

TRAGEDY AND TRUGEDY

The *locus classicus* for the didactic aspect of Greek tragedy is, of course, Aristophanes' *Frogs*, especially the passage at 1009–10 where Aeschylus and Euripides agree that (we) tragic poets are valued ὅτι βελτίους... ποιούμεν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν. But how seriously should we take this? It is comedy, after all.

E. R. Dodds (in his commentary on Plato's *Gorgias*, 321) disparaged 'the notion – based mainly on a single passage of the *Frogs*, but erected by many Victorian writers into a dogma – that the Greek dramatists wrote their plays in order to inculcate moral "lessons"'. (With friends like 'many Victorian writers' – let alone Werner Jaeger – who needs enemies?) Albin Lesky held similar views and added a chronological point: 'the earliest demand that tragic poets should be educators was voiced by Aristophanes in his *Frogs*'.¹ Both were much influenced by the chapter 'Aristophanes and Aesthetic Criticism' in Bruno Snell's *The Discovery of the Mind*.²

The generation of fine scholars which dominated Greek studies in the middle decades of our century reacted against the didactic approach to tragedy, which they felt obscured emotional and aesthetic priorities and 'dramatic effect'. No one, presumably, still believes that the tragedians composed 'in order to inculcate moral lessons'; but the belief that their works have moral and intellectual weight, that they somehow help us to understand and live with the human condition, make us better at living with other people (βελτίους... ἀνθρώπους ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν) – such a belief should not be too hastily dismissed as an anachronism based on the *Frogs*.

My purpose in this note is to bring to bear a *testimonium* which has not, so far as I know, been fully appreciated before. It is more serious, and earlier, than *Frogs*, though at the same time it is nothing if not amusing. In *Acharnians* we are made to wait a long time for Dicaeopolis' speech in defence of his peace and of the Spartans, his ῥῆσις μακρά, or 'chopping-block speech'. We were first alerted for it back at lines 294 ff. and have been led to expect something special.³ He begins (496–501):

μή μοι φθονήσατ', ἄνδρες οἱ θεώμενοι,
εἰ πτωχός ὦν ἔπειτ' ἐν Ἀθηναίοις λέγειν
μέλλω περὶ τῆς πόλεως, τρυγωιδίαν ποιῶν.
τὸ γὰρ δίκαιον οἶδε καὶ τρυγωιδία.
ἐγὼ δὲ λέξω δεινὰ μὲν, δίκαια δέ.

500

Lines 500–1 give all available stress to Aristophanes' concern with τὸ δίκαιον. He has created a character called Δικαιοπόλις and made him follow in the footsteps – and outfit – of Telephus, who (probably) said in Euripides' play that even with his head on the block (fr. 706 N² = 113 Austin) οὐ... κυγήσομαι δίκαια γ' ἀντειπεῖν ἔχων – lines taken up by Dicaeopolis at *Acharn.* 317–18, καὶ γὰρ μὴ λέγω δίκαια... If it is true that the charge which Cleon had brought against Aristophanes was one of ἀδικία (schol. *Acharn.* 378), then his opponent supplied him with his catchword.

¹ *Greek Tragedy* (English transl. by H. P. Frankfort, London, 1965), 18, cf. Lesky's review of Pohlenz in *Gnomon* 28 (1956), 25. Contrast D. A. Russell, *Criticism in Antiquity* (London, 1981), 84, who says that in *Frogs* Aristophanes is 'formulating a general idea which would have been widely accepted not only among his own audience...'.
² English transl. of 2nd ed. by T. Rosenmeyer, Harvard, 1953; 4th German ed. Göttingen, 1975. The chapter was first published as an article in *Die Antike* in 1937.
³ On the retardation, see R. Harriott *Gand R* 29 (1982), 35.

