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# Introduction

## 1 A drama of words

For the study of ancient Greek comedy, and of Greek drama in general, the second half of the twentieth century might be called the "Golden Age" of performance criticism and performance-oriented scholarship. The tragic and comic plays of ancient Athens were emphatically and insistently envisaged as stage events, rather than as written texts and fabrications of words. They were productions to be acted out in vivo before an audience, and they could be properly understood and interpreted only in the context of their live theatrical execution. This "theatrocentric" view of ancient drama was proclaimed with might and main by scholars such as Carlo Ferdinando Russo with regard to comedy and Oliver Taplin with regard to tragedy.[1] They were the prophets of a new age of scholarship, and their arguments were soon established as the prevalent academic orthodoxy. It became customary for authors of philological commentaries on ancient plays to include, in their prefaces or introductions, a statement to the fact that they considered the text they commented on as a script or a libretto for performance. Every student of Greek drama had to be an imaginary *metteur en scène*, putting up a production of the classical tragedies and comedies in the theatre of their mind. The eyes of all classicists had to turn inwards, to move away from the words on the page in front of them and towards the phantasmic stage that was to be erected inside the reader's mind; it was on this imaginary theatrical space that the text had to be reflected in the form of live action.

There is no doubt that performance-oriented study afforded important insights into ancient dramatic texts and opened up fruitful perspectives for the understanding of theatrical experience in classical antiquity. On the other hand, comedy, as an art form, is not only a performative event. The kind of highly literary and poetically accomplished play in verse, which was produced during the acme of the comic genre in the Classical and early Hellenistic age, is also an intricately crafted text, a masterful work of artfully elaborated language, a consummate piece of wordsmithing. The justified emphasis on spectacle and scenic performance, which permeates much of modern scholarship on ancient comic drama, should not make us forget its fundamental linguistic dimension. Greek

1 Russo 1962; Taplin 1977; Russo 1994.


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comedy was, first and foremost, a theatre of language, a drama of words. The *logos*, in its multifarious aspects, was the paramount constituent of comic poetics.

In some respects, indeed, the text seems to have been regarded as the primary factor which determined the aesthetic value of a comedy and conditioned its reception by the audience and the pleasure of the spectators. The comic poets themselves took great pride in the verbal sophistication and linguistic accomplishment of their scripts. Aristophanes, in particular, often extols the high-level wordplays and verbal jokes and emphasises the creative use of language which he displays in his works. This is formulated very eloquently in a passage from the parabasis of the *Clouds* (537–544), in which the poet, speaking in the first person through his Chorus, exalts the virtues of his comedy. As he points out, he has not used in his play the common and vulgar devices for eliciting easy laughs from the audience. He included neither obscene jests with the comic phallus of the actor (538–539), nor the lascivious *kordax* dance (540), nor scenes of scenic violence and noisy knockabout, with people rushing on stage, brandishing torches, and crying for help (543). Also, the poet did not present an elderly character that resorts to slapstick, hitting the people around him with his stick, in order to cover up for the poor jokes that are assigned to his part (541–542). By contrast, the Aristophanic comedy confidently relies on its ἔπη (544, ἀλλ' αὐτῇ καὶ τοῖς ἔπεσιν πιστεύουσ' ἐλήλυθεν), that is, on its poetic verses, on its verbal constituents and the quality of its text.

This passage is highly significant as to the artistic merits that the comic poet would have wished to be primarily judged and evaluated upon. Aristophanes stresses the value and proficiency of the text and the verses of his work, of its poetic and linguistic composition. Furthermore, he contradistinguishes this textual and verbal aspect from a series of low-brow artifices, aimed at provoking gross and uncouth laughter, almost all of which pertain to the performance, the scenic materialisation and live staging of the script: the jests with the phallus rely on an element of the comic actors' costume and on the performers' gestures for manipulating it; the *kordax* dance is self-evidently an exhibition of lewd and indecent movements; the animated scenes with torches and actors rushing on stage also depend on bodily motions in the performance area. Even with regard to the scenes of the poorly jesting old man (541–542), the poet's censure does not fall so much on the character's low-brow banter (πονηρὰ σκώμματα) as on the fact that he resorts to physical slapstick (the age-old routine of beating up other personages) in

order to draw the audience's attention away from the awful quality of his jokes.[2]

In other words, Aristophanes glories in the excellence of his verbal humour and the brilliance of his poetic writing, while he finds fault with coarse routines which belong to the *mise en scène* and the stage execution. This stance seems characteristic of an author who considered himself first and foremost a poet and a writer, rather than an artist of the stage. Not fortuitously, Michael Silk, in his perceptive critical monograph on Aristophanes, at the turn of the new millennium, reacted against the theatrocentric vision of ancient drama and called for a reconsideration of the Aristophanic oeuvre in terms of purely literary artistry: Silk's Aristophanes is primarily a writer, a creator of poetic discourse, a literary author whose main task is the manipulation of words, before and beyond their potential transformation into performance.[3] The same idea has been implicit in much of the scholarship on the language of ancient comedy, which has never ceased to be produced and has yielded insightful and illuminative studies during the past few decades (see the bibliographical survey below, in section 2 of the introduction).

The *Clouds* are not the only witness to this kind of poetic self-appreciation. Other passages from the comic corpus support the same perspective. Aristophanes repeatedly proclaims the dexterity and originality of his poetic lines and highlights his mastery of particular linguistic artifices, such as metaphors, imagery, and verbal humour. He boasts that his plays contain the best comic verses ever to be heard by Athenian audiences (*Wasps* 1047, μὴ πώποτ' ἀμείνον' ἔπη … κωμῳδικὰ μηδέν' ἀκοῦσαι). He attributes the greatness of his art to his magnificent poetic lines and his refined jokes (*Peace* 749–750, ἐποίησε τέχνην μεγάλην … ἔπεσιν μεγάλοις … καὶ σκώμμασιν οὐκ ἀγοραίοις). He exhorts the spectators to cherish those poets who can "speak" something original (*Wasps* 1053, καινόν τι λέγειν, a characteristic choice of verb). He especially singles out his inventive

**2** The reference to the "jests against bald men" (*Clouds* 540, οὐδ' ἔσκωψεν τοὺς φαλακρούς) is ambiguous: coarse verbal mockeries at the expense of the bald may be evoked; but the poet may also have in mind scenic routines in which bald characters were physically abused and ridiculed on stage, e.g., by being laughed at for the funny spectacle of their hairless head, or by receiving loud slaps on their bare pate.

**3** Silk 2000, 1–6, 98–206. For a more detailed summary of Silk's views on Aristophanic verbal artistry, see below, section 2.6 of the introduction. Cf. also Konstantakos 2019, 244–246, where I discuss the dramatic writer as a literary craftsman and drama as a form of literature to be enjoyed also by reading — a very ancient idea, which goes back at least to Aristotle (*Poet.* 1450b 18–19, 1453b 1–6, 1462a 11–14) and runs through the history of European criticism up to T.S. Eliot (e.g. Eliot 1932, 113–115).

metaphors and comic images (εἰκούς, *Clouds* 559), which his fellow-writers strive to imitate and plagiarise.

It might be argued that the insistence on the verbal aspects of comic art is an exclusive characteristic of Aristophanes, not shared by any of his colleagues. Under this viewpoint, Aristophanes would be holding up the excellence of ἔπη as a brandmark of his own creations, the central component of his own poetics, by contrast to the inferior productions of his opponents, who would have primarily focused on slapstick and performative gimmicks for the generation of comic effect. As is the case with many facets of ancient comic dramaturgy, the scantiness and fragmentariness of the other comic authors' textual remains render it nearly impossible to refute the claim of Aristophanes' uniqueness — although it should not be forgotten that the same factors make it equally difficult to prove this claim. Nevertheless, there are a few comparable statements from the works of Aristophanes' colleagues, which indicate that the latter was not alone in his exaltation of linguistic artistry.[4] Pherecrates, in a fragment from a parabasis, calls his audience to appreciate an original invention of his, which consists in a new kind of "condensed" anapaests (fr. 84, ἐξευρήματι καινῷ, συμπτύκτοις ἀναπαίστοις). The creative innovation, in which the dramatist takes pride, is again an artifice of poetic expression, regarding the metrical composition of the verses. Aristophanes, as noted above, censures his colleagues for plagiarising his witty metaphors (*Clouds* 559); this implies that the criticised writers were conscious of the high value of verbal humour and wished to imitate Aristophanes in this respect.

The axiom of "saying new things" persists until much later, in the indirect poetological statements of New Comedy. In Hegesippus fr. 1.2–3, a slave reproves the garrulous cook, a hackneyed figure of the comic stage, by challenging him to either pronounce something evidently new (λέγων φαίνου τι δὴ καινόν) or be silent. As often in New Comedy, these lines entail an implicit criticism of commonplace and trite comic motifs (such as the cook's loquacity), which tend to be routinely used by uninventive writers. The meritorious poet must brush aside such stock-in-trade stuff and create work of true novelty.[5] It is

4 On these passages of poetological self-presentation, cf. Sommerstein 1992, 17–27; Konstantakos 2004, 13–20.

5 On the underlying poetological implications of Hegesippus' passage, see Konstantakos 2004, 32–33. One should not misunderstand the well-known (and most probably apocryphal) anecdote about Menander, who claimed that his comedy was ready, even though unwritten — for he had designed the outline, and it only remained for him to add the little verses (Plut. *Mor.* 347e–f, ᾠκονόμηται γὰρ ἡ διάθεσις, δεῖ δ' αὐτῇ τὰ στιχίδια ἐπᾶσαι). This tale does not imply that the language and the verbal formulation of the comic text were deemed unimportant by

noteworthy that in this case, well over a hundred years after the καινόν τι λέγειν of *Wasps* 1053 was heard on the Attic stage, verbal expression is again highlighted, in exactly the same words, as the indicator of comic inventiveness and originality.

Aristophanes, and perhaps also other poets of Old Comedy, belonged to that small and selective elite of literary creators whom George Seferis, the Modern Greek poet and Nobel laureate, has called "the lords of language" (ἄρχοντες τῆς γλώσσας).[6] The happy few authors of this group possess absolute mastery over the complete range of resources afforded by their native tongue, and confidently exploit the full extent and variety of its stylistic means, linguistic niveaus, specialised jargons, and peculiar idiolects. They can combine and fuse together all these expressive elements into an exuberant, polymorphic, and kaleidoscopic linguistic synthesis, which offers their compositions a characteristic richness of style and serves as the brandmark of their literary versatility. Language for them is not (as in the case of other writers) a strong and challenging rival to fight with, but a cunning, resourceful, yet entirely obedient servant, who is ready to faithfully carry out every one of his master's commands. Aristophanes and his colleagues may worthily take their place in this old literary aristocracy, next to some of the foremost authors of the western canon, from Shakespeare and Rabelais to Italo Calvino, from Joyce to Anthony Burgess and the members of the Oulipo team.

Thriving in their lordship over language, the comic poets of ancient Greece employed a vast range of linguistic means to achieve the aesthetic effects they desired. They delved deeply into the mechanisms of language in order to create humour and entertain their audiences. On the level of vocabulary, they fabricated long grotesque compounds, portmanteau words, neologisms and funny word formations, ridiculous diminutives, and speaking personal names. They were also deft at parodying all kinds of specialised and technical terminology, from scientific jargon to philosophical and rhetorical nomenclature. With regard to more composite verbal and phrasal structures, they crafted clever puns and wordplays, paradoxes and oxymora, *para prosdokian* jokes, and ludicrous accumulations. They elaborated various stylistic figures, such as inventive

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the poet. It simply serves to highlight, *modo Aristotelico*, the prominence of the plot in the overall craft of playwriting and the poetics of comic drama. The verses are not in themselves a negligible constituent; in fact, they are designated as the main aesthetic means for the expression of the poetic design which the poet has formed in his mind. Cf. Willi 2002, 1–2; Ciesko 2011, 124.

**6** Seferis 1974–1992, I 203, 259, 319, II 99, III 185. Cf. Seferis 1966, 20, 60.

metaphors, lively imagery, and similes, by means of which they produced both poetic enchantment and comic amusement. They occasionally cultivated intricate patterns of formulation, for example, witticisms and ironical quips, clever apophthegms and absurd sophisms, riddles and conundrums, so as to emanate an air of refined pleasantry. They also indulged in more violent forms of mocking language, from *aischrologia* and obscene jokes to abusive insults and satirical speech, in order to ridicule their targets or enhance the carnivalesque tone of their works. Their chameleonic creativity extended to larger stretches of discourse, chiefly by use of the techniques of parody: they comically imitated and distorted all forms of high-flown literary and official expression which were established in their milieu. They parodied the elevated style of epic, tragedy, and lyric poetry, as well as the rhetorical formalities of judicial and political oratory.

The comic exploitation of language was not confined to the composition of a humorous text for the generation of poetic *charis* and amusement. Language was a pliable and multivalent tool which could be made to serve every aspect of the comic dramaturgy. It was the fundamental means for the realisation of the dramatic storyline and the creation of the comic fiction. In fact, language was intrinsically connected to all the main constituents of the comic work, from plot, characterisation, and ideology to scenic spectacle and performance. The words of the script were the basic materials for the formation of the dramatic mythopoeia and the central factor which conditioned the holistic aesthetic experience offered by the play.

In particular, comic language was a valuable instrument for *ethopoiia*, for the characterisation and ethological constitution of the dramatic personages. The characters of the play, the comic hero and his antagonists, the various stock types and standard figures of the comic repertoire, all may be viewed as products of linguistic operations and systems of speech. An individual character might be endowed with his or her peculiar style of expression or scenic idiolect; he might display distinctive verbal or phrasal habits and gimmicks, which functioned as recognisable brandmarks of his speech. This practice of linguistic and stylistic characterisation has been traced, in a more or less elaborate form, throughout the history of Classical Greek comedy, from Aristophanes to Menander and the other poets of the fourth century.[7]

In some cases, the Greek comic poets created dramatic characters that are entirely generated from stylistic processes and idiosyncratic operations of language. The whole *ethos* of such figures, their dramatic personality and identity

7 See below, sections 2.4 and 2.8 of the Introduction.

are determined by peculiar choices of vocabulary, phrasal patterns, and figures of speech; it may be said that characters of this kind are truly "made of words". An evident example is offered by the foreigners and aliens of the comic stage: the barbarians who speak broken Greek, such as the Scythian archer in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, and the non-Athenian professionals, such as the Doric doctor, a recurrent type in the comic repertoire from Crates and Ameipsias to Menander. The presence of these personages in the play, their comic effect, their entire role, in essence, are the result of their linguistic make-up; they are funny because they speak in a ludicrously strange and devious idiolect, and this is the main reason why they have been created by the author and included in the scenario.[8] In the person of such a character, comic language has been made flesh; linguistic morphology and grammatical peculiarity have acquired a body and face.

