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Proper Names, Nicknames, Epithets: Aspects of Comic Language in Middle Comedy

Abstract: Starting from the assumption that the development of a particular literary genre is reflected in changes in language and style that take place within the genre itself, this chapter attempts to examine particular aspects of humour associated with comic names, nicknames, and epithets of the *kōmōi-doumenoi* in fourth-century comedy, the so-called Middle Comedy. More specifically, the analysis focuses on wordplays, inventive metaphors, asymmetrical similes, hybrid epithets, and other impressive devices associated with these names. The aim of the chapter is threefold: first, to help us appreciate the art of the individual poet who makes use of these devices; secondly, to contribute to the reconstruction of the theatrical history of the characters bearing these names and nicknames or characterised by such epithets; and thirdly, to shed light on common techniques of fourth-century poets and the development of linguistic humour during the period between Old and New Comedy.

1 Introduction

It is a common assumption that the evolution of a literary genre is depicted in changes in form and expression within it. When it comes to fourth-century comedy, the so-called Middle Comedy, however, its fragmentary status has apparently dissuaded scholars from systematic research into its language, and this field has remained underexplored until recently. It is telling that the *Encyclopedia of Greek Comedy*, edited by A.H. Sommerstein in 2019, includes special lemmas on the language of Old and New Comedy, but not of Middle Comedy.¹ However, given that language is a crucial parameter of comic drama, it seems

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¹ For the language of Old Comedy, cf. Tribulato 2019, 486–488; for that of New Comedy, cf. Cartlidge 2019, 485–486. The only field in the language of Middle Comedy that has systematically attracted scholarly interest is the parody of dithyrambic language; cf. Nesselrath 1990, 241–280; Dobrov 2002; Arnott 2010, 308–310. See also the introduction by Ioannis Konstantakos in this volume.

useful to turn our attention to it, especially when dealing with fragmentary texts such as those of Middle Comedy, where the signifier provides a more available — and safer — field of research than the signified.² Moreover, the international series *Fragmenta Comica*, still in progress, has already produced systematic commentaries on several poets of the fourth century, offering the opportunity to investigate and consider trends and inclinations in the comic language of that period.

Concerning the specific issue covered in this chapter, we should take into account that, unlike tragedians, who inherit the names of the tragic heroes from the mythological repertoire, the comic poets, with the exception of plays belonging to mythological burlesque, have to find names for their characters themselves. This supposedly advantageous position of tragic poets compared to comedians is playfully expressed in Antiphanes fr. 189 from *Poiēsis*, although the speaking character (perhaps the personified Comedy) implicitly admits that comic poets not only invent names, but also use recycled, stereotypical ones such as Chremes or Pheidon.³ As is only to be expected, comic poets' naming decisions have an impact on their audience, who are implicitly invited to identify, interpret, and appreciate the characters in connection to their names as the play unfolds. Through this process, the comic nomenclature calls to mind the debate in Plato's *Cratylus*, where Hermogenes and Cratylus have different opinions on the nature of names: the former defends the accidental, the latter the truthful nature of the names.

In Old Comedy, Aristophanes in particular, speaking names and historical proper names dominate within the frame of political satire and *onomasti kōmōidein*.⁴ This attitude declines over the following years, and in New Comedy historical proper names and personal satire are almost absent, whereas speaking names are very rare, applied mostly to particular secondary characters such as boastful soldiers and parasites.⁵ On the contrary, most characters bear conventional, stereotypical names, which are not etymologically associated with

² The problem is aptly put by Willi 2002, 2: "For Doric and Middle Comedy, for example, the fragments provide us with rich evidence on the *signifiant* side, but we are frequently tapping in the dark when we ask for a coherent *signifié*, for entire plots and themes. So why should we not turn the tables for a change and think of literary history as the history of the *signifiant* as much as that of the *signifié*?"

³ Cf. Konstantakos 2003–2004, 21–30; Olson 2022, 342.

⁴ For comic names in the Classical period and their reception in English comedy, see Barton 1990; for speaking names in Aristophanes, see Kanavou 2011.

⁵ E.g. Cleostratus for a soldier in Menander's *Aspis*. On the names of the braggart soldiers of New Comedy, see Konstantakos 2015, 46–47. Speaking names reappear in Roman Comedy; cf. Fontaine 2010.

eminent characteristics but are easily identified as “generic” names. Old fathers, young lovers, slaves, courtesans, matrons, and citizen girls have distinct sets of names which are recycled from play to play, sharing, with variations, typical characteristics.⁶

The aim of this paper is to consider some aspects of the linguistic humour surrounding the personal names, the nicknames, and the epithets of the *kōmōi-doumenoi* in the preserved fragments of Middle Comedy. More specifically, I focus on puns and word-plays, inventive metaphors, incongruous similes, impressive constructions, and further elaborations associated with comic names. This study has a triple aim concerning the function of comic language: firstly, to help us understand the art of a particular comic poet, as he creates his imaginary world;⁷ secondly, to contribute to the reconstruction of the theatrical history of the characters bearing these attributes; and thirdly, to shed more light on current, generic trends of fourth-century comedy and the evolution of the linguistic humour of Attic comedy from the period of Old Comedy to that of New Comedy.

2 Personal proper names

2.1 Historical and mythological names

In the course of the fourth century, with a few exceptions, political satire and *onomasti kōmōidein* recede, as comic theatre gradually assumes an international character and addresses both Athenian and non-Athenian audiences.⁸ On the other hand, social issues dominate and well-known personalities of the time are still satirised, mainly for their lifestyle, for example as gourmands and prodigals, or for some physical deformity, or for other individual shortcomings. Moreover, unlike New Comedy, where most characters bear fictitious names, in Middle Comedy many proper names, belonging either to mythical or to historical persons, appear both in the titles and in the preserved fragments. The change of attitude is already traceable in the two last plays of Aristophanes, *Assemblywomen* (392 BCE) and *Wealth* (388 BCE), which are sometimes considered to belong to Middle Comedy. Apart from personified concepts such as Plutus and Penia, there are also speaking names (e.g. Praxagora, Blepyrus), anonymous

⁶ Cf. Ulmann 1916, 61–64; MacCary 1969, 277–294; Webster 1974, 94–98; Brown 1987, 27–34.

⁷ Cf. Barton 1990, 15; and Ioannis Konstantakos’ chapter in the present volume.

⁸ For the internationalisation of comic theatre, cf. Konstantakos 2011, 153–162.

characters (e.g. Old Woman, Young Man), and characters bearing “generic” names indicating age or status (e.g. Chremes, Chremylus, Carion).

It seems that the coexistence on stage of mythical, historical, and fictional figures in fourth-century mythological burlesque favours the frequent use of composite comic titles, consisting of a mythical name and that of an invented generic character or of a well-known person of the time, such as Eubulus’ *Sphingokariōn*, Alexis’ *Asklēpiokleidēs*, Menecrates’ *Manektōr*, or Timocles’ *Orestautokleidēs*. This practice already appears in Old Comedy.⁹ In such composite titles it is not always easy to tell who is the imitator and who the imitated, but it seems that at least in some of them, for example *Sphingokariōn* and *Orestautokleidēs*, the second part is that which denotes the most significant character of the play.¹⁰

Historical personal names appear as comic titles, denoting both foreigners (e.g. Eubulus’ *Dionysius* and Mnesimachus’ *Philip*) and Athenians (e.g. Heniochus’ *Polyeuktos*, Anaxandrides’ *Sōsippus*, Aristophon’s *Kallōnidēs*, and Antiphanes’ *Kleophanēs*, *Lampōn*, *Lykōn*), although the Athenian names are usually difficult to match to the proposed candidates.¹¹ Intellectuals, philosophers in particular, are often satirised.¹² Besides, although political satire declines in the course of the fourth century, it is not altogether absent. There are sporadic mentions of fourth-century politicians in Alexis, Mnesimachus, Antiphanes, and Anaxandrides. In Timocles in particular, the most “Aristophanic” poet of the fourth century, at least nine politicians are satirised, some for their policies and others for personal vices or inclinations. The main targets of his satire are the anti-Macedonian orators, some of whom are described in figurative language.¹³

The playful association of *kōmōidoumenoi* with mythical figures, which seems to be part of the Athenians’ inclination for mockery, is often employed in

⁹ Cf. Cratinus’ *Dionysalexandros* (cf. Bianchi 2016, 198–301), Aristophanes’ *Aiolosikōn* (cf. Orth 2017, 90–93); also the comic descriptions of Bdelycleon as Δημολογοκλέων (Ar. *Vesp.* 342b) and Κομηταμυνίας (Ar. *Vesp.* 466) by the Chorus. A variation on such hybrid constructions in Old Comedy consists in composites in which the first element is a general designation and the second a historical name, e.g. Pherecrates’ *Anthrōphēraklēs*; Polyzelus’ *Dēmotyndareōs*; Stratitis’ *Anthrōporestēs* (cf. Orth 2009, 43–54); and the mysterious composite Κολακοφωροκλείδης in Phrynichus Com. fr. 18; cf. Chronopoulos 2006, 140–143; and the chapter by Simone Beta in the present volume.

¹⁰ Cf. Apostolakis 2019, 203.

¹¹ Cf. Henderson 2014, 185; Olson 2022, 143, 170.

¹² Cf. Aristophon’s *Plato* and Antiphanes’ *Kleophanēs*; Henderson 2014, 187–188.

¹³ See below on Demosthenes/Briareos and the river Hypereides; cf. Apostolakis 2019, 115–123, 149–154.

