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Aristophanes and his rivals¹

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ABSTRACT: This paper provides an introduction to the work of Aristophanes' main rivals, especially Cratinus and Eupolis.

Just as there was a canon of three tragic dramatists, so the ancient world recognised a canon of three dramatists of Athenian Old Comedy: Aristophanes, of course, but also Cratinus and Eupolis.² This article is chiefly concerned with Cratinus and Eupolis—a frustrating and unsatisfactory subject. Their plays are lost, and we have to rely on meagre fragments, preserved in quotations or on papyrus, and on various kinds of indirect evidence about their work. There is therefore very little that can be said about them, and even less that can be said with confidence. Nevertheless, the attempt to say something is worthwhile, in part because of the light that it may shed on Aristophanes' surviving works if we can discern something of the context in which he was working, but also because these men were evidently masters of their craft. One word of warning is in order: despite their mastery of the comic craft, uproarious entertainment is not to be expected from a paper on Cratinus and Eupolis; if jokes that have to be explained are notoriously unamusing, what can we expect of jokes that have to be reconstructed conjecturally before they are explained.

I shall begin with a playwright who was not, strictly speaking, a rival of Aristophanes: Crates, whose career is thought to have ended before Aristophanes' first play was performed in 427. Crates' output was small—seven or eight plays over a period of perhaps 20 odd years; but three of them took first prize at the Dionysia, so that he was proportionately very successful. If we can believe Aristotle, Crates made a crucial contribution to the development of comic drama; he was the first (or possibly the first Athenian) comic dramatist to compose 'universal' plots (*Poet.* 1449b5-9): 'As for plot-construction, originally it came from Sicily; of those at Athens, Crates was the first to abandon the iambic form and construct universalised stories and plots.' This is usually taken to mean that he abstained from abusing individuals, an interpretation at first sight recommended by the reference to iambic poetry (i.e., lampoons); so far as we can tell Crates did abstain from abusing individuals. But that cannot be what Aristotle means. 'Universal', in the *Poetics*, is a technical term concerned with plot-structure: a plot is 'universal' if the events which constitute it are connected with each other 'in accordance with necessity or probability' (1451b8-9, cf. 54a33-6); the opposite is the 'episodic' plot in which things happen one after another, but not because of each other (1451b34-5). So the implication of Aristotle's remark must be that

¹ This paper was given to the Oxford Branch of the Classical Association on 17 May 1989. References to comic fragments and testimonia are to R. Kassel and C. Austin, *Poetae Comici Graeci* (Berlin & New York, 1983-), unless otherwise specified.

² 'Plures eius [sc., antiquae comoediae] auctores, Aristophanes tamen et Eupolis Cratinusque praecipui', Quint. 10.1.66; cf. Hor. *Sat.* 1.4.1.

earlier comedy had consisted of a series of essentially independent incidents, and that it was Crates who began to tie them together into a causally consequential plot, such as we find in Aristophanes.³

This, if true, tells us something interesting about Cratinus. Cratinus' career overlapped Crates' at both ends: he won his first victory in the late 450s, at least two years before Crates' first victory (as we know from an inscribed list of victors), and survived to compete against Aristophanes in the late 420s. So the implication of Aristotle's claim about Crates is that Cratinus' earliest plays will have been episodic in structure, without a causally coherent development of plot.

There is something to support this judgement in the remnants of later ancient scholarship on comedy. One anonymous source (test. 19) says that the earliest Attic comic poets introduced their characters in a disorderly way (ἀτάκτως)—a fair description of what Aristotle would call episodic structure. Cratinus (it is said) checked this disorder, but without escaping from it completely (which was left to Aristophanes). Platonius praises Cratinus' inventiveness, but says that the development of his plots was incoherent and inconsequential (οὐκ ἀκολουθῶς). So we may imagine a dramatist who is imposing some structural coherence on his plots, perhaps under the influence of his contemporary Crates, but whose plot-construction is even so less developed than we observe in Aristophanes.

It nicely reflects the limitations of our knowledge that the one case in which we can gain some idea of Cratinus' handling of plot lends no support to this hypothesis. Our knowledge of the *Dionysalexandros* ('Dionysus playing the role of Alexander'—or, to use his other and to us more familiar name, of Paris) depends largely on a plot-summary partially preserved on a papyrus published at the beginning of this century.⁴ Unfortunately the first part of the papyrus is lost, and the summary does not begin to make connected sense until the parabasis. Before the parabasis we know or can guess that there was a search of some kind; that Hermes appeared—he made an exit immediately before the parabasis, having made some arrangement about the judgement of the three goddesses; and that it has been arranged that Dionysus will take the place of Paris in judging the goddesses surreptitiously, in disguise. We do not know why this has been arranged, or on whose initiative. Given the devious Dionysus of *Frogs*, and the Hermes of *Peace*, easily flattered and bribed, I would guess that Dionysus took the initiative, lecherously wanting to see the goddesses naked.⁵ But that is a guess; and with comedy, in which so much depends on bizarre and unexpected invention, guesses are more than usually precarious.

However that may be, after an encounter of some kind with the Chorus (which consists of satyrs accompanying Dionysus) Hermes goes to fetch the

³ I have argued for the coherence of Aristophanes' plots in *Political Comedy in Aristophanes* (*Hypomnemata* 87, Göttingen 1987), 43-54; for a more detailed discussion of Aristotle's notice of Crates see *CQ* 39 (1989), 348-52.

