THE ORIGIN OF ATTIC COMEDY

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

1. *The Data for Inquiry*

An inquiry into the origins of the Old Comedy which flourished and declined at Athens in the century between the Persian Wars and the death of Aristophanes must be based partly on literary tradition, partly on a study of the eleven plays which are the only complete specimens left to us of this peculiar form of art. The literary tradition is, unfortunately, very meagre. Its most important data come, directly or indirectly, from Aristotle and his school, the first serious students of literary origins. When to these are added certain statements made by Aristophanes about his own work and that of his predecessors, we have before us the bulk of what deserves to be taken as evidence of first-rate authority. Precious as it is, and not to be set aside without the very strongest reasons, the consideration and reconsideration of it by many generations of scholars have not led to very clear conclusions. Above all, a number of remarkable features, which are characteristic of the Aristophanic play and distinguish it from every other form of Comedy, are still unexplained. Until these can be accounted for, the problem, under its most interesting aspects, remains unsolved. Zielinski, therefore, was well advised when he turned from these scraps of historical tradition to a direct study of the plays themselves, and sought to determine the laws of their structure and composition. Many of his minor conclusions will not stand; but the method has proved unexpectedly fruitful. I shall follow his example, and try to set in a clear light those constant features of Aristophanic Comedy which make it unlike the

Comedy of other lands and later days. I shall also put forward an hypothesis to account for them. Whether this hypothesis finds favour or not, I hope to convince the reader of the need of some explanation more adequate to the curious nature of the facts than any that has yet been given.

2. *The Structure of an Aristophanic Play*

Of all the strange characteristics of a play by Aristophanes, the one which most forcibly strikes the modern reader is the *Parabasis* of the Chorus—a long passage which cuts the play in two about half way through its course and completely suspends the action. This passage is almost wholly undramatic. It is delivered by the Chorus and its Leaders, and it normally opens with a farewell to the actors, who leave the stage clear till it is over, and then return to carry on the business of the piece to the end. The Chorus, meanwhile, turn their backs on the scene of action and advance across the orchestra to address the audience directly—the movement from which the *Parabasis* takes its name. The action of the play is thus divided into two parts.

Of these two parts, the first normally consists of the *Prologue*, or exposition scenes; the Entrance of the Chorus (*Parodos*); and what is now generally called the *Agon*, a fierce 'contest' between the representatives of two parties or principles, which are in effect the hero and villain of the whole piece. In the *Acharnians*, for instance, the conflict is between Peace and War; in the *Lysistrata*, between Man and Woman; in the *Wasps*, between the political ideals of the elder and the younger generation. The victorious principle is usually incarnated in the protagonist or hero of the play. In this contest the interest of the first part centres and culminates.

The second part, after the *Parabasis*, contains the rest of the action. It is especially with reference to this division of the play that the work of previous students needs to be supplemented. Zielinski concentrated attention on the *Agon*, with the result that scholars often speak as if the business of the play were finished with the first part, and nothing remained in the second but a string of 'loose burlesque scenes.' This is by no means a true account of the matter. When we compare the plays with one another, it is

soon evident, in the first place, that nearly all of them end with an incident no less canonical than the *Agon*—a festal procession (*Kômos*) and a union which I shall call a 'Marriage'—a use of the term to be hereafter justified. But that is not all. We shall also find in almost every play two other standing incidents which fall between the *Agon* and the final *Kômos*—a scene of Sacrifice and a Feast. In several of the earlier plays these form nearly the whole of the action, and fill nearly the whole time of presentation, in the second part. In the later plays, from the *Birds* onwards, plots of a more complicated type are developed, chiefly in this latter half of the play; but still the old sequence of fixed incidents in the old order remains as the substructure of the action: *Agon*, Sacrifice, Feast, Marriage *Kômos*. Another regularly recurring type of incident is the interruption of the Sacrifice, or the Feast, or both, by a series of unwelcome intruders, who are successively put to derision by the protagonist and driven away with blows. Each of these constant incidents we shall later examine in turn, and the proof of these statements will then be laid fully before the reader.

Meanwhile, for the sake of clearness, it will be well to state here the hypothesis we shall offer in explanation of these facts. It is that *this canonical plot-formula preserves the stereotyped action of a ritual or folk drama, older than literary Comedy, and of a pattern well known to us from other sources.* In the absence of direct external evidence, the proof of this proposition must necessarily be cumulative, and the reader is invited to suspend his judgment until the whole argument has been laid before him.