Middle Comedy. It seems that a standard method was to call a person after a mythical figure, on the basis of a common (real or supposed) incident or characteristic. This practice may have its origin in real life, perhaps in sympotic contexts, through *eikasmos*, the play of mocking “likeness”, which implies a metaphorical description.¹⁴ Unlike riddles, however, where the description is set out first and the addressee is invited to reach the solution by explaining this metaphorical description, in *eikasmos* the reverse order is applied: the comparison comes first and the explanation follows.¹⁵

In some cases, the association of mythical figures with historical persons is supported by means of another comic technique: the mythical names are turned into speaking ones by means of false or far-fetched etymology. One of the most interesting passages in Middle Comedy is Timocles fr. 19, where contemporary people, the prodigal Autocles and the supposedly thievish politician Aristomedes, are explicitly associated with mythical figures, the satyr Marsyas and the Thracian king Tereus:

Μ[α]ρσύαν δὲ τὸν φ[ί]λαυλον Αὐτοκλέα δεδαρμέν[ο]ν
 γυμνὸν ἐστάναι καμίνῳ προσπεπατταλευμένον,
 Τηρέα τ’ Ἀριστομήδην. (B.) διὰ τί Τηρέα λέγεις;
 (A.) διότι τηρ[ε]ῖν δεῖ παρόντος τοῦδε τὰ σκεύη σφόδρα·
 εἰ δὲ μή, Πρόκνη γενήσῃ, κνώμενος τὸ κρανίον,
 ἄν ἀπολέσῃς. (B.) ψυχρόν. (A.) ἀλλὰ πρὸς θεῶν ἐπί[σ]χετε
 μηδὲ συρίζητε

(A.) The flute-lover Autocles, a naked Marsyas, must stand nailed on the chimney, and so must also Aristomedes the Tereus. (B.) Why do you call him Tereus? (A.) Because, when he is present, you must be very careful of the vessels. Otherwise, you will become Procne, scratching your head, if you lose them. (B.) This is a frigid joke. (A) By the gods, hold and don’t hiss at me.¹⁶

This fragment seems to reproduce a concise form of *eikasmos*, probably in a sympotic context. The comparison of Autocles with Marsyas calls to mind the famous scene in Plato’s *Symposium* (215b) where Alcibiades compares Socrates with this notorious misshapen silen. Timocles employs here a complicated kind of linguistic humour, which includes identifications with mythical figures, on the basis of real or putative common characteristics, and then puns on the

¹⁴ For the play on *eikasmos*, see Monaco 1966, 12–41, 50–60, 71–112.

¹⁵ See Konstantakos 2004b, 129–130.

¹⁶ For the translations of Greek passages, I follow the Loeb Athenaeus (Olson) and those provided in the commentaries of *Fragmenta Comica*, with slight adaptations.

mythical names and the supposed shortcomings of the satirised persons. More specifically, the persons who are mocked are given both their proper and a mythological name, which is explained in the following lines through etymological wordplay. This juxtaposition of historical and mythical names is already employed in Old Comedy, in Cratinus in particular, where Pericles is called “onion-headed Zeus” (σχινοκέφαλος Ζεὺς, fr. 73), and Aspasia is described both as Hera and as “the dog-eyed concubine” (παλλακὴ κυνώπις, fr. 259). Hints at sexually dissolute persons seem to exist in both Cratinus and Timocles. Aspasia is apparently so called because she was thought to be an ex-hetaera,¹⁷ while the association of Autocles (probably a person notorious for sexual corruption) with the naked Marsyas nailed on the chimney may well activate an obscene imagery in the spectators’ mind, i.e. a naked man with an erection.¹⁸ The mention of Tereus and Procne further recalls Aristophanes’ *Birds*, where the two mythological figures appear on stage as Hoopoe and Nightingale respectively.

However, this series of comparisons turns out to be a sequence of forced wordplays, containing incongruous associations and false etymology. Both the pun on Tereus, metrically supported by the repetition of a tribrach (resolution of the first long syllable of a trochaic foot: διὰ τί Τηρέα — διότι τηρεῖν), and that on Procne (πρό and κυῖν, “the one who scratches at the front”),¹⁹ supposedly arouse the reaction of the spectators and the characterisation of the joke as frigid (ψυχρόν).²⁰ Such an onstage comment on a joke, which is evaluated on aesthetic terms through a metatheatrical device, including exchanges between characters and theatre audience, is very uncommon. The best explanation for rebuking such frigid jokes on stage is to avoid similar reactions from the audience; in order to prevent the audience from scolding frigid puns, it is the characters themselves who do so, and this preserves their dignity on stage.²¹ It seems, therefore, that here Timocles innovates, first by having his character coin far-fetched connections between historical and mythical names, and then

¹⁷ Cf. Ar. *Eq.* 765 and *Vesp.* 1032, where Cynna, “Bitch”, a well-known prostitute, is mentioned.

¹⁸ There is archaeological evidence of ithyphallic figures in front of an oven (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, F683/757/829/822); cf. Apostolakis 2019, 163.

¹⁹ This pun also calls to mind the Aristophanic wordplay on προκρούειν (“beat”, here metaphorically “screw”) and Προκρούστης in Ar. *Eccl.* 1015–1021.

²⁰ For “frigid” in comedy in the context of “bad joke”, cf. Eup. fr. 261.3, σκῶμμα ψυχρόν καὶ μεγαρικόν; as an aesthetic term of style, in connection with odd vocabulary and strained metaphors, cf. Arist. *Rh.* 1405b 34–1406b 19; Zink 1962, 65–73.

²¹ Cf. Kidd 2014, 181–183. Here one may also recognise an Aristophanic metatheatrical technique, as exploited in *Frogs* 1–4, where Dionysus attempts to discourage Xanthias from telling jokes which cause disgust. Cf. *Lys.* 1218–1220; *Eccl.* 888–889.

by elaborating the mythical names through false etymologies. Moreover, in order to anticipate the audience's negative reactions, the poet activates a metatheatrical device through which he provides a safety valve for the joke.²²

In Old Comedy, politicians, philosophers, and poets are often mocked within the frame of personal satire (*onomasti kōmōidein*) in contexts both central and peripheral to the plot, or just incidentally. Some poets of Middle Comedy adopt this technique, through which personal satire is introduced by the side door. One such structure is the self-imposed challenge pattern, which entails asymmetrical consequences. A typical example is Alexis fr. 149:

εἴ τινος μᾶλλον φιλῶ
ξένους ἑτέρους ὑμῶν, γενοίμην ἔγγελος,
ἵνα Καλλιμέδων ὁ Κάραβος πριάτο με

If I love any other foreigners more than you, may I turn into an eel, so that Callimedon the Crayfish may buy me.

The pattern of this structure includes a transformation: “If I don’t love A most of all, may I suffer a hateful transformation into a B”.²³ Here the speaking person wishes to suffer what an eel would suffer in the hands of the *opsophagos* Callimedon. The same pattern, expanded through an accumulation of names, is employed in Ehippus fr. 16:

Διονυσίου δὲ δράματ’ ἐκμαθεῖν δέοι
καὶ Δημοφώντος ἅττ’ ἐποίησεν εἰς Κότυν,
ρήσεις τε κατὰ δεῖπνον Θεόδωρός μοι λέγοι,
Λάχητί τ’ οἰκήσαιμι τὴν ἐξῆς θύραν,
κυμβία τε παρέχομι’ ἐστιῶν Εὐριπίδῃ

May I be forced to learn Dionysius’ plays by heart and everything that Demophon wrote for Cotys, and may Theodorus recite speeches to me over dinner, and may I live next door to Laches, and may I supply Euripides with small drinking-cups, whenever I give a feast.²⁴

²² On this mechanism of pleasure and the psychogenesis of jokes, see Freud 1960, 143–170, who argues that the pleasure in a joke lies in its “nonsense”. On the contrary, according to Aristotle, when the spectator gets the joke, he feels a pleasure which consists in this very learning of its content (*Rh.* 1410b 9–10).

²³ Cf. Arnott 1996, 439.

²⁴ Farmer (2017, 51–54) considers Ehippus’ passage a sample of the ways in which the comic poets incorporate tragedy in everyday situations of their fellow-citizens. For a full discussion of this pattern, cf. Papachrysostomou 2021, 171–172.

This structure, which originated in epic poetry (e.g. Hom. *Il.* 2.258–261), also occurs in Aristophanes, again in a theatrical context.²⁵ It appears that this pattern offered comic poets the possibility of mocking well-known persons of their time, including other playwrights, by inserting their names (and their activities or habits) into an irrelevant scene in progress.

2.2 Speaking names

In Aristophanic comedy the fictitious characters bear significant names (e.g. Dicaeopolis, Trygaeus, Philocleon, Peisetaerus, Lysistrata etc.) which allude to emblematic characteristics; as the play unfolds, the true nature of these names is confirmed through the actions of the bearers.²⁶ This tendency recedes in fourth-century comedy, although it does not disappear altogether. It is striking that an interest in the relationship of a name to the real nature of the bearer sometimes appears in scenes containing pseudo-philosophising discussions. In Alexis fr. 247 (from the play *Phaedrus*), the speaking character appears to investigate the real nature of Eros, and after the description he concludes with a comic remark that “he is close to the name of the demon”.²⁷

Amphis’ title-character *Dexidēmīdēs* is a strong candidate for a significant name, since such a historical name is unattested. It may allude, for example, to a wealthy citizen who receives and treats people with *hestiasis*.²⁸ In the preserved fragments of Middle Comedy there are few speaking names of the Aristophanic type, and it is uncertain whether they are at the centre of the plot or constitute occasional wordplay. On the other hand, it is not always necessary for a poet to invent a significant name from scratch, since he can also semantically reload an existing one and turn it into a punning name.²⁹ Moreover, some of the historical personal names which appear as titles in Middle Comedy may well hint metaphorically at some characteristic of the bearer, and in that sense it is not impossible that they also function as speaking names. For example, in Antiphanes the

²⁵ *Knights* 400–401, εἴ σε μὴ μισῶ, γενοίμην ἐν Κρατίνου κώδιον / καὶ διδασκοίμην προσᾶδεν Μορσίμου τραγῳδίᾳ, “if I don’t hate you, may I turn into a blanket in Cratinus’ house and be coached by Morsimus to sing in a tragedy”.

²⁶ For the function of speaking names in Aristophanes, cf. Kanavou 2011.

²⁷ Cf. Arnott 1996, 702 (*ad loc.*): “the speaker’s conclusion is presumably intended as a comic dig at the triviality of some of the current theorising”.

²⁸ Cf. Papachrysostomou 2016, 86.

²⁹ For example the name Λάμαχος, which is associated with μάχη in Ar. *Ach.* 268–269; see ch. 4.1.

titles *Lampōn* and *Phaōn* may include connotations of a brilliant appearance or character, whilst the titles *Lykōn* and *Leōnidēs* may denote men of wolf-like or lion-hearted temperament,³⁰ and Amphis' *Philetairos* might be a historical person and/or a sobriquet denoting the very nature of the main character.³¹

Alexis in fr. 19 seems to employ a strong metaphor to show that the poet Choronikus, “the poet who wins with his Chorus”, is far better than the (musician) Argas.

Χορόνικος <ὁ> ποιητῆς ὁδί.
(B.) τίνων ποιητῆς ἄσμάτων; (A.) σεμνῶν πάνυ.
(B.) τί πρὸς τὸν Ἀργᾶν οὗτος; (A.) ἡμέρας δρόμῳ
κρείττων

(A.) The poet here's Choronikus. (B.) What sort of songs does he write? (A.) They're very distinguished. (B.) How does he compare to Argas? (A.) He's miles and miles better.