⁴ For a translation see F.H. Sandbach, *The Comic Theatre of Greece and Rome* (London 1977), 49; some severely damaged scraps are omitted, and the text of Aphrodite's offer translated is probably corrupt (see n.10 below).

⁵ For this portrayal of Hermes see M. Heath, 'Some deceptions in Aristophanes', *PLLS* 6 (1990), 229-40.

goddesses, and the Chorus are left to address the audience ‘about the poets’. (There is a problem here to which I will return; for now just think of the parabases in which Aristophanes talks about himself and other comic poets.) Paris at this stage of his career is living as a shepherd on Mt Ida, so when Dionysus returns he is disguised as a shepherd; the Chorus make fun of him, perhaps because of his disguise. Then Hermes returns with the goddesses, each of whom offers Dionysus (Paris, as they suppose) an inducement. It is inevitable in comedy that a sexual inducement will be preferred; Dionysus awards the prize to Aphrodite.

There is a problem about the staging of this scene. If each of the goddesses spoke, as well as Dionysus and Hermes, we would have five speaking actors on stage at once; the evidence suggests that this was not possible.⁶ So either the goddesses were put on show one after another, with lyric interludes between the scenelets, or else they were played by mutes and made their offers through Hermes, just as in Aristophanes’ *Peace* Peace herself is a mute and communicates only through Hermes.⁷ I prefer the latter reconstruction; having the goddesses visible together seems a better way to run a beauty contest. One other consideration favours their keeping silent: since the contest is properly one of beauty, the inducements are bribes, which can hardly be offered publicly; the offers should be made in secret. Hermes is an appropriate intermediary, not only as the divine herald, but also as god of trickery.⁸

Having awarded the prize to Aphrodite, Dionysus goes off to Sparta to fetch his reward; presumably a choral song covered the interval. He returns with Helen; but then things begin to go wrong. First he hears that the Greeks have invaded and are looking for Paris, that is for him. We know from *Frogs* that Dionysus is not a brave god, and now he panics. He hides Helen in a basket (the first attested use of this classic bit of slapstick, so far as I am aware), and disguises himself as a sheep; this gives us a context for a striking fragment, preserved by quotation: ‘The idiot’s going round saying “baa, baa” like a sheep’ (ὁ δ’ ἡλίθιος ὡσπερ πρόβατον ἴβῃ βῆ λέγων βαδίζει, fr. 45). But then the real Paris intervenes; he discovers the miscreants, and gives orders to have them handed over to the Greeks. Helen, presumably and understandably anxious about her reception, is reluctant to go; Paris takes pity on her, and decides to keep her as his own wife (at least, pity is the only feeling the papyrus mentions: other emotions may have come into play in the original). So Paris keeps Helen, which neatly reconnects the plot of the comedy to the traditional story of the Trojan War. But Dionysus is still to be given back. The play ends with his being taken away, accompanied by the satyrs, who offer encouragement and promise never to desert him.

The play thus ends with a question-mark hanging over Dionysus’ fate; this might be seen as a weakness in the plot-structure. But otherwise the handling of plot (in so far as we can discern it) seems admirable.

⁶ See K.J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (Berkeley 1972), 26-8; the strongest evidence is provided by *Clouds* 887, where Socrates has to make an unmotivated exit to release an actor for the confrontation of Right and Wrong.

⁷ The former solution is preferred by E.W. Handley, *BICS* 29 (1982), 113; the latter by W. Luppe, *Philologus* 110 (1966), 173f.

⁸ On Hermes *dolios* in Aristophanes see Heath (n.5).

I must now admit much is uncertain even in the sparse account I have given. For example, I said that the parabasis is ‘about the poets’; in fact the papyrus has not ΤΩΝ but ΥΩΝ, ‘of pigs’ or ‘of sons’, while ‘poets’ renders an abbreviation that has been interpreted in other ways. There are some scholars who think that something can be made of ‘about making sons’; I am confident that Körte’s emendation is right, but it remains a conjecture.⁹ Again, I said that Hermes accompanies the goddesses; the papyrus does not mention him at this point, but this may be an accident, since it is clear on other grounds that some words have dropped out here through miscopying. His presence is a reasonable inference from the traditional story, but is, again, conjectural. This is not the only miscopying: in particular, Aphrodite’s bribe has been garbled, although it is clear from what follows that Cratinus is adhering to the conventional story, and Helen was what was on offer.¹⁰ Most irritating of all, between the title and the name of the author is another line with an eta, a space, and a gap in the papyrus. The eta almost certainly means ‘or’ (ἢ), introducing an alternative title (we have more titles for Cratinus than the attested number of plays); but what was the title? Of those known, *Idaioi* (‘people from Mt Ida’) has been suggested. In its favour are the locale and the fact, known from a scholion on *Thesmophoriazusae*, that the play contained a scene of disguise, in which (as in *Thesmo.*) someone was shaved (fr. 90).¹¹ There is also the possibility that ‘divine forms’ appeared in this play, although little weight can be attached to a possibility which depends on two emendations in a desperately corrupt scholion on *Ecclesiazusae* (fr. 91). However, the title implies a Chorus of people, presumably shepherds, from Mt Ida, and we already have a Chorus of satyrs. A second Chorus is conceivable, as in *Frogs*; I see no plausible role for them in the second part of the play, but since we know so little about what happened before the parabasis, a subsidiary Chorus cannot be ruled out.¹²

Another possibility is perhaps *Dionysoi* (‘Dionysus and his companions’, a use of the plural found in several of Cratinus’ titles). Of that play we know only that the Chorus sang the line ‘May he who speaks best for the city win’ (fr. 52), which would fit a parabasis about the poets—unless the parabasis was about pigs or sons instead. This illustrates the kind of compound uncertainty that hinders any enquiry into lost comedies.

