Introduction

When I first published on parody some twenty years ago now it was still being treated by many critics as a rather lowly comic form which had been of little real significance in the history of literature or of other arts. Not only was Dr Leavis said to have dismissed parody, but many of the structuralists and post-structuralists who were thought to have challenged his ideas had either described parody in negative terms or not deemed it or its examples important enough to warrant extensive or thorough analysis. It was also in part because of the latter attitude that the role played by parody in the development of terms favoured by structuralist and post-structuralist theorists and critics, such as the term 'intertextuality', was not fully recognised or acknowledged. Since then, and with the rise of what has been called 'postmodernist' literature and theory, parody has seen something of a revival in contemporary theory and artistic practice, but on the basis of several different understandings, and misunderstandings, of its background, functions and structure.

In this new work on parody – 'ancient, modern, and post-modern' – an attempt has been made to clarify the modern, late-modern, and post-modern representations of parody which have dominated this century by reviewing the uses and meanings given the term from the ancients onwards and by analysing different aspects of a variety of works named parody in both ancient and modern times. These aspects of parody include the peculiarities of its structure, its comic character, the attitude of the parodist to the work parodied, the reader's reception of it, its meta-fictional and 'intertextual' aspects, and its relationship to other devices.

In addition to giving a critical review of past theories and uses of parody to the present with reference to these and other of its aspects, some new ways of designating the modern and post-modern uses of the term are suggested, and the concept of the post-modern explored and expanded further.

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Parody: ancient, modern, and post-modern

Of the chapters which follow, the first deals with the ancient meanings of the term parody as well as with the basic structure and functions of parody as used from the ancient mock-epics and the plays of Aristophanes onwards, while the second chapter discusses a variety of both ancient and modern terms with which parody has sometimes been confused, from burlesque and travesty, through pastiche and related forms, to satire, irony, and meta-fiction.[1]

The third chapter then discusses a variety of influential modern and late-modern theories and uses of parody, from those of the Russian formalists and M. M. Bakhtin, through extensions made to their theories by the reception theorists Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, to a variety of structuralist and post-structuralist comments on the subject.

The introductory section of the fourth chapter, on contemporary late-modern and post-modern uses and concepts of parody, begins with comments on the differences between the two major types of post-modernism which have dominated discussion of the subject in recent years and provides a summary of the many different definitions given the post-modern from the beginning of the twentieth century to its concluding decade. Following pages then discuss the various theories or uses of parody of Ihab Hassan, Jean Baudrillard, Fredric Jameson, Dick Hebdige, A. S. Byatt, Martin Amis, and others, before the chapter proceeds to a discussion of what can be called a 'post-modern' understanding of parody and to comments on the works and views of Charles Jencks, Umberto Eco, David Lodge, and Malcolm Bradbury.

The book ends with a general review and summary of the past uses and theories of parody, some concluding comments on its future, a bibliography of works referred to, and an index.

1 While this work is in all a new study of parody, chapters 1 and 2 also contain clarifications and extensions of arguments developed in my *Parody//Meta-Fiction. An Analysis of Parody as a Critical Mirror to the Writing and Reception of Fiction* (London, 1979).
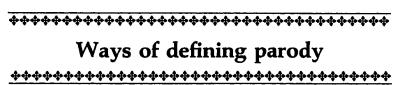
PART I

Defining parody from the Ancients onwards

I

Ways of defining parody

Many definitions of parody have paid insufficient attention to its ancient heritage. Even the original *Oxford English Dictionary* entry on parody which describes it as deriving from the ancient Greek word *παρῳδία* ('parodia') can be said to have followed a largely eighteenth-century view of parody when defining it as a 'burlesque' poem or song.   Several misunderstandings have been generated by the definition of parody as burlesque (the word 'burlesque' is not just a more modern word than 'parodia', but has been derived from quite different terms) and a more critical and historical approach seems necessary given both the repetition of the definition of parody referred to above in the new edition of the *OED*[1] and the advent of some new misunderstandings of the term.

