

## THE STRUCTURE OF ARISTOPHANIC COMEDY

### I. INTRODUCTORY\*

THE structure which is generally taken to underlie the composition of the plays of Aristophanes is made up of a number of quantitative parts which have been abstracted by dividing the comedies into broad sections. It roughly corresponds to the quantitative division of tragedy offered by the twelfth chapter of Aristotle's *Poetics* (*viz.* prologue, episode, *exodos*, *chorikon* or choral song, the last-named subdivided into *parodos* and *stasimon*), and includes prologue, *parodos*, 'proagon' or 'battle scene,' 'epirrhematic *agon*,' *parabasis*, iambic scenes, choral songs or *stasima*, *exodos*.

This division is not ancient, although for the comic prologue and *parodos* we have the authority of Aristotle,<sup>1</sup> and of course the practice of *parabainein* is referred to by the comic poets themselves,<sup>2</sup> while the terminology associated with the *parabasis* and its seven-part subdivision goes back to sources of respectable antiquity (Heliodoros, Hephaestion, etc.).<sup>3</sup> The rest of the terms have been taken over from the *Poetics*<sup>4</sup> or have been coined by modern scholars. In fact, the recognition of the complex symmetrical elements of the *proagon* and epirrhematic *agon*, which do not seem to have been noticed in antiquity, is no small achievement of modern scholarship.<sup>5</sup>

The idea that the study of the traditional elements of comedy, whether 'Bauformen' or 'stock characters,' could lead to the discovery of its ritual origins was from the beginning, and has always been, entertained by most students of the genre, although the emphasis shifted at times from history to dramatic technique and vice versa.<sup>6</sup> I wonder, though, whether the discussion of the quantitative parts of comedy may not have reached a point of exhaustion or, in any case, a point where it should merge with the analysis of the qualitative (in Aristotle's sense), organic,

\* I should like to acknowledge here the valuable help given to me by Hans-Joachim Newiger, Michael Silk, and Alan Sommerstein, who were kind enough to read this paper and offer their comments and constructive criticism; my thanks also go to the anonymous referee of the *Journal*. Needless to add that they do not share all my views, and have no responsibility for my mistakes.

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle mentions but does not define these terms in relation to comedy, *Poet.* 1449b 4, *Rhet.* 1415a 9-22, and *EN* iv. 2, 1123a 23.

<sup>2</sup> Using various forms of the verb: Ar. *Ach.* 629, *Eq.* 508, *Pax* 735, *Thesm.* 785; Platon, *fr.* 92 Kock.

<sup>3</sup> Hephaestion (p. 72) Consbruch; Heliodoros survives in metrical scholia to Aristophanes: *Ach.* 626, 659, *Eq.* 498, 503, *Nu.* 518, 1115, *Vesp.* 1009, *Pax* 733, *Av.* 1058, *Ran.* 675, 686, reproduced by J. W. White, *The verse of Greek comedy* (London 1912) 397-421 (White on Heliodoros, 384-395); cf. Pollux, iv 111; Platonios, p. 4 Kaibel; Plutarch, *Mor.* 711f.

<sup>4</sup> The *Tractatus Coislinianus* already mentions prologue, *chorikon*, episode, *exodos* (xvii, p. 40 Janko); episode is defined by Suidas (E 2144 Adler), and other lexica (*Et.M.* 356. 28; Bekker, *Anecd. Gr.* i. 253, 19) as 'what is added to the play for the sake of laughter, being outside the plot,' and by Suidas (E 2143) and *Et.M.* 356. 34, as 'what is introduced to the plays as an addition and an expansion of the play.' This recalls what Aristotle says about *epeisodiodes* at *Poet.* 1451b 33-34, and episode at 1455b 23, but the definition is hardly Aristotelian for that.

<sup>5</sup> First observed by R. Westphal (A. Roszbach and R. Westphal, *Metrik der Griechen im Vereine mit den übrigen musischen Künsten*, ii: *Griechische Metrik* [Leipzig 1868] 401 ff.), the epirrhematic *agon* was extensively treated by T. Zieliński in his book on *Die Gliederung der altattischen Komödie* (Leipzig 1885), which justly became the foundation of all subsequent work on the 'Bauformen' of Old Comedy.

<sup>6</sup> Any bibliographical selection here, however limited, would be far too long to be contained in a footnote. I can do no better than refer to Newiger's bibliography in *Aristophanes und die alte Komödie*, (Darmstadt 1975). A. C. Quicke's unpublished thesis, *Aristophanes and Athenian Old Comedy. A survey and bibliography of twentieth-century criticism, with an essay on the current state of bibliography in classical studies*, submitted for the Fellowship of the Library Association, 1984, consists of 533 pages and lists 2398 items, with a brief and usually very clear summary of their contents (it is available for consultation in the Institute of Classical Studies, London).

constitutive elements of the genre.<sup>7</sup>

I have tried to present a method of analysis of Aristophanes' plays as dependent on a system (or better a set of interrelated subsystems) of conventions, governing both the composition and the stage production of the plays, in a paper on theatre conventions and the poetics of Old Comedy.<sup>8</sup> What I propose to do here is to use that method in trying to identify what could be called the 'genre narrative structure' of Old Comedy, as it can be extracted from the surviving plays of Aristophanes.

## II. GENRE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AND 'UNIVERSAL LOGOS'

By genre narrative structure I mean a typical sequence of actions that make up a story pattern underlying all specimens of the genre in question; an elemental ground-plan on which the plots of individual plays are constructed. To isolate this story pattern, I have used as a model Aristotle's advice<sup>9</sup> regarding the way a poet 'should first simplify and reduce to a universal form' (ἐκτίθεσθαι καθόλου) his story (λόγος), 'whether already made [i.e. being a traditional one] or of his own making' (*Poet.* 1455a 34–b 1, Bywater's translation), before arranging it into episodes and giving it the proper length (ἐπεισοδιοῦν καὶ παρατείνειν, *Poet.* 1455b 1; Bywater's translation of this phrase, 'before proceeding to lengthen it out by the insertion of episodes,' does not seem very successful).

Aristotle gives two examples of such generalizing summaries, which it will be convenient to quote here: 'The following will show how the universal element in *Iphigenia*, for instance, may be viewed: a certain maiden having been offered in sacrifice, and spirited away from her sacrificers into another land, where the custom was to sacrifice all strangers to the Goddess, she was made priestess of this rite. Long after that the brother of the priestess happened to come; the fact, however, of the oracle having bidden him go there, and his object in going, are outside the plot of the play. On his coming he was arrested, and about to be sacrificed, when he revealed who he was—either as Euripides puts it, or (as suggested by Polyidus) by the not improbable exclamation, "So I too am doomed to be sacrificed, as my sister was"; and the disclosure led to his salvation. This done, the next thing, after the proper names have been fixed as a basis for the story, is to turn it into episodes' (*Poet.* 1455b 2–13, Bywater's translation).

Aristotle's second example is the argument (*logos*) of the *Odyssey* which, as he says, 'is not a long one. A certain man has been abroad many years; Poseidon is ever on the watch for him, and he is all alone. Matters at home too have come to this, that his substance is being wasted and his son's death plotted by the suitors to his wife. Then he arrives there himself after his grievous sufferings; reveals himself, and falls on his enemies; and the end is his salvation and their death. This being all that is proper to the *Odyssey*, everything else in it is episode' (*Poet.* 1455b 17–23, Bywater's translation).

Following these examples, I first tried to 'simplify and reduce to a universal form' the story line of each Aristophanic comedy. Then I divided each of the resultant short, narrative, paraphrases into sections corresponding to the actions of the main characters in each story.

The pioneering work in this kind of analysis of a text into a sequence of actions, or

<sup>7</sup> I should like to mention in this connexion M. Landfester's study on *Handlungsverlauf und Komik in den frühen Komödien des Aristophanes* (Berlin 1977), and A. H. Sommerstein's felicitous concept of 'functional structure' of Aristophanic comedy, which was put forward in the introduction to his edition of *Acharnians* ([1980] 11–13) and anticipates the sequence of 'functions' discussed in this paper.

<sup>8</sup> 'Towards a modern poetics of Athenian Old Comedy,' *Métis*, iii (1988), 53–67.

<sup>9</sup> Perhaps I should not fail to declare at the outset my allegiance to Aristotle, both as a historian and a theoretician of drama. I believe that only when we have made every effort to understand the implications of what he says about poetry and drama (not only in the *Poetics*) should we introduce our own conjectures and theorizing.

'functions' of the 'actors' (the bearers of the action, so to say) involved in a story, is the *Morphology of the folktale* by the Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp, which was published in 1928 but became widely known in the West only after its translation into English in 1958.<sup>10</sup> Since then, Propp's study has exercised an enormous influence not only on the study of various forms of folk and traditional narrative literature but also on the study of narrative technique in general.

