1961

An Aristotelian Approach to the Sources of Comic Effect in the Birds of Aristophanes

John J. O’Callaghan

Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses

Part of the Classics Commons

Recommended Citation


https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/1657

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master’s Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.

Copyright © 1961 John J. O’Callaghan
AN ARISTOTELIAN APPROACH TO THE

SOURCES OF COMIC EFFECT IN

THE BIRDS OF ARISTOPHANES

by

John J. O'Callaghan, S.J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
LIFE

John J. O'Callaghan, S.J. was born in New Rochelle, New York, October 20, 1931.

He was graduated from St. Xavier High School, Louisville, Kentucky, June, 1949, and entered the Society of Jesus in that year. In June, 1954 he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from Loyola University, Chicago.

He began his graduate studies at Loyola University in 1954. After completing his courses in philosophy he taught Greek and Latin at Loyola Academy, Chicago and Wilmette, Illinois, from 1957 to 1959. He began his theological studies at West Baden College, West Baden Springs, Indiana, in 1959.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The problem of literary forms—Tragedy and Comedy distinguished—Can Aristotle’s norms for tragedy in the Poetics be applied to comedy?—Procedure.

| II. THE POETICS: ITS APPLICATION TO COMEDY | 8 |

General aim of the Poetics—Overall scheme—Examination of particular concepts: imitation, action, qualitative parts, high seriousness, catharsis—Adaptation to comedy—Lane Cooper—Other "Aristotelian critics".

| III. SUPPLEMENTARY NORMS FOR COMEDY | 50 |

The Tractatus Coislinianus: authenticity, value—"Non-Aristotelian critics"—Sources of Comic effect not discussed in the Poetics—Psychology of Comedy: historical survey, incongruity, catharsis, "self-satisfaction."

| IV. THE NORMS APPLIED TO THE BIRDS | 81 |

General view of play—Categorical study: plot, character-thought—Sequential analysis using combined "norms"—Summary.

| V. CONCLUSIONS | 121 |

Specifications—Relative importance of qualitative parts for tragedy and comedy—Agon theory—value of Poetics for criticism of comedy.
Much printing ink has been expended in recent years on the subject of literary forms. What are forms in terms of literature? Are they limited in number? Are they universal, mutually exclusive? Interestingly enough, it is in connection with the study of the Sacred Scriptures that the question has been widely discussed. Increasing scientific knowledge has brought home the fact that Scriptural books hitherto accepted at face value as historical accounts (in the way "historical" has come to be accepted in our day) can no longer be so unquestionably accepted. Yet this is revelation, the word of God. To solve the dilemma, scripture scholars have done much thinking.

One of the results of this thinking is that much new light has been shed on literary forms. Scholars have come to realize that great care must be had in typing a work of literature in a neat category. Uncritical acceptance of such a typed work can lead to positive error in its interpretation, or at least to un-
warranted or mistaken criticism of its excellence. For instance, to consider the book of Genesis as strict history is to run in the face of scientific evidence. "The literary forms of the first eleven chapters of Genesis do not correspond to any of our classical categories and cannot be judged in the light of Greco-Latin or modern literary types. It is therefore impossible to deny or to affirm their historicity as a whole, without unduly applying to them norms of a literary type under which they cannot be classed."1 In the same connection Moriarty observes that "since the Old Testament contains such a variety of forms, many of which are peculiar to the ancient world, the student must take into careful consideration the character of these forms under penalty of misinterpreting their message."2

It is commonly accepted, then, that literary forms do change. When we talk of the historicity of the Old Testament, we are not claiming the Old Testament as history in the same sense that, for instance, Churchill's history of England is. It is history the

---


way the ancient Semites thought of it, and some of it is a far
cry from the factual, critical, footnoted history of today's schol-
lars. The fault lies in our terminology. We do not ordinarily
define with accuracy what we mean by "history."

Now let us apply all this to another field. What of that
type of literature called the drama? Are we correct in thinking
of our modern theatre in the same way as we think of ancient
Greek drama? Is the literary form the same now as it was two
thousand years ago? If not, then what of the norms for drama
laid down by Aristotle?

The problem becomes more complex if we descend our quasi-
Porphyrean tree to types within the drama. The common division
is between comedy and tragedy. How exclusive a division is it?
Is tragedy a form essentially different from comedy? If so, can
the norms for criticizing the two be the same?

To narrow our discussion of this last point, let us confine
ourselves to a classical context. Are the plays of ancient
Greece's Aristophanes essentially different from those of Sopho-
cles? The instance has the merit of involving extremes. If the
plays are only accidentally opposed, then the Aristotelian "laws"
for tragedy should govern Aristophanes' plays as well as Sopho-
cles'. Do they? If on the other hand Aristophanes' comedy differs essentially from Sophocles' tragedy, then what are comedy's "laws," and how do they differ from tragedy's?

Now we are approaching the real problem of this thesis. It is a problem in literary criticism. Can we apply to comedy the norms of criticism which Aristotle gives us for tragedy? Notice that we have limited our scope considerably. We are not considering now whether modern comedy is essentially the same as ancient comedy. We are considering whether ancient Greek comedy as a literary type is essentially different from ancient Greek tragedy.

Since this question is still considerably beyond the scope of a single thesis, however, we must limit ourselves further. In order to verify or disprove that ancient Greek comedy and tragedy are essentially different, we would need an extensive study of many plays of both types, by representative authors of various stages in classical drama. We propose in this thesis to study one play, of one playwright: the Birds of Aristophanes. Our findings, therefore, cannot be considered as facts based on a scientifically proven hypothesis.

Nevertheless, we may consider the results of our work as one instance in which a hypothesis is or is not verified. Such re-
suits are not without value. Using the findings of this thesis as a beginning, others could continue the verification process and hope to arrive eventually at a conclusion sufficiently universal as to be considered a literary canon.

Our work therefore will be this: to begin with an analysis of Aristotle's norms for tragedy in the Poetics, explaining them sufficiently for the clear understanding necessary before we can try to use them to evaluate comedy; to show how these norms might be adapted, without essential change, to fit the different approaches a comedy would take. This will constitute the second chapter of the thesis.

We will then attempt to supplement the norms of the Poetics with the later analysis--this time of comedy proper--given in the Tractatus Coislinianus, generally attributed to John Tzetzes. Since the approach and general terminology of this document is indisputably Aristotelian, we will not be going beyond our limits in thus using it. We shall, of course, discuss also its claim to be

3The attribution of this fragment or condensation of a larger original to John Tzetzes is based on its strong resemblance to some of his known works on comedy. Cf. for example his "First Proem to Aristophanes," cited in G. Kaibel, ed., Comicorum Graecorum Fragmenta (Berlin, 1899), I, fasc. prior.
ing an actual outgrowth of the "lost book" on comedy of the Poet-
ics. At the same time we can bring in the opinions of later
scholars and writers on the subject who are at least implicitly
indebted to Aristotle, to supplement the norms thus far estab-
lished, without fear of getting outside of our "Aristotelian ap-
proach." Here too we can touch briefly on what we may call a
"psychological analysis" of comedy, interesting as an introduc-
tion to another method of analyzing comic effect. This will be
covered in Chapter Three.

At this point we shall be ready, in Chapter Four, to examine
the Birds in the light of the norms formulated from the above
studies. With the exception of two major points of criticism,
we shall attempt to analyze the play scene by scene, thus keeping
as much as possible of its original pace and movement, and avoid-
ing a dreary and unnatural cataloguing of sources of comic effect.

Chapter Five we shall devote to summing up and drawing some
conclusions from our study.

In summary, then, our problem may be stated as this: Does
Aristotle in the Poetics, and in the literary tradition he estab-
lished, give us adequate norms for judging comedy as well as tra-
gedy? To resolve it, we shall attempt to formulate, with the
help of scholars, a set of norms for comedy based on the *Poetics*
and supplemented by later comic analyzes in the Aristotelian tra-
dition. In the light of these norms we shall then examine Aristo-
phanes' *Birds*, with the purpose of testing the adequacy of an
Aristotelian analysis of tragic drama when applied to comedy.

The net result of this will be the beginnings of an answer
to the larger question of literary form proposed at the begin-
ning of this chapter: Is comedy essentially different from tragi-
dy? Moreover, since the *Birds* must play the central role in
the thesis, we may legitimately hope for, as an added result of
our work, a heightened appreciation of the excellences of the
play, and a deeper insight into the type of literature it repre-
sents.
CHAPTER II

THE POETICS: ITS APPLICATION TO COMEDY

Aristotle wrote his Poetics probably c. 330 B.C. Different opinions have been advanced as to the circumstances of its composition and it seems safe to say this, that it is, as we have it, not the comparatively polished work that other extant writings of the great philosopher are. Again, its immediate purpose is nowhere stated, but as to the Poetics' general aim there seems little doubt. The book is a "manual on poetry" in which Aristotle inquires into the nature of each literary medium and into its potentialities."2 In it, "he tells one . . . how to construct a

---

1 Thus, Lane Cooper, Aristotle on the Art of Poetry (New York, 1913), xxvii, conjectures that what we have are "merely the notes of a student, taken down from oral delivery." Ingram Bywater, Aristotle on the Art of Poetry (Oxford, 1909), xix-xx, says concerning manuscript difficulties: "The only conceivable hypothesis is that the Aristotelian materials survived at first simply on loose tablets, or sheets, as we should say; that each one of these contained a definite piece of text of varying length, sometimes that of a chapter, and sometimes that of one of the sections or paragraphs of a modern edition; and that the whole was put into its present shape by an early editor."

2 John Gassner, "Aristotelian Literary Criticism," introduc-
good play and a good epic, just as in the *Rhetoric* he tells one how to make a good speech."³ It is "an analysis of the nature and functioning of the art of poetry and of its species."⁴

This analysis consumes twenty-six chapters, which may be grouped into five main sections. Bywater gives them as:

1. A preliminary discourse on Tragedy, epic poetry, and comedy, as the chief forms of imitative poetry, and the subject of the inquiry that is to follow (chaps. 1-5).
2. Definition of a tragedy, and the rules for its construction (chaps. 6-22).
3. Rules for the construction of an epic (chaps. 23-4).
4. Enumerations of the criticisms to which an epic or tragedy may be subjected, and of the various possible replies to them (chap. 25).
5. A comparison of epic poetry and Tragedy, showing the artistic superiority of the latter (chap. 26).⁵

we will go into some sections in greater particular here, so that we may enter upon our actual employment of the pertinent ideas with greater understanding.

---


Aristotle begins his treatment with a statement that poetry, of whatever kind, is a type of imitation (μίμησις). This term has given rise to much discussion; here we will accept it in the same sense that Butcher takes it, as "a creative act which is the expression of the concrete thing under an image which answers to its true idea."\(^6\) Looked at in this way, imitation is not a slavish reproduction, as it is so often misinterpreted to be, but "a rivalry of nature, a completion of her unfulfilled purposes, a correction of her failures."\(^7\) The objects of imitation are human characters, emotion, and action. So poetry, "imitative art in its highest form," is "an expression of the universal element in human life."\(^8\)

The Poetics continues with a discussion of the origin of poetry. It is traceable to two instincts in man: that of imitation, and that of harmony and rhythm. Historically, men tended to imitate the actions of good men or of "meaner persons" (τῶν

---

\(^7\)Ibid.  
\(^8\)Ibid.
depending on whether they themselves were "graver spirits" (διὰ σκοπότεροι) or the "more trivial sort" (διὰ εὐτελέστεροι). This divergence eventually issued in two types of poetry: tragedy and comedy.

The steps in the rise of each of these types are given briefly, along with a definition of the ludicrous (τὸ γέλοιον) as consisting in "some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive." (1449a 33-34) Then tragedy, its definition, constitutive parts, "rules," excellences, ideals, is discussed at great length. We shall reserve our treatment of this until later. Chapter 20 takes up the question of language in general; Chapters 21 and 22, poetic diction in particular; and Chapter 23 begins a discussion of epic poetry.

In Chapter 24, Aristotle proposes objections to poetry in general, and indicates the principles on which these are to be answered. In conclusion he gives a comparison of epic and tragic poetry, and assigns a higher place to the latter as having all

---

Aristotle, Poetics, 1448b 25-6. Henceforth the citations will be noted immediately by Bekker number, and unless it is otherwise stated will be according to the translation of Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, which will be cited as Poetry and Fine Art.
the epic merits and, moreover, "attaining its end more perfectly" (1462b 14-15).

So much for a conspectus of the whole book. Now we want to return to the section dealing with the nature of tragedy to examine the principles there contained.

"Tragedy," says Aristotle, "Is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not or narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions" (1449b 24-28). Let us examine the definition.

The concept of imitation as a basis for poetry has already been treated. The next key idea in the definition is that of action (πρᾶξις). This is more than just an external process, "one of a series of outward phenomena."\(^{10}\) It is, according to Butcher, "mainly an inward process, a psychical energy working outwards; deeds, incidents, events, situations, being included under it so far as these spring from an inward act of will, or elicit some ac-

\(^{10}\) Butcher, Poetry and Fine Art, p. 123.
tivity of thought or feeling.  "11 But if this πρᾶξις must spring from an inner force, its outward manifestation is equally important. "The very word 'drama' indicates this idea. The verb (ὀπαν) from which the noun comes, is the strongest of the words used to express the notion of doing; it marks an activity exhibited in outward and energetic form."12 So we see "[t]he word 'action' . . . requires to be interpreted with much latitude of meaning. It embraces not only the deeds, the incidents, the situations, but also the mental processes, and the motives which underlie the outward events or which result from them. It is the compendious expression for all these forces working together toward a definite end."13

It is this action in a drama which Aristotle calls μῦθος, plot. And it is clearly the heart of the drama. Aristotle himself talks of it as that: ἄρχη μὲν οὖν καὶ οἴον ψυχή ὁ μῦθος (1450 a-b, passim). And he goes on to discuss at length the particular requirements for its excellence. But he notes immediately that

11Ibid.
12Ibid., p. 335.
13Ibid., p. 337.
action implies agents with certain qualities of thought (διάνοια) and character (θέως). He then devotes some time to a discussion of these two elements, and the other constitutives of drama: diction (λέξις), song (μελωποιία), and spectacular elements (δραματικά) (1450a-b, passim).

To begin with plot, Aristotle early makes the statement, deceptively jejeune at first sight, that a good tragic plot must have "a beginning, a middle, and an end" (1450b 27-28). A study of this principle soon brings to light its soundness. What Aristotle is saying is that, given a certain start, the incidents of the plot must flow from that start and toward this ending with the certain progression of effect from cause, cause to effect. This rules out a building-block process of heaping up incidents. Such a story may be of sufficient length; it is not ipso facto a unity. Nor does the unity of the hero assure unity of plot. For "infinitely various are the incidents in one man's life which cannot be reduced to unity; and so, too, there are many actions of one man out of which we cannot make one action" (1451a 16-19). No, only an organic structure of incidents, each related inescapably—or at least with probability—to what precedes or follows it can fulfill the Aristotelian demands for a perfectly unified
plot. As he puts it, "... the plot, being an imitation of an action, must imitate one action and that a whole, the structural union of the parts being such that, if one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed" (1451a 31-34).

As for the truth of a plot, Aristotle would require it to be poetic rather than historical. That is, "it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen--what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity" (1451a 37-39). So the tragic poet expresses the universal, the historian only the particular.

Plots may be simple--when they progress evenly from outset to logical consequence with no interruption or reversal of the situation, or complex--when the events are complicated by an unexpected recognition influencing the outcome, or by a reversal of the situation, or by both. Of the two possibilities Aristotle prefers the complex plot for a perfect (καλλίστη) tragedy.

Next Aristotle takes up what is often said to be part of his discussion of character, but what, as Else remarks, is so only "insofar as the character of the hero is related to the best func-
tioning of the plot."\textsuperscript{14} To attain tragedy's purpose of exciting pity and fear, a definite principle is in order. It is that:

\[ \text{the change of fortune presented must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us. Nor, again, that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity: for nothing can be more alien to the spirit of Tragedy; it possesses no single tragic quality; it neither satisfies the moral sense nor calls forth pity or fear. Nor, again, should the downfall of the utter villain be exhibited. A plot of this kind would, doubtless, satisfy the moral sense, but it would inspire neither pity nor fear; for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves. Such an event, therefore, will be neither pitiful nor terrible (1452b 34 - 1453a 7).} \]

The remaining possibility, Aristotle goes on to point out, is a renowned and prosperous man who is not eminently good and just, but whose downfall is brought on not by vice or depravity, but by an error or frailty.\textsuperscript{15}

This notion of the tragic hero is an important one in the Poetics. We will find it a key point in our attempt at applying the norms of tragedy to comedy. To understand it fully, we must understand the nature of the "error or frailty" mentioned above

\textsuperscript{14}Else, p. 365.

\textsuperscript{15}For a minute analysis of these plot-alternatives, as of everything else in the Poetics, cf. Else. This point is covered on pp. 366-375.
as the cause of the hero's downfall. This is the concept of ὀμματια, one of the most famous of the Poetics' elements of tragedy, and one of the most controverted. Without enlarging on the controversy here, let us call on the authority of Else, who says, with ample substantiating evidence, that this is "an ignorance or mistake as to certain details" which ignorance is the "cause" of the tragic action in that it supplies a plausible reason for the fall of a good (though not perfect) man.16

This fall from good to bad fortune should be, for a perfect tragedy, the only issue of the plot. Those tragedies which have a double thread of plot: one happy, for the good character, and one unhappy, for the bad, are only accounted good plays "because of the weakness of the spectators; for the poet is guided in what he writes by the wishes of his audience. The pleasure, however, thence derived, is not the true tragic pleasure. It is proper rather to comedy . . ." (1453a 33-36). Aristotle does not enlarge on this last statement. As we will see below, theories have been advanced as to the pleasure proper to comedy. For now we will pass over the point.

---

16 Else, pp. 383, 385.
The next notion we wish to examine is that of character, ἴθος. Because it is so intimately tied up with another element of the drama, σιάνως, we will understand both better if we examine them together. Else explains them this way: "ἲθος and σιάνως . . . designate these two factors in the moral or practical life of man: the set of character, which is primarily a matter of habituation, and the practical reason, which judges particular cases in relation to general principles. Out of their interaction come our decisions, choices (προαίρεσις); and choice is the test and fullest expression of the moral life."17 He goes on to admit, however, that "we perhaps cannot acquit Aristotle of some ambiguity or hesitation as to the exact line of division between character and thought."18

Else is here referring to the two seemingly disparate definitions of ἴθος and σιάνως which follow one another in the Poetics. At one point Aristotle says: "By character I mean that in virtue of which we ascribe certain qualities to the agents. Thought is required wherever a statement is proved, or, it may be,

17 Else, pp. 239-240.
18 Ibid., p. 245.
a general truth enunciated." (1450a 5-7). Later on he declares: "[Thought is] the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances. . . . Character is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids. Speeches, therefore, which do not make this manifest, or in which the speaker does not choose or avoid anything whatever, are not expressive of character. Thought, on the other hand, is found where something is proved to be or not to be, or a general maxim is ununciated" (1450b, 4-5, 8-13).

The difference, Else explains, is "the conception of both character and thought as being speech, or conveyed through speech: τὸ λέγειν ὀνασθαί . . . πολιτικῶς ἐκποίουν λέγοντας . . . τῶν λόγων ἐν οἷς . . . διάνοια ὧς (sc. ἐστὶν οἱ λόγοι) ἐν οἷς κτλ. In their original context the two 'parts' were brought in primarily as the factors which 'qualify' the actions of the dramatic characters. There only διάνοια was defined in terms which clearly referred to the actual expression of thought. Here they are defined --redefined--as the content of the characters' speeches."19 Then this is further complicated by Aristotle's noting that "the older

19Ibid., pp. 266-267.
poets make their characters speak the language of civil life; the poets of our time, the language of the rhetoricians" (1450b 7-8). The difficulty with Butcher's translation here, Else points out, is that [λέγειν] πολιτικῶς refers, not to political oratory, but rather to the "combined art of Ethics and Politics." Hence λέγειν πολιτικῶς is really equivalent to λέγειν ἡθικῶς in the sense of "speaking in accordance with one's character," habitually and unreflectively. λέγειν ὑποτικῶς on the other hand means "speaking what is appropriate for a character in a situation" consciously and reflectively. It is easy to see that in the former manner of speaking it is the true natural character that receives the emphasis, while in the latter the intellectual, self-conscious element comes to the fore. And it is a commonplace of criticism that Euripidean and post-Euripidean tragedy contained much more of this intellectual element than did the earlier tragedians' works, thus accounting for Aristotle's historical distinctions.

In short, the difference in Aristotle's definitions of ἡθικῶς and διάνοια seems to stem in large measure from the difference in the usage and emphasis different playwrights introduced. If he

20 Ibid., pp. 265-266.
tends to distinguish ἡθος and δίδυμα as bases for certain ways of speaking from ἡθος and δίδυμα as the contents of speech, it is chiefly a matter of point of view, and not of real distinction δίδυμα as natural expression of ἡθος again, is distinguished from δίδυμα as conscious, artful distinction and delineation of ἡθος largely by starting point and emphasis of the playwright. In fine, the original explanation of these two elements by Else as the set of character and the practical reason will serve our purpose here very well.

