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The People of Aristophanes

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No one has yet succeeded in constructing a complete and coherent theory of character.

(Mieke Bal, *Narratology*)

I personally would like to bring a tortoise onto the stage, turn it into a racehorse, then into a hat, a song, a dragon and a fountain of water.

(Ionesco, *Notes and Counter-Notes*)

I

Aristophanes is not, in the ordinary sense, a difficult writer, and many of the incidental difficulties which he does pose—say, those involving intricate verbal jokes—are well understood by his interpreters. The diverse creatures who people his plays, however, pose special problems of interpretation. Consider the following representative instances from *Thesmophoriazusae*, which serve to suggest some pertinent questions. The instances are transparently uncomplicated—and therefore convenient to begin with.

Thesmophoriazusae is a striking mixture of (*inter alia*) broad comedy and devotional lyrics. Some of the broad comedy and all of the devotional lyrics are carried by one set of people, the women at the Thesmophoria—some of them in the chorus, some ostensibly among 'the characters'.[1] The women combine

[1] Except for the possibility that the 'Lady Herald' may be the chorus-leader (cf. K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (London, 1972), 166 f.), it is customary to assume that the two groups are wholly separate. However, it is not obvious what distinguishes (e.g.) 531 f. (traditionally ascribed to the chorus) from 533 ff. (ascribed to the anonymous 'First Woman'). The groups certainly share the same alignment and indeed the same virtual anonymity: two of the women (we learn incidentally) have typical names (Μίκ(κ)α, 760; Κρίτυλλα, 898), but then so do *choral* individuals elsewhere (e.g. Δράκης, *Lys.* 254; Νικοδίκη, *Lys.* 321; etc.). Need it be assumed that the groups are wholly separate in fact?

two main roles. They are humorous figures, aggressive assailants of Euripides, and they are devotional figures, pious hymn-singers who celebrate the gods in five separate choral songs. The question arising here is simply this: What sort of relationship is there between the two roles, and what sort of entities are the women who play them?

The two central characters of *Thesmophoriazusae* are clever Euripides and his dumb and docile relative Mnesilochus.[2] Early in the play Euripides concocts a plan to get a man disguised as a woman to infiltrate the women's festival. Euripides cannot go himself. His fellow dramatist Agathon has the wit and the performing-skills required, and Euripides asks him to do the job. When Agathon refuses, Mnesilochus offers his services instead—although (on the evidence of his bumbling performance to date) he patently lacks any qualification for such a delicate mission:

Ευ. ὦ τρισκακοδαίμων ὡς ἀπόλωλ' Εὐριπίδης.
Μν. ὦ φίλτατ' ὦ κηδεστὰ μὴ σαυτὸν προδῷς.
Ευ. πῶς οὖν ποιήσω δῆτα;
Μν. τοῦτον μὲν μακρὰ
κλάειν κέλευ', ἐμοὶ δ' ὅ τι βούλει χρῶ λαβών.
Ευ. ἄγε νυν . . .

EU. Poor, poor Euripides! done for!
MN. My dear cousin, don't give up.
EU. What can I do?
MN. Tell him to go to hell: how about using me?
EU. Well, in that case . . . (209–13)[3]

The comic possibilities of Mnesilochus' failure duly form the basis for most of the subsequent action. Euripides, one notes, never actually suggested that Mnesilochus should take the part. That—one might say—is because it won't work, and Euripides would be too clever to suggest it. Why, then, does the clever Euripides accept such an implausible offer at all? And why does the dumb and docile Mnesilochus suddenly thrust himself into

[2] The name Mnesilochus, as is well known, is not used in the text, but derives from ΣR. This notwithstanding, it is both convenient and harmless (cf. the use of the name Homer), whereas the alternatives (the favourite English alternative is 'Kinsman') tend to be frigid and distracting.

[3] Quotations from Aristophanes follow the text of Sommerstein, but for *Thes.* (as here) the text of Hall and Geldart (OCT).

the part in the first place?—a part which, while all goes well, he proceeds to perform with gusto and some considerable inventiveness. It is not an answer to say, 'The plot requires it.' This moment is itself part of the plot; and anyway that kind of answer only converts the first set of questions into a second set: Why is it acceptable, on the level of what we call character, for the plot to 'require' it? In these various examples we seem to observe inconsistencies of behaviour in varying degrees on the part of the women, Euripides, and Mnesilochus. Why, and how, are such inconsistencies acceptable?

Consider again the women in *Thesmophoriazusae*. Their duality produces (or is produced by) not only inconsistencies of behaviour in the ordinary sense, but also inconsistencies of linguistic behaviour. There is a moment in the play when, after Mnesilochus in disguise has spoken up for Euripides (466–519), the women react furiously. One of them threatens, obscenely, to shave his (supposedly her) pussy (χοῖρος, 538), a threat to which Mnesilochus responds with understandable alarm ('Please, ladies, not my *pussy*!', 540). Up to this point the women have been fairly restrained in their language, not only in the songs with all their religiosities ('come thou, mighty maiden . . . come thou, dread lord of the sea', 317 ff.), but in the dialogue too. The sudden use of the word χοῖρος represents, for them, a stylistic switch: the level suddenly drops. If asked to 'explain' this switch, we might point to the speaker's anger, as if the change were explicable in terms of a real individual's real emotional reaction. Such a rationalizing explanation is certainly available in this case. But stylistic switches abound in Aristophanes, and most of them are not explicable in such terms. One case in point, among many others, is a comparable vulgarism early on in the play, this time on the lips of Euripides. Mnesilochus, who is again the recipient of the obscenity, purports not to be able to remember who Agathon is. Euripides puts him wise:

Μν. μῶν ὁ δασυπώγων;
Ευ. οὐχ ἑόρακας πώποτε;
Μν. μὰ τὸν Δί' οὔτοι γ' ὥστε καί μέ γ' εἰδέναι.
Ευ. καὶ μὴν βεβίνηκας σύ γ', ἀλλ' οὐκ οἶσθ' ἴσως.

MN. The one with the untidy beard?

EU. Haven't you ever seen him?
MN. No—not consciously, anyway.
EU. Well, you must at least have fucked him—not consciously, of course. (33–5)

Up to this point Euripides, like the women later, has spoken in a restrained idiom. His remarks to Mnesilochus have been equable in tone, and there is nothing now to suggest that his mood has changed. Nor is there anything in his characterization to come which would suggest that obscenity is a fundamental trait of his, as it is, by contrast, of Mnesilochus'. This vulgarism, certainly, is hardly open to rationalization.[4]

In Aristophanes the stylistic level of a speaker's (or a singer's) words switches frequently and, often, drastically. In interpreting his plays we tend to rationalize such switches, or (failing that) to explain them away as 'comic effect'—thus resorting to a tautology which in a sense points to the true explanation of the phenomenon and yet, in itself, explains nothing. The fact is that both our rationalizings and our ascriptions of 'comic effect' presuppose what is not the case: that, irrespective of any contrary indications, the speakers, and the singers, of Aristophanic comedy must ultimately conform to realistic norms.