### III. THE MORPHOLOGY OF NARRATIVE AND PROPP'S 'FUNCTIONS'

Propp defines morphology (a term he borrowed from Goethe's biological works) as the study of forms. 'In botany,' he writes in his Foreword, 'the term "morphology" means the study of the component parts of a plant, of their relationship to each other and to the whole—in other words, the study of a plant's structure' (xxv).<sup>11</sup> Inorganic substances like minerals, as well as plants and animals, are described and classified according to their structure (13). It was also possible, Propp declared with youthful enthusiasm, to make an examination of the forms of the tale which could be 'as exact as the morphology of organic formations' (xxv).

As Propp was to write many years later, in his 1966 rejoinder to C. Lévi-Strauss' critique of his method,<sup>12</sup> his analysis originated in the observation that in miraculous tales different characters performed 'identical actions:'

In a series of wondertales about the persecuted stepdaughter I noted an interesting fact: in 'Morozko' [Frost]... the stepmother sends her stepdaughter into the woods to Morozko. He tries to freeze her to death, but she speaks to him so sweetly and so humbly that he spares her, gives her a reward, and lets her go. The old woman's daughter, however, fails the test and perishes. In another tale, the stepdaughter encounters not Morozko but a *lesij* [a wood goblin], in still another, a bear. But surely it is the same tale! Morozko, the *lesij*, and the bear test the stepdaughter and reward her each in his own way, but the plot does not change. Was it possible that no one should ever have noticed this before? Why did Afanas'ev and others think that they were dealing with different tales? It is obvious that Morozko, the *lesij*, and the bear performed the same action. To Afanas'ev these were different tales because of different characters in them. To me they were identical because the actions of the characters were the same. The idea seemed interesting, and I began to examine other wondertales from the point of view of the actions performed by the characters. As a result of studying the material..., I devised a very simple method of analyzing wondertales in accordance with the characters' actions—regardless of their concrete form. To designate these actions I adopted the term 'functions.' My observations of the tale of the persecuted stepdaughter allowed me to get hold of the end of the thread and unravel the entire spool. It turned out that the other plots *were also based on the recurrence of functions and that all wondertale plots consisted of identical functions and had identical structure* (emphasis mine).<sup>13</sup>

Function, then, according to Propp's definition, 'is understood as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action' (*Morphology*, 21).

<sup>10</sup> 1st ed. trans. by L. Scott (1958), 2nd ed. rev. by L. A. Wagner, with an introduction by A. Dundes, (Austin 1968). Propp's book has now been translated into eleven European languages and Japanese.

<sup>11</sup> A modern definition of morphology as a branch of biological sciences can be found in *Encycl. Britannica* (15th ed., vol. 11, s.v.): 'Morphology is a term used in biology for the study not only of shape and structure in plants, animals, and microorganisms but also of the size, structure, and relationships of their parts. The term morphology connotes the general aspects of biological form and arrangement of the parts of a plant or an animal.'

<sup>12</sup> 'La structure et la forme. Reflexions sur un ouvrage de Vladimir Propp,' *Cahiers de l'Institut de Science Économique Appliquée*, série M, vii (1960) 1–36, reprinted in the author's *Anthropologie structurale*, ii (Paris 1973) and its English translation, *Structural anthropology*, ii (New York, 1976).

<sup>13</sup> Propp's reply was written at the instigation of the publisher of *Morphology's* Italian translation (1966). The quotation is from the English translation of this text, published in V. Propp, *Theory and history of folklore*, trans. Martin and Martin, ed. A. Liberman (Minneapolis 1984) 69–70.

The functions of characters are 'constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled;' they 'constitute the fundamental components of a tale;' and their number is limited (21). The characters and circumstances of the tales are variable elements, and their number and variety extremely large. This explains the two-fold quality of the folktale, 'its amazing multiformity, picturesqueness, and color, and, on the other hand, its no less striking uniformity, its repetition' (21).

One more quotation from Propp's reply to Lévi-Strauss will clarify the character of the function as an abstract, structural unit, as opposed to concrete actions in specific tales:

If the hero leaves home in quest of something, and the object of his desires is far away, he can reach it by magic horse, eagle, flying carpet, flying ship, astride the devil, etc. I will not enumerate all the possibilities. It will be easily seen that in each case we are dealing with the transfer of the hero to the place where the object of his search is located, but that the forms in which the transfer is realized are different. We have both constants and variables. Let us take another example. The princess does not wish to marry, or her father does not want her to marry a suitor he or she dislikes. The suitor is required to perform impossible tasks: to jump to her window on horseback, bathe in a cauldron of boiling water, solve the princess's riddle, procure a golden hair from the sea king, etc. To the uninitiated listener all these variants seem completely different, and in a way he is right. But to the sophisticated scholar this diversity conceals a logically determinable unity... If the hero jumps to the princess's window on horseback, we do not have the function of jumping on horseback (such a definition would be accurate only if we disregarded the advance of the narrative as a whole) but *the function of performing a difficult task as part of courtship*. Likewise, if an eagle takes the hero to the country of the princess, we do not have the function of flying on a bird but one of *transfer to the place where the object of the search is located*.<sup>14</sup>

Propp based his analysis on the study of one hundred folktales, taken at random from the great collection of Russian folktales by A.N. Afanas'ev, *Naródnje rússkie skázki* ([1855-66] 6th ed. Moscow, 1957), and isolated a syntagmatic, or linear, order of 31 functions, including 'absentation,' 'interdiction,' 'violation,' 'reconnaissance,' 'delivery,' 'trickery,' 'complicity,' 'villainy,' (or 'lack'), 'mediation,' 'beginning counteraction,' 'departure,' 'first function of the donor,' 'the hero's reaction,' 'provision or receipt of a magical agent,' 'spatial transference between two kingdoms / guidance,' 'struggle,' 'branding / marking,' 'victory,' 'liquidation of the initial lack or misfortune,' 'return,' 'pursuit,' (or 'chase'), 'rescue,' 'unrecognized arrival,' 'unfounded claims,' 'difficult task,' 'solution,' 'recognition,' 'exposure,' 'transfiguration,' 'punishment,' 'wedding.' Although not all functions occur in every tale (this is rather uncommon), their order is fixed and always the same: 'Freedom within this sequence [of functions] is restricted by very narrow limits which can be exactly formulated' (Propp, *Morphology*, 22). So if a tale ends with the liquidation of misfortune (no. 19) and return of the hero (no. 20), or with his rescue from pursuit (no. 22), it will not have the remaining functions of the series. Or when no. 31, wedding, occurs, it always comes at the end, while several members of the abstract series may be absent between wedding and the function that precedes it in many a tale; and so forth.

Propp grouped the functions into seven 'spheres of action,' corresponding with an equal number of 'roles,' but also made the crucial observation that the same characters may take up and fulfil functions of different roles, and that the reverse can also happen, that is, a single sphere of action or role can be distributed among several characters (*Morphology*, 80-81). The significance of this observation, and of the concept of role as opposed to a specific character, is that they demonstrate the precedence and supremacy of plot over characters in traditional tales (and in literary works based on them, cf. Aristotle, *Poet.* 1450a 15-30, 38).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74.

## IV. NARRATIVE STRUCTURE DISTINGUISHED FROM DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

Propp has had a long line of followers, critics, and continuators (in America, France, and elsewhere) who have applied similar kinds of analysis to a variety of materials, and have tried to improve on his method mainly by reducing the number of functions and arranging them into various structural models, in the hope to discover what one of them, Claude Bremond, has called 'logic of narrative.'<sup>15</sup> Valuable though much of this literature is, it does not concern me here.<sup>16</sup> But I do have to state clearly where my analysis of Aristophanic plays diverges from Propp and why.

There is certainly one significant difference, namely my preliminary operation of simplifying and reducing the dramatic plots to what Aristotle calls 'a universal form.' What this amounts to is turning a dramatic plot into an elemental narrative form, a *logos* or argument revealing the bare bones of the story, its skeletal system, so to speak. (Aristotle suggests that expressing the argument of a play in generalizing terms, or universal form, is the first step to be taken by a poet in composing his play; but in his discussion of the stages of composition he, also, had to move backwards and extract the arguments he used as examples—quoted earlier—from the respective finished works.) Now Propp worked with the texts of the folktales themselves, which of course are straightforward narratives; and although the way he refers to them implies that he too had to do a lot of summarizing—if only to be able to discuss and refer to his material—he did not aim at inserting an intermediate level of abstraction between the specific tales and the abstract, universal, sequence of functions. (As a result, his linear scheme of functions is too long and rigid, so he had to allow for several exceptions, variations, and equivalences, for which he was criticized.<sup>17</sup>)

However, dramas cannot be analysed as narratives unless they are translated into some kind of narrative form—which means that the resultant analysis will not reveal their dramatic structure but only the latter's narrative foundations. After all, drama is a 'mimetic' art (in the Aristotelian sense) that presents a story to an audience, although its manner of presentation, or *re-presentation* or *re-enacting*, differentiates it sharply from other kinds of narrative.<sup>18</sup> But as long as it communicates a story to an audience, drama partakes of the narrative, *is* a kind of narrative in a broad sense. And as such it has a narrative structure—or perhaps a narrative substructure, underlying its proper, dramatic, structure.<sup>19</sup> The latter is much more complex than the former, involves stage, movement, dancing, music, and several other elements of composition and theatre production, and requires an altogether more sophisticated set of tools to describe and analyse properly.

