

FATHER SILENUS: ACTOR OR CORYPHAeus?¹

DURING the entire period of the creative activity of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, tragic playwrights were required to enter the dramatic competition at the Dionysia with tetralogies consisting of three tragedies followed by a satyr play. This last was a comparatively short mythological travesty, a *παίζουσα τραγωδία*,² that received its name because its chorus is invariably composed of satyrs:³ comical half-men, half-beasts who regularly embody a wide range of shortcomings but nevertheless are possessed of a mysterious fund of knowledge and wisdom.⁴

A second invariable characteristic of satyr plays is the presence of the chorus's 'father', as he is regularly styled,⁵ Silenus. Silenus is a curious figure, and there is no real equivalent for him in tragedy. He is, up to a point, an individual, but nevertheless he is in a sense only a distillation or projection of the corporate personality of the chorus.

This is true in several ways. First, to an extent he seems physically bound to the chorus, and is generally a participant in whatever happens on stage. But this requires modification. He can enter independently of the satyrs by appearing in the prologue (*Cyclops*, *Ichneutai*, and probably *Dictyulci*),⁶ and can make momentary exits, as when he goes off to fetch food for Odysseus and his crew at *Cyclops* 174–88. Much more strikingly, he simply vanishes from the *Cyclops* at 590, and does not reappear.

Second, he apparently always shares their situation. In the *Ichneutai* they perform the same task for Apollo in order to gain a common reward. In the *Cyclops* they are alike prisoners of Polyphemus. I do not know of an instance where they work at cross-purposes, save for momentary dissensions.⁷

Third, he does not have a personality or set of psychological responses really distinct from those of the satyrs. They are alike fond of gratifying their various appetites, arrogant when safe but craven when in peril, etc. Much of the stock humour of satyr plays of course comes from these traits. A good example of this is an apparently stereotyped situation in which Silenus and/or the satyrs make an abrupt transition from arrogance to cowardice. In the *Cyclops*, the satyrs exultantly jeer at Polyphemus' impending downfall, until Odysseus suggests

¹ This was written on a grant from the American Philosophical Society.

² Demetrius, *On Style* 169.

³ This was wrongly queried by R. J. Walker, *The Ichneutai of Sophocles* (London, 1919), 348–52.

⁴ For the latter, one no longer has to cite Alcibiades' comparison of Socrates with a satyr or Vergil's eclogue: cf. *P. Oxy.* viii. 1083.

⁵ Cf., for instance, Eur. *Cyclops* 84 and Soph. *Ichneutai* 47.

⁶ Fr. 464 M. of the *Dictyulci* almost certainly comes from the prologue; cf. M. Werre-deHaas, *Aeschylus' Dictyulci* (Leiden, 1961), 32 f. But Werre-deHaas refuses to concede the presence of Silenus in this scene on the grounds that he cannot appear apart

from the chorus, and invents a hypothetical old man to replace him. This is astonishing, as Silenus appears in the prologues of other satyr plays, and there is no reason to exclude him from this scene. Those, such as H. Lloyd-Jones, Loeb Library *Aeschylus*, ii. 531–41, who wish to identify him as a participant, are more likely correct.

⁷ It is far likelier that the satyrs quarrel with Dionysus than with Silenus in the principal fragment of the *Isthmiastai*, *P. Oxy.* xviii. 2162, as their antagonist is termed a *γύνυς*, an epithet more appropriate of Dionysus, and used of him by Aeschylus in the *Edonians*, fr. 72 M.; so B. Snell, 'Aeschylus' *Isthmiastai*', *Hermes*, lxxiv (1956), 1–11, and Lloyd-Jones, *op. cit.* 545.

that they assist in his blinding, at which point they are reduced to panic (608–54). In the *Ichneutai*, Silenus jeers at the satyrs for their fear of the sound of the lyre, until he hears it and is reduced to a state more abject than theirs (125–207). In Sophocles' *Inachus*,¹ both he and they put up a brave show against Hermes and even jeer at him for his ineffectuality, until they are reduced to panic by the sound of his flute (*P. Tebt.* 692, cols. ii and iii). It is instructive to note how the same comically stereotyped reactions can be attributed to either Silenus or the chorus, or to both, and the same point could be made regarding many other traits.