3. *Some current Theories of the Origin of Comedy*

That Comedy sprang up and took shape in connection with Dionysiac or Phallic ritual has never been doubted. In the older histories of literature, it was customary to draw more or less imaginative pictures of village feasts in honour of the God of Wine, with processions and dances of wild disorder and drunken licence. We were asked to conceive some rustic poet breaking out, when the new wine and the general excitement had gone to his head, into satirical sallies and buffooneries, taken up with shouts of laughter by the crowd of reeling revellers. The ultimate matter of Attic

Comedy was to be sought in these songs and broad jokes, varied occasionally by a set match in abuse. M. Maurice Croiset,[1] who sets before our eyes a brilliant bacchanalian piece on these lines, remarks, however, that in primitive Comedy, as so conceived, there is no element of 'dramatic fiction.' This observation may give us pause. The absence of dramatic fiction or dramatic *representation* (*μίμησις*) in the original phase of any kind of drama is a grave defect. It is as difficult to see how drama can come out of what is not, even in germ, dramatic as it was to Anaxagoras to conceive how hair could come out of what is not hair. M. Croiset is driven to suppose that his drunken *cortège* of Attic peasants must sometimes have indulged the natural love of mimicry in little '*scènes bouffonnes*.'[2] In the absence of any direct evidence that they did, he turns to Dorian countries and to the very doubtful tradition that Megarian Comedy was imported into Attica in the days of Susarion. We shall return to this view later. Here we need only note that our own hypothesis stands in sharp opposition to any such theory. We shall argue that Attic Comedy, as we know it from Aristophanes, is constructed in the framework of what was already a drama, a folk play; and that behind this folk play lay a still earlier phase, in which its action was dramatically presented in religious ritual. This view has the advantage of supposing that the element of dramatic representation was there from the very first.

Another point of difference between this hypothesis and other current accounts is that it seeks for traces of the original form of Comedy in the dramatic action of the plays, in the conventional pattern of the plot. It has been more usual to regard the *Parabasis* —the choral passage which breaks this action in two—as, in some sort, the nucleus of Comedy.[3] Round the *Parabasis*, we are told, a number of originally disconnected comic scenes have gathered, which, in the developed form of the art, as known to us from

[1] *Hist. de la lit. grecque*[2] (Paris, 1899), iii. 429. Mazon's description (*Essai sur la comp. des Com. d'Arist.*, p. 178) is similar. So, too, is Couat's (*Aristophane et l'ancienne Comédie attique*[3], Paris, 1902, p. 14 ff.).

[2] M. Croiset, *op. cit.* p. 557, regards primitive Comedy as consisting of these almost disconnected scenes, surviving in the second part of the Aristophanic play, while he thinks the first part '*manifestement une extension du prologue, qui avait servi d'abord à lier plus étroitement les scènes suivantes et qui, peu à peu, était devenu lui-même une partie considérable de la pièce.*'

[3] The *Parabasis* has also been regarded as a prologue, and as an epilogue.

Aristophanes, are strung on the thread of some guiding idea.[1] This view altogether ignores the plot-formula which we shall bring to light. It is certainly not easy to see how any form of drama worthy of the name could come into existence by such a casual process of aggregation. That a form of drama with a conventional plot-formula, and such distinct features as the *Agon*, should arise in this way may be frankly declared impossible.

Zielinski's brilliant work marks the first definite advance towards a more reasonable view. However little we may be convinced by some of his attempts to bring recalcitrant plays into line with the normal type, a great step was taken when the importance of the *Agon* was established. But the emphasis laid upon this moment of the action to the exclusion of the rest, together with the contrast between the two sorts of composition—epirrhematic and episodic—which Zielinski held to be characteristic of the two halves of the play, led him to break an Aristophanic Comedy into two parts, each of a different type. This entailed the supposition that these two parts must at some time have been juxtaposed. Comedy must have arisen, not merely by the confluence of two streams of influence, but by the patching together of two kinds of dramatic performance originally distinct. Zielinski, accordingly, saw in the *Parabasis* the epilogue of the first part, and treated the second part as an appendix.[2]

[1] This seems, for instance, to be the view of Christ-Schmid (*Griech. Litteraturgesch.*[6], München, 1908, i. 384): *In diesem Teil* (*Parabasis*) *der altattischen Komödie schimmern noch deutlich kultliche Vorgänge aus dem alten Dionysosfest hervor. An diesem Mittelpunkt schlossen sich wohl, vorhergehend oder nachfolgend, schon beim alten Volksfest verbindungslos die allerlei komischen Szenen, die dann durch die Kunstkomödie leidlich auf einen Faden gezogen worden sind und die J. Poppelreuter passend mit den Entremeses bei den Kirchenfesten in Spanien verglichen hat.* Poppelreuter's theory will be criticised below, § 71.