On the other hand, narrative structure is generally easier to study than dramatic structure, if only because the subject of analysis—a given text or body of texts—is more graspable and

<sup>15</sup> *Logique du récit* (Paris 1973).

<sup>16</sup> Reference must be made here to E. M. Meletinskij's study, 'L'étude structurale et typologique du conte,' published in V. Propp, *Morphologie du conte* (Paris 1970) and, in English, in *Genre iv* (1971) 249–279 (originally, a supplement to the second Russian edition of *Morphology* [1969]). Also, very useful is Liberman's Introduction to Propp's *Theory...* (see n. 13). Among recent contributors to the study of ancient mythology, W. Burkert has made good use of Propp's analytical principles in his *Structure and history in Greek mythology* (Berkeley 1979).

<sup>17</sup> Strangely, most of Propp's critics and successors tried to simplify his scheme and make it more abstract rather than discover variations or different function patterns, which might have been a more productive line of research.

<sup>18</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 392d ff., Aristotle, *Poet.* 1447a 16 ff.

<sup>19</sup> It may be useful to recall in this connexion that translation from narrative to drama has been extremely common throughout the history of dramatic art, from Greek tragedy to modern cinema and TV dramas (most often based on modern novels, short stories, old tales, etc.). The opposite is also true, though much less common, witness Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* or Brecht's *Threepenny novel*. The affinity of tale and drama is already highlighted by Plato's calling Homer the first of tragic poets (*Rep.* 607a).

definite than the elusive dramatic performance. The narrative understructure of a dramatic genre like Old Comedy, embedded though it may be deeply in the dramatic structure, ought to be even easier to handle, once it is isolated, because such other aspects of *mimesis* as characterization (*ethos*), diction (*lexis*), movement in space, time development, and points of view, do not have to be taken in at the same time since they all actually belong to, and should better be dealt with as parts of, the dramatic structure. Therefore, my preliminary reduction of the plot of individual plays to a short, universalizing, narrative paraphrase aims at isolating the actions making up a story—so that a direct comparison of their sequence might be possible—and at projecting similar actions to the more abstract and more general level of functions, the sequence of which constitutes the typical narrative structure of the genre. For the operation of segmenting the story into units of action, of determining the significance of these actions in relation to each other and to the advance of the narrative as a whole, and finally of discerning their similarities as functions of the *dramatis personae* (also seen at this stage not as characters of individual plays but as equally universal bearers of the functions, or ‘roles’), Propp’s method is invaluable.

One possible objection to the application of a method originally developed for the study of anonymous, traditional, tales to the study of the works of a great poet should be forestalled here. Propp, writing in 1966 (at the time, that is, that the movement of structuralist literary analysis was gathering a forceful momentum in the Soviet Union, France, and elsewhere), was fully aware of the strengths and limitations of his method: ‘The methods proposed in my [*Morphology*] book before the appearance of structuralism, as well as the methods of the structuralists who aim at the objective study of literature, ...are possible and profitable *where recurrence is the norm, as in language and folklore*. But when art becomes the product of a unique genius, the use of exact methods will yield positive results only *if the study of recurring elements goes hand in hand with the study of the unique, which to us is simply a miracle*’ (my emphasis).<sup>20</sup>

That there are many recurring, typical, elements in the plays of Aristophanes needs no demonstration. Tradition and innovation are familiar concepts in classical scholarship with reference to Greek literature. In fact, these two strains can be seen to interact and interlace in varying proportions in all phases and genres of Greek literature (and art), from its earliest epic beginnings down to the end of antiquity. But to disentangle and isolate the personal from the traditional, or *vice versa*, is far from easy—though of utmost importance for the study of the *poietike* (poetics as the art of making), as well as for the study of the history of literature.

## V. THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF OLD COMEDY

I shall now proceed to present the results of my analysis of the plays. In the Table of Functions (pp. 140-2) the argument of each play is shown to be divisible into sections, arranged into a syntagmatic,<sup>21</sup> horizontal, order. The plays follow each other chronologically, and sections corresponding to similar actions—similar, it should be recalled, with regard to the unfolding of the story as a whole—appear one below (or above) the other, in vertical, ‘paradigmatic,’ columns. Sadly, the horizontal sequences number only eleven, as many, that is, as the surviving plays of Aristophanes. The vertical columns are eight, and correspond to the functions of comedy, as I have been able to identify them. The Table thus represents a paradigmatic plane, on which each horizontal course corresponds to the story of a play divided into discrete actions, while each vertical column shows the variant actions of each function. The functions are named, or briefly described, at the top of each column, and their sequence forms

<sup>20</sup> *Theory and history of folklore*, 81.

<sup>21</sup> The term syntagmatic is used here in both its linguistic and archaeological senses (a linear order of independent forms standing in relation to each other).

what I have called the 'genre narrative structure' of Old Comedy. And, as the arguments of the plays represent already a first level of abstraction, the scheme of functions extracted from them represents a second level of abstraction.

The comic functions, then, numbered 1 to 8, are as follows:

1. *Villainy, or lack, or misfortune.* Comedy, like the miraculous tale, always takes its rise from an initial villainy,<sup>22</sup> or lack, or misfortune, afflicting one or more persons, or even a large group of people. Examples of villainy are the tyranny of the new household manager over other slaves in *Eq.*, or the reckless spending by the son of the countryman in *Nu.* Examples of misfortune are represented by the countryman's distress over the war in *Pax*, or the exasperation of women over the men's war in *Lys.* Lack is exemplified well by Dionysus' need for a good poet in *Ran.*

Villainy is a function properly speaking, and not only the persons affected by it but, usually, also the persons who perpetrate it are characters in the respective stories and the plays based on them. But misfortune or lack, viewed as they are from the sufferer's point of view, are conditions, and their causes cannot always be referred to specific villainous actions. The persons affected by (or being aware of) them are of course characters of the stories; but those who are responsible for, or have caused, some misfortune may or may not appear in them.

'Villains' or quasi-villains (i.e. villainy doers in a technical sense, not doers of evil in a moral sense), or persons who are wholly or partially the cause of the misfortune or discomfort of others, are the new household manager in *Eq.*, the extravagant son in *Nu.*, the father addicted to jury service in *Vesp.*, War personified in *Pax*, the womenfolk in *Thesm.*, Euripides in *Ran.*, Wealth in *Pl.* On the other hand, token villains, as it were, like the Herald or Lamakhos in *Ach.*, or the weapon makers in *Pax*, are minor characters of the plays, reflecting the cause of misfortune but hardly responsible for it. Therefore, they do not occur at the level of the general argument of the story (because they are not bearers of functions) but only at the lower, specific, level of individual plays.

2. *Decision / plan to counteract misfortune.* This is the function in which comedy shows its strong affinity with folktales (more about this later on). For in deciding to do something about the difficult or unfortunate situation in which they are, the bearers of this function know no limit of imagination, and usually embark on a wondrous course of action. Scholars often speak of brilliant, revolutionary, or grandiose, ideas or ambitions of the comic heroes, but such descriptions are hardly applicable once it is granted that the characters of the comic tales do not have to obey the laws of time, space, and causation, of ordinary, everyday, life. In fact, they sometimes begin their action without a definite plan and have recourse to oracles (*Eq.*, *Pl.*). In other instances, they have only a vague idea of what they should do and seek advice (*Av.*), and plans often have to be modified in accordance with the circumstances encountered (*Nu.*, *Pax*, *Av.*, *Thesm.*, *Pl.*).

3. *Service or help of a supernatural or quasi-magical helper is obtained.* This is another obligatory function of the folktale, which is better discussed here with reference to specific characters of the plays. In *Ach.* Dikaiopolis obtains the services of Amphytheos (God-descended-on-either-side), who claims to be immortal and a descendant of Demeter and Triptolemos (47); he also claims to be the only person authorized by the gods to make peace with the Spartans (52), and indeed makes good his claim by securing a private treaty between Sparta and

<sup>22</sup> In naming the functions of comedy I have tried to keep as close as possible to Propp's terminology. 'Villainy,' of course, in relation to comedy should be taken with a grain of salt; but being an active term it is usefully differentiated from 'lack' and 'misfortune' (or 'predicament,' suggested to me by Sommerstein), which are passive.

Dikaiopolis. The Sausage-seller in *Eq.* appears in the nick of time, as if by divine intervention, to assume the task of fighting against the Paphlagonian. Although he was unaware of the oracle which he was seen to fit, and defeats the Paphlagonian in his own game, he is able later on to restore Demos' former beauty by boiling him down (1321). Socrates in *Nu.* has the extraordinary power to conjure up the Clouds for the sake of Strepsiades (266 ff.). Animal helpers (very common in folktales) include the giant-beetle in *Pax* and the two black birds at the beginning of *Av.*; moreover, Epops also acts as a helper later in *Av.* Herakles gives information to Dionysus at the beginning of *Ran.* and Apollo's oracle has advised Khremylos when *Pl.* begins. This function is absent in *Vesp.*, *Lys.*, and *Eccl.*, while a purely human helper, without any extraordinary power (and hence in the end ineffective), steps in to take up the role of the seeker-hero in *Thesm.*, viz. Euripides' relative, supplied with equipment for his disguise as a woman by Agathon, an unwilling helper himself.