For a stylistic idiom to be compatible with realism, it must involve a range of expression which is *consistently* related to a vernacular language, a language of experience, a language of

[4] On Aristophanes' stylistic switches, cf. my discussion in 'Pathos in Aristophanes', *BICS* 34 (1987), 78–111. Regarding the tone of βινεῖν, H. D. Jocelyn, *LCM* 5 (1980), 65–7, has argued interestingly that (unlike e.g. English 'fuck') the word is not obscene, partly on the grounds of its distribution within Attic comedy (esp. its use by females), partly on the grounds of its supposed occurrence in a Solonian law (Hsch. s.v. βινεῖν = Solon, *Test. Vet.* 448 Martina). He suggests that the word, instead, had an 'intimate' tone. Against this: (i) the overwhelming occurrence of the word is in low literature (largely comic—cf. the representative citations in LSJ—but note also Arch. 152. 2 West, Hippon. 84. 16 West): if this (given the sense of the word) does not suggest obscenity, it is not clear what would. (ii) 'Intimacy' is not actually incompatible with obscenity: it is a known feature of current English (certainly British English) usage that the obscene 'fuck' is used by some couples (including female members of couples) in intimate contexts, and one recalls D. H. Lawrence's thoughts in this general area (see e.g. 'A propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*', in D. H. Lawrence, *Phoenix II*, ed. W. Roberts and H. T. Moore (London, 1968), 514). (iii) The presence of an 'intimacy' in a law, however, seems appreciably less likely (even) than that of an obscenity. (iv) But in any case the actual source of the 'Solonian' citation is as uncertain as its detail (on which Jocelyn himself remarks (67): 'this entry [in Hsch.] is obscure and has been much emended'). All in all, Jocelyn's challenge to the established view can only be called insubstantial.

life. Either the idiom is felt to amount to a 'selection of the language really spoken by men', as Wordsworth called it;[5] or alternatively it involves a broadly consistent stylization, like (for instance) the stylization of Greek tragic language, which does not constitute anything like a language of life, but is, nevertheless, fixed and conventionalized at a set, comprehensible distance from some hypothetical and more naturalistic idiom, which *would* pass for a language of life *à la* Wordsworth. In the latter case, specifically colloquial vocabulary, phraseology, syntax, and so on, will tend to be excluded, not capriciously or opportunistically in one play or in one part of one play, but *throughout* the play or plays. And the same principle of consistency applies to the more conspicuous, if still limited, presence of archaisms, conventional tropes, and the other familiar features of an elevated language.[6] This principle of consistency is complicated, but not subverted, by a gradation of stylization into different levels—like the levels represented by song and speech in Greek tragedy, or narrative and direct speech in many novels, or the direct speech of one character and the direct speech of another character in much narrative fiction and much drama too. In Aristophanes, the inconsistency within a given speaker's range of idiom points the opposite way. The style in which his people are made to express themselves is incompatible with any kind of realism; and more fundamentally, as this consideration of style serves to suggest, the people of Aristophanes *per se* are not strictly containable within any realist understanding of human character at all. Their linguistic and their non-linguistic behaviour[7] may cohere, but in neither case on a realist premiss. And as such, these beings are distinguishable from their counterparts in the central tradition of Western fiction, in drama or outside it.

[5] Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (rev. edn.; London, 1965), 244 (1802 variant).

[6] Cf. Arist. *Poet.* 22; M. S. Silk, 'LSJ and The Problem of Poetic Archaism: From Meanings to Iconyms', *CQ* NS 33 (1983), 303.

[7] *Pace* the curious pretence (current among some literary theoreticians) that linguistic behaviour ('text') is everything. 'Outside of language there is neither self nor desire', says one theorist (J. Frow, 'Spectacle Binding: On Character', *Poetics Today*, 7/2 (1986), 238). In drama (which includes silent films and ballet), as in life (which extends to deaf and dumb illiterates etc.), this is self-evidently untrue. Cf. (in the classical context) the welcome discussion by D. Wiles, 'Reading Greek Performance', *G & R* 34 (1987), 136–51.

This whole non-Aristophanic tradition we may call *the realist tradition*. It is the tradition within which 'l'effet du réel'[8] is not so much characteristic as ultimately decisive. In agreeing to call it 'realist', one is using 'realism' not (like many literary historians[9]) as a period term, but to designate 'a perennial mode of representing the world' in its 'consequential logic and circumstantiality', a mode which has no 'single style' and whose actual style, or styles, in any given age vary according to cultural norms, and whose 'dominance at any one time is a . . . cultural option'.[10] So defined, the realist tradition is the tradition canonized by Aristotle's theory and Menander's practice, and the tradition which reaches its fullest expression in the nineteenth-century novel. And so defined, the tradition includes instances of the two contrasting types of fiction, the narrative and the dramatic: narrative fiction, with (typically) its 'omniscient' narrator who can tell us about a character, as well as seeming to show us that character in action; and dramatic fiction, which presupposes the individual human presence of the actor—whose performance, furthermore, introduces a variable which (except in a marginal case like oral-epic recitation) has no equivalent in the narrative sphere. The differences between narrative and drama are large and important, but, for present purposes, inconsequential.

Within the realist tradition we encounter a wide variety of ways of representing fictional people. Sometimes we feel called on to comprehend these people as 'characters', sometimes (to use Christopher Gill's distinction) to empathize with them as 'personalities'.[11] Some presentations seem to expand or diffuse

[8] The phrase was coined by Roland Barthes in an essay itself entitled 'L'Effet du réel' in *Communications*, 11 (1968), 84 ff. For Barthes the stress is on 'effet', not on 'réel', because of the structuralist anxiety to see literature as removed from reference to real life. However, the fact that all fictional characters (like everything in literature) are *constructed* apart from real life (which is what we mean by 'fictional') does not affect their referential capacity to evoke that outside reality. Cf. G. D. Martin, *Language, Truth and Poetry* (Edinburgh, 1975), 68–106.

[9] Most commonly of nineteenth-century, as opposed to earlier, fiction, but also of 'modern' as opposed to 'ancient' fiction (so, for instance, among classicists, G. M. Sifakis, *Parabasis and Animal Choruses* (London, 1971), 7–14, esp. 9). See further the refs. in nn. 10 and 12 below.

[10] J. P. Stern, *On Realism* (London, 1973), 32, 28, 52, 79, 158. On the history of the term 'realism', see R. Wellek, 'The Concept of Realism in Literary Scholarship', *Neophilologus*, 45 (1961), 1–20.

