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Metaphors and Personifications Onstage

Abstract: A typical literary technique of Old Comedy is the visualisation of abstract concepts by dramatising metaphors or by the appearance of personifications on stage. The comic poets of the fifth century BCE had three separate ways of bringing abstract concepts onto the stage. First, they use metaphor, taking an image literally and bringing it to life as a prop or in action. Second, they introduce personifications as a considerable part of the comic action. Finally, they strip a real, well-known person of his individuality to render him into a representative of a particular group. This chapter analyses these techniques in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* (180–202), *Clouds* (role of Socrates and the Chorus), and *Birds* (904–957, 1372–1409), and in some fragmentary comedies by Aristophanes' rivals (especially Cratinus' *Pytine* and Pherecrates' *Cheiron*).

1 Visualised metaphors

It is a constant anthropological principle that human beings interpret and encounter the phenomena that control their lives, and especially those that threaten them, by imagining them in physical and even personified form. Anything that can be named and imagined causes less fear than an intangible abstract power, and personifications of this kind abound in Hesiod's works. Abstract concepts such as Sleep, Death, or Love are elevated into the rank of divine or demonic powers, visible beings, and even occasionally honoured in cult worship.¹ This principle applies even more to fundamental values: conventions and rules of behaviour that govern human life such as honesty or reliability, as well as lies and deceit, persuasion, strife, and related concepts. In *Works and Days*, we can see the transformation of abstract terms into personifications (760–764):

ἀλλ' ἔρδειν δεινὴν δὲ βροτῶν ὑπαλεύεο φήμην·
φήμη γάρ τε κακὴ πέλεται κούφη μὲν αἶψαι
ρεῖα μάλ', ἀργαλέη δὲ φέρειν, χαλεπὴ δ' ἀποθέσθαι.
φήμη δ' οὐ τις πάμπαν ἀπόλλυται, ἤντινα πολλοὶ
λαοὶ φημίζουσι. θεὸς νύ τις ἔστι καὶ αὐτή.

This chapter was translated into English by Rachel Bruzzone.

1 Cf. West 1966, 33–34 (“deification of abstracts”).

Act this way. Avoid the wretched talk of mortals. For talk is evil: it is light to raise up quite easily, but it is difficult to bear, and hard to put down. No talk is ever entirely gotten rid of, once many people talk it up: it too is some god.²

These verses vividly illustrate the way that human gossip, at first simply words, suddenly gains substantial weight and becomes a millstone on the neck of the victim. Even if the sufferer gains freedom, some portion of the gossip always sticks (*semper aliquid haeret*).³ Similar personifications occupy a particularly central position in Greek comedy of the fifth century BCE. An exploration of the characteristics of the plays of this epoch, Old Comedy, makes clear why personifications, as the embodiments of abstract ideas or circumstances, played such a prominent role. Archaic comedies are rightly called “political”, in that their content typically has to do with the *polis* of Athens. The term can include politics proper, in the modern sense of domestic, social, and international policy, but these plays are also concerned with religion, culture, literature, education, and related issues that are of consequence to the city. To a far greater extent than in narrative or discursive texts, comedy turns on these abstract phenomena, not by constructing arguments about them, but by converting them into action. If comic poets had not done so — and occasionally they do not, instead allowing argumentative points to collide in the form of an *agon* — they would not, in fact, have composed dramas, but rather staged static discussions which would not be focused on comedy. Much more often, comic poets, driven to produce colourful, engaging, and, above all, comic or burlesque plots annually, chose to make their thoughts visible, and thus comprehensible, via comic representation in the form of personification.

In his 1957 book *Metapher und Allegorie*, Hans-Joachim Newiger explored this particular feature of Aristophanic comedy, a point on which there is a clear distinction from Menander’s plays, demonstrating that the Aristophanic personifications reflect particularly comic aspects of real life. For example, the old gentleman Demos in *Knights* or the Chorus of judgemental wasps in *Wasps* in fact carry the plot, deriving their comic effect and vividness from their roots in the common metaphors of colloquial language, now made absurdly literal and translated into action or visible figures. This becomes clear in two examples: in *Acharnians* (187–202), Aristophanes plays on the ambiguity of the word σπονδαί, which signifies both the ritual of libation, made when contracts are concluded, as well as,

² Translation by Most 2006, 149; cf. West 1978, 344 ff.