In the folktale, Propp distinguished the character he called 'donor' (or 'provider') from the helper, the former providing the hero with a 'magical agent,' the latter effecting the spatial transference of the hero, and often (and most important) the liquidation of misfortune or lack. I am not following Propp here chiefly because no clear case of a donor in his exact sense is found in the extant plays of Aristophanes, but also because I should like to keep things as simple as possible. Yet, there is a difference, say, between Euripides and Amphyteos in *Ach.*, or Agathon and 'Mnesilokhos' in *Thesm.*, or Herakles and Charon in *Ran.*, in that the second person in each pair gives the seeker some actual help—and so he is a helper proper—whereas the others do not get involved in his quest but provide him with information or some useful objects. So they are more like the donors of the folktale—Euripides in particular, in that he willy-nilly (like many a folktale donor) provides Dikaiopolis with a quasi-magical agent, the rags of Telephos.

4. *Transference.* In seeking to rectify their misfortune, or the misfortune of others, several persons in the comic stories have to move from one place to another, cover long distances, or even be transferred to a different world, in order to reach the place where the object they desire to obtain is situated, or where they have to fight for their objective.<sup>23</sup> The helpers point the way (*Ran.*, *Pl.*), act as guides or transferers (*Pax*, *Av.*, Charon in *Ran.*), or even go by themselves on behalf of someone else who has secured their services to help him out of his difficult situation (special envoy dispatched to enemy country in *Ach.*, disguised man sent to women's festival in *Thesm.*).

5. *Opposition or obstacles to be overcome.* No interesting tale of any kind (and certainly no narrative type as such) has ever been known to be without a fight or without difficulties and obstacles, which have to be faced and overcome before matters are allowed to rest. In point of fact, all previous functions seem to prepare and lead up to this and the next two functions, in which the main issues of the story are contested and resolved. Opposition to the plan decided upon in function 2, developing into a proper struggle, in which a fighter defending his, or somebody else's cause, faces his opponent(s), occurs in *Ach.*, *Eq.*, *Vesp.*, *Av.*, *Lys.* (and *Eccl.*, if speaking in the assembly amidst the jeers of one's opponents and the shouts of one's own supporters can qualify as a form of fight). In *Pax*, violence against a young girl has taken place in a classic fashion (Peace, like a princess in myth or folktale has been handed over to an ogre, War), and more violence and destruction is threatened but, although Peace's seeker arrives in heaven on a winged steed of sorts, he cannot possibly engage in direct combat with War

<sup>23</sup> 'Popular fiction is fond of far away places; and fifth-century Greek comedy is no exception. *Birds*, *Thesm.*, *Frogs*, *Plut.*, all begin with two people going somewhere,' E. W. Handley in *The Cambridge history of classical literature* i (1985) 379.



himself. However, he cleverly revises his initial plan, secures effective help, and in the end frees Peace. In *Thesm.*, the ineffective defender of the poet's cause is unsuccessful and falls into the hands of the opposition. This situation, unique in the surviving plays, has repercussions in the following functions, as we shall see. In *Nu.* too the old countryman does not succeed in learning the art of making the worse appear the better cause because of his own incapability. In *Ran.*, Dionysus succeeds in going through a series of hardships and humiliations during his trip to the underworld, and for some time after his arrival there. Finally, in *Pl.* the countryman succeeds in having Wealth cured despite the latter's objections and Poverty's intervention.

The chief bearer of this function is the seeker-hero who has to fight or overcome some opposition, unless this task is taken over by his helper (*Eq.*, *Thesm.*). More often than not, the opponent of the seeker or helper is the initial villain (Paphlagonian in *Eq.*, War in *Pax*, Men in *Lys.*, Women in *Thesm.*, Men in *Eccl.*; also Wealth, whose blindness is indirectly the cause of misfortune, in *Pl.*); or the quasi-villain's allies (the Jurors in *Vesp.*), or even the seeker's own colleagues (*Ach.*). In *Av.* the opponent (the Birds) is related neither to the cause of misfortune nor to the seeker.

6. *Persuasion exercised in debate.* This part of the narrative structure we have been examining so far corresponds to the epirrhetic *agon*, which actually belongs, and should be examined with reference to, the dramatic structure (this is why its metrical symmetry and formal properties have always been considered so important). In the context of the sequence of functions at the level of the narrative structure of comedy, this function represents the last stage in the efforts to bring about the fulfilment of the plan (function 2). The passage from struggle and violence to the use of persuasion, even though the debaters may exchange threats and jeers and generally be not very polite (e.g. *Eq.*, *Ran.*), is very characteristic of comedy and uncharacteristic of the folktale, although debates are not unknown in other forms of folklore.

The bearers of this function, the debaters, may be the same persons, or groups, as the bearers of the preceding one (*Ach.*, *Eq.*, *Av.*), or their representatives (*Lys.*, *Eccl.*). In *Vesp.* the seeker (Bdelykleon) argues with the original villain (Philokleon), whose reform is the object of the seeker's quest. In *Pl.* the seeker has to face a new opponent in debate (Poverty), in *Pax* it is a helper (Hermes) who has to be convinced by the seeker not to oppose but participate in the quest, while in *Nu.* and *Ran.* it is the seeker himself who must be convinced by the debaters: in the former, the debaters are two surrogates (Just and Unjust Reason) of the helper (Socrates), trying to win over the villain-turned-seeker; in *Ran.* the person that has been the cause of misfortune, who is also the sought-for subject, contests with another person who replaces him as the subject of the seeker's quest. When the seeker is one of the debaters—which is usual—he always succeeds in winning over his opponent (*Ach.*, *Vesp.*, *Pax*, *Av.*, *Eccl.*) or in neutralizing his opposition (*Lys.*, *Pl.*). The helper, when turned seeker, also succeeds in neutralizing the villain (*Eq.*), although he succumbs to the persuasion of the seeker (*Pax*). The villain is defeated or won over by the seeker (*Eq.*, *Vesp.*, *Eccl.*, *Pl.*).

7. *Liquidation of villainy or misfortune.* Although the matter at issue is by and large settled in the preceding function, this is a distinct stage in the development of the story, in which the liquidation of the original villainy or misfortune is actually achieved, while its (often far reaching) consequences for all parties concerned are anticipated or begin to take effect, leading up to the next and conclusive stage of the story. In *Pax*, this function incorporates the return of the countryman from heaven to his country, to which he brings Peace. In *Nu.* the liquidation of misfortune is illusory, and thus a negative one, as the old man is soon to find himself in a

situation far worse than before.<sup>24</sup> *Thesm.* lacks the previous function and, as the poet's helper has fallen into the hands of the villain (Women), the only way for the poet to liquidate the danger threatening him is to make a deal with the Women; but this is at best a compromise, so the play has no triumphant party and lacks the last function also.

This function often entails that a sought-for person is found or redeemed, whether being initially a victim of the villain (Demos in *Eq.*, Peace in *Pax*), or the villain himself, who is thus reformed (Philokleon in *Vesp.*, Men in *Lys.* and *Eccl.*, Wealth in *Pl.*). In *Ran.* Euripides, whose death instigated Dionysus' quest (and is therefore the cause of the latter's misfortune), is also the sought-for person, although he is unexpectedly replaced by Aeschylus, who shows himself through function 6 to be a better answer to the seeker's need. As function bearers, all these persons—found, redeemed, or reformed—could be described as objects of quest.

8. *Triumph.* Adventures, contests, victory, and accomplishment of the end aimed at, result in a triumph enjoyed by the seeker-hero, and/or by the persons standing for the object of the quest. Straightforward triumphant seekers are found in *Ach.*, in *Pax*, in which the object of the quest (Peace) is not shown to participate in the festivities, and in *Av.*, where triumph reaches its pinnacle in the apotheosis of Peisthetairos and his marriage to Basileia. But Wealth in *Pl.* outshines his redeemer, and so do Aeschylus in *Ran.* and Demos in *Eq.*, whose reappearance at the end of the play has been interpreted as a divine epiphany.<sup>25</sup> The reformed old juror in *Vesp.* lapses into a senile delinquency, so to speak, which causes new headaches to his son, and prevents him from enjoying his father's cure. However, the old man in *Vesp.* does have his special triumph in the end, unlike his counterpart in *Nu.*, who after a brief spell of reckless behaviour learns, in an unexpected way, what the accomplishment of his son's education means for him, and has his illusory triumph turned into disaster. In *Lys.* and *Eccl.*, in which the sufferer-seeker-winner and the villain-opponent-loser are the total female and male population respectively, triumph can only lead to reconciliation, and hence happiness for all and general celebration.