[11] See n. 21 below.

single traits, some seem to produce 'rounded' characters. The presentation may impinge as two-dimensional or as three-dimensional; as more or as less inward-looking; as a matter of status at least as much as of temperament; as a matter of types or as a matter of individuals. And interpreters may have good reason to draw attention to the differences between the presentations of (say) the Greek tragedians and Eugene O'Neill, or Shakespeare and his predecessors, or Euripides and *his* predecessors, or (most commonly) the modern European novel and *its* predecessors.[12] But all such presentations have one thing in common. The people presented have what we may see as a constant relationship with 'reality'—with the world outside as we perceive it or might be presumed to perceive it—because they stand at a constant distance from that real world.[13] They impinge as sentient beings, each with a tendency to be (in Aristotle's language) 'appropriate', 'lifelike', and 'consistent'.[14] At its most clear-cut this tradition produces figures in which we detect a wealth of recognizable detail, with each detail corresponding to some possibility of life, and each detail connectible with or continuous with some other—even *each* other—detail, and the product of the details a recognizable yet also unique creation. It is within this tradition, and only within this tradition, that characters can be seen to do what we call 'develop'.[15] Such development (it might be argued) implies a progression from one perceived state to another via shifts of emphasis between the identifiable details—perhaps like phonetic changes taking place via a continuum of allophones.[16] Within this tradition development is possible, though most certainly not invariable or even always usual: it is most characteristic of the nineteenth-century novel, though we seem to see it first attested in eighth-century BC epic, in the shape of Homer's Achilles.[17]

[12] As (variously) J. P. Gould, 'Dramatic Character and "Human Intelligibility" in Greek Tragedy', *PCPS*, NS 24 (1978), 43–67; K. Newman, *Shakespeare's Rhetoric of Comic Character* (New York, 1985); J. Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (London, 1962), 239–79; I. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (London, 1957), 9–34.

[13] Cf. Stern, *Realism*, 55.

[14] Arist. *Poet.* 15; see Lucas ad loc., and most recently, S. Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London, 1986), 159–65.

[15] It is not uncommon to find the capacity 'to develop and change' virtually equated with 'character' *per se* (as by Newman, *Shakespeare's Rhetoric*, 1).

[16] On which see e.g. M. L. Samuels, *Linguistic Evolution* (Cambridge, 1972), 126.

[17] See M. S. Silk, *Homer, The Iliad* (Cambridge, 1987), 83–96.

Aristophanes (I suggest) does not strictly belong to this tradition. There are, it is true, some Aristophanic characters that lend themselves reasonably well to a realist interpretation. Take Strepsiades in *Clouds*. He is a recognizable type, in opposition to his equally typical son Pheidippides. The son is a corruptible, extravagant young urban sophisticate:

> *Φε.* ὡς ἡδὺ καινοῖς πράγμασιν καὶ δεξιοῖς ὁμιλεῖν,
> καὶ τῶν καθεστώτων νόμων ὑπερφρονεῖν δύνασθαι.
> ἐγὼ γάρ, ὅτε μὲν ἱππικῇ τὸν νοῦν μόνῃ προσεῖχον,
> οὐδ' ἂν τρί' εἰπεῖν ῥήμαθ' οἷός τ' ἦ πρὶν ἐξαμαρτεῖν.
> νυνὶ δ', ἐπειδή μ' οὑτοσὶ τούτων ἔπαυσεν αὐτός,
> γνώμαις δὲ λεπταῖς καὶ λόγοις ξύνειμι καὶ μερίμναις,
> οἶμαι διδάξειν ὡς δίκαιον τὸν πατέρα κολάζειν.

PH. How nice to be *au fait* with everything clever and chic, and have the chance to look down on traditional values. In the days when all I could think about was racing, I couldn't put two words together without making a gaffe. But now . . . [Socrates] has got me out of that, and I spend my time on subtle ideas, arguments, preoccupations, I think I can show that it's morally right to whack your father. (1399–1405)

The father is a thrifty, crude old peasant, crafty but not brainy, and deeply conservative:

> *Στ.* πῶς οὖν ἀπολαβεῖν τἀργύριον δίκαιος εἶ,
> εἰ μηδὲν οἶσθα τῶν μετεώρων πραγμάτων;

ST. So how can you be entitled to get your money back, if you don't know about meteorology? (1283–4)

> *Στ.* ὡς ἐμαινόμην ἄρα,
> ὅτ' ἐξέβαλον καὶ τοὺς θεοὺς διὰ Σωκράτη.

ST. How mad I was, then, when I actually threw the gods out—all because of Socrates! (1476–7)

It is not difficult to list the leading characteristics of the two figures (in this instance they are inseparably matters of status and temperament), or to see how, with Strepsiades in particular, actions and words are aligned to each other: how they are evocative, that is, of various character-traits *as a continuum*. The old man's coarse language, for instance, is suggestive of an earthy background *and* of a certain intellectual mediocrity *and* of a fundamental antipathy to the Socratic Enlightenment. All

three characteristics, accordingly, are shown to belong together:

Σω. ὦ μέγα σεμναὶ Νεφέλαι, φανερῶς ἠκούσατέ μου καλέσαντος.
ἤσθου φωνῆς ἅμα καὶ βροντῆς μυκησαμένης θεοσέπτου;
Στ. καὶ σέβομαί γ', ὦ πολυτίμητοι, καὶ βούλομαι ἀνταποπαρδεῖν
πρὸς τὰς βροντάς· οὕτως αὐτὰς τετραμαίνω καὶ πεφόβημαι·
κεἰ θέμις ἐστίν, νυνί γ' ἤδη—κεἰ μὴ θέμις ἐστί—χεσείω.

SO. O most holy Clouds, you have hearkened to my call in visible form. [*To St.*] Did you hear their voice in the awesome thunder's roar?

ST. Yes, and I'm in awe, all right, O most honoured ones, and I'm so nervous and shaken up I feel like farting back at the thunder. Maybe it's right and maybe it's wrong, but the fact is I need a shit this minute. (291–5)

Furthermore, Strepsiades even begins to develop. He learns from experience. He sees his past in a new perspective, and is therefore able to identify what went before as his mistake ('how mad I was', 1476), like (say) Cnemon in *Dyscolus* (713) or Creon in *Antigone* (1272). These are real, if minimal, instances of development. They are distinct, for instance, from the differential revelation of character we encounter in (say) *Bacchae* with Pentheus, who begins as strident autocrat and ends as susceptible psychopath, but (we infer) was actually ('really') both all the time. The development of a Strepsiades, a Cnemon, or a Creon, of course, is slight compared with the development of (say) an Isabel Archer:

> Madame Merle was already so present to her vision that her appearance in the flesh was like suddenly, and rather awfully, seeing a painted picture move. Isabel had been thinking all day of her falsity, her audacity, her ability, her probable suffering . . . She pretended not even to smile, and though Isabel saw that she was more than ever playing a part, it seemed to her that on the whole the wonderful woman had never been so natural. (Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, ch. lii)