The name Choronikus, otherwise unattested, appears to be invented, as is perhaps the name Nausinicus in another play by Alexis titled *Kybernētēs* (fr. 121).³² The metaphorical description “a day's journey better” seems to retain the competitive vocabulary inherent in Choronikus' name and also has a flavour of Old Comedy.³³

Also in Alexis, a father describes his son as a drunkard and compares him with notorious toppers, both historical and mythical (fr. 113):

ὁ μὲν οὖν ἐμὸς υἱός, οἶον ὑμεῖς ἀρτίως
εἶδετε, τοιοῦτος γέγονεν, Οἰνοπίων τις ἢ
Μάρων τις ἢ Κάπηλος ἢ <καὶ> Τιμοκλῆς·
μεθύει γάρ, οὐδὲν ἕτερον

As for my son, as you've just seen, this is what he's turned into: an Oenopion, a Maron, a Capelus, or even a Timocles. Because he's drunk; that's all there is to it.

It is worth noting that at least two of the four persons mentioned bear significant names. Oenopion, the mythical son of Dionysus or Theseus, apparently functions here as a *nom parlant*, from the popular etymology οἶνον πίων, “one

³⁰ Cf. Olson 2022, 143.

³¹ Cf. Papachrysostomou 2016, 224–225.

³² “Fortasse nomen est fictum, ut Agoracritus Aristophanis” (Kock). Cf. Arnott 1996, 19 and Kanavou 2011, 192.

³³ Cf. Ar. *Nub.* 430, ἐκατὸν σταδίοισιν ἄριστον; *Ran.* 91, πλεῖν ἢ σταδίῳ λαλίστερα; and the famous compliment of Pericles in Eupolis fr. 102, ἐκ δέκα ποδῶν ἥρει λέγων τοὺς ῥήτορας.

who has drunk wine”, although it probably derives from οἶνοψ, “dark”.³⁴ On the other hand Capelus, either as a significant proper name or as a common name, “tavern keeper”, is also quite relevant, while Maron is a hero associated with wine in *Od.* 9.197, and Timocles (perhaps, but not certainly, the comic poet) was a contemporary toper.³⁵

Paratragedy combined with wordplay on proper names is another technique. In Antiphanes fr. 74, the speaking character informs his interlocutor about Laomedon, apparently explaining his name etymologically.³⁶ In Philetaerus fr. 4, from the play *Achilleus*, by punning on *pēlos* (“mud”), the Iliadic hero Peleus becomes a potter:

Πηλεύς· ὁ Πηλεὺς δ' ἐστὶν ὄνομα κεραμέως,
ξηροῦ λυχνοποιοῦ, Κανθάρου, πενιχροῦ πάνυ,
ἀλλ' οὐ τυράννου νῆ Δία

Peleus; Peleus is the name of a potter — a skinny lamp maker called Cantharus, who's really poor. But it's not a tyrant's name, by Zeus!

This passage paratragically echoes Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis* 701: Πηλεύς· ὁ Πηλεὺς δ' ἔσχε Νηρέως κόρην. While, however, the tragedians, Euripides in particular, find in the heroes' names their fate and character,³⁷ Philetaerus employs the comic practice of playfully using proper names as epithets. Such paratragic wordplay on mythical names originated in Old Comedy. Aristophanes, in particular, mockingly reproduces the tragedians' false etymologies.³⁸

A wordplay on common and proper names also appears in Antiphanes fr. 278, φαινίνδα παίζων † ἦεις ἐν Φαινεστίου, “playing *phaininda* † you came † in Phaenestius' place”. King Juba in Athenaeus identifies Phaenestius (PAA

³⁴ Cf. Arnott 1996, 305. Oenopion is also a cupbearer in Lucian, *Pseudologista* 21.

³⁵ Cf. Apostolakis 2019, 9.

³⁶ Unfortunately, the text is corrupt. Kaibel read v. 3 as an etymology of Laomedon's name from stone (“tamquam λίθινον ἦτορ ἔχων”), but Seidler's correction ἀπ' ἀρχῆς “after his royal office” (μέδων τοῦ λαοῦ) is preferable; for a convincing defence of this solution, cf. Konstantakos 2000, 107.

³⁷ For example, Pentheus is associated with πένθος (*Bacch.* 367, 508), Polyneices with νεῖκος (*Phoen.* 636, 1493), Helen with ἑλεῖν (*Tro.* 891), Aphrodite with ἀφροσύνη (*Tro.* 990); cf. McCartney 1919, 348–349.

³⁸ Cf. Ar. fr. 373, ἐνταῦθα <δ> ἐτυράννευεν Ὑψιπύλης πατὴρ / Θόας, βραδύτατος τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις δραμεῖν, “here reigned as king the sire of Hypsipyle, Thoas, the slowest runner of all mankind”, an apparent comic inversion of Eur. *IT* 31–32, Θόας, ὃς ὠκὺν πόδα τιθεὶς ἴσον πετροῖς / ἐς τοῦνομ' ἦλθε τότε ποδωκείας χάριν, “Thoas who came into his name, because of his swift-footedness, for he runs with the speed of wings”.

lyptomenē, in Plautus' *Aulularia*, and in Terence's *Andria*, *Heauton timorumenos*, and *Adelphoe*. In Dionysius fr. 3, Dromon appears on stage probably as a slave of a cook, and is given instructions in a figurative language using military vocabulary,⁴³ which contains some wordplay: Δρόμων ... κατάρτεχε, "Dromon ... run down". It appears that this is the earliest mention of this speaking name, which in the course of time would become a generic name for the *servus currens*.

Coining verbs from personal names is another practice. Unlike fourth-century oratory, where the pro-Macedonians were described with the verb φιλιππίζειν, "to be Philip's followers" ([Dem.] 58.37; Aeschin. 3.130), Alexis has coined the verb φιλιππιδόω, with reference to the emaciated politician Philipides (fr. 148).

(A.) κακῶς ἔχεις, † στρουθίς ἀκαρῆς νῆ Δί' εἶ·
πεφιλιππιδῶσαι. (B.) μὴ σὺ καινῶς μοι λόλει.
ὅσον οὐ τέθνηκα. (A.) τοῦ ταλαιπώρου πάθους

(A.) You're in bad shape, † you are nothing but a sparrow, by Zeus! You've Philippidised.
(B.) Don't use newfangled vocabulary on me; I'm as good as dead. (A.) What a miserable turn of events!

To the best of my knowledge, πεφιλιππιδῶσθαι is the only instance in the preserved fragments of Middle Comedy of a verb formed from a proper name. However, such *hapax* coinings are not unknown in Old Comedy, for example μελλονικιᾶν (Ar. Av. 639) and ἐσωκράτων (Ar. Av. 1282), denoting a morbid condition of Nicias and Socrates respectively.⁴⁴ The coining of πεφιλιππιδῶσθαι in the context of a deathlike condition is a step further on from exaggerated descriptions like ἰσχνότερον Φιλιππίδου (Aristophon fr. 8), where a character (probably Plato) asserts that he will make a member of the Academy thinner than Philipides.⁴⁵ It also calls to mind a similar description of Chaerephon in *Clouds*, where Socrates promises Strepsiades that the latter will become indistinguishable from Chaerephon, and Strepsiades comments that he's going to become like

⁴³ Cf. Orth 2020, 348.

⁴⁴ Such interesting plays on a character's proper name also appear in Plautus; see *Trin.* 975–977, where a trickster invites the old man Charmides to become un-Charmides, i.e. to admit that he is not Charmides: *proin tu te, itidem ut charmidatus es, rursum recharmida*. Cf. *Pseud.* 585, *Ballionem exballistabo*, "I'll cannonball Ballio".

⁴⁵ Cf. Φιλιππίδου λεπτότερον ... νεκρόν, "a skinnier corpse than Philipides" (Menander, *Orgē* fr. 266).

a half-dead man.⁴⁶ What is worth noting in Alexis' passage is the comment of the interlocutor, who dismisses this kind of verbal coinage. Here, however, unlike the supposed metatheatrical comment in Timocles fr. 19 (see above on ch. 2.1), the critique remains within the bounds of theatrical convention.

Personal proper names are also turned into mocking epithets. Such is the compound epithet which occurs in Ephippus fr. 14.3, where a man from Plato's Academy is called τις τῶν Βρυσωνοθρασυμαχειοληψικερμάτων, "one of those taking coins like Bryson and Thrasyarchus". The first component refers to Bryson of Heraclea, a pupil of Socrates, the second to Thrasyarchus of Chalcedon, the sophist.⁴⁷ This *hapax* recalls known Aristophanic hybrids, e.g. *Eccl.* 1169–1175; *Av.* 491.

3 Epithets

3.1 Epithets as comic titles

Given that in fourth-century comedy political and personal satire recedes and social and domestic themes and subjects prevail, contemporary people appear rather peripherally, while the dominant characters are cooks, parasites, pimps, soldiers, rustics, courtesans, spendthrifts, and other figures stereotypical in later comedy. It is unsurprising, then, that these comic characters are often qualified with epithets denoting or alluding to their main occupation, an idiosyncratic element, or a ruling sentiment of their personality. Such epithets, apparently attributed to the main character of the play, even appear as comic titles in Middle Comedy: *Agroikos*, "Boorish fellow" (Anaxilas, Antiphanes, Philemon), *Monotropos*, "Solitary Man" (Anaxilas; cf. Phrynichus), *Misoponēros*, "Hater of Wickedness" (Antiphanes), *Philetairos*, "Loyal Comrade" (Alexis, Amphis, Antiphanes), *Philomētōr*, "Mother's Boy", and *Philopatōr*, "Father's Boy" (Antiphanes), *Mempsimoiros*, "Fault-Finding Fellow" (Antidotus), *Dyskolos*, "Bad Tempered" (Mnesimachus; cf. Menander), *Polypragmōn*, "Busybody" (Timocles, Heniochus; cf. Diphilus), *Epichairekakos*, "The Spiteful Man" (Timocles), *Philodiktēs*, "The Man Who Loved Jury-Duty" (Timocles), *Malthakē*, "Soft Woman" (Antiphanes), *Aischra*, "Ugly Woman" (Anaxandrides). In some cases these epithets, associated with relevant characters, are already used in Old Comedy, and

⁴⁶ *Ar. Nub.* 503–504: (ΣΩ.) οὐδὲν διοίσεις Χαίρεφῶντος τὴν φύσιν. / (ΣΤΡ.) οἶμοι κακοδαίμων, ἡμιθνής γενήσομαι.