Triumph is a very abstract term implying the canonical rewards of heroes of popular fiction, namely food, drink, sex, and good company.<sup>26</sup> In the context of specific plays, these themes manifest themselves in various forms, from ritual marriage in *Pax* and *Av.* to licentious womanizing in *Ach.*, *Vesp.* (cf. *Eq.* 1389–1395), and community of women, though on women's own terms, in *Eccl.*; from communal feasting in *Eccl.* to sacrifices and preparations of sumptuous meals in *Pax*, *Av.*, *Pl.*, to drinking parties in *Vesp.*, *Lys.*, *Ran.*, and even a wine festival and a private food market in *Ach.*

These, then, are the functions of Old Comedy, which show a remarkable similarity with the functions of the folktale and their sequence established by Propp. They are only eight as compared with Propp's thirty-one, but this is due to my previous operation of reducing the plays to an abstract, short, narrative form. However, all functions of comedy, with the exception of

<sup>24</sup> Structurally speaking, a negative triumph is the exact opposite of the canonical ending. It is not the same as the punishment (of villain) on Propp's scheme, but occurs in comic forms of folk drama, such as the modern Greek shadow-puppet theatre, in which the comic hero, Karagiozis, is often beaten up at the end of plays (but he may also, though less often, be treated to a sumptuous dinner; see my *Παραδοσιακή δραματουργία του Καραγκιόζη*, Athens, 1984). It should be noted, however, that the ending of *Clouds*, as we have it, is that of the revised (and apparently never produced) version of the play; cf. Dover who suggests that the new ending, too, provided 'the customary noise and movement' (*Clouds*, pp. xxiv f., xciii f.)

<sup>25</sup> H. Kleinknecht, 'Die Epiphanie des Demos in Aristophanes' "Rittern"', *Hermes* lxxvii (1939) 58–65 (= Newiger [ed.], *Aristophanes und die alte Komödie* 141–154). See also Kleinknecht's treatment of *Av.*, 'Zur Parodie des Gottmenschentums bei Aristophanes,' *ARW* xxxiv (1937) 294 ff.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Dover, *Clouds* liii.

the sixth (debate / persuasion), correspond to the key functions in Propp's scheme.

Before proceeding to the next section, in which the bearers of functions will be discussed further, I should like to repeat here, and emphasise, that the above sequence of functions does not represent a quantitative division of comedy. It only represents a narrative pattern, a rough ground plan, taken for granted in the construction of many different superstructures, which incorporated a great variety of architectural ideas and imaginative solutions. It lies hidden within, or beneath, the dramatic structure (and can be detected by analysing the dramatic action and plot of the plays) but reveals nothing about diction, imagery, political content, parody, humour, and all other aspects of the play texture. So, by studying the functions we cannot, for instance, account for the metaphor of master and slaves standing for the personification of the free male population of Attica and certain prominent politicians respectively in *Eq.*, nor understand that the two wenches Demos is presented with at the end of the play to take to the fields (with an obvious sexual allusion, cf. *Ach.* 272 ff., 989 ff.) are personified thirty-year Peace-Treaties (being two rather than one because the word for treaty, *spondai*, in Greek is a plural-only word); nor can we account for the fact that a large part of the dramatic structure corresponding to the negative triumph of Strepsiades in *Nu.* takes the form of a metrically complete epirrhematic agon (1345–1451). Conversely, function analysis makes it possible to understand that the last scenes of *Nu.* stand for, firstly, an illusory triumph and, then, a negative one (even though the burning of the school, i.e. turning against one's own helper, who did exactly what he was asked for, is an atypical action); or to account for the lack of celebration and festivities in the last scenes of *Thesm.*, or for the *metastasis* of the chorus in *Eccl.*, where the chorus is the bearer of the all important function of seeker.

## VI. BEARERS OF FUNCTIONS, CHARACTERS, AND TYPES

Bearers of functions and roles are neutral terms with regard to characterization, and to refer to them by such descriptions as seeker, helper, opponent, and so forth, is to ignore deliberately their *ethos*. Even 'villain' has been used above in a technical and not moral sense (person causing distress or discomfort to somebody else). This kind of abstraction is necessary in order to raise the *dramatis personae* to the same level of generalization as their functions, and thus facilitate comparison between performers of similar actions (listed, that is, in the same vertical columns on the Table). The performers of actions in specific plays—countryman, slave, ill-tempered master of household, honest citizen, etc.—are not devoid of *ethos* but I shall come to them a little later. My concern here is to determine what Propp calls spheres of action of the *dramatis personae*, in other words which functions are fulfilled by the same bearers, or how functions are distributed among them.

Very briefly, then, the bearers of the functions of Old Comedy are the *villain / cause of misfortune*, the *seeker*, the *helper*, the *opponent*, and the *object of quest*. The sphere of action of the seeker extends through all functions. That of the villain consists of function 1 and functions 5 to 7 (from opposition to liquidation of misfortune). Opponents unrelated to the villain operate in the two contest functions (5, 6). The activity of the helper is centered on functions 3 and 4 but may on occasion extend through the rest of them. The persons standing for the object of the quest appear in the last three functions.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> In a discussion of dramatic abstractions, reference should be made to Étienne Souriau, *Les deux cent mille situations dramatiques* (Paris 1950). Souriau's strange title refers to the theoretically possible situations resulting from the interactions of what he calls 'fonctions dramaturgiques,' or roles, represented by dramatic characters and forming a 'system of forces.' All possible characters, he suggests, in all kinds of drama, correspond to six such functions or forces (to which he attributes astrological names and symbols): 'Le Lion: la Force thématique,' 'le Soleil: le Représentant du bien souhaité, de la Valeur orientante,' 'la Terre: l'Obtenteur virtuel de ce bien,' 'Mars: l'Opposant,'

It should be borne in mind that the bearers of functions belong to the highest level of abstraction, and so do their spheres of action, or roles, which consist of their participation in a number of functions. The function bearers and their roles generally correspond, but do not always coincide, with the performers of actions in individual plays and their configuration of activities at the intermediate level of abstraction, represented by the summaries of the Table; and they coincide even less with the actual dramatic characters and their participation in the dramatic action, which of course is much more complex and varied at the level of individual plot and stage performance of the plays. As Propp pointed out (see p. 000 above), one character may be involved in several spheres of action, for example, Philokleon in *Vesp.* is the villain at first and the triumphant object of quest in the end; the Sausage-seller in *Eq.* is helper at first and seeker later on, as the initial seekers retreat to the background, and so on. The reverse case, in which several characters share the same sphere of action, is exemplified by the different opponents in the consecutive functions 5 and 6, e.g., in *Vest.*, *Pax*, or *Pl.*, or by the different helpers in the context of the same plays, e.g. Socrates and the two Reasons in *Nu.* (the latter being also opponents in function 6). Choruses that are not function bearers like the Acharnians (opponent), the Birds (opponent) or the Women in *Thesm.* (villain) and *Eccl.* (seeker), are characters partaking in the sphere of action of one of the function bearers; e.g., the Knights and the Clouds share in the role of helper, the Panhellenes in *Pax* share in the role of seeker, and so on.

Between the theoretical extremes of the abstract and the concrete—function bearers and individual dramatic characters—fall the action performers, as well as such categories as comic ‘types’ and ‘heroes,’ often encountered in the bibliography. What I should like to do here is to define and correlate these categories in order to clarify their relevance to different levels of analysis, such as the one attempted in this paper, or the analysis of the dramatic structure of comedy or that of the texture of specific plays.

I have said enough already about the bearers of functions but perhaps I should add that to refer to ‘countryman,’ ‘slaves,’ ‘honest citizen,’ etc. (see the first column of the Table), by the generic description ‘action performers,’ is a way to discuss the action sequence of the plays, and abstract the function sequence from their comparison, without regard to dramatic characters. To establish that there is a narrative pattern, in the first place, underlying individual comedies like a ground plan, or foundation, actually means that in comedy too ‘they [the dramatists] include the characters for the sake of the action’ (*Ar. Poet.* 1450a 21), and that the general shape of the action, at least, does not derive from the characters and their interaction. This again entails that the characters of Old Comedy plays are not, psychologically speaking, unique individuals, like the characters of modern realistic drama (Chekhov, Ibsen, etc.), or like the penetrating psychological studies offered by Ingmar Bergman’s films, or even—in a more popular vein—like the characters of such television ‘soap operas’ as *EastEnders*, *Brookside*, etc., whose weekly instalments lack a most elementary feature of drama (in the Aristotelian sense), i.e. a beginning, a middle, and an end, but (despite a certain measure of escapism which they offer their viewers) they present realistic imitations of ordinary people in ordinary, everyday situations. On the other hand, Dikaiopolis, Philokleon, Trygaios, and the other Aristophanic characters, may be unique, technically speaking, as characters of specific plays, but in so far as they get involved in predictable situations, to which they react in a predictable manner, they are variants of types.