The broad gallery of the comic *alazones* is also a noteworthy manifestation of the same characterological phenomenon. This ample category, which traverses the entire history of Greek comedy, comprises a variety of arrogant and boastful figures — from the cook, the medical doctor, and the conceited philosopher and scientist to the yarn-spinning traveller, the glorious military, the pompous poetaster, and the charlatan priest — all of whom pretend to be something greater than they are in reality, to possess knowledge or powers which they lack in fact. The pretentious temperament of these characters is expressed, in textual terms, through the use of fanciful and bizarre language, of vocabulary and style which starkly deviate from the common norm of speech of comic drama. Their *alazoneia* is manifested through linguistic exhibitionism.[9] The *miles gloriosus* uses bombastic rhetoric, aggressive discourse, and pompous high-style locutions; the poetaster recites high-flown chants which ridiculously mimic epic, dithyrambic, or tragic diction; the pompous intellectual reproduces abstruse philosophical terminology or scientific jargon; the cook accumulates interminable sequences of names of foods and describes detailed culinary recipes; the bragging traveller narrates exaggerated tales about the extraordinary marvels he has witnessed in faraway lands.

Thus, the *alazones* of comedy acquire their ethological identity and dramatic substance by means of their idiosyncratic linguistic constitution. They are

**8** Cf. Del Corno 1997, 245–246. On the broken Greek of comic foreigners, see the relevant chapter of Willi 2003, 198–225. On the doctor's Doric, see Rossi 1977; Imperio 1998, 63–75; Imperio 2012; Montemurro 2015; Ingrosso 2016; and cf. the survey of research in section 2.4 of the Introduction.

**9** See Konstantakos 2015, 43–44.

roles substantially made up of funny language. Another kindred figure, paired and contrasted with the *alazon* already by Aristotle (*Eth. Nic.* 1108a 21–25, 1127a 13–1128b 1, *Rh.* 1419b 7–9, cf. *Tractatus Coislinianus* XV 38–39 Koster), is the so-called *bomolochos* of Old Comedy. The role of the *bomolochos*, as aptly noted by Sommerstein, essentially consists in a particular type of utterance: a string of mocking, buffoonish, silly, and often vulgar statements, which are interposed in comic dialogue in order to ridicule the serious or grandiloquent pronouncements of other characters and provide humorous relief. The *bomolochos* personage is practically made up of these low-brow jokes; he is another creation of funny speech made flesh.[10]

With such character creations, the poets of Greek comedy initiated a seminal literary practice, which was bound to enjoy a long posterity in the comic theatre and more broadly in the humorous literature of the western world. The ridiculous personage whose essence consists in his peculiar language is a well-loved figure of the comic tradition, which has many whimsical specimens to display, up to the present age. The foreigner who speaks in pidgin language, with a distorted vocabulary and mutilated morphology, remained a perennial favourite of humoristic writing, from the Mufti and his mock-Turkish entourage in the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* to the heavy Teutonic accents of the psychologist Doctor Zempf in Stanley Kubrick's adaptation of *Lolita*. A modern variation of the type is the German tourist in *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, who communicates with ready-made, stilted phrases lifted out of an English dictionary and mechanically agglutinated together. One may also recall Maistre Janotus de Bragmardo, the doyen of the Sorbonne in Rabelais' *Gargantua*, who constructs his speech out of strings of Latin quotes from the breviary; Camille Chandebise, in Feydeau's *A Flea in the Ear*, who pronounces only the vowels of words and omits the consonants; and the grotesque lay brother Salvatore in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, who speaks a lunatic medley made up of Latin and various European vernaculars. These hilarious characters carry on the comic line which goes back to Aristophanes' Scythian guard, the Doric-speaking doctor, and the grandiloquent braggarts of the Greek theatre.

Last but not least, comic language crucially interacts with the stage action of the play and provides the basic stuff for the live performance of the actors. This aspect comes forward most impressively in an emblematic Aristophanic technique which is examined in two chapters of the present volume: the scenic

**10** Sommerstein 2004. On the role of the comic *bomolochos*, see Kloss 2001, 132–188; Borowski 2013.

materialisation of metaphors and figures of speech.[11] By means of this procedure, which is recurrent in Aristophanes' plays, a figurative expression or a proverbial phrase is taken in an entirely literal sense and is transformed into a visible spectacle on stage: for example, the "King's Eye" (the synecdochic title of a Persian official who served as the king's representative) is presented with an enormous eye on his mask; poetic verses are "weighed" (a metaphorical idiom of Attic speech, meaning "evaluated") literally on a pair of scales; the demagogic politicians, who rhetorically claimed to be the "watchdogs" of democracy, are metamorphosed into actual dogs.[12] Thus, poetic language and its stylistic artifices become the basis for elaborate theatrical representations and sensational stage effects.

With these fascinating scenic visions, the present section, which began with a reference to the possible overvaluation of comic performance by comparison to the words of the script, comes full circle: comic language is not an opponent of performance but its good master, its benefactor and main provider. The literary text creates the setting for the performance to evolve and establishes the main guidelines to be followed by the performers. The comic poets of Greece wrote plays of words and presented before their eager audiences a drama of language.

## 2 A selective research survey

In his classic *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, first published in 1957, Albin Lesky set an important research goal for the following generations of students of Aristophanes: "It must be remarked with regret that, amidst all the critical work on the preserved plays, the task of bringing out the elements of Aristophanic humour has been very much neglected. Although the comedy of situation is amply used, the primary conveyor of Aristophanes' humour is language".[13] In this way, the great Austrian philologist was indirectly but firmly encouraging

**11** See the first two chapters of this volume, by Bernhard Zimmermann and Ioannis M. Konstantakos.

**12** For these and further examples and relevant bibliography, see the chapters by Zimmermann and Konstantakos in this volume.

**13** Lesky 1971, 506: "Mit Bedauern muß man feststellen, daß über der kritischen Arbeit an den erhaltenen Stücken die Aufgabe, die Elemente des aristophanischen Humors herauszuarbeiten, stark vernachlässigt wurde. So reich auch Situationskomik ausgenützt wird, ist Träger dieses Humors doch vor allem die Sprache".

younger scholars to take up this neglected task and analyse the comic language of Aristophanes' oeuvre, the linguistic artifices exploited by the poet to generate his unsurpassable effects of humour. The younger generations of classicists responded quickly to this exhortation.[14] Important monographs on various aspects of Aristophanic verbal artistry and humour appeared within a few years of the first edition of Lesky's work. Their flow continued steadily over the following decades.

Collectively, the scholarly investigations extended over a wide range of linguistic facets and stylistic artifices of the comic text. Studies have been published on poetic figures such as metaphors and similes, on rhetorical devices such as accumulations and epithets, on categories and thematic areas of comic vocabulary, on types of humour (paradoxes, *para prosdokian*, obscene jokes), on personal names, on particular grammatical and syntactic structures (diminutives, forms of address, reported speech), as well as on the literary imitation and parody of the language and style of various other genres. Most interestingly, there have also been happy few attempts at a broader synthesis: monographs which bring together and examine the multiple levels and expressive means of comic language in their complex interrelation; essays which afford a holistic approach to the comic text as an aesthetic creation. The bibliographical account, which is set out in the next pages, does not aspire to offer a complete and systematic overview of modern research on the language of ancient Greek comedy; such a task would probably require an entire book and surpasses the present writer's scholarly stamina. I merely intend to select and describe several important works on various facets of this vast topic, based mainly on my own research experience.[15]

In other words, what follows is an unavoidably partial memoir on the books and essays which I have found most illuminating and useful during my thirty-year-long engagement in the study of ancient comedy. Emphasis is given to works of a more general nature, which address broader phenomena and tendencies of comic speech and writing, rather than to specialised studies of particular plays or passages. Above all, the selection is restricted to approaches which treat language as an aesthetic medium and an artistic tool, used by the comic poet to construct his fictional world, create poetry, amuse his audience,

**14** At least two Modern Greek scholars admit, in the introductions of their dissertations, that Lesky's statement inspired their choice of topic: Spyropoulos 1974, 2; Michael 1981, 9.

**15** An admirable survey of scholarship, up to the turn of the millennium, has been published by Andreas Willi, in his introduction in Willi 2002, 1–32. A young and dynamic scholar should now continue this work and bring it up to date, covering the rich crop of the past two decades.

and achieve humorous effects. There is little mention of purely technical and grammatical treatments, which explore the comic corpus as a source of linguistic phenomena (for example, the syntax of the genitive case, colloquialisms, or word formation), in connection with the history and structure of ancient Greek, but without reference to their literary operation and aesthetic purposes. This, unfair though as it may seem towards the hard-core workers of philological linguistics, is in accordance with the overall thematic orientation and objective of the present volume. The aim of the contributions gathered here is to highlight verbal materials, artifices, and figures of expression which serve the creative and poetic operation of comic drama.

## 2.1 *Catalogues raisonnés* and their reverberations

In 1962 Jean Taillardat published a virtually exhaustive survey of Aristophanes' figurative expressions, including poetic imagery, metaphors, and similes — an aspect of his art in which the poet himself took great pride, as already remarked above (see *Clouds* 559).[16] Understandably for that time, the book was rather thin with regard to theoretical linguistic background. Nonetheless, Taillardat covered important unexplored ground, and his work was soon established as a standard tool of research. His investigations were poured into the layout of a long catalogue of entries, methodically categorised according to the notions expressed by the figurative locutions. Every passage of the catalogue was accompanied with a detailed exegetical discussion, which illuminated the meaning of the Aristophanic text with apt commentary and apposite textual parallels. The book thus brought to light the basic principles of Aristophanes' handicraft of fabricating metaphors. Taillardat also carried out some useful work of practical criticism, trying to evaluate the originality and artistic accomplishment of the comic poet's linguistic imagery — a perilous and speculative but indispensable part of philological study. Even if it is read as a catalogue, from beginning to end, Taillardat's book will not give the impression of an arid, interminable list. On the contrary, it reveals to the reader the multicoloured and variegated mosaic of an entire world, throbbing with life — the world within which the comic poet lived and worked.

The one aspect which Taillardat neglected was the significance of imagery within the dramatic world of an individual play, the use of images and similes as leitmotivs which help to organise and unify the plot and bring forward the

**16** Taillardat 1962.

poetic meaning of the work. This lack was soon redressed in other studies, which focused on the close reading and interpretation of particular Aristophanic comedies. Cedric Whitman, in his monograph on the comic hero, one of the most fascinating critical studies of Aristophanic poetics and aesthetics, was the pioneering figure in this respect.[17] Alongside many other poetic and dramaturgical constituents, Whitman trailed and highlighted the clusters of imagery which recur in several episodes of the plays and connect the different parts into an integral artistic unity (e.g. wine, filth, and scatology in the early peace plays; food and eating in the *Knights*; air in the *Clouds*; feathers and flying in the *Birds*; the circle in the *Wasps*; animal imagery in many comedies). In particular, these permeating systems of imagery bring forth the contrast between the miserable reality of the early stages of the plot and the ideal world created by the comic hero through the implementation of his fantastic scheme.

Whitman's contribution was very influential in the field of Aristophanic studies, especially among Anglo-Saxon academics. Its echoes and reverberations are felt in many other books and essays, even decades later, by authors who do not necessarily focus on comic language, but have taken over and adapted Whitman's methods of close reading in order to correlate recurrent figurative motifs with central notions in one or another comedy. The interaction of these two registers was thus proved to be a determining factor for the interpretation of the Aristophanic works.[18] More recent studies have proceeded further on this track with greater theoretical complexity and sophistication. Scholars such as Ian Ruffell and Nicola Comentale have traced extensive networks of imagery and symbolism, which run through the text of particular comedies (e.g. the wine of peace in the *Acharnians*, the allegory of the *polis* as a household in the *Knights*, the interweaving of animal metaphors and dicastic imagery in the *Wasps*). They have analysed the intersection of these metaphorical networks with the central themes, plot patterns, and ideological contexts of each play.[19] They have also highlighted the association of imagery with theatrical

**17** Whitman 1964.

**18** See, e.g., Arrowsmith 1973 on the metaphors of flying, wings, and *eros* in the *Birds*; Cassio 1985 on the imagery of the *Peace*; Reckford 1987 concerning the use of poetic images in various plays; Hubbard 1991 on literary-critical metaphors; Bowie 1993 on images from ritual; and my own essays (Konstantakos 2012, Konstantakos 2021a) on the exploitation of motifs from tragedy and comedy.

**19** See Ruffell 2011, 54–213; Comentale 2015, 60–66.

performance, as the dominant metaphors of the text are visualised on stage through scenic objects and their manipulation.[20]

Taillardat's tradition was followed by the Greek scholar Elias Spyropoulos in his useful study of verbal accumulations and lists of terms in Aristophanic comedy.[21] This device is indeed one of the most impressive traits of Aristophanes' comic style; like his distant French kinsman Rabelais, the Greek comic poet piles up words into heaps, as children do with pebbles.[22] In the model of Taillardat, Spyropoulos compiled methodical and well-arranged catalogues of the numerous extant examples of comic accumulations. He classified a great mass of material by more than one criterion, such as the distribution of specimens in the different parts of the comedy, the semantic fields and subject-matter of the lists, and the grammatical genus of their ingredients; he thus offered valuable service to subsequent commentators of Aristophanes with his detailed and well-indexed collections. He also included selective comments on the aesthetic and literary function of accumulations, their rhetorical dimension, emotional use by the characters, humorous and parodic effects, as well as their relationship to other techniques of humour, such as puns and *para prosdokian* jokes. This critical aspect of the study should have been more developed; as it is, Spyropoulos did the basic groundwork of tilling the field and left the harvest of the rich fruits of interpretation to later experts. His most valuable critical contribution was the study of the additional stylistic artifices and tropes which may be intertwined with the accumulation and heighten its poetic effect: alliterations and sound effects, asyndeton and polysyndeton, repetition and anaphora, homeoteleuton and climax, as well as the prominence of lists consisting of three items — the "magical" number which links comic poetry with the world of folksong and oral popular formulas.