One other thing the summary tells us: the play attacked Pericles by innuendo for bringing the war on Athens. (On this basis the play is conjecturally dated to 430, early in the Peloponnesian War.) Although we cannot hope to trace the

⁹ The most recent discussion supports the conjecture: W. Luppe, *ZPE* 72 (1988), 37f.

¹⁰ See W. Luppe, *GGA* 227 (1975), 187-90, *Philologus* 124 (1980), 154-8. (The summary was copied onto the beginning of the roll by its owner, who was evidently careless; cf. Handley (n.7) 114.)

¹¹ The youthful Paris would naturally be portrayed beardless. Since Dionysus himself was usually portrayed as beardless in the late fifth century, it could be argued that he would not need shaving; but the bearded Dionysus is also found.

¹² Luppe (n.7) 184-91 argues for *Idaioi* as the alternative title, taking the shepherds as the main chorus and the satyrs as subsidiary; Handley (n.7) 115 is rightly cautious of this proposal.

innuendo in detail,¹³ the idea is plausible in principle. An obvious parallel is Dicaeopolis' speech in *Acharnians* (496-556), where likewise the Peloponnesian War is assimilated to the Trojan War, Pericles is blamed for, and scurrilous motives are alleged. The Greek invasion and Dionysus' cowardly reaction to it could make an excellent satire on Pericles' defensive strategy in the face of Peloponnesian invasions, a policy we know to have been derided in comedy (Hermippus fr. 74); Athene's offer of 'courage in war' would then be an ironical allusion to this alleged cowardice of Pericles. A complication is that, while Athene offers (and Dionysus declines) something which Pericles did not have, Hera's offer of 'unshakeable tyranny' (also declined) alludes to something which Cratinus elsewhere claims Pericles did have (a theme we will return to shortly). So we can see various possibilities of political innuendo, but cannot tell how exactly Cratinus exploited them.

It is worth mentioning in passing Cratinus' mythological burlesques did not always have a political target. According to Platonius, his *Odysseus* ('Odysseus and his companions') was a straightforward burlesque of the Polyphemus episode in the *Odyssey*. This play began with Odysseus and his crew putting into land to avoid a storm; it seems that their ship was portrayed by some piece of stage-machinery, and one fragment suggests that steering was troublesome (fr. 143b)—there is obvious scope here for comic business. The fragments give us many of the elements of the story familiar from Homer, but without revealing how they were turned into comedy. Polyphemus was perhaps more cautious than in Homer: in one fragment he enquires about Odysseus' whereabouts; he is told—curiously enough—that he was last seen on Paros 'buying a huge ripe cucumber' (fr. 147). Certainly, Cratinus' Polyphemus was on a higher level of civilisation than Homer's; instead of eating his victims raw, he took a lively interest in how to prepare them: 'for that I'll take all you "trustworthy comrades", and roast and boil and toast and broil you; I'll dip you in brine, and in vinegar-brine, and in garlic-brine; and whichever one of you seems most nicely done—I'll swallow him up, o soldiers' (fr. 150). 'Trustworthy companions' (ἐπιήρους ἐταίρους) is a Homeric phrase, and the whole passage is written in hexameters.

Platonius also tells us that the play was pure burlesque also tells us that it was a forerunner of Middle Comedy, in that it had no choral lyrics and no parabasis. This is absurd. The play certainly had a Chorus—we have some of its recitative lines (fr. 151), as well as one fragment of glyconics (fr. 153); and you cannot have a Chorus that does not sing. It is possible that the play was preserved only in an incomplete text, without the lyrics. We know that some of Cratinus' plays did not survive at all; and the lyric portions of dramatic texts were sometimes omitted in copies.¹⁴

¹³ For a notably flat-footed attempt see J. Schwarze, *Die Beurteilung des Perikles durch die attische Komödie* (Zetemata 51, Munich 1971), 6-24.

¹⁴ For the omission of lyrics see W.S. Barrett, *Euripides, Hippolytus* (Oxford, 1964), 438 n.2 (Taplin's sceptical discussion, *LCM* 1 (1976), 47-50, infers from the use of the formula χόρου μέλος where no lyrics had originally been composed that it was not used where the original lyrics had been omitted; this does not follow). Platonius' notice is discussed by M. Bertan, *Atene e Roma* 29 (1984), 171-8.