Lack of attention to the historical background of the terms used to define parody has been but one of the problems of parody definition. One other problem has been the restriction of the description of parody to only one or two aspects of that term or its usage. In the past, parody has been defined by most of its lexicographers in terms of either

(1) its etymology,
(2) its comic aspects,
(3) the attitude of the parodist to the work parodied,
(4) the reader's reception of it,
(5) the texts in which parody is not just a specific technique but the 'general' mode of the work itself (one example is Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, where the parody of the works read by the hero is intimately related to the selection of adventures and characters and provides a textual background for Cervantes' work which can

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1 See the new *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1989), vol. 11, p. 247. Liddell and Scott (eds.), *A Greek-English Lexicon*, revised edn (Oxford, 1983), p. 1344 also defines 'parodia' as meaning 'burlesque' as well as 'parody'.

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also be used for 'meta-fictional' reflections on the writing of his
own fiction or on the writing of fiction in general),

(6) its relationship to other comic or literary forms.

Several attempts have been made to clarify the concept of parody
by expanding one or other of such categories, and some modern and
post-modern theorists will be seen to have developed new criteria
such as intertextuality from examples of general parody such as
Cervantes' *Don Quixote* of 1605–15 or Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* of
1759–67. As the survey of modern and 'late-modern' theories of
parody in chapter 3 will show, the complexity of great parody, as
found in the works of Aristophanes, Cervantes, or Sterne, has rarely
been acknowledged, however, as implying the necessity of investi-
gating all of the above categories at once, and before the major
modern theories of parody of the last century are reviewed the
categories listed above will be discussed in greater detail so that some
background is established for the understanding of both the problems
and insights of those various theories.

The etymology of parody

Dispute and uncertainty have prevailed in descriptions of the ancient
uses and meanings of words for parody. Of all the terms still used to
describe comic quotation, imitation, or transformation, parody alone is
named in the classical literature and poetics of the Greeks, and has
gained some importance in the Western tradition from this fact. But it
is also to some extent owing to its long history that the meaning of
the term parody has become the subject of so much argument. This is
so not just because the length of time involved has allowed dispute to
propagate itself, but because it can be assumed that, in that time,
records of its earliest uses and meanings have been lost.

One other factor which may need to be taken into account here is
that some records were not made in the first place because the subject
was not considered to be sufficiently 'serious' in the sense of either
'grave' or 'important' by all ancient scholars. Aristotle (384–322 BC)
writes in chapter 5 of his *Poetics* that 'though the successive changes
in Tragedy and their authors are not unknown, we cannot say the
same of Comedy; its early stages passed unnoticed, because it was not
as yet taken up in a serious way'.[2]

2 See Aristotle, *De Poetica*, translated by Ingram Bywater in *The Works of Aristotle*,
edited by W. D. Ross, vol. 11 (Oxford, 1924), chapter 5, 1449a, and the Greek

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Other problems for the historian of parody include the use of several different words by the ancient Greeks for that which modern languages have since accepted as meaning parody, and the way in which modern commentators on those terms have been limited by their vocabularies in their descriptions of the more ancient words.

Fred W. Householder Jr alludes to both of these issues in his article 'ΠΑΡΩΙΔΙΑ' of 1944 when rejecting the *OED* and Liddell and Scott definitions of 'parody' as being completely suitable for describing the more ancient words for that device.[3]

Householder's own definition of the term follows from his designation of Aristotle's use in chapter 2 of his *Poetics* of the word παρῳδία ('parodia'), to which most lexicons relate our word for 'parody', as the earliest found usage of that noun, and from the meaning given it by both Aristotle and a later commentator, Athenaeus of Naucratis (*c.*170–*c.*230 AD). After deriving the meaning of 'parodia' from its application by Aristotle in his *Poetics* to works written by Hegemon,[4] and from references to and quotations from Hegemon and other writers of 'parodia' in Athenaeus' *The Deipnosophists*,[5] Householder (p. 3) describes it as 'a narrative poem of moderate length, in epic meter, using epic vocabulary, and treating a light, satirical, or mock-heroic subject'.

