a playgoer and student of drama.[61] In the first period of his sojourn in Athens, while Aristotle was a pupil and member of the Platonic Academy, in the years 367–347 BCE, the use of the phallus in the comic actors' outfit was still universal and omnipresent. This is amply testified by the theatrical monuments and artefacts dated within the aforementioned period: on one hand, the terracotta figurines from Athens and other regions of the Greek-speaking world, which represent comic personages; on the other hand, the vase-paintings depicting comic scenes, on vessels from Magna Graecia and Sicily, which are mostly inspired from performances of Attic plays (or at least of plays conforming to the conventions of fifth- and fourth-century Athenian comedy). As transpires from this large body of evidence, until about 340 BCE, all male comic roles portrayed on the monuments are equipped with a prominent phallus, which is either let down to dangle freely or curled up and pinned on the actor's undergarment. Clearly, the phallus was an inseparable component of the comic performances which Aristotle would have watched in Athens as a resident in Plato's school.

After 340 BCE, the presence of the phallus in the theatrical monuments documenting comic performances is perceptibly, even rapidly reduced. During the 330s, the phallus practically disappeared from the costume of almost all the male roles that belonged to the category of free citizens. It only remained visible in characters of lower class or low-brow social and ethical level, such as slaves, parasites, pimps, and the ridiculous enamoured old men of the *senex amator* type. This trend of decline was further consolidated with the transition into the Hellenistic age and the time of New Comedy.

61. On Aristotle as an active playgoer in Athens, see Burkert (1975); Hose (2023) 18–21.

At the end of the fourth century, the phallus only survived as a relic in the costumes of comic slaves; no other comic character bore it any longer.[62]

Therefore, when Aristotle came back to Athens around 335 BCE, to found the Peripatetic school and reside in the city, until his persecution in 322, he would have faced a new reality of staging and performance in the theatre: the phallus had disappeared from most of the comic roles; its use as an element of the *opsis* of comedy was now extremely limited. Under the light of this development, Aristotle's teleological thought would doubtless be tempted to regard the phallus as an antiquated remnant from the prehistory of the comic genre, a relic of its remotest and age-old origins, which tended towards elimination with the evolution and refinement of comic art in the course of time. Such an evaluation of the visible data would reinforce the idea that the roots of comedy lay in spectacles of a phallic type, the waning and moribund presence of the phallus in the comic costume being a legacy from those primitive antecedents of the genre.

This view of things presupposes, of course, that the final redaction of Aristotle's *Poetics*, as known today, was compiled during Aristotle's last and most fruitful sojourn in Athens, in the period of the Peripatetic School, after about 335 BCE. At least the theory about the connection of comedy to the *phallika* must have been fashioned and finalised during this latter period, after Aristotle's familiarisation with the new type of comic costume and the stark restriction of the phallic element on the comic stage of Athens. The overall dating of the contents and composition of the *Poetics* is a matter of scholarly debate;[63] several experts detect in the known text of the treatise ideas and positions which seem to go back to the earlier stages of Aristotle's thought, from the time of his affiliation with the Platonic Academy.[64] However, it would be an extreme position to advocate that the entire complete text of the extant *Poetics*, in all its details, should have been definitively and irrevocably fashioned in that earlier period, and that the philosopher never came back to this particular work, to add further material and thoughts at a later time.[65] By contrast, other modern experts argue that the surviving text of the *Poetics* represents a composite mixture of ideas and materials

62. On the evolution of the comic phallus and its gradual disappearance from the actors' costumes in the second half of the fourth century, see Green (2006) and Green – Konstantakos (2020) 310–11, 320–21. Sufficient iconographic material is provided there for visual documentation.

63. For a survey of earlier bibliography on the question, see Halliwell (1998) 324–25.

64. For an exposition of such elements, see the recent study of Tsitsiridis (2024).

65. Even hard-core supporters of the early dating of the *Poetics* are obliged to admit that Aris-

belonging to different periods and phases. While some of the tenets put forward in this work originated in Aristotle's earlier, "Academic" phase, the extant written product has been supplemented with many elements of a later date, pertaining to the years of the philosopher's teaching at the Peripatos.[66] Under this light, Aristotle's theory on the phallic origins of comedy, which is briefly mentioned in the fourth chapter of the extant *Poetics* and may have been developed at greater extent in the lost second book, will naturally be classed among the latter category of posterior components.