So even if he has a name, a separate costume,² and a differentiated role, Silenus blends together with the chorus to the point that he is not really an individual personality in the same sense as other *dramatis personae*, such as Odysseus in the *Cyclops*. He has very fairly been described as a *tertium quid* standing halfway between the chorus and the fully defined characters and, as such, he finds no equivalent in tragedy.³

His position is so singular that scholars cannot agree whether he was played by an actor or was merely the coryphaeus (first chorister)⁴ playing a more active and independent role than in tragedy.⁵ To appreciate this division of opinion, one has only to compare the two editions of Sir Arthur Pickard-Cambridge's *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*.⁶ On p. 242 of the first edition, written by Sir Arthur himself, we read: 'That the satyric chorus consisted at the end of the fifth century of twelve persons has been argued with great probability from the Pronomos vase, on which there are eleven choreutai in addition to Silenus, their leader.' But in the second edition, revised after Sir Arthur's death by John Gould and D. M. Lewis, this is replaced with a different passage written by the editors:⁷ 'It has been inferred from the Pronomos vase on which eleven choreutai appear in addition to Silenus, that the satyric chorus at the end of the fifth century consisted of twelve choreutai; but the inference is based on a false assumption, namely that Silenus is merely the chorus-leader, given, as he would not be in tragedy, a name. The assumption is shown to be false by the fact that Silenus can hold an iambic dialogue with the chorus-leader (Eur. *Cyclops* 82 ff.; Soph. *Ichneutai* 107 ff. Page): Silenus is an actor, and the Pronomos vase gives no certain evidence on the size of the satyr chorus. Even though it is hard to see how a satyr play can have existed without a chorus, there is no clear evidence of the existence of a satyric chorus in later periods, let alone for the number of choreutai.'

¹ The *Inachus* is shown to be satyric by a violation of Porson's Law at *P. Tebt.* 692 i. 7, as I will show in a forthcoming article 'A Handlist of Satyr Plays' in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*.

² Cf. Sir Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*² (Oxford, 1968), 180.

³ So Werre-deHaas, op. cit. 74; cf. also N. E. Collinge, 'Some Reflections on Satyr Plays', *P.C.Ph.S.* n.s. v (1958–9), 29.

⁴ There is a new discussion of the coryphaeus in Greek drama by Maarit Kaimio, *The Chorus of Greek Drama within the Light of the Person and Number Used* (Helsinki, 1970), 157–78.

⁵ I will limit myself to citing some recent opinions. Among those identifying Silenus with the coryphaeus are Schmid-Stählin, *G.G.L.* ii. 59 no. 2 and Werre-deHaas, op. cit. 74; among those claiming that he was played by an actor are Kaimio, op. cit. 174. no. 4, Lloyd-Jones, op. cit. 535 n. 1, E. Buschor, *Satyrnünze und frühes Drama* (Munich, 1943), 81, and A. M. Dale, Oxford edn. of the *Alekestis*, xix n. 2.

⁶ 1st edn., Oxford, 1953; 2nd edn., Oxford, 1968.

⁷ That the substitution is the work of the editors is shown by the preface to the 2nd edn., viii.

It is true that passages such as *Cyclops* 82-4 or 262-9, where Silenus converses with 'the chorus' in iambs, correspond exactly to passages in tragedy that we would not hesitate to regard as transactions between an actor and the coryphaeus. This would seem a decisive consideration, save for one point. It seems an attractive conclusion for plays such as the *Cyclops* and the *Ichneutai*, which would consequently be three-actor plays: one actor would be detailed to represent Silenus, and the others would be free to act the other characters of the play. But none of the authorities who have argued for this conclusion have faced the difficulty of satyr plays written before Sophocles introduced the third actor. Assuming that Silenus is an actor, and that he plays as active a role as in later satyr plays, this would apparently mean that in no two-actor satyr play could more than one character appear on stage with Silenus and the chorus. This presents enormous dramaturgical problems. How is it possible to write plays in which the characters cannot confront each other on stage?¹ The arguments for thinking Silenus was represented by an actor are strong, but unless this problem can be solved, they must be regarded as incomplete, if not downright defective.