In respect to ἡθος (and its outgrowth δίδυμα) Aristotle lays down "four things for the poet to aim at" (1454a 16, tr. Cooper). The agents must be: 1) good, 2) true to type, 3) true to life, 4) consistent.

By a "good" agent Aristotle means one possessing ἀρετή, i.e., performing his proper function. He expatiates on this: "The ethical element will be present in a tragedy if, as was said, by speech or act the agents manifest a certain moral bent in what they choose to do or avoid; and the ethos will be good if the habit of choice is good" (1454a 17-19). And Butcher indicates that "the characters portrayed by epic and tragic poetry have their basis in moral goodness; but the goodness is of the heroic order."
It is quite distinct from plain, unaspiring virtue. It has nothing in it common or mean. Whatever be the moral imperfections of the characters, they are such as impress our imagination, and arouse the sense of grandeur; we are lifted above the reality of daily life." So besides choosing the good and avoiding the bad, a really good character must, for Aristotle, be outstanding in his goodness.

Aristotle's next requirement for an agent in tragedy is truth to type, or propriety. By this he means that actions must realistically proportioned to the one doing them. "There is a type of manly valour; but valour in a woman, or unscrupulous cleverness, is inappropriate" (1454a 22). This is not a question of credible as opposed to incredible situations or actions; that is covered by the next requirement.

Truth to life means a certain realism supplying credibility to the incidents of the play. "The agents must seem like natural human beings."22

The last point, self-consistency, Aristotle himself qualifies. "[T]hough the subject of imitation, who suggested the type.

21Butcher, Poetry and Fine Art, p. 233.
22Cooper, Aristotle on the Art of Poetry, p. 50.
be inconsistent, still he must be consistently inconsistent" (1454a 26-28). And Cooper adds, "If the characters are not true to their nature as first presented, their inconsistency must not be accidental. Departures from the norm must not be made without suggesting the norm." 23

Next in order of "parts" of tragedy is diction, λέξις. Here Aristotle is speaking of the linguistic form of the speeches, as opposed to their content, i.e., character and thought. In explaining diction, he goes into a very basic analysis of language, starting with its smallest component, the letter, and progressing to the sentence or phrase. He then says something very significant in the light of his following remarks: "Every word is either current, or strange, or metaphorical, or ornamental, or newly-coined, or lengthened, or contracted, or altered" (1457b 1-3). Enlarging on these types, he concludes that "the perfection of style is to be clear without being mean" (1458a 18). And in charting the middle course he finds that "nothing contributes more to produce a clearness of diction that is remote from commonness than the lengthening, contraction, and alteration of words.

23 Cooper, An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy (N.Y., 1922), p. 203
For by deviating in exceptional cases from the normal idiom, the language will gain distinction; while, at the same time, the partial conformity with usage will give perspicuity" (1458a 34 - 14-58b 5).

If clarity without triteness is style's perfection, its crowning grace is, to Aristotle, "to have a command of metaphor." This is "the greatest thing by far. This alone cannot be imparted by another; it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances" (1459a 6-8).

Here it should be noted that, in spite of Butcher's interpretation of the text as meaning that "its [i.e., λέξις] essence is the same both in verse and prose" (1450b 15-16), this meaning is by no means certain. Else contends that such an interpretation falsifies the thought and really is just the opposite of the truth. With convincing arguments he reasons that what Aristotle really means is that his definition of λέξις as "the expression of meaning through the use of language" holds true "whether one speaks of 'verses' or 'speeches'" (1450b 15-16, tr. Else). From this and other facts24 about the Poetics he concludes that "λέξις

24Chiefly that "outside of one very general allusion to the dithyramb (59a 9), there is no mention of and no citation from any kind of lyric verse" (p. 567).
in Aristotle's usage means exclusively dialogue-composition, the composition of spoken verses. The style of the choral lyrics of tragedy is not treated in the Poetics. This fact will have bearing on our projected adaptation of the Poetics to comedy.

The elements of song, μελοποιία and spectacle, ὠψίς are next treated rather briefly. Of the former as performed in tragedy we know little. And we know less about its difference from the corresponding choral element in comedy. Hence we shall not discuss it at any length. Spectacle is dismissed by Aristotle as of all the parts "the least artistic, and connected least with the art of poetry. For the power of Tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors. Besides, the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet" (1450b 20-21).

This seems to show that ὠψίς was a considerably narrow term for a special feature of Greek stagecraft: the convenient (for poets) arrangement of solving the insoluble plot difficulty by a

25Ibid., p. 568.

26 Here we are speaking, of course, of the choral dance itself. Of the choral lyrics, their metres, etc., we have much extant evidence.
deus ex machina in one form or another. However, Else interprets ὑπ' ᾿ελθεν to mean specifically to the functions of the property man or stage costumer. At any rate it seems clear that "it does not mean the 'spectacle' or staging of the play as a whole, but simply the visual aspect of the dramatic characters."27

This completes the analysis of the qualitative parts of tragedy. Going back to the definition Aristotle gives, we find that most of its notions have been covered in the above analysis. Two exceptions to this are: οἰκουμή and κάθερις.

When Aristotle speaks of the action of tragedy as οἰκουμή, he is attributing to it gravity, weight, "high seriousness." We recall section 1448b 24, where he noted that historically "the graver spirits [among poets] imitated noble actions, and the actions of good men."28 Though translators have rendered the word in various ways,29 we can see clearly from context what Aristotle

27 Else, p. 278.

28 The Greek word for "graver" is σεμνότατος. The point is that men of that type would naturally produce plays whose whole action is οἰκουμή.

29 So, 1448a 2, where Aristotle opposes men who are σεμνότατος to those who are φαύλοι. Butcher translates: the higher to the lower type; Bywater: the good to the bad. 1448a 27 has the same
is driving at, and realize that precisely here is a major distinguishing mark between comedy and tragedy.\footnote{Butcher, Poetry and Fine Art, says: "No one English word completely renders ὁμοφαῖος. The translation 'noble', which has the merit of applying to the characters as well as to the action, yet suggests too much a purely moral quality, while at the same time it does not adequately bring out the implied antithesis to comedy. Grave and great--these are the two ideas contained in the word." (p. 241. [Italics not all in the original.])} We shall go into this more later.

The last major point of Aristotle's analysis we must explore is the complicated and controverted notion of ἀξίωματικός. Since it figures so largely in the Poetics' make-up and history, we will treat it at some length, while recognizing that we cannot exhaust the scholarship and ingenuity which commentators have expended on it.

Two explanations of the term have become classic, and most if not all of the important commentators on the Poetics have es-

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Transliteration of the same words.} 1449b 17, τραγῳδίας ὁμοφαῖος is translated by both the above as "good tragedy." 1448b 34, τὰ ὁμοφαῖα, is "the serious style" for both. 1449b 10, ὁμοφαῖοι, Butcher translates: "[characters of] a higher type"; Bywater: "[imitation of] serious subjects." 1451b 6, ὁμοφαῖότερον, Butcher renders: "a higher thing"; Bywater: "of graver import."
  \item \footnote{Butcher, Poetry and Fine Art, says: "No one English word completely renders ὁμοφαῖος. The translation 'noble', which has the merit of applying to the characters as well as to the action, yet suggests too much a purely moral quality, while at the same time it does not adequately bring out the implied antithesis to comedy. Grave and great--these are the two ideas contained in the word." (p. 241. [Italics not all in the original.])}
\end{itemize}
established themselves in one or the other camp. A third radically different solution is proposed by Else. We shall examine these three explanations in turn.

The first opinion, subscribed to by such men as Weil and Bernays, whom Butcher and Bywater would follow generally, holds for catharsis as a purgation of the emotions analogous to the purgation of "peccant humours" accomplished by a physic. The cue for this explanation is a passage in the Politics (8.7) where Aristotle speaks of certain kinds of music producing a salutary effect on those subject to excesses of enthusiasm.31 The music effects a homeopathic cure, as it were fighting fire with fire. That this example of catharsis is pertinent to drama is supported by what Aristotle says by way of preface to it: "What we mean by katharsis we will now state in general terms [ἀπλῶς]; hereafter we will explain it more clearly [ἔροδεσαν οἰκείοτερον] in our treatise on poetry."32

---

31The Greek ἕθουσιαστικός has the meaning of "frenzied, frantic, wildly passionate," or even "possessed." Aristotle's idea seems the opposite of Congreve's "music hath charm to soothe the savage breast"—though it looks to the same end.

Since, however, he does not keep this promise—or at least we have no extant evidence that he did—we are left to make what we can of his cryptic references to catharsis in the Poetics. The advocates of the purgation theory hold that the experiencing of pity and fear in the course of viewing a tragedy "purges away" the painful elements in the real-life pity and fear each one feels, leaving those emotions "transmuted into higher and more refined forms." Butcher would add to this, at least as "the natural outcome of his [Aristotle's] doctrine" that the spectator "forgets his own petty sufferings. He quits the narrow sphere of the individual. He identifies himself with the fate of mankind. . . . [and] it is precisely in this transport of feeling, which carries a man beyond his individual self, that the distinctive tragic pleasure resides. Pity and fear are purged of the impure element which clings to them in life. In the glow of tragic excitement these feelings are so transformed that the net result is a noble emotional satisfaction."  

---

33 Butcher, Poetry and Fine Art, p. 254.  
34 Ibid., pp. 268-269.  
The second standard explanation of catnarsis, held by Hein- 
sius, Milton, Lessing, Susemihl, Brandis, Hermann, etc., is the 
**purification** theory. According to its exponents, not a purgation 
but a purification of pity and fear takes place in the viewers of 
tragedy. Though there are varying explanations of this, the 
principal idea is that the emotions are moderated, healthfully 
checked, by being exercised at a tragedy, whether because the 
suffering is fictional, or because there is no self-interest in 
the viewer's emotions, or just because the emotions are dissi-
pated by frequent excitement. The metaphor is no longer medici-
nal here, but religious, going back to the rite of purification 
from some pollution or stain of sin.

The third explanation is also based on the ancient Greek 
idea of "blood-guilt." Else sees this concept of pollution for 
the killing of especially blood-kin as playing a large role in 
Greek religious, legal, and poetic history. This, he says, is 
testified to by:

*its roots in the primitive solidarity of the family; the 
preoccupation, not to say obsession, of archaic Greece 
with means of purification, especially for the spilling of 
kindred blood; the connection of all this with new ideas 
(actually old ideas revived) about the survival of the dead; 
the flourishing concept of the Erinyes or Erinyes, especially 
those excited by the murder of kindred; the very large share
which these preoccupations had in the rise of Delphi to a place of commanding importance; the tardiness and hesitancy of the state in taking over responsibility for the direct prosecution of homicide, especially the murder of blood-kin; the special provisions (as to both courts and procedure) for handling such cases, even in fully developed Greek law; and, finally, the literary precipitate of all these fears and taboos in Attic tragedy, particularly that of Aeschylus (above all in the _Orestia_), but also in other trilogies and in individual plays.36

Basing his arguments on textual interpretation, Else contends that the latter part of Aristotle's definition of tragedy has been widely mistranslated, and therefore misunderstood, thus giving rise to theories on catharsis widely different from Aristotle's real meaning. Butcher's translation is an example of this misunderstanding: "[an action] through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions."37 For such a version Else would substitute: "carrying to completion, through a course of events involving pity and fear, the purification of those painful or fatal acts which have that quality."38

With this as at least a possible explanation of the text,


37Butcher, _Poetry and Fine Art_, translating _Poetics_ 1449b 27

38Else, p. 228. On this and the following pages he gives a detailed explanation of the grammar, etc. involved.
Else goes on to examine related passages for its substantiation. He finds that substantiation to his satisfaction, and emerges with a theory which is in substance this:

Something (i.e., the πάθος) μιαρόν (foul, tainted, causing pollution) has been done. To make it fit as a tragic constituent it must be purified so as to excite pity and fear in the rational viewer and/or reader. This can only be done by the μιμησία—the unfolding of the plot—which of course depends on the poet's art.

In Else's own words:

Thus the catharsis is not a change or end-product in the spectator's soul, or in the fear and pity (i.e., the dispositions to them) in his soul, but a process carried forward in the emotional material of the play by its structural elements, above all by the recognition. For the recognition is the pay-off, to use a vulgar but expressive modernism; or, in more conventional figure, it is the hinge on which the emotional structure of the play turns. The catharsis, that is, the purification of the tragic act by the demonstration that its motive was not μιαρόν, is accomplished by the whole structure of the drama, but above all by the recognition.40

A weakness of Else's theory is its failure to explain why modern theatre-goers, lacking the Greeks' pre-occupation with "blood-guilt," are still able to experience an emotional cathar-

40 Ibid., p. 439.
sis at a performance of, say, _Cedipus Rex_. Perhaps he would argue that they don't, at least to the extent the ancients did. This whole objection might fall into the category of pre-formed judgments based on a false theory of catharsis.41

At least Else's theory has the merit of concreteness, and in this it contrasts forcibly, as Else himself notes, with other attempts at interpreting Aristotle on this point. Beyond this, the explanation is undeniably logical and seems to accord with personal experience. Built as it is on Else's indisputable ability as a Greek scholar, it can hardly be denied textual justification. And the other theories, also textually justifiable presumably, seem to labor under their own difficulties. Chief among these is the vagueness mentioned before, but ranking high, to the author's mind, is a certain dissatisfaction they leave with him in the face of experience. The question then arises whether the fault (if there is objective fault) lies with what Aristotle meant, or

41 So, Else says (pp. 443-444): "... [O]ne of the great virtues of the traditional view(s) was ... a vagueness which made it possible to stretch 'catharsis' to cover almost every conceivable variety of literary experience. We have grown used to feeling--again vaguely--that serious literature is hardly respectable unless it performs some 'catharsis.' ... But all this may be nothing but a self-propagating mirage. Aristotle does not tell us that catharsis is so important ..."
with what he is interpreted as having meant. The question cannot be answered, of course. But it seems that for purposes of analyzing comedy absolutely, apart from anyone's—even Aristotle's—ideas on it, that explanation of catharsis should be used which best satisfies the psychological data. To go a step further, we could say that the notion itself of catharsis should be used only insofar as it seems to explain this data.

Be this as it may, we in our Aristotelian approach should doubtless be ready to adapt the catharsis notion to comedy if it can be so adapted. Else's explanation hardly provides material for adaptation. Cooper on the other hand has explicitly made the adaptation of the traditional purgation—as we shall see in the paragraphs immediately following this—and we can follow him in applying it to the Birds. The amount of conviction with which we do so is irrelevant here.

Having finished, then, an analysis of the Poetics sufficient for our purposes, we turn now to the adaptation to comedy of its norms for tragedy. Foremost among the authorities in this field is Lane Cooper. In his book An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy, Professor Cooper has done an ingenious and careful study of the transference to comedy of Aristotle's principles for tragedy. He
states his opinion on the legitimacy of such a transfer in clear terms:

Much of the Poetics as it stands is implicitly applicable to comedy; with a little manipulation it becomes directly applicable, and not merely to Aristophanes, but, such is its universality, to the fragments of Menander, and to Plautus and Terence, who restore to us some part of the lost Greek comedies intervening, and also to the modern comic poets.\[41\]

Specifically, Cooper would see Aristotle’s first demand for comedy as organic unity. If comedy is to be a work of art, then:

"[e]ven though the scheme of the whole were distorted for comic purposes, still it would be complete and unified; we might compare it with the outline of a ludicrous animal, which does not lack a sort of comic perfection."\[42\] Important words here are, "even though the scheme of the whole were distorted for comic purposes." They contain a qualification which will continue throughout most of Cooper’s adaptation, and which as we shall see looms large in an evaluation of his theory.

Again, reasoning from Aristotle’s customary teleological approach to art, Cooper sees him as demanding that a drama to be

\[41\]Lane Cooper, An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy, p. 44.

\[42\]Ibid., p. 45.
classed as comedy "produce the proper effect of comedy—not any chance effect, but a calculated one, and the right one. And the aim or end will determine the means."\[43\] These means may be "various, chiefly consisting in what is said and done in the play, and secondarily in the employment of music and spectacle."\[44\] But—and here lies the key to successfully adapting to one species of drama norms formulated for a quite different species—"underneath all lies the proper use of the law of proportion, and the law of probability or necessity in the sequence or order of details."\[45\] The operative word here is "proper use." Often that must mean absolute negation; but negation can only apply to something one has first affirmed. That is, "whether he keeps things in proportion, or throws them out of proportion, the writer of comedy must understand true perspective. He must understand the law of proportion as surely as any other artist, as the tragic poet, in order to deviate from it in the right way, at the right time, and to the right extent."\[46\] This same thing holds true with the law

\[43\]Ibid., p. 46.
\[44\]Ibid.
\[45\]Ibid.
\[46\]Ibid.
of probable or necessary sequence—that poetic truth we spoke of above as germane to good tragedy. "The comic poet must work with this law clearly in mind, in order to deviate from it, when deviate he may or must, in the right way, and not in some inartistic fashion."47

It might be objected that this "using by not using" the Aristotelian norms is making a farce out of an attempt to judge comedy by the Poetics. Yet here we are touching on what may well be the essence of comedy's appeal: the radical departure from a norm, perceived as precisely that departure. This is nothing more than incongruity from which "[i]t is generally agreed that the sense of the comic arises."48 This incongruity "implies a process of comparison, which implies the reference to some standard or norm." We will speak of it in some detail in Chapter III when dealing with the "psychology of comedy."

47 Ibid.


49 Ibid., p. 58.
Cooper goes on to discuss the constitutive elements or qualitative parts of tragedy, and concludes: "The composing dramatist obviously does have to attend to these six elements, and the list, as Aristotle correctly observes, is exhaustive. It would be the same for a comic as for a tragic poet."\(^{50}\) The statement is just that, a statement, with no attempt at proof. Cooper seemingly\(^{51}\) takes for granted that these elements are constitutive of "drama" under which genus he, with Aristotle, subsumes tragedy and comedy. Whether or not this is correct regarding certain generic elements possessed in common, we cannot decide \textit{a priori} in this thesis, where our problem is radically concerned with that very point. Still, as a working hypothesis, we may accept Cooper's statement, especially since it has some textual basis,\(^{52}\) and it does, when analyzed, bear out what logic seems to tell us about any play.

A play, if it is to fulfill the very widest definition, must have

\(^{50}\text{Cooper, An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy, p. 47.}\)

\(^{51}\text{Indeed he says as much: "According to Aristotle, in every drama there are six constitutive elements . . ." (p. 46; italics not in original.) Aristotle actually says: ἄνάγκη οὖν πάσης τραγῳδίας μόριν εἶναι ἡξ. But cf. 1448a, where the specific form of μέλος called drama is subdivided into tragedy and comedy according to the objects (good or bad) imitated.}\)

\(^{52}\text{Cf. below on plot, character, and diction.}\)
a plot, however jejeune, agents (character), however nondescript, dialogue (diction), however uninspired, and so on. The way in which these elements are used is quite another story, but they must be, or there is no play.

This much, it seems, we can accept without danger of a circulum vitiosum. Cooper goes on to say, however, that: "[a]s in tragic and epic poetry, so in comedy Aristotle would regard the plot, or general structure of the whole, as the chief of the qualitative or constituent parts of the play, since everything else depends on that."53 Anticipating an objection, he adds that Aristotle's preference for "involved" over "episodic" plots for tragedy (cf. Poetics 1453b 33-34) might not hold true for comedy, especially if he drew on Aristophanes for examples to be analyzed. But he further says:

At the same time I must dissent from a common opinion, and surely from exaggerated forms of it, as to the relative unimportance, as is alleged, of the main action in the works of Aristophanes taken generally. The fundamental thing in each of his plays as we know them is a great comic idea or substantial form which gives rise to all the details of each; it is, even more than the wealth of imagination with which he renders it incarnate, the primary mark of his genius.54

53 Cooper, An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy, p. 47.
54 Ibid., p. 49.
The issue here is not quite as easily disposed of as the former one. It is not per se evidens that plot must be the most important element in a comedy, whatever Aristotle has to say of tragedy. It is not even certain that the "great comic idea" which Cooper sees as fundamental to each of Aristophanes' plays can be equated at all with plot as Aristotle defines it for tragedy.