Types generally correspond to action patterns, and by definition extend beyond the limits of specific plays and (usually) beyond the works of single authors. They come into being gradually, and develop within a certain tradition into many variants. Variants are specific artistic creations—characters of specific plays in our case—while the types are theoretical abstractions

‘la Balance: l’Arbitre de la situation, attributeur du bien,’ ‘la Lune: l’Adjuvant, redoublement d’une des forces précédentes’’ (83–117).

resulting from the comparison of the variants. Types, then, are what the analysis of the dramatic structure of Old Comedy as a genre should aim at specifying; type variants are constituents of the texture of specific plays. I hope, therefore, to have made clear why my analysis of comedy's narrative structure could account neither for dramatic types nor for characters, and why I had to use the neutral generic description, 'action performers,' to refer to the characters of the plays.

Now as far as such 'types' as the *bomolokhos* (buffoon), the *iron* (ironic man), and the *alazon* (boaster or impostor), are concerned, which are traced to Aristotle via the *Tractatus Coislinianus*,<sup>28</sup> and are often referred to as the main types of comedy, I should like to point out that they represent a higher order of abstraction than that of the types. As defined above, types would result from a comparison of actual type variants (e.g., *Lysistrata*, *Praxagora*, *Woman A* in *Thesm.*). But buffoon, etc., are conceptions based on just one moral trait or habit (in Aristotle's sense), which naturally override sex, age, social class, and other characteristics, that would make up a usable dramatic type.

The same can be said about the concept of 'comic heroism,' which was suggested by C. Whitman<sup>29</sup> but was never precisely defined so as to be practicable and useful as a tool of analysis. In fact, Whitman defined rather vaguely the 'achievement' of the main characters in *Ach.*, *Eq.*, *Nu.*, *Vesp.*, *Pax*, and *Av.*, as being 'not of the sort which is usually called moral' but 'an assertion (...) of boundlessness, a dethronement of limit, of reason, and even of the gods themselves;' and comic heroism as 'consisting largely in [the hero's] infallible skill in turning everything to his own advantage, often by a mere trick of language' (25). But this description could apply just as well to heroes of myth and folktale. Unfortunately, to try to formulate the concept of hero in terms of achievement and his capacity for it, and not in terms of his moral characteristics, is not very meaningful when your hero belongs to a universe in which the laws of ordinary logic and credibility are by definition suspended. However, I do not want to dismiss the concept of comic heroism as useless, because I feel that many Aristophanic characters do possess some heroic *quality*, but to suggest that heroism, as defined and employed so far by classical scholars writing on Aristophanes, is very inadequate as a criterion of character classification.<sup>30</sup>

To summarize: The bearers of functions and the action performers are useful in discussing the narrative pattern of comedy and the sequence of actions in specific plays respectively, without taking into account characterization. But if characterization does not influence the general shape of the action at the deep level of narrative structure, things are different so far as dramatic structure is concerned because, as Aristotle puts it with reference to tragedy, 'the action involves agents, who must necessarily have their distinctive qualities both of character and thought' (*Poet.* 1449b 37; transl. Bywater); therefore, persons of a certain ethos, i.e. *characters*, are an integral part of dramatic structure. By studying the behaviour of specific dramatic characters (as, for instance, Dover studies Philokleon) and by comparing and superimposing similar characters (e.g., countrymen, slaves, etc.) we may arrive at, and comprehend, the types of Old Comedy, who are part of its structure as a genre. Then, we have to go back and correct our understanding of specific characters by comparing them to the abstract types, whose variants

<sup>28</sup> *Tract. Coisl.* xii; Aristotle, *EN* 1108a 21–26, 1127a 13–1128b 3, *Rhet.* 1419b 2 ff.

<sup>29</sup> In his well known book on *Aristophanes and the comic hero* (Cambridge, Mass. 1964). The comic hero has found considerable acceptance ever since, cf. J. Henderson, *The maculate muse* (New Haven 1975) 13; R. Janko, *Aristotle on comedy. Towards a reconstruction of Poetics II* (London 1984) 218.

<sup>30</sup> I hope to deal with comic types and characters more fully on another occasion.

they are.<sup>31</sup> For, in the last analysis, the behaviour of type variants is largely predetermined by the tradition of the genre to which they belong, but also depends proportionately on the peculiarities with which the dramatist may have endowed them while pressing them into a new use as specific characters of individual plays. The above operations presuppose a clear distinction between the levels of narrative and dramatic structure, on the one hand, as well as between the universal dramatic structure (or code of conventions) of Old Comedy and the texture of individual plays, on the other. It should also be remembered that the latter is realized in performance and, therefore, incorporates the appearance of the characters (masks, costumes, movement), elements, that is, which reveal and connote character as much as what the *dramatis personae* say on stage.<sup>32</sup>

## VII. COMEDY, FOLKTALE, AND MYTH

In the final section of this paper, I should like to discuss briefly the implications of my inference that the sequence of functions of *dramatis personae* in Old Comedy is very similar to that of the European folktale.

Comedy, of course, has been related to the folktale. I believe the first major contribution to this subject is Zieliński's long and still very useful paper on 'Die Märchenkomödie in Athen,' published in the same year as his *Gliederung der altattischen Komödie*, 1885.<sup>33</sup> Zieliński traced folktale motifs and references to folktales in the texts of Aristophanes and in fragments of other dramatists (e.g., the Doghead at *Eq.* 416, the cock's ability to digest coins at *Vesp.* 794, 'Tierkönigs Brautwerbung,' that is Pisthetairos' marriage to Basileia, the daughter of the King [of gods, whom he equated with Athena] at the end of *Av.*,<sup>34</sup> cf. Kratinos, *fr.* 423

<sup>31</sup> Or else we shall continue to believe, with Dover, that Philokleon 'seems to be the kind of man (fortunately, there are not many of them) who as a soldier loots from unarmed civilians but keeps clear of an armed enemy, and in old age spends his days in the infliction of pain on others and his evenings in running his hand up his daughter's skirt. If we still like him, why do we? Is it that Aristophanes, by some dramaturgical skill which resists analysis, has compelled us to like him? Or is it that we, through a deficiency of imagination which prevents us from reacting to fictitious creations as we do to the people and situations encountered in our own lives, have misunderstood Philokleon and his creator's intentions?' (*Aristophanic comedy*, 127). What seems to me to be Dover's difficulty here is that he judges Philokleon as if he were a psychologically consistent creation by a realist author such as Ibsen. The reason he and we like Philokleon is that the man belongs to such an established and likeable type that his aberrations, mentioned in various parts of the play, cannot upset this basic fact nor amount to a negative moral portrait. He is much closer to Demos than to Dikaiopolis or Trygaios; he has no moral purpose but is a misled old man on the verge of dotage; hence he is naughty and in need of being reformed. In other words, all these characters are variants of the same type but carriers of different functions and roles: Dikaiopolis and Trygaios are seekers while Demos and Philokleon are objects of quest. Philokleon is likeable by virtue of belonging to the same type as many a comic hero but as his sphere of action is different from that of the imaginative and energetic seekers he shows certain ugly sides of his character, which are not enough to differentiate and detach him from the company of other type variants and their generally congenial behaviour.

<sup>32</sup> C. W. Dearden, *The stage of Aristophanes* (London 1976) 128–42, has tried to correlate Aristophanic characters with the archaeological evidence but his results are very tentative because he did not employ a strict method to elicit the type variants from the texts. Largely impressionistic is the classification of types by K. McLeish, *The theatre of Aristophanes* (London 1980), who uses such descriptions as *spoudaios* and *poneros*, the latter in its Modern Greek sense, without reference to Whitman — which is amazing.

<sup>33</sup> First published as a supplement to *Jahresbericht der Deutschen Schulen zu St. Annen in St. Petersburg*, reprinted in the author's collected papers under the title *Iresione, I. Dissertationes ad comoediam et tragoediam spectantes continens* (*Eos*, Suppl. 2 [Lwów 1931]) 8–75.

<sup>34</sup> The hero marrying the king's daughter is a canonical folktale ending but Basileia is nowhere explicitly called daughter of Zeus. To Pisthetairos' question, 'Who is Basileia?' (1537), Prometheus replies that she is 'A maid most fair, who keeps in charge for Zeus / his thunder and all his royal attributes, / law, counsel, discipline, naval estimates, etc.' (Murray's translation, published in 1950), and the chorus call her Zeus' πάρεδρος (1753). So she does sound like a clear case of personification of 'die Weltherrschaft des Zeus,' in Kock's words (his ed. of *Av.*, on 1864), although the form Βασίλεια means Queen, Princess, 'Sovereign Bride' (Murray) and not Monarchy or Sovereignty (Βασιλεία, with a long ending). An enormous amount of effort has been directed to speculating about her mythological identity, and Zieliński was

Kassel–Austin, etc.), but had to look for the tales themselves in modern collections—tale collections in Modern Greek, Russian, Polish, Italian, and other languages—and to suppose that the stories go back to classical antiquity. However, he was rather too generous in defining his scope, and took into account all talking animals—including of course animal choruses—, references to a past golden age ('Schlaraffenkomödien'),<sup>35</sup> as well as to monsters and strange creatures, even when used metaphorically, like the description of Kleon in *Vesp.* 1031–36 (= *Pax* 754–59); for this reason, Zieliński compared the fight of the Sausage-seller with Kleon in *Eq.* to the fight of many a tale-hero (and more particularly of the folktale hero called Hans Dumbbart in German) with a dragon. (In this he was right, though not because Aristophanes pictures Kleon as a monster in later plays but because the struggle is a regular function of both comedy and folktale.)