Such a complex response as Isabel's here, with its intricate mixture of positive and negative feelings, presupposes a fully explored personal history, which presupposes, in turn, a development over a substantial period of fictional time, even (as with James's novel) a period of years. Full development, one might

say, requires at least the time-span of a Shakespearean tragedy (or an *Iliad*)—the span sufficient, for instance, to show us a 'progress' like Macbeth's from a guilty recklessness ('come what come may', I. iii; 'If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well | It were done quickly', I. vii) to the several stages of moral dissolution that follow ('I am afraid to think what I have done', II. i; 'What man dare, I dare', III. iv; 'I have almost forgot the taste of fears', V. v.). A Greek tragedy (or New Comedy) tends, instead, to centre on an expanded moment of crisis and the magnification of an individual's response to it. Such patterns, nevertheless, are obviously conducive to the presentation of character-development, however embryonic; and it is symptomatic that they should be as generally uncharacteristic of Aristophanic comedy as they are characteristic of Greek tragedy.

Most (perhaps all) of Aristophanes' characters belong in *some* degree to the realist tradition, and some of them (like Strepsiades) might be construed—without too much forcing of the evidence—as belonging wholly to it. However, most (perhaps all) of them partake also of a different mode of representation, which, for lack of a better term, I propose to call *imagist*. Words used in images—that is, words used tropically, and especially words used metaphorically—disrupt the terminological continuity of their context.[18] Like words used literally, they evoke some reality.[19] Unlike words used literally, they evoke their reality through discontinuity. Verbal sequences that involve imagery rarely consist entirely of disruptive terminology (an exception is the ancient allegory). Commonly, the image is part disrupt*ive* terminology (the 'vehicle'), part disrupt*ed* terminology (the 'tenor').[20] Aristophanes' characters, similarly, have their realist elements, or moments, or sequences, disrupted by imagist elements, or moments, or sequences. And though realist elements, or moments, or sequences, remain, the presence of the disruptive serves to differentiate the representation as a whole from realism proper. In the discontinuities of imagist presentation, accordingly, it is reasonable to see a factor of decisive importance.[21]

[18] See M. S. Silk, *Interaction in Poetic Imagery* (Cambridge, 1974), 6–14.
[19] Cf. Martin, *Language*.
[20] Cf. Silk, *Interaction*, 8–14.
[21] This analogy between character and image is (as far as I know) my own. Various

To avoid any misunderstanding at this stage in the argument, it should be noted that some of Aristophanes' characters, especially some that we may think of as his 'non-fictional' characters, invite comparison with images on quite different grounds. Take Socrates in *Clouds*. This figure may or may not have traits comparable with those of the historical Socrates. What he certainly has is exaggerated traits—recondite scientific interests, pretensions to authority, spokesmanship of new deities, an indifferent attitude towards the two arguments, Right and Wrong—which collectively amount to a cartoon of the new intellectualism. But what sort of cartoon is it? Not the emblematic, metonymic kind (as Uncle Sam is a metonym for the USA or John Bull for England). Rather the metaphorical kind—like the lumbering cart-horse which the cartoonist Low regularly used to represent the Trades Union Congress in Britain between the wars, or the infant of tender years he once used to represent the human race in the new atomic age ('Baby play with nice ball?'). So in *Clouds* the new Enlightenment is personified as a mad scientist, called (for convenience) Socrates. So (more transparently) in *Knights* the relation

critics and theorists have suggested that there is a tendency towards discontinuous characterization in *comedy in general*: e.g. N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957), 170; and notably L. Pirandello, *L'Umorismo* (1908), who suggests that serious writing 'composes' a character 'and will want to represent him as consistent in every action', whereas 'the humorist . . . will *decompose* the character . . . and . . . enjoys representing him in his incongruities' (quoted from the trans. by A. Illiano and D. P. Testa, *On Humor* (Univ. of N. Carolina Studies in Comp. Lit., 58; Chapel Hill, 1974), 143). Discontinuity in Aristophanic characterization has been discussed, but without what I take to be the necessary emphasis, e.g. by Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, 59–65. Remarkably, theories of character as a whole tend to ignore the fact that there is such a thing as discontinuous presentation at all. This is the case with such diverse and wide-ranging discussions as C. C. Walcutt, *Man's Changing Mask: Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction* (Minneapolis, 1966); P. Hamon, 'Pour un statut sémiologique du personnage', in R. Barthes *et al.*, *Poétique du récit* (Paris, 1977), 115–80; S. Freeman, 'Character in a Coherent Fiction', *Philosophy and Literature*, 7 (1983), 196–212; J. Frow, 'Spectacle Binding'; S. Chatman, 'Characters and Narrators'; U. Margolin, 'The Doer and the Deed: Action as a Basis for Characterization in Narrative'; C. Gill, 'The Question of Character and Personality in Greek Tragedy' (all four essays in *Poetics Today*, 7/2 (1986), 189–273). Structuralist-semiotic attempts to 'dissolve' character into 'text' are no exception (see e.g. J. Weinsheimer, 'Theory of Character: *Emma*', *Poetics Today*, 1 (1980), 195; cf. Hamon, 'Pour un statut'; Margolin, 'The Doer'; Frow, 'Spectacle Binding'): *all* character is simply subjected to a common reinterpretative principle. Margolin, however, briefly considers the phenomenon of texts (e.g. the *nouveau roman*) which frustrate expectations of 'a unified stable constellation' of '[character] traits or trait-clusters' ('The Doer', 207).

between the people and their leading politicians is represented metaphorically as the relation between an old man (labelled Demos, as he might be in a modern cartoon) and his slaves, old and new.

Whatever else he is, Euripides in *Thesmophoriazusae* is partly an image of this kind. For instance, despite his original disinclination to disguise himself, Euripides in fact goes through three disguises, the last of which is the disguise of the old madam. Why *that* disguise? Because Euripidean tragedy (in Aristophanes' eyes) is a new and morally subversive kind of drama, fascinating but disturbing: lower in tone than the heroic tragedy of an earlier age (its heroes in rags were notorious), more seductive in its persuasive techniques.[22] This is all summed up in the representation of Euripides himself as an old hag bringing on a girl to seduce the forces of law and order (here the Scythian policeman) and thereby distracting and (literally) disarming them. More generally, the Euripides of this play is an image in the same sense: he is a personification of the 'real' Euripides' own plays. Among the other salient characteristics of those plays (as seen by Aristophanes) are melodramatic emotional moments, flashy ideas, modishly difficult thoughts, and a penchant for the unexpected. Accordingly, throughout this play the character Euripides is melodramatic ('today will tell if Euripides is to live on or die', 76 f.), full of flashy ideas ('brilliant and up to your best standard' [Mnesilochus], 93) given to modishly difficult thoughts ('you can't *hear* what you'll soon be here to *see*', 5 f.), and, 'by introducing something new and clever' (1130), constantly doing the unexpected.[23] In these respects Euripides is evidently, in my terms, a figure belonging to the *realist* tradition. Irrespective of his relation to the historical Euripides or to the historical Euripides' plays, his characterization endows him with the set and stable features of a realist character—albeit a realist

[22] See e.g. *Ran.* 939–44, 954 (lowering the tone); 842, 1063 (rags); 771–6 (persuasion). The mode of transference seems to recall the technique of the (later) ancient biographers of Greek authors: 'the smallest hints of personality in conventional statements [in their works] could be developed into character traits [in their authors]' (M. R. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (London, 1981), ix).