And yet if we examine the Poetics we find that it is not devoid of references to comic plots (µῦθοι). Speaking of poetry as dealing with the universal, Aristotle is citing comic poets when he says: "It is only when their plot is already made up of probable incidents that they give it a basis of proper names, choosing for the purpose any names that may occur to them, instead of writing like the old iambic poets about particular persons" 1451b 12-15, tr. Bywater). Again, he submits that those tragedies with a double thread of plot do not produce true tragic pleasure. Their pleasure is "proper rather to Comedy, where those who, in the piece, are the deadliest enemies--like Orestes and Aegisthus--quit the stage as friends at the close, and no one slays or is slain" (1453a 36-39). The phrase "in the piece" translates ἐν τῷ µῦθῳ. Another reference to plot in connection with comedy is found in 1449b 5-9. It seems, then, that Aristotle recognized
plots for comedy which were at least analogous to those for tragedy.\textsuperscript{55} The text of the Poetics gives us no clue as to the primacy of these comic plots in their own sphere. We can only submit Cooper's hypothesis to the test of the Birds, and draw a limited conclusion as to its worth.

The same holds true for Cooper's estimate of the relative importance of the other qualitative parts of comedy. Aristotle certainly recognizes the necessity of character; he makes it the object differentiating comic μιμησίς from tragic.\textsuperscript{56} But he nowhere speaks of its relation to comic plot. He refers obliquely to a ludicrous use of certain elements of diction\textsuperscript{57} but that is all. Of the other elements in relation to comedy he says nothing. Cooper's final argument on the point is this:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{55}Cooper elsewhere clarifies his own position and makes a neat distinction when he stresses that Aristotle would have "recognized the legitimate comic appeal of the unsequential," yet still believes that, while approving comic effects arising from the impossible, disjointed λόγος, the inconsequential, "as details in a play," Aristotle would "demand organic structure when he sketched the ideal plot of a comedy." "The Comic Appeal of the Unsequential," Classical Journal, XIX (1924), 566.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{56}\textsuperscript{Cf. Poetics, 1148b 26; 1149a 4-5, 31.}

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., 1458b 11-15.
In analyzing the constituents of the drama, Aristotle proceeds from what is more inward to what is more superficial, from what comes first in the mind of the poet to what comes later, and from what directly concerns the poetic art to what incidentally concerns it, or partly requires the help of another art such as that of the costumer. It follows that in ranking the several elements in comedy he would give them the same relative positions as in tragedy: first, plot; second, ethos. 58

Once again, we can only judge this from our own examination of the Birds.

The next note of tragedy which needs adaptation is σπουδή. Obviously, comedy cannot be "serious." In his definition of comedy taken from Aristotle's definition of tragedy, Cooper makes it "ludicrous," taking his cue no doubt from 1448b 37, where Aristotle speaks of Homer as first laying down the "main lines of Comedy, by dramatising the ludicrous instead of writing personal satire." This is an obvious substitution, acceptable as such without further comment.

Lastly we must treat the concept of catharsis. Holding as he does to a form of the purgation theory, Cooper regards catharsis as an essential element in drama. Thus he says:

[It has generally been assumed that, as Aristotle thought the arousal and relief, or 'catharsis', of pity and fear,
and the resultant pleasure, to be the proper effect of tragedy, so he would recognize some sort of catharsis, and the resultant pleasure, to be the proper end of comedy, basing his opinion upon the observable effect of the best comedies on the spectator or reader. And this effect would be, so to speak, both psychological and physiological—as in tragedy we have the bodily shiver accompanying fear, and the flow of tears accompanying pity. The inward feeling displays itself outwardly, emotion and bodily reaction being in fact so closely allied as to be virtually one and the same thing. The observable effects of comedy are on the one hand a heightened sense of well-being, accompanied by a thrill of joy and even cries of joy, such as cheering, and on the other hand the phenomena of laughter.59

To what is this "heightened sense of well-being" attributable? What purgation does it follow upon? Here Cooper taxes his ingenuity to find a parallel to tragic pity and fear, though admitting that there is "perhaps nothing definite" to correspond here. What he puts forth as a conjecture is a purgation of anger and envy, two emotions garnered from a list in another work of Aristotle,60 and "rather constant in daily life."61 These emotions are, "like pity and fear, intimately related; both are disturbing emotions; and their catharsis would amount to a form of

59 Ibid., p. 80.
60 Rhetoric, 2.1 (1378a 26).
61 Cooper, An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy, p. 66.
pleasure as distinct as is the catharsis of the tragic emotions."
Not only are they purged away for a time by the pleasure of com-
edy, but the "sense of disproportion"62 from which they arise is
dissipated. Without going into detail on this point, we may give
Cooper's summary of it:

[As men in daily life are accustomed to suffer from a sense
of disproportion, it is this that is relieved or purged away
by the laughter of comedy; for comedy (witness the comic
mask) distorts proportions; its essence is the imitation of
things seen out of proportion. By contemplating the dispro-
portions of comedy, we are freed from the sense of dispro-
portion in life, and regain our perspective, settling as it
were into our proper selves.]

Admittedly the whole subject of comedy's peculiar effect is
a complex one, and Cooper has examined it historically with cus-
tomary thoroughness before postulating his anger-envy catharsis.
The end result of this theory, the "settling into our proper
selves" seems to be as satisfactory explanation of comedy's ef-
fct as any. One wonders, though, if trying to pinpoint to two
the emotions involved is not overdoing fidelity to Aristotle. At
any rate the subject of the "psychology of comedy" will be taken

62Ibid.

63Ibid., p. 180.
up later in the thesis (and we shall refer to Cooper's investigations there as well), so we need not go into it further now.

In reviewing Cooper's position on the tragic norms in relation to comedy, we see that his premise is that much of the Poetics is applicable as it stands to comedy; the rest is adaptable to comedy. The chief principle underlying adaptability is that of a self-conscious departure from the recognized norms. This is in itself a recognition of the principle of incongruity as elemental to comedy. Though Cooper seems on occasion to try too hard for one-to-one correspondence between the given norms for tragedy and the hypothetical norms for comedy, still his general procedure seems valid and useful. At least the terminology and general divisions of the Poetics fit "drama" as a whole, and so in using them for comedy we have an Aristotelian critical framework—even if that means little more than a logically, psychologically, and workably realistic analysis of de facto compositions.

Though Cooper is the most explicit in his use of Aristotelian tragic norms for comedy, he is by no means the only literary scholar or critic so to use them. There is a long tradition of "Aristotelian" critics of comedy, although perhaps not all would classify themselves that way. Professedly or not, a large segment
of literary critics is in the Aristotelian stream and uses his concepts and terminology—so deeply imbedded in Western thought is Aristotle. Without attempting to exhaust this literary school, we may sample it here to substantiate our own procedure.

We begin with the interesting statement of an Irish comic playwright named George Farquhar (1677-1707). As a scholarly opinion it does not carry much weight; as an indication of a widespread acceptance of an Aristotelian approach to comedy it is more significant. Speaking of the man in the street's appraisal of a poor comedy, he observes:

... I can tell you that one part of the plot had no dependence on the other, which made this simple man drop his attention, and concern for the event; and so, disengaging his thoughts from the business of the action, he sat there very uneasy, thought the time very tedious, because he had nothing to do. The characters were so uncoherent in themselves, and composed of such variety of absurdities, that in his knowledge of nature he could find no original for such a company; and being unacquainted with any folly they reproved, or any virtue that they recommended, their business was as flat and tiresome to him as if the actors had talked Arabic.64

It is noteworthy that the lack of a coherent plot and the incon-

---

sistency of character are the main points of criticism here, just as they were the elements most stressed in Aristotle's treatment of tragedy.

More authoritative as well as more specific is the analysis of comedy by Elisabeth Woodbridge. Thoroughly Aristotelian in approach to drama, she assumes as evident the importance of plot and character in comedy, "for it is with these that the drama [both tragedy and comedy] essentially deals." She then distinguishes two types of comedy on the basis of this:

... [W]e have two main classes of comic effects purely conceptual and perceptual-conceptual, of which the second falls into two parts, according as the contrasts occur simultaneously or successively, and so have to do respectively with plot and character... [W]e have distinguished the comedy whose main point lies in the incongruities of men's character, from the comedy which emphasizes mainly the incongruities in the things that happen to men.

And again she explicitly notes the application of the Poetics' doctrine to comedy: "... Dramatically, character can scarcely be presented save through action, and Aristotle's assertion--difficult to explain as it stands--is unquestionably true if we change its application and read: 'Without action there cannot be

65 Woodbridge, The Drama Its Law and Its Technique, p. 57.
66 Ibid., pp. 57, 62.
a comedy; there may be without character." 67 True, Miss Woodbridge later makes clear that this statement must be modified:

In many respects the laws of structure determined for the serious drama are equally valid for comedy, but there are also important differences between the two kinds of dramatic creation. First, it may be generally stated that in comedies the action of the plot is much more independent of the characters than it is in the serious drama; it is, as we have already implied, even possible to create a comic plot which shall be really comic, while its persons are nothing more than puppets, the development of the plot being wholly extraneous to the characters. 68

But in spite of reservations, she is clearly committed to treating comedy in terms of plot and character—i.e., in terms of Aristotelian elements.

Another distinguished scholar, admittedly Aristotelian, in his well-known edition-translation of the Poetics makes this statement:

Although Bk. II is now lost, there are indications in Aristotle himself which may give us some idea of the ground it must have covered. It may be taken to have comprised (1) the discussion on Comedy promised in Poet. 6, 1149b 21, and (2) the Catharsis theory to which reference is made in Pol. 8.7, 1341b 32 . . . TA GELOIA, the appointed subject of Comedy, must have been considered and examined with the same analytical care as in the treatment of TA PHOSERA KAI ELEI-NA in the surviving theory of Tragedy. And if his theory of

67 Ibid., p. 62.
68 Ibid., p. 137.
Comedy was on much the same lines as that of Tragedy, Aristotle must have had something to say on the MUTHOI of Comedy and also on the ETHOS and LEXIS of the comic personages. The strange expression in Fr. IV [Fragmenta as numbered on pp. 92-95 of Bywater] TO DE PANTON KUNTOTATCH may perhaps have been in its original setting an illustration of the possibilities in the way of diction in Comedy.69

Admitting that the condition ". . . if his theory of Comedy was on much the same lines as that of Tragedy" must qualify all the speculation here, we may note that the very positing of the condition as a possibility by a man like Bywater adds weight to Cooper's theory.

To conclude: for the usage of Aristotelian concepts and terminology in an analysis of comedy, we do not lack precedents. Aristotle himself in the Poetics indicates general areas of such usage, and Cooper has laid down principles which seem reasonable and workable. Moreover he is implicitly supported by the modus agendi of not a few modern literary critics, of whom we have seen some examples.

The final judgment on the validity of these norms will, of course, be their usefulness in the analysis of the Birds.

69Bywater, Aristotle on the Art of Poetry. p. xxiii.
CHAPTER III

SUPPLEMENTARY NORMS FOR COMEDY

Having examined the Poetics for its application and adaptation to comedy, we will attempt in this chapter to supplement the norms it has given us with the ideas of other students of comedy. In some cases we will find confirmation of the Poetics even if not always verbal correspondence. In others we will find definite additions to the ideas so far encountered.

First among the works on comedy we wish to consider is the so-called Tractatus Coislinianus. An outline or digest of a long work, it is of uncertain origin and was first published in 1839 from a manuscript of the 10th century, Number 120 in the De Coislin collection at Paris. Since then it has been published in several other places\(^1\) and has received approbation in varying degrees from scholars. They are almost universal in pointing out

its insufficiencies as an Aristotelian critique of comedy. So Bywater says:

The ... *Tractatus Coislinianus* ... preserves a definition of Comedy, which has no doubt a certain Aristotelian look; anyone can see, however, by simple inspection that it has nothing more than an adaptation, or rather, as Bernays calls it, a travesty of the well-known definition of Tragedy in the existing *Poetics*. ... It is evident that neither the compiler of the *Tractatus* nor the older writer from whom he may have been borrowing had the genuine Aristotelian definition of Comedy before him, and that the gap in knowledge had to be filled up by means of the ... sorry fabrication. The same marks of origin are observable in what the *Tractatus* says of the 'matter' of Comedy ... ²

To this we may add Gudeman's conviction that the most striking proof of the non-Aristotelian origin of whatever source the *Tractatus* is dependent on is that this source was able to furnish only a grotesque travesty of Aristotle's definition of tragedy.³ Cooper quotes McMahon as one who "goes far in depreciating the significance of the fragment."⁴

Yet the *Tractatus* is not to be discounted entirely, most authors argue. Kayser claims for it the foremost place in its cate-


⁴Cooper, *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*, p. 11.
Starkie gives it an implicit encomium when he says: "The loss that literature has sustained through the disappearance of the chapters of the Poetics of Aristotle dealing with comedy can be estimated from a study of the Tractatus, which Cramer edited, from the Codex Coislinianus, more than a half-century ago." Rutherford is less restrained in his tribute and Cooper gives a balanced evaluation of the Tractate. "When all possible objections have been urged against the fragment," he says, "There remain certain elements in it that, we may contend, preserve, if not an original Aristotelian, at all events an early Peripatetic, tradition." Moreover, "[t]hrough constructive effort, the fragment

5 J. Kayser, De Veterum Arte Poetica Quaestiones Selectae, p. 5. Cited in Cooper, An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy, p. 11.


7 Cf. Cooper, Ibid.

8 Ibid., p. 13.
serves to explain Greek comedy in the same way, if not to the same extent, as the Poetics has served to explain Greek tragedy and the epic."\(^9\) True, not everything in the Tractate is of equal value. Indeed, parts of it "may show an unintelligent use of the Poetics, or else a badly-mangled tradition"\(^10\) but other parts, viewed correctly, may well provide an insight into the "lost book" on comedy. The important thing, to Cooper, is that the Tractate never assume more authority than it merits. His premise is that the Poetics itself is considerably applicable to comedy. Then and only then, after such an application has been made, "the authentic elements (if such there be) of the Tractatus Coislinianus become an addendum, very significant in any case, but subordinate to the main Aristotelian theory of comedy, and improperly estimated unless viewed in a perspective of the whole."\(^11\) Given this perspective, "the categories of the ludicrous in the Tractate, whether they proceed from Aristotle himself, or were merely produced under his influence, fall into line as a part of a ratio-

\(^9\)Ibid., p. 15.

\(^{10}\)Ibid., p. 13.

\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 17.
nal and helpful method in the study of the drama."12

Having gained an a priori evaluation of the Tractatus, let us examine it objectively. As printed in Cooper (An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy, pp. 224-226) it occupies three pages and consists of the following material:

1) Categories of poetry in general, with subdivisions.

2) A brief description of tragedy and its function.

3) A definition of comedy (the "travesty" inveighed against above) as an "imitation of an action that is ludicrous and imperfect, of sufficient length, [in embellished language,] the several kinds [of embellishment being] separately [found] in the [several] parts [of the play]; [directly presented] by persons acting, and not [given] through narrative; through pleasure and laughter effecting the purgation of the like emotions. It has laughter for its mother."13

4) A fairly extensive listing of the sources of laughter: diction and content.

5) The distinction of comedy from abuse; the province of comedy: faults in soul and body; the place of laughter in comedy as parallel to fear in tragedy.

6) The breakdown of the "substance" of comedy into its parts (which are the same as Aristotle's qualitative parts of tragedy).

12Ibid., pp. 17-18.

13Ibid., p. 224. Cooper has emended and supplied words where the text is doubtful, basing corrections on the best mss.
a) a brief explanation of each of these parts.

b) a statement as to the occurrence of these parts in comedies.

7) A list of the quantitative parts of comedy.

8) A division of comedy into Old, Middle, and New.

Of these contents of the Tractate, some are of little interest to us here: the divisions of poetry, the quantitative parts of comedy, the divisions of comedy. The much-discussed "definition" of comedy seems to merit most of the condemnation it has received as a meaningless parroting of Aristotle. An obvious case in point here is the function of catharsis of the "emotions" of pleasure and laughter. Again, having Aristotle's own statements on tragedy, we need not pause with the Tractate's. And so with many other details. The "sources of laughter," however, and the listing and explanation of the qualitative parts are very much ad rem and will repay our study. In particular the sources of laughter merit reproduction here, for purposes of using them further:

Laughter arises (I) from the diction[= expression] (II) from the things[= content]

(I) From the diction, through the use of--
(A) Homonyms
(B) Synonyms
(D) Paronyms, formed by
(1) addition and
(2) clipping
(E) Diminutives
(F) Perversion
(1) by the voice
(2) by other means of the same sort
(G) Grammar and syntax

(II) Laughter is caused by the things—
(A) From assimilation, employed
(1) toward the worse
(2) toward the better
(B) From deception
(C) From the impossible
(D) From the possible and inconsequent
(E) From the unexpected
(F) From debasing the personages
(G) From the use of clownish (pantomimic) dancing
(H) When one of those having power, neglecting the greatest things, takes the most worthless.
(I) When the story is disjointed, and has no sequence.\textsuperscript{14}

This breakdown is reminiscent of Woodbridge's analysis of the sources of comic effect. She divides the incongruity which she posits as the basis of any comic effect into 1) purely conceptual and 2) chiefly perceptual.\textsuperscript{15} The former would be wit, and would correspond to the Tractate's diction. Miss Woodbridge, in amplifying her category of wit, mentions "puns, double mean-

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 225. Numerals and letters here are Cooper's additions.

\textsuperscript{15}Woodbridge, The Drama Its Law and Its Technique, p. 53.
ings, irony, hyperbole, etc. The similarity to the Tractate's listing is noteworthy. Incongruity which is chiefly perceptual is stated in general terms as "the contrast between expectation and fulfillment" in the perception of successive events, or the comparison of deviations from a norm to the norm itself, in the perception of simultaneous appearances. An example of the former is "the case of a man who goes to sit down in a chair, the chair is drawn away, he sits on the floor." This could be classified in the Tractate's terms as "deception" or "the unexpected," and it might well involve a "debasing" of the person involved. The latter incongruity is exemplified by "the juxtaposition of a very tall man and a very short man, or a very fat and a very thin man." The contrast to the normal may be implied by a single abnormal individual too, as Falstaff, whose huge girth is humorous for this reason.

Miss Woodbridge nowhere refers to the Tractatus Coislinianus.

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., p. 54.
Though it is possible she is indebted to it indirectly, the probability is that she wrote her theory of comic effects independently of the Tractate. The degree of similarity between the two cannot but help recommend this portion of the Tractate to our consideration.

The first source of laughter, diction, is a familiar Aristotelian term. But here we are given a breakdown of specific techniques which will produce comic effects. They need little explanation, and in their application to the *Birds* in Chapter Four we will see them at some length.

Laughter caused by "things" does not fit so apparently into the *Poetics* scheme. On closer examination of the subdivisions here, however, we find that most of them deal with what we would include under Aristotle's plot and character, with one referring more to Aristotle's spectacle. We will find them of value in applying these norms to the *Birds*.

The listing and explanation of qualitative parts of comedy, being the same as Aristotle's for tragedy, generally, will be use-

---

20 A breakdown, using Cooper's lettering of the Tractate, might be: Plot-A,B,C,D,I; Character-A,F,H; Spectacle-G. It need not be pointed out that these are general divisions, subject to overlapping and even substitution depending upon emphasis wanted.
ful in the same way in Chapter Four.

The Tractate, then, or at least parts of it, we will treat as being in the Aristotelian tradition in the sense that many of its terms are Aristotelian, and it without doubt an attempt at following out the mind of Aristotle on comedy. How authentic it is we leave to the experts; at least in making limited use of it to complement the Poetics in certain areas we will not be going beyond the bounds of prudence.

Turning now to modern drama scholars and critics (as contrasted to Aristotle), we will endeavor to find in their writings elements of comedy which might serve to amplify or complement the norms so far settled upon. With this in mind we will say nothing more here about the many writers who use Aristotelian notions from the Poetics in analyzing comedy. They would only confirm what we are accepting already.

Gilbert Norwood, a noted student of Greek comedy, considers that Aristophanes' greatness as a comic poet lies in three things: "superb wit, splendid poetical genius, immense vitality."21 One of these elements we may ignore as lying outside the scope of

this thesis. Although the poetic quality of his plays is noteworthy, we are not concerned with Aristophanes' genius for beauty. We want to know what makes his work funny--or rather, we want to know what makes any comedy funny, Aristophanes being only a concrete example. To this, it seems, Norwood's elements of wit and vitality primarily conduce.

We find the same two elements cited by Drew as of prime importance in comedy. Speaking of certain sources of comic effect as "elemental and changeless realities" she says, "Verbal wit has always played a great part. Style alone can almost sustain a comedy. . . . So can genuine good spirits. 'Energy is perpetual delight' says Blake, and nowhere more so than in the spirit of comedy. It is astonishing what creative vivacity and fertility can do on the stage, and to what lengths an audience can be trusted to respond, if they can be bounced or cajoled into the right mood."22

Still, large as these ingredients of wit and vitality loom in comedy, they are not, to these critics, the only sources of comic effects. Drew contends that:

---

It is neither wit nor zest which is the most important element in comedy. . . . It is the power to create ironic situation. We have already mentioned the immense effectiveness of irony in the theatre--especially of that type of irony which depends upon the audience having knowledge of facts of which the characters in the play are ignorant. This is the very heart of the comic on the stage, and can operate in the largest and smallest aspects of comic material.  