³ *Audacter calumniare, semper aliquid haeret* (Tosi 2017, nos. 1 and 2; Kudla 2021, no. 3143).

per synecdoche, the agreement itself that the libation concludes.⁴ When pleas for peace fall on deaf ears in the popular assembly and the comic hero Dicaeopolis concludes one for himself and his family through his negotiator Amphitheos, then, the treaty can thus have a specific age, just as wine does: it can last five, ten, or even thirty years, just as wine ages. And just as the quality of wine improves over time, the longest-lasting peace treaty is by far the best (180–202). When Amphitheos — pursued by the ferocious charcoal burners of Acharnae attempting to prevent the conclusion of peace — brings the σπονδαί with him in the form of wineskins, both peace and those threatening it are made material. It becomes clear that it is the Acharnians who would like to hinder it, while, on the other hand, Peace is rendered appealing and delicious in a way familiar to everybody in the theatre. This example serves as a typical demonstration of the way that Aristophanes uses metaphor. Metaphor thus sets into motion the process that allows the play to explore conflict, and the tension between war and peace is rendered not only rational, but also part of a sensual and emotional process based on shared sensory experience.⁵ The Acharnians have caught the scent of the wine (179) and, like the Erinyes in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* pursuing the trail of Orestes' blood, they track the scent of the peace offering. This sensual dimension, which turns on the ambiguity of the term σπονδαί, is developed further as Dicaeopolis holds a wine tasting, sampling the different vintages that Amphitheos offers: the five-year-old wine tastes of bad luck and new ships, namely of war. The ten-year-old one has the flavour of sluggish negotiations with allies, and therefore is acidic like vinegar. Only the thirty-year-old wine is spared: it tastes of nectar and ambrosia rather than military commands. It is also crucial that the wine is appropriate to the Dionysian context in which the Lenaea was celebrated, early in the year. The peasant Dicaeopolis, upon tasting the thirty-year-old wine, bursts out in the delighted exclamation "Dionysian!" and announces that he would, after ending the war and all its evils, return to his home village to celebrate the local Dionysian festival (201 ff.).

The connection between metaphorical language and the visualisation of the abstract becomes even clearer in the personification of *Clouds*, a play concerning the impact of the sophists on the traditional education of Athenian youth.⁶ This happens on several levels. The plot shows how the Athenian citizen with the

4 Newiger 1957, 104–106. On the technique of literalised and enlivened metaphors in Aristophanes' works, see also the chapter by Ioannis M. Konstantakos in this volume.

5 Tension simultaneously builds as to how the Chorus of wild Acharnians will perform and what the conflict with Dicaeopolis will be; cf. Konstantakos 2021, 199.

6 Cf. Newiger 1957, 50–74.

speaking name Strepsiades, “Distorter” — in fact “Distorter of Law” as it turns out — is destroyed through his own fault and due to the influence of the sophist teacher Socrates. His *oikos* and family are ruined, and his own son beats him before demonstrating, with his education in Socratic argumentation, that he is entirely right to do so. The contrast between the old, traditional education and its modern, sophistic counterpart, which underlies the whole piece as its basic tension, is made clear in the central portion, in the *agon* between the two personified *Logoi* (889 ff.).⁷ The two *Logoi*, which in this form probably belong to the second, revised version of the *Clouds*,⁸ are not as lifelike as the other personifications of Aristophanes. Their appearance is confined to a small portion of the text, does not develop logically from the action, and, above all, the two *Logoi* do not have their roots in a metaphorical manner of speech which would lend the scene a colourful background. This may have been different in the first version of *Clouds*. The Scholion VE at verse 889 reports that in the earlier version the two *Logoi* were brought onto the stage in cages and fought like roosters in a cockfight. The surviving text, the revised version, contains no such references to a cockfight. It is therefore reasonable to assume that in the first version the *agon* was designed in the manner of a cockfight or that cockfight metaphors were used — probably by the Chorus — to describe the confrontation.⁹ In the absence of metaphorical imagery in the version passed down to us, the scene of the epirrhematic *agon* approaches a discussion between two allegorical forms, such as we see in the discussion between *Penia* and *Plutus*, Poverty and Wealth¹⁰ — a discussion that is perhaps even inspired by the allegory of Heracles at the crossroads, which goes back to the sophist Prodicus.