[23] For these as characteristics of Euripidean drama, see (e.g.) *Ran.* 1330–63 (melodramatic moments and constant surprises: the Euripidean predisposition towards the unexpected is summed up in the word στρέφειν, 957); and 892–9 (modish thoughts and flashy ideas); cf. Stanford on both passages.

character comically stylized by its construction around a few limited traits.

The representation of Euripides as 'unexpected', in the image of the unexpected twists and turns of his plays, brings us back to imagist presentation in the sense that primarily concerns us. Images, characteristically, work by discontinuing the context they presuppose. Imagist characters, accordingly, act discontinuously, and unexpected behaviour, verbal or visual, is therefore their imagist prerogative. In the particular instance of Euripides in *Thesmophoriazusae* a version of discontinuity is *also*, ingeniously, converted into a realist character-trait. It is almost as if one were to act on Aristotle's instruction that an inconsistent character should be portrayed as *consistently* inconsistent.[24] However, as the examples already considered suggest, the point (in these Aristotelian terms) is that imagist characters are *in*consistently inconsistent.

The mobile, continuous characters of the realist tradition do, or can, develop: they do, or can, do so by gradual movement between their particular traits. The imagist characters of Aristophanes are fundamentally different. If and when they change, they change abruptly and, perhaps, entirely—like the women at the Thesmophoria, dropping their respectability and picking it up again; like the clever Euripides, abruptly accepting Mnesilochus' offer to help (which *might* be explicable in terms of Euripides' own traits of character); or like the stooge Mnesilochus, suddenly assuming the role of hero by making that offer (which is not apparently explicable in such terms). In short, the realist tradition, at its extreme, permits character-development, whereas the Aristophanic mode of representation involves, at *its* extreme, a binary principle: instead of development, it permits inversion or reversal. Imagist representation, it will be gathered, accepts a merely sequential view of time. In the realist tradition, by contrast, time is perceived as a (literally) *con*sequential matter, as an Aristotelian process of events that follow the laws of 'probability or necessity'.[25]

[24] Arist *Poet.* 15.

[25] Arist. *Poet.* 7. To dissociate Aristophanes and development is not to ascribe a non-developmental tendency to comedy as a whole, as S. K. Langer did in *Feeling and Form* (New York, 1953), 335 f. Different again are the 'semantic reversals' which are reasonably taken to be a sign of inner 'psychic process' (i.e. of one form of realist characterization) by Newman, *Shakespeare's Rhetoric*, 11.

It is usual to discuss 'character' in Aristophanes in terms of alternatives which belong to the realist tradition rather than the imagist. Are his characters (for instance) 'types or individuals'? Such a question is eminently discussible in respect of Menander, and it is discussible in respect of Aristophanes the more his characterization approximates to the Menandrian-realist. It is therefore a more appropriate, and a more meaningful, question to ask of Strepsiades in *Clouds* than it is of (say) Philocleon in *Wasps*. That old man begins his play as a sort of caricature of Athenian legalism—and ends it as a sort of personification of the self-expressive life-force, abusing, drinking, and dancing. When we first see him, he is totally lacking in self-confidence, pining in captivity (317). Later on, he exudes total self-confidence ('much the most outrageous of them all', 1303). He is, no doubt, both an individual and a type at different times, perhaps even at the same time, but that formula is not illuminating: the important thing is his capacity to reverse. In this connection it is revealing to note that various interpreters of Aristophanes, from Süss to McLeish, have sought to identify his characters with a neo-Aristotelian set of character-types derived from the *Ethics* and elsewhere: notably the εἴρων (the dry wit, who understates himself), the ἀλαζών (the charlatan, who overstates himself), the βωμολόχος (the buffoon).[26] What these attempts show is that the 'types' cannot be consistently equated with Aristophanes' *characters*, but may be equated with their *functions*. Beyond a certain point, in other words, the analysis is bound to resemble a Proppian analysis of narrative functions,[27] in which a given function may be seen to be transferred from one character to another. So whereas Mnesilochus, for instance, begins *Thesmophoriazusae* as the buffoon, in the later stages of the play the buffoon's function is transferred from Mnesilochus to the Scythian, while Mnesilochus himself acts as a sort of 'dry wit' in his speech at the women's assembly, when he catalogues the vices of the sex from (purportedly) a woman's point of view. The transferability of such 'functions', however,

[26] Arist. *EN* 2. 7, 4. 7 f.; *EE* 3. 7; *Rhet.* 3. 18: see W. Süss, *De Personarum Antiquae Comoediae Usu et Origine* (Bonn, 1905); id., 'Zur Komposition der altattischen Komödie', *Rl. M.* 63 (1908), 12–38; K. McLeish, *The Theatre of Aristophanes* (London, 1980), 53–6, 74 f. The three types occur as a set in the *Tract. Coisl.*: see R. Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy* (London, 1984), 39, 216–8, 242.

[27] See V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Bloomington, 1958).

is largely, if not entirely, a corollary of imagist discontinuity. The application of these types to the discussion of Aristophanes, therefore, leaves a plausible realist interpretation of his characters as unattainable as ever.

It is a necessary, though not a sufficient, condition of imagist representation that it should involve figures whose appearance is decisive for their being. It follows that if such figures are disguised, they change. In life we suppose that this is not true. In this kind of art, however, it has the appearance of truth—hence the wonderful repeated joke in the second half of *Thesmophoriazusae*, that by appearing to be Menelaus, Euripides can rescue Mnesilochus, if Mnesilochus appears to be Helen; and by appearing to be Perseus, Euripides can rescue Mnesilochus, if Mnesilochus appears to be Andromeda. Mnesilochus himself makes the principle explicit:

> ἔα· θεοί, Ζεῦ σῶτερ, εἰσὶν ἐλπίδες.
> ἀνὴρ ἔοικεν οὐ προδώσειν, ἀλλά μοι
> σημεῖον ὑπεδήλωσε Περσεὺς ἐκδραμών,
> ὅτι δεῖ με γίγνεσθ' Ἀνδρομέδαν.