⁴⁷ Cf. Papachrysostomou 2021, 152–153.

in that sense the poets of Middle Comedy receive and upgrade them as comic titles. Examples include *agroikos* in Ar. *Eq.* 40 (said of Demos) and *Nub.* 42, 46 (of Strepsiades); *monotropos* (already as a proper name and title of a comedy in Phrynichus); *dyskolos* (Ar. *Eq.* 41, of Demos); *polypragmōn* (Eupolis fr. 238); *philodikastēs* (cf. Ar. *Vesp.* 87, φιληλιαστής, of Philocleon). In some cases the formation of such epithets may have originated in periphrastic expressions: for example, the epithet *misoponēros* is modelled after the description of Timon the Misanthrope in *Lysistrata* 816–818, οὕτω 'κεῖνος ὑμᾶς ἀντεμίσει τοὺς πονηροὺς ἄνδρας ἀεί. Likewise, epithet-titles with φιλο- as the first component (*Philetairos*, *Philopatōr*) recall Aristophanes' *Wasps* 77–88, where a series of jokes includes epithets denoting an inclination to a practice: φιλόκυβος, φιλοπότης, φιλόξενος, φιλοθύτης.⁴⁸ Since, however, such titles are relatively rare in Old Comedy, it seems that the poets of Middle Comedy are amplifying an existing practice.⁴⁹ On the other hand, some of these epithet-titles indicate an association with fourth-century philosophical inquiry and contemporary oratory. For instance, *misoponēros* occurs in Demosthenes (21.218) and Aeschines (1.69; 2.171), while *philoponēros* is one of Theophrastus' characters (no. 29); the titles *Agroikos* and *Mempsimoiros* are shared by Theophrastus (*Char.* 4 and 17), and *epichairekakos* as a character is described in Arist. *Rh.* 1379b 17–19, τοῖς ἐπιχαίρουσι ταῖς ἀτυχίαις.

These epithets are apparently substituted for the main character's real name, although he probably also had a fictitious proper name.⁵⁰ Sometimes the linguistic humour supports the representation on stage of such characters, who are given an epithet emblematic of their obsession. Antiphanes, for example, is a poet who tends to do this. In his play *Philomētōr*, “The Man who Loved his Mother”, he associates the name of his title-character with food by means of an arbitrary etymology. In fr. 219, he crowns an accumulation of word-plays on μήτηρ, “mother” (ἔμμητρον ξύλον, “wood from the core of the tree”, μητρόπολις, “mother-city”), with a pun on μήτρα, “womb”, and Μητράς (Metras of Chios).⁵¹ Also in his fr. 157 of *Misoponēros*, “The Hater of Knaves”, the fierce

⁴⁸ Cf. Simone Beta's chapter in the present volume.

⁴⁹ In Old Comedy, cf. Phrynichus' *Monotropos*, “Solitary”. Cf. Henderson 2014, 195, who recognises in Middle Comedy both amplifications of older elements and innovations.

⁵⁰ Such a practice is attested in New Comedy; for example, Cnemon is the real name of the main character in Menander's *Dyskolos*.

⁵¹ μήτραν τινὲς πωλοῦσιν ἥδιστον κρέας. / Μητράς ὁ Χιὸς ἐστὶ τῷ δήμῳ φίλος, “some people sell sow's womb, the most delicious meat there is; Metras of Chios is a friend of the people”. However, it is a matter of dispute whether the play was originally *Philomētōr* or *Philopatōr*; cf. Olson 2021, 116.

invective against different social and professional classes (Scythians, wet-nurses, pedagogues, midwives, mendicant priests, fishmongers, and money-lenders) is quite compatible with the idiosyncrasy of a *misoponēros*, in fact a misanthrope. More particularly, the expressions γένος μιαρώτατον, “the foulest kind” (v. 8–9), and ἔθνος ἐξωλέστερον, “a more pestilential race” (v. 11–12), the patterns of syntax, and the rhetorical questions support an indignant tone and contribute to the depiction of this particular misanthrope.⁵² Moreover, at least one of Timocles’ title-characters, named after an epithet, may be illustrated in the preserved fragments. In a play titled *Epichairekakos* (fr. 11), the speaking character narrates Corydus’ behaviour in the fish-market. The sarcastic comment “What happened to him was ludicrous, alas!”, about the destitute parasite whose mouth waters when looking at expensive fish, may well reveal a spiteful man, one who enjoys others’ misfortunes.⁵³

3.2 New epithets for stereotypical characters

Apart from standard epithets for stereotypical characters in Middle Comedy (e.g. *opsophagos*, *parasitos*), the comic poets often use equivalent, descriptive ones which, in the course of time, also become emblematic of the characters to whom they are attributed. For example, a parasite is often called ἄκλητος, “uninvited” (e.g. Antiphanes fr. 193.7, 227.1–3), Lat. *invocatus* (Plautus, *Captivi* 69); ἀσύμβολος, “without paying his contribution” (Timocles fr. 10.4); κεστρεὺς νῆστις, “a hungry grey-mullet” (Alexis fr. 258); παραμασήτης, “fellow-chewer” (Alexis fr. 238.2; Timocles fr. 9.6). Some poets of Middle Comedy exhibit an inclination for epithets which are unusual, even unique in the existing literature. In the following lines I focus on inventive epithets used for gourmands and fish-eaters (*opsophagoi*), persons commonly satirised in Middle Comedy.

In Theophilus fr. 4.3–4, the *opsophagos* politician Callimedon is satirised for his inappropriate rhetorical style as ψυχρός, “cold”. The mechanism of the wordplay is activated by means of the particular epithet, which on a first level is applied to a crayfish within a culinary context, and is turned through metonymy into an aesthetic term for Callimedon’s rhetoric.⁵⁴

⁵² Cf. the detailed analysis of Konstantakos 2021, esp. 167–176.

⁵³ Cf. Apostolakis 2019, 105–106.

⁵⁴ On ψυχρόν with aesthetic connotations, cf. Alexis fr. 184, (φρέαρ) ψυχρότερον Ἀραρότος; Ar. *Thesm.* 170, ὁ δ’ αὖ Θέογνις ψυχρὸς ὦν ψυχρῶς ποεῖ; and ch. 2.1 above.

Amphis, on the other hand, a poet who often employs *hapax* epithets in his poetry,⁵⁵ uses in the same passage (fr. 10) the rare epithet κνισολιχός, “fat-licker” (the only other instances where it occurs are Antiphanes fr. 64 and Sophilus fr. 8),⁵⁶ and the *hapax* ὀλβιογάστωρ, “belly-blessed”, to describe Eurybatus (it is not clear whether he is a historical or a mythical person). But while compounds with κνῖσα are always derisive (e.g. κνισοτηρητής, “fat-hunter”, adesp. com. fr. 622), ὀλβιογάστωρ is an inventive adaptation of elevated epithets (e.g. ὀλβιοδαίμων, “of blessed lot”, Hom. *Il.* 3.182; ὀλβιόδωρος, “bestowing bliss”, Eur. *Hipp.* 750) to a comic situation.⁵⁷

In Timocles, in a context of political satire from the play *Heroes*, the anti-Macedonian orator Hypereides is called *opsophagos* (fr. 4.9). In another of Timocles’ plays (*Icarian Satyrs*), Hypereides’ notorious appetite for fish is described in a more inventive style (fr. 17):

τόν τ’ ἰχθυόρρουν ποταμὸν Ὑπερίδην πέρα
 ὃς ἡπίαις φωναῖσιν ἔμφρονος λόγου
 κόμποις παφλάζων τήπιοις† πυκνώμασι
 πρὸς παν ... δυσας ἔχει,
 μισθωτὸς ἄρδει πεδία τοῦ δεδωκότος

Then cross the fish-rich river Hypereides, who with mild sounds of prudent speech, blustering boastfully with † wheedling † rhetorical aggregations ... as a hired servant he waters his employer’s fields.

The language of the first line indicates a parody of high poetry, the possible serious pattern being that of a person giving directions to a traveller. Such an example occurs in *Prometheus Bound*, when Prometheus gives instructions to Io and advises her to avoid dangerous crossings: 717–718, ἤξεις δ’ ὑβριστὴν ποταμὸν οὐ ψευδώνυμον / ὃν μὴ περάσης, “You will then come to the Violent River, not inaptly named; do not cross it”. Timocles seems to inverse the serious pattern when he has the speaking character instruct the traveller to cross the river, and, perhaps, by ascribing to the orator characteristics of a river, instead of having the river acquire human properties (cf. ὑβριστὴν ποταμὸν). Besides, the *hapax* epithet ἰχθυόρρουν, “a river flowing with many fish”, actually an innovative variation on the stereotypical epic epithets ἰχθυόεις (Hom. *Il.* 16.747) and βαθύρρουν (Hom. *Il.* 7.421), is clearly bathetic. The poet, by ascribing this new-

⁵⁵ Cf. Papachrysostomou 2016, 15–16.

⁵⁶ Perhaps surviving in Plautus’ *nidoricupi*, “aroma greedling”, said of Tranio, who hides in a kitchen (*Most.* 5); cf. Fontaine 2010, 172.

⁵⁷ Cf. Papachrysostomou 2016, 78.

coined epithet to Hypereides, activates successive transformations of the fish-river Hypereides, who retains both human and riverine characteristics, into a tumultuous orator, who splashes on the model of the fifth-century demagogue Cleon, the Paphlagon of the *Knights*,⁵⁸ while in the final verse he becomes a paid (μισθωτός) gardener, who waters his master's fields.⁵⁹ In Antiphanes fr. 104, probably in the epilogue of the play *Thamyras*, pronounced by a god, it is said that a river will be called in the future by the significant name (ἐπώνυμος, an epithet unique in comedy) Strymon, after the (otherwise unattested) King Strymon. The river, endowed with the largest eels (v. 3, μεγίστας ἐγγέλεις κεκτημένους), calls to mind the fish-river Hypereides and is also compared to a gardener, who waters the land (v. 2, κατάρδων).⁶⁰

3.3 Divine epithets

Traditional epithets from high poetry, adapted to comic situations, also appear in Middle Comedy.⁶¹ To this category belong the divine epithets, mostly of epic origin. Although stereotypical divine epithets do not usually offer many opportunities for comic exploitation, the poets sometimes exploit them inventively in new contextual circumstances.⁶² Such is their use in contexts of incongruous language. As a case study, I will consider the function of divine epithets associated with Hermes in Middle Comedy. Hermes' presence is well established in comedy since Aristophanes' time, as he was associated — perhaps more than the other gods — with everyday life, as his corresponding epithets denote: ἀγοραῖος (Ar. *Eq.* 297), ἐμπολαῖος (Ar. *Ach.* 816). Also, as a patron of tricks

58 Cf. Ar. *Eq.* 918, ἀνὴρ παφλάζει, “the man is splashing”; Pax 313–315, παφλάζων καὶ κεκραγώς, “plopping and screaming”. It seems, however, that another passage of the *Knights* is also recalled, namely the mention of Cratinus, who in the parabasis is described as a rapid stream flowing against his opponents (526–528, cf. Bernhard Zimmermann's chapter in the present volume).