Croiset notes as "le premier don d' un poète comique" that of "l' invention"--which we may translate as "imagination." He is supported in his view by Butcher, who, besides imagination, cites as elemental--to Aristophanic comedy at least--the power of typifying. Coleridge makes comedy chiefly concerned with untrammelled freedom and vivacity, Lever, with surprise.

What consensus can we draw from these suggestions? Wit, vitality, irony, imagination, typifying power, zest, freedom, vivacity--these are the "non-Aristotelian" candidates for comic ingre-  

---

23 Ibid., pp. 145-146.
diens. The first thing we notice about the list is its repetitiousness. Using different terms often, many of the critics point out identical, or almost identical, characteristics. This is certainly true of Norwood, Drew and Coleridge when they speak, respectively, of vitality, zest, freedom, imagination and vivacity. We shall, then, for the sake of simplicity, include all these terms in the one name Zest.

This leaves us with wit, irony, and typifying power. It goes without saying that rarely will these elements be found separately; nevertheless they do seem distinct elements, and may not be combined or reduced to common denominators. Our final list of sources of comic effect, or in other terms, norms for comedy, not mentioned in either our application or adaptation of the Poetics to comedy, is: wit, zest, irony, and typifying power.

We shall treat them in that order. Wit, first of all, is defined by Norwood as "the intellectual rendering of incongruity." Its essence is "not so much brevity as a short-circuiting of ideas." Its method "is to leave something for the reader to supply and to appreciate all the more zestfully for that very rea-

28Norwood, Greek Comedy, p. 304.
son." "[I]n the story of the man who drew his revolver upon another, explaining that he had determined to shoot anyone whom he found uglier than himself, one version continues: 'The other answered, Shoot!!' The alternative version gives: 'Well, if I'm really uglier than you I don't want to live, so shoot!' The first version is wit; the second has no merciful name."29

In all this, Norwood is distinguishing wit from humor. Speaking of both as the "amusing self-expression of one who envisages the incongruous," he says, "Humour observes and rejoices in the penumbra of character and events; its method is a rich blurring of outline. Wit insists upon the exact shape of thought and gains its effects by remorseless rendering of outline. Humour is emotional, wit intellectual. The humorist sympathizes with those at whom he laughs; the wit may be all compact of malice."30

This is not to say that wit and humor are always divorced in practice. Another way of distinguishing them—and a more satisfactory way to some—is Woodbridge's division of conceptual and perceptual incongruity. It is evident that these need not be, and generally

29 Ibid., p. 305, passim.

30 Ibid., p. 298.
are not, mutually exclusive categories. At any rate, if we think of wit as primarily intellectual, we will have distinguished it enough for our purpose of analysis.31

Zest, or its equivalents, as a source of comic effect is treated by Norwood in an Aristophanic context once more. Prescinding from the context, we may quote his remarks in order to understand the notion of zest itself.

As for the vitality of Aristophanes, a deep sense of it is the first experience of every one who approaches him and the final impression as we look up at length from these extraordinary pages. . . . He rejoiced in life and art, fun and politics, pleasure and wisdom, during that radiant age when all these were still interwoven, pouring forth the treasures of his poetry with prodigal splendour. That is the secret of his charm and of his immortality: he is not only magnificent, he is prodigal.32

Norwood calls a deep sense of Aristophanes' vitality the "first experience" and the "final impression" of one who reads his plays. He is choosing his words well, because one does experience this this vitality or zest; it is an impression. It is easier to feel

31It is noteworthy that Aristotle's category of Diction, strictly speaking, would include this "intellectual incongruity," and in that sense this is not a supplement to the Poetics' norms. But certainly the emphasis which Norwood and others give wit in comedy is justification for treating it as such here.

32Norwood, Greek Comedy, pp. 310-311.
than to define. Thus Drew—who advances this "vivacity" as a chief comic ingredient—illustrates her point:

Hohiere . . . can keep a whole play rattling along on sheer exuberance of high spirits—apparently creating its comedy as it goes—extending its gently satiric theme with the greatest variety of comic 'business', from the linguistic nonsense of the lesson in phonetics, to the light-hearted foolery of the dancing and fencing lessons, and the burlesque Grand Turkery of the imposture and the ballet. Among modern plays, Noel Coward's Hay Fever illustrates the same fertile capacity for brisk and extravagant nonsense.33

So much for zest, until we see it concretized in the Birds.

Our next concern is with irony as a source of comic effect. This is a mode of speech in which "the intended implication is the opposite of the literal meaning of the words" (Webster). Under irony we may include satire, which implies by paralleling, pokes fun by exaggerating, calls attention by understating, and in many and varied ways shows connections between what is depicted on-stage and what is perpetrated off-stage.

The last item on our list is typifying power. Butcher, who sees in it a basic source of comic effect, explains this well, again speaking of Aristophanes.

The characters of the Aristophanic drama are not fairly judged if they are thought of simply as historical individu-

33Drew, Discovering Drama, p. 144.
als, who are subjected to a merciless caricature. Socrates, Cleon, Euripides are types which represent certain movements in philosophy, politics, and poetry. They are labeled with historical names; a few obvious traits are borrowed which recall the well-known personalities; but the dramatic personages are in no sense the men who are known to us from history. Such poetic truth as they possess is derived simply from their typical quality. . . . Aristophanes' imagination works by giving embodiment to what is abstract. . . . He seems to think through materialized ideas. He personifies the Just and the Unjust Logic and brings them before us as Lawcourt disputants; he incarnates a metaphor such as the philosopher "in the clouds," the jurymen with waspish temper, mankind with their airy hopes. The same bent of mind leads him to give a concrete form to the forces and tendencies of the age, and to embody them in actual persons. 34

This kind of comic person is necessarily a caricature, and as such his words and actions are incongruous. When we recognize familiar traits blown up to improportionate size, we laugh.

We will content ourselves for the present with this brief analysis of the supplementary norms for comedy.

One aspect of comic effect remains to be discussed. We touched on it above in connection with Cooper's adaptation of tragic plot to comedy, when we mentioned Woodbridge's theory of incongruity. The idea of incongruity brings us to a problem on another level than the one we have been considering. It is one

34 Butcher, Poetry and Fine Art, pp. 380-381.
thing to analyze the techniques of playwrighting as applied to comedy. That analysis tell us, "such and such is comical, such and such is not." It does not tell us why this is true. In the next few pages we shall try to delve a little deeper into the psychological phenomenon in which comedy is rooted. The ideas set forward are based chiefly on the study of Professor Albert Cook of Harvard, with substantiation, at least implicit, from other authors, historical and contemporary.

Surely some of the ancients before Aristotle had discussed literature; since Aristotle's time it has been the subject of countless books and endless discussion. What is most striking about Aristotle's treatment of literature of any kind, is his ability to get at its essence. This is a reflection of his philosophy. We have the results of his analysis of tragedy. Unfortunately, if he did analyze comedy, his work is lost to us. His predecessors and his contemporaries no doubt did discuss comedy. There are instances, indeed, in the Dialogues of Plato. But on the whole, before him there seems to have been no attempt at de-

---

fining what makes comedy comedy. After Aristotle we may presume that the Greek and Roman writers were acquainted with the Poetics and other pertinent works, and wrote in the light of them. Cicero says: "Comedy is an imitation of life, a mirror of custom, an image of truth." This sheds little light on the real essence of the comic, however. He goes somewhat deeper when, answering the question whence does laughter arise, he links comedy with "ugliness and a certain deformity." "Those expressions," he says, "are alone, or especially, ridiculous which disclose and represent some ugliness in a not unseemly fashion."

It may not be out of place here to mention a distinction which up to now has not been made. It is that between laughter and comedy. The two are not strictly interchangeable ideas. One is the cause, the other the effect, and it is not correct to equate every real comedy with side-splitting hilarity. That is

36 A section in Plato which may shed light on the problem will be mentioned below, however.

37 Quoted by Donatus in De Comœdia, as cited by Cooper, An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy, p. 91. (Further citations from this book in the remainder of this chapter will be noted only as from "Cooper."

making comedy the same as farce. Comedy is essentially humorous, but humor has many degrees, and more effects. The quiet, pleasant, warm feeling aroused by some imitations of action entitles them to the name comedy just as much as (and often more than) the riotous aisle-rolling which accompanies others. Still, few real comedies completely lack elements of hilarity, so that to apply what is said of laughter to comedy is permissible if the statement is understood. It is in this sense—of laughter's being comedy's hallmark—that we shall talk about both of them.

Proclus (A.D. 410-485) associates laughter and comedy when he sees "comedy as rousing in us the love of pleasure and drawing us into absurd bursts of laughter...." So too the 3rd century scholiast on Dionysis Thrax (c. B.C. 180), when he says that "the aim of comedy is to move its hearers to laughter." And John Tzetzes (c. A.D. 1110-1180) describes comedy as "an imitation of an action...purging of the emotions, constructive of life,


moulded by laughter and pleasure." This description is substantially like that in the Tractatus Coislinianus where the imitation of action is designated as "ludicrous and imperfect . . . through laughter and pleasure effecting the purgation of the like emotions." According to the Tractatus, comedy "has laughter for its mother," just as tragedy has grief.

All this is very well, but it seems to be of little help in solving the basic question. Granted that laughter is a property of comedy, what makes comedy laughable? Or if you will, what causes the interior pleasure which manifests itself in the physical phenomenon of laughter? Quintilian recognized the problem and said: "At all events, although many have attempted an explanation, I think it has never been adequately explained whence laughter arises, which is excited not only by word or deed, but sometimes even by bodily touch."

To put it another way, the description of comedy usually ad-

\[41\] Kaibel, Fragmenta, p. 17. Cited in Cooper, p. 86.

\[42\] Cf. Cooper, p. 225.

vanced seems to be concerned with the sources of comic effect. There are various lists of these, such as in the Tractate, where expression and content are the main headings and such things as homonyms, garrulity, grammar and syntax, or description, the unexpected, pantomime, are subdivisions. In general the common denominator of such listings is incongruity. When something strikes us as incongruous—whether in speech or action—we laugh. But this is not the ultimate explanation. A contemporary writer on drama expresses the problem well: "It is generally agreed that the sense of the comic arises from a perception of incongruity. . . A fat man is funny, not in virtue of his fatness per se, but because most men are not fat. One may ask, 'But why is that funny?' which is merely to ask why any incongruity is comic. There is as yet no answer."  

Miss Woodbridge goes on to say that a further explanation of the facts must be left to the physiological psychologists. Perhaps this is so, and yet she herself admits that Hobbes may be right in calling the comic sense "a sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves by comparison with

44Woodbridge, The Drama Its Law and Its Technique, p. 58.
the inferiority of others, or with our own formerly." In this passage Hobbes seems to be thinking of what may underlie the humor in incongruity—an implicit comparison of the abnormal with ourselves as normal. Nor is Hobbes the only one to have indulged in such theorizing. Freud sees the comical as a discharge of static energy occasioned somehow by the physical and mental peculiarities of human beings. Croce formulates a definition of the comic in which the incongruous causes pleasure by bringing on "the relaxation of psychical forces which were strained in anticipation of a perception whose importance was foreseen," but he himself doubts the usefulness or even validity of that or any such definition.

Cooper thinks he sees in all these men a leaning toward his solution to the problem by the hypothesis of an Aristotelian catharsis comparable to the purgation of pity and fear by tragedy.

---


Admitting that in so conjecturing he is treading uncertain ground, he nevertheless reasons that, since to Aristotle tragedy's function was to arouse, and by arousal relieve, two of the common disturbing emotions of daily living, there are grounds for believing that comedy was considered as having a parallel homeopathic effect. The question then is, what are the emotions purged by laughter? Taking a cue from Plato, 48 Cooper hits upon anger and envy. The choice is supported by other listings of emotions in Aristotle, and Cooper gives it psychological foundation by explaining that anger and envy arise from a sense of injury or injustice, or more generally, of disproportion. A man feels angry or envious because his neighbor—whom he thinks less worthy than himself—gets twice the salary he does. But let him go to a play like, say, the Plutus of Aristophanes, where the accidents of wealth and poverty are still further exaggerated and become ludicrous, and his sense of disproportion lessens. He sees things in a clearer light and the envy or anger he felt before are mitigated. The ensuing pleasure is the proper effect of comedy.

This theory of Cooper's may be looked on as a development of

Hobbes', whatever the debt of origin. For the real cause of the pleasure involved is nothing more than a satisfaction with oneself after one's feeling of inferiority has been dissipated. Granted that it is a more praiseworthy satisfaction than Hobbes' because more realistic and more humble, still it is a species of the same genus and justifies linking the two theories.

There is another approach to the problem of comedy's essence which may be said to embrace the approaches already discussed, absorb and amplify them. It is a "philosophy" of comedy advanced by Albert Cook. Because of the scope of Professor Cook's treatment, and even more because of the symbolism tied up with it, we can hope to do no more than give the basic idea of the theory here.

To establish this philosophy of comedy, Cook starts not with comedy but with life. To him the world is a huge stage and men and women the actors, tragic or comic as their characters determine. The new, the strange, the wonderful—these are proper to the tragic spirit; the ordinary, the commonplace, the probable—these are the stuff of comedy. The two, Wonderful and Probable, are symbols for "two profoundly different techniques for attack-
able is conventional, the wonderful, religious. Professor Cook discusses these and other aspects of the two and sums up: "The probable and the wonderful are antinomic symbols, forming a duality of which each member is dependent on and implies the other, as day does night; man, woman; spring, fall. The following facets of them have been discussed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Probable</th>
<th>Wonderful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>Artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason (empirical,</td>
<td>Imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deductive, inductive)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (Aristotle)</td>
<td>Extreme (Christianity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictability</td>
<td>Nonpredictability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>Symbol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naturalism</td>
<td>Symbolism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the light of this duality, there are two basic ways of regarding life; in art this is the great generic duality, comedy versus tragedy."[^51]

[^51]: Ibid., p. 28. I have abbreviated the schema as given by Cook so as not to include those facets of the duality which might, without further explanation, cause confusion. Cf. also pp. 50-51 for another table of antinomies which takes in other aspects of life.
To Cook, tragedy and comedy are symbolic attitudes, infinitely complex and extensive. To classify them descriptively (as Aristotle, Freud and Bergson do comedy) is trivial. The point is to probe their depths, not to chop them into portions. Without attempting to reproduce here these probings, we may summarize the main ideas thus: Tragedy deals with death, romantic love, the individual, eternal truths, sin; comedy deals with politics, marital sex, the family, particular ideas, manners. Tragedy depicts a normal man, successful, socially accepted, who, because a searcher for the wonderful, becomes an outcast of society. That such a thing should happen is paradoxical, unpredictable. Comedy on the other hand represents a buffoon violating the norms of social living and as a result being expelled from society. The outcome is obvious—predictable.

Notice that here we are approaching from another direction the phenomenon of incongruity treated before in dealing with the older theories of comedy. The buffoon violating social norms is incongruous. But what makes the incongruity comic? It cannot be per se humorous, for the tragic hero's searching for the wonderful implies an equally incongruous violation of laws. Yet tragedy makes us weep, comedy makes us laugh. What is the difference?
Cook would say that the difference lies in the outcome of the incongruous mode of conduct. In tragedy the searcher eludes the probable, fights the norm, and perseveres in going counter to society. In comedy the norm is triumphant, the buffoon is reduced to conformity, society draws together vindicated, abnormality expelled. We laugh. And "[i]n this sense laughter is superiority, though always the superiority of a group which follows the mean over the abnormal individual whose excess it constrains."

It is in adjusting the new, the nonprobable plots of comedy to the probable that society takes pleasure. In this, "success is achieved, the unpredictable has been made predictable, the New Year is like the old." 53

"Comedy represents the success of society over the clever individual." 54 Cook finds in Molière's principles a substantiation of this theory. The French playwright puts into the mouth of one of his characters what may be considered his own philosophy. "Ces

52 Ibid., p. 39.
53 Ibid., p. 42.
54 Ibid., p. 70.
sortes de satires tombent directement sur les moeurs et ne frappent les personnes que par réflexion. N' allons point nous appliquer nous-mêmes les traits d' une censure générale; et profitons de la leçon, si nous pouvons, sans faire semblant qu' on parle à nous . . . Ce sont miroirs publics, où il ne faut jamais témoigner qu' on se voie."

Cook notes that "[i]n the social act of attending comedy, one preserves the mask of complete harmony--while noting on the stage one's own divergencies from the norm, which can then be corrected to the norm." This is the reason behind the pleasure comedy affords.

The similarity between this view of Cook's and what Hobbes and Cooper have to say is worthy of note. All three, in searching for the real psychological root of comedy's appeal, have come up with a kind of self-satisfaction. In the opinion of each,

55Uranie in L' Ecole des Femmes, cited by Cook, p. 110.

56Cook, The Dark Voyage and the Golden Mean, p. 110.

57So too, A. Feldman seems to do when he makes the comic catharsis one of scorn and cheer (πίστις- confidence, self-assurance "When we scorn a sufferer we are identifying ourselves with the motive force of his misery. The secret cause is hidden from the victim and it is his struggle to discover and conquer it which makes the plot of the play." --"The Quintessence of Comedy," Classical Journal, XLIII (1948), 392.
we laugh at comedy because watching it gives us a feeling of power and contentment, of smugness, perhaps—though we would probably deny vehemently any such unworthy sentiment. Whether or not, indeed, this contentment as source of pleasure may be considered certain remains a question. But the reasoning behind it seems sound. It does not run counter to most theories of ancient and modern times; rather it absorbs and completes them. Particularly Cook, with his wide-reaching analysis of human nature on life's "stage," marshals cogent arguments in defense of his theory. Granting that further psychological investigation may modify it, the thesis of The Dark Voyage and the Golden Mean seems an adequate answer on a sufficiently profound plane to our original query in this section: "What makes comedy comic?"
CHAPTER IV

THE NORMS APPLIED TO THE BIRDS

Now we go into the last phase of our study: the analysis of the Birds in the light of the Poetics' norms for drama, supplemented by other norms specified for comedy. After a brief resume of the play we shall treat first of Aristotle's three primary qualitative parts looking at the play as a whole, and then work through it from the beginning, applying other norms from our list as they seem to suggest themselves. This method may serve to combine the overall view where it is necessary with a live and natural appreciative analysis.

The Birds begins with its two chief characters, Peithetaerus and Euelpides, searching for a land where they "can find a snug retreat" from the taxes and litigiousness of Athens. They turn for help to Tereus, former king of Attica, now transformed into a bird, the Hoopoe, and married to the Nightingale who was once

^1^Aristophanes, the Birds and the Frogs, tr. Marshall MacGregor (London, 1927), l. 44. Subsequent quotations from the Birds will be from the same edition unless noted otherwise, and will be cited parenthetically according to text line.
Proops. He, if anyone, since he "became a bird and flew / Over all lands and seas the whole world through" (117-18), will know if such a city exists. The Hoopoe, intrigued by this question, suggests various cities, each of which has unpleasant features for the two Athenians. Then Peithetaerus conceives the idea which is the grand framework for the entire comedy. "Combine and found a city," he tells the birds (172), "And men shall be as locusts in your power / and Gods like Melians with hunger cower" (185-6). The plan broached, action follows swiftly. The Hoopoe is easily persuaded that the project is feasible, and summons the chorus of the birds to enlist their aid. Horrified at first to find men, their natural enemies, in Bird territory, they finally listen to reason, after causing our heroes some anxious moments (e.g., "On now! Set on! On and attack the foe! . . . Both shall today bewail their sorry fate / And with their flesh our eager bills shall sate"[343, 347-8]). The city is founded by the simple expedient of building a surrounding wall, and the birds, entranced by Peithetaerus' assurance that ". . . you're prior by birth to the gods and the Earth" (475) and therefore ". . . to you as the eldest is due / Both by custom and justice the throne" (477-8), settle down to force men and gods to acknowledge their
hegemony.

This they plan to accomplish by intercepting the aroma of sacrifices ascending to the gods, and by harassing men through picking up seeds and pecking out the eyes of domesticated animals.

The plan of action put into effect, results follow quickly. In a series of brief episodes we see the victorious outcome of the venture, as well as the irksome and ridiculous after-effects. After repulsing the unwanted men who come to offer their services or achieve their fond hopes in "Cloudcuckoorise," and after successfully negotiating with a delegation from Olympus, Peithetaerus, in the final triumphant scene, weds the maiden Sovereignty and gains possession of the sceptre of Zeus as the stage resounds with "Cheer for the conquerer, Cheer on cheer, / Divinity without a peer!" (1766).