To return to the use of mythology in political satire: in a number of fragments Cratinus casts Pericles in the role of Zeus; again, *Acharnians* provides a parallel, when Dicaeopolis calls Pericles ‘the Olympian’ (530, cf. Telecleides fr. 17 Kock). Some of these turn on a joke about Pericles’ head, which was oddly-shaped (this is why he is always portrayed wearing a helmet.) In *Cheirones* (‘Chiron—the centaur—and his companions’), the Chorus (presumably of centaurs) sang a mock-theogony. Cronos mates with Stasis (Civil-strife), and begets ‘a great tyrant, whom the gods call...’: and then the Homeric epithet for Zeus, ‘cloud-gatherer’ (νεφεληγερέτα) is slightly altered, so that ‘cloud’ becomes ‘head’: κεφαληγερέτης (fr. 258; another fragment of the same song casts Pericles’ mistress Aspasia as ‘bitch-faced’ Hera (Homer says ‘cow-faced’) offspring of Cronos and καταπυγοσύνη, shameless sexual misconduct: fr. 259).

This theogony combines the motif of Pericles as Zeus with that of Pericles as tyrant. The same combination is found in a fragment of *Ploutoi* (‘gods of wealth’). The Chorus of this play consisted of Titans who, in the Golden Age when Cronos ruled, had been in charge of wealth; when Zeus overthrew Cronos, he had imprisoned them along with the other Titans. But now that the tyranny is overthrown and the δῆμος rules (δῆμος δὲ κρατεῖ, fr. 171.23) they have come back to visit their relative (ἀντοκοκασίγνητον, fr. 171.25); it is not certain what relative they are referring to: perhaps Plutus, the god of wealth, himself, anticipating Aristophanes’ play. The overthrow of the tyranny and the restoration of democracy (the latter detail making it clear that a contemporary reference underlies the mythological joke) is generally taken as a reference to the impeachment and temporary ousting from office of Pericles in 430;¹⁵ the play would then date from 429.

Not much of the action of this play can be discerned, but we know that an enquiry is instigated into the affairs of those who have been enriched, perhaps improperly, in the Chorus’s absence. We have some lines from a scene in which the politician Hagnon is under investigation; his defence counsel denies that he is a dishonest *nouveau riche*: on the contrary (fr. 171.70) he is ἀρχαίοπλουτος (that is, he is from a traditionally wealthy family), since he has all his property ἐξ ἀρχῆς, ‘from the beginning’—but also ‘from public office’.¹⁶ This pun puts us in territory familiar from Aristophanes, with the automatic assumption that politicians are corrupt profiteers.

We do not know how *Dionysalexandros* and *Ploutoi* fared in competition. But there is no doubt that Cratinus was the most distinguished comic poet at work in Athens in 430-29, the years to which these plays are conjecturally assigned. But

¹⁵ This interpretation is impossible if Pericles was restored to office before the following year’s elections (thus, e.g., Gomme on Thuc. 2.65.4). For the contrary view see C.W. Fornara, *The Athenian Board of Generals from 501 to 404 (Historia Einzelschriften 16, Wiesbaden 1971)*, 55; D. Kagan, *The Archidamian War* (Ithaca 1974), 93 and n.69.

¹⁶ Some scholars are sceptical about this pun. W. Luppe, *WZHalle* 16.1 (1976), 79-80 and n.105, followed by Schwarze (n.13) 47 n.105, distinguishes ἐξ ἀρχῆς from ἐκ τῆς ἀρχῆς; but many Aristophanic puns put a greater strain on ‘common usage’. J.C. Carrière, *Le carnaval et la politique* (Paris 1979), 280 objects that the speaker is supposed to be defending Hagnon, but see K.J. Dover (n.6) 59-65, on ‘discontinuity of characterisation’.

429 was also the year in which Eupolis made his début; and Aristophanes' first play, *Banqueters*, was produced two years later, in 427. A challenge to Cratinus' supremacy was afoot.

Aristophanes plays were at first produced on his behalf by others; it was not until 424, with the *Knights*, that he produced a play himself. In the parabasis of *Knights* (507-50) he explains his earlier reticence, and characteristically takes the opportunity to insult the audience: you are untrustworthy and treated earlier poets most unfairly. As examples of this unfairness he mentions Magnes (one of the great names from the earliest generation of Athenian comedy) and Crates (discussed already), but also, sandwiched between them, Cratinus. The placing of Cratinus between two poets whose careers were already over is not an accident. Aristophanes is full of praise for the talent Cratinus *used* to display; but he is scathing about his present drivellings. The audience's unkindness lies precisely in the way they make him go on spouting nonsense, even now he is incapacitated by old age and alcoholic indulgence; they ought to let him go into retirement and give him a seat of honour in the audience (*Knights* 526-36).

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that there is nothing to substantiate the picture of Cratinus which Aristophanes draws in this passage; it should be treated instead as an abusive and tendentious caricature of a still-vigorous rival. It is true that Cratinus was elderly (although if he began competing in the 450s he could still have been under sixty in 424); and there are enough jokes about his heavy drinking in the comic fragments to suggest that he was far from abstinent. But there is no reason at all to believe that he was incapacitated by age or by drink. Consider these facts. In the previous year, at the Lenaea of 425, Cratinus had been beaten into second place by Aristophanes' *Acharnians*; at the Lenaea of 424, he came second to *Knights* itself. The previous year's success obviously gave Aristophanes an opening for deriding his senior rival as passed it, but it does not justify the claim; after all, Cratinus came second, not third. In fact, in 425 third place had gone to Eupolis, who was presumably no push-over, since he had won first prize at the Lenaea in 426, and was to win first prize at the Dionysia of 424. Cratinus was hardly, on this evidence, washed out.