The masterpiece among the studies of "catalogue" type was Jeffrey Henderson's groundbreaking investigation of obscene language and *aischrologia* in Old Comedy. Published originally in 1975, reissued and still in print today, *The Maculate Muse* is the boldest of the reference works of Aristophanic scholarship.[23] Henderson compiled a comprehensive catalogue of the sexual,

**20** Cf. also above, section 1, with reference to the chapters by Zimmermann and Konstantakos in this volume, concerning scenically materialised images and metaphors.

**21** Spyropoulos 1974, based on his doctoral dissertation at the Sorbonne (1973), for which Taillardat himself served as an examiner.

**22** Cf. Anatole France's famous quote about Rabelais: "Il joue avec les mots comme les enfants avec les cailloux; il en fait des tas" (France 1928, 95).

**23** The second edition, Henderson 1991, is the standard one. I once told the author (a perfect American gentleman, supremely courteous and impeccably dressed) that I had read his book

scatological, and other obscene jokes of Greek comedy, and interpreted a large number of obscure, unclear, or multi-levelled comic passages. The objections raised by some critics with regard to points of detail, dubious explanations, inaccuracies, or mistranslations,[24] have not essentially detracted from the great value of this book for all subsequent editors, commentators, and translators of Greek comedy. Henderson furthermore provided a substantial introduction discussing general critical and grammatological issues: the origins of obscene humour in the ritual roots of the comic genre, the aesthetic function of *aischrologia* in the poetics of Greek comedy, its interrelation with the themes and dramaturgy of the plays, and its psychological effects on the audience.

Although theoretical perspectives have been altered and broadened since then, Henderson's discussion remains the starting point for the appreciation and understanding of this vital constituent of ancient comic art. Later scholars have offered valuable insights and clarifications as to particular sexual images or categories of obscene vocabulary.[25] James Robson, in his monograph on humour and obscenity, set the *aischrologia* of Aristophanic comedy in a complex and up-to-date methodological frame, laden with the full apparatus of modern humour theory and discourse analysis. He refined and supplemented Henderson's views on the psychological effects of obscene language, stressing its convivial, playful, and carnivalesque aspects. He analysed in general the operation of *aischrologia* as a type of humour, according to the prevailing cognitive, social, and psychological theories. But he did not add to the collection of material, the practical explication of bawdy jokes, the typologies of sexual and scatological imagery, or the elucidation of difficult words and expressions — the perennial exigencies of the readers and commentators of Aristophanes.[26] In this respect, no one has yet achieved a synthesis of the same breadth and comprehensiveness as Henderson's work.

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through with great enthusiasm already as an undergraduate. He looked at me with an air of mock-severity and answered, with a twinkle in his eye: "You were not very well brought up, were you?"

**24** See also the chapter by S. Douglas Olson in this volume.

**25** See the essays by Jocelyn 1980, Komornicka 1981, Bain 1991a, Bain 1991b, Bain 1992 on the terminology of sexual organs and copulation; Edwards 1991 on scatology; Beta 1992 on the sexual vocabulary of Cratinus; Sommerstein 1999, 196–208 on sexual and scatological euphemisms; and McClure 1999, 205–259, comparing the varieties of obscenity used by male and female comic characters.

**26** Robson 2006.

## 2.2 Parody

Another branch of the study of comic language, which also took roots in the 1960s, in the wake of Lesky's admonitions, was the investigation of the literary allusions and imitations which are interwoven in the comic text. Parody of high-style poetic genres took the lion's share in this respect. The seminal work in the field was Peter Rau's monograph on paratragedy, a large-scale examination of the humorous adaptations and satirical versions of tragic material in Aristophanes' works, with particular attention to the extensive sequences of episodes based on Euripidean tragedies in the *Acharnians*, *Thesmophoriazusae*, and *Peace*.[27] A good deal of Rau's analyses was centred on content and plot, rather than on language. The author examined various plot motifs, dramaturgical techniques, themes, and structural patterns which Aristophanes took over from tragic drama and reworked in his own productions. Nevertheless, Rau also paid detailed attention to matters of language and style. He compared particular Aristophanic citations to their tragic models, word by word; he minutely distinguished the verbal and metrical elements of tragic discourse which were taken over in every comic passage that mimics tragedy. He thus highlighted the techniques of variation, substitution, degradation, and distortion, which were used to turn the tragic formulations into ridiculous statements and sources of mirth.

In the intervening decades since Rau's pivotal publication, countless essays on comic paratragedy have appeared. Scholars have examined the reflection of particular tragic motifs, structural patterns, and techniques in the oeuvre of Aristophanes and the remains of his colleagues; or they have provided close readings of particular comic passages and sequences of tragic parody in individual plays. These multitudinous studies, often supported by elaborate apparatuses of literary theory, have shed abundant light on the parodic mechanisms employed, both in terms of language and in matters of content, and on the metadramatic constructs created through the incorporation of tragic models into the comic fiction. The comic imitation of tragic models has also been studied as a powerful dramatic tool, which serves the broader intellectual and ideological topics of the comedy and the creation of poetic meaning.[28] Nevertheless,

**27** Rau 1967.

**28** The most important studies, selected from among a vast number, are Zeitlin 1981; Foley 1988; Dobrov 2001; Nieddu 2004; Rosen 2005; Platter 2007, 42–62, 143–175; Jay-Robert 2009, 114–133; Lauriola 2010, 115–132, 181–192; Wright 2013; Nelson 2016; and the collections of essays in Calame 2004 and Medda/Mirto/Pattoni 2006. More references to specialised studies of particular plays and passages are listed in Willi 2002, 14; Konstantakos 2021b, 205–206, 217, 222–225.

with regard to the stylistic aspect of paratragedy, Rau's book has remained the standard work of reference, because it offers the fullest, most comprehensive, and most illuminating survey of Aristophanes' linguistic techniques of parody — at least until Stavros Tsitsiridis wrote his own, dense and all-embracing typological classification of the material.[29]

Published a few years after Rau, Wilhelm Horn's dissertation focused on the imitations and parodies of prayer in Aristophanic comedies.[30] Building on the earlier monograph by Hermann Kleinknecht, who had examined many examples from Aristophanes in the context of his broader overview of parodies of prayer in ancient literature,[31] Horn collected the Aristophanic passages in prayer form and analysed their literary substance and function in the context of the comic plays. As in many studies of parody, the examination of thematic elements and dramaturgical aspects of prayer coexists with attention to stylistic markers, ritual language, traditional formulations, and the methods employed for their comic distortion.

Although tragedy was diachronically the favourite and most prominent intertext of Greek comedy, the Aristophanic drama, at least, is a truly polyphonic composition, which assimilates and reflects in a panoramic manner all the grammatological genres and literary forms of its time.[32] Stimulating contributions have therefore been dedicated also to the echoes of other poetic genres, such as lyric and epic, in the texts of Old Comedy. Christoph Kugelmeier published an admirable study of all the quotations, parodies, and imitations of Greek lyric poetry which are traced in Aristophanes and the other poets of Old Comedy.[33] He meticulously examined the text and wording of every one of these lyric reflections, in connection with their operation as a literary means within the broader comic script. Kugelmeier also offered a full-scale analysis of the parodies of the so-called "New Dithyramb", the form of lyric song that was greatly in vogue in late Classical Athens, during the acme of Old Comedy.[34]

A number of other studies revolve around the parodies of epic poetry, especially Homeric epic, in Aristophanes, Cratinus, and their colleagues. Apart from pointing out the hilarious reworking of epic myths and episodes, scholars also tend to the linguistic aspect of the parody; they discuss epic words, phrases,

**29** Tsitsiridis 2010.
**30** Horn 1970.
**31** Kleinknecht 1937.
**32** See Konstantakos 2021a, 92–97.
**33** Kugelmeier 1996.
**34** The parody of the ponderous New Dithyramb is also discussed by Zimmermann 1997.

typical formulas, or centos of Homeric verse, and their incorporation or misrepresentation in the comic text for the achievement of humorous effects.[35] There have also been discussions of epic parody in Epicharmus, who regularly used Homer and the epic cycle as models for his mythical travesties. The ironical echoes and satirical pastiches of Homeric formulas in the papyrus fragments of *Odysseus Automolos* have attracted particular attention.[36]

## 2.3 Vocabulary and idiolects

The examination of the vocabulary of comedy, of its humorous functions, sources, and specialised categories, has also been at the epicentre of fruitful research. Investigations in this area have mostly taken the form of articles and essays concerning particular thematic groups of words, specific systems of terminology, peculiar social and professional idiolects, or specialist jargons, which are exploited in the comic text for the construction of the dramatic mythopoeia and the generation of mirth. Studies of this kind have covered a very wide variety of thematic areas, sociolinguistic niveaus, and cultural domains: for example, the language of power and government; the catchwords, slogans, and ideologically charged imagery that was current in Athenian political discourse, in the speeches of the demagogues and the civic parlance of the Agora and the popular assembly; the language and rhetoric of the courts and the juridical procedures; the vocabulary used for the life of the soul and the mind, the psychological operations and emotions; words of praise or affection and epithets of insult; medical terms, words for illnesses, medicaments, and the physician's tasks; the jargon of sophists and intellectuals, of rhetoricians and literary criticism; the nomenclature and terminology of athletic contests, games, and competitive sports; and the terms for sailing, shipbuilding, maritime travel, navigation, fishing, and all other aspects of sea life.[37]

A relevant perspective consists in the exploration of ritual terminology and religiously charged jargons in ancient comedy. Important work on an aspect of this theme was done in the already mentioned monographs by Kleinknecht and Horn, who analysed the formulation and style of prayers in the Aristophanic plays. In the same direction, other scholars have investigated the morphology of

**35** See mainly de Lamberterie 1998; Macía Aparicio 2000; Ornaghi 2004; Revermann 2013.

**36** See Cassio 2002, 73–82; Willi 2008, 177–192; Willi 2012.

**37** See especially Denniston 1927; Handley 1953; Handley 1956; Byl 1981; Byl 1990; Dover 1992; Zimmermann 1992; Casevitz 1996; Camacho Maxia 1996; López Eire 1997; Noël 1997; Zanetto 1999; Jouanna 2000; Campagner 2001; Dover 2002; Byl 2006; Jay-Robert 2011; Zanetto 2020.

religious hymns incorporated in comic drama, mostly on the lips of the Chorus; the formulas of oaths and their parodic or satirical use in the dramatic action; the diction, imagery, and poetic language of comic oracles and their relation to other genres, from epic to fifth-century oracular poetry; the invocations of gods, their typology and use in comic situations; the cult epithets of gods and their connection to the general themes and the overall poetic meaning of the plays.[38]

In another pioneering essay, Alan Sommerstein compiled a glossary of Aristophanic euphemisms, that is, attenuated or vaguer expressions used in place of stronger ones which might cause offence, embarrassment, or be of ill omen.[39] He classified the euphemistic terms and phrases according to their subject matter (death, old age and disabilities, vice and crimes, political misdeeds, sex and scatology) and surveyed their distribution among the various sections and roles of the Aristophanic comedies, highlighting their prominence in the speech of women and elderly characters.

In total, over a period of several decades, considerable work was done on all these individual facets of the verbal repertoire of comedy. At the turn of the millennium, the time was ripe for a broad and comprehensive synthesis, which would collect and survey the various types of vocabulary and specialised idiolects, so as to give a more spherical picture of the protean and kaleidoscopic nature of comic discourse. This task was accomplished, with regard to Aristophanes' oeuvre, by Andreas Willi in a book which constitutes one of the richest and most engaging works of Aristophanic philological scholarship.[40] Making use of the research methods and tools both of modern linguistic science (especially sociolinguistics) and of traditional philological approaches, Willi explored the great diversity of verbal ingredients, the mixture of linguistic varieties, terminological registers, and forms of speech that make up the mosaic of the Aristophanic text. His goal was to sketch a comprehensive (though unavoidably not exhaustive) panorama of the multiform and polychromatic landscape of Aristophanic poetic expression; to provide, as Willi himself liked to suggest, a linguistic equivalent to Victor Ehrenberg's *People of Aristophanes*, that classic survey of the social and anthropological substance of ancient Athens, as reflected in comedy.

To fulfil this task, Willi focused on a cross-section of representative categories of Aristophanic language, comprising religious formulas and technical

**38** See most prominently Anderson 1995; Dillon 1995; Gil 1997; Conti Bizzarro 1998; Suárez de la Torre 1998; Bellocchi 2009.

**39** Sommerstein 1999.

**40** Willi 2003.

vocabulary, scientific jargon and sophistic terminology, and also foraying into social and characterological idiolects, such as the speech of women and foreigners. Most of these categories had been treated, more or less abundantly, in earlier scholarship, and some of them would continue to be studied in subsequent works. In Willi's monograph, however, these were considered for the first time together, in their coexistence and interaction within the complete linguistic arsenal of the great comic poet. In particular, Willi examined two religiously charged forms of expression in Aristophanic comedy: the more elaborate poetic hymns, which offer praise and encomia for the gods, and the simpler prayers, in which a specific request to the divine is directly posed. In this context, he considered a series of linguistic components and stylistic markers, such as cultic epithets, formulaic cries and invocations, speech-act verbs, and syntactic structures. He painstakingly differentiated between the overlapping but distinct registers of hymn and prayer, and studied their intersection with the dramatic situations and the characterisation of personages.

In connection with technical, scientific, and sophistic terminologies, Willi reached some of the most original and provocative conclusions of his study. He examined legal and juridical language, medical vocabulary, and terms of literary criticism in the Aristophanic texts, and established sophisticated criteria for distinguishing truly technical and professional jargon from words which had passed into general everyday usage. He demonstrated how Aristophanes adapts and parodies the language of Pre-Socratic thinkers, especially Eleatic and Orphic poetry, Protagorean grammatical theory, and the neologisms and verbal habits of the sophists, in order to fashion a peculiar brand of scientific parlance for the intellectuals of his comic fictions.