Is there, in all this, a plot in the full Aristotelian sense? If one sets out to "capsulize" the play he arrives at something like this: Two men, wishing to get out of Athens, consult a bird for suggestions on where to settle down. Unsatisfied, they conceive the plan of founding, with the birds, a city in the sky, and establishing in the process sway over gods and men. The plan succeeds, over various obstacles, and the play ends with the
symbolic marriage of the main character with Sovereignty. Compare
with this the sketch Aristotle himself makes of Euripides' Iphige-
nia Among the Taurians:

A certain maiden has been offered in sacrifice; has mysteri-
eriously vanished from the sight of those who were sacrific-
ing her; and has been transported to a foreign land, where
it is the custom to offer up all strangers to the goddess.
Here she is appointed priestess of the rite. Some time later
it chances that the brother of the priestess arrives. ---Upon
his arrival he is seized, and, on the point of being sacri-
ficed, reveals his identity; either as Euripides arbitrarily
makes him disclose it himself, or, following the suggestion
of Polydius, by the not unnatural reflection: 'As my sister
was offered in sacrifice, so must I be also'; and so the Dis-
covery leads to his own preservation. (Poetics, 1455b 3-12,
tr. Cooper).

Aside from the immediate difference in subject matter—the
one play dealing with light imaginations, the other with sombre
realistic actions—there is a basic divergence in the sequence of
events in the two plays. In the Birds, incident builds on inci-
dent in the manner of bricks on bricks. The net result is pretty
much whatever the bricklayer desires. There is certainly no ne-
cessity, nor even probability, connecting the two men's quest for
a new home with the founding of a city of birds. There is no hint
of a mistake or ἀμαρτία in Peithetaerus or Tereus or Iris or any-
one, which would result in a characteristic, inevitable ending.
The episodes of poet, lawgiver, mathematician, etc., which follow
upon the founding of Cloudcuckoorise are hardly such that the removal of any one, or all of them, would destroy the organic unity of the play. As a matter of fact, the only organic unity the play seems to possess comes not from the "structural order of the incidents" but from the very ridiculousness and lack of order among the incidents. It is precisely in the unexpectedness of happenings that the play is unified.

In the Iphigenia, on the other hand, (Although its happy ending is untypical of what Aristotle calls tragedy, and certainly not his ideal of tragic outcomes) there is a definite, intellectually satisfying sense of sequential progression as the play unfolds. Once Iphigenia is ensconced as sacrificial priestess, the scene of tragedy is set. When Crestes, pursued by the Furies (and this, though outside the play itself, is well known to the audience), comes to Taurus, the expectation is evident. Condemned to die as a sacrificial victim, it is poetically fitting that Crestes should die at the hands of his unknowing sister. The discovery of their relationship, accomplished in a logically "probable" way, brings about the necessary reversal. The ending of the play has followed, grown out of, the middle, which in turn is organically dependent on the beginning. The tragedy is a whole in the techni-
Apply the same analysis to the play seemingly closest to Aristotle's ideal tragedy, Oedipus Rex, and the basic difference in "plot" structure between that and the Birds is even more apparent. King Oedipus' downfall follows from his initial mistake, through his mounting tragedy, with relentless necessity. The play is a near-perfect organism, whose integrity would seem to suffer from any subtraction or addition. Surely this is not true of the structure of the Birds.

Yet does this undeniable difference render Aristotle's concept of plot superfluous in analyzing comedy? Since Aristophanic plot is obviously not the tight-knit, logically probable sequence of events Aristotle set down as ideal for tragedy, must we dismiss Aristotle's norm out of hand when dealing with comedy? It seems obvious in the light of Cooper's theory discussed above that to do so would be rash. Rather we can point to the deliberate departure from logical sequence, the conscious abandonment of realistic or probable situation as a major source of the comic effect of the play's structure. Precisely in this lies the basic incongruity of the comedy.

Critics have recognized this element in Aristophanes and
others. Speaking of Moliere, William Hazlitt remarks:

He was unquestionably one of the greatest comic geniuses that ever lived; a man of infinite wit, gaiety, and invention--full of life, laughter, and whim. But it cannot be denied that his plays are in general mere farces . . . The plots of several of them could not be carried on for a moment without a perfect collusion between the parties to wink at contradictions, and act in defiance of their senses. . . . and yet, notwithstanding the absurdity of the plot, it is one of the most laughable and truly comic productions that can well be imagined.  

We might say, rather, that because of the absurdity of the plot Moliere--and in his turn Aristophanes--is hailed as having written great comedy.

Coleridge comments specifically on Aristophanes' deliberate avoidance of logical sequence and subordination:

. . . In the Old Comedy the very form itself is whimsical; the whole work is one great jest, comprehending a world of jests within it, among which each maintains its own place without seeming to concern itself as to the relation in which it may stand to its fellows. In short, in Sophocles, the constitution is monarchical, but such as it existed in older Greece, limited by laws, and therefore the more venerable, --all the parts adapting and submitting themselves to the majesty of the heroic sceptre: --in Aristophanes comedy, on the contrary, is poetry in its most democratic form, and it is a fundamental principle with it rather to risk all the confusion of anarchy, than to destroy the independence and privileges of its individual constituents, --place, verse, characters, even single thoughts, conceits, and allusions, each

---

turning on the pivot of its own free will.  

Harsh makes the same point: "Tragedy, having developed earlier and remaining the more important dramatic presentation at each festival, naturally exerted constant influence upon comedy; but during the period of Old Comedy this influence was largely of a negative type—the one thing absolutely forbidden comedy was seriously to resemble tragedy." And Lord says: "Greek Comedy has the same fondness for unreal and whimsical situations, a world turned topsyturvy [as light opera]."  

"Topsy-turvy" is the word for Aristophanic plot indeed. By creating a story which upsets the accepted order by ignoring or reversing the ordinary logical sequence, Aristophanes achieves notable comic effect. To appreciate this fully, and to realize the maximum enjoyment of the humor, it is a great advantage to have in mind the concept of plot not only in the vague, generic

---

3Samuel Taylor Coleridge, quoted in Clark's European Theories of the Drama, p. 424.


5Louis E. Lord, Aristophanes, His Plays and His Influence (Boston, 1925), p. 18.
sense of a grouping of incidents, but in the full Aristotelian sense, with all its refinements.

Next we must examine Ἐρως, with its concomitant δίψωσις, in the Birds. We said above that the two stand for set of character and practical reason, which determine the habit of choice and its expression. We saw too that Aristotle requires for ideal tragic character the qualities of goodness, truth to type, truth to life, and consistency. Do the agents in the Birds live up to this standard? Let us examine them.

Does Peithetaerus exhibit a habit of choosing the morally correct thing? Even superficial examination of the text indicates the answer: he does not. To take an extreme example, his idea of bliss as expressed to Tereus is approbation of, and invitation to, pederasty (137-142). And again, when dealing with Iris, his threat of rape is unmistakable (1242-5). Then his explanation to the birds of their origins and one-time regal powers, while amusing, is patently a lie (467-522).

But the outstanding trait of Peithetaerus is not his immorality. He is not so much immoral as amoral. That is, Aristophanes is not portraying a monster of wickedness, but a tool of the comic. If some of the actions and words of Peithetaerus derive their
humor from the gutter, still their only purpose is to be humorous—not to be immoral for the sake of immorality. If we accept this view of him, it becomes evident that to speak of goodness or badness of character in this connection is to miss the whole point of Peithetaerus.

Euphides, though not as flagrantly prurient as his companion, is just as slippery and deceptive, and so could be called immoral. But the same thing is true of him as of Peithetaerus, he is only incidentally immoral. Primarily he is comic, and the playwright uses various means to achieve that end.

Once we have talked of these two, we have exhausted the "character" in the Birds. All the other personages are either mere foils for these two, or onstage so briefly as to defy any attempt at analysis. They are, many of them, parodies of well known contemporaries of the poet, or mere types put forth to poke fun at

6E.g., lines 486-7, where he supports Peithetaerus' lies about the origins of the birds.

7E.g., Metron, a famous astronomer and architect who proposed a calendar reform which was bitterly opposed for religious reasons. Cf. Victor Ehrenburg, The People of Aristophanes, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1951), p. 256. This excellent book, giving a dimension to Aristophanes' plays otherwise missing for the general reader, helps very much in their appreciation.
groups of Athenians. As types or extreme parodies they are easily understandable—or were to Aristophanes' audiences—but they do not stand up under deep scrutiny for goodness, badness, consistency or anything else. We may ignore them for the most part, then in discussing the attributes of ΠΟΙΟΣ in the play.

The next requirement is truth to type. Peithetaerus is a man. Taking our cue from Aristotle's own comment, let us see if he has the characteristics we expect in a man. He is portrayed as bold and imaginative (162-3), commanding (354-5; 438), eloquent (462 ff.), and lustful (1242 ff.). These qualities are plausible in a man. But he is also seen to be cowardly (88-90), garrulous (523-30), and deceitful (467-522). These are the qualities ordinarily associated by the Greeks with women; certainly not the traits of a hero according to Aristotle. So Peithetaerus is partially true to type, partially not. The important thing is that whether true to type or not he is funny. And Cooper's adaptation of this norm is surely valid: "... [f]or comedy it [would not] be inappropriate to represent a woman as valorous ... or as masterly in argument—as in Lysistrata."8

Euelpides is a little harder to analyze because he is so variable. At one time he is a commanding figure (80), at another, a born "yes-man" (476, 493-7, 501-2). Now he is unutterably thick (464), now sharp-witted and sharp-tongued (476, 479-80, 847-848). It is interesting to note that Aristophanes seems bound—probably by the conventions of earlier comedy which are only shaken off by later comic poets—to placing only two characters at a time in the center of the action. Cornford would certainly see in this a throwback to the ritualistic origins of comedy, where the leader of the Phallic procession exchanged jibes and insults with the bystanders. And it almost certainly is that. The point to make here is that it has the effect of presenting the characters Aristophanes creates in totally different lights at different times. So, in the beginning of the Birds, it is Euelpides who does most of the talking with the Butler Bird and his master the Hoopoe. Until line 161 or thereabouts, the reader might think that the central character of the play was certainly Euelpides. And he might have the impression that he was a forceful character, a leader of men. Then suddenly Peithetaerus comes forth as the

imaginative genius who "takes over" the action from here to the end of the play, so that Eueipides fades out of the picture completely, not appearing by name after line 646. Before he does fade out, as we have seen, Eueipides loses his previous forcefulness and becomes a real "stooge," with all the time-honored tricks of the trade we recognize in a modern comedian like Lou Costello or Jerry Lewis.

Of the other personages in the Birds, the Hoopoe is sometimes true to type, sometimes not. In many ways he is a regal personage, looked up to by the other birds, dignified and commanding respect. But his appearance is certainly not regal, and much of the humor connected with him stems from the incongruity of manner contrasted with appearance. In his case too, there is the added factor of the strains of lyric beauty Aristophanes puts into his mouth, setting him off as a serio-comic character. The poet, the statute-seller, the commissioner, the oracle-monger, etc., are ridiculous parodies of their real-life counterparts. As such they are partly true-to-type, partly just the opposite. In their case, Cooper's contention that comic effect stems from departing consciously from the norms seems especially in place. Really, that is merely another way of saying that Aristophanes' comedy is thor-
oughly interlarded with parody and satire, which is certainly so. More about this after we treat of the last characteristic of Ἔος.

The norm of truth to life also seems to be observed in the *Birds*, where even those characters who are non-human are imbued with convincing human characteristics: Trochilus, the Butler Bird with his solicitude for his master's rest (81), Tereus himself with his regal airs (92). And certainly Peithetaerus, Euelpides, the poet, etc. are combinations of true to life characteristics, though often in extreme forms.

Finally, what of self-consistency? As we noted above, each main character in the *Birds* exhibits widely divergent traits. Peithetaerus is brave and timorous, Euelpides is stupid and keen. Yet in this inconsistency they are invariably consistent. Aristophanes seems to follow Aristotle's qualified norm.

To sum up: of the four directives Aristotle gave for Ἔος, investigation shows that one—goodness—seems to be generally reversed in the *Birds*. One—truth to type—is sometimes adhered to, sometimes not. Two—truth to life and consistency—are followed fairly closely. Cooper's contention seems to be borne out: in this area, much of what Aristotle wrote for tragedy is applicable to comedy, some as it stands, some by way of "conscious departure."
At the very least it is safe to say that these norms serve a useful purpose in focusing an analysis onto key areas of drama, whether tragic or comic.

Abandoning the categorizing method now, we shall analyze the play scene by scene for examples of other norms. To do this effectively we must recapture as far as possible the whole play: picture the setting, hear the songs and dialogue, feel the rhythm of the dance, and in every way enter into a piece of art that was never created to be appreciated remotely and dissected drily. For evidence that the Birds is still capable of holding spellbound a modern theatre audience, see Appendix I, p. 130. In the absence of a like opportunity, we must call on our imagination to fill in the gaps. As Murray says in his introduction to the play:

It needs, no doubt, a certain effort, an effort of historical imagination and sympathy, to enjoy a comedy so full of topical allusions, so characteristic of its time and birthplace, as the Birds; but it is beyond doubt a thing of beauty, and it rests with us to keep it a joy forever.10

Onto a stage bare of elaborate scenery but fitted with a tree or two and a large rock, enter the two "heroes." They are Athen-

10 Aristophanes the Birds, tr. Gilbert Murray (London, 1950), p. 11. Future citations from this translation will be noted parenthetically only as Murray.
ians, their leather σκολάδα and linen χιτώνα dusty and travel-stained, their weary, plodding gait betraying the effects of a long journey. Any tendency to feel sympathy toward them, however, is forestalled by the realization that each of them is gazing fixedly at, strange to say, a bird perched on his arm! Not only gazing, but talking to it! Certainly there is here an initial example of the Tractate's attribution of humor to the impossible and the unexpected. And while the situation gradually unfolds for the audience in the dialogue, incidental humor is injected by puns (the Tractate's homonyms), allusions to persons and places, unexpected "comebacks," and other forms of wit, zest, irony, etc.

Some of Aristophanes' puns, as well as his other forms of wit, need interpretation for a modern reader. Many defy translation. But there are many more which a clever translator can render happily, catching the spirit, if not always the precise letter, of the joke. So, MacGregor renders the pun on οἱμόι (o woe!) and δοἱμόκε, οὐ (way, road, path) in line 12 as: Eu. "Oh Hell!" Pei: "You can go there, Sir, if you please."\(^{11}\)

\(^{11}\) Marshall MacGregor, Aristophanes the Birds and the Frogs. Further citations from MacGregor will be from this book and will be noted parenthetically.
Very early, too, we find samples of broad or pointed allusions. Such allusions derive their comic effectiveness from several sources. One is certainly the feeling of pleasure at recognizing the allusion as such. This is heightened and reinforced by the incongruity of Aristophanes's use of the reference, especially because behind this incongruity there was usually a barb directed at some individual, group, or type. It stands to reason that a modern reader will miss many of these, however, With our modern imperfect historical records, the paucity of extant ancient manuscripts, and the lacunae in those we do have, our knowledge of political and literary antiquity is limited. That some passages allude to events or writings now unknown we must take on the word of the Scholiasts who spent so much time annotating copies of the plays. Others we recognize because they are specifically mentioned by the playwright as allusions or references, imitations or parodies\(^1\) but we cannot get their full significance because we

\(^1\)Parody is a loosely used term, but refers generally to "something sung—or composed—conformable to an original but with a difference." "With Aristophanes there develops the most advanced form of parody, that of selecting and illuminating the special characteristics of the author whose material is employed." (F. J. Lelievre, "The Basis of Ancient Parody," Greece and Rome, XXIII [1954], 66, 81.) For a detailed catalogue of passages parodied in
have no copy of the literary work, or know nothing of the person
or event, they suggest. But even in its limited form our know-
ledge of Aristophanes' familiarity with the life and literature
of his times cannot but impress us. Lever calls him "[o]ne of the
best-read and most cultivated men of his generation, if not of all
Greek civilization." And Clark says: "An immense intellectual
vitality possessed him. He dealt with the entire sweep of con-
temporary Athenian life and thought: events, personages, gossip,
customs, art, literature, education, philosophy, and, above all,
politics, domestic and foreign. Whatever in his metropolitan
world afforded subject for ridicule lay within the scope of his
dramatic interests."^4

The first person Aristophanes singles out for ridicule in the
Birds is Execestides. It seems that this man was an alien of no
mean powers of self-insinuation who had managed to obtain citizen-

the Birds and in other works of Aristophanes, cf. two articles
by A. C. Schlesinger entitled "Indications of Parody in Aristoph-
anes," in American Journal of Philology, 1937, 294-305, and Trans-
actions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association,
LXVIII (1936), 296-314.

14William S. Clark, Chief Patterns of World Drama (Cambridge,
ship at Athens. The barb, along with the humorous reference to
the heroes' helpless situation, is obvious when Peithetaerus re-
plies to Euxipides' question as to his ability to find his father-
land from where they are, "No, that would pose even--Eusecestides!"

Philocrates, a seller of wild birds at Athens, gets a nod as "a
regular cheat" and a "fool" (14-15, tr. Rogers), in the midst of
vehement complaints about this "son of impudence" (17, tr. Murray)
the dawn, which he had unloaded on the eager travellers at Athens,
and the crow, whose most intelligent and intelligible statement
Peithetaerus reports as that "she'll gnaw my fingers off" (26, tr.
Rogers). The Tractate's division of "debasing the personages"
seems à propos here, as well as that of "clownish dancing," which
is easy to imagine as a result of the birds' pecking.

Then Euxipides turns directly to the audience for the first
time and bemoans the fate of two poor citizens "ready and willing
to go to the ravens" (28, tr. Rogers), but unable to find them.

---

15 Aristophanes, with the English Translation of Benjamin
Bickley Rogers, (Suffolk, 1920), II, The Birds, line 11. Further
citations from this translation, the Loeb Edition's, will be noted
parenthetically as Rogers.

16 This proverb-pun is based on the equivalent of our "going
to the dogs." Murray renders it "go to the crows," MacGregor,
"each of us prepared . . . to be a gallows-bird."
With the emergence of the motives for this strange journey, Athens comes in for the first share of what will be a generous outlay of barbs and satire. The very idea of Peithetaerus and Eulipides going to the birds to find happiness satirizes the confusion and corruption of Athens. The idea of worshipping the birds satirizes the new and radical religious (or a-religious) beliefs current in the declining Hellenic period. The idea of starving the gods into submission satirizes Athenian battle tactics in the Peloponnesian War. The allusions to Cleonymus (289), Nicias (363), Menippus (1293) and numerous others satirize this or that characteristic of well known figures or of life and mores at Athens. The comedy involved in this is obvious. We laugh at the incongruity of hearing someone say one thing when we know that he means much more, that really he is poking fun—or sometimes a sword—at someone or something else.

Eulipides begins the fun by describing Athens as a city that "great in prosperity and bliss has waxed / and everyone within her's free—ly taxed" (38, tr. MacGregor)—mingling an ironic pun with the unexpected for good comic effect. In the next breath he compares Athenian citizens to cicadas chirping over lawsuits all their lives (reminiscent of the Tractate's "assimilation toward
the worse"), and then he lets the audience in on the raison d'être of the journey:

That's why we're footing it upon our feet,  
With basket, pot, and myrtle-bough complete,  
Searching around to find a snug retreat  
To live in the remainder of our days.  
And so, to make inquiries, now our way's  
To Tereus the Hoopoe, if in his flight  
Such city anywhere has crossed his flight.  
(42-8, tr. MacGregor)

This established, things happen quickly. The suggestion Peithetaerus makes for arousing attention—"I'll tell you. Bang your head against the rock!"—gets a rapid-fire reply from Eubelides which is good fun in any language: "You bang your head -- it'll cause twice the shock!" (54-5, tr. MacGregor). But moments later, when a somewhat formidable butler-bird appears and demands identification (hinting that men would find a very frosty welcome), Eubelides loses his bravado and avers that "I'm the Panic-struck, a Libyan bird" (65, tr. Rogers), while Peithetaerus protests that he is a "tell-tale tit from Lydia, Bowelsweak" (69, tr. MacGregor).17

In passing we may observe that this somewhat earthy allusion

17 Line 67: καὶ μὴν ἐροῦ τὰ πρὸς ποδῶν seems better placed after this, especially in the light of the Scholiast's comment: "Dicit hoc, quasi prae timore cacaverit." Cf. Rogers on line 67.
is one of the very few spots where Aristophanes' notorious vulgarity intrudes into the *Birds*. Here the intrusion is so brief, and so mild—especially in view of the considerably less fastidious attitude toward natural functions which that less sophisticated age possessed—that many a 20th century American play (to say nothing of French ones!) should blush by comparison. Granting Aristophanes' ability to produce extremely "low" humor—his *Lysistrata* is the classic example of this—we must also admit his undoubted ability to be lengthily and vigorously funny without recourse to any considerable amount of objectionable material.

Once Trochilus leaves to call his master, the bluster reasserts itself as Peithetaerius denounces Euepides' cowardice in letting his bird go during the interlude. When Euepides retorts in kind, Peithetaerius protests that he didn't let his bird go—she flew away herself. "Oh," mocks Euepides, "You're a brave boy!" (91, tr. Rogers).