In the following year, Cratinus got his revenge. At the Dionysia of 423 Aristophanes' *Clouds* failed (if there were only three comedies, it came third out of three, but that is now uncertain);¹⁷ the first prize was awarded to Cratinus for his play *Putine* ('Wine-flask'), a play ingeniously founded on Aristophanes' slanders. We know something about its content from a scholion to *Knights*.

The chief character in the play was Cratinus himself, along with his 'wife', Comedy. The play began with Comedy explaining to the audience that she was going to leave Cratinus and sue for divorce on the grounds of neglect and ill-treatment. But friends of Cratinus arrive and urge her not to act in haste; I take it that this is the entry of the Chorus. There followed a debate in which Comedy set out her complaints and Cratinus defended himself. The fragments indicate that

¹⁷ For the assumption that the number of comedies performed was reduced from five to three during the Peloponnesian War; cf. A.W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*² (Oxford 1968), 83; *contra* W. Luppe, *Philologus* 116 (1972), 53-75

this exchange was in iambic trimeters, rather than the recitative metres we generally associate with a comic agon (although there is always a margin of uncertainty about the assignment of fragments to any particular scene).

The details of Comedy's complaint are uncertain. Clearly, Cratinus was unfaithful; she speaks of him running after every pretty little bottle (οἶνισκον, a paradoxical substitute for νεάνισκον, 'youth', in fr. 195). Some have thought of a mistress called Drink; unfortunately, when our source describes Comedy as complaining that 'he no longer writes comedy but devotes himself to drink (σχολάζου δὲ μέθη)', we cannot tell whether μέθη is to be construed as a personification, parallel to Comedy herself. But the sum of her complaint is clear: 'I used to be his wife, but am so no longer' (fr. 194; it is possible that another ground of complaint was poverty—at least, at some point in the play a character said 'I can't see even a cabbage-leaf or a bone any more': fr. 204). Of Cratinus' reply we have the first line, parodying a cliché, of legal oratory: 'you are aware, perhaps, of the preparations [sc., of my opponent]' (fr. 197);¹⁸ and the memorable epigram 'if you drink water you'll never get a good idea' (ὕδωρ δὲ πίνων οὐδὲν ἄν τέκοις σοφόν) probably belongs here (fr. 203). A fragment which praises the forcefulness of his expression may perhaps be a reaction to this speech (though since it refers to 'poems' this is doubtful); a nice touch is the way it echoes Aristophanes' double-edged compliments from the year before, exploiting the same metaphor of a torrent (fr. 198, cf. *Knights* 526-8).

As often in comedy, it seems that the debate did not resolve the issue.¹⁹ In another fragment an unidentifiable speaker (not Comedy, since the speaker is masculine) wonders how to stop Cratinus' excessive drinking, and has the idea of smashing all his wine-jars (fr. 199). We also find Cratinus lamenting over an empty container: 'is your belly truly full of cobwebs?' (fr. 202). But at some stage Cratinus acknowledged the error of his ways (fr. 200), and there must have been a reconciliation between him and Comedy. There are traces of a scene in which two characters are consulting about the writing of a comedy. 'Don't talk nonsense', one of them says, 'put him in an episode; Cleisthenes will be a laugh playing dice...' (fr. 208); and 'rub out "Hyperbolus" and write "in the lamps"' (fr. 209)—a reference to the standard comic portrayal of the politician Hyperbolus as a lamp-maker, just as Cleon was represented as a tanner. This scene surely follows the reconciliation; for it must be Cratinus who is writing the comedy, and who better to offer advice than Comedy herself? The conception is stunning: the comedian is being advised by Comedy on writing a comedy in a comedy. Of all lost comedies, this is the one I would most like to read.

We also know a little about the play's parabasis. The epirrhematic section criticised the citizens for neglecting the navy (fr. 211); this passage included a personification of triremes (fr. 210), in which one can detect an echo of the personified triremes of the second parabasis of *Knights* (1300-15). That is cheeky:

¹⁸ Cf. Andocides 1.1; Lysias 19.2; L. Radermacher, *Artium Scriptores* (SB Vienna 227.3, 1951), C29; παρασκευή often implies corrupt machinations, e.g. Lys.13.12 δικαστήριον παρασκευάσαντες, of a 'packed' jury, cf. 13.26, 28, Dem.43.38.

¹⁹ Cf. T. Long, *TAPA* 103 (1972), 285-99.

for the ‘parabasis proper’ contained a counter-attack on Aristophanes, and accused him of being a plagiarist (fr. 213), a point to which we shall return.

Putine is the last play that we know Cratinus to have produced, although given the gaps in our knowledge that does not prove that it was in fact his last play. We do not know the programme of the Dionysia of 422 or the Lenaea of 421. At the Dionysia in 421, in *Peace*, Aristophanes refers to Cratinus’ death: he could not stand the sight of a wine-jar being smashed by the Peloponnesian invaders (700-3). Since there had been no invasion between the production of *Putine* in 423 and the *Peace* in 421, this cannot be taken very literally; and the joke would be just as good if Cratinus were sitting in the audience, so we cannot be sure that he really was dead by 421. Just as I disbelieve the portrait of Cratinus offered in *Knights*, so I think we should be cautious of the sentimental image some have constructed of the burnt-out old poet pulling himself together for one last heroic effort before he died. In reality, we know nothing about the end of Cratinus’ career.