59 The *opsophagos* Hypereides as a river rich in fishes perhaps finds a parallel in the parasite Neilus: Euphanes fr. 1.6, ποῦ Κόρυδος, ἢ Φυρόμαχος, ἢ Νείλου βία; “Where is Corydus, Phylomachus, the forceful Neilus?” Given that Neilus as a personal name is very rare (only one instance in the fourth century), it may be the nickname of a parasite, due to his impetuosity (cf. βία); cf. Mastellari 2016, 303. If so, then the impetuous river becomes a metonymy for an *opsophagos*, as well as for a parasite.

60 For the parodic language of the passage cf. Olson 2022, 24.

61 Cf. Anaxilas fr. 22.3–5, ἄμεικτος, πύρπνοος, τρίκρανος, which paratragically recalls Heracles' labours in Soph. *Trach.* 1089–1100; cf. Tartaglia 2019, 128.

62 Cf. Willi 2002, 5.

(cf. Ar. *Thesm.* 1202, δόλιος), he is more often involved in comic situations. For all these reasons he has sometimes been considered a divine patron of comedy.⁶³

This tradition may be echoed in Middle Comedy. In Alexis' play *Thesprōtoi*, apparently in a scene of *nekyiomanteia*, personal satire occasionally intrudes, the target being the politician Philippides (fr. 93):

Ἑρμῇ θεῶν προπομπὲ καὶ Φιλίππιδου
κληροῦχε, Νυκτός τ' ὄμμα τῆς μελαμπέπλου

Hermes, divine escort, to whom Philippides belongs by lot; and thou, eye of dark-robed Night.

Hermes as a *psychagōgos* is said to have a claim on the dead-like Philippides, who was often compared with a corpse.⁶⁴ This role is supported by the epithet “dark-robed”, applied to Night, the appropriate time of action for the *psychagōgos* Hermes.⁶⁵ The joke is constructed on the juxtaposition of the grandiose synopsis θεῶν προπομπὲ and μελάμπεπλος νύξ on the one hand, and the unexpected Φιλίππιδου κληροῦχε on the other, which comically subverts the imposing style of the verse and the darkness of the whole scene, probably coming from the prologue of the play.⁶⁶

In Eubulus fr. 95, Hermes, “the son of Maia”, is described as λίθινος, “made of stone”, polished with prayers till he shines in the *kylikeion* (ὄν προσεύγμασιν ἐν τῷ κυλικίῳ λαμπρὸν ἐκτετριμμένον). The apparently dignified address is brought down to earth when one realises that this is only a statuette kept in the cupboards, among kitchen utensils.⁶⁷

Comic inventiveness also characterises another passage of Timocles (fr. 14), from his play *Heroes*:

Ἑρμῆς δ' ὁ Μαΐας ταῦτα συνδιακτορεῖ
ἄν ἢ π[ρ]όθυμος καταβέβηκεν ἄσμενος
χαριζόμενός γ' Ἀριστομήδη τῷ καλῷ,
ἵνα μηκέτ' αὐτὸν ὁ Σάτυρος κλέπτειν λέγῃ

⁶³ Cf. Moodie 2019; for Hermes in Old Comedy, see Beta 2019.

⁶⁴ θεῶν προπομπὲ has rather a tragic tone (cf. πομπός, Aesch. *Pers.* 626; Soph. *OC* 1548). This formulation, however, causes textual problems, since Hermes appears in the epic tradition as *psychagōgos*, not as an escort of the gods, and Casaubon's correction of θεῶν into νεκρῶν might be correct; cf. Arnott 1996, 244–246.

⁶⁵ Cf. e.g. Hom. *Il.* 24.694–695, where Hermes as *psychagōgos* addresses Priam in the darkness of the night.

⁶⁶ Cf. Arnott 1996, 244–246.

⁶⁷ Cf. Beta 2019, 99.

Hermes, the son of Maia, aids in conducting these affairs, on condition that he is eager to do so. He has descended with pleasure, showing favour to Aristomedes the Handsome, so that Satyros will no longer call him a thief.

Here, too, the initial context suggests a grandiose intervention of the god. The (post-Homeric) formula “son of Maia”, the echo of Hermes’ epic epithet δῖακτορος (an obscure epithet, perhaps “messenger”) in the verb συνδιακτορεῖ (Wilamowitz’s correction of the papyrus’ συνδιακτονεῖ), an inventive coining of a verb out of a traditional divine epithet, and the prayer-formula in the context of a *katabasis* (v. 2, καταβέβηκεν ἄσμενος), by which Hermes is described as a god eager (πρόθυμος) to assist, suggest a context of response to a prayer. But the last lines subvert the initial grandiose description, causing a comic incongruity. Hermes is now acting as a patron of thieves, by offering his help to his protégé Aristomedes, a supposed “thief”, in return for sexual services (v. 3).⁶⁸

4 Nicknames

Unlike Aristophanic comedy, where the play on names mainly focuses on the “speaking names” of the main characters, invented by the poet, in Middle Comedy the stereotypical characters such as *alazones* (braggart soldiers), parasites, *opsophagoi*, and courtesans, when appearing on stage or just being mentioned, already have their well-established nicknames, by which they are known outside the theatre. The comic poets, in turn, exploit the possibilities offered by these nicknames by activating jokes which refer to the very mechanism of their creation. Sometimes, however, they invent themselves nicknames for their characters, which are strictly employed within the particular play or, possibly, within a particular context, in order to make fun of them.⁶⁹ Some nicknames may actually have originated on the comic stage. A typical case is Antiphanes fr. 27 from *Halieuomenē*, where a fishmonger’s on-stage association of well-known persons with special fishes, on the basis of common (actual or supposed) characteristics, may provide such material. More specifically, there are two parallel lists of fishes and names, each name (either a proper name or a nickname) corresponding to and being playfully identified with a fish, so that the exposition

⁶⁸ For a discussion of this fragment, cf. Apostolakis 2019, 127–134.

⁶⁹ Cf. Millis 2015, 169, who considers the first type “permanent nicknames” and the second “isolated jests”.

of the fishmonger's trade in the fish market is transformed into a list of *kōmōi-doumenoi*.⁷⁰

A common source of nicknames is the mocking association of a person with some material object indicative of his/her occupation. In this way, significant names are turned into standard nicknames in the course of time, and are recycled on the comic stage. In Philetaerus fr. 14, a cook is called *Pataniōn* (from πατάνιον “little flat dish”).⁷¹ Already in Aristophanes (*Ran.* 549), a baking woman is called Plathanē (from πλάθανον, a dish for baking bread), while the similar name Scapha (σκάφη, “Trough”) occurs in Plautus (*Most.* 158, 162). On the other hand, the courtesan Λοπάδιον (Timocles fr. 27) is apparently named after a small vessel for boiling fish (λοπάς), but this must be an already established nickname, not one invented by the comic poet. On the procedure of generating a nickname, a telling passage is that in Anaxandrides (fr. 35):

ὕμεις γὰρ ἀλλήλους ἀεὶ χλευάζετ', οἷδ' ἀκριβῶς.
 ἂν μὲν γὰρ ἥ τις εὐπρεπής, Ἱερὸν Γάμον καλεῖτε·
 ἔαν δὲ μικρὸν παντελῶς ἀνθρώπιον, Σταλαγμόν.
 λαμπρός τις ἐξελήλυθ' – ὅλολος οὗτός ἐστι·
 λιπαρὸς περιπατεῖ Δημοκλῆς, Ζωμὸς κατωνόμασται·
 χαίρει τις αὐχμῶν ἢ ῥυπῶν, Κονιορτὸς ἀναπέφηνεν·
 ὀπισθεν ἀκολουθεῖ κόλαξ τῷ, Λέμβος ἐπικέκληται·
 τὰ πόλλ' ἄδειπνος περιπατεῖ, Κεστρίνός ἐστι Νῆστις.
 εἰς τοὺς καλοὺς δ' ἂν τις βλέπη, καινὸς Θεατροποιός·
 ὑφείλετ' ἄρνα ποιμένος παίζων, Ἄτρεὺς ἐκλήθη·
 ἔαν δὲ κριόν, Φρίξος· ἂν δὲ κωδάριον, Ἰάσων

For you always mock one another, I know well. For if someone is attractive, you call him Sacred Marriage; and if he is an exceedingly small fellow, Drop. Someone has turned out comely [...] this one is Womanish; Democles walks about (over-)oiled, he has the name Soup; someone delights in being unanointed or dirty, he is clearly Dustcloud; a flatterer follows behind someone, he is called Skiff; whoever walks around generally dinnerless, is Starving Mullet. If someone stares at handsome boys, a new Theatre-maker; if he took a shepherd's lamb as a joke, he was dubbed Atreus; if a ram, Phrixos; and if a fleece, Jason.⁷²

In this catalogue it is possible to discern two sources of nicknames. The first is from everyday life, referring either to physical characteristics or to a particular

⁷⁰ See Konstantakos 2000, 70–71, who convincingly remarks that Antiphanes may well have been inspired by an Old Comedy source, e.g. Archippus' *Fishes*, fr. 15–18. For comic descriptions of seafood as puns on the nicknames of some *hetairai*, cf. Lamari 2021.

⁷¹ This *Pataniōn* might well be the ancestor of the cook Citrio (probably associated with χύτρα) in Plautus' *Casina*.