## 2.4 Linguistic characterisation

With regard to the social and character categories of language, Willi also had important earlier research to build on and carry further. Kenneth Dover, in a seminal paper, was the first to substantially discuss the question of linguistic characterisation in Old Comedy. Dover examined the idiolects of a series of character types from Aristophanic plays (old countrymen, slaves, philosophers, tragic poets) and showed that their speech represents a compromise between realism and comic convention. Many of these personages are endowed with a modicum of distinctive stylistic markers of naturalistic quality (e.g. sophistic neologisms for the intellectuals, old-fashioned vocabulary for the rustics, high-flown tragic expressions for the poets), but none of them preserves full consistency of this linguistic make-up. All the Aristophanic characters may abandon

their expected language register and freely stray into different levels of discourse for the purpose of jokes, parody, and other comic effects.[41] Subsequent studies refined these conclusions and adduced further observations on techniques of linguistic character depiction, such as the stylistic differentiation between opposed characters (the hero and the *bomolochos*, the antagonists in a contest), the querulous and self-defensive tone of old men's speech, or the use of verbal tics.[42]

Much attention has been awarded to the language of women in comedy, in accordance also with the emphasis on gender studies which prevails in recent classical scholarship. In a number of essays, the speech of the heroines of Aristophanic plays has been analysed, with a view to pointing out distinctive traits which permeate their manner of expression: affective locutions, pathetic and sentimental adjectives and forms of address, endearing diminutives, informal and colloquial turns of phrase, laxity and simplicity of style, euphemisms and restricted use of obscenity, and a preference for particular oaths.[43] On the other hand, Stephen Colvin dissected with precision and minuteness the passages of non-Attic dialect (Laconian, Boeotian, Megarian) placed on the lips of non-Athenian characters in Aristophanic comedy. He investigated in full the phonology, morphology, lexicon, syntax, and idioms of these marked stretches of comic text and assessed the accuracy of the representation of the various Greek dialects in the dramatic world of comedy. He also made interesting remarks on the use of dialect as a literary tool in comic drama, as an element of dramatic realism, a means of characterisation, and a medium for humour.[44]

In the wake of this earlier work, Willi also studied the language of Aristophanes' female characters and identified a long series of idioms peculiar to it: terms of endearment and affection, markers of politeness and attenuating speech patterns (litotes, non-assertive moods and verbal forms), possessive and emotive elements (pronouns, ethical dative), and other peculiar syntactic structures and phenomena, which are much more prominent in the lines of female personages than in those of the male characters, and may thus be considered as more characteristic of the idiolect of women.

In the final chapter of his book, Willi meticulously analysed the broken Greek of the barbarian figures in Aristophanes' plays, especially the longest such extant part, that of the Scythian archer in the *Thesmophoriasuzae*. He

**41** Dover 1976; Dover 1987, 237–248.

**42** See especially Silk 1995, 208–214; Del Corno 1997.

**43** See Sommerstein 1995; McClure 1999, 205–259; Nieddu 2001.

**44** Colvin 1999; cf. Colvin 2000.

compared the Aristophanic material with examples of modern representations of "foreigner talk" in literary contexts, so as to highlight the humorous effects that these characters' faulty speech would produce on the Athenian audience. Another valuable study of barbarian speech in Old Comedy and its comic exploitation was recently published by Piero Totaro, who concentrated on the briefer roles of this type: Pseudartabas of the *Acharnians*, the Triballus of the *Birds*, and the strangely speaking young guard on the so-called "New York Goose Play Vase" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.[45]

The most comprehensive and elaborate study of the use of language for characterisation in Old Comedy was written by Simone Beta.[46] The central axis of Beta's monograph is the identification of the different ways of speaking and forms of eloquence that are assigned to individual categories of personages in Aristophanes' works. The author aims at defining the distinctive manner of expression which represents a character's peculiar nature and epitomises the way in which the poet, the other personages of the play, and the audience look at this character. Rather than focusing on the vocabulary and grammatical structures traced in the speech *per se* of one or another group of comic figures, as Willi and other scholars had done, Beta analyses the significant terms, descriptions, and evaluations provided in the Aristophanic texts for the language used by each one of these groups. In this perspective, Beta establishes a basic dichotomy which conditions Aristophanes' classification of speech forms: on one hand, the "negative speech" is typical of the targets of comic satire, such as politicians, sophists, mediocre poets, antagonists of the hero, and the other *alazones* of the stage; on the other hand, the "positive speech" is attributed to the poet himself, in his statements in the parabasis, and to the praiseworthy heroes of his dramas.

A series of unpleasant, dangerous, and reprehensible qualities is associated with the speech of the satirised characters. Politicians and charlatans have loud, babbling, and offensive voices, similar to the cries of animals. The language of sophists and intellectuals is marked by emptiness, vagueness, and vanity, a hollow void under their verbal brilliance and subtlety. Their words are like thin air. Their talk abounds, of course, in neologisms, complex antitheses, and other rhetorical gimmicks. The discourses of politicians are steeped in lies and deceit, calumny and flattery, sycophancy and cunning. The degenerate

**45** Totaro 2019. Colvin included a few remarks on the language of comic barbarians in his own studies: Colvin 1999, 281–294; Colvin 2000, 287–291. See also Brixhe 1988; Morenilla-Talens 1989; Lamagna 2000; Negri/Ornaghi 2008.

**46** Beta 2004.

eloquence of radical demagogues, in particular, is associated with filth, scatology, and perversion. The *alazones*, *bomolochoi*, and buffoons of the comic stage are also notable for deceitful and puffed-up outpourings. Women are prone to idle talk, chattering, and loquacity, although central heroines, such as Praxagora and Lysistrata, may display the serious rhetorical skills of male eloquence. The propensity towards prattling and garrulousness is also deemed to be a feature of old men and slaves. By contrast, the elocution of the poet and the positive heroes is a model of truthfulness, justice, righteousness, and good sense.

Plutarch, in his notorious denunciation of Aristophanic comedy (*Comparatio Aristophanis et Menandri* 853d), accused the great comic poet of haphazardly mixing all kinds of disparate styles. In Plutarch's view, Aristophanes never gives to each particular category of characters its fitting and appropriate language; the reader cannot tell from the text whether the speaker is a son or a father, a rustic or a god, a hero or an old woman, a king or a housewife, an orator or a scumbag of the market. It is a pity that Plutarch did not have the chance to read the works of Willi, Beta, and the other scholars mentioned in this section. He would have been moved to considerably revise his unfair statements.

## 2.5 Artifices of humour

The comic poet's mastery of language is particularly evident in the way he manipulates words to create humour. Lesky had already remarked that the major and most interesting part of Aristophanic comic effects are generated through verbal mechanisms; wordplays and puns, paradoxes and oxymora, unexpected locutions and *aprosdoketa*, funny words and phrases, and other artifices of this kind are at the centre of the comic writer's *métier*. Although research on these linguistic procedures has not been prolific, in spite of Lesky's exhortations, a few stimulating works, especially in the new millennium, have successfully anatomised the verbal neurons of Aristophanic humour.

As was the case with the categories of comic vocabulary (see above, 2.3), there have been individual studies of separate linguistic tropes and devices of humorous intent. These include the repetition of phrases and lines of comic text, which may serve to produce humorous effects (irony, derision, parody, burlesque absurdity, comic characterisation) or to connect different parts of the comedy through recurrent linguistic leitmotivs; various kinds of wordplay, which rely on semantic ambiguity, polysemous words, assonance, or elliptic and ambivalent syntax; comic misunderstandings caused by euphemistic and ambivalent expressions; punning compounds and word coinages; and various

figures of speech and rhetorical effects, such as anaphora, chiasmus, and antithesis.[47] Ian Ruffell also examined the arrangement of sequences of jokes into larger routines, around which entire scenes may revolve; for example, the funny metonymies of the animal trial in the *Wasps*, the strings of "stand-up comedy" jests with the audience in the prologue of the same play, or various metaphor-oriented routines of comic confrontation in the *Knights*.[48]

Much interest has been roused by the so-called *aprosdoketon* or *para prosdokian* joke, the kind of jest that relies on unexpected expressions and verbal surprise. In a series of essays, plentiful examples of this device have been catalogued and classified with regard to their themes, grammatical and lexical structure, notional function, and positioning within the lines of the text. Scholars have explicated the basic mechanics of the device, in particular the effects of dissonance and incongruity, the mixture of serious and ludicrous terms, and the operation of the final surprising punch line, the unforeseen tag which carries the gist of the joke. Through close readings of passages including *aprosdoketa*, mostly from Aristophanic texts, scholars have also highlighted the interaction of this form of humour with other comic techniques, such as obscenity and political invective.[49]

Most recently, the study of the *para prosdokian* has been significantly furthered by Dimitrios Kanellakis, who dedicated to this artifice a long and thought-provoking chapter of his monograph on the poetics of surprise in Aristophanic comedy.[50] Kanellakis combined the insights of ancient grammarians with the methods of modern linguistic science, to establish an accurate definition of the *para prosdokian* ("a figure of speech in which the latter part of an idiom, proverb, or well-known expression or formula of words is altered to make an unexpected and humorous ending"). He offered full analysis of the structure and verbal mechanisms of this device and proposed a typological classification of the specimens, based on criteria of source, theme, and morphology. He thus brought forth the close interaction of *para prosdokian* jokes with other important

**47** See Miller 1944 and Miller 1945 on repetitions; Diller 1978 on various kinds of wordplay, calembour, punning compounds, and neologisms, but restricted to the *Acharnians*; Sommerstein 1999, 213–217 on misunderstandings; Slings 2002 on figures of speech; Melis 2018 on verbal plays of polysemy and ambiguity. Robson 2006, 39–69 also discusses examples of various types of joke (repetition, tragic parody, *para prosdokian*, coinages and unusual words, puns of ambiguity, and double entendres), although his emphasis is on theoretical models of humour analysis, not on the elucidation of verbal mechanics.

**48** Ruffell 2011, 112–156.

**49** Filippo 2001–2002; Napolitano 2007; Comentale 2015, 53–60.

**50** Kanellakis 2020, 23–85.

procedures of linguistic amusement (paratragedy, *aischrologia*, hyperbole, and climax). He investigated the structural and syntactic distribution of *aprosdoketa* in Aristophanic discourse, the linguistic materials (parts of speech, grammatical levels) involved in the fabrication of the extant examples, their relative statistical occurrence in the various sections of the play and in the parts of different standard characters. He explicated dozens of passages of this kind from Aristophanic comedies, underlining the reverberations of the verbal comic technique on the dramatic situation and the scenic action. With his methodical approach, control of the evidence, and good judgement, Kanellakis has not only written the most fruitful discussion of the comic *para prosdokian* but also provided a model for future studies of verbal techniques of humour.

In a brief coda, Kanellakis has also treated the oxymoron, a type of witticism which consists in the juxtaposition of two opposite semantic values. This particular device proves to be rare in Aristophanic comedy.[51] It would take perhaps a more affected and mannered kind of humorous writing, as found, e.g., in the stilted courtly satires of the English Restoration or in the witty brilliance of Wilde and Shaw, to elaborate the oxymoron to the full extent of its potential.

Another particular source of verbal humour, which has been repeatedly studied, consists in the so-called speaking or significant names: in other words, the personal names of comic characters and other relevant appellations (nicknames and sobriquets, demotics, ethnic and place names, theonyms), which have been specially coined by the poet or appropriately chosen from the existing repertoire of real life, so as to serve an aesthetic and dramatic purpose — for example, to express a character's particular *ethos* and role in the comedy, epitomise central themes and tendencies of the plot, function as a medium of invective and satirise personalities of contemporary Athens, or produce various humorous results. Related studies have emphasised the use of names as literary tools and structural elements of the comic fiction, as well as their importance for personal satire and *onomasti komoidein*. The use of stock or standardised names for particular categories of characters (e.g. slaves, citizen women, and elderly men), which was bound to become a staple feature of Middle and New Comedy, was also traced back to the comic poets of the fifth century. Most interestingly, scholars have commented on the dynamic operation of naming as an element of dramatic action, highlighting how the names of important characters

**51** Kanellakis 2020, 85–87.

are revealed at key moments of the plot, so as to maximise their dramatic impression or their laughable effect.[52]

There have also been forays outside the classic tradition of Attic comedy. Andreas Willi offered an exemplary survey of Epicharmus' literary dialect, analysing its phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, as well as its colloquial material and local Sicilian idioms. In this context, he also discussed Epicharmean linguistic humour, especially puns of etymology and paronomasia, funny similes, *aprosdoketa*, and accumulations. His lead was followed by Sara Tosetti, who collected and interpreted a good number of Epicharmean wordplays and verbal jokes: puns based on homonymy, homophony, semantic ambiguities, and sound effects, double entendres with obscene sense, quiproquos and misunderstandings, fabricated speaking names, and ridiculous compounds.[53] All these artifices bear eloquent testimony to the refined humour and high literary level of Epicharmean drama.

Two broader synthetic studies of verbal humour were produced decades apart from each other. Firstly, the Greek scholar Christos Michael wrote a dissertation on the tropes and stylistic devices of the Aristophanic comic *logos*, drawing amply on the poet's entire oeuvre.[54] His work covered a mixed variety of literary techniques, including categories which pertain to content rather than linguistic form, such as satire, invective, irony of situation, black and macabre humour, marvellous tales, the ridicule of gods, and the manifestations of *alazoneia*. Much of his study, nonetheless, surveyed purely linguistic forms of comic expression: witticisms, sophisms, funny proverbs and maxims; various kinds of wordplay based on sound effects, semantic ambiguities, synonymy, homonymy, and etymology; the mechanisms of parody, such as transposition, disfigurement, and pastiche; misunderstandings of multivalent words and phrases; the linguistic means of irony (rhetorical questions, exclamations); *aprosdoketa* created by unexpected words, phrases, and pragmatic references, by the distortion of literary passages and proverbs, or by incongruous combinations of disparate items;

**52** See Bonanno 1987; Olson 1992; Beltrametti 2019. The monograph by Kanavou 2011 is scarcely more than a catalogue of lemmata, accompanied by explanations borrowed and compiled from the standard commentaries on Aristophanes, with no trace of original thought and no contribution to broader interpretative issues. It is sad that this book should occupy now the place of a "standard" work on Aristophanic speaking names, due to the mere lack of alternatives. A new synthetic and interpretative study of personal names in Old Comedy is sorely needed.

**53** Willi 2008, 119–161; Tosetti 2018. A methodical description of the poetic dialect of Epicharmus and the Doric mime was already carried out by Cassio 2002.