[2] Kaibel's view (s.v. *Aristophanes*, Pauly-Wiss. ii. 987) seems to be similar: *Die Parabase redet in der Person des Dichters den Epilog . . . Bis zur Parabase ist sie* (*die Komödie*) *ganz individuell, wie die epirrhematische Composition dieses Teils zeigt: was hinzu kommt, lediglich um den Umfang zu erweitern, hat fremde Form, die epeisodische Composition der Tragödie. Inhaltlich sind es ganz freie, meist possenhafte Scenen, die mit der Handlung vor der Parabase in ideellem, aber nicht in logisch zwingendem Zusammenhang stehen.* Starkie (*Wasps*, p. xxi), after summarising Zielinski's view of the *Parabasis* as an epilogue, says: 'It seems to me more probable that down to the end of the *Parabasis*, the Attic Comic poets constructed their plays after the model set by Epicharmus. The succeeding scenes are a survival of the old Phallic *Possenspiel*, which suited too well the taste of the ordinary Athenian playgoer to be omitted with impunity.'

Various considerations seemed to point to a Dorian origin of these later scenes.[1] Poppelreuter took another step along the same lines, when he suggested that the type of drama from which they must have come was some sort of popular play like the *Kasperlespiel* of modern Germany. A later writer, W. Süss,[2] has gone further still, and maintained that this type of popular mime, whose influence he detects in all parts of the plays, is the oldest form of Aristophanes' Comedies, and he speaks of the Chorus as having 'crept into the mime.' Another[3] traces even the *Agon*, in which, if anywhere, the Chorus have a real part in the action, to the non-choral Comedy of the northern Peloponnese. The present tendency is, thus, to derive nearly all the characteristic features of Aristophanic Comedy, except the *Parabasis* and *Exodos*, from foreign sources; and hardly anything is left for the native tradition of Attica, beyond certain choral dances of beast-clad mummers, known to us from early vases, but otherwise obscure.

This theory, in some form, is now widely held, and that it contains some elements of truth will not be denied. We shall later see good reason to recognise certain affinities with Dorian forms of mime. But we shall not admit that the structure of Aristophanic Comedy could have been made by the simple juxtaposition of two blocks of different origin. It will, I hope, become clear that there is a unity of action running through both parts of the plays, consisting precisely in that recurrent plot-formula which has already been indicated. If the existence of such a structural unity can be made out, the theory of mere juxtaposition falls to the ground at once. We shall be compelled to suppose—what, after all, seems antecedently much more probable—that in that underlying formula of the action we have the fundamental framework of the original drama complete from beginning to end. Some amount of foreign influence coming in upon the top of it can then be admitted. In respect, however, of the extent and importance of this foreign influence, our hypothesis will run directly counter to the prevalent

[1] Others, however, regard the so-called 'loose scenes' as survivals of an old 'Ionian *Possenspiel*,' and suppose that it is the early part of the play that follows the Dorian model set by Epicharmus. Cf. Starkie, Introd. to the *Wasps*.

[2] *De personarum*, etc., p. 100.

[3] H. E. Sieckmann, *de comoediae atticae primordiis* (Gottingae, 1906), p. 26. W. Süss (*Zur Komp. der altatt. Kom.*, Rh. Mus. (1908), 12 ff.), while correcting some of Sieckmann's statements about Epicharmus, agrees that the origin of the *Agon* type of composition is to be sought in Dorian lands.

tendency, and claim not only all the principal features of plot and structure, but also the main types of character as the indigenous growth of Attic soil. We shall end by reducing the contributions of Megarian or Dorian mime within very narrow compass.

Our task, then, is to establish the existence of the underlying plot-formula, to discover the ritual sources from which it derives, and to show how our results can be reconciled with such of the external evidence of literary tradition as deserves respect.