The rhetorical, and thus rather dry for a comedy, in fact even uncomedic character of the two *Logoi* is clearly evident in comparison with another personification of the play, namely the Clouds that form the Chorus. As Socrates explains to an astonished Strepsiades (252 ff.), the Clouds are tutelary deities of all intellectuals (330–334, σοφισταί), be they seers or physicians, dithyramb poets or young people from a good family who are in the habit of staying in the orbit of the sophists. By introducing Clouds as the tutelary deities of intellectuals, Aristophanes succeeds in making everything that is associated with intellectuals in public opinion intensely visible. The metaphors behind the identity of the Chorus of *Clouds* are still used today — at least in the German language — to characterise

7 Cf. Newiger 1957, 134–155.

8 On the two versions of the *Logoi*, see Olson 2021, 2–5; Torchio 2021, 11–38.

9 Dover 1968, 95.

10 Cf. Newiger 1957, 155–178; Torchio 2021, 39–43.

intellectuals: they “take flight” like clouds, or they hover above the ground of reality, as Socrates does at the opening of the play. Intellectuals are, like clouds, “untouchable”, they cannot be grasped or understood. They constantly change their opinions, like clouds do their appearances. And intellectuals can have a seductive influence, as the personified Clouds do to poor Strepsiades. The fact that these symbols of sophistry ultimately turn out to be quasi Aeschylarian deities, in that their seduction of the comic hero accords with the motto *πάθει μάθος*, “knowledge through suffering”, is the surprise that Aristophanes saves for shortly before the end of the comedy. A personification can therefore remain an exciting riddle or present the viewer with a subsequent puzzle, even after the first seems to have been solved. But it should never be forgotten that in comedy a primary tension is often created by enigmatic identities.¹¹

A particular form of personification occurs in the person of Socrates in *Clouds*. It is clear that Aristophanes does not bring a “real” Socrates onto the stage here, in that he does not create a likeness of the historical man Socrates of 423 BCE. Rather, the Socrates character represents all those who are under the special protection of the cloud goddesses, i.e. the entire group of intellectuals at the time of the performance.¹² While the Clouds illustrate the characteristics of intellectuals generally, Socrates acts as a generic intellectual on the stage — just as Lamachus in *Acharnians* represents the whole group of those who advocate war and seek profit.

2 Dithyrambic poetry in metaphor and personification

Using the example of the scene of the poet and Kinesias in *Birds* (904–957, 1372–1409), a second stage of this study will now illustrate how Aristophanes explores the possibilities of making the abstract visible with the help of personification and metaphorical dramatisation. The anonymous poet (Ποιητής) represents the type of poet who works on commission, *à la* Simonides and Pindar, and who, as he proudly emphasises, composes dithyrambs, partheneia, and songs in the manner of Simonides (919, *μέλη κατὰ τὰ Σιμωνίδου*). He is thus an old-school choral lyricist who has mastered the craft and is at home in all choral and occasional genres. In order to secure Peisetaerus’ permission to enter the newly

¹¹ Cf. Konstantakos 2021, 196.

¹² Zimmermann 1993, 260–267; Olson 2021, 5–7.

founded Cloudcuckooland, the beggar poet offers — Hipponax is certainly the model¹³ — Pindaric verse interspersed with Homeric and lyric set pieces.¹⁴ Not because he is overwhelmed by the poet's skill, but simply to get rid of his irritating presence (931, 940), Peisetaerus presents him with a cloak and asks him to flee.

Kinesias, the representative of modern choral poetry influenced by sophistry, fares quite differently. The son of the citharode Meles,¹⁵ he was a dithyrambic poet and politician active from 425–390 BCE. At the beginning of the fourth century, a Chorus directed by him won a victory at the Dionysia (*IG* II² 3028). As a city council member, he introduced a resolution to honour the Syracusan tyrant Dionysius I (*IG* II² 18). He also accused a certain Phantias of criminal action. In his defense of Phantias, Lysias (fr. 195.1 Carey) accuses Kinesias of impiety and of belonging to an obscure club of *κακοδαίμονισταί* who had mocked the gods and despised the laws. In comedy, he is regularly ridiculed for physical abnormalities, thinness, and incontinence.¹⁶ Whether the husband of Myrrhine in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (838–979), also named Kinesias, is to be equated with the dithyrambic poet is unclear, but he may be the same man.¹⁷ In the list of the rapists of Music in Pherecrates' *Cheiron* (fr. 155.8–12),¹⁸ he is attacked for having “twisted” everything in his dithyrambic compositions. The epithet “Chorus killer”, which Strattis gives him in his comedy *Kinesias* (fr. 16), indicates that Kinesias almost “killed” the dithyrambic Choruses with his compositions, since they were not danceable.¹⁹ Exactly the same point is made when Kinesias is addressed in the *Birds* (1379): “Why are you dragging around the dithyrambic circle with your clubfoot?” (τί δεῦρο πόδα σὺ κυλλὸν ἀνὰ κύκλον κυκλεῖς;). The compositions of the dithyrambic poet are thus represented as so twisted and crazy that they are in fact impossible to dance, so that one could even get the impression that the Chorus members are clubfooted.²⁰

¹³ On v. 935, cf. the commentary of Dunbar 1995, 535 ff.