Nonetheless, the phallic aspects of comic performance provide only part of the answer to the question. It is difficult to believe that an element belonging purely to the *opsis*, the external appearance and material execution of the comic play, would have been the sole motive that conditioned Aristotle's thought on the subject and led the philosopher towards an association of comedy with the phallic processions. It must not be forgotten that the *opsis*, the outer staging and aesthetics of the theatrical production, was a secondary element in Aristotle's view, not a constituent factor of poetic creation (see *Poet.* 6.1450b 16–20, 26.1462a 11–14). Therefore, it seems unlikely that the philosopher would have based an entire theory about the origins of the comic genre solely on the visual aspect, on the external elements of staging and costuming.

For this reason, I would like to venture an additional, complementary hypothesis, which relies not on *opsis* but on the constitution of the comic plot and the layout of the storyline of the play — in Aristotelian terms, the *mythos*, which forms the central core of the dramatic event. On a profound level, the phallic element is inherent in the essence of ancient comedy; it is congenital to the mythical substance and the archetypical plot scheme that characterise the comic genre throughout its long history in the ancient world. The primary matrix, from which all the scenarios and storylines of Classical Greek comedy are produced, emblematises and represents the rising course and final triumph of the phallus. By contrast to tragedy, which in its canonical form dramatises the extraordinary hero's destruction under the weight of adversity, comedy presents the protagonist's triumph on the circumstances of his milieu. The comic hero, by the force of his will and

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totle may have made additions to this work in later periods, until the end of his life: see e.g. Else (1957) xi, 11, 127–31, 152–55, 667; Düring (1966) 126, 162–64; Janko (1987) xiv.

66. See the enlightening discussion of Halliwell (1998) 324–30. See also De Montmollin (1951) 11–15, 41–47, 117–36; House (1956) 32–39; Lucas (1968) xii–xiii; Fuhrmann (1982) 150–55; Tsitsiridis (2024); and cf. Hose (2023) 67–72 (the present form of the *Poetics* postdates Plato's *Laws*, and therefore Aristotle's period of work at the Academy).

genius, manages to prevail over his enemies, surpass all obstacles, and impose his personal scheme on the world — whether on the microcosm of his own home and neighbourhood (as e.g. in domestic Middle and New Comedy) or more grandly on the universe (as in the fantastic plots of Aristophanes and the other fifth-century *Märchenkomödien*).[67]

In this context, the protagonist of comedy flies to the sky and brings the goddess of peace back to earth; he builds a city in the air and acquires supreme power over the entire *cosmos*; or he may simply override the resistance of his stern father and the reactions of his rich rival and gain the girl he loves. In any case, in the majority of comic plays, the hero's final victory is celebrated with an erotic, sexual union between the hero himself and an alluring female figure.[68] Dicaeopolis is caressed by two young prostitutes in the banquet; Trygaeus marries the goddess of crop-bearing; Peisetaerus becomes the husband of Basileia, the personification of universal power; the *Lysistrata* ends with a general reunion of Greek men with their beloved wives. The young protagonist of Middle and New Comedy finally marries the citizen maiden he has fallen in love with, or he enjoys his love with the beautiful hetaira.

This triumph of eroticism in the typical finale of classical comedy —a triumph that consists primarily in the fulfilment of the male hero's sexual desires— marks the fundamentally phallic nature of the comic genre. The standard underlying scheme of every comic plot is an *agon*, a struggle that aims at the ultimate dominion and satisfaction of the protagonist's phallus. The comic hero himself may be regarded as the great *ithyphallus* in person, the scenic embodiment of the archetypical phallus of fertility, which conquers and overcomes all opposition, leaps up and grows manly and fierce, and in the end penetrates the universe. The consciousness of this deeper nature of comedy was perhaps the determinative factor, which led ancient poets and thinkers to look for the roots of comic poetics in their familiar rites of the phallus.

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67. On this typical pattern of the standard comic plot, see McLeish (1980) 64–78; Sifakis (1992); Konstantakos (2002).
68. See Süss (1910) 450–60; Kunst (1919); Wehrli (1936) 21–55.

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