I mentioned that in *Putine* Cratinus accused Aristophanes of plagiarism, specifically of plagiarising Eupolis. Eupolis himself took up this charge in a later play, claiming to have ‘made a gift’ of the *Knights* to ‘baldy’ (τῷ φαλακρῷ, fr. 89).²⁰ This was itself a reaction to the charge (which we find in the revised parabasis of *Clouds*, 553-6) that Eupolis had copied *Knights*, and made a characteristically bad job of it (κακὸς κακῶς).²¹ What are we to make of these charges and counter-charges?

Reading through the comic fragments in bulk gives the impression that there was a common pool or repertoire of comic material: anything put on stage in a comedy would become public property and be absorbed into the repertoire, so that all comic poets contributed to it; and all drew on it, although each would aim to give a new and original twist to the material which he borrowed, so that the repertoire constantly evolved. If this was so, then any poet could lay claim to originality (since he gave the pooled material a novel twist); and any rival could make a counter-claim of plagiarism (since the material was in part drawn from the pool). Both claims have to be evaluated (and discounted) in the light of this constant process of exchange and evolution of material. The charges of plagiarism are part of a system of ritualised insults; they are not meant to be believed, but to make the other party lose face. There is a close parallel in Athenian political practice, where (as we know from Demosthenes and Aeschines) rival politicians swapped extravagant claims about each other’s origins and morals.²²

Invective based on a claim of foreign descent is a feature of the treatment of politicians by comic poets, as well as by other politicians; it was also a feature of

²⁰ For Aristophanes’ ‘baldness’ cf. *Knights* 560, *Peace* 767-74. The Eupolis fragment is discussed by A.H. Sommerstein, *CQ* 30 (1980), 51-3.

²¹ It is not safe to assume that Aristophanes attacked Eupolis for plagiarism only in the revised parabasis of *Clouds* (for another possible case see fr. 58, with the note in Kassel-Austen; others may simply have been lost). Hence D.P. Fowler’s claim that Eupolis ‘can rely on the audience knowing the revised *Clouds*’ (*CQ* 39 (1989), 258) is groundless, and no inference can be drawn concerning *Buchpoesie* in fifth-century Athens.

²² On the use of humour in political invective see P. Harding, *Phoenix* 41 (1987), 29-32.

comic poets' treatment of each other. Phrynichus, a contemporary of Eupolis and Aristophanes, was accused by his rivals of being a foreigner, as well as a rotten poet, a plagiarist and bad at metre. (These charges are recorded by a scholion to the prologue of *Frogs*, where Phrynichus is one of the rivals Aristophanes mocks. The note adds, rather touchingly, that there is nothing like this in Phrynichus' surviving plays, 'but presumably there was something of the kind in his lost works'; this commentator had clearly not grasped the ritualised character of such invective.)

Recall here the doubts about Aristophanes' origins that surface in the biographical tradition. If he were associated only with Aegina, we would obviously regard this as an inference from the parabasis of *Acharnians*, where Aristophanes associates himself with Aegina. But the sources also link him with Rhodes and with Naucratis in Egypt. This suggests the possibility that the charges are rooted in comic insults.²³ A fragment from one of Eupolis' parabases rebukes the audience for admiring 'foreign poets' and looking down on native ones 'at least as clever' (μηδ' ἐν χεῖρον φρονῶν, fr. 392), which surely attests to the mutual insults of comic dramatists, whether or not Aristophanes is one of the 'foreigners' specifically in view.

But let us now look more closely at Eupolis himself. The play which was, according to Aristophanes, plagiarised from *Knights* was Eupolis' *Maricas*, presented probably at the Lenaea of 421, that is, after Cleon's death, when Hyperbolus had come to political prominence. Hyperbolus (whom we have already met as a lamp-maker) was the play's target, disguised as the barbarian slave Maricas, in a household, with a master.²⁴ The basis for the charge of plagiarism is obvious. We can also trace some correspondences of detail in the fragments; like the Sausage-seller, Maricas had acquired only the rudiments of literacy (fr. 208; his education was informal, mostly picked up through eavesdropping in barbers' shops, which were centres of gossip: fr. 194). In spite of these resemblances, *Maricas* was certainly not a mindless reproduction of *Knights*; even the scanty fragments, eked out now by the discovery of a few bits of commentary on papyrus (fr. 192), suffice to prove that Eupolis innovated while borrowing.

One addition that Aristophanes disparagingly attests to was Hyperbolus' mother (*Clouds* 552). There was a stock joke about Hyperbolus' mother being a bread-seller (just as Euripides' mother was supposed to sell vegetables); Hermippus, another contemporary, wrote a play about Hyperbolus which had a Chorus of bread-sellers, the *Artopolides*. The comic potential of the female bread-seller can be deduced from Aristophanes. In *Frogs*, Dionysus refers to Aeschylus and Euripides abusing each other like bread-sellers (857-8); and when Lysistrata summons the market-women as allies to beat off the policemen, it is the bread-sellers who provide the climax: ὦ σπερμ-αγοραιο-λεκιθο-λαχανοπώλιδες, ὦ σκοροδο-πανδοκευτρι-αρτοπώλιδες (*Lys.* 457f.). These allies are summoned

²³ Cf. M.R. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (London 1981), 112f.