With this Tereus the Hoopoe appears and Aristophanes weaves into the ensuing conversation a good many jibes at persons and things local. Sophoole's *Tereus* is mentioned reproachfully (101), Euepides makes a pun on the name of Aristocrates the revolutionary (126, ἀριστοκράτης—"to be governed by nobles"), and then a
reference to the Athenian version of the paddy-wagon, the despatch boat Salaminia (146). Peithetaerus refers with bold irony to the practice of pederasty (137-42), while Daelpides satirizes the fair-weather friends among the Athenians. (133-4). Melanthius' leprosy (151), Opuntius' penchant for informing (153), Teleas' for servile flattery (168), Nicias' strategic starving of the Melians (186)--all are paraded for the audience, inextricably mixed with puns and other word-twisting.

In this setting Aristophanes plants the grand comic idea of the play. Until now the purpose of going to the birds was merely to get advice on choosing a city. Suddenly Peithetaerus gets an inspiration. "Aha! Ah, yes! By all the gods, a grand idea" (161-162, tr. Murray). Instead of looking for a city, why not build one--a city of the birds! On this theme Peithetaerus enlarges for his startled hearers and in doing so certainly caricatures a sophistic Athenian orator--the modern "super-salesman." Aristophanes himself describes the type (in an iambic syzygy of the chorus, 1694-1705) as one who "with its tongue its belly fills . . . with its tongue the soil it tills" (tr. Rogers). The powers of Peithetaerus' tongue here at least prove sufficient to convince the Hoopoe of the merit of the plan: "Wh-ew! Wh-ew! O Mother
Earth! O Glory! Ods nets! Ods traps! Ods limes! Ods devilments!

The neatest, prettiest plot I ever heard!" (193-5, tr. Murray).

But of course the birds must finally decide. In a passage of real lyrical beauty the Hoopoe and his nightingale mate (represented by a flute) summon the airy tribe and before long they begin to assemble, to the amazement and eventual consternation of our two worthies.

Perhaps no other scene in the play, or indeed in any of Aristophanes' plays, furnishes a better example of the ebullient zest with which he imbued his comedies. The birds flutter onstage singly, then in twos and threes—twenty-four in all—dancing ecstatically, their brilliant feathers and graceful costume—wings filling the stage and orchestra with a riot of mobile color, while the strains of the lyric summons die away and the excited cries of

18 MacGregor says of Aristophanes' work: "With abounding vitality, exuberant fancy, an ironic temper . . . a command of all the resources of drollery, whether in thought or language, there is combined . . . a genuine lyric gift. . . . [T]he poetic strain of itself refuses an unrelaxing control and blossoms at times in strange places." (Aristophanes the Birds and the Frogs, p. 15)

Even here Aristophanes could not resist drawing a smile to his hearers' lips as they recognized a plagiarism, (250-1) from Alcmene's Frag. 26: βάλε δὴ βάλε κηρύλος εἰ σὺν / ὅς τ' εἰπ' κύματος ἀνέσω ἄμμον/ ἀλκυόνοςι ποτήρα.
recognition rise to the crescendo of Peithetaerus' chant:

Jay and turtle, lark and sedgebird,
thyme-finch, ring-dove first, and then
Rock-dove, stock-dove, cuckoo, falcon,
fiery-crest, and willow-wren,
Lammergeyer, porphyrion, kestrel,
waxwing, nuthatch, water-hen.

Euelpides rejoins:  Oho for the birds, Oho! Oho!
Oho for the blackbirds, ho!
How they twitter, how they go,
shrieking and screaming to and fro.  
(302-7, tr. Rogers)

But he adds:  Goodness, are they going to charge us?
They are gazing here, and see
All their beaks they open widely (307-9, tr. Rogers).

--to which Peithetaerus murmurs apprehensively:

That is what occurs to me.  (309, tr. R.)

The apprehension turns out to be well-founded.  To the Hoo-
poe's surprise his subjects take a dim view of his receiving men
among them.  Instead of welcoming Peithetaerus and Euelpides, they
determine "bit by bit . . . [t]o tear and rend them" (338, tr. Ro-
gers).  This turn of affairs brings on a laughable squabble be-
tween the heroes to fix the blame for their plight, which is ended
abruptly by Peithetaerus' reminding Euelpides that he won't die
of weeping, as he sorrowfully predicts. "What a foolish thing to
say! / Weeping will be quite beyond you, when your eyes are pecked
away" (341-2, tr. Rogers). The demoralizing effect on Euphides is easily imagined, with all its comic overtones.

It is perhaps over-interpretation to see in the birds' martial formation and furious assault (repulsed by Peithetaerus and Euphides with improvised pot-helmets and spit-spears) a satire on the current Peloponnesian War and in particular the Sicilian expedition. Yet appreciating Aristophanes' eye for political foibles—if we may so characterize such a momentous campaign—and considering the open, and openly sarcastic, reference to Nicias (363), commanding general of the Sicilian fiasco, we are not without basis for the interpretation. Whether satirical or not, the situation is funny enough in itself, as any mock battle fought with wings, beaks, and kitchenware must be.

The following dialogue, with references to Ceramicus (395), the Athenian burying ground (whose meaning of "potters' quarters" is a pun on the protective pots they were using) and Ornea (399), a town in Argolis attacked by Athens in the recent past (whose name is an obvious pun on πους—bird), further connects the situation with Athenian military affairs. And perhaps in the interchange about a treaty-pledge (438-46) we may detect a scoffing allusion to the treaties which must have been made and broken light-
ly in those days of turn-about Hellenic strife. Certainly the unexpected and brash condition the chorus sets down: "[I swear] so may I win by every judge's vote, / And the whole Theatre's," qualified so liberally with, "But if I'm false, then by one vote alone," (445-7, tr. Rogers) is a sure source of laughter which needs no explanation or comment and depends on no allusion for its essential humor.

The treaty agreed on, Peithetaerus is given the floor. His elaborate preparations for a speech, accompanied by protestations of eagerness, and countered by Euphides' maliciously naive question, "Are we getting ready to eat?" (463, tr. MacGregor) form a delightfully boisterous piece of nonsense. And the speech itself is a masterpiece of lies and half-truths couched in involved and high-flown language. The combination is especially funny because punctuated with expressions of the birds' growing gullibility and the "helpful" remarks of Euphides. It certainly witnesses to the Tractate's category of garrulity, and bristles with humorous ingredients of all kinds.

Satire on mythology (469, 471, etc. passim), personal references (to Lysicrates, 513; the Persians, 487; Lampon, 521; etc.) abound, and the fanciful account mounts higher and higher to the
ridiculous until its climax in the vivid and comically heart-rending account of the fate of birds, a classic bit of superb bathos (523-8).

Of course it overwhelms the birds. They are putty in Peithetaerus' hands and he proceeds to mould them adroitly. He speaks again (549-52). The stupendous plan is broached! The complete abandonment of law and logic is a triumph of Aristophanic zest. No wonder Norwood says, "A play by Aristophanes ... would still be a comedy even if no one uttered a verbal joke. For the whole thing is a joke."¹⁹ There are, however, verbal jokes aplenty, inserted as it were between Peithetaerus' breaths as he rises to a crescendo of super-salesmanship. Here more than ever Eupelpides plays the "stooge" role made familiar by so many later comedians. At one time he gushes with admiration (552), at another grandly gives his approval (569), but then slips in a disturbing observation about Zeus's possible retribution (575) which Peithetaerus pretends to ignore. Nothing abashed, he inserts a satirical shaft aimed at the Athenian doles (579), then announces a bright decision (598) based on Peithetaerus' promises, which he follows up

¹⁹Norwood, Greek Comedy, p. 300.
with an equally abrupt reversal and new decision (602):

A galley for me; I am off to the sea!
No longer with you will I stay.

My galley may go; I will buy me a hoe,
And dig for the crock and the casket.

(tr. Rogers)

The birds, convinced by Peithetaerus' eloquence, next launch into the Parabasis (684-800), which is begun by an "ornithogeny" done in the lofty manner of Hesiod. It minglea bombast with real beauty, and it is perhaps more admirable than funny, though the clever parody which the Athenians could appreciate must have given keen amusement. The consequent claims to power and majesty are a combination of truths (the harbingers of seasonal change are the birds [708-15]) and half-truths (the birds are prophets [719-22]) and magnaninous promises of safety and pleasure for those who acknowledge the birds as gods. And through all runs the usual Aristophanic strain of jibes and insults at the expense of Athenian types and individuals. This is climaxed by the little homily on the value of wings, with its earthy allusions to excretory functions (790-2) and cuckoldry (793-6).

The Parabasis marks the end, practically speaking, of the "rising action" of the play. Having unfolded the entire scheme,
Aristophanes adds on one incident after another which test it before final success is achieved.

Peithetaerus and Euelpides part company when the former sends the latter off on multiple errands in a jumbled speech whose contradictions are rendered more ridiculous by reason if its being recited quickly in one breath. Euelpides' rejoinder, picking up the last line and recasting the sense, is good repartee: Pei. "... [L]et them come / From thence; for me." Eu. "And you, remaining here, / Be hanged--for me!" (884-5, tr. Rogers). The ψυψοσ illustrates laughter caused by perversion of the voice, the repartee illustrates once more Aristophanic wit.

As soon as Euelpides leaves (never again to appear in the

---

20 This technique, called a ψυψοσ or "choker," is paralleled by many comedians. MacGregor cites one such passage from Gilbert and Sullivan's Iolanthe: "You're a regular wreck with a crick in your neck and no wonder you snore for your head's on the floor and you've needles and pins from your soles to your shins and your flesh is a-creep for your left leg's asleep and you've cramps in your toes and a fly on your nose and some fluff in your lung and a feverish tongue and a thirst that's intense and a general sense that you haven't been sleeping in clover." (Lord Chancellor's song

21 For a thorough treatment of this technique in Aristophanes, see H. W. Miller, "Comic Iteration in Aristophanes," American Journal of Philology, 1945, 398-408.
play's action) we are introduced to the first of many humorous episodes involving a variety of nuisance-characters. Here more than before slapstick becomes the order of the day. Witness the phantasm of Peithetaerus standing by while the priest laboriously recites the litany of bird-gods, sprinkled with jibes at well known figures until finally, his patience exhausted, he uncere-
moniously pushes the man offstage:

Stop, damn you, stop inviting them. Good Lord, What sort of feast, you fool, will this afford Your vultures and sea-eagles? Don't you see One kite could whirl it off quite easily? Out of the way, you and your fillets! Shoo! I'll see what I without your help can do. (889-93, tr. MacGregor)

The sacrificial victim, of course, was a προβάτιον—"an extremely meagre goat" (MacGregor).

Walter Kerr, in his adaptation of the play for modern stage illustrates some of the possibilities for interpreting this epi-
sode. He has the priest kneel with outstretched arms, calling up-
on the new gods and goddesses in solemn, sepulchral tones. Close

22 E.g., Cleocritus (875), the Chians (879), Poseidon--"Suni-
um-Hawking" (867).

by kneels Peithetaerus, anxiously mimicking his every gesture, trying desperately to insert his own invocations between the priest's.
The rhythm grows faster and faster, with Peithetaerus losing out more and more, until at last he ends the series of "O Hawk! O Pelican!" etc. with "Oh hell!" and disposes of litany and priest together. 24.

This surely is a legitimate interpretation of the scene, and there is no doubt that it is very funny. Its grotesque mimicry of official worship is typical of Aristophanes' irrepressible penchant for ridicule even in sacrosanct areas.

The priest is followed swiftly by a parasitic poet, in whom Aristophanes spoofs all the professional versifiers of Athens (who must have been the more ubiquitous counterparts of today's greeting card authors). Peithetaerus manages to silence him with presents of clothing stripped off the poor priest (934, 947)—which action must have had the same comic effect as the modern slapstick comedian losing his pants.

Next the Oracle-Monger (959-90), Meton, the land-surveyor (991-1018), the Colonial Commissioner (1021-31), and the Statute-

24. F. Osmun has an interesting and helpful article on this technique: "Building up Comic Steam," CJ, XLIX (1953), 85-89.
Seller (1036-55) enter and are "removed" in quick succession, but not before Aristophanes has managed to create some delicious satire on the equivalent institutions of Athens.

After another choral interlude ending with a second unabashed appeal for the judges' favor, and strengthened with a threat,25 a messenger announces that the city wall is built, "splendid, magnificent, past comparison; / So broad it stands, Proxenides of Boastington / and Theagenes with steeds, huge as that one / Of Troy, to their chariots harnessed might drive / Atop of it past each other." (1125-29, tr. MacGregor). He goes on in this vein describing the Birds' heroic labors in what seems to be a "parody of tragic inflation of language."26

Suddenly, alarm! An Olympian has penetrated the fortifications. There is a flurry of orders and reports, silenced by the appearance of the intruder herself, identified as none other than Iris the fleet ("Ἰρίς ταξεφά --her usual Homeric title, which

2525Vis: "But should you the prize deny us, you had better all prepare, / Like the statues in the open, little copper disks to wear; / Else when' er abroad ye're walking, clad in raiment white and new, / Angry birds will wreak their vengeance, spattering over it and you." (1114-17, tr. Rogers).

26MacGregor, Aristophanes the Birds and the Frogs, p. 53.
prompts Peithetaerus to pun, "The Paralus, or the Salaminian?" [1204, tr. Rogers]). The goddess unburdens herself of some utterances in the high-tragic mode, which even Peithetaerus calls "bombast" (1236-42), and after hardly royal treatment is dismissed to warn Zeus of his fate. Says Peithetaerus, Ἐφράδης παντίς (1258), which is variously translated: "Shoo, shoo!" (Rogers), "Pack, whack!" (MacGregor), "Be off there quick! Slap, Bang!" (Murray). This ancient equivalent of a thumb-and-whistle, addressed to a goddess, is like a 19th century street vendor taking leave of Queen Victoria with, "Okay, Vickie, on your way!"

By this time reports are flooding in as to men's reaction to the new kingdom. The speech of the messenger (1274-1307) is an intricately woven fabric of puns and allusions, illustrated by this sentence describing the fad of bird-imitation:

Soon as they rise from bed at dawn,
They settle down on laws, as we on lawns,

---

27 An allusion to the despatch boats of Athens mentioned above (146).

28 Iris' use of the word ταφαίσολος (1242) and Peithetaerus' double repetition of it (1248, 1261) afford another instance of "comic iteration." Confer Miller in AJP as mentioned above p. 110.

29 Including a threat of rape by Peithetaerus (1254-56).
And then they brood upon their leaves and leaflets.
And feed their fill upon a crop of statutes.
(1285-89, tr. Rogers)

The puns on ἴμος—law, νομὸς—pasture, βιβλία—books or the rind of the papyrus, ψῆφισμα—statute, ψῆφος—pebble, tumble over one another. And following soon after the reports come the men themselves, eager to share in the benefits of Birdland. A Sire-striker, thinking he will find a law to justify his patricidal wishes (1337-71), Cinesias (1373-1409), a dithyrambic poet desirous of flitting about on wings who exemplifies his airy verses (with plagiarisms from Anacreon) freely till Peithetaerus gets free of him, a Sycophant ("What can I do? I never learnt to dig!" [1432, tr. Rogers]) whose shady purpose in seeking wings is lashed—literally and figuratively—by Peithetaerus: all get into the act. But the outrageous effect of the next intruder, the hero Prometheus, cow-tering under an umbrella must be rated one of the supreme comic ef-fects of the play. Its basis is the legend of Prometheus so well known in Greek mythology and so notably presented years before in Aeschylus’ Prometheus Bound. The usage Aristophanes makes of it here is unsurpassed. True to his altruistic self ("You know I am always well-disposed to men" [1543, tr. Rogers]), Prometheus...
brings Peithetaerus "inside information" on the sad state of Olympus: "All's up with Zeus!" (1514, tr. Rogers). And even as he slinks off, the envoys symbolic of Zeus's desperation step into view. There are three, Poseidon, Heracles, and a Barbarian god. The satire the latter afford is too good not to comment on.

Aristophanes' Heracles is at once a highly amusing sketch of a coarsely anthropomorphized god and a brutish "male-animal" hero type. The playwright conveys this impression in various ways, ranging from the comparatively subtle remark of Peithetaerus when Poseidon refuses his terms: "As you will. Now, cook, be sure you make the gravy thick" (1636-7, tr. Rogers) to the blunt accusation of Poseidon when Heracles volunteers to "stay and roast the meat, while you three go." "To ROAST the meat!" his uncle roars, "To TASTE the meat, you mean" (1689-92, tr. Rogers).

The portrayal of the Barbarian god, the Triballian, is doubtless a dig at the complacent Athenian attitude toward any foreigner. ὁ βαρβαρός originally meant only "stranger," but in

---

30 Unknowingly, probably, Aristophanes has parodied that peculiar blind spot of human nature: thinking a man can hide from his God. Centuries later Francis Thompson was to pinpoint it in his immortal "Hound of Heaven." Here, Prometheus is immortally ridiculous.
Aristophanes' time it was used contemptuously to describe any member of the "uncivilized" (i.e., non-Hellenic) world. The ridiculous looking, gibberish-spouting god carries this concept to its logical limits.

Of this legation Poseidon is in charge. He is already by no means happy with at least one of his fellow ambassadors: "Democracy, what will you bring us to, / When gods elect to represent them --THAT?" (1570-1, tr. MacGregor). He soon finds that the other, Heracles himself, is reduced to a salivating bird-sympathizer at the sight of the luscious barbecue Peithetaerus just happens to be innocently preparing (1578 ff.). Backed by this most concrete argument, Peithetaerus wins a two-one decision over Poseidon, and the legation returns to Zeus with its fateful news.

This, the climactic episode of the play, is climactic in its humor too. Aristophanes' imagination is at its best here, with very human gods being tempted by a very crafty man, and finally giving in chiefly on the score of Heracles' greed. The satire here might be interpreted as outrageously atheistic, but somehow we can see the tongue in the poet's cheek, and the impression gets across that it is merely irrepressibly irreverent, nothing more.

Commenting on this characteristic, Norwood says of Aristophanes,
"[H]e employs that celebrated parrhesia—not merely 'free speech', but the right to say whatever enters his head."\(^{31}\)

Now Peithetaerus retires briefly to prepare for the ceremonial acceptance of Zeus's sceptre and of the maid Soveriegnty, "daughter of Zeus and embodiment of all political virtue."\(^{32}\) Soon a burst of turgid lyric heralds him onstage again:

He comes. No star set in Heaven's golden dome
Can match its ray 'gainst his resplendent beam,
No, not the Sun's own glittering far-flung gleam
So radiant glows, as doth the beauteous grace
Ineffable lighten in his mistress' face.
The thunderbolt he wields, Zeus' winged shaft,
To heaven's high arch strange, fragrant odours waft,
Fair vision, incense-smoke's curled canopy
Floats on the breezes fluttering tremulously.
Lo, where he comes! The Muses' lips unseal
With sacred song to greet and wish him weal.

(1709-19, tr. MacGregor)

Though at the start we ruled out of our consideration Norwood's third element of Aristophanes' greatness as a comedian, it seems to fit in here as an example of zest and vitality. The element is Beauty, and in this passage we find it. It adds to the closing stanzas of the play a charm, a vivid, picturesque effect

\(^{31}\)Norwood, Greek Comedy, p. 311.

\(^{32}\)Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes, p. 58.
that crowns the wit and cleverness with something more excellent.

And by just such abrupt transitions from broad humor to lyric strains does Aristophanes gain much of his vitality. We can do no better than to reproduce the text here, and with it Rogers' beautiful translation:

```
Pei. Ἐπεσθε νῦν γάμοισιν, καὶ φῦλα πάντα συννόμων πτεροφόρ' ἵτ' ἐπὶ κέδον Δίος καὶ λέχος γαμήλιον. ὄρεξον, ὃ μᾶκαιρα, σὴν χείρα, καὶ πτερῶν ἐμῶν ἀλμοῦσα συγχόρευσον ἀἵρων δὲ κουψιῶ σ' εγώ.

Cho. ἀλαλαί, ἵτ' παιήμον, τῆνελλα καλλίνικος, καὶ δαιμόνων ὑπέρτιται.
```

(1755-65)

Now follow on, dear feathered tribes,
To see us wed, to see us wed;
Mount up to Zeus' golden floor,
And nuptial bed, and nuptial bed.
And O, my darling, reach thine hand,
And take my wing, and dance with me,
And I will lightly bear thee up,
And carry thee, and carry thee.

Raise the joyous Paean-cry,
Raise the song of Victory.
Io Paean, alalalae.
Mightiest of the Powers,
to thee!

So we end our analysis of the Birds. Far from attempting a complete catalogue of its sources of humor, we have tried to reconstruct its main lines and single out examples of its multifarious laugh-getters. A further listing of these will be found
in Appendix II, p. 133. We may hope that this chapter has served the double purpose of proving, ambulando, the helpfulness of our pre-established norms in appreciating comedy, and of actually helping that appreciation here and now. It only remains, in the last chapter, to sum up our findings and conclude.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Before drawing the conclusions from our study, there are certain things to be noted.