Thank heaven! There's still hope. My man won't let me down. He just shot past as Perseus. It was a sign that I must be Andromeda. (1009–12)

The topic is prefigured, programmatically, by Agathon, earlier on in the play. The writer must 'identify with', and therefore disguise himself as, his own parts:

> ἐγὼ δὲ τὴν ἐσθῆθ' ἅμα γνώμῃ φορῶ.
> χρὴ γὰρ ποιητὴν ἄνδρα πρὸς τὰ δράματα
> ἃ δεῖ ποιεῖν πρὸς ταῦτα τοὺς τρόπους ἔχειν.
> αὐτίκα γυναικεῖ' ἢν ποιῇ τις δράματα,
> μετουσίαν δεῖ τῶν τρόπων τὸ σῶμ' ἔχειν.

I wear the clothes that fit in with my projects. A playwright, you see, must tailor his own life-style to the dramatic task in hand. If it's a play about women, his own physical being has to have something of their style. (148–52)

Role-playing, disguise, and identification, of course, can and often do figure within the realist sphere. In the imagist tradition, however, they have a distinctive significance.

II

Realism of some kind seems to dominate fictional writing in the Western world from Aristophanes' own day to the beginning of the present century. More precisely: outside Aristophanes the best examples of imagist representation seem either to belong to the twentieth-century avant-garde or to be naïve—perhaps in the ordinary sense of that word, or else in Schiller's sense, whereby (say) Homer is naïve, and the word tends to imply *early*.[28] We do indeed find hints of imagist representation in Homer, especially in the *Iliad*, where (with the notable exception of Achilles) characters have fixed qualities which they either live up to or fail to live up to, and where the prospect of any such failure is felt as a threat to—because a reversal of?—personal integrity. So Hector, besought by Andromache to hold back from the fighting where he will risk his life and her future, grants the validity of her fears but points to the constraints of public opinion *and his own nature*:

> ἦ καὶ ἐμοὶ τάδε πάντα μέλει, γύναι· ἀλλὰ μάλ' αἰνῶς
> αἰδέομαι Τρῶας καὶ Τρῳάδας ἑλκεσιπέπλους,
> αἴ κε κακὸς ὣς νόσφιν ἀλυσκάζω πολέμοιο·
> οὐδέ με θυμὸς ἄνωγεν, ἐπεὶ μάθον ἔμμεναι ἐσθλὸς
> αἰεὶ καὶ πρώτοισι μετὰ Τρώεσσι μάχεσθαι,
> ἀρνύμενος πατρός τε μέγα κλέος ἠδ' ἐμὸν αὐτοῦ.

Woman, all this is on my mind as well as yours. But I am too much in awe of the Trojan men and the long-robed Trojan women to skulk away from battle like a coward. Nor is that what my own heart bids me do, for I have learned always to be valiant and fight among the leading men of Troy and win great glory for my father and myself. (6. 441–6)

'Yes,' says Hector in effect, 'you are right: I *will* be killed. But what else can I—*being me*—do? *Ich kann nicht anders*.' His obstinacy, however, is prompted not by any sort of Lutheran conscience, but by a consciousness that cannot conceive of—and is not conceived in terms of—a flexible response.[29]

[28] Friedrich Schiller, *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795–6). Examples from 'carnival' literature might be adduced to support the correlation between imagist and naïve. There are, however, some surprising counter-examples of sophisticated imagism: the Duke in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* is one.

[29] The reference is to Luther's speech at the Diet of Worms, 18 Apr. 1521.

Perhaps the simplest, and certainly the most naïve, type of imagist representation is found in the fairy-tale. The ugly frog who changes into a handsome prince is a typical instance. The character is represented as an unchanging being—except that it can go into binary reverse and become its own opposite. Compare the transformation of Demos from ugly old man to handsome younger man at the end of *Knights*.[30] Compare, too, similar transformations in surviving forms of traditional popular culture like the pantomime.

In our own century many writers, especially dramatists, have opened up the possibilities of imagist representation in a more self-conscious, experimental way, by reacting against the whole realist tradition as no Greek of Aristophanes' day either needed to or could. Against familiar stabilities and traditional expectations of development the new age puts a series of challenging questions. Sometimes the challenge is mounted on behalf of what many would think of as a marginal artistic tendency—stream of consciousness, surrealism, the absurd. For Strindberg, it is associated with a neo-realist perception that modern people, 'living in a transitional era more hectic and hysterical' than earlier ages, are, and should be represented as, 'more vulnerable, . . . torn and divided'.[31] For Pirandello, questions give way to new answers: 'My drama lies entirely in this one thing . . . in my being conscious that each one of us believes himself to be a single person. But it's not true . . . each one of us is many persons.'[32] Accompanying and often underlying these new positions is the rejection of the 'substantial unity of the soul' by influential thinkers like Nietzsche and Freud.[33] Marx-

[30] Despite the arguments of L. Edmunds, *Cleon*, Knights, *and Aristophanes' Politics* (Lanham, 1987), 43–4, it may be assumed that when Demos is pronounced 'handsome' (καλὸν ἐξ αἰσχροῦ, 1321) the ordinary associations of this phraseology would point to some sort of rejuvenation. It is true that (e.g.) at Xen. *Smp.* 4. 17 we learn that old men can be called handsome (καλοί) too, but only by way of a refined qualification to the everyday perception that 'good looks soon pass their prime'—i.e. that 'beauty' and 'youth' do belong together, as of course they do in a host of familiar contexts from Homer (e.g. *Od.* 6. 108) to Aristophanes himself (e.g. *Lys.* 647).

[31] From Strindberg's preface to *Miss Julie* (1888), trans. E. M. Sprinchorn, in B. F. Dukore (ed.), *Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (New York, 1974), 567.

[32] The father's words in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), trans. F. May (London, 1954), 25.

[33] The phase, 'substantial unity of the soul', is used (as a target) by T. S. Eliot in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (*The Sacred Wood* (London, 1920), 56).

ist theory too produces its alternative to the realist tradition, above all in the work of Brecht. In *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*, for instance, 'the "good woman" Shen Te assumes a mask of harsh oppressiveness and turns into the businessman Shui Ta, so that each of her twin personalities recalls the possibility of the other'.[34] As early as *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1928) Brecht is seen to be exploring norms of imagist representation. At the final peripeteia of the drama, for instance, we find the arch-criminal, Macheath, suddenly snatched from the gallows by royal decree and raised to a peerage, exchanging his crude curses on the police and farewells to fellow criminals and lavatory attendants for the lofty operatic observation that the greater the need, the more imminent the rescue—this frog having become a prince after all.[35]

In classical Greek drama as we have it, imagist characterization is much more characteristic of comedy than of tragedy; but the 'progress' of comedy (in the fourth century), as of tragedy (in the fifth), is clearly towards the realist mode. If one is prepared to extrapolate backwards from that tendency, it might be conjectured that early drama, tragedy as well as comedy, contained various imagist elements. One likely context would be the chorus—the stylized speaking or (especially) singing group, which both forms of drama eventually found to be incompatible with their aspirations towards realism, and sought to eliminate. The Aristophanic chorus, certainly, is—still?—markedly imagist. In no extant Aristophanic comedy, in fact, 'does the chorus have a consistent and unalterable dramatic character'.[36] The women in *Thesmophoriazusae*—in or out of the chorus—actually constitute a modest specimen of group variability. The chorus in *Wasps* begin as creaky old men, turn into fierce wasps, and end as earnest commentators on the action.[37] The chorus in *Peace*, as the play's most recent editor observes, actually has 'four or five distinguishable identities' in the space of five hundred lines.[38] But in tragedy too the identity

[34] R. D. Gray, *Brecht* (London, 1961), 66.