**54** Michael 1981.

repetition of words and lines, anaphora, parallelisms, homeoteleuton, and rhyme; funny sobriquets and satirical distortion of proper names; comic neologisms, fabrication of new words, onomatopoeia, derivatives, and ludicrous long compounds; sound effects, alliteration, and paronomasia; metaphors and similes; comic prayers, oaths, and curses; and the humorous functions of the classic repertoire of rhetorical figures, from hypallage, hysteron proteron, hendiadys, and hyperbaton to asyndeton, polysyndeton, periphrasis, antithesis, metonymy, synecdoche, and aposiopesis. He also briefly touched upon other figures of style, such as bathos and anticlimax, paradox, repartee, insults, obscenity, and the humorous exploitation of colloquialisms and specialised vocabulary.

Michael set his study in a general philosophical framework; he elaborated on the aesthetic nature and psychological effects of the comic, based on ideas from Schlegel, Schopenhauer, and Bergson. In spite of the broad range and comprehensiveness of the material, however, the investigation of the individual tropes and artifices was not much developed in terms of interpretation and commentary. Michael offered typological classifications and methodical systems of subdivisions for each category, but attempted no close readings of individual passages, no explications of the mechanics of humour, and no comparative investigations. Much of his book consists of catalogues of examples, classified under typological headings. The author drew a preliminary map of the vast area of Aristophanic comic discourse, but provided little guidance as to its sights.

Much more sophisticated and theoretically up-to-date is Stephen Kidd's book on nonsense and meaning in Greek comedy, in which a number of verbal mechanisms of comic effect are explored, though hardly in a systematic or exhaustive manner.[55] Kidd sets out from the concept of "nonsense", the utterance or action that is seemingly interpretable but ultimately escapes meaning; according to his approach, this kind of playful reference-free incongruity lies at the core of the pleasure of comedy and constitutes the risible element *par excellence*, the essence of comic fun. Under this perspective, Kidd examines a series of linguistic formations and devices which can be connected with the central axis of hilarious nonsense, such as riddles, metaphors, allegories, wordplays, verbal coinages, repetitions, and rambling speech. Unfortunately, the reduction of the material under an idiosyncratic and ultimately elusive concept does not favour the methodical classification and comprehensive study of the techniques and figures of speech. Nonsense is essentially a notional, not a linguistic category, and as such it is not a suitable tool for illuminating the mechanics of comic

**55** Kidd 2014.

language. It may prove useful, nonetheless, in probing peculiar, exceptional, or borderline cases of linguistic creativity.

In this direction, Kidd examines riddles and conundrums incorporated into the comic text, a fascinating element of verbal humour, which was especially loved by the authors or Middle Comedy but has roots already in fifth-century masters such as Aristophanes and Crates. He focuses primarily on riddles and cognate forms (oracles, allegorical locutions) which do not truly have a solution but offer parodies and funny reproductions of enigmatic and symbolic formulas, as a void shell of form, without correspondence to an external reality. In such cases, the riddling language turns and reflects on itself. Kidd furthermore discusses extended metaphors and allegories, such as the trial of the dogs in the *Wasps* and the vocabulary of sex used in connection with feminine personified abstractions in several plays (Aristophanes' *Peace* and *Lysistrata*, Eupolis' *Cities*). As he demonstrates, in these examples the metaphorical expression sometimes breaks loose from the signified reality and wanders freely into the imaginary world created by the imagery *per se*. An analogous approach is applied also to other elements: far-fetched wordplays, which rely on simple homophonies and games of sounds and have a tenuous connection with the content and meaning of the characters' words; ludicrous verbal coinages and multi-syllable compounds, in which the semantic values of the individual components seem to merge into the pure exuberance of language; and funny repetitions of words or phrases, which destroy the meaningfulness of the linguistic items by means of their vain proliferation.

## 2.6 The Silk Road: broader syntheses

The years around the turn of the millennium were a propitious time for the study of Aristophanic poetic expression. Apart from the comprehensive monographs by Willi and Beta, which were mentioned above, two other important works were published at that time, offering a wide-ranging overview and critical evaluation of many facets of Aristophanes' verbal humour and artistry. For the scholars of ancient comedy, the inauguration of the twenty-first century showed that in the beginning was the word.

Gerrit Kloss, in his book on the manifestations of comic speech in Aristophanes, examined the forms of linguistic humour in the context of pragmatic analysis and communication theory, as speech acts of a peculiar kind.[56] In essence,

**56** Kloss 2001.

the jokes of comedy are speech acts gone wrong, utterances which violate one or more of the prerequisite conditions for the success of a speech act. The comic effect is generated from the disturbance or failure of the communicative process. This theoretical frame enables the scholar to analyse the modes and tropes of comic language not merely as rhetorical and stylistic artifices, but as integral factors of the plot and performance of the play; the funny speech acts are viewed as constituents of the live interaction between dramatic characters and are interwoven with the creation of comic situations. In this perspective, Kloss reviews a series of phenomena of humorous speech, which belong to various categories, and provides close readings and detailed discussions of several Aristophanic passages. His work thus becomes a useful commented anthology and a selective encyclopaedia of the forms of comic language.

Kloss' investigation ranges over phenomena of linguistic characterisation, deviant or aberrant idiolects, parody and imitation of literary, official, and cultic registers, types of joke, and stylistic figures. In particular, he examines the gibberish and the ridiculously broken Greek of barbarian characters (Pseudartabas, Triballus, the Scythian guard), a form of communicative failure which causes laughable incongruities and misunderstandings. The dialectical speech of non-Athenians, on the other hand, is proved to function as a means of characterisation, rather than as an object of mockery and comic effect. The vocal and grammatical faults of prominent contemporary *komoidoumenoi* (for example, Cleon's loud tirades, Alcibiades' and Hyperbolus' flawed phonetics, the *lapsus linguae* of the actor Hegelochus) are mercilessly satirised. Kloss furthermore discusses the comic use of various revered or established linguistic systems from the spheres of literature, religion, administration, and popular culture: hexameter oracles, legal documents such as laws, decrees, and treaties, public prayers and curses, military orders, sympotic songs, fables and Sybaritic anecdotes, and the vocabulary of philosophical discourse. The introduction of these divergent language codes into the comic text serves a variety of dramatic purposes.

A valuable chapter is dedicated to the vulgar jokes, anticlimactic similes, mocking asides, and silly anecdotes placed on the lips of the *bomolochos* and interposed in the dialogue in order to afford comic relief. Kloss also analyses examples of comic misunderstandings (such as the hilarious interventions of Critylla in the parody of Euripides' *Helen* in the *Thesmophoriazusae* 850–923) from the point of view of failed speech acts. Finally, he explores the repetition of words and phrases as a means of creating burlesque or ironical effects and as a leitmotiv connecting different parts of the play. Though far from exhaustive, Kloss' study conveys a fair idea of the overall richness and variety of the linguistic arsenal of Aristophanic humour. The comic poet emerges as a verbal jongleur,

who dexterously juggles with a large number of linguistic devices, like so many balls in the air, in order to produce a magnificent and entertaining spectacle for his audience.

The most complex and fascinating critical appraisal of Aristophanes' language as an aesthetic creation and an accomplishment of poetic art is found in Michael Silk's magnum opus on Aristophanes and the definition of comedy, the culmination of two decades of thought and research. Amidst an impressive general discussion of the literary techniques and expressive means of Aristophanic drama, Silk dedicated a sizeable part of his investigation to language and style as a central component of comic poetics.[57] He sought to trace the sources of Aristophanes' poetic greatness in his mastery of words and demonstrated how the multifarious ingredients of Aristophanic style (from tragic borrowings to barbarian pidgin, from omnivorous literary echoes to colloquialism and animal voices) ultimately serve the poet's unified vision of the world. A genuine heir of the best traditions of New Criticism, Silk offered close readings of numerous textual passages, by means of which he brought forth the defining qualities of Aristophanes' poetics of language.

As Silk demonstrates, the Aristophanic text is branded by an immense variability and mobility of stylistic level. High and low elements are blended with the utmost dexterity. The poet often juxtaposes characters that incarnate different stylistic codes or contrasted levels of expression (e.g. the turgidity of Aeschylus versus the insubstantiality of Euripides). The language displays unpredictable variations and continuous undulations between the portentous and the banal, the literary and the colloquial, pathos and bathos, lyric exaltation and coarse insult. Yet, behind and beyond this seemingly infinite diversity, there are certain stylistic features which permeate Aristophanes' manner of expression and assume central significance for his art. Silk singles out first and foremost the physicality of the language, the preponderance of the material element which is given poetic form. The metaphors materialised on stage, the osmosis of the metonymical and the real, the sharp and bold verbal combinations, the sensuous obscenity, all these elements contribute to the intensely physical sense of the text. The second trademark of Aristophanic writing is accumulation, which is displayed on every level of composition: lexicon (large compound words), syntax (long lists of terms, paratactic juxtapositions), elocution and versification (parallel phrases and repeated stylistic patterns, often enhanced by sound effects). This accumulative slant is the main cause of the exuberance which so strongly marks the Aristophanic text.

**57** Silk 2000, 98–206.

The third main trait, a corollary of the essential mobility of Aristophanic style, is discontinuity, in other words, the collision of incompatible items, which is ubiquitous in the text and underlies a range of stylistic manoeuvres: paratragedy, *para prosdokian*, verbal coinages, violation of the dramatic illusion, bold comic metaphors, all rely on the unpredictable and irregular combination of unrelated elements. In the most extended and elaborate sequences of metaphor and allegorical imagery, the terms of the real subject continuously intrude and disrupt the consistency of the metaphorical image. The conjunction of the concrete and the abstract ("oats and salvation", "smell of quietism and poplar") is another emblematically Aristophanic manifestation of the same principle of discontinuity. The cumulative effect of these three capital stylistic features is to convey a particular poetic vision of the world, an exuberant acceptance of existence in all its peculiar diversity. Silk compares this Aristophanic worldview with the modern literary-theoretical concept of defamiliarisation, which was developed by the Russian formalists: the purpose of poetry is to make objects unfamiliar and thus grant readers a renewed vision of the things of the world, which will enhance their sensation of life. The vitalism of Aristophanic language is the essential catalyst for this defamiliarising and reinvigorating experience.

## 2.7 Middle Comedy

Most of the monographs and essays mentioned in the preceding sections concern exclusively or *par excellence* the language of Aristophanes; at most, they take account also of the fragments of his fifth-century colleagues. It was inevitable, perhaps, that the material of Old Comedy would preponderate in scholarly research, given that the comic language of Aristophanes (and, to some extent, of his contemporary playwrights) was a rare artistic accomplishment, a phenomenon of poetic vitality and euphoria virtually unparalleled in the ancient literary canon. However, the history of Greek comedy did not end at the beginning of the fourth century, nor should the study of its verbal and stylistic aspects stop at that time. Although they are fewer by comparison with the bulk of Aristophanic scholarship, important and stimulating studies of the language of Middle and especially of New Comedy have been published over a period of several decades. There are also great prospects of further research in this particular area, both with regard to the material of fourth-century comedy *per se* and in comparison with the expressive means of Aristophanes and Old Comedy.

Concerning the produce of Middle Comedy, the fragmentary remains of the early and middle decades of the fourth century, most of the relevant scholarship focuses on the parody of high-style poetic genres and its humorous techniques.

Tragedy, especially Euripidean tragedy, but also the productions of the post-classical tragic dramatists, remained an important intertext for the comic writers of that age. Following the example of Rau and other students of Aristophanic paratragedy, the scholars who have investigated this phenomenon in Middle Comedy examined a variety of materials, surveying both content and form. Alongside the comic adaptation and distortion of tragic myths and scenarios, scenic machinery and dramaturgical techniques, they also drew attention to linguistic facets: tragic quotations and paraphrases introduced in the comic fragments, burlesques of lines from tragedies and pastiches of tragic style, use of marked formulas and stylistic patterns from standard structures of tragedy, such as the narrative prologue and the messenger speech. In spite of the difficulties posed by the scantiness and fragmentariness of the material, scholars have attempted to delineate new traits and tendencies which distinguish the paratragedy of fourth-century comic poets by comparison to their fifth-century predecessors. These new trends consist firstly in a more nuanced critical stance towards tragedy as a model art form; and secondly in the assimilation of the tragic echoes and imitations into the favourite plot schemes and thematic concerns of fourth-century comic drama, such as the travesty of myth, love intrigues, and culinary matters.[58]

The most abundantly exploited target of parody in Middle Comedy was dithyrambic poetry. A great number of comic fragments consist of burlesque spoofs of the high-flown style of the New Dithyramb, usually placed on the lips of comic cooks or slaves, who describe in a ridiculously elevated manner foodstuffs and culinary dishes, wine and drinking vessels, and other paraphernalia of the banquet. Heinz-Günther Nesselrath, in his seminal monograph on the literary history and poetics of Middle Comedy, dedicated a substantial chapter to the analysis of these mock-dithyrambic tirades and described in detail their linguistic ingredients: extravagant compound words, rare and stilted poetic vocabulary, long and rambling circumlocutions, affected periphrases, loose or tortuous syntax, and interminable sequences of accumulated clauses in asyndeton or parataxis. All these stylistic means were well exploited already by Aristophanes, who also regularly made fun of the dithyrambic poets and their heavily ornate expression. Nevertheless, as Nesselrath showed, in Middle Comedy these devices were applied to different subject-matter, combined in new ways, and treated in a wholly peculiar and distinctive spirit, which produced a form of verbal humour and a kind of sound unheard in the comic tradition until then.[59]

**58** See Oliva 1968; Hunter 1987, 281–291; Cusset 2003, 31–52.

**59** Nesselrath 1990, 241–280.

In the context of his investigation, Nesselrath also examined a number of other rhetorical and poetic figures mobilised by the bragging cooks and slaves of Middle Comedy to enhance the mock-elevated effect of their tirades: enormous lists of food names and culinary terms, mostly cast in long clusters of anapaestic dimeters; accumulations of phrases and parallelism of verses, reinforced through parison, isocolon, and homeoteleuton.