CHAPTER II

THE EXODOS

4. *The* Exodos: *Marriage and* Kômos

RESERVING the *Agon* for a later chapter, we shall begin our examination with the last term in the fixed series of incidents which make up the plot-formula of Aristophanic Comedy. The plays regularly end with a procession in which the Chorus marches out of the orchestra, conducting the chief character in triumph and singing a song technically known as the *Exodos*.[1] The hero, moreover, is accompanied in this *Kômos* by a person who, perhaps because she is (except in one play) always mute, has attracted less notice than she deserves. This person is sometimes a nameless courtesan, sometimes an allegorical figure. She is the temporary partner of the hero in what is, in fact though not always in the legal sense, a marriage. She exists solely for that purpose, and has no other part in the action, only making her appearance in time to take her place beside the hero in his triumphal *Kômos*. Superficial dissimilarities of literary form and variations dictated by the needs of the several plots have diverted attention from the fact that what is fundamentally the same incident—this marriage with its *Kômos*—ends almost every play of Aristophanes, no matter what its subject may be. Before we discuss its significance, the facts must be set before the reader in detail. We shall, accordingly, pass in review the final scenes of all the plays in their order of date. Besides the uniform character of the concluding incident, the reader is invited to notice several cases in which the hero is treated with royal, and even divine, honours—hailed as a new King or a new God.

[1] That this term as applied to Comedy properly denotes the final song, not including the scene which precedes it, is rightly pointed out by Ascherson, *Jahrb. f. klass. Philol.* iv. Suppl. 3 Heft (1862), p. 423 ff., and explicitly asserted by the '*Tractatus Coislinianus*' (Kaibel, *C. G. F.* i. p. 53): ἔξοδός ἐστι τὸ ἐπὶ τέλει λεγόμενον τοῦ χοροῦ. Cf. Poppelreuter, *de com. att. prim.*, p. 37 ff.

5. *The* Exodoi *of the Plays*

The ACHARNIANS ends with the scene (1190 ff.) in which Dikaiopolis and Lamachus return, the one from the banquet with the priest of Dionysus, at which he has won the drinking-competition of the *Choes*,[1] the other from the battlefield, covered with wounds and other marks of the miseries of war. Dikaiopolis has a courtesan on each arm; there are two of them, to match the two slaves who support the hobbling Lamachus. The two heroes perform a duet, Lamachus bewailing his discomforts in the tone of a tragic *Lament*, Dikaiopolis capping him with ribald lines which set in contrast his own enviable condition. While Lamachus calls for a surgeon, Dikaiopolis demands to be taken to the 'King' of the festival,[2] to receive his prize, the skin of wine, which he presently holds up empty. He then raises the cry of τήνελλα καλλίνικος (Hurrah for the Victor!), and calls upon the Chorus to sing it as they follow him. This cry is well known as the refrain of the *Kômos* Song of Archilochos, chanted by the victor's friends in the evening procession after the Olympian contest. It is to be noted that Dikaiopolis, like the Olympic victor, himself leads the triumphal strain: he acts as *Exarchos*.[3] Evidently, the actual Song of Archilochos, though it is not written out, formed the *Exodos* of the *Acharnians*.[4]

In the KNIGHTS, the victory of the Sausage-seller in the long competition with his rival is at last admitted by the Paphlagonian, who resigns to him the wreath of office (1250). When he has piously

[1] 1143. Dikaiopolis has been dismissed by the Chorus to this banquet with the wish: τῷ δὲ καθεύδειν | μετὰ παιδίσκης ὡραιοτάτης.

[2] Perhaps, as Starkie holds (note *ad loc.*), the Archon Basileus, who presided at the Lenaea.

[3] Pind. *Ol.* ix. 1: τὸ μὲν Ἀρχιλόχου μέλος φωνᾶεν Ὀλυμπίᾳ, καλλίνικος ὁ τριπλόος κεχλαδώς, ἄρκεσε Κρόνιον παρ' ὄχθον ἀγεμονεῦσαι κωμάζοντι φίλοις Ἐφαρμόστῳ σὺν ἑταίροις. Christ *ad loc.*: *Victor vero ipse vice praecentoris* (ἐξάρχου) *fungebatur sodalibus praeeuntis, id quod Pindarus verbo* ἀγεμονεῦσαι *significavit et scholiasta hac adnotatione confirmat:* κωμάζει δὲ πρὸς τὸν τοῦ Διὸς βωμὸν ὁ νικήσας μετὰ τῶν φίλων, αὐτὸς τῆς ᾠδῆς ἐξηγούμενος. Cf. F. M. Cornford, chapter on the 'Olympic Games,' in J. E. Harrison, *Themis* (Cambridge, 1912), p. 256 ff.