¹⁴ On this, see Zimmermann 1985b, 55–58; Dunbar 1995, 520–540.

¹⁵ Cf. Pherecrates fr. 6; Pl. *Grg.* 502a.

¹⁶ Cf. Ar. *Ran.* 366, 1437; *Eccl.* 328–330; fr. 156.10; Plato Com. fr. 200.

¹⁷ Cf. Kidd 2014, 87–117.

¹⁸ On this issue, see Restani 1983; M. Napolitano in Franchini 2020, 242–294.

¹⁹ Cf. Orth 2009, 108–115.

²⁰ On this interpretation of the verses, see Dunbar 1995, 667–668; Zimmermann 1995, 125 ff.; Zimmermann 2008, 117–120.

In verses 1383–1390, Kinesias describes his dithyrambic art:

- Ki. ὑπὸ σοῦ πτερωθεὶς βούλομαι μετάρσιος
ἀναπτόμενος ἐκ τῶν νεφελῶν καινὰς λαβεῖν
ἀεροδονήτους καὶ νιφοβόλους ἀναβολάς.
Πε. ἐκ τῶν νεφελῶν γὰρ ἂν τις ἀναβολὰς λάβοι;
Ki. κρέματα μὲν οὖν ἐντεῦθεν ἡμῶν ἡ τέχνη.
τῶν διθυράμβων γὰρ τὰ λαμπρὰ γίγνεται
ἀέρια καὶ σκοτεινὰ καὶ κυανauγέα
καὶ πτεροδόνητα.
- Ki. I want wings from you, to fly on high and snatch from the clouds fresh preludes air-propelled and snow-swept.
Pe. You're saying you can snatch preludes from the clouds?
Ki. Why, our whole art depends on them! In dithyrambs the dazzling bits are airy, dusky, darkly flashing, wing-propelled.

The art of the dithyrambic thus lives in the clouds, and poets soar up to them for new ideas and inspirations (cf. *Peace* 828–831). Indeed, the poetry itself has all the qualities of clouds: it is something airy, intangible, and floating, and can also be dark and difficult to see through.²¹ As in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, then, the Chorus symbolises all those who, in Newiger's words, "confuse people by throwing blue mist before their eyes, including especially the orators" ("zu denen vor allem die Redekünstler, die den Leuten blauen Dunst vormachen, gehören").²² In *Birds*, the art of the dithyrambic poets is described as something ethereal and intangible, which is removed from normal life, through the air and cloud metaphors. The dithyrambic poets, like the teachers of rhetoric and the sophists, are windy characters who "throw mist before people's eyes".

A comparison of the metaphors used in *Clouds* and *Birds* makes clear that the two groups — rhetors and sophists on the one hand and dithyrambicists on the other — can be seen as parallel to each other. Socrates pursues his thoughts while floating in the air (225, ἀεροβατῶ καὶ περιφρονῶ τὸν ἥλιον; cf. also 1503), while the dithyrambic poet receives inspiration for his poems (ἀναβολαί) in the same region. The Clouds are the nurturing deities not only of the sophists and soothsayers, but also of the dithyramb poets (333 ff., κυκλίων τε χορῶν ἁσματοκάμπτας, ἄνδρας μετεωροφένακας, / οὐδὲν δρῶντας βόσκουσ' ἄργούς, ὅτι ταύτας μουσopoοῦσιν). The poetry of the dithyrambic poet is therefore something

²¹ Cf. Newiger 1957, 90.

²² Newiger 1957, 74.

insubstantial and windy (1384, ἀεροδονήτους), something that constantly changes shape and remains elusive.²³

A second quality is also closely related to the airy nature of the dithyrambs: their darkness (σκοτεινιά). The cloud metaphor is maintained in this sense as well. Clouds can be dark and inscrutable, as can the dithyrambs, containing the inscrutable and incomprehensible. A further characterisation is found in the adjective νιφοβόλος, “whipped by snow”, a poetic expression for the rhetorical term ψυχρός, “cold” or “lifeless”. Aristophanes already used the image of “coldness” for uninspired poetry radiating lifelessness in *Acharnians*, where he associated the tragic poet Theognis, notorious for his “coldness”, with snowstorms and the freezing cold in Thrace: just when everything in Thrace was suffering from freezing cold, Theognis was performing his plays in Athens (138–140).²⁴ Additionally, they are καινά, “new”, since the poet always has to offer something new to the client. A second meaning of καινός also resonates in this context: these works are modern and innovative, since the author breaks new ground in the composition of dithyrambs.