Other scholars carried on these researches and further explored the figure of the comic cook as a wordsmith and master of language, both in Middle Comedy and in its epigones in the Hellenistic age. They documented the cook's verbalism and lofty expressions, his parodies of high-style tragic and dithyrambic poetry, his detailed accounts of recipes and accumulations of culinary vocabulary, his use of Homeric glosses, philosophical terms, and scientific jargon from various disciplines (medicine, musical theory, architecture, astronomy, geometry, and military tactics).[60] Riddles and conundrums, which were a popular form in Middle Comedy and provided material for extensive episodes and even for entire plays, have also been fruitfully studied. Scholars have dissected the linguistic procedures and stylistic figures of comic riddles, their use of kennings and enigmatic circumlocutions, metaphors and symbolic imagery, contradictions, paradoxes, and other artifices intended to confuse the listener and obfuscate meaning.[61]

Overall, in spite of the aforementioned works, the verbal humour of Middle Comedy is an underexplored field of research. Many valuable remarks on the style and linguistic artifices of particular fragments are found in the commentaries on the remains of individual poets, from the classic earlier books by Richard Hunter and Geoffrey Arnott to the long series of excellently documented volumes of the Freiburg *Fragmenta Comica* project, which has already covered most of the poets of this period. Nevertheless, the lack of broader synthetic studies of the language of Middle Comedy is palpable. There is room for more than one dissertation which will investigate the multifarious figures and tropes of humorous expression in fourth-century comic fragments, from wordplay, witticisms, funny compounds and neologisms, types of vocabulary, philosophical jargon, ritual and technical codes to repetition, graphic metaphors and similes, sound effects, *aprosdoketa*, and even such rhetorical devices as asyndeton and polysyndeton, homeoteleuton, hypallage, and synecdoche. Perennially pushed

**60** See Dohm 1964, 160–203; Kassel 1974; Livrea 1980; Gallo 1981, 84–140; Roselli 2000; Dobrov 2002; Belardinelli 2008; García Soler 2008; Di Marco 2010; Stamatis 2014, 31–33, 131–177.

**61** See Konstantakos 2000, 115–117, 146–210; Pütz 2007, 192–211; Monda 2012; Kidd 2014, 52–69.

to the margins of literary history, Middle Comedy is still expecting to find its Andreas Willi, its Simone Beta, its Gerrit Kloss, or (why not) its Michael Silk.

## 2.8 Menander and New Comedy

The discoveries of many papyri, over more than a century, have vouchsafed us a moderate sample of Menander's oeuvre, sufficient for literary study and interpretation, even though miserably small by comparison to the poet's total output. Menandrian style and poetic expression, so different from the exuberant speech of Aristophanic comedy, have attracted a good deal of scholarly interest. Benjamin Cartlidge's recent dissertation has offered an admirable grammatical description and analysis of Menander's language, examining most of its main aspects (phonology, morphology, word formation, syntax of subordinate clauses) in relation to the development of the Hellenistic Koine.[62] Earlier linguistic investigations of this kind concentrated on the typology of selected grammatical and syntactic phenomena, such as the formation, use, and distribution of the perfect tense and the varieties of hyperbaton in the Menandrian texts.[63] The new words (mostly unattested compounds or derivatives) found in the papyri of Menander have also been collected and analysed morphologically and semantically, as important indications for everyday speech or technical registers in early Hellenistic Athens.[64]

The bulk of related scholarship is concerned, of course, with the literary aspects and aesthetic operation of Menandrian language, with the poet's stylistic devices, mechanisms of verbal wit, and their dramatic function. Research in these areas has tended to take the form of specialised essays and small monographs on individual techniques and figures of style, rather than produce comprehensive and synthetic works comprising general overviews of a variety of such forms. Nevertheless, the scholarship on Menander's humorous wordsmithing is much more plentiful than the studies dedicated to his predecessors of the period of Middle Comedy.

Menander's complex literary debt to tragic poetry has been explored in many books and articles, and its linguistic aspects have received a fair amount of attention. Scholars have examined the introduction of tragic quotations in the Menandrian text and their self-conscious exploitation by the personages;

**62** Cartlidge 2014.
**63** Goldberg 1996.
**64** Pascucci 1971; Pascucci 1972.

the use of elevated tragic vocabulary, metre, and diction to underline the tension and pathos of a dramatic scene or the emotion of a character's speech, often in a subtly ironic manner; the application of tragic elocution to mundane matters or the mixture of tragic style and everyday speech for humorous effects; the imitation of the style of standard tragic parts, such as the narrative prologue, the recognition scene, and the messenger speech; and the employment of tragically coloured speech for linguistic characterisation, in order to mark particular dramatic characters as notably educated and dignified, or conversely as pretentious and pompous persons.[65]

This latter line of investigation leads to another area of research on which plentiful scholarly studies have concentrated: namely, the utilisation of linguistic and stylistic means in order to illustrate the *ethos* of the Menandrian personages, to bring out the peculiar idiosyncrasy, moral qualities, or intellectual gifts of individual characters. Much more prominently and palpably than in the plays of Aristophanes, the personages of Menander's comedy are differentiated through the language they speak, according to their sex, age, social position, educational background, or comic type. A great number of essays have explored this rich stratification of the Menandrian text, whether focusing on the idiolect of individual characters from one or the other play, or highlighting general trends which distinguish the speech of entire categories of personages and stock types.[66] Menander is shown to have handled a range of devices for this purpose: specific phrases or speech patterns used by an individual character as his or her favourite mannerisms or personal gimmicks of speech; dense repetition of the same or cognate keywords, whose semantic field pertains to the speaker's main ethical qualities; preferential assignment of selected elements (particular oaths and interjections, personal, possessive, or demonstrative pronouns, and other grammatical structures) to certain social or ethological groups of characters, such as slaves, women, hetairai, or old grouches; reserved recourse to special codes, such as obscenity, slang, and technical jargon, for the illustration of peculiar types (drunken slave, mock-doctor etc.); and a nuanced distribution of rhetorical effects such as asyndeton, enjambement, alliteration, anaphora, and hyperbaton.

**65** See especially Sandbach 1970, 124–136; Katsouris 1975, 101–181; Poole 1978; Arnott 1986; Hurst 1990; Cavallero 1994, 83–89; Leurini 1994; Cusset 2003; Zanetto 2014.

**66** See Zini 1938; Osmun 1954; Dedoussi 1964; Sandbach 1970; Feneron 1974, 88–91; de Kat Eliassen 1975; Del Corno 1975; Katsouris 1975, 101–181; Ferrero 1976, 100–105; Bain 1984; Brenk 1987; Arnott 1995; Grasso 1995; Krieter-Spiro 1997, 201–251; Ferrari 2014.

A series of important findings have emerged from these researches, which help to draw a linguistic map of the world of New Comedy. To take some examples: The old men of Menander's comedies do not constitute a linguistically unified type, but rather an ample gallery of variegated speech idiosyncrasies, which includes some of the most amusing specimens of Menandrian theatre. For instance, the language of Niceratus, the simple and poor paterfamilias in the *Samia*, is branded by short asyndetic sentences and a proclivity towards superlative and exaggerated expressions, especially in his moments of anger. On the other hand, Demeas, the rich gentleman in the same play, masters a rich variety of registers, ranging from cultured fluency and vivid imagery to emotionally charged paratragedy and dexterous manipulation of humour and irony. Knemon, the protagonist of the *Dyskolos*, displays his rustic uncouthness and misanthropy through his predilection for negatives, emphatic and absolute expressions. Other rustic figures, such as Gorgias in the *Dyskolos*, suffer from rigid syntax, maladroit articulation of sentences, imitation of old-fashioned or pompous bookish style, and proneness to gnomic platitudes. Young men, especially lovers, such as Sostratus in the *Dyskolos* and Moschion in the *Samia*, are endowed with fluent and elegant speech, rhetorical capacities, and a reflective or introspective tone. The soldiers, such as Polemon in the *Perikeiromene* and Thrasonides in the *Misoumenos*, are prone to impulsive expression and hyperbolic sentimentality.

The diction of many slaves is colourless and conventional. Nevertheless, some of the most interesting representatives of the type are marked by stylistic individuality. For example, Daos in the *Aspis* demonstrates his intelligence through his complex syntax, familiarity with elevated and tragic diction, wide-ranging vocabulary, wordplays, and ironic wit. Pyrrhias in the *Dyskolos* is gifted with lively figurative language. The garrulous Onesimus in the *Epitrepontes* uses colourful images and mixes colloquialisms with fancy terms, which betray his desire to mimic the style of the well-educated. The cook Sikon in the *Dyskolos* is one of the greatest verbal masters of Menandrian comedy, full of wit and wordplays, unusual words and imaginative metaphors. Female characters fill their speech with emotional expressions, especially adjectives, adverbs, forms of address, and exclamations indicating affection, sympathy, tenderness, and (self-)pity. Habrotonon in the *Epitrepontes*, with her effusive superlatives and abundant terms of endearment, is an emblematic example. On the other limit of the spectrum, the elderly woman slave Philinna in the *Georgos* utters many impulsive exclamations which voice strong feelings.

These fruitful researches are founded on the groundwork laid by other formalistic studies, which have methodically examined important grammatical

phenomena, complex syntactic structures, and rhetorical figures (asyndeton, aposiopesis, questions and answers, word order, direct and indirect speech, rhyme and sound effects, anaphora and repetition, traditional verbal formulas) and illuminated their use, typology, and distribution over the entire Menandrian corpus, though not necessarily in connection with particular character types and their ethology. As has emerged from these studies, uncommon or abnormal word order serves to underline the speaker's emotion, excitement, or sarcasm. Asyndeta of various lengths and types may be used in monologues, narrative speeches, and lively dialogue, in order to create graphic vividness or indicate emotional agitation. Aposiopesis is introduced by speakers for reasons of discreetness and delicacy, euphemism, or repression of violent sentiments. Questions, longer or shorter, are employed to reveal various kinds of emotion, ensure dramatic pace and vivacity in dialogue, or help the advancement of the plot through the disclosure of information. Quotation of direct speech and dialogue inside a soliloquy renders the long monologue livelier and more theatrically effective; it is also useful for the indirect characterisation of other personages. Long and complex sentences are used in prologues, monologues, and *rheseis* to convey important information or capture the heart of an argument in an economical manner. Rhyme, assonance, and anaphora heighten emotion and afford rhetorical elevation to the speech, often with ironic results.[67]

Considerable interest has been attracted by the gnomic utterances, maxims, and proverbs included in the Menandrian text. Scholars have studied a number of aspects, including the morphology and syntactic structure of these forms of didactic speech; the formulas employed for their introduction and demarcation in the comic text; the metrical effects and rhetorical figures used for their formulation (chiasmus, parallelism, antithesis, assonance); their moral content, themes, and areas of reference; the imagery and similes contained in them, which range over a wide variety of fields of experience, from the animal kingdom to food, from myth to ethnic stereotypes and popular folktale; their literary ancestry and attestations in earlier tradition; and their application to the dramatic situation, the plot of the drama, and the delineation of the characters, which is often innovative or ironic.[68]

Menander's techniques of verbal humour have also enjoyed their share of attention. The linguistic artifices, on which related scholarship has concentrated, include wordplays, both hackneyed and original ones; witticisms and effects of

**67** See Feneron 1974; Ferrero 1976; Katsouris 1976; Turner 1980; Ireland 1981; Ricottilli 1984; Heap 1992; Lamagna 1998; Nünlist 2002.

**68** Tzifopoulos 1995; Leurini 2006; Schirru 2010; Tosi 2014; Leurini 2019.

comic irony; rude terms and insults, even some obscenities and double entendres, especially on the lips of low-brow characters, such as the slave personnel; funny combinations of words and paradoxical turns of phrase; long accumulations and odd-sounding or exuberant compounds; *para prosdokian* jokes, artfully positioned in the verse; misunderstandings of ambiguous terms; and repetition of the same words and phrases to hilarious results. All these effects, of course, are exploited by the comic poet with moderation and subtlety, in conformity with the overall refinement and urbanity of the Menandrian *comédie larmoyante*.[69] As in the case of Middle Comedy, the works of this kind are fewer than the studies of the same phenomena in the oeuvre of Aristophanes. The full and methodical investigation of verbal humour in Menander and more generally in New Comedy still constitutes a desideratum of research. Antonis Petrides takes a significant step towards the fulfilment of this goal with his chapter in the present volume; he provides an all-embracing survey of Menander's linguistic techniques of humour, though concentrating on a single play.

Finally, a fascinating line of investigation, which has not been pursued as much as it would deserve, is the interaction of language and performance, especially the connection between particular forms of style and the delivery of the text by the actors. Phenomena such as the use of long and syntactically complex clauses, full of dense participial constructions, in the narrative prologues, or the abundance of asyndeta, anacolutha, and exclamations in passages of emotionally charged speech, may have served also as indications for a specific manner of *hypokrisis* and enunciation of the dramatic text on stage. The quotations of other characters' speech within a soliloquy, which are demarcated with a number of formal and syntactic conventions, would also have called for a special mode of delivery; they might well have been uttered with a voice, tone, and sound effects different from those the speaker would have used for his own words. Other special forms of speech, such as repartee, asides and interjections, obscene insults and allusions, would have been appropriately voiced by the performers and accompanied with suitable movements and mimicry, to maximise their scenic effect.[70]

**69** Cavallero 1994; Arnott 1997; Craik 2001; Rampichini 2002.

**70** Osmun 1952; Del Corno 1994; Cavallero 1994, 98–101; Nünlist 2002.

# 3 The present volume

The present volume represents a contribution to the study of the language of ancient Greek comedy, in the wake of the rich tradition of research outlined in the previous section. A collection of eleven chapters address a range of aspects of the linguistic material and stylistic artifices exploited by the Greek comic poets, from vocabulary, metaphors, and imagery to parody and obscenity, from artifices of humour, such as the *par' hyponoian* and the droll compounds, to figures of style, such as similes, accumulations, and rhyme. Most of the chapters concentrate on Aristophanes and Old Comedy, which offers the richest repository of verbal wealth and the most fully equipped arsenal of comic techniques. Nevertheless, the less ploughed fields of Middle and New Comedy are not ignored. Throughout the volume, the emphasis falls on practical criticism, textual readings, and "micro-philological" approaches, on the examination of specific figures and artifices of speech, on the analysis of individual comic words and passages. Broader theoretical issues are taken into account by several authors in connection with their focused philological and textual investigations; but this is not a book of linguistic theory or a manifesto of new methodologies. Above all, the main unifying theme, which runs through the chapters of this volume, is the use of language for the achievement of the aesthetic, artistic, and intellectual purposes of ancient comedy: for the generation of humour and the production of comic effect, the delineation of characters, the transmission of ideological messages, and the construction of poetic meaning.