[4] *Ach.* 1227. *Dik.* . . . τήνελλα καλλίνικος. | *Chor.* τήνελλα δῆτ' εἴπερ καλεῖς γ', ὦ πρέσβυ, καλλίνικος . . . | τήνελλά νυν ὦ γεννάδα . . . | *Dik.* ἕπεσθέ νὖν ᾄδοντες ὦ τήνελλα καλλίνικος. | *Chor.* ἀλλ' ἑψόμεσθα σὴν χάριν | τήνελλα καλλίνικος ᾄδοντες σὲ καὶ τὸν ἀσκόν. Schol. *ad loc.* τήνελλα· μίμημα ἐπιφθέγματος αὐλοῦ τὸ τήνελλα. Ἀρχίλοχος· τήνελλα, ὦ καλλίνικε χαῖρ' ἄναξ Ἡράκλεες, αὐτός τε κἰόλαος, αἰχμητὰ δύο. Zielinski, *Gliederung*, p. 187.

ejaculated 'O Zeus Hellanios, thine the prize of victory!' the Sausage-seller is hailed as καλλίνικος.[1] After an interval of preparation for the final festivities, filled by the Second *Parabasis* of the Chorus, the Sausage-seller reappears, calling for religious silence, and declaring that, like Medea, he has regenerated Demos by cooking him to a new life. The Propylaea are thrown open, and Demos is revealed in all the splendours of the old Ionian dress, to be hailed as 'King of the Hellenes.' When he has proved the amendment of his character by being put through a sort of political catechism, the Sausage-seller presents him with a folding stool and a boy to carry it. Finally he calls out *Libations* (*αἱ Σπονδαί*), courtesans who represent allegorically the old peace days of the thirty-years truce.[2] Demos in return invites him to dine in the Prytaneum and gives him a green-coloured robe, such as was worn by the King in tragedy.[3] Demos ordains that the defeated Paphlagonian shall be degraded to the vile condition formerly held by his rival. He calls the wretched man a *Pharmakos*, and orders that he shall be 'carried off to his trade' of sausage-selling, and exhibited to those whom he has outraged in the days of his power.[4] Here the text of the play ends; but the Chorus can hardly have left the orchestra in silence. It may be conjectured that it was divided into two parties. One half would escort Demos with 'Libations' and his new favourite in triumphal procession to the Prytaneum, probably singing the Song of Archilochos. The other half would hound the Paphlagonian out with cries of execration, perhaps literally treating him as a *Pharmakos*, a scape-goat carrying all the evil of the city upon his head.[5]

[1] 1254: ὦ χαῖρε καλλίνικε κτλ. The lines are variously assigned to the Chorus or to Demosthenes.

[2] Schol. *ad v.* 1390: εἰσῆλθον αἱ Σπονδαὶ ἑταῖραι ὡραῖαι.

[3] 1406: ἔπου δὲ ταυτηνὶ λαβὼν τὴν βατραχίδα. Pollux, iv. 116: ἐσθῆτες μὲν τραγικαὶ ποικίλον . . . τὰ δὲ ἐπιβλήματα ξυστίς, βατραχίς. . . .

[4] 1404: *Demos.* καί σ' ἀντὶ τούτων ἐς τὸ πρυτανεῖον καλῶ
ἐς τὴν ἕδραν θ', ἵν' ἐκεῖνος ἦν ὁ φαρμακός.
ἔπου δὲ ταυτηνὶ λαβὼν τὴν βατραχίδα·
κἀκεῖνον ἐκφερέτω τις ὡς ἐπὶ τὴν τέχνην,
ἵν' ἴδωσιν αὐτὸν οἷς ἐλωβᾶθ' οἱ ξένοι.

[5] The suggestion that the Paphlagonian was so treated is put forward by Mazon, *Essai sur la comp. des com. d'Aristophane* (Paris, 1904), p. 47: *Cléon était sans doute traîné dans l'orchestra. Là, on le traitait peut-être comme une victime expiatoire* (1405, φαρμακός); *on lui mettait dans la main un fromage, une galette, des figues, et le chœur le suivait en le huant et en le flagellant avec des scilles et autres*