The sensual dimension of Aristophanes’ metaphors is on display again in the metaphorical use of the adjective ψυχρός: the coldness of Theognis’ and Kinesias’ poetry can be experienced almost physically.²⁵ The samples of his art that Kinesias then offers (1392–1400) fully illustrate what is new in dithyrambic poetry: the dithyrambs of the modern poets are concerned with the essential sound of words, full of associative leaps, and are characterised by an accumulation of adjectives. Any meaning recedes behind the beautiful sound and impressive combinations of words and coinages, especially of adjectives.²⁶

The Kinesias scene of *Birds* deftly combines the two comic techniques of personification which is closely related to the ὀνομαστί κωμωδεῖν, and of metaphorical dramatisation. A well-known figure, the politician and dithyrambic poet Kinesias, represents a whole group, in this case the community of modern choral poets influenced by sophistry. The Kinesias scene gains significantly more weight

²³ Cf. Newiger 1957, 58.

²⁴ Cf. Olson 2002, 116.

²⁵ Regarding the adjective ψυχρός, it can also be understood how metaphors become rhetorical *termini technici*. Aristotle discusses in *Rhetoric* (1405b 34–1406b 14) the adjective ψυχρός as “the result of excessive use of compound words, odd vocabulary, peculiar epithets, and strained metaphors” (Olson 2002, 116).

²⁶ Cf. here also Palumbo Stracca 2015, 17. I would emphasise that in Zimmermann 1985a, 80 ff. I already highlighted the pastiche character of the hoopoe monody of *Birds*. The “paradox” that Aristophanes simultaneously uses the achievements of New Music, even while criticising them, is entirely resolvable, as I have pointed out (Zimmermann 2012, 202 ff.).

in that Aristophanes allows an anonymous representative of traditional choral poetry to appear through the figure of the Poietes. This beggar poet irritates the comic hero and receives a cloak; but in the case of Kinesias, Peisetaerus even becomes violent in order to finally be rid of him (1402), “the poet who is courted by all the community” (1403 ff.).

The dramatic use of metaphor has a double face in the Kinesias scene. The dithyrambic poet soars into the air to reach Cloudcuckooland and asks Peisetaerus for wings so that he may find further artistic inspiration in the realm of the Clouds (1385 ff.).²⁷ Aristophanes thus uses the metaphor of “floating” or “being lifted off” or the absence of any connection to the earth, to characterise the nature of contemporary dithyrambic composition. Simultaneously, he allows Kinesias to explain dithyrambic poetry in terms of literary theory, using cloud metaphors as poetic and rhetorical terms. We thus stand on the threshold where metaphorical language begins to develop into literary, specialised, rhetorical and poetic terminology — with the result that the image fades and theory comes to the fore.

3 Cratinus, Pherecrates and personified art

As this study has shown, Aristophanes has three separate ways of bringing abstract concepts onto the stage. First, he may use metaphor, taking an image literally and bringing it to life as a prop or in action. Second, he sometimes introduces personifications as *dramatis personae* which form a considerable part of the comic action (e.g. Demos in *Knights* or the Choruses of *Wasps* or *Clouds*). Finally, he can strip a real, well-known person of his individuality to render him a representative of a certain group, and thus a personification of characteristics and behaviours ascribed to that group. This last group is numerous in Aristophanes’ oeuvre: Lamachus represents warmongers and profiteers, Socrates the intellectuals, Euripides poetry influenced by sophistry, Kinesias dithyrambic poets, and so on. While the first two methods of rendering ideas concrete are not tied to any particular time period, personification using a real person anchors the comic plot to the specific date of the performance and thus makes clear the political relevance of the comedy in question to the *polis* at that point in time.

²⁷ Cf. Ar. *Pax* 828–831: at his heavenly council, Trygaeus also meets the souls of some dithyrambic poets who found their “wind-swept musical inspirations” in the lofty realms (ἀναβολάς ... τὰς εὐδιαερίαιρινχέτους τινάς).

The cases examined thus far, which in some points have expanded on Newiger's conclusions regarding metaphor and allegory, are based on Aristophanes, and therefore cannot claim to represent all forms and functions of personification and the dramatisation of metaphor in fifth-century comedy. Research in recent years has demonstrated that comic poets engaged in a constant agonal dialogue, adopting, altering, and developing the themes and techniques of their rivals to win the audience's favour. Therefore, there were probably similar elements in other comic poets, but it is also probable that each poet also employed unique techniques.