[35] 'Die Mordgesellen, Abtrittsweiber, | Ich bitte sie, mir zu verzeihen. | Nicht so die Polizistenhunde . . .'; 'Ja, ich fühle es, wenn die Not am grössten, ist die Hilfe am nächsten': Bertolt Brecht, *Versuche 1–12* (Berlin, 1959), 217–18.

[36] Sifakis, *Parabasis*, 32.

[37] *Vesp.* 230 ff., 403 ff., 1450 ff.: cf. Silk, 'Pathos in Aristophanes', 87–90, 110 f.

[38] Aristophanes, *Peace*, ed. A. H. Sommerstein (Warminster, 1985), xviii.

of the chorus is often—in realist terms—elusive: the 'Theban elders' in *Antigone* are a classic case in point.[39] More fundamentally, though, it may be that imagist characterization is originally implicit in the very rhythms of Greek drama—in the alternative reversals from happy man to sad man (common in tragedy) and sad man to happy man (usual in comedy). That Aristotle should have interpreted such patterns as essentially and primarily sequences of *action* testifies to his overwhelming concern with classic tragedy and his own penchant for realism.[40] And that latter prejudice, no doubt, *is* broadly justified by classic tragedy as we know it, where the imagist presence is a marginal one. Outside the chorus, in fact, it is chiefly visible in the dramatic experiments of Euripides. His *Medea*, for instance, reveals *both* the progressive realist who explores the woman's inner agonies about killing her children *and* the avant-garde anti-realist who offers us her transfiguration from oppressed victim to divine agent of vengeance at the end.

III

The obvious positive feature of imagist presentation of character is discontinuity; and if one seeks confirmation of the plausibility of an imagist reading of Aristophanes—a reading that sees discontinuities of characterization as essential, not incidental—one will find it above all in the evident kinship between such discontinuities and others elsewhere in the text or texture of Aristophanic drama.[41] I have already instanced Aristophanes' stylistic shifts and reversals as symptomatic of the mode of character-presentation that they contribute to. With the word 'imagist' in mind, we can hardly overlook the fact that no mechanism is more characteristic of Aristophanic writing in general than metaphor, the discontinuous stylistic feature *par excellence*[42]—just as nothing is more characteristic of his verbal humour than the surprise joke (παρὰ προσδοκίαν).[43]

[39] See M. S. Silk and J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1981), 267 f.

[40] See Arist. *Poet.* 6; and (on the endings of tragedies and comedies) cf. M. S. Silk, 'The Autonomy of Comedy', *Comparative Criticism*, 10 (1988), 27–9.

[41] Cf. Silk, 'Pathos in Aristophanes', esp. 103–8.

[42] See esp. J. Taillardat, *Les Images d'Aristophane* (Paris, 1965).

[43] 'The instances of comic surprise in Aristophanes are legion' (W. J. M. Starkie, *The Acharnians of Aristophanes* (London, 1909), p. lxvii). It may be noted that the ancient theorists who established the principle of humour παρὰ προσδοκίαν themselves tended to interpret it very narrowly, as e.g. did Demetrius (*Eloc.* 152), who classified it as merely one among many humorous mechanisms (ibid. 137–62).

An equivalent discontinuous tendency is apparent in the organization of his dramatic fictions. This is what we commonly discuss under the heading of 'breaches of illusion'; and no one can dispute the propensity of Aristophanes' characters to be the carriers of these 'breaches' *without undermining their own peculiar mode of existence*. 'Master, shall I tell you one of the usual jokes that always get the audience laughing . . .': whatever else is true of such an opening to a play, it is certainly true that it alerts us to a kind of character-presentation which is not going to be that of a Menander (let alone a Henry James).[44] One notes, however, the frequency of such moments in twentieth-century avant-garde drama, including that of Brecht.[45]

Going deeper into Aristophanes, one could also relate his character-presentation to the discontinuities of his plot-construction, notably those associated with the loose connection of episodes in the latter parts of many of his plays. Here too Brecht offers a valuable point of reference—the Brecht of theory even more than the Brecht of practice. As he repeatedly urges us to see in his theoretical writings on the theatre, seemingly unrelated aspects of drama in fact hang together—above all, aspects of his own innovatory 'epic theatre' as against aspects of the traditional dramatic, or 'Aristotelian', theatre. In particular he allows us to sense a connection between Aristotelian theatre's 'evolutionary' treatment of character and its 'linear development' of plot, as against the concern of his own epic theatre with 'jumps' and 'curves'. Traditional theatre means *growth*; his own means *montage*, where, in place of a 'natural' whole, the individual events are tied together in such a way that 'the knots show'.[46]

[44] *Ran.* 1 f.: cf. Sifakis, *Parabasis*, 7–14.

[45] A representative example from *Die Dreigroschenoper*: the address to the audience in the theatre by Macheath's rival, Peachum, explaining the thinking behind the royal pardon for Macheath ('. . . wir haben uns einen anderen Schluss ausgedacht . . .': Brecht, *Versuche 1–12*, 218).