The book opens with Bernhard Zimmermann's essay on "Metaphors and personifications onstage" in Old Comedy. As the author observes, the comic poets of the fifth century have three distinct techniques of enlivening abstract notions on stage. Firstly, they use common metaphors and verbal images, take them in an absolutely literal sense, and transform them into live theatrical spectacles. Secondly, they embody various aspects of reality or social life into personifications, which appear as *dramatis personae* with a greater or lesser role in the action of the play. Thirdly, the comic poets strip a well-known contemporary person of his individual characteristics and introduce him into the play as the representative of a broader group. The first technique is illustrated by a famous scene of the *Acharnians* (180–202), in which the *spondai*, the libations for the conclusion of a peace treaty, are materially represented before the spectators' eyes in the form of three jars of wine. With regard to personifications, Zimmermann examines in particular the incarnated Clouds, who form the Chorus of the homonymous play. The Clouds are introduced as the patron deities of intellectuals and embody all the typical features attributed to intellectuals by public

opinion. Their representation in the comedy is based on metaphors which persist in modern languages for the characterisation of impractical theoreticians and philosophers (e.g. "hover above the ground" for thinkers who are out of touch with reality). Socrates' figure in the *Clouds* is an example of the third technique. The Aristophanic character does not correspond to the historical Socrates of 423 BCE. Rather, he generically conflates in his person all the intellectuals who are under the protection of the Cloud goddesses, and thus becomes a stage symbol of the total of Athenian intellectual life at that time.

Analogously, in the *Birds* the well-known dithyrambic poet Kinesias scenically epitomises the entire category of the innovative choral poets of the New Dithyramb. The vocabulary and metaphors, which Kinesias employs to describe his poetic works, express in a graphic manner the literary defects of dithyrambic art, namely, its airy insubstantiality, cloudy darkness, and frigidity. Cratinus and other early poets of Old Comedy had already pioneered this technique. Some of their Choruses, such as Cratinus' *Archilochoi* and *Kleoboulinai* or Telecleides' *Hesiodoi*, represent particular cultural tendencies, ideological agendas, or poetic genres. Individual personifications were also assigned the same function of rendering artistic and political notions in visible manner. In Cratinus' *Cheirones*, the historical characters Solon and Pericles stood respectively for the idealised past and the contemporary state of corruption and *stasis* in the city. Female figures such as Comedy in Cratinus' *Pytine* and Music in Pherecrates' *Cheiron* are stage holograms of art forms and give voice to the poet's critical reflections on art. Thus, in the first chapter of the book, the interaction of the language with the performance and staging of comic drama is emphasised. It is this peculiar operation of comic speech, its use as a malleable, almost physical stuff for the creation of scenic spectacle, which defines the aesthetic and dramaturgical nature of Old Comedy.

In the second chapter ("Imaginary wor(l)ds: Comic language and the construction of fantasy"), Ioannis M. Konstantakos examines the use of language as a means for the creation of comic fantasy in the works of Aristophanes and his contemporaries. As he points out, the construction of a secondary fantastic world often entails the invention of the languages spoken by the inhabitants of that world; this is exemplified in many modern works of fantastic fiction, from Thomas More's *Utopia* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* to the narratives of Borges, Tolkien, and George R.R. Martin. The ultimate roots of this phenomenon may be traced back to ancient Greek literature. In the Homeric epics, the gods have their own peculiar language, of which specific terms are cited in the text; the authors of Hellenistic travel romances made up strange or bestial local dialects, spoken by the natives of legendary or fictitious lands at the edges of

the earth. Attic Old Comedy also provides a possible example of a language fabricated for a fictional metaphysical world. Pherecrates, in his comedy *Krapataloi*, invented a special numismatic system for the polity of the underworld, with particular names for the monetary units and their subdivisions. These names do not occur independently in the rest of the ancient literary tradition and may have been invented by Pherecrates for his comic fiction of Hades.

The comic poets of the fifth century, who were fond of producing comedies on fantastic and fairy-tale themes, also applied other linguistic and stylistic methods to illustrate secondary worlds in their dramas. They invented grotesque composite names for utopian states, names which reveal the mythopoeic function of comic fantasy. The technique of verbal and phrasal accumulation was amply employed to depict ideal alternative societies of fabulous wealth and gastronomic abundance. Aristophanes often resorted to the scenic materialisation of linguistic metaphors and proverbial expressions (a technique also discussed, in a different context, in the chapter by Bernhard Zimmermann), in order to highlight the surreal nature of the fictitious worlds of mythopoeia. Above all, wordplays, especially of the type based on homonymy, homophony, and ambiguous or polysemous words, are used in the comic plays to trigger the genesis of the fantastic world, and also to condition the formation of many of its particular aspects.

A characteristic example is included in Aristophanes' *Birds*, in which the play on two virtually homophonous words (*polos* and *polis*) constitutes the cornerstone for the foundation of the new city of the birds in the sky. The most extensive exploitation of such creative wordplays is found in Archippus' comedy *The Fishes*, the swan song of Athenian fairy-tale drama at the end of the fifth century. In this play, the verbal puns on the names of various species of fish become a dominant motif of the plot and provide the basic code both for the administrative organisation of the fishes' state and for its external relations to the cities of men. As transpires from Konstantakos' discussion, the creation of a secondary fictional world, in the context of a poetic drama, is above all a labour of diction and a feat of poetic language.

There follows a series of chapters which concentrate on verbal artifices of humour in the Aristophanic oeuvre. S. Douglas Olson ("A less maculate Muse") offers a new appraisal of sexual humour in Old Comedy, starting from a critical review of the standard scholarly monograph in this field, Jeffrey Henderson's *The Maculate Muse* (see above, section 2.1). Henderson's philological approach to the comic texts and his close readings of a great number of passages are premised on the argument that the comic poet describes sexual activities and sexual organs with a wide variety of primarily allusive terms. Comic obscenity is

expressed *par excellence* through figurative language, which is deployed on stage to shock and amuse.

Olson takes issue with a number of Henderson's individual interpretations, in which obscene jokes are misunderstood, confused, or inadequately explained, and their humour is not correctly appreciated. In the main part of the chapter, seventy-two cases are examined, in which Henderson has detected sexual metaphors or double entendres. These items fall into four figurative fields: agricultural metaphors for the sexual act and the genitals; elongated objects which are supposed to represent phallic implements (from flask, bar, and peg to spear, sword, and ladle); nautical language and images borrowed from ships and marine life; and words which signify hits, blows, piercing and the like. Olson argues that the interpretation of these passages in obscene sense is erroneous, based on weak evidence or on problematic textual readings, and supports a more straightforward explanation of the text. This line of argumentation, in turn, raises broader questions about the detection of sexual jokes and more generally the appreciation of allusive humour in Old Comedy.

Olson stresses the need to establish alternative basic principles for the appraisal of such figures of speech, taking account of the incompleteness of surviving materials, as well as of our temporal distance from the sources of the materials and the surrounding culture of antiquity. It is commonly observed, even in everyday experience, that language which is considered metaphorical by one recipient may not appear so to another. Such problems become even more acute in the field of classical studies, given that present-day readers belong to a different age and culture from that of the original texts. The information preserved from the time of composition of the classical texts may be scant, fragmentary, obscure, or not fully reliable. Thus, it is difficult to definitively rule whether a certain verbal expression has additional overtones, regardless of its context. In this connection, Olson proposes two viable criteria for establishing a figurative second sense of a particular word. Firstly, multiple uses of an image that are not dependent on (and hence not generated by) context, can be regarded as examples of established use (as happens, for example, with the sexual connotations of "pussy" and "bang" in modern English or ἐλαύνειν in ancient Greek). Secondly, a metaphorical interpretation gains in plausibility if it is supported by ancient sources, such as scholia and lexicographers.

Georgios Triantafyllou ("Like a rabid dog: Animal metaphors and similes in Aristophanes") focuses on another type of imagery which is also a core characteristic of Aristophanic style: the animal metaphors and similes, which suggest an order of similarity between a person or group of humans and an animal creature. In this figure of speech, the animal functions as the symbol of a certain

type of behaviour or trait of character. While in other poetic genres, such as Homeric epic, animal similes are applied to high-brow and heroic qualities, in Aristophanic comedy this stylistic effect is used to assign lowly and negative features to comic personages. The author proposes a classification and typology of the comic animal similes, both in morphological terms (similes demarcated by specific syntactic structures or implied by pragmatic reasoning) and in terms of subject matter, especially with regard to the human target of the comparison: politicians, citizen bodies, artists, and other citizens.

Animal similes concerning politicians exemplify the essential ambiguity of this stylistic figure. The politicians, as *dramatis personae* of the comedy, use the similes to attribute to themselves the positive qualities of the animals described; for example, Cleon presents himself as a loyal dog which guards and protects his master Demos. By contrast, when describing their opponents, they have recourse to the animals' negative traits; similarly, the poet applies animal comparisons to ridicule the demagogues for their vices. Thus, Cleon is also represented as a cunning and thieving dog, which cheats his master and steals food. Various other rapacious animals are used for this kind of political satire, from foxes and monkeys to seals, whales, birds of prey, and mythical monsters.

A wide range of animal species is employed to bring out the ridiculous defects of the other categories. The Athenians are compared to sheep and pigeons for their naiveté, or to rabid dogs and wasps for their aggressiveness. The Spartans and other enemies of Athens are presented as ravenous and treacherous creatures, such as monkeys, foxes, wolves, and kites. Failed poets and artists are pictured as small and contemptible birds and insects. Many of the similes serve as satirical tools to convey the poet's critique against his political enemies and artistic rivals. Others are merely humorous and generate hearty laughter rather than scorn. In a few examples, the animal image highlights a man's positive virtues, as when the old tragic poet Phrynichus is compared to a bee for the sweetness of his songs. In general, similes targeting politicians are harsh and sarcastic, while those regarding artists or simple citizens are often playful and less acrid.

Simone Beta, in his chapter "The shop of Aristophanes the carpenter: How comic poets assembled (and disassembled) words", focuses on another emblematic device of comic wordsmithing: the compound words, especially the invented and innovative compounds which were fabricated by Aristophanes and his fifth-century colleagues with great resourcefulness and ingenuity. Beta highlights the use of these droll made-up compounds in their textual context, in close connection with the plot and the comic situation at hand, and analyses their role in the generation of humour. He examines a large number of specimens,

classifying them by means of morphological criteria into grammatical categories. Firstly, compounds beginning with prepositions produce ironic formations and hilarious portmanteau words, such as Καταγέλα (*Acharnians* 606), Ἀντιλέων (*Knights* 1044), and ἀπηλιαστά (*Birds* 109–110). Secondly, compounds with the prefixes φιλο- and μισο- comprise many original Aristophanic coinages and *hapax legomena*, which express the poet's or a character's strong passion in favour or against something. Especially the compounds introduced by μισο- are frequent in political contexts and convey the poet's hatred for demagogues and warmongers.

The third category consists of compound nouns created by use of standard nominal suffixes, such as -μανία (e.g. ὀρνιθομανία, λακωνομανία), a suffix employed to satirise social tendencies and trends. Another large group is made up of composite personal names (a rich area of study, rather poorly covered even in recent monographs, which is also examined in the chapter by Kostas E. Apostolakis with regard to Middle Comedy).[71] These include meaningful patronymics (Pheidippides in the *Clouds*); burlesque verbal concoctions, such as Ἀποδρασιππίδης (*Wasps* 185), which humorously render the essence of a comic situation; and fanciful conjunctions of names of contemporary Athenian *komoidoumenoi*, joined together for the purposes of political or literary invective (e.g. Τεισαμενοφαινίππους and Γερητοθεοδώρους, *Acharnians* 603–605; μελλονικιᾶν, *Birds* 639; εὐριπιδαριστοφανίζων, Cratinus fr. 342). The longest compound words in the corpus of Old Comedy are spoken by female Chorus members (*Lysistrata* 457–458, *Ecclesiazusae* 1169–1175) and have culinary associations. The way is thus opened for the exuberant verbal cuisine of Middle Comedy (cf. also the chapter by Ioannis Konstantakos in this volume).

The series of chapters on the linguistic devices of humour closes with Andreas Willi's essay ("'When he should have said…': The treatment of humour παρ' ὑπόνοιαν in the Aristophanic scholia"), which offers a reappraisal of a well-known type of verbal jest: the *para prosdokian* or *par' hyponoian*, as it is most usually termed in the ancient scholiastic literature. This kind of humorous effect has also been analysed in earlier studies (see above, section 2.5), but Willi approaches it from a different, innovative angle: he examines the comments and explanations of *par' hyponoian* jokes included in the Aristophanic scholia, the mass of ancient scholarship on comedy which was compiled in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. As he points out, the oeuvre of Aristophanes was studied in later antiquity not only as a school text, a model of Attic speech, or a source of *realia* for Classical Athenian history, but also for the pure amusement

**71** See above, section 2.5.

and pleasure it offered to readers. The Aristophanic scholia do not ignore verbal humour but provide descriptions and exegesis for several wordplays and other linguistic jokes, especially those based on unexpected substitutions of terms. These are usually called *par' hyponoian* by the scholiasts, a term more specialised and more pertinent to comedy than the *para prosdokian*, which is a more general critical appellation for a rhetorical figure, not necessarily associated with humorous effects.

Often the term *par' hyponoian* involves a particular counter-expectational device: the lack of a rational connection between the point of the joke and what precedes it (as noted in the scholion on *Wealth* 27). In conceptual terms, the name *par' hyponoian* may serve in the scholia as an "umbrella" for a variety of comic artifices. According to Willi's classification, prospective *par' hyponoian* jokes consist of sequences in which the audience is induced to expect a particular continuation, only to be surprised by what is actually said (e.g. *Acharnians* 119, *Wasps* 238, *Lysistrata* 114). In retrospective jests, by contrast, the audience realises only after a certain thing has been spoken, that another term would have yielded a more logical utterance in the wider context (e.g. *Clouds* 833–837). In other cases, the unexpected arises from a pun of paronomasia, by means of which another, closely sounding or homophonous word is substituted for the expected one (e.g. *Clouds* 856–857). As Willi further notes, the scholiasts sometimes fail to distinguish between what might be expected in the real world and what is logically consistent in the fictional world of the comic play (see e.g. the scholia on *Knights* 296). Ultimately, the term *par' hyponoian* could also be applied as a generic formula for any kind of textual surprise effect. The scholiasts resort to *par' hyponoian* explanations even in connection with difficult and problematic passages, which they cannot account for otherwise.