If we consider Aristophanes' older rival, Cratinus, we discover a similar type of personification to what Aristophanes employs, and to a much greater extent: namely, his Choruses often represent a particular spirit, be it political or cultural. A defining characteristic of the Choruses of Cratinus seems to be that they often embody a certain cultural tendency, or else followers, friends, or companions of a certain person. A few examples suffice to illustrate this tendency: in *Archilochoi*, they are Archilochus and his followers; in *Odysses*, Odysseus and his companions; in *Kleoboulinaí*, Kleoboulina and her friends; in *Cheirones*, the centaur Cheiron and his companions; in *Dionysoi*, the god Dionysus and his entourage. Regarding *Cheirones* (concerning the centaur Cheiron, Achilles' tutor, and his companions),²⁸ a play which Cratinus emphatically claims to have laboured intensively to write (πόνος, fr. 255),²⁹ Hesiod certainly serves as a background influence (*Theog.* 1001; fr. 40.2 and 204.87 M.-W.), and especially the *Precepts of Cheiron* (Χείρωνος ὑποθήκαι, cf. fr. 253 M.-W.), a didactic poem attributed to Hesiod which was used as a school text in the fifth century.³⁰ In keeping with the character of the Chorus, the comedy seems not only to have dealt with the decay of political culture, but — similarly to Aristophanes' *Frogs* or Pherecrates' *Cheiron* — also with the decline of musical education (fr. 247, 248, and 254).³¹ The character of Solon returns to the world of the living as a representative of the good old days (ἐπὶ Κρόνου, fr. 246),³² standing as the antithesis of the character of Pericles. The latter is represented as the son of Stasis, domestic warfare, who, together with Hera/Aspasia as the daughter of immorality and lasciviousness (καταπυγούνη),³³

²⁸ On the orthography of Χείρ- or Χίρ-, cf. the introduction to the play in Kassel/Austin 1983–2001, IV 245.

²⁹ Schwarze 1971, 55–64.

³⁰ Cf. West 1966, 430. On the school text, see Schmid 1929, 287 ff.

³¹ On the political content, see Farioli 2000, 406–431.

³² It remains unclear whether he opened the piece as the speaker of the prologue, or whether he was called out of the underworld (by the Chorus?) or returned to Athens in its company.

³³ On personification in Hesiod, see West 1966, 33 ff.

rules over a city torn apart by party struggles (frr. 258 and 259). The Chorus, borrowed from the myth, thus stands, as is the case in *Wasps* and *Clouds*, for a new cultural movement — the old *paideia*, embodied by the centaur Cheiron — against which the decay of education of the present is contrasted. Similarly, in the *Archilochoi* (“Archilochus and his Companions”) the theme of *paideia* in music may have been linked to politics, a tension which could likewise lead to a clash between different positions — Archilochus and his followers on the one hand and a group of modern poets on the other.³⁴

A look at the *Poetae Comici Graeci* demonstrates that a comedy like *Archilochoi* was not the exception in the fifth century. Judging by the title, the *Hesiodoi* of Telecleides (before 429 BCE) may have been a comedy concerning poetic practice, like Cratinus’ *Archilochoi*.³⁵ In it, the tragedians Nothippus (fr. 17) and Philocles, who assumes an Aeschylan attitude (fr. 15; cf. fr. 31), are deemed “bad” poets. It is possible that an *agon* took place between poets, with the participation of the personified Poetry or Tragedy. Nor was personal mockery absent (fr. 12, Pericles; fr. 16, Androcles). Conflict dealing closely with the genre of tragedy is attested in frr. 41 and 42, where Mnesilochus and Socrates are named as co-authors of Euripides.³⁶

The last comedy of Cratinus, *Pytine* (“The bottle”) — the 423 BCE play with which Cratinus achieved a victory over the *Clouds* of Aristophanes that the younger comedian never got over — was probably full of personification. In this piece, the older poet unveils his aesthetic programme in direct confrontation with his younger rival³⁷ — and unmistakably makes himself the comic hero of the play.

The Scholion to Aristophanes’ *Knights* 400a (*Pytine* test. ii) conveys the essential points of the plot of the play:³⁸ enraged by Aristophanes’ characterisation of him as an old drunkard past his prime as a poet in the previous year’s parabasis of *Knights* (531–536), Cratinus — although he had already retired from the business of writing — took up the pen again in a comedy about himself and his own drunkenness (μέθη). Cratinus thus represents himself as the husband of the personified Comedy,³⁹ who wants to end their relationship and accuses him of abuse (κακώσεως). Frr. 193–196 are Comedy’s own accusation, and fr. 197 Cratinus’

³⁴ The reconstruction of the plot is controversial, see the discussion in Zimmermann 2011, 727.

³⁵ Schwarze 1971, 94–96; Bagordo 2013, 117–138.