First, we did not touch specifically, in Chapter IV, on the Birds' basic approach to its subject. Earlier (p. 42) we had seen Cooper's substitution of 

ludicrous  

for serious as the characteristic adjective of comedy as opposed to tragedy. This seems so obvious, especially in the light of what discussed as a "psychology of comedy" in Chapter III, that we need do no more than reiterate it here. If Aristophanes sometimes conceals a serious purpose behind his tomfoolery\(^1\) still, what is obvious is the tomfoolery. Whatever his motive, his approach is via the ridiculous, as is amply evidenced by everything in Chapter IV.

Catharsis, too, insofar as it has place in comedy, was discussed as an element of its psychology. What was advanced then

---

\(^{1}\)The extent to which he does this is a highly controverted question which we shall relegate to an appendix (p. 151) for summary.
as a tentative statement cannot be improved upon now.

One point, however, that merits further discussion here is the question of the primacy of plot and the relative placement with regard to the other qualitative parts found in comedy. Having discussed the existence of a type of plot in the *Birds*, and having seen it worked out as we went through the play, the question we must still answer is: is the plot in comedy the element of chief importance, as it is for Aristotle in tragedy?

To answer this, we can do no better than bring forward a literary theory of the structure of Aristophanes' plays called the *Agon*.

According to this theory, there is a standardized "format" for Aristophanic comedy, inherited from the original Dionysiac rites from which comedy grew. Murray, speaking of the "persistent elements of structure" found in the plays, says "[i]t is impossible not to see in them . . . remains of those rites connected with the renewal of the year or of the life of the earth which are known to us in many parts of the world. . . Aristophanes in composing his comedies was working in a traditional ritual pattern and could no more have left out the *Agon* or the *Parabasis* than he could leave out the phallic dress." And MacGregor holds
that "... it was from such sallies and controversies of the festivals ... that the Old Attic Comedy took its origin and its character. The essence of them was conflict, the encounter of rival wits; and the works of Aristophanes and his fellow comic poets preserve this agonistic type stamped ineffaceably on them."\(^2\)

Butcher concurs that: "A play of Aristophanes is a dramatized debate, an AGON, in which the persons represent opposing principles; for in form the piece is always combative, though the fight may be but a mock fight."\(^3\) As a debate, the plays would have a pattern, but hardly a plot. And the "opponents" would not be finely delineated characters. The "principles are brought into collision and worked out to their most irrational conclusions, little regard being paid to the coherence of the parts and still less to propriety of character."\(^4\)

Harsh's statement well sums up this Agon theory:

The typical plot of an Aristophanic comedy is construct-


\(^3\)Butcher, *Poetry and Fine Art*, p. 380.

\(^4\)Ibid.
ed very differently from that of a tragedy or a later comedy. Normally the leading character conceives a happy idea, ridiculous in its very extravagance and impracticality. . . . This idea normally meets with violent opposition . . . but this opposition is overcome in a debate or 'agon'. The idea is now ready for the test of actual practice. . . the results are dramatized in a series of scenes between the main character and various typical figures who have been affected. These scenes have little or no connection with each other and there is no dramatic development, but emotionally they tend to rise to a climax.5

Cooper recognizes this historical structure of Aristophanic comedy. Citing Aristotle's use of ΜΟΘΟΣ or ΑΟΥΟΣ interchangeably for the plot of a drama, and noting that "plot in its general sense means for him the basic idea of a play,"6 he contends that when Aristophanes uses ΑΟΥΟΣ to describe the contents of his plays he means it in the same Aristotelian sense. It would be the very "soul of comedy."7 So Cooper finds that he "... must dissent from a common opinion, and surely from exaggerated forms of it, as to the relative unimportance, as is alleged, of the main action in the works of Aristophanes taken generally. The fundamental thing in each of the plays as we know them is a great comic idea

6 Cooper, An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy, p. 49.
7 Ibid., p. 50.
or substantial form which gives rise to all the details of each.

... And this assumption would agree well enough with modern
theories concerning the agon or 'debate' as the centre of the
Aristophanic drama.8

Looking at the Birds in the light of this Agon theory, we
see the clash clearly. The fantastic concept, founding the city
of the birds, and its proponent Peithetaerus, meet with plenty of
opposition from the birds themselves. In a debate featuring beaks
and talons against rosy promises and flatteries, Peithetaerus wins
out. Then his idea is put to the test of various quacks in sever-
al episodes, and finally triumphs over all opposition, finding
fulfillment in his marriage to Sovereignty and his usurpation of
Zeus's throne.

How does this Agon structure fit in as a comic element? Can
we rate it, along with wit, zest, etc., a source of comic effect?
It seems not. Rather it is an underlying psychological factor in
comedy which finds manifestations in wit and the rest. It pro-
vides the prime matter for the various puns, allusions, insults
and varia which we have seen in our study. In this way it is cer-

8Ibid., pp. 49-50 passim.
tainly basic, and if we wish to talk of it as the comic equivalent of plot, we can say there here, as in tragedy, plot is foremost.

For the other qualitative parts it is difficult to find as clear-cut a case. Certainly ἔθος is exemplified more negatively than positively, and very often the διάνοια-λέξις element is most humorous precisely because of its being deliberately incongruous for the character to which it is imputed. All in all it seems safe to say that ἔθος as a consistent quality is subordinated to whatever gives opportunity for a greater display of incongruity—whether this be a startling reversal of ordinary habits of action, or an unexpected manifestation of judgement, or a wild and surprising suggestion or retort. Wit, then (and the διάνοια-λέξις with which it is associated), seems of greater importance in the Birds than ἔθος. The other parts would fall into place for comedy as for tragedy.

This said, we may add a final conclusion. From our investigation it seems evident that comedy is susceptible to a certain systematic analysis on the basis of definite norms. This is true because there seems to be an essential reason for anything being funny, and that is incongruity.

Incongruity in turn may be achieved by many means, and these
means to some extent fall into categories or types. Aristotle's categories of tragic elements are partially valid for these comic categories as well, at least as far as the "qualitative parts"—plot, character, thought, diction, song, and spectacle. But in comedy these elements sometimes appear quite modified or even as only negative norms. This does not nullify their usefulness, but places a limit on it.

On the other hand, there are elements in comedy—means to incongruity—which do not seem to be treated in the *Poetics*. They are peculiar to comedy, which is so heavily veined with them as to take on a definite cast totally different from the cast of tragedy. Thus, sprightliness, the result of what we have termed zest, is a distinguishing mark of comedy certainly unshared by tragedy. Wit is not so confined to comedy as zest, but at least its usage there is both more radical and slanted to a quite different end. True, Aristotle's element of diction may include wit as one of its sub-categories, but the emphasis for tragedy would be totally different. The same amy be said for irony, which is certainly discussed in the *Poetics*, but whose usage in comedy is widely diver-

---

9E.g., 1453a 12, ff.; 1453b 26, ff.; 1454a, 1-15.
gent. Typifying power, finally, is not excluded from tragedy, but has no role comparable to its important one of furnishing the comic playwright with objects for some of his choicest and most devastating humor. Butcher says, "The Aristophanic comedy, having transported real persons into a world where the conditions of reality are neglected, strips them of all that is truly individual and distinctive, it invests them with the attributes of a class or makes them representative of an idea."\(^{10}\) And again, "The actors in an Aristophanic play are transparent caricatures. In these half-grotesque impersonations the individual is entirely subordinated to the type . . ."\(^{11}\)

So the *Poetics* norms for tragedy need filling-out to be adequate in evaluating comedy. But even their supplements are not wholly unfamiliar to Aristotle, and no one of them is opposed to Aristotelian norms. Realizing this, and aware from our study of the impressive framework for dramatic (i.e., tragic and comic) criticism the *Poetics* does provide, we can safely say that an "Aristotelian approach to comedy" as set forth above is feasible

\(^{10}\)Butcher, *Poetry and Fine Art*, p. 383.

\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 387.
and profitable. It is sufficiently scientific without being stifling, sufficiently adaptable without being undisciplined; it provides objective norms while leaving room for the incontestable rights of personal taste. It is an adequate, intellectually satisfying and aesthetically acceptable approach to a literary form whose heightened appreciation is an addition to the life of any man of culture.
APPENDIX I

THE BIRDS AS CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

An interesting sidelight on the Birds is its production as good comedy for modern audiences. Two instances fall within the author's personal experience.

The first was a one-act version produced during April, 1958. Part of a program designed to trace the progression of comedy from ancient Greek times through Elizabethan to our own, the version used was that adapted for staging by Walter Kerr and put on by Catholic University. Kerr's translation was an adaptation of Rogers', with some original translation or unacknowledged borrowing from other translators. The editing of the text is skillfully done, and the result is a sprightly stage version made more intelligible by free rendering of puns and allusions, but thoroughly Aristophanic in flavor if not always in detail.

Using this version (or rather half of it, for the "second act" was not used at all), the Dramatic Club of Loyola Academy, Wilmette, Illinois, directed by the author, produced the Birds "in the round" for an audience of some two-hundred and fifty adults.
and high school students. The costuming was colorful and fairly authentic, the choral "dances"--done by high school juniors and seniors--were attempts at interpreting the poetry of the various choral pieces.

The audience reaction to this was highly favorable. Part of this may be attributed to the fact that the audience was not uninterested in the performers. Part certainly was due to the innate excellence and good humor of the play. Proof of this is that one of the other plays offered to the same audience was received very coolly, with polite applause but no enthusiasm. Doubtless the spectacle of winged and costumed young men brought laughter, but it did in Aristophanes' time too. Perhaps the only significant difference, except for the lyric odes of the nightingale, which were omitted, was in the choral dances. The Loyola production must have had far less beauty and rhythm, far more slapstick than the Athenian version in this area.

A second and more elaborate production was staged in November, 1959 by the Minor Seminary of St. Meinrad Abbey, Indiana, under the direction of Rev. Gavin Barnes, O.S.B.. Using a cast of twenty, besides the chorus of ten, Fr. Barnes did the whole play (again using Kerr's translation) complete with elaborate costumes,
complicated choreography, musical background, and a machina used to striking advantage, particularly in the final Gamos scene. It would be hard to express adequate admiration for the staging of this version, which certainly must have gone far toward capturing the flavor of the original. As an authentic supplement, in the areas of song and spectacle especially, to the usual reading of the play, it was invaluable for appreciating Aristophanic comedy. Its enthusiastic reception by a large audience for three performances indicates its calibre.

Granting the inevitable divergences from the original, these modern productions of the Birds should prove to the satisfaction of all but the most adamant anti-classicists that Greek comedy is not a dead issue, but a very much alive and lively form of entertainment. The corollary as to the universality of Aristophanes' genius need not be underscored.
APPENDIX II

A SUPPLEMENTARY LIST OF SOURCES OF

COMIC EFFECT IN THE BIRDS

The material in this appendix is intended as further material for the analysis of the Birds according to the norms of the thesis. Unlike the material included in the body of the thesis, it will be listed by category: puns, literary and political allusions, zest, etc.. In some cases the lists will contain repetitions of things mentioned in the text, but only when they involve further explanation or fuller translation than was given there.

The listings will be sequential within categories. The line number(s) will be given, the Greek quoted if necessary or helpful. For puns the indicated vocabulary will be given, and the pun explained if necessary. Then several translations will be cited, using the same references as above in Chapter IV. Allusions will simply be explained according to available knowledge shedding light on the humor they involved.

133
lines 271-2. Εὖ. βασιλεύον καλὸς γε καὶ φοινικίοδες

Hoopoe εἰκότως καὶ γὰρ ὅναμ ἀυτῷ γὰρ ἐστὶ φοινικόκτερος.

φοινικίος—reddish-purple, red; κτερόν,—ou—feather.

φοινικόκτερος,—ou—a red water-bird, perhaps the flamingo.

MacGregor: "... a fine bird, on my word! He gleams like flame." "Yes, of course he does. It's natural, as flamingo is his name."

Rogers: "Lovely creature; nice and red like flaming flame."
"So he should be, for Flamingo is the lovely creature's name."

line 299. Πει. -- δος ὃσι; κειρύλος.

Εὖ. κειρύλος γὰρ ἔστιν ὀρνις;

Πει. οὗ γὰρ ἔστι ἱππόηλος;

From κειρύλος,—ou—a sea-bird, to some the male halcyon; (Attic κειρύλος [a comic word] to play upon κειρῶ—to shear or cut.) Sporgilus was a well known Athenian barber.

MacGregor: "That? The Shaver." "Really, then you're a Shaver? "Yes, to Birds he's what the Barber is to men."

Rogers: "That's a clipper. He's the lady halcyon's mate."
"Can a clipper be a bird then?" "Sporgilus is surely so."

line 302. Εὐ. τίς γλαῦχ Ἄθηνας ἔγαγεν;

The owl was common to Attica, but besides, it was the sacred bird of Athena, and its image appeared on many Athenian coins. So the pun is getting something like our "carrying coals to Newcastle."
MacGregor: "Who brought an owl to Athens? Labour lost again!"

Rogers: "And who to Athens brought an owl, I'd like to know."

lines 179, 184. Ευ. οὖχ οὖτος οὖν ὅταν 'οστὶν ὄρνιθων πόλος; Πει. ἐκ τοῦ πόλου τούτου κεκλησται πόλις.

πόλος,-ou--pole, exis; used here in the sense of the whole vault of the heavens. (πόλις,-ioς--city)

MacGregor: "This is the birds' **site**, that you won't deny." "... City instead of site it will be found."

Rogers: "And is not that the station of the Birds?" "... And from your Station is evolved your State."

lines 475-6. Πει. τὸν πατέρ' αὐτῆς ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ καταράξαι. Ευ. ὁ πατὴρ ἄρα τῆς κοινοῦ σοι νυνὶ κεῖται τεθνεῶς κεφαλῆσιν.

Κέφαλή:--an Attic deme, used for the sake of the pun on κεφαλή--head.

MacGregor: "... she made him a grave in her head." "The result, I remark, is the sire of the lark rests at Headingly now that he's dead."

Rogers: "... the poor creature contrived to bury her sire in her head." "So the sire of the lark, give me leave to remark on the crest of a headland lies dead.

Pitts: "... the Lark finally laid him away in her head." "Exactly. That's how Hyde Lark got its name."

lines 764-5. Χο. εἰ δὲ δοῦλος ἐστι καὶ κάρ ὁπερ Ἴηκεστίδης, φύσατω πάπποις παρ ἡμῖν, καὶ φανοῦνται φάτερεσ. φάτωρ,-ορος (better φάτηρ,-ερος)--a member of a φάτρα, a

---

clan or family. κάπνος--grandfather; little bird.

MacGregor: "If a slave there be from Caria, such as Excecestides, he shall get him grandforefathers and (he)enfranchized he shall be."

Rogers: "Come along, you slave and Carian, Excecestides to wit, Breed with us your Cuckoo-rearers, they'll be guildsmen apt and fit."

Fitts: "Even a creeping calamity like Excekestides can hatch ancestors up here and become respectable."

lines 790-2. Cho. Εἴ τε Πατροχλείδης τις ὑμᾶς τυγχάνει χεζητιῶν, οὐχ ἄν ἐξίδισεν ἐκ θοίματιον, ἀλλὰ ἀνέκτατο, καποδρῶν κάπανεύσας ἄθεις ἄδ κατέκτατο.

χεζητιῶν--to want to go to stool. ἐξίδιω--to exude (euphemistic for τιλώ--to have a thin stool).

θοίματιον--tunic (= to ημάτιον). ἀποκάδρω--to break wind.

ἀνανέω--to have a respite, recover.

MacGregor: "Then if Mr. Busybowels were impelled to seek his ease, he would not befoul his linen, but fly away, and when he discharged his wind and burthen, back on wings would haste again."

Fitts: "Or say you develop a sudden case of the runs. Do you sit there and spoil your suit? No, you simply zoom up into the air, do your job, fart twice, catch your breath, and coast back to your seat again."

lines 813-16. Pei. βούλεσθε τομέα τούτο τούτω Λακεδαιμονος Ἐπάρτην ὅνομα καλῆς εἰς τήν αὐτήν;

ἐν. Ἑράκλεις Ἐπάρτην γὰρ ἄν θείμην ἐγὼ τῆμι πολει; οὔθ' ἄν χαμελή πάνω γε κείριαν ἔχων.

ἐπάρτεια, -ης--a rope or cord of "spartum" (a kind of hemp;
used for its obvious similarity to Sparta, the city).

MacGregor: "... style it (lispng) Lathedaemon." "As I live, I'll not. What? Lath--my city? For a bed I'd have no laths but mattress springs instead."

Rogers: "What do you think of that grand Laconian name, Sparta? "What, Sparta for my city? No. I wouldn't use esparto for my pallet, not if I'd cords . . . ."

Pitta: "Shall we go in for a touch of Lakonian je ne sais quoi and name it New Sparta?" "I want no part of Sparta. Gosh, I wouldn't tie a name like that to a flop-house bunk!"

Ρει. σφ δε γ' οίςχερ ατοτύζιιοι χρίμει τάχα.

'Ολοφυξιοί --inhabitants of a town in the Chalcidian peninsula, chosen for the similarity to ολοφύροεις --to complain, lament. άτοτύζιοι (= of 'οτοτύζιοι) from άτοτύζειν --to howl.

MacGregor: "The following weights, measures, and Parliamentary Acts shall be those of the Cloudcuckoothersians according to to the uses and wont of the Chohians--" "The Howlhowians shall be yours without delay." (Thrashes him).

Rogers: "Item, the Cloudcuckoothersians are to use the self-same weights, and measures, and the self-same coinage as the Olo- phyxians." "And you the self-same as the Oh! Oh! -tyxians."

lines 1106-8. Cho. γλαύκες ύμας οδοτ' εύκληψουσι Λαυρειωτικῆς... άλλ' ένοικήσουσιν ένδον, έν τοῖς βαλλαντίοις έννεοτεύεσσοι κάκληψουσι μικρά κέρματα.

Λαυρειωτικῆς γλαύκες --common appellation of Athenian silver coins, so called because of the famous silver mines of Lau- rion, a mountain in Attica. κέρμα, -κος-- anything small, esp. used of coins; small change.
MacGregor: "Guinea-fowls you'll ne'er be short of (those, I mean, the Mint has bred), But their homes they'll make among you, in your purses lay their bed. Snugly brooding there you'll find them and small change for you they'll hatch."

Rogers: "Little Lauriotic owlets shall be always flocking in. Ye shall find them all about you, as the dainty brood increases, Building nests within your purses, hatching little silver pieces."

lines 1203-5. Pei. ὅνομα οὐ σοι τί ἐστι, κλοῖον, ἢ χυτή;

Iris. Ἰρίς ταξιά. Pei. Πάραλος, ἢ Σαλαμίνια;

κλοῖον,-ου--ship or vessel, usually a merchant ship.
χυτή,-ης--leather cap or bonnet. τὸξος,-εια,-υ--swift, fleet
the pun comes in applying this adjective, fitting for a
ship, to the goddess.

MacGregor: "What name do you bear? Bonnet or Barquentine?"
"Iris the fleet." "China or home d'ye mean?"

Rogers: "Your name! What is it? Sloop or Head-dress?" "Iris the fleet." "The Paralus, or the Salaminian?"

Pitts: "Your name? Are you sea-going, or a flying hat-rack?" "Fleet Iris am I." "Deep sea or inland waters?"

lines 1460-5. Sycophant. βεμβίκος σοβ' ὅπασι διαφέρειν ὅς ἔ.

Pei. μανθάνω βεμβίκα· καὶ μὴν ἐστι μοι νη τὸν δία
κάλλιστα Κερκυραία ποσεύτι πτερά.

---

2Merry (The Birds, p. 63 of notes) quotes a passage from Milton's Samson Agonistes describing the appearance of Delilah, whose similarity to this passage is striking: 'But who is this? What thing of sea or land? / Female of sex it seems, / That so bedecked, ornate, and gay, / Comes this way sailing, / Like a stately ship / . . . . . . . . . . Sails filled and streamers waving.'
MacGregor: "Here--there, just like a top." "I follow that, a top, yes. In Corecyra by-the-bye they use this pretty means to make things fly." (Produces a whip) "0 dear me! That's a whip." "No, means of flight, Whereby today I'll make you to(ho)p all right."

Rogers: "Round like a top I'll whiz." "I understand. A whipping-top; and here by Zeus I've got fine Corecyrean wings to set you whizzing." "O, it's a whip!" "Nay, friend, a pair of wings, to set you spinning round and round today."

Pitts: "I'm busy as a top." "Top? Here's something to make tops spin: first-class goods from Korkyra." "Put it away!" "Call it a pair of wings. By God, it'll send you into a nose dive."

lines 1529-30. Prometheus. ἐι τι ἔστιν; Τριβαλλοί.

Τριβαλλοί—a people on the borders of Thrace; hence, as a comic name for barbarian gods. ἐπιτριβεῖν--the optative 2nd sing. of ἐπιτριβέω—to rub away, grind down; as a curse: "be hanged!"

MacGregor: "A name? Damubians." "The same, of course, from whom our saying 'Damn you' came."