²⁴ On the derivation of the name Maricas from Old Persian ('male child', whence 'slave' and 'rogue') see A.C. Cassio, *CQ* 35 (1985), 38-42, with J.D. Morgan, *CQ* 36 (1986), 529-51. Morgan cites the comic and rhetorical invective against Hyperbolus based on his alleged servile or foreign birth; it is, of course, nonsense: H. Wankel, *ZPE* 15 (1974), 88f.

specifically for their violence, abusiveness and shamelessness (459f.). The bread-seller deprived of her wares appears in the *Wasps* (1388-1414; cf. 238), and also in one of Aristophanes' lost plays (*Geras*, fr. 129). Although he is not above exploiting bread-sellers himself, Aristophanes naturally puts an unfavourable gloss on the introduction of Hyperbolus' mother into *Maricas*, calling her 'the drunken old woman who danced the *kordax*' (*Clouds* 555; the *kordax* was a vulgar dance). Even that, he says, was plagiarised; Phrynichus had done it years ago (apparently in a burlesque treatment of the Andromeda story: fr. 71 Kock.)

Another innovation in Eupolis' play, confirmed by the papyrus, was the division of the Chorus into two groups: rich opponents of *Maricas*, and poor supporters. One may compare the division of the Chorus in *Lysistrata*. It is easy to see how this division, with the added dimension of conflict it makes possible, could have been a distinct improvement on the uniformly partisan Chorus of *Knights*. But the fragments do not give much away about how Eupolis exploited this potential. We have one fragment (fr. 193) in which a politically naive common man is being questioned by *Maricas* in an attempt to frame Nicias on a charge of treason: "How long have you been associated with Nicias?" "I've never seen him—except just now, standing in the agora." "He admits it! He's seen Nicias! And why would he have seen him, if he wasn't a traitor?" The semichorus of poor men exclaims that Nicias has been caught red-handed; the rich semichorus dismisses the charge with contempt.

How the plot developed, we have no idea. The Chorus presumably united for the parabasis, in which Eupolis called on his audience to 'wake up' and to 'rub the drivel of ephemeral poets' out of their eyes (fr. 205), and which referred to a god angrily inflicting disease on an army—a denunciation of the folly of the Athenians and/or their leaders (fr. 206). But the Chorus seems still to be divided after the parabasis.

One other joke we can discern is a parody of Aeschylus' *Persians*; the beginning of the lyric part of the parodos, where the Persian elders sing 'the city-destroying royal army has crossed over' is emended, the royal army being replaced by the 'city-destroying *Maricas*' (πεπέρακεν μὲν ὁ περσέπολις ἤδη Μαρικῶς, fr. 207). This alludes simultaneously to Hyperbolus' alleged barbarian birth, and to the grandiose imperialist ambitions which are mocked also in the second parabasis of *Knights* (1303f.), where Hyperbolus is said to be planning to send a hundred triremes against Carthage.

The impossibility of reconstructing the plot of *Maricas*, even to the limited extent we were able to reconstruct the plots of Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* and *Putine*, is a problem that plagues us wherever we turn in Eupolis. But in a couple of other plays we can at least glimpse the comic idea on which the irrecoverable plot was based. Probably the most famous of Eupolis' plays in antiquity was the *Demes*, produced (it is thought) in 412. In it, four statesmen from the good old days—Solon, Aristides, Miltiades and Pericles—were brought back from the dead to put Athens to rights.

The man who brought them back was called Pyronides. It has generally been believed that this Pyronides was identical with Myronides, the famous Athenian

general active in the 450s. This identification gives rise to reconstructions like that of Page, in his *Literary Papyri*, in which the recently dead (this is a guess) Myronides reports the degenerate state of Athens to the other dead, who thereupon decide to send a deputation to the upper world to sort things out.²⁵ But the identification of Pyronides and Myronides rests solely on a corrupt variant reading in a single manuscript of Plutarch. I can see no reason why Eupolis should have changed the name nor why, if five dead men returned, Aelius Aristides, our main source, mentions only four. The identification is untenable, therefore, and Myronides should be left out of account entirely; Pyronides was an ordinary Athenian exasperated by the state of affairs in contemporary Athens (a man like, say, Dicaeopolis), who has the idea of retrieving someone from the dead to solve his problem (as does Dionysus in the *Frogs*).²⁶

The discovery of a papyrus (fr. 99) with the end of the parabasis and parts of the following scenes gives us one fixed point in the plot to work with. After the parabasis, which contains attacks on various prominent contemporaries, Aristides arrives in Athens in company with Pyronides and greets his native land (fr. 90.35f.); they meet some unidentifiable interlocutor, and are welcomed by the Chorus, which also questions Pyronides about—something: his identity, journey, whatever (fr. 99.68ff.). What has become of the other statesmen? They cannot have arrived before Aristides, because the Chorus seems to be greeting Pyronides for the first time; but not more than sixty lines into this scene a plurality of visitors from the dead are seated together (with Pyronides alone remaining standing, and talking to the Chorus: fr. 99.64f.). So the other statesmen must have arrived with Aristides, and must have been played by mutes; at any rate, if we have Aristides, Pyronides and the unidentified interlocutor as speaking parts, we clearly cannot have all the other statesmen speaking as well. (The constraints are the same as with the goddesses in *Dionysalexandros*.)