Even as a theoretical problem, this would be an important consideration. But it is more than that. We possess considerable papyrus fragments of two satyr plays by Aeschylus, the *Dictyulci* and the *Theoroi* or *Isthmiastai*, and it is noteworthy that both apparently require three on-stage speakers. The *Isthmiastai* definitely contains a scene with three speaking characters, Silenus, Dionysus, and a third character, perhaps Sisyphus,² and it is plausible that the final scene of the *Dictyulci*, in which Dictys must have reappeared to rescue Danae from Silenus, also required three speaking parts.³ It is barely possible that both plays were written in the final years of Aeschylus' career, when, as in the *Oresteia*, he wrote three-actor plays,⁴ but it seems preferable to conclude what one could probably assume on hypothetical grounds anyway, that he wrote satyr plays in which two characters could confront each other on stage, in the presence of Silenus and the chorus.

Apparently only N. E. Collinge has displayed an awareness of this problem and put forth a solution.⁵ He suggested that Silenus was originally represented by the coryphaeus, but was played by an actor after the introduction of the third actor. While he deserves credit for sensing the existence of this difficulty, his proposal seems doubtful. If, during the course of the fifth century, Silenus had been 'promoted' from coryphaeus to actor, one would think that this evolution would be reflected in the way his part was written. After he came to be played by an actor, his role would presumably grow in independence and importance. But there is no visible difference between his nature or function in Aeschylean satyr plays and those of Sophocles and Euripides, and this scarcely supports Collinge's theory.

A second possibility seems equally implausible, that the three-actor system was adopted for satyr plays substantially earlier than for tragedies. This would

¹ Since Aristotle in the *Poetics* held both that the second actor was only introduced by Aeschylus, and that tragedy evolved out of the satyr play, or at least something satyr play-like, it is conceivable that the proposition that Silenus is played by an actor might cause difficulties for our understand-

ing of the evolution of drama.

² See Snell, op. cit. and Lloyd-Jones, op. cit. 546-8.

³ So Werre-deHaas, op. cit. 74 f.

⁴ Suggested for the *Dictyulci* by Lloyd-Jones, op. cit. 535 n. 1.

⁵ Collinge, op. cit. 29 f.

directly contradict the testimony of Aristotle and many others that Aeschylus wrote for two actors and Sophocles introduced the third.¹

I would like to propose another solution, based on the assumption that the Pronomos vase accurately reflects the *dramatis personae* of a satyr play.² It is not exactly correct to say that this vase depicts eleven choreutai and Silenus. Rather, it shows one individual in a special costume holding a Silenus mask (upper row, second from right) and eleven holding satyr masks. Of these, ten are naked save for furry drawers, but the eleventh wears a sleeveless chiton and himation (lower row, second from right). Gould and Lewis suggest that this is the coryphaeus, and his costume certainly suggests a status superior to the rest.³

At first sight this would seem to support the thesis that Silenus is not the coryphaeus. But the difficulty is the number of choreutai. We are told that Sophocles raised the number of the chorus from twelve to fifteen (*Vit. Soph.* 4, etc.). If he did this for satyr plays as well as tragedies, perhaps the number was again reduced to twelve by the end of the century, the date of the play illustrated here, or perhaps it was reduced for this one play for some special reason. But in any case twelve choreutai is an attested reality, while ten or eleven is not, so perhaps another interpretation is in order. Silenus may be the coryphaeus, strictly speaking, and the individual who plays him would then be the coryphaeus of the preceding tragedies. But in order for the chorus to participate in the dialogue, a sub-coryphaeus must be appointed for satyr plays.⁴ It is possible that the artist hints at this by placing Silenus and the 'coryphaeus' at corresponding places in the upper and lower rows. Now, this is admittedly a hypothesis, and liable to attack, in so far as the interpretation of the Pronomos vase will always remain debatable. But as a hypothesis it has the double advantage of dealing with the problem of the two-actor satyr play and solving some of the problems raised by the Pronomos vase; it would have the advantage of explaining the observed facts of Silenus' appearance in satyr plays without creating the difficulties raised by other solutions that have been proposed in the past.