Householder also connects this usage of 'parodia' to an earlier use of the term παρῳδός or 'parodos' (plural παρῳδοί or 'parodoi') to describe an 'imitating singer', or 'singing in imitation'[6] (which he suggests was made in contrast to a concept of the 'original singer'),[7]

text in Aristotle, *The Poetics*, translated by W. Hamilton Fyfe (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1973), pp. 1–118; p. 20.

3 See Fred W. Householder, Jr, 'ΠΑΡΩΙΔΙΑ', *Journal of Classical Philology*, vol. 39, no.1 (January 1944), pp. 1–9.

4 Householder refers to the use of the noun παρῳδία in Aristotle, *Poetics*, chapter 2, 1448a.

5 See Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, translated by Charles Burton Gulick, 7 vols. (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1941).

6 'Parodos' and 'parode' meaning the side entrance of the ancient theatre through which the chorus of the drama first entered, or their first song, are spelt πάροδος and πάροδή in Greek and derive from the words παρ/α 'by, by the side', and ὁδός 'way', not ᾠδή 'ode'.

7 See Householder, pp. 2 and 8, and see also F. J. Lelièvre, 'The Basis of Ancient Parody', *Greece and Rome*, Series 2, vol. 1, no. 2 (June, 1954), pp. 66–81; p. 79. Several studies have also been made of parody and music. See, for example, W. Steinecke, *Das Parodieverfahren in der Musik* (Kiel, 1934).

and to the derivation from those words of the noun $\pi\alpha\rho\omega\delta\acute{\eta}$ or 'par-ode' and the idea of a song or 'ode' 'sung in imitation of another'.

After noting that Quintilian (Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, *c.*35 AD–d. after 96 AD) had described the word $\pi\alpha\rho\omega\delta\acute{\eta}$ in Book 9.2.35 of his *Institutio Oratoria* as 'a name drawn from songs sung in imitation of others, but employed by an abuse of language to designate imitation in verse or prose',[8] Householder suggests that one difference between uses of $\pi\alpha\rho\omega\delta\acute{\iota}\alpha$ and $\pi\alpha\rho\omega\delta\acute{\eta}$ is that the latter can refer merely to 'close literary imitation',[9] but later implies that both could also refer to mock-epics.[10]

With reference to the derivation of the word $\pi\alpha\rho\omega\delta\acute{\eta}$ from the word for 'ode' and the prefix 'para' Householder writes of the latter (p. 2): 'Excluding purely local uses, $\pi\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}$ in composition with verbs and verbal nouns, sometimes also with nouns and adjectives, quite commonly has the meaning "like, resembling, changing slightly, imitating, replacing, spurious".' Householder adds with reference to the use of $\pi\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}$ in words such as $\pi\alpha\rho\omega\delta\acute{o}\varsigma$ or 'parodos': 'Our basic sense, then, would seem to have been "singing in imitation, singing with a slight change" [e.g., of subject-matter].'

F. J. Lelièvre echoes this description when he defines $\pi\alpha\rho\omega\delta\acute{\eta}$ or 'parode' in his article 'The Basis of Ancient Parody' of 1954 as 'singing after the style of an original but with a difference',[11] and also points to the ambiguity of the prefix 'para' and its ability to describe both nearness and opposition.[12] With reference to the many modern distortions of the ancient meaning of the term parody it is also significant that, despite Householder's concluding example of a change of subject-matter in words derived from $\pi\alpha\rho\omega\delta\acute{o}\varsigma$, neither Householder nor Lelièvre restrict the ancient parody to the imitation of form with a change to subject-matter, as has been the practice in many other modern, post-seventeenth-century definitions of the term.[13]

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8 See Householder, p. 7 and Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 4 vols., translated by H. E. Butler (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1960), vol. 3, p. 395.
9 See Householder, p. 4. Householder, however, admits to using only a few examples and at least one of these suggests that humour was also being described by the use of that term. 10 See, for instance, Householder, p. 8.
11 See Lelièvre, p. 72 and p. 66.
12 See Lelièvre, p. 66 and the following section on general parody.
13 This issue is discussed again both later in this chapter and in the account given in chapter 2 of the modern translation of parody into a form of the burlesque.