⁷² Cf. Ar. Av. 1291–1299; Alexis fr. 183.3.

behaviour, such as Stalagmos, Zōmos, Ololys, Koniortos, Lembos, as parallels indicate; while the second is more sophisticated, including mythological parallels, and may well be the poet's inventive addition, in a comic culmination.⁷³ At the same time, this fragment illustrates the process by which comic poets take popular jokes and turn them into useful comic material. The nickname Stalagmos, in particular, has its own history, since it survives as the name of a slave in Plautus' *Captivi*, and as the title of a play by Naevius, apparently the eponymous character.⁷⁴ This might mean that this particular nickname was introduced to theatre at some point as the name of a comic character, and was subsequently adopted by the Roman comic poets. Finally, sometimes an existing nickname is used to stigmatise a particular behaviour of another person, by comparing the stigmatised person with the original bearer of the nickname. We can follow this process on stage in Timocles fr. 21, when the speaking character calls somebody "a Tithymallus and a parasite" (Τιθύμαλλον αὐτὸν καὶ παράσιτον ἀποκαλῶν), apparently because the person behaves like that notorious parasite by invading a dinner uninvited.⁷⁵

4.1 Braggart soldiers

While in Greek New Comedy and Roman comedy braggart soldiers are mainly mercenaries, the old type is a prominent public figure.⁷⁶ In Timocles' *Heroes* (fr. 12), Demosthenes is described as a *miles gloriosus*, and this description rather looks backwards, to the early history of this stereotypical character.

Οὐκοῦν κελεύεις νῦν με πάντα μᾶλλον ἢ
τὰ προσόντα φράζειν. (B.) πάνυ γε. (A.) δράσω τοῦτό σοι.
καὶ πρῶτα μὲν σοι παύσεται Δημοσθένης
ὀργιζόμενος. (B.) ὁ ποῖος; (A.) τὸ Βριάρεως,
ὁ τοὺς καταπάλτας τάς τε λόγχας ἐσθίων,
μισῶν λόγους ἄνθρωπος οὐδὲ πώποτε
ἀντίθετον εἰπὼν οὐδέν, ἀλλ' ἄρη βλέπων

(A.) I see what you mean; you ask me to tell anything except what is appropriate. (B.) Just the thing! (A.) I will do it for your sake. This is the first: Demosthenes will stop being angry

⁷³ Cf. Timocles fr. 19. For the "Aristophanic" technique of ending a list with an abbreviated form, cf. Spyropoulos 1974, 12–17; Millis 2015, 169 n. 62.

⁷⁴ Cf. Bechtel 1898, 11; Millis 2015, 169.

⁷⁵ Apostolakis 2019, 174–175.

⁷⁶ For a detailed discussion of the evolution of this character, see Konstantakos 2015.

with you. (B.) Who is Demosthenes? (A.) Briareos, who swallows catapults and spears, this hater of discourse, who never used a single antithesis in his speech but has a martial stare.

The ironical game played on stage (*antiphrasis*) requires the replacement of the qualities belonging to a person with quite the opposite ones. In this context, the expression “he never used a single antithesis” alludes to the anti-Macedonian slogan “not give (*dounai*) but return (*apodounai*)” of the Halonnesus debate (342 BCE), in response to Philip’s offer of Halonnesus to the Athenians. By this antithetical expression (actually a paronomasia), which was credited to Demosthenes, the Athenian orator proposed the rejection of Philip’s offer, since the island had belonged to Athens in the past. Through this ironical device Demosthenes, the supposed fervent champion of war, is revealed to be a false Briareos, a braggart *miles gloriosus*, who exhausts his combative spirit in uttering warlike cries against the Macedonian king. Briareos, perhaps originating from βριαρός, “strong”, might be a significant name for a terrifying fighter, as Demosthenes is ironically described. It is telling that Lamachus, the comic archetype of the *miles gloriosus*, is also associated with μάχη in Aristophanes (cf. *Ar. Ach.* 269–270, πραγμάτων τε καὶ μαχῶν καὶ λαμάρχων ἀπαλλαγείς). The description of the martial stare of Demosthenes (Ἄρη βλέπων) also recalls a similar description of Lamachus in *Acharnians* 566, ἰὼ Λάμαχ’, ὃ βλέπων ἀστραπάς. Demosthenes’ description, therefore, as a Briareos, has a rather Aristophanic flavour.⁷⁷ Mythical figures as braggart soldiers also appear, as one would expect, in mythological burlesque. In Ephippus’ *Busiris*, Heracles (fr. 2) boasts and asserts that he, as a Tirynthian Argive, fights all his battles drunk, but his claims are dismissed by his interlocutor, who remarks that this is why Tirynthians always run away.⁷⁸

Given, however, that during the fourth century the role and number of mercenary soldiers dramatically increased, the braggart soldier became a stereotypical figure on the comic stage. Plays titled *Stratiōtēs* were written by Antiphanes, Alexis, and Xenarchus (and also Philemon and Diphilus), while Ephippus wrote *Peltastēs*. *Milites gloriosi* bearing speaking names are very common in Greek New Comedy and Roman comedy. These names either existed in real life, e.g. Bias, Polemon, and Stratophanes (Menander), or are invented, e.g. Hairesiteiches (Diphilus) and Pyrgopolynices (Plautus). On the other hand, we have only scanty

⁷⁷ Cf. Hermippus fr. 47 and Cratinus fr. 300, where Pericles is described in similar terms to Demosthenes. Timocles fr. 12 also recalls Mnesimachus fr. 7, where a character boasts about his military abilities in similar terms. For further discussion of Timocles’ scene, see Apostolakis 2019, 115–123.

⁷⁸ Cf. Konstantakos 2014, 172; Papachrysostomou 2021, 34–41.

evidence for Middle Comedy. Possible, but far from certain, instances are the comic titles *Thrasōn* in Alexis, and *Kleophanēs* and *Tychōn* in Antiphanes.⁷⁹ However, sometimes we can trace the bombastic rhetoric of a *miles* in the preserved fragments.

In the following lines, I will consider the opportunities for jokes and word-play offered by a nickname for a braggart soldier. In the unique preserved fragment by Heracleides (fr. 1), Chares is ironically described as liberal and magnificent, since he gave a splendid banquet to the Athenian people for an insignificant — and easily earned — victory over Adaeus, the commander of the foreign troops of Philip, who was known as “Rooster”:

Ἀλεκτρυόνα τὸν τοῦ Φιλίππου παραλαβὼν
 ἄωρὶ κοκκύζοντα καὶ πλανώμενον
 κατέκοψεν· οὐ γὰρ εἶχεν οὐδέπω λόφον.
 ἓνα κατακόψας μάλα συχνοὺς ἐδείπνισεν
 Χάρης Ἀθηναίων τόθ', ὥς γενναῖος ἦν

He caught Philip's Rooster as he was squawking and wandering around early in the morning, and chopped him to pieces; because he didn't have a crest. Even though he only chopped up one Rooster, Chares fed an enormous number of Athenians dinner. What a generous guy he was!

Through an established nickname, the slaughter of Philip's official is inventively transformed into a culinary event. The nickname Ἀλεκτρυών, “Cock” or “Rooster”, is further elaborated in two inseparable levels. Philip's braggart officer is seen as a cock crowing too early, i.e. selecting the wrong timing for the battle. He goes astray without his basic armour, like a cock without his crest, and is eventually killed by Chares. Moreover, the victor gave a dinner for the Athenians to celebrate his battle against Philip's mercenaries under Adaeus the “Rooster”, who is said to have been chopped into pieces and offered as a meal. The joke is probably inspired from Aristophanic material. In *Birds* (v. 290), Euelpides comments on a bird's crest and alludes to Cleonymus having flung away his shield on the battlefield.⁸⁰ Besides, the same culinary term (κατακόπτειν, “butcher”) is applied in a feasting context both to Alectryon's slaughter in Heracleides and to birds butchered for a wedding feast in *Birds* (v. 1688).

⁷⁹ For Thrason, see Arnott 1996, 249–250. Tychon (perhaps “Lucky”) is an alternative title (Στρατιώτης ἢ Τύχων), and, since it is quite uncommon as an Athenian name, it might be a significant name for a *miles*; cf. Konstantakos 2000, 212–214; Olson 2021, 34.

⁸⁰ Cf. also *Birds* 1366, where Peisetaerus advises the man who strikes his father (*Patraloias*) to become a brave fighter: νομίσας ἀλεκτρυόνος ἔχειν τονδὶ λόφον.

4.2 Parasites and *Opsophagoi*

Most parasites in fourth-century comedy bear nicknames. Interestingly enough, the very title *parasitos* seems to be a nickname, by which this particular character is introduced on the comic stage. The following fragment of Alexis (183.1–2) is telling:

καλοῦσι δ' αὐτὸν πάντες οἱ νεώτεροι
Παράσιτον ὑποκόρισμα· τῷ δ' οὐδὲν μέλει.

All the young men call him “Parasite” as a nickname. But it doesn’t bother him.

As Arnott speculates, this is the first time that this comic type, known during the fifth century as *kolax*, “flatterer”, was launched in the comic theatre under this term, which had hitherto been reserved, both inside and outside the theatre, for men who offered their services to a cult and received free meals in return.⁸¹

Both Greek and Roman poets invent further nicknames for their comic parasites, and elaborate on them with various explanations, according to the special inclinations of their characters. Sometimes parasites themselves explain their own nickname when introducing themselves. In Aristophon (fr. 5.3), a parasite says that his name is *Zōmos*, “Broth”, because he always arrives first at dinner.⁸² In Antiphanes’ *Progonoi* (fr. 193), a parasite declares that he is ready to offer any kind of service to the patron without a second thought (ἀπρόσκεπτος). And that is why the younger men call him “Thunderbolt” (Σκηπτός). He even argues that mocking remarks don’t bother him (οὐθὲν μέλει τῶν σκωμμάτων μοι). The wordplay ἀπρόσκεπτος — Σκηπτός underlines the impetuosity of this particular parasite and his resolution to undertake any activity in order to help his patron. More importantly, this pattern of self-description survives in Roman comedy, in Plautus in particular (*Captivi* 69–76), where the parasite Ergasilus comically explains why the young people have named him “The Prostitute”. The similarities between the two passages (e.g. καλοῦσί μ’ οἱ νεώτεροι — *iuuentus nomen indidit*; ἄκλητος — *invocatus*; σκωμμάτων — *derisores*) leaves little doubt that

⁸¹ Arnott 1996, 543–544; Arnott 2010, 323. For the parasites, see Damon 1995.

⁸² It is interesting that *Zōmion* (apparently the nickname of a parasite) is the alternative title of a play by Philemon (Μετιῶν ἢ Ζωμίων).