The exact wording of line 500 is worth further scrutiny. Why *τρυγωιδία* rather than the much more common *κωμωιδία*? *τρυγωιδία* and its related words are sufficiently rare to allow a quick survey – in fact I have found only eight uses (before 400 B.C., that is) apart from the two in the passage in question (so I count *Acharn.* 499 and 500 as numbers i and ii).⁴ There has been much antiquarian speculation, in ancient and modern times, about the word and its bearing on the origins of tragedy and comedy. We should weigh the plausibility of that approach against Pickard-Cambridge's conclusion that *τρυγωιδία* is 'probably in origin simply a comic parody of *τραγωιδία*, giving to comedy a name which was both ludicrous and also suggestive of wine...' (*Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*, 284).

(iii) *Acharn.* 628: at the opening of the parabasis-anapaests.

ἐξ οὗ γε χοροῖσιν ἐφέστηκεν τρυγικοῖς ὁ διδάσκαλος ἡμῶν...

(iv) *Acharn.* 886: Dicaeopolis greets the Copaic eel in tragic style (see further Rau *Paratragoedia* 145–6).

ὦ φιλάττη σὺ καὶ πάλαι ποθουμένη,
ἦλθες ποθεινὴ μὲν τρυγωιδικοῖς χοροῖς...

(v) *Wasps* 650: spoken by Bdelycleon at the beginning of his big attack on the law courts.

χαλεπὸν μὲν καὶ δεινὴς γνωμῆς καὶ μείζονος ἢ 'πὶ τρυγωιδοῖς,
ἵασθαι νόσον ἀρχαίαν ἐν τῇ πόλει ἐντετοκυῖαν.

As in *Acharn.* 499–500 the suggestion is that Aristophanes is attempting to make *τρυγωιδία* take on more than is normally supposed to be its function.

(vi) *Wasps* 1537: the very last words of the play,

τοῦτο γὰρ οὐδεὶς πω πάρος δέδρακεν,
ὀρχούμενον ὅστις ἀπήλλαξεν χορὸν τρυγωιδῶν.

The choreographic point here is very difficult to reconstruct;⁵ but there seems to be some emphasis on this being the first time that it (whatever it is) has happened in *τρυγωιδία* as opposed to something else.

(vii) *Clouds* 296: Socrates rebukes Strepsiades.

οὐ μὴ σκώψει μηδὲ ποιήσεις ἄπερ οἱ τρυγοδαίμονες
ἀλλ' εὐφήμει...

Dover (ad loc.) glosses *τρυγοδαίμονες* as follows: 'obviously "comedians", a humorous distortion of *τραγ-*, as in *Ach.* 499 [= i]... and fr. 149. 9 [= viii] ... , blended with the disparaging *κακοδαίμων*...'.

(viii) Ar. *Gerytades* fr. 149. 9 (K): who has been sent down to Hades as representatives of Athens?

πρῶτα μὲν Σαννυρίων
ἀπὸ τῶν τρυγωιδῶν, ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν τραγικῶν χορῶν
Μέλητος, ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν κυκλίων Κινησίας.

(ix) Ar. (*Second*) *Thesmophoriazousai* fr. 333. 1 (K): looking back to the good old days when Crates was producing comedy.

ἡ μέγα τι βρώμ' ἔτι τρυγωιδοποιομουςική...

⁴ The word is introduced by emendation in at least two passages by P. Ghiron-Bistagne in *RÉG* 86 (1973), 285 ff.; but I leave these out of account.

⁵ There is an interesting discussion, even if no satisfactory answer, by J. Vaio, *GRBS* 12 (1971), 344–51.

(x) Eupolis *Demoi* fr. 92. 29 (Austin): during the parabasis some politician is under attack, and this incomplete line is among his many offences.

ταῖς στρατηγαῖς δ' ὑφέρπει καὶ τραγωιδῶ[

'He makes up to the High Command and [...] comedy', presumably does it down in some way.

Surveying these eight passages it seems clear beyond dispute that in three of them – i.e. iv, vii and viii – the *τραγυ-* word is chosen primarily in order to make some word-play with *τραγωιδία*. It seems to me likely that this verbal association is also intended in three of the others, viz. iii, v and vi. There does not seem to be any such homeophonic point in the other two fragments (ix and x), though we cannot be sure.

On return to the opening of Dicaeopolis' *rhesis* in *Acharnians* I trust