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One of the earliest influential 'modern' (in the sense of post-Renaissance) discussions of parody, in J. C. Scaliger's *Poetices libri septem* of 1561,[14] further illustrates the dangers of translating the ancient Greek words and their connotations into other languages.[15] Scaliger had used the word 'ridiculus' in describing the basic meaning of parody as the singing of a song which 'inverted' or changed around the words of the songs sung by the Homeric 'rhapsodists' or bards and turned their sense into something 'ridiculous': 'Est igitur Parodia Rhapsodia inversa mutatis vocibus ad ridicula sensum retrahens.'[16] Scaliger's word 'ridicula'·· could be translated as 'laughable' in the sense of 'funny' or 'amusing' (it derives from 'rideo', 'to laugh', and had been used in Madius' *De ridiculis* of 1550 with relation to Aristotle's comments on the laughable), but had also been given the sense of 'to mock' by Horace and has more often been translated as to make 'ridiculous' in the sense of 'absurd', and as a mocking 'laughing at', rather than as a 'laughing with', by critics writing in English.[17] (Scaliger's *Poetices libri septem* also describes himself and some others as having composed during a carnival a parody of Virgil's *Aeneid* which reduced Virgil's heroic subject-matter to the subject of drink.[18])

Scaliger's discussion of parody was in its turn taken up by several other critics in their accounts of ancient parody, and while Scaliger cannot be held responsible for all of the negative connotations attributed to parody in recent centuries (one other reason is the relegation of parody to a sub-category of the burlesque in the eighteenth century), his use of the Latin word 'ridiculus' to describe the comic aspects of parody may be said to have led some English critics at least to view the latter in a more negative light than was necessary because of the associations of the word ridicule with

14 See the chapter on 'Parodia', in J. C. Scaliger, *Poetices libri septem* (Lyons, 1561), p. 46.
15 Scaliger's description of parody is also based on interpretations of Aristotle and Athenaeus.   16 See Scaliger, p. 46.
17 Egert Pöhlmann's claim in his 'ΠΑΡΩΙΔΙΑ', in *Glotta*, vol. 50, nos. 3–4 (1972), pp. 144–56; p. 144, that Scaliger understood 'para' in the sense of 'zuzüglich zu' (or as 'in addition to', rather than 'against') does not appear to have taken into account Scaliger's interpretation of the parodies as both inverting other songs and making them 'ridiculous'.
18 See Scaliger, p. 46. Th. Verweyen and G. Witting, *Die Parodie in der neueren deutschen Literatur. Eine systematische Einführung* (Darmstadt, 1979) also comment on this passage on their p. 11.

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mockery in English, and to have thus made its eventual reduction to
the burlesque more easy.

While John Florio's *Worlde of Wordes, Or Most Copious and exact
Dictionarie in Italian and English* had followed some other classical
scholars writing after Quintilian in defining parody in relatively
neutral terms as 'a turning of a verse by altering some words' in
1598,[19] Ben Jonson's use of it in Act V, scene v of his *Every Man in his
Humour*, to describe an imitation of popular verses which made them
more 'absurd' than they were ('A Parodie! a parodie! with a kind of
miraculous gift to make it absurder than it was'), had clearly
emphasised the more 'ridiculous' aspects of the form,[20] and by the
early nineteenth century Isaac D'Israeli could describe parody as
including variations which stretched from the fanciful to the
malignantly ridiculing.[21] Writing after both Scaliger's description of
the ancient parodists as turning the sense of their models into the
ridiculous and the reduction of parody to the burlesque by Joseph
Addison and others,[22] D'Israeli had even gone on to describe the
'parodoi' who followed the Homeric rhapsodists as 'buffoons':
'When the rhapsodists, who strolled from town to town to chaunt
different fragments of the poems of Homer, had recited, they were
immediately followed by another set of strollers – buffoons, who
made the same audience merry by the burlesque turn which they gave
to the solemn strains which had just so deeply engaged their