*Av.* has been the subject of at least two studies, J. R. T. Pollard's long paper on 'The *Birds* of A.: a source book for old beliefs' (*AJPh.* lxxix [1948] 353–376), which is a careful study of fables and bird-lore referred to in *Av.*, and H. Hofmann's Tübingen dissertation on *Mythos und Komödie. Untersuchungen zu den Vögeln des A. (Spudasmata, xxxiii [1976])*. Hofmann argues (rightly) that there can be no real distinction between folktale, legend, and myth, in antiquity, and offers a mythological analysis of *Av.* with an emphasis on comedy's ability not only to incorporate mythological materials but to adapt and utilize them in making up its own myths. Hofmann is thorough but his claim that the composition of *Av.*, in regard to both its plot and characters, is based on what he calls the 'Grundstruktur der Gigantomachie' is not very convincing, because it actually relies more on an analysis of content than on a study and comparison of structures.

Now, there is a significant difference between tracing references to folktales, popular beliefs, mythical and folktale motifs, in comedy, on the one hand, and recognizing a basic similarity in the narrative structure of comedy and folktale, on the other. Important and interesting as it may be, the former line of approach can tell us very little about either the origin of comedy or the making of the plays—as the dependence of tragedy on myth for its subject matter also tells us very little about its origin and poetics. But the realization that comedy has a close structural affinity with the folktale helps to resolve the apparent contradiction which is inherent in Old Comedy and constitutes its most distinctive feature, namely, the ability of perfectly ordinary people to do the most extraordinary things—*now*. For the characters of the folktale also may be, very often, quite ordinary but their wonderful adventures take place in a remote, usually unspecified, past, whereas in comedy, contemporary Athenians take for granted the use of means which appear to be magical or supernatural in order to pursue their plans to get out of difficult, or rather hopeless, situations.

This coupling of ordinary characters, with whom the average member of the audience, as Dover puts it, could identify, with a narrative form which rids them of their human impotence and enables them to pursue their wishful thinking, more often than not related to contemporary

neither the first nor the last scholar to support Athena's candidacy for serving as Pisthetairos' bride (cf. Newiger, *Metapher und Allegorie* [Munich 1957] 100–102), which seems to me impossible for two reasons: (a) To have Athena, the virgin goddess, appear on the stage in a role that should feature or connote, according to the expectations of the audience, a courtesan would amount to ridiculing the protectress of the city and committing a religious offence that was beyond comedy's licence; (b) Basileia is *not* called daughter of Zeus, and has been taken as such only because *our* expectations demand a king's daughter as the proper reward of the tale's triumphant hero, who is to become the new king.

<sup>35</sup> Such comedies were Kratinos' *Ploutoi*, Telekleides' *Amphiktyones*, Krates' *Theria*, Pherekrates' *Metallês*, Metagenes' *Thouripersai*, and Nikophon's *Seirenes*.

social and political problems, to its fulfilment, is the special genius of Athenian comedy.<sup>36</sup> *Märchenkomödie*, then, Attic Old Comedy may be not because it incorporated folktale materials but because its poets spun their yarns and wove their own tales after a time-honoured pattern.

Now this leads us to the question: How did this narrative pattern come to be adopted by the comedians, and where did it come from? Unfortunately, there can be no short or clear answer to this question. Comedy, of course, could not possibly have any genetic relationship with the folktale, for even if we had not known from Aristotle that it originated in the *phallika* (no matter how we want to reconstruct them) we would still have to imagine its beginnings as a ritual and action of some kind, being done or performed (*cf. dran, dromena, drama*) by a group of people in worship and/or play. Besides, it is very doubtful whether the folktale had an independent existence in classical times as a kind of popular fiction distinct from myth—the (ancient) Greek language, at any rate, had no special word for it. The modern, scholarly, distinction between myth or legend, on the one hand, and miraculous tale, on the other, the former being quasi-historical (i.e. credible and related to specific gods, heroes, and places), the latter being purely fictional and unhistorical, unspecific of time and place, and laying no claim to credibility, may be valid with regard to the folklore of Christian Europe but is largely useless in regard to pre-Christian (and many non-Christian) cultures.

In ancient Greece, no strict sacred tradition dictated which stories were to be believed, and which were not. Scholars have often wondered at the scarcity of folktales known from Greek and Roman antiquity, as compared to the great collections of tales in modern European languages (not to mention the Indian, and other non-European traditions). The truth of the matter, however, is that in ancient Greece folktales and myths are entangled in one huge, complex, mass,<sup>37</sup> and that some of the greatest heroes of the Greeks were famous mythical seekers, e.g., Herakles, Theseus, Kadmos, Jason, and Perseus, who resemble closely the dragon slayers and other seeker-heroes known from countless European and Oriental folktales.

E. S. Hartland, who devoted to the legend of Perseus a three-volume comparative study of mythical and folktale materials collected from all over the world,<sup>38</sup> also wrote a valuable, and still very readable, small book on *Mythology and folktales: their relation and interpretation* (London 1900), in which he demonstrated very lucidly that folktales originated in myths, and that before assuming the character of playful fiction they were, in very old times, perfectly credible. The priority of myth over the folktale was also recognized by Propp. He postulated a gradual movement from the former to the latter, allowing for periods of overlapping. Regarding classical antiquity, Propp pointed out that myths and folktales may have existed side by side but could not have had the same plots and subjects, because 'the myth of the Argonauts and the wondertale of the Argonauts cannot coexist among the same people. There could be no

<sup>36</sup> Mythical fantasy in comedy, then, is the same as in myth, described by Kirk as follows: '[Mythical] fantasy deals in events that are impossible by real-life standards; but in myths it tends to exceed the mere manipulation of the supernatural and express itself in a strange dislocation of familiar and naturalistic connexions and associations. That is what Cassirer meant by referring to the mythical concept of causality (...) The dynamic aspect of mythical fantasy is both more revealing and more typical. It includes more than causality; indeed, all the rules of normal action, normal reasoning and normal relationships may be suspended and distorted' (*Myth*, 268–269). If this description does not sound quite clear it is because of the author's effort to reduce fantasy to some kind of principle. The same is attempted by Burkert (n. 16) 19–20, who even denies that the element of the fantastic ('in the sense of the "impossible", from our point of view') is indispensable in myth and even in fairy-tale; but he goes on to speak of 'action inverted by logic,' and of 'logic disregarding reality;' 'a good tale,' he claims, 'overdetermined and "crystallized", may just be too logical to be true.' I am afraid Burkert's 'logic disregarding reality' is too much of a simplification, which will not explain away the constant of mythical causality in folk narratives. That this causality may not be unprincipled or haphazard is very likely, but scholarship has still a long way to go before it can discover the ways it works.

<sup>37</sup> For an application of various kinds of structural analysis to Greek myths and discussions of methodological matters see B. Gentili and G. Paioni (eds.), *Il mito greco* (Rome 1977).

<sup>38</sup> *The legend of Perseus* (London 1894–1896).



wondertales about Theseus where his myth was alive and where he was the object of a cult.<sup>39</sup>

We may be unable, then, to distinguish clearly between myth and folktale in Greek antiquity but we should have no difficulty in tracing the sequence of functions of comedy to the world of traditional folk narratives. Comedy itself may have been mythological at an early stage, and we have many titles of plays from the fifth century suggesting mythological subjects. However, comedy, having broken away quite early from the fertility rites and deities related to its origins, went on, unlike tragedy, to also break away from mythology altogether as a source of its subjects.

There was a great force that pulled it away from the past and into the present: the need to function in a fast-changing social context, and the possibility to take account of contemporary social and political life so as to be not only funny but also satirical, instructive, and relevant to the concerns of its audience. Comedy, like other arts in the context of the young Athenian democracy, rose superbly to the challenge. It gave up the gods and other characters of the myths (or got them involved in contemporary situations), and adopted as its main characters contemporary men and women standing for large sections or whole classes of people, and often also introduced to its stage caricatures of leading personalities of the day; but it retained the basic narrative substructure of myth and folktale. Contemporary characters could not but get involved in contemporary actions. But the sequence of these actions and their relationships to each other were predetermined by the mythical narrative formula, of which the rules of mythical causality were an integral part. The potential here was great and the comic dramatists were quick to exploit it.

A final word about the origins of comedy: The narrative structure, which I tried to isolate in this paper, can by itself reveal little about the origins of Attic comedy, because it is too general. Besides, the origins of *drama* should be sought for in the *dramatic* structure rather than in the latter's narrative constituent, which as we have seen cannot account for such elements of the comic performance as hymns to gods, choral singing and dancing, animal disguises, sacrifices and processions, phallic costumes, and other elements that can be reasonably considered to go back to comedy's ritual beginnings. When dramatic structure is more clearly determined, research should take up again the question of relationship of myth to ritual, and try to trace how, in Webster's words, 'the ritual refracted into myths'<sup>40</sup> and then how myth influenced the development of comedy as a poetic and dramatic art.