The chapter by Dimitrios Kanellakis ("Rhyme in Greek comedy") shifts the focus to the broader field of rhetorical and poetic figures and concentrates on rhyme — a very much underrated topic of research in connection with ancient Greek literature. Although rhyme, as a poetic phenomenon, is rarely discussed by ancient critics, relevant specimens are included in Aristotle's discussion of the rhetorical device of homeoteleuton, which relies on various effects of rhyming assonance. Kanellakis rejects the unfounded statements of earlier classicists, who sweepingly condemned rhymes in Greek poetry as grotesque and ugly or argued that rhyming in an inflected language is simply a fortuitous result of grammatical suffixes. He establishes a series of criteria for detecting perfect and imperfect rhymes in ancient Greek verse, relying on the consonance of endings and the identity of stress. On this basis, he offers a full catalogue of the rhymes found in extant Greek tragedies and comedies, from Aeschylus to

Menander, demonstrating that the effect was common enough in ancient dramatic poetry.

Kanellakis also classifies and analyses the various functions of rhyme in Greek comic texts. When it is used in stichomythia or antilabe, rhyme underlines aggression and sarcasm or punctuates a speedy exchange of words. Most usually, both in dialogue and in continuous discourse, rhyme highlights an antithesis, with the opposing terms placed at the end of successive lines. It also amplifies the effect of comic accumulations, strengthening the impression of abundance, exaggeration, or emotional climax, or boosting a comic point or a surprise joke. Furthermore, rhyme is employed in poetic narratives and descriptions, to convey a steady pace or make them sound more exciting. In choral sections, it serves important technical functions, such as the transition from recitation to song or from one song to another. Occasionally, it is employed to enhance various other humorous artifices and figures of speech, from hyperbole and parody of high-register genres to proverbial expressions, rhetorical parallelism, and formal address. As is well known, certain purist Greek poets and critics of the early modern period branded rhyme as a "barbaric" phenomenon, on the grounds that it is absent from ancient Greek poetry and alien to traditional Greek aesthetics. Kanellakis' chapter, a sound warning against such exaggerated claims, shows that rhyme is a familiar effect in Greek verse already since ancient times.

Piero Totaro's chapter, "Three words in Aristophanes' *Wealth* (999, 1037, 1083)", signals another thematic move, this time to the area of comic vocabulary. The author, who is preparing a much-expected commentary on Aristophanes' *Wealth*, provides a detailed study of three problematic words (ἄμης, τηλία, ἐτῶν) from the text of this comedy, all of them taken from the burlesque episode of the lustful old woman and her former young lover. Totaro elucidates the multiple linguistic nuances of these terms and determines their exact meaning in the light of the information provided by ancient scholia and lexica. In *Wealth* 999, an ἄμης, that is, a kind of soft cake made of dough and milk, is sent by the young man to the old lady, his former mistress. The deeper significance of this gesture is that the smooth milk-based pastry is particularly appropriate for a toothless old woman; the young man thus confirms his abandonment and rejection of his aged paramour.

Regarding *Wealth* 1037, Totaro argues in favour or the reading τηλία (nominative), as given in the majority of medieval codices, instead of the genitive τηλίας transmitted by the Ravenna manuscript. The speaker sarcastically compares the old woman to a *telia* (a large round board or tray with a raised circular edge), so as to mock her fat girth and ridicule her claims of having grown thin

from chagrin. In *Wealth* 1083, Totaro defends the manuscripts' reading ἐτῶν γε, which creates a witty double entendre in conjunction with the foregoing participle διεσπλεκωμένῃ (1082, in obscene sense, "screwed"). The form ἐτῶν may represent the genitive plural not only of the word ἔτος, "year", but also of the noun ἔτης, "fellow citizen". Apart from being mocked for her age, the old woman is also denounced as a veteran whore who has been possessed by innumerable lovers in her long career.

Anna A. Novokhatko, in her chapter "Spoudaiogeloion revisited: Homeric text between a scholar and a cook", concentrates on yet another favourite stylistic mechanism of humour: the citation and parody of high-registered literary discourse in the comic text, especially the parody of epic poetry — an area which has attracted some study but has never been the focus of such keen interest as the parody of tragedy (see above, section 2.2). Novokhatko examines a number of comic fragments, together with some passages from parodic poems, in which Homeric verses are quoted, ridiculed, or discussed by the characters. She thereby charts the various ways in which comic literature engages with Homeric texts, and the effects this might have on the audience.

In Old Comedy, Homeric vocabulary and formulas become the objects of discussion and literary criticism, as in the famous scene from Aristophanes' *Daitales* (fr. 233), in which a father probes his son's knowledge of Homeric glosses. This scene echoes contemporary Athenian school practice and fifth-century handbooks of Homeric explication. Epic phrases, metrical units, and syntactic patterns are also abundantly reworked and woven into comic speech. This may happen for satirical and parodic purposes: corrupt politicians are styled with grandiloquent Homeric epithets (Cratinus fr. 258, Hermippus fr. 47); typical words and morphemes of the epic language may be dismantled and reassembled in new combinations, to fabricate droll neologisms and compounds (e.g. κεφαληγερέταν, Cratinus fr. 258; ὀπτότατος, Cratinus fr. 150). Apart from the humorous potential, the comic poets' preoccupation with epic language indicates that Homeric criticism and transmission were a focus of interest for the intellectuals of Classical Athens.

In the parodic poetry of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, a genre which has close affinities to comedy and extensive intertextual exchanges with the comic corpus, the traditional language and style of Homeric epic are applied to the down-to-earth pleasures of everyday life, such as culinary matters, foodstuffs and banquets, or hot baths. Epic verses and phrases are distorted, inverted, and conflated into pastiches or centos; the heroic or fabulous contents they originally evoked are ridiculously re-contextualised and connected with trivial objects, such as gastronomic courses, fishes, and cooking methods. This practice

survived into the period of Middle and New Comedy, as shown by a masterful tirade from Straton's *Phoenicides* (fr. 1), in which a pompous cook baffles his employer by using Homeric glosses to refer to kitchen implements and the paraphernalia of the sacrifice. The semiliterate *mageiros* misunderstands and falsifies the epic terms, but also exploits them as raw materials for inventive verbal concoctions. This amusing scene reflects both the use of the Homeric poems in school practice and the contemporary scholarly exegesis of the Homeric oeuvre, as exemplified by the lexicon of Philitas. All these comic and parodic reworkings of Homer also serve as testimonia of the state of the Homeric text in the Classical age, before the editorial interventions of the Alexandrine grammarians.

The foray into the province of later Greek comedy is continued in the two closing chapters of the volume. Kostas E. Apostolakis contributes a much-needed examination of aspects of linguistic humour in the fragments of Middle Comedy. As noted above (section 2.7), this is a comparatively neglected and underexplored area of research. Apostolakis' chapter ("Proper names, nicknames, epithets: Aspects of comic language in Middle Comedy") is an important step towards filling this gap of scholarship, and significantly contributes to mapping the evolution of humorous language in the interim period between Aristophanes and Menander. The author concentrates on jokes and humorous effects which depend on the speaking names, nicknames, and droll epithets attributed to *komoidoumenoi* in Middle Comedy. The discussion brings forth the artistry and ingenuity of the often underestimated and marginalised comic writers of the fourth century, who are shown to have proficiently handled a range of verbal artifices, from wordplay and inventive metaphors to incongruous similes and hybrid compounds.

Continuing a well-documented trend of Old Comedy, the fourth-century playwrights construct burlesque compounds which bring together the name of a mythical figure and that of a generic stage character or a well-known contemporary personality (e.g. Timocles' *Orestautocleides*, Eubulus' *Sphingocarion*). Mythical names also give rise to wordplays (e.g. Timocles fr. 19, Antiphanes fr. 74). Speaking names, which reflect the bearer's peculiar nature and qualities, are sometimes attributed to comic personages and epitomise or comically contrast with their role in the play (e.g. Amphis' *Dexidemides*; the lyric poet Choronicus in Alexis fr. 19; the slave Pistus in Antiphanes fr. 69). Other verbal plays on historical or stock personal names include punning assonances, etymological figures (Dionysius fr. 3), and burlesque coinages and compounds (πεφιλιππίδωσαι, Alexis fr. 148, for a man thinner than the emaciated politician Philippides; Βρυσωνοθρασυμαχειοληψικερμάτων, Ephippus fr. 14).

Much more than speaking personal names, Middle Comedy revels in inventive nicknames, which ironically connect the bearer (whether a character of the plot or a *komoidoumenos*) with his or her main passion, occupation, or moral vice (Anaxandrides fr. 35 is among the most telling examples in this respect). Colourful nicknames were made up for particular categories of comic personnel, such as braggart soldiers, parasites, and hetairai. Epithets may also be a powerful and multivalent means of comic expression. Characterological adjectives, often serving as play titles, reveal the central ethical disposition of the main hero (e.g. Antiphanes' *Misoponeros*, *Philopator*, *Philometor*). Witty descriptive epithets are used to emblematise particular comic types, such as the parasite (e.g. ἄκλητος, κνισολοιχός, ὀλβιογάστωρ). Traditional epithets of gods, usually originating in epic poetry and ritual, are invoked in an innovative and sarcastic manner for satirical purposes (e.g. Alexis fr. 93, Timocles fr. 14).

The long journey of the Greek comic language in time reaches its last station in the subtle verbal wit of Menander, the subject of the final chapter of the book by Antonis K. Petrides ("Strategies of verbal humour in Menander's *Dyskolos*: From linguistics to dramaturgy"). Petrides takes advantage of the approaches and taxonomies of modern humour studies to provide a comprehensive overview of Menander's techniques of verbal comicality, using the only complete extant Menandrian play, the *Dyskolos*, as a case study and repository of examples. All the lexical, stylistic, and pragmatic resources, by which laughter and comic effects are achieved in this comedy, are methodically classified by character and species; their mechanisms are analysed and their semantics are probed in detail. A wide range of verbal artifices are singled out and described, including comic hyperbole, irony and sarcasm, malapropisms and *para prosdokian*, the comedic use of proverbs, scurrility and double entendres, puns and witticisms, plays with homonymy and polysemous words, imaginative metaphors and peculiar vocabulary, parody of high style, repartee, accumulations and repetitions, paradoxes and teasing pleasantries. These are distributed among some of the main characters of the comedy: the slave Getas, the cook Sikon, the young lover Sostratus, the landowner Kallipides, the parasitic Chaereas, and the prologue god Pan.

Menander's pretentions to linguistic naturalism have caused his texts to be considered as privileged models for studying everyday language and conversational humour in the late fourth century BCE. However, as Petrides points out, Menander's comic speech is an artificial and artistic construct, no less than the comic language of earlier playwrights (although it takes, of course, a different form). Menander purposefully distributes the various mechanisms of verbal humour among the characters of the comedy in a manner which transcends

mere naturalism and serves dramaturgical purposes of character individualisation and configuration. For example, analogous linguistic tics and humorous tendencies connect characters of the same household; personages who are antagonists in the plot share a penchant for the same figures of style. Therefore, the naturalistic use of verbal humour is shown to be an elaborate authorial strategy. Menander mirrors the occurrence and operation of humorous devices in real conversational contexts, with a view to establishing an appropriate setting for the deployment of his dramatic and ethological artistry.

Furthermore, Menandrian humour functions thematically: the various linguistic devices are assigned to the dramatic characters in such a way as to underline the fundamental ideological issues and dichotomies of the play. In the *Dyskolos*, the rustic and poor characters of the countryside are scantily endowed with jokes; they appear to be rather grim and agelastic. By contrast, the urban and rich personages and their household are liberally invested with humour. Thus, the targeted use of linguistic comicality boosts the main thematic concern of the play, the division between city and country or misanthropy and philanthropy. As Petrides concludes, for Menander verbal humour is not an end in itself but one of several instruments in the playwright's dramaturgical toolbox, organically interwoven with dramaturgy, character depiction, and ideology.

In conclusion, we hope that the volume, as a whole, will contribute to a deeper understanding of the verbal artistry and linguistic craft of ancient Greek comedy. The authors have explored a great variety of mechanisms of language and resources of poetic expression, building on the foundations of earlier studies to highlight further, often ignored or undervalued facets of the examined materials. In some cases, constructive criticism is exercised towards previous approaches to particular linguistic artifices and forms of humour, such as obscenity, rhyme, and *par' hyponoian* jokes, in order to establish a broader perspective, greater complexity, or finer distinctions in the treatment and operation of these forms. The rich vocabulary of comic speech, in particular, is sifted and probed to a great detail in several of the chapters; some of its most idiosyncratic and intriguing manifestations (such as droll compounds, comic names and nicknames, epithets, and ambiguous terms) become the object of new investigations and reappraisals. Figurative expressions (staged metaphors and turns of phrase, animal similes, food imagery), which have always been at the centre of scholarly interest, are examined anew with regard to broader aspects of their function, such as their contribution to the making of the comic fiction and to the ideological content of the play.

Several areas of research, which have received scant attention or only occasional treatment in earlier scholarship, are brought to the fore and explored

*in extenso* in this volume. Emphasis is placed on the importance of the ancient scholia and the writings of ancient scholars and grammarians for the understanding of comic language and of the operation of jokes. The various verbal artifices of humour are not only studied individually, as separate mechanisms, but are also viewed in their interaction and collaboration within the overall script of the play, and are appraised for their collective contribution to the aesthetic experience of the comic text as a work of art. In the same perspective, a wide range of linguistic materials and techniques are considered as the main building blocks for the construction of the entire dramatic world of the play, the fabrication of the plot, the creation of comic fantasy and phantasmagoria, the delineation of the characters, and the organisation of the performance. In general, the authors of this volume have collectively striven to bring into relief the multifarious and paramount role of language in the creation and experience of the ancient comic theatre. We are all disciples of Mallarmé and Seferis, the poets who stressed that poetry is made with words. Comic poetry is no exception.

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