Antiphanes' passage has influenced Plautus in the creation of inventive nicknames of comic parasites on stage.⁸³

When parasites are nicknamed, either inside or outside theatre, the verb καλῶ, "call", is regularly used. In Anaxippus fr. 3.3–6, this use also explains the title of the play *Keraunos* with impressive metaphorical language:

τοῦτον οἱ φίλοι καλοῦσί σοι
 νυνὶ δι' ἀνδρείαν Κεραυνόν. (B) εἰκότως.
 ἀβάτους ποιεῖν γὰρ τὰς τραπέζας οἶομαι
 αὐτόν, κατασκήπτοντα † αὐταῖς † τῇ γνάθῳ

(A.) Nowadays your friends call him Lightning-Bolt, because he's so brave. (B.) That makes sense; because I imagine he makes their tables sacred ground, by descending † on them † with his jaws.

The supposed impressive braveness of the parasite is undermined by the second interlocutor, who explains the nickname "Lightning-Bolt" with another elaborate wordplay. In fact, Anaxippus' wordplay is a variation on Antiphanes' ἀπρόσκεπτος – Σκηπτός, and adds a religious dimension to the joke. More specifically, the tables are struck by a thunderbolt which descends on them (κατασκήπτειν), and become ἄβατοι in both senses, i.e. "untrodden", and "not to be trodden", as places struck by lightning and therefore sacred. At the same time the sacred context is subverted by the remark that the parasite Lightning-Bolt's attack is made with his jaws (κατασκήπτειν τῇ γνάθῳ).

This passage might be indicative that at least some of the stereotypical names of parasites have their origin in fourth-century comic descriptions of this character. The parasite described in Anaxippus' passage might well anticipate the stereotypical parasite Gnathon, "Big Jaws", who appears in both Greek and Roman comedy (e.g. Menander, *Kolax*; Terence, *Eunuchus*; cf. Cic. *Phil.* 2.15). Indeed, γνάθος, "jaw", and the related σιαγών, "mandible", are often associated with the parasite's voracity. In Alexis fr. 185.3, a parasite is said to never have his jaws idle (ἀργοὺς ἔχειν μηδέποτε τὰς σιαγόνας). Moreover, parasites are often associated with biting and chewing food (μασᾶσθαι; cf. Hegesippus Com. fr. 2.5; Antiphanes fr. 202 and 253).⁸⁴ The related term παραμασήτης, "fellow-chewer" (Timocles fr. 9.6; cf. Alexis fr. 238.2), and the alternative παραμασύντης

⁸³ Cf. Fontaine 2010, 230–233. Cf. also Plaut. *Men.* 77–78, *iuventus nomen fecit Peniculo mihi, ideo quia ... mensam quando edo detergeo*, "The youngsters have given me the name 'Peniculus, the Brush' because ... when I eat I wipe the table clean".

⁸⁴ See Konstantakos 2000, 235. Cf. Timocles fr. 10.5, where the parasite Corydus is always ready to set his teeth in motion (κινεῖν ὀδόντας).

(Ephippus fr. 8.6 and Alexis fr. 224.8) also describe a typical activity of a parasite. Therefore, such connotations with *gnathos* in fourth-century comedy may have contributed to the creation of the generic name Gnathon for parasites.

Tithymallus (“Ruddy”) is another notorious parasite, so nicknamed after the homonymous plant or bush (“spurge”).⁸⁵ He is a typical intruder at dinners, without paying his contribution. This practice is associated with his complexion in Dromon fr. 1, where a character says that he is embarrassed to go and eat dinner without contributing any money, and his interlocutor answers that Tithymallus also goes from house to house redder than a pomegranate seed (ἐρυθρότερος κόκκου), because he does not contribute to dinner either. Tithymallus’ complexion, which accounts for his nickname, is now associated with his way of life and supports a joke on stage. What is surprising, however, is that the colour red, usually associated with the blush of modesty, is in Tithymallus’ case ironically applied to his impudence.

Callimedon the *Karabos*, mentioned fifteen times in the preserved comic fragments, is the most famous *opsophagos* in Middle Comedy.⁸⁶ The origin of the nickname *Karabos* is disputable.⁸⁷ According to Athenaeus (3.104d), it is due to his predilection for crayfish. Also in Euphron fr. 8, it is said that once when a womb was served to him, it made him leap about as he ate it, whence he was called Crayfish (ὄθεν ἐκλήθη Κάραβος).⁸⁸ His *opsophagia* is also stressed through a wordplay in Alexis’ *Pontikos* (fr. 198), where the speaking character declares that Carabus is eager to die not for the sake of his fatherland (πάτρα), but for a womb (μήτρα). While, however, Callimedon is the consumer of fish, a typical *opsophagos*, sometimes, through a playful use of his nickname, he himself becomes food for others. In Antiphanes, in particular, this transformation takes place in an impressive inversion, performed on stage (fr. 27.7–8):

ὦ Καλλιμέδων, σὲ κατέδετ’ ἄρτι τῶν φίλων;
οὐδεὶς ὃς ἂν μὴ κατατιθῇ τὰς συμβολάς.

Which of your friends, Callimedon, is going to gulp you down any minute now? No one who doesn’t contribute his share of the dinner expenses!

⁸⁵ Theophr. *Hist. pl.* 9.11.7, τῶν δὲ τιθυμάλων ὁ μὲν παράλιος καλούμενος κόκκινον φύλλον ἔχει περιφερές; cf. Bechtel 1898, 41; Orth 2020, 442.

⁸⁶ Cf. Sommerstein 2019.

⁸⁷ Cf. Apostolakis 2019, 215.

⁸⁸ Cf. Antiphanes fr. 77; Eubulus fr. 8; Alexis fr. 57, 49, 249; Dioxippus fr. 3.

Here the play on names takes another form: instead of calling an *opsophagos* by the name of his favourite fish, it is the fish itself which is called by the *opsophagos*' proper name. This may be an amusing innovation by Antiphanes.⁸⁹

On the other hand, ugliness is another source of mockery.⁹⁰ Bechtel believes that Callimedon was nicknamed *Karabos* due to his squint eyes.⁹¹ Squint-eyed characters on the comic stage were a particularly welcome spectacle, especially if they aspired to attract others for political or erotic reasons, like the politician Callimedon and the *amator* Strabax in Plautus' *Truculentus*.⁹² In fact Alexis, a poet with a strong inclination to linguistic humour, activates a wordplay on the squint-eyed man (fr. 117):

τῷ Καλλιμέδοντι γὰρ θεραπεύω τὰς κόρας
ἤδη τετάρτην ἡμέραν. (B.) ἦσαν κόραι
θυγατέρες αὐτῷ; (A.) τὰς μὲν οὖν τῶν ὀμμάτων,
ὅς οὐδ' ὁ Μελάμπους, ὃς μόνος τὰς Προιτίδας
ἔπαυσε μαινομένας, καταστήσειεν ἄν

(A.) I've been looking after Callimedon's pupils for three days now. (B.) You mean he had daughters? A. No — the pupils of his eyes. Not even Melampus, the only person who cured Proetus' daughters of their madness, could set them right.

The poet substitutes the nickname *Karabos* with a wordplay on the double meaning (daughters and eye pupils) of the word *korai*. In Timocles, the nickname *Karabos* is also playfully associated with his squint eyes (fr. 29):

εἴθ' ὁ Καλλιμέδων ἄφνω
ὁ Κάραβος προσήλθεν. ἐμβλέπων δ' ἐμοί,
ὥς γοῦν ἐδόκει, πρὸς ἕτερον ἄνθρωπὸν τινα
ἐλάλει· συνιείς δ' οὐδὲν εἰκότως ἐγὼ
ᾧ ἔλεγεν ἐπένευον διακενῆς. τῷ δ' ἄρα
βλέπουσι χωρὶς καὶ δοκοῦσιν αἱ κόραι

Then suddenly Callimedon the Crayfish arrived. He seemed to be looking at me, but he was talking to someone else. Naturally I understood nothing of this; but I kept nodding my head vacantly. You see, his eyes look in a different direction than they seem to.

89 Cf. Konstantakos 2000, 75. Also in Philemon fr. 43, a certain Agyrrhius (apparently Callimedon's son) addresses a crayfish which was served to him with the words "Hail, dear papa"; cf. Theophrastus fr. 4.

90 *Est etiam deformitatis et corporis vitiorum satis bella materies ad iocandum* (Cic. *De or.* 2.59.239).

91 Bechtel 1898, 23–24.

92 The squint-eyed character also appears in Old Comedy (Eupolis fr. 298.3).

The fragment comes from the play *Polypragmōn*, “Busy-body”. Callimedon, indeed, displayed some elements of a busy-body in his real political life, since he was an active supporter of the Macedonians, was involved in political trials, and also engaged in mine-enterprises. When the speaking character describes his squint-eyed stare, he may be alluding to his practice of acting for different goals at the same time, as a busy-body politician. However, it is quite uncertain whether he was the emblematic *polypragmōn* of the title. It seems more plausible that the play contains a series of episodes involving meddling persons, in which case Callimedon, the notorious *opsophagos* and squint-eye, is perhaps a fitting participant.⁹³

4.3 Courtesans and lovers

The “women most mentioned” in Classical Athens were by far the courtesans.⁹⁴ However, it is not always possible to identify them with certainty, since their original names are often hidden under professional nicknames. Athenaeus in his thirteenth book has the grammarian Myrtilus deal with these names, which mainly occur in Middle and New Comedy, as well as in fourth-century oratory. Professional nicknames were the vehicle through which courtesans were fictionalised and turned into subjects and characters on the comic stage. Thanks to the second-century grammarians who dealt with glossing the courtesans’ names — and Myrtilus represents a typical case — we are given a glimpse of these nicknames and their bearers. The problem is that this material is often decontextualised and adapted to the intellectual and literary environment of the late Classical period. On the other hand, we have many quoted comic fragments at our disposal, and in some cases it is possible to trace original techniques employed by the comic poets concerning the nomenclature of courtesans and their lovers. In this chapter I confine myself to a few typical instances in which these nicknames provide fodder for inventive jokes and plays on language in the preserved fragments of Middle Comedy.

Courtesans were often known by suggestive working names, some of which appear as comic titles: *Klepsydra*, “Water-clock” (Eubulus), *Neottis*, “Nestling, Little Bird” (Antiphanes, Anaxilas, Eubulus), *Pannychis*, “Vigil” (Eubulus, Alexis), *Kynagis*, “Huntress” (Philetaerus), *Malthakē*, “Soft” (Antiphanes), *Melitta*,

⁹³ Cf. Apostolakis 2019, 212.

⁹⁴ For naming a hetaera, cf. McClure 2003, 59–78; for courtesans in fourth-century comedy, cf. Henderson 2014, 190–194.