³⁶ See Patzer 1994, 51–55; cf. Kallias fr. 15.

³⁷ Cf. Ruffell 2002; Olson 2007, 80–87.

³⁸ For possible reconstructions of the play, see the note on the testimonia and fragments in Kassel/Austin 1983–2001, IV 219–232, as well as Schmid 1946, 85; Heath 1990, 148–151; Ruffell 2002, 156–158; Bakola 2010, 59–64.

³⁹ See Hall 2000, 410–412.

reply. Friends arrive and ask Cratinus not to rush things, and inquire about the causes of the quarrel with his wife Comedy. She reproaches him for no longer spending time with her, but instead with Methe, the personified drunkenness. The fragments do not reveal whether Methe faced Comedy or whether Cratinus was forced to choose between the two women in the role of Heracles at the cross-roads.⁴⁰ But in any case, Drunkenness (Methe), whether appearing onstage in personified form or not, is also conceived of as a person, like Comedy. The friends discuss how they can cure Cratinus of his drunkenness (fr. 199) and only find one solution: to smash all the drinking cups. Cratinus seems to have yielded (fr. 200) and agreed to abstain from wine. But his plaintive address to his empty, cobweb-defaced cup (fr. 202) suggests that his abstinence will not last long. The fragments permit two possible resolutions of the crisis: one possibility would be that the spouses are reconciled. Alternatively, a perhaps more comedic solution would be if Cratinus, after first letting himself be taught better (similarly to Philocleon in Aristophanes' *Wasps*), eventually falls back into his old vice in even greater extremes of Dionysian exuberance.

Which of the two interpretations is correct depends on the interpretation of fr. 198, in which the elemental power that gushes out of his verses and songs is described, and fr. *203 ("If you drink water, you will never produce anything clever!").⁴¹ Central to the plot is whether, in the *agon*, Cratinus defends his wine-inspired poetry, or whether in the *exodos* he has abandoned all good intentions and returned to drunkenness. The second solution would fit better to the general poetic technique of the piece. Just as Aristophanes' *Frogs* discusses the right way to write a tragedy, the *Pytine* — probably in the *agon* — seems to have centered on the craft of the comic poet (fr. 208 and 209). In the classroom scene, as we know it from the Aristophanic *Clouds* and *Wasps*, Comedy gives instructions to Cratinus.

In the *Pytine*, Cratinus engages in direct confrontation with Aristophanes by putting forth both friendly and biting characterisations, reworking representations which his rival bestowed on him in *Acharnians* (848–853) and above all in the parabasis of the *Knights* (526–536). Many men — according to Aristophanes in *Knights* (517) — have already propositioned Comedy, but only a few have been kind to her.⁴² According to Cratinus' response in *Pytine*, he has nothing to do with

⁴⁰ See Heath 1990, 150.

⁴¹ With an even clearer Dionysian reference in Epicharmus fr. 131, οὐκ ἔστι δῖθύραμβος, ὅκχ' ὕδωρ πίης. This in turn resonates significantly with Archilochus fr. 120 West; cf. Conti Bizzarro 1999, 73–79.

⁴² On interpreting πειρᾶσθαι with an erotic connotation, see Henderson 1991, 158: "Comedy visualized as an *hetaera* at whom poets make passes".

the poets as variously successful lovers of the difficult, capricious Comedy; rather, he shares a conjugal relationship with Comedy.⁴³ He abandoned her for another woman, Methe, of his own free will, and now Comedy is fighting to win him back as her husband. The old man whom Aristophanes mocked in *Knights* as a living corpse is thus still the object of intense female attraction. In the image of his poetry as animated by a massive elemental force capable of sweeping away everything in its path and destroying the opponents, which Aristophanes portrayed in *Knights* (527 ff.), Cratinus in *Pytine* develops a theme of Dionysian poetics based on Archilochus. The image of wine resembles that of Archilochus fr. 120 West (ὡς Διωνύσου ἀνακτος καλὸν ἐξάρξαι μέλος / οἶδα διθύραμβον οἶνω συγκεραυνωθείς φρένας), as a metaphor for divine inspiration.⁴⁴ Fr. 198, which describes the power of Cratinus' words and characterises them as flooding and sweeping everything away, reproduces Aristophanes' judgement even on the level of vocabulary.⁴⁵ Archilochus becomes the main reference point of Cratinus' comedic poetry, representing both Dionysian inspiration and scathing personal mockery.⁴⁶ In addition to the Dionysian metaphor συγκεραυνοῦν (fr. 199.4), there is a word-for-word quotation from Archilochus in fr. 211 (= fr. 109 West).⁴⁷ Fragments 208, 209, 212, 214, and 215, meanwhile, show that the comedy was peppered with personal mockery, with Aristophanes also receiving criticism for stealing ideas from Eupolis (fr. 213). One could almost say that Cratinus, provoked by Aristophanes' mockery, revives the two dominant elements of his comic poetry, the Dionysian⁴⁸ and the satirical, in his last comedy. However, he does not do this in the form of a performative speech — for example in an *agon* or *parabasis* — but rather by

⁴³ Cf. Hall 2000, 411 ff.