---

139 PUNS

Sync. οἶμοι τάλας· μάστιγ' ἔχεις.

Pei. πτερῶ μὲν οὖν, οἶσι σε ποιήσω τῆμερον βεμβικάν.

βέμβικες, -ικός—a top, spun by whipping. μάστιγες, -ιγός—a whip or scourge. Κερκυραῖος, -ης,-ον—of or belonging to Corecyra (modern Corfu). "The Corcyrean whip" with double thong . . . seems to have been a special weapon of public chastisement in that turbulent island."

3 Merry, The Birds. pp. 72-73 of notes.
Rogers: "The name? Triballians." "Aye, I understand. 'Tis from that quarter Tribulation comes."

line 1569. Poseidon. Λαϊσκοδίας εί την φύσιν.

Λαϊσκοδίας--from λαῖος, -α, -ον--left-handed, awkward, and ποσς, ποδός--foot. The pun is in the incongruous combination of the two words.4

MacGregor: "O you born Makemuddle you!"

Rogers: "A born Laispodias!"

Pitts: "Do you want these people to take you for Laispodias?"

ALLUSIONS

line 31. Σκύθη: Meaning "Scythian," it was a name for Acestor, a tragic poet aspiring to Athenian citizenship, though a foreigner. Herodotus (VIII, 64) says the Persians call all Scythians by this name.

line 126. τον Σκελλίου: Scellias' son was named Aristocrates. He took part in the oligarchical revolution of the 400. There is a pun here, too, on the verb δριστοκρατεῖσθαι-- 'to be governed by nobles', which appears in line 125.

line 146. Ζαλαμνία: A despatch-boat of Athens which had been sent some months before the Birds' premiere to bring Alcibiades back from Sicily.

4This is only one, and perhaps the lesser, of two sources of comedy here. The other is the allusion to an Athenian general by the name of Laispodias, who "having a stiff or withered leg," Rogers tells us, "wore his cloak awry to conceal the defect" (p. 137). Pitts (p. 177) interprets a Scholion on this as referring to Laispodias' sexual incapacity, though a better interpretation would seem that it alludes to his promiscuity. Neither affects the joke here.
line 151. Μαλανθίος: A tragic poet said to be a leper. The pun is on the similarity of the city's name to the man's disease.

line 153. Θαύμαντιος: An obnoxious, one-eyed informer. The pun is a duplicate of the one in line 151.

line 168. Τελέας: A flatterer. Here the joke seems to be "It takes one to know one."

line 186. Λίμως Μηλίω: "Melian famine." About ten or twelve months before this, the Melians had been starved into submission by Nicias.

lines 282-4. A reference to the Tereus of Sophocles, and to Philocles, a tragic poet who plagiarized it with his Pandionis, and a dig at Callias, head of an illustrious house, who dissipated its wealth and terminated its glory.

lines 289-90. Κλέωνυμος: A notorious glutton, known also for having thrown away his sword at the battle of Delium. The joke is twofold, on his gluttony and his cowardice, when Peithetaerus expresses surprise that there should be another glutton than he, and Eupplides explains that Cleonymus would surely not be created (i.e., helmeted for battle).

line 300. Σποργίλος: A well known barber at Athens, obviously fitting the description of a "bird" given, supposedly, by Teleas in lines 168-9 above.

line 440. ὁ μαχαιροπιός: A cutler with a notoriously quarrelsome wife, who made a pact of mutual forebearance from scratching, biting, etc.

lines 471-2. ὁ Σφαστής: This fable of Aesop--himself a fabled character--is not in the collection of his stories as we have it now. Not to have "read your Aesop" in those days was apparently a mark of ignorance.
line 475. ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ κατορύξαι: An absurd allusion to the gestation of Athene (Pitta); resembles in some points the legend of the Phoenix (Merry). Perhaps the shape of the 'crested lark's' head supplied the basis for the whole story.

line 487. κυρβασίαν . . . ὀρθῶν: Only the king of the Persians wore the tiara upright, like the cock of the birds.

line 513. λυσικράτης: A corrupt Athenian officer. Perhaps there is another emphasis here—reference to a recent tragic portrayal of Priam as λυσικράτης—'having destroyed the power' of Troy.

line 521. Ἀδιμων: A noted soothsayer, said to have salved his scruples by swearing not νῇ τῶν ζήνα, but νῇ τῶν χήνα.

line 553. Πορφυρίων, Κεφρίονα: Two of the giants mentioned in Herodotus (i, 179) in connection with the assault on Olympus. The former may well be used here as a pun on the bird of the same name.

line 575. Ἰριν... ίχάλην: The Scholiast notes concerning this passage that εἰσὶ... αὐτὸς [Ὁμήρου] καὶ ὑμνοὶ. In Hymn I, 114, the same words are used to describe Iris.

line 580. δημήτριο . . . μετρεῖν: Demeter will keep up her dole. The joke is in the reference to the doles of the demagogues: they too οὐκ ἔθελεσιν.

line 601. οὐδείς, etc.: A proverb about which the Scholiast says: τοῦτο ἐλέγετο ἐπὶ τῶν ἀγνόστων.

line 640. μελλονικίαν: A reference to the hesitancy of Nicias, coining a word out of his name much like our "malapropism" or "quisling."

line 651. ὡς ἐν Ἀιδώκου λόγοις: Aesop's first fable, according to our collections.
line 670. έσμερ παρέννος: Like a maid. Possibly an imitation of Iliad II, 872.

lines 685-7. This is possibly an imitation of Iliad VI, 146, and has overtones of Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound, 549.

lines 691 ff. This passage is an obvious imitation of Hesiod, starting off in the language of Theogony 116.

line 692. ἴοδίψης: A sophist, reputed teacher of Euripides.

line 712. ἱφέστη: A notorious robber with the practice of stripping his victims after robbing them. The joke is obvious.

line 750. θρύνιχος: A tragic poet who lived around 500 B.C.

line 762. ζηνιόδρου: One struck off the register of Athenian citizens.

line 763. φιλίμονος: A Phrygian much lampooned for his nationality, according to the Scholiast.

line 790. Πατροχλαίδης: A politician of unpleasant habits.

line 798. Διδρήφης: A self-made man of foreign extraction, who rose to wealth through the manufacture of wicker sheathing for wine casks, and was elected to successively higher military offices until finally he became ἰππαλέκτρυν-ών—a horse-cock (fabled animal, with a play here on the leader of the cavalry.)

line 808. τάδ' οὖχ ... πτεροῦς: A quotation from the Hyrmaidons of Aeschylus (Frag. 123).

line 822. Θρυσίνες: A prominent Athenian who became one of the Thirty in 404 B.C.

line 823. Αἴσχινος: An Athenian sent as ambassador to Lacedaemon. Both he and Theogene were notorious for boasting of
wealth they did not possess—"castles in the air."

line 824. ἡλεγρας: A plain in Thrace where the poets laid the scene of the mythical conflict between the gods and the giants. Aristophanes is here belittling the whole mythology.

line 831. Κλεοθένης: An Athenian noted for his effeminacy. The lines are a parody of the Meleager of Euripides.

line 858. Χαίρις: A notoriously bad flute player.

lines 879-80. ... αὐτοῖς καὶ Χίοισι. Χίοισιν ... προσκειμένοις: A playful reference to the fact reported by the Scholiast that the Chians, allies of Athens at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, were always included in the public prayers. And perhaps a touch of irony, due to the fact that the Chians had revolted from Athens after the Sicilian expedition.

line 910. κατὰ τὸν Ὁμήρον: A vague reference to Homer, supported by places like Iliad I, 321, but always referring to common house servants, not servants "of the Muses."

line 919. κατὰ τὸ Σιμωνίδου: Refers to Simonides of Ceos, a lyric poet.

lines 926-30. A parody of an ode of Pindar on Hiero, Tyrant of Syracuse.

line 962. Βάκης: A famous soothsayer of Heleon in Boeotia.

line 988. Διοκελής: Noted soothsayers.

line 922. Μετων: A famous mathematician, astronomer and engineer. The joke about his being known in Hellas and Colonus is comparable to our saying "famous in New York and Gopher Gulch, Arizona." Perhaps some work or statue of Meton was in Colonus.
line 1009. ἀλής: An even more famous mathematician and philosopher.

lines 1012-13. ἐν Δαυεδίῳ, ἐξελατοῦντα: Spartans were known to drive strangers out of their land in a body, and had generally the reputation of being inhospitable.

line 1021. Σαρδανάρτ(π)αλλος: Last king of Assyria, famous for debauchery and effeminacy.

line 1028. Φαρνάχης: A Persian satrap. The joke is hitting at Athenian statesmen's proclivity for collusion with the Persians.

line 1071. Διαγόρα: An atheist said to have thrown contempt upon the national religious festivals, especially the Eleusinian mysteries. Linking him with others of γυδων νευρατων may be a dig at the Athenian fear of anyone who might rob them of their precious democracy.

line 1104. Ἀλεξάνδρου: An allusion to the famous choice of Paris (commonly called Alexander) which supposedly was the spark which touched off the Trojan War.

line 1121. Ἀλφείον πνέων: An allusion to the river Alpheus, identified with the Olympic Games which were held in Elis on its banks.

line 1126. Προξενίθης ὁ Κομμασσίς: A well known braggart, here represented as from an imaginary deme (κομμασσίς—to vaunt, boast); "Proxenides the Boastonian" (Merry, p. 60).

line 1128. δοῦριος: equals δοῦρειος—wooden. Here the reference is no doubt to the Trojan Horse.

line 1147. τί . . . ἔργασαίτο: An allusion to the proverb, with the original χειρες—"hands" changed to "feet." "What feat is there beyond the reach of feet?" (MacGregor, p. 53).

lines 1190-98. The metre and language of this chorus is modelled
on the form of the Tragic Chorus. Cf. Merry, p. 62 of notes.

line 1204. Ἡρις ταξις: A phrase found often in Homer, where Zeus sends his messenger off on an errand. So, in Iliad VII, 399; XI, 186; XV, 158; XXIV, 144.

line 1232. μηλοσφαγεῖν . . . ἑσχάραις: An echo of Euripides, Frag. Pleisth. 5: μηλοσφαγεῖ τε δαιμόνων ἐκ ἑσχάραις.

line 1238. ξύ μόρε, μόρε: Once again in the vein of high tragedy.

line 1242. Δικαιονίας ῥολαῖς: An allusion to the Lycimnius of Euripides, now lost, in which the hero was struck by lightning.

line 1244. κότερα Λυδόν ἡ φρύγα: Lines taken from the Alcestis of Euripides, 675.

line 1247. μέλαθρα μὲν αὐτοῦ καὶ θόμους Ἀμφιόνως: A quotation from the Niobe of Aeschylus, according to Merry (p. 65 of notes) and Pitts (p. 174).

line 1282. ἐσωχράτων: A jibe at the absent-minded, simple-living and "queer" philosopher. It is the same type of word as ἐλαχωνομάνους—Spartophile, in the line above.

lines 1293-97. Μενίππης, Ὀικουντιφ, Φιλοκλέει, Θεωγένει, Λυκουργός, etc.: well known persons whose suitability for being thus nicknamed can only be conjectured.

lines 1337-39. These lines, the Scholiast notes, are copied from the lost Cinemoaon of Sophocles.

line 1369. τάξι Θράκης . . . : An allusion to the many expeditions sent in recent years by Athens to fight the northern states.

lines 1371, ff. Κινησίς: A dithyrambic poet of unsavory reputation. His opening lines are those of a love poem of Anacreon.
line 1406. Ἀειπροφιδήν: An Athenian of extremely light build.

lines 1410-11. ὄρνιθες, etc.: A parody on Alcaeus: ὄρνιθες τίνες
οἴοί ὀξεινῷ γας ἀπὸ περράτων . . .

line 1420. πτερίδων πτερίδων δεί: From the Myrmidones of Aeschylus, ac­
cording to the Scholiast.

line 1421. Πελλήνη: A town in Achaia famous for the manufacture of
woolen cloaks.

line 1420. πτερίδων πτερίδων δεί: From the Myrmidones of Aeschylus, ac­
cording to the Scholiast.

line 1421. Πελλήνη: A town in Achaia famous for the manufacture of
woolen cloaks.

line 1475. Κλεόνυμος: Another reference to the coward and informer
mentioned above (lines 289-90). Here the figure of a
tree rich in summer (when informers' fees were easy to
come by) but "shedding its shields" in the winter, is
a scatter-shot blast at him. Pitts (p.171) holds that
the later passage dealing with Orestes is also aimed at
Cleonymus, by comparing the two.

line 1491. Ὄρεστη: Here the notorious footpad is linked up with
the legend that if one were to meet Orestes, son of
Agamemnon, at night, he would find his right side para­
yzed. If one were to meet the Athenian Orestes at
night, the same thing might happen, and his cloak would
disappear to boot.

line 1519. Ἑσμοροφιός: One day out of the five spent celebrating
this festival in honor of Demeter was a fast day.

line 1549. Ἀριμνή: A recluse and misanthropist of Athens. Here
Prometheus is likened to him in his hatred of his fel­
low beings, the gods.

line 1552. δίφρον: In the Panathenaic Festival there were attend­
ant maidens who carried parasols and ceremonial foot­
stools.

line 1553. Σκιδαρίν: The Shadowfeet, a fabled people of Lybia who
used their large feet as parasols. This whole passage
parodies the eleventh book of the Odyssey.
ALLUSIONS and ZEST

line 1556. Πεύκανδρος: The key figure in the establishment of the rule of the 400 at Athens, and a proverbial coward.

line 1639. γυναικὸς μίας: Here, Sovereignty; reminiscent of Helen of Trojan War fame.

line 1650. τῶν νόμων: Solon's Laws, later (1661) quoted.

line 1652. ἐκ ξένης: Alcmene, daughter of Electryon, king of Messene.

line 1694. Φαναίς: This is to be understood not as the southern promontory of Chios, but as the fictional residence of informers (derived from the legal action known as φάναις—an accusation.)

line 1695. Κλευόμα: The water-clock which timed the speakers in the Athenian law courts.

line 1696. ἔγγυλωτογευστορῦν: A parody on Χειρογοῦτορῦν—the ordinary term for men in this vale of tears.

line 1701. Γοργίας, Φιλίκκος: Types called after two famous rhetoricians who made a living from their sophistic speeches.

line 1763. ἀλαλαί: The Athenian battle-cry, guaranteed to make the grand exodus a spirited and noisy spectacle.

ZEST

lines 123-4. Ἑρώπα. ἐπειτα μείζω τῶν μαναζῶν ζητεῖς πόλιν;

Εὐ. μείζω μὴν οὐδέν, προσφορώτεραν δὲ νῦν.

This is a good example of a smooth answer to an embarrassing question. "You want a greater town than Rugged Screes?" "No, one that better with our type agrees."
lines 133-4. \Eu. καὶ μηδαμῶς ἄλλως ποιήσεις· εἰ δὲ μὴ, μὴ μοι τότε γ' ἔλης, εἶταν εὖ πράττω κακὸς.

The reversal of life's ordinary situation is effected here with complete abandon. "Don't disappoint me, please, or see you stay at home likewise, when troubles come my way."

line 177. \Epops. νὴ δίᾳ ἀπολαύσομαι τι ὃ', εἰ διαστραφήσομαι.

The Hoopoe's complaint, coming as a surprise when our attention is fixed on determining the reason for Peithetaerus' directions, is startling and ridiculous. "So obviously, its dislocation will be good for me."

lines 442-3. \Pie. μὴ' ὀρχίσκεδ' ἐλκείν: μὴ' ὀρύττειν . . .

Cho. οὖ τι ποιον τὸν; οὐδαμῶς.

The Scholiast adds here, after Peithetaerus' line: δεικνύς τὸν πρῶτον. [πρῶτος, -ους, backside; οὐρτίς-sensu obsceno, like Latin fodere.] The vulgarity—accompanied by a gesture—comes as a surprise and draws a laugh. "All biting to be barred, low hitting, gouging---." "This? (pointing) Oh that's too hard. Refused." "No, eyes—it's those I want to guard."

line 959, ff. That this episode still retains its comedy is proven by the popularity of a contemporary nightclub entertainer who recently recorded one of his acts called "It's in the Book." Idea and technique bear startling resemblances to its 5th century B.C. counterpart.

IRONY

lines 362-3. \Eu. ὃ σοφώτατ' εὖ γ' ἀνεδρέει αὐτὸ καὶ στρατηγικῶς· ὑπεραχοντὶζεις οὐ γ' ἥδη Νικίαν ταῖς μηχαναῖς.

MacGregor: "It's a notion marks you master of the military art. At ingenious devices you'd give Nicias a start."
line 1011. Pei. ἔχειν δὲ διὰ τὴν μιθοδ ηλὼν μὴ πράγματ' ἔχειν, ἀλλ' ἀπέλιναι:

Rogers: "You know I love you, Meton. Take my advice and slip away unnoticed."

lines 1026-7. Pei. βουλεῖ δὴ πεῖν μιθοδον λαβὼν μὴ πράγματ' ἔχειν, ἀλλ' ἀπέλιναι:

Rogers: "Come now, will you take your pay and get you gone in peace?"

lines 1405-7. That this question of Peithetaerus' is ironic is made evident by Cinesias' reply: "You're jeering me ..".

line 1423. Pei. ἐκ μακάμες τῆς τέχνης.

Rogers: "O the jolly trade you've got!"

line 1426. Pei. ὑπὸ πτερύγων τί προσκαλεῖ σοφότερον;

Rogers: "You'll summon them more cleverly, I suppose, to the tune of wings?"
APPENDIX III

SOME OPINIONS ON THE MOTIVATION
OF ARISTOPHANES' COMEDY

As was indicated on p. 121, note 1, the whole subject of the motivation of Aristophanes' comedies has been much discussed. Some scholars see political reform and civic moral reconstruction as Aristophanes' prime purpose. Among these are Sövern, Köchly, Bineaut, and Ranke (as cited in Merry, Aristophanes, the Birds, pp. 14, 17), as well as Sullivan, Harman, and others. Some, on the other hand, claim that it is easy to overemphasize such didactic factors as primary at the expense of the real, liberal end of the comedies: fun from any and every source.

Holding the first opinion, Sövern interprets Heaven (Olympus) as the Peloponnese, the birds as the Athenians who will starve them out, etc. E. G. Harman avers that "to seek a political meaning in the Birds, far from being 'far-fetched' . . . is the most natural course to take." His own investigations into this meaning are detailed and so very involved as to confound, not clarify,
the allegorical vagueness of the play.\textsuperscript{1} For example, "Aristophanes may have had no serious intention of advocating among his own friends, who would have also been those of Alcibiades, the desperate expedient of using the fleet in Sicily for holding up \[?] the democracy at Athens, and compelling them thereby to do justice to the Conservative Party, whom they had driven by persecution through the popular law courts into dissatisfaction."

Nevertheless, this "represented his real political aspirations."\textsuperscript{2}

Such subtle and highly-refined concepts, he readily admits, were "not seized by a Greek audience," but only by "the author's political friends."\textsuperscript{3}

On the other side, MacGregor, while admitting that Aristophanes did some political axe-grinding, remarks, "But Aristophanes was, after all, a comic poet and many of his statements are not intended to be serious."\textsuperscript{4}

It is perhaps significant that Sullivan, though abundantly

\textsuperscript{1}The Birds of Aristophanes Considered in Relation to Athenian Politics (London, 1920), p. 89.

\textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 101.

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 91.

\textsuperscript{4}MacGregor, Aristophanes, the Birds and the Frogs, p. 9.
exemplifying Aristophanes' political purposes from his other plays, makes no reference to the *Birds*. Possibly the Aristophanes Sullivan sees ("A satirist, a thinker, a reformer, of ancient Greece who fearlessly faced the very problems that we must face and solve today") restrained, from weariness, wariness or aesthetic considerations, his political ardor in this play of "escape."

Gilbert Norwood, with customary directness and sound judgment, says:

The one "difficulty" that can be said to arise has been imposed on the poet from without wantonly. Why did he write the play? or what is he satirizing? . . . Modern scholars often assert that he is satirizing the boundless schemes of conquest that now excited Athens. . . . That Aristophanes meant to ridicule these imperial dreams there is no shred of proof; . . . In the *Birds* his purpose, for anyone not obsessed by research-mongering, is almost too obvious to state: it was the working out of a glorious comic fancy . . ."

For more discussion of these same points, confer, among many others, the following books or articles:


BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. PRIMARY SOURCES


-----. *The Peace, the Birds, the Frogs*. With an English Translation by Benjamin Bickley Rogers. Suffolk, 1920.


II. SECONDARY SOURCES

A. BOOKS


Lord, Louis E. Aristophanes, His Plays and His Influence. Boston, 1925.


----- Aristophanes, a Study. New York, 1933.


B. ARTICLES


The thesis submitted by John Joseph O'Callaghan, S.J., has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Classics.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

March 28, 1961

Date

Raymond V. Schoder, S.J.
Signature of Adviser