[46] Bertolt Brecht, *Schriften zum Theater* (Frankfurt, 1963–4), ii. 117, vii. 67. The relevance of Brecht's theory to Aristophanes' practice is briefly, but properly, stated by Sifakis, *Parabasis*, 21, 113 n. 46; cf. W. Görler, 'Über die Illusion in der antiken Komödie', *A & A* 18 (1973), 44–57; K. von Fritz, *Antike und moderne Tragödie* (Berlin, 1962), x–xxviii; H. Flashar, 'Aristoteles und Brecht', *Poetica*, 6 (1974), 17 ff.; D. Bain,

One might, with profit, lay still more stress on a different affinity. The tendency of Aristophanes' imagist characters to reverse themselves surely belongs to a vast pattern of reversals, inversions, and oppositions in Aristophanic comedy as a whole. *Thesmophoriazusae* again offers an apt instance with (among much else) its women playing at being men (ecclesia and all); one man (Mnesilochus) playing at being a woman *ad hoc*; another man (Cleisthenes) who habitually takes that role; a member of the dominant sex (Mnesilochus) taken captive by the weaker sex (women), but himself reversing roles when he kidnaps their 'baby'. Within the action of the play we have a whole series of reversal tableaux, like the weak man Cleisthenes being put down by the strong women ('stand aside—I'll do the interrogating', 626); or the vocal representative of the dominant sex (Euripides) being forced to ask for terms from the supposedly weaker women; and another member of that weaker sex (the dancing-girl) overcoming another member of the stronger sex (the Scythian), who (as a laughable foreigner) is an inversion of establishment domination in his own right. Within such a series of reversals and inversions, details like the women's sudden coarseness, or Mnesilochus' sudden assumption of the strong man's role and Euripides' eager response to it, fall into place, unnoticed. Everywhere we meet (as Bakhtin says of the medieval carnival) 'the relativity of prevailing truths and authorities . . . the peculiar logic of the "inside out"'.[47]

Furthermore, all such reversals and inversions belong to a still larger system of fundamental oppositions, notably those expressed in agonistic terms, around which so many of the plays are constructed: men and women (as *Thesmophoriazusae*), men and gods (as *Birds*), peace and war (as *Acharnians*), new and old (as *Clouds*), young and old (as *Wasps*). The oppositions, of course, may be subject to inversion themselves. In *Wasps*, for

Actors and Audience (Oxford, 1977), 3–5. Before Brecht, Pirandello had anticipated the connection between discontinuous character and discontinuous dramatic form: the 'decomposed' and 'incongruous' characters of 'the humorist' (see n. 21 above) are related to 'all that is disorganised, unravelled and whimsical, all the digressions which can be seen in the works of humor' (*On Humor*, 144 f.).

[47] M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), 11. On inversions in *Thesmophoriazusae*, cf. F. Zeitlin, 'Travesties of Gender and Genre in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*', in H. P. Foley (ed.), *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, (New York, 1981), 169–217.

instance, the normal pattern whereby the young resist the orthodoxies of their elders (cf. the end of *Clouds*) is reversed, so that the son Bdelycleon labours in vain to reduce his father to order, the imagist corollary of which is that the old man *becomes* 'young' in his own right.[48] And pervading all the plays is the opposition between higher and lower, serious and non-serious, a particular version of which we find alluded to in a contrasting pair like Euripides and Mnesilochus, and another version in the stylistic switches discussed earlier. This, arguably, is the opposition from which, above all, Aristophanic comedy gets its bearings.[49]

IV

This discussion of imagist representation can hardly be regarded as comprehensive, either in a theoretical sense or in respect of Aristophanes. I hope to have answered one question: the inconstancies of behaviour which the people of Aristophanes exhibit are acceptable because they presuppose Aristophanic 'norms' of discontinuity both on the level of character and elsewhere. And I hope, in answering it, to have shed some light on the possibilities (and actualities) of character-presentation in general. At the same time, various other questions have been left unconsidered. Their existence should at the very least be acknowledged, if only as a gesture towards the ideal of a comprehensive treatment.

In the first place, my discussion of Aristophanes has been essentially behaviourist. I have concentrated on the words and actions of his people and have generally evaded their minds and thoughts. As imagist beings, can they actually be said to have minds and thoughts? In realist representation, characters are assumed to have minds and thoughts which work like those of real people in real life. Real people have experiences, whether *we* know about them or not; they have habits that imply responses to those experiences; and in general they have

[48] νέος γάρ εἰμι ['I'm only young, you see'] (1355). On the implications of this 'becoming', see Silk, 'Pathos in Aristophanes', 109–11.

[49] Cf. Silk, 'The Autonomy of Comedy', 16; O. Taplin, 'Fifth-Century Tragedy and Comedy: A *Synkrisis*', *JHS* 106 (1986), 163–74.

memories of their experiences. Fictional people, necessarily, have experiences only when we know that they do, and responses and memories only when these are made public in some way. Within this limitation, however, the characters of realist fiction impinge on us as sentient beings: so far as we see and know them, they act from their minds (experiences, responses, memories), and their behaviour is referable to their minds. Are we to make any such reference with imagist characters, and if so, when and why? Picture Mnesilochus taking his decision to help Euripides, and it is hard to deny imagist characters any mental capacity at all. Think of Xanthias' anti-illusionary question to Dionysus at the start of *Frogs*, and it is hard to see what sort of experiences, responses, or memories such a being needs to be, or can be, credited with.

Secondly, it is easier to say (as I have said) that Aristophanes' presentation of character is both imagist and realist than to assess the relative strength of each element in any given dramatic sequence. The general principle (I would say) is clear enough. And this is that Aristophanic comedy presupposes a non-realist sense or logic of human *being* and *behaving*. As such it admits realism in so far as realism suits its own logic.[50] However, the particular problem, as it concerns particular sequences, remains unsolved. For instance (thinking back to the previous unanswered question), we might ask: Do we credit the character Xanthias with a mind ('of his own') when he talks to Dionysus 'in character', but not when he makes anti-illusionary remarks like the one at the start? Do we in fact—can we conceivably—switch mentalist assumptions on and off like a tap in this way? Is the truth that even when we credit Xanthias with a mind, we always do so on some non-realist terms, which remain to be specified?

Finally, a comprehensive discussion must certainly come to terms with the evaluative implications of the modern experiments in imagist representation, whose diversity and sophistication suggest that while we may argue for the superiority of realism, we cannot simply assume it. As John Gould reminds us in his discussion of tragic character, realist character in fiction—from Greek tragedy to Eugene O'Neill—is a construct,

[50] Cf. Silk, 'The Autonomy of Comedy', 23–7.

not a hidden pre-existing reality.[51] This is hardly to devalue realist characterization, since our sense of a human character in life, arguably, must always be as much of a construct as a response to a hidden reality itself.[52] And certainly it does not justify us in describing realist characters as 'systems of rule-governed equivalencies' (like Philippe Hamon) or, more simply, as 'predications' (like Todorov).[53] But it does encourage us to see that the constructional quality of imagist representations does not in itself invalidate their claim to serious attention.

[51] See n. 12 above. Gould (I hasten to add) is at pains to *contrast* Greek tragedy and O'Neill, and he does not give them any common 'realist' label, as I do.

[52] See e.g. E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY, 1959); J. Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris, 1966), 93 ff.; cf. Easterling's discussion in ch. 4 above. A similar conclusion about (realist) characterization is reached by Newman, *Shakespeare's Rhetoric*, 127 f.

[53] Hamon, 'Pour un statut', 144; T. Todorov, *Grammaire du Décaméron* (The Hague, 1969), 27–30.

Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature

EDITED BY

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CLARENDON PRESS · OXFORD

1990