G.M. SIFAKIS

*Department of Philology,  
Aristotelian University, Thessaloniki*

<sup>39</sup> *Theory and history of folklore*, 80.

<sup>40</sup> In Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, tragedy, and comedy* (1962) 193.

## TABLE OF FUNCTIONS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
VILLAINY, LACK, OR MISFORTUNE	DECISION & PLAN TO COUNTERACT MISFORTUNE	SERVICE OR HELP OF A SUPERNATURAL OR QUASI-MAGICAL AGENT OR HELPER OBTAINED	TRANSFERENCE	OPPOSITION OR OBSTACLES TO BE OVERCOME	PERSUASION EXERCISED IN DEBATE	LIQUIDATION OF VILLAINY OR MISFORTUNE	TRIUMPH OF HERO
<p><b>ACHARNENSES.</b> A countryman is longing for peace and is disgusted with the way the public affairs of his country are conducted and by the fact that the end of the war, in which his country is involved, is as remote as ever.</p>	<p>He conceives the idea to make peace privately.</p>	<p>He employs as his personal envoy a 'divine' man authorized by the gods to make peace with the enemy.</p>	<p>The envoy is dispatched to the enemy and returns with a peace treaty.</p>	<p>But the farmer has to overcome the opposition on the part of other farmers, who consider him a traitor, before he can have his peace.</p>	<p>However, he manages to persuade them that he was right.</p>	<p>He is allowed to have his private peace,</p>	<p>and proceeds to enjoy the advantages of peaceful life, now available to him alone.</p>
<p><b>EQUITES.</b> The slaves in the household of an old, ill-tempered, master are in a state of despair because a new slave, recently acquired by their master, is making life unbearable for them. Having won complete confidence of the master by flattery and deception, he is now manager of the house; and he uses blackmail and slander to exploit the other slaves.</p>	<p>In seeking to rid themselves of their tyrant, the latter come across an oracle implying that the knave can be defeated only by another knave.</p>	<p>A streetwise rogue who fits the oracle chances to come by and is recruited.</p>	<p>The envoy fights with the knave and betters him in cunning.</p>	<p>In the end, he manages to persuade the old master that his favoured slave is a swindler.</p>	<p>The latter is deposed from his position as manager of the household.</p>	<p>The office of manager is now entrusted to the victorious rogue, who restores the household to its earlier order and the old master to his former dignity.</p>	
<p><b>NUBES.</b> An old countryman is distressed by his many debts, accumulated on account of his son's extravagance.</p>	<p>He gets the idea to have his son taught the art of making the worse appear the better cause, so as to defeat his creditors in court and not repay his debts. The son refuses, and the old man decides to become a student of sophistic art himself.</p>	<p>He is admitted to the school of a great teacher of the art and is offered instruction.</p>	<p>But he is unable to learn because of his age and failing memory, so he pleads with his son to take his place.</p>	<p>The son grudgingly agrees, and is thoroughly educated by a demonstration of subtle talk.</p>	<p>The father is confident that his son can now win any case. He abuses and mocks the money-lenders but when he disagrees and quarrels with his son he is beaten up by him. (False or imaginary liquidation.)</p>	<p>The son justifies his action by using the method he learned at his father's insistence, and the father, enraged and remorseful, proceeds to destroy the school of the sophist. (Negative triumph.)</p>	

VESPÆ. An honest citizen is disgusted by the way the courts of law are manipulated by the politicians and distressed by his father's addiction to constantly serving as a juror.

He decides to have him confined to their own home against his will.

PAX. A countryman, who is sick and tired of a war that has been wearing out not only his country but all men of his race,

makes a plan to go up to heaven in order to demand from Zeus the reason for this destruction, and argue for an end of it.

But in order to keep him at home and prevent him from going to the court he has to forestall his repeated attempts to escape, and resist the old man's fellow-jurors who come to his assistance.

But when he arrives he is informed by Zeus' herald, Hermes, that the gods, being angry with men, have retreated to the innermost part of heaven, and let War occupy their place and deal with men as he likes. He has imprisoned Peace and intends to completely destroy the cities. But he is delayed, so the countryman calls out the farmers, merchants, artisans and others to help liberate Peace,

He acquires a giant beetle

by which he is transported to heaven.

Finally, he manages to persuade him to change his mind about what he thought to be the advantages of being a juror.

and persuades Hermes not to oppose but cooperate with the men.

The old man reluctantly agrees to give up his addiction,

Peace is set free and taken to earth by the countryman, who has her installed in his country as a goddess.

and proceeds to enjoy the leisure and the pleasures which his son puts at his disposal.

He then proceeds to enjoy the good things of peaceful life which his initiative has made possible and entitles him to.

AVES. Two old men are disgusted with their fellow-citizens' love for law-courts and litigation.

They decide to look for a place to live where they could just rest and do nothing, and seek the advice of an ex-man turned into a bird about the land of their quest.

They acquire two birds to show them the way,

and with their help arrive in Birdland, where they find the creature they were looking for.

As they pose their questions one of them gets the idea that a bird-state should be established right there, which would put the birds in control of both gods and men. But first the birds' hostility to, and mistrust of, men has to be overcome.

The man who had the extraordinary idea manages to persuade the birds,

a city is set up and its power is recognized by the gods,

while the imaginative man and his colleague enjoy their new life and reap great rewards.

LYSISTRATA. The womenfolk of two warring states are exasperated by the frequent absence of their men from home because of the war.

A woman possessing imagination and initiative conceives the plan to organize a sexual strike of the women of both states, which would eventually force the men to make peace. She summons the women to explain her plan,

and for good measure has them occupy the sacred acropolis of the city, where the public funds were kept.

To succeed in occupying the acropolis, the women have to use force and to engage in skirmishes with the men; to succeed in their strike they have to overcome their own human weakness.

But in the end they manage to carry out the plan and reconcile the warring states.

They all then proceed to enjoy the rewards of peaceful life.

continued.....

**THESMOPHORIAZUSAE.** A poet is afraid that the women-folk of his country, while gathered to celebrate a women's festival, will put him to trial and condemn him to death because they consider him to have slandered and wronged them.

He conceives the plan to ask another poet, who could pass for a woman, to defend him at the trial.

The latter declines but supplies him with the necessary equipment for the disguise of a relative of the poet, who is willing to undertake the risk, into a woman.

The disguised man goes to the place where the women's festival and the trial are going to take place,

and attempts to defend the poet but is given away, exposed as a man, and captured.

Still, the trial is interrupted and the condemnation of the poet is avoided. The poet, after several unsuccessful attempts to help the defender escape, is reconciled with the women and liberates his defender by making a deal with them never to revile the women again in the future.

**RANAE.** After the death of the last of the great tragic poets, Dionysus, the patron-god of the theatre, is in great need of a good poet.

He decides to go to the underworld in order to bring the recently deceased poet back to life.

He is advised by Herakles about his journey.

and transferred to the underworld by Charon's boat.

He has to sustain the hardships and rigours of his unusual journey and, when he arrives at the habitation of the blessed and of Pluto and is finally recognized, to serve as the judge of

a poetic contest between the poet for whom he had undertaken his journey and a poet of an earlier generation, who had been, up to the other's arrival, the uncontested occupant of the throne of tragedy in the underworld. The contest is closely-fought and ends in a draw;

Dionysus and the poet depart from the underworld and are seen off by the blessed.

**ECCLESIAZUSAE.** Filled with despair by the way the men conduct the affairs of state,

the women plan to take over the government by disguising themselves as men and voting in the assembly of citizens in favour of their own proposal, to hand the government of the state over to the women.

The women are organized by an energetic woman

and go, disguised as men, to the meeting of the assembly,

where they support their leader, acting as their spokesman, to overcome the jeers of the countrymen as she puts forward and defends the women's proposal.

She finally persuades the assembly to entrust the affairs of the state to the women, and then her own husband about the wisdom of the assembly's resolution.

and enjoy the careless life from now on fully provided for by the state, including free banquets and community of women.

**PLUTUS.** An old man is frustrated by seeing the unjust and sacrilegious getting rich while he, a god-fearing, honest man is poor and unhappy.

So he decides to seek Apollo's advice about his son—for he himself is already too old—, viz. whether the young man should think it expedient to change his ways and become a rascal.

He goes to the oracle of Apollo, but the god does not give him a straight answer but tells him to follow the first man he sees after leaving his temple.

The countryman follows an old blind man for a long time, until the latter is made, under pressure, to reveal that he is the god Wealth, blinded by Zeus so that he would not recognize and benefit good men, of whom Zeus was jealous. The countryman has the idea of getting him cured of his blindness,

but first he has to convince him—because Wealth is afraid of Zeus—and then to stand up to Poverty, who tries to prevent him from having Wealth cured.

However, Wealth is eventually cured by Asklepios, and proceeds to redistribute wealth among men and reward the good ones.

As a result, men cease to honour the gods, who had taken so bad care of them in the past, Hermes deserts them to offer his services to men, while Wealth is reinstated as a god in the temple of the (former) patron-goddess of the state.