⁴⁴ The Dionysian verb συγκεραυνοῦν, “to strike with lightning”, is found in fr. 199.4. Rosen (2000, 35) assumes that there will be an eventual reconciliation between Cratinus and Comedy; while Cratinus would reduce his wine consumption, he would not give it up entirely; this view is contrary to that of Dionysian poetry developed here.

⁴⁵ Cf. Ar. *Eq.* 526, πολλῶ ῥεύσας ποτ' ἐπαίνω; Cratinus fr. 198.1, τῶν ἐπῶν τοῦ ῥεύματος. Cf. Zimmermann 2010, 53–61.

⁴⁶ Rotstein 2010, 281–346.

⁴⁷ In any case, it is entirely possible that πολιῖται, stemming from Archilochus, has intruded into Cratinus' fragment; cf. Kugelmeier 1996, 171 ff.

⁴⁸ The Dionysiac element is already clear in the titles *Dionysoi*, *Dionysalexandros*, and *Satyroi*. It is possible that *Boukoloi* and *Euneidai* also had Dionysiac content: the old family of the Euneidai included the priest of Dionysus Melpomenos and was responsible for a particular type of Dionysiac cult music, cf. Burkert 2006, 114–116.

converting that poetic programme into a comic stage action playing with metaphors and personifications.⁴⁹

Pherecrates undoubtedly played with similar ambiguities with the female personification in his *Cheiron*, which is undatable but should probably be dated before Cratinus' *Pytine*; the decline of contemporary musical art is the focus of this play. In terms of the age of the speaker, fr. 156 may have been spoken by Achilles' tutor. It is presumably addressed to the Chorus, and the centaur seems to have appeared, as in Cratinus' *Cheirones*, in the role attributed to him by the didactic poem *Precepts of Cheiron* (Χείρωνος ὑποθήκαι).⁵⁰ Of particular interest for the history of the dithyramb and the "New Music" is the extensive text (fr. 155) handed down by Pseudo-Plutarch in *De musica*, which may have come from the prologue. In it, the personified Music, abused on every part of her body, complains to the personified Justice about the tortures inflicted on her by the representatives of the New Dithyramb and the New Music (Melanippides, Kinesias, Phrynis, Timotheus, Philoxenus).⁵¹ Pherecrates plays with sexual ambiguities throughout; the musical innovations of the avant-gardists, which were intended above all to make their compositions richer and more varied, are described as the rape of the incarnated Music.

4 Conclusion

This sampling of the works of Aristophanes and of his rivals, even in their fragmentary state, suffices to demonstrate that personification in its various forms was one of the central techniques of Old Comedy. The plot structure of fifth-century comedy drives this tendency, which will disappear in the course of the fourth century until the time of Menander. The plays of Old Comedy, in contrast, are usually based on a "critical idea" that occurs to the protagonist. In light of his criticism of the rampant wrongs going on in the *polis*, he develops a fantastical counter-model to remedy the abuse. Playwrights prefer not to leave the abuse that is being criticised, or indeed the criticism itself, in the vacuum of abstraction. Instead, they render it both visible and understandable, in accordance with the

⁴⁹ The *Didaskaliai* may also have featured implicit poetics and self-referentiality, if one assumes with Kaibel (Kassel/Austin 1983–2001, IV 139) that Cratinus introduced his individual pieces as a (probably personified) Chorus, forming a kind of career overview.

⁵⁰ Schmid 1946, 106.

⁵¹ The fragment has been discussed in detail from a music-historical viewpoint by Restani 1983, 130–159; cf. Hall 2000, 414 ff.; Henderson 2000, 143.

genre of drama and especially comedy. Comic poets of the fifth century thus employed personifications, either as protagonists of the entire play, like Aristophanes in *Knights* or Cratinus in *Pytine*; or as the main characters in a single scene, such as the *Logoi* in Aristophanes' *Clouds*; or in a wealth of associations of metaphors. When the genre of comedy later allows critical analyses of contemporary events to recede into the background, the personifications and metaphors that animate it eventually disappear from the plays.

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