“Honeybee” (Antiphanes). These titles usually denote the main characteristic of the courtesan, whether she herself is the title-character of the play or another person is named after her, through a common dominant characteristic. The sympotic material provided by Athenaeus allows some speculation on the origin and function of these names. Such an instance is mentioned in *Deipnosophists* 6.245d, when the parasite Corydus asked the courtesan Gnome, “Opinion”, to contribute not money, but “whatever the people thought fit” (Γνώμην δὲ συμβάλλεσθαι ὃ τι δοκεῖ τῷ δήμῳ). Moreover, in Machon’s *Chreiae*, also preserved in Athenaeus, elaborations on hetaeras’ nicknames are a favourite subject. A telling example is the explanation of the name of the courtesan Mania by her habit of crying “Crazy!” (μανία) whenever she wanted to approve or disapprove of something (fr. 14.204–210 Gow). Such punning explanations in Athenaeus echo the Alexandrian and Second Sophistic scholars’ linguistic interest in these matters. Comic titles such as *Klepsydra* might allude (literarily or metaphorically) to the courtesan’s sexual practices, i.e. allowing her clients to have sex as long as the water clock runs (Ath. 13.567c–d). It has also been suggested that Timocles’ *Lēthē* might denote a courtesan, a name — or, more probably, a nickname — deriving from side-effects associated with sympotic activities and love affairs.⁹⁵

On the other hand, nicknames denoting plants, birds, or fishes might be facilitated and/or explained as metaphors in existing comic passages. Concerning bird-titles (e.g. *Neottis*), birds were sometimes used as metaphors for female genitals.⁹⁶ In Epicrates’ *Antilais* fr. 3.11, the hetaera Lais is described in her youth as νεοττός, “a young chick”. In Eubulus, courtesans are identified with decoy-birds, which attract other birds with their tuneful song (fr. 82, τὰς φιλωδοὺς κερμάτων παλευτρίας).⁹⁷ A different image occurs in Ephippus fr. 6, where the good courtesan kisses her lover “not with her lips squeezed together, as if he were an enemy, but instead with her mouth wide open just like baby sparrows do”. Such images might have contributed to the creation of nicknames such as Στρουθίον, “Little Sparrow”, in Lucian.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Cf. Pherecrates’ *Ἐπιλήσμων ἢ Θάλασσα* (where the title probably denotes a hetaera); and *Μνησίς*, the opposite of *Λήθη*, mentioned as a flute girl (αὐλητρίς) in Ath. 13.576f. Cf. Apostolakis 2019, 182–183.

⁹⁶ Cf. Ar. *Lys.* 770 (on χελιδών); Henderson 1991, 48.

⁹⁷ For a similar description of courtesans, cf. Amphis fr. 23, where Sinope, Lyca, and Nannion are described as παγίδες τοῦ βίου (“traps of life”).

⁹⁸ On this description of the *bona meretrix*, cf. Papachrysostomou 2021, 89. On courtesans compared with predators, cf. Epicrates fr. 3.

Love affairs, a standard theme in Middle Comedy, and relationships between courtesans and lovers in particular, are often expressed metaphorically. In Ath. 13.582e–f (attributed to Machon), the nickname Aix, “Goat”, is mentioned for the hetaera Nico, who supposedly devoured her lover Thallus, “Sapling”, and the grammarian Myrtilus explains that goats delight in saplings (θαλλῶ χαίρουσιν αἱ αἶγες). In Eubulus fr. 54, Heracles describes a love affair with the courtesan Ocimon, “Basil”, at Corinth in gastronomic terms, as a proverbial gluttonous hero: λάχανόν τι τρώγων ὤκιμον διεφθάρην, “eating an herb called Ocimon, I was destroyed”. As a result, the hero lost his tunic. Perhaps the subsequent verses explained how this love affair was associated with the loss of the tunic.⁹⁹ A plausible explanation is that this particular courtesan was very expensive.

The insatiable courtesan who consumes her lovers also appears in the context of fish-eating (*opsophagia*), in an interesting inversion of the pattern of “the *opsophagos* lover and the fish-courtesan”.¹⁰⁰ The emblematic *opsophagos* courtesan in Middle Comedy is the famous Pythionice. In Antiphanes fr. 27.22 (from *Halieuomenē*), Pythionice is mockingly said to have a taste for salt fish (ἐπὶ τὸ τάριχός ἐστιν ὠρμηκυῖα), the commodity which Chaerephilus, the father of her lovers, imported.¹⁰¹ Also in Timocles, she devours two *saperdai*, “Nile perches”, also called *skombroi*, “mackerels”, i.e. the sons of Chaerephilus. In fr. 15 she is said to be fond of salt fish (φιληδεῖν τάριχῳ), and in fr. 16 she “keeps company with two Nile-perches” (σύνεστι σαπέρδαις δυσίν), an expression with sexual connotations. In this case it is not the courtesan herself who is nicknamed after her penchant for fish, but her victims.¹⁰²

One of the most interesting couples of a profligate lover and his hetaera is mentioned in Axionicus fr. 1.

ὁ Πυθόδηλος οὔτοσι
ὁ Βαλλίων προσέρχετ' ἐπικαλούμενος
μεθύουσά τ' ἐξόπισθεν ἢ σοφωτάτη
Ἀποτυμpanισχὰς κατὰ πόδας πορεύεται

Here comes Pythodelus, whose nickname's Ballion; and behind him, drunk, the clever Apotympanschas is dogging his steps.

⁹⁹ Cf. Hunter 1983, 141.

¹⁰⁰ Courtesans nicknamed after fish: Aphyē, “Small Fry” (Anthis, Ath. 13.586b); Saperdion, “Little Fish” (Phryne, Ath. 13.567e).

¹⁰¹ Cf. Konstantakos 2000, 87–91.

¹⁰² Cf. Apostolakis 2019, 141–142.

Both the hetaera and her lover probably enter on stage at the moment of their presentation (cf. οὔτοσί, προσέρχεται), although it is not clear whether they play an important role in the play or participate in a short episode.¹⁰³ Pythodelus is nicknamed (ἐπικαλούμενος) Ballion, “Big Dick”, from βαλλίον “phallus”. This nickname became a generic name for pimps in later comedy.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, Apotympanischas is an *ad hoc* invented name for the courtesan nicknamed Ischas.¹⁰⁵ This seems an appropriate nickname for a courtesan, since ἰσχάς, “dry fig”, indicates the female genitals.¹⁰⁶ Although it is not attested in this sense in Attic Comedy until Axionicus, it already appears in Hipponax (fr. 124 West), in a description of cunnilingus. If this allusion is accepted, it is interesting that both the profligate *amator* and the drunkard courtesan are nicknamed here after their genitalia. On the other hand, it is not clear why Ischas is associated with a particular method of execution, crucifixion on a plank (*tympanon* or *apotympanismos*). Perhaps, according to the speaking character, she deserves such torture for the damage she causes her lovers.

Courtesans and lovers also appear in paraepic and paratragic contexts. In Anaxilas fr. 22, whether the *persona loquens* is a young lover or a father or old friend who warns the young man about courtesans’ greed and infidelity, well-known nicknamed courtesans are called a “criminal bunch” (κατάπτυστον γένος) and compared with mythical monsters: Chimaera, Charybdis, Scylla, Sphinx, Hydra, and Siren.¹⁰⁷ This long collective type of invective, which addresses a specific group of men or women, here the courtesans, derives from Euripides. There are also indications of an intertextual dialogue with epic and tragic poetry.¹⁰⁸ In fact, this type of comparison leads in some cases to a third level of qualification. The poet takes established nicknamed courtesans of the time and further elaborates their characteristics by associating them with

103 For a full analysis of the scene, cf. Orth 2020, 169–174.

104 Cf. Plautus, *Pseudolus* and Cicero, *Pro Roscio* 20, *Ballionem illum improbissimum et per-iurissimum lenonem*.

105 Cf. Menander, *Colax* fr. 4.1; perhaps it is the same person as that mentioned in Axionicus; cf. Orth 2020, 173.

106 Henderson 2014, 118.

107 See the analysis of Tartaglia 2019, 120–156. For such corresponding parallel lists as material for comic accumulation, cf. Ar. Av. 565–569, 760–767, 1136–1157; Timocles fr. 6; Anaxippus fr. 1.28–49; see Konstantakos 2000, 71.

108 Chimaera: Hom. *Il.* 16.328–329; Sphinx: Eur. *Phoen.* 806–811; Clytaemnestra as Scylla: Aesch. Ag. 1231–1236; as a viper: Cho. 246–249; Medea as a lioness and Scylla: Eur. *Med.* 1342; cf. Tartaglia 2019, 125. Also Stuligrosz (2017, 17–27) discusses the reworking of mythical motifs and characters from Homer and their adaptation to everyday situations.

mythical figures. Eleven courtesans are also paratragically described as Furies in Timocles' *Orestautokleidēs* fr. 27, probably because Autocleides, being a pederast, has usurped their privileges. Courtesans are given real names (Pythionice), nicknames (Lopadion), and generic or common names (Plangon, Lyca, Myrrhine, Chrysis).¹⁰⁹

5 Conclusion

The poets of Middle Comedy often play with proper names, nicknames, and accompanying epithets. In the preserved fragments, characters bearing historical names sometimes appear in the frame of personal satire and are often compared with mythical figures, in order to highlight their true character. Invented speaking names of the Aristophanic type and relevant wordplay also appear in Middle Comedy, but less frequently. Moreover, the poets of Middle Comedy show a notable inventiveness in adapting traditional epithets or transforming them into new-coined ones in order to describe their characters, most often in parodic passages. Antiphanes, Alexis, and Timocles are poets with a tendency to employ wordplay in connection with names, and show a notable versatility in creating innovative epithets which aid the comic subversion of a seemingly serious situation.

On the other hand, it seems likely that some techniques characteristic of the comic language of New and Roman Comedy can already be traced in Middle Comedy. More specifically, parasites, courtesans, and gourmands are mainly presented on stage or mentioned with their established nicknames which, however, still offer an opportunity for comic exploitation. They are often further elaborated through wordplay and metaphorical language, and in a sense they anticipate the generic names of the stereotypical characters of New Comedy. Finally, as far as the fragmentary status of Middle Comedy allows us to say, nomenclature in Middle Comedy is a combination of Aristophanic "Cratylism" and the "Hermogenean" stance of Menander. It includes both earlier comic elements and innovative amplifications, and prepares the way for New Comedy, where the comic characters acquire typical names and nicknames in the same way as type-masks.

¹⁰⁹ Plangon and Myrrhine are also names of free women. Cf. Apostolakis 2019, 204.

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