19 Prior to Florio, Stephanus' *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae* (Geneva, 1572), vol. 1,
    column 119 g, had defined both 'parode' and 'parodia' as relating to 'parodeo'
    understood as 'canticum vel carmen ad alterius imitationem compono', while
    G. W. H. Lampe's *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961–8), part 4 (Oxford,
    1965), p. 1046 suggests that the fourth-century AD Gregory of Nyssa had also
    used 'parodeo' to mean to 'cite with alteration'.
20 Judith Priestman's doctoral dissertation, *The Age of Parody. Literary Parody and
    Some Nineteenth-Century Perspectives* (University of Kent at Canterbury, 1980), p.
    245, n. 24 suggests that the *OED* is wrong in giving 1598 as the date for the first
    recorded use of parody in English deriving from this play since only the 1616
    Folio version makes reference to it.
21 See Isaac D'Israeli, 'Parodies', in Isaac Disraeli, *Curiosities of Literature*, Second
    Series (1823) 14th edn (London, 1849), 3 vols.; vol. 2, pp. 504–11; p. 505.
    (Priestman, pp. 15 f. also notes how in the eighteenth century Dr Johnson had
    attributed to parody the functions of both alteration and degradation.)
22 See the section on the burlesque in chapter 2.

attention';[23] although he was also to agree with Fuzelier that parody
was not simply 'buffoonery'.[24]

Whereas some, including Householder, have claimed that the
'parodoi' were amateurs who improvised imitations of the Homeric
verses to create variety for the audiences of the more professional
rhapsodists,[25] other commentators have attributed the 'parodes' to
the Homeric rhapsodists themselves, or seen this particular question to
be unresolved.[26]

Connections are also made between the earlier use of the word
παρῳδός or 'parodos' to describe an imitating singer and the word
παρῳδία or 'parodia' because both have been said to apply to the
singing of songs in imitation of Homer which were of a 'mock-heroic'
or 'mock-epic' nature.[27] As Householder has noted, Aristotle had
applied the word παρῳδία in his *Poetics* to Hegemon of Thasos, a near
contemporary of Aristophanes (*c*.450 BC–*c*.388 BC), and the author,
according to Athenaeus' *The Deipnosophists*, of mock-epics such as the
Gigantomachia or 'Battle of the Giants'. While Aristotle writes in
chapter 2 of his *Poetics* on Hegemon simply that he was the first writer
of parodies, and, like Nicochares, the author of the *Diliad*,[28] showed
men in a bad light,[29] Athenaeus goes further by not only recording
various anecdotes about Hegemon (such as that he had been dubbed
'Lentil Porridge' after being pelted with filth by his countrymen), but
in describing him as a successful writer of epic parodies and in quoting

23 D'Israeli, 'Parodies', p. 505. D'Israeli, p. 506 n., names as sources the sixteenth-
     century Henry Stephen (Henricus Stephanus) and eighteenth-century Abbé
     Sallier, but fails explicitly to mention Scaliger's earlier, and not dissimilar,
     description of the rhapsodists.
24 See D'Israeli, p. 511, and the following discussion of Fuzelier's and D'Israeli's
     views.   25 See Householder, p. 8.
26 See, for example, Lelièvre, p. 79 on the openness of this question.
27 See Householder, p. 8 where he uses the term mock-epic. J. A. Cuddon's *A
     Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1977), revised edition (London, 1979), suggests, p.
     398 that the term 'mock-heroic' may be described as a more general application
     of the term mock-epic and of its application of the heroic style and 'machinery'
     of the Homeric epics to more trivial subjects.
28 W. Hamilton Fyfe translates this in Aristotle, *The Poetics*, p. 11 as the 'Poltrooniad',
     but 'Diliad' preserves the Greek title of Δηλιάδα, and its probable mock-heroic
     character, better.
29 Aristotle's *Poetics*, chapter 2, also states after referring to Hegemon and others that
     comedy shows persons in a worse light than they are, while tragedy shows them
     to be better, but later specifies this, in its chapter 5, as relating not to every fault
     but to the 'ridiculous', or the 'laughable'. (See the phrase τὸ γελοῖον in *The Poetics*,
     1449ª, 34, p. 18.)