The papyrus also contains fragments of a subsequent scene in which a sycophant tries to justify his activities, describing an incident in which he had tried to blackmail a foreigner on a trumped-up charge of profaning the Eleusinian Mysteries: he had barley in his beard, and a barley-drink was used in the Mysteries, so clearly he must have been involved in a parody of them (fr. 99.81f.). Aristides the Just has him carted off to summary punishment, and lectures the Athenians on the importance of justice (fr. 99.112ff.).

Although the other statesmen were probably played by mutes after the parabasis, with Aristides as their spokesman, the others did speak at some point in the play; we have fragments in which Miltiades and Pericles speak (fr. 106, 110). Furthermore, although the four apparently arrive in Athens together, there is also evidence that at some point in the play they were introduced on stage one after

²⁵ D.L. Page (ed.), *Select Papyri, 3: Literary Papyri, Poetry* (London 1941), 202-4. Since the text is outdated, the translations in this volume should also be used with caution.

²⁶ For the source of the 'Myronides' confusion, see Kassel-Austin's apparatus to fr. 110, with that to fr. 100 for the correct form; they retain the identification, but cannot solve the problems it entails ('cur hoc nomine Myronides comice appellaverit... poeta non liquet'). The contrary arguments in K. Plepelits, *Die Fragmente der Demen des Eupolis* (Vienna 1970), 116-32, are convincing.

another (if they are all to speak, this procedure is inevitable). The last in the series was Pericles, and Eupolis revives the old joke about his head: Pericles is the ‘summing up’ of those from below, κεφάλαιον (fr. 115). Pericles then asked about his sons (fr. 110, 111, 112; the dead are interested in news from up here, as in the *Odyssey* 11.492f.) and perhaps about the state of oratory—at any rate, there is discussion at some point about contemporary oratory (fr. 103, 116). Since sons and oratory are both treated as degenerate, Eupolis is here engineering an opportunity to insult living individuals.

This serial introduction of the statesmen must have occurred before the parabasis. Presumably it was Pyronides who gave them news about the living; there are also traces of someone who introduced the dead to him—a guide or assistant, whose identity is unknown (fr. 102). Given the parallel in *Frogs*, it is natural to assume that Pyronides went down to the underworld to get his statesmen; and the Chorus do speak of him as having ‘come’ from somewhere (fr. 99.70). But this is not the only way to raise the dead—we have seen already that Eupolis had read Aeschylus’ *Persians*. So perhaps we should remain agnostic on this point, as on many others; in particular, one would like to know how the continuity of the Chorus before and after the parabasis was handled.²⁷

The comparison of Pyronides with Dicaeopolis and Dionysus in the *Frogs* should recall the point made earlier about the shared repertoire of comic material, drawn on by the poets, but constantly varied and reworked. The buffonish Dionysus of *Frogs* was a more common and stereotyped element in comedy than the surviving works of Aristophanes suggest. He appeared in our first, *Dionysalexandros*, and also in Aristophanes’ lost *Babylonians*; he also appeared in my last play, Eupolis’ *Taxiarchs* (the taxiarchs were the elected commanders of the infantry contingent of each of the ten Athenian tribes).²⁸

Apart from Dionysus himself, the leading character in this play was Phormio, the great Athenian general, active since 440, but best known for the naval victories described in the second book of Thucydides. Phormio is mentioned in *Lysistrata* as an example of the rugged, manly soldier type (*Lys.* 801-4); and clearly he fitted the same mould in Eupolis’ play: ‘don’t you know my name is Ares?’, he asks in one fragment (fr. 268.13). The contrast with the soft, effeminate and cowardly Dionysus has obvious comic potential, which Eupolis tapped by making Dionysus a new recruit who Phormio has to train in military ways; for example, he was instructed in how to hold his shield (fr. 276), and in how to row: ‘Stop spraying us, you in the prow... stretch out your leg...’ (fr. 268.50-3). The parallel with Dionysus’ rowing-lesson in *Frogs* (197ff.) leaps to mind here, and illustrates again how foolish it would be to take seriously Aristophanes’ charges of plagiarism.

²⁷ For an unconvincing discussion see Plepelits (n.25) 69-75.

²⁸ Other appearances of Dionysus in Old Comedy are known: Aristophanes wrote a *Dionysus nauagos*, Aristomenes a *Dionysus asketes*; two plays entitled *Dionysus* are attributed to Magnes; Dionysus appeared in Ameipsias’ *Apokokottabizontes* and a play of Hermippus (fr. 77, spoken by Dionysus according to Athenaeus).

Presumably Dionysus made a complete mess of his training. Certainly, he was unpromising raw material: he came to the camp equipped (as Phormio contemptuously remarks) with a bath-tub and a cauldron, like a female camp-follower from Ionia (fr. 272, the Ionians being regarded as notoriously soft); he may even have had a parasol (fr. 481). He is confronted with the grim facts of military rations: a peeled onion and three salted olives (fr. 275); but he retains a longing for a better way of life, 'Naxian almonds to eat and wine to drink from Naxian vines' (fr. 271; the god Dionysus had a particular association with Naxos). But how this potentially rich situation was developed (to what extent, for example, Phormio was deflated by his inept pupil, as Aristophanes deflates Lamachus)—once more, we do not know. The information we have in this case is so sparse that the limits of responsible speculation are encountered even sooner than with the other plays I have discussed. The greatest wisdom in the study of lost plays is the knowledge of when to fall silent.