POSTSCRIPT

I have already quoted the opinion of Gould and Lewis. Their final remark, however, bears further consideration: 'Even though it is hard to see how a satyr

¹ It has been suggested to me that the evidence of Aristotle, who is talking specifically about *tragedy*, is not conclusive for the number of actors available in satyr plays, and that the question remains open, since on the one hand the analogy of comedy, with its considerably freer handling of extra parts, might suggest that it was not conclusive, while on the other the fact that satyr plays were part of the same group of performances in the festival might tie it more closely to the conditions prevailing for tragedy. My response would be, first, to question whether it is really clear that Aristotle is talking specifically about tragedy; second to reply that since the satyr play is so intimately connected with tragedy both historically and within the context of

the festival, it seems a reasonable assumption that it would march very closely with tragedy in such dramaturgic respects; and third, that the fact that no known satyr play of any period requires more than three on-stage speakers tends to support this assumption, by placing the satyr play with tragedy, not comedy, in this respect. Aristotle gives evidence at *Poetics* 4. 1449^a15; for other authorities giving (independent?) corroboration, cf. Pickard-Cambridge, *op. cit.* (1968) 130-2.

² For this vase cf. A. D. Trendall and T. B. L. Webster, *Illustrations of Greek Drama* (London, 1971), 29 with ref. and pl. II, 1.

³ Pickard-Cambridge, *op. cit.* (1968) 186.

⁴ For the possibility of a play having more than one coryphaeus, cf. Kaimio, *op. cit.* 158.

play can have existed without a chorus, there is no clear evidence for the existence of a satyric chorus in later periods, let alone for the number of choreutai.¹ I must confess that I find this statement bewildering. Perhaps what is intended is that there is no monumental evidence for post-classical satyr choruses, but there is perfectly good literary evidence, both direct and indirect, that suffices to remove any doubt that later satyr plays had satyr choruses. We possess fragments of three, or perhaps four,¹ post-classical satyr plays, the *Agon* of Python, the *Menedemus* of Lycophron, and the *Daphnis or Lityerses* of Sositheus.² There is good evidence for the existence of a satyr chorus in the *Menedemus*, as in frag. 1 S. Silenus is the speaker (guaranteed by Athenaeus 420B), who addresses his 'rascally children' (line 1). Who are these if not the satyrs? Likewise, frag. 1 S., line 5 of the *Agon* mentions *magoi* and in his brilliant reconstruction Bruno Snell shows that in this play satyr-magi attempt to resurrect the hetaera Pythonice.³ Finally, at *Ars Poetica* 244-6, Horace prescribes how the satyrs should talk and behave in a satyr play, from which it can be safely inferred that both Horace and the Alexandrian critics, such as Neoptolemus, on whom he depends assume as a matter of course that satyr plays would contain satyr choruses. I know of no reason for doubting that this was always the case: a mythological travesty not containing a chorus of satyrs would be called something else, probably a mime, and the term 'satyr play' would be reserved for a play with such a chorus.⁴

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¹ In an article 'Timocles Satyricus' forthcoming in *Dioniso*, I have suggested that Timocles' *Icaroi Satyroi*, commonly considered a Middle Comedy, was another such play.

² Fragments in V. Steffen, *Satyrographorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Poznań, 1952), and now in B. Snell, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* i (Göttingen, 1971).

³ B. Snell, *Scenes from Greek Drama* (Cambridge, 1964), 106 f.

⁴ The only conceivable evidence to the contrary is Diomedes, p. 490, 20, 'Latina Atellana a Graeca satyrica differt, quod in satyrica fere satyrorum personae inducuntur aut si quae sunt ridiculae similes satyris, Autolycus, Busiris', a passage on which I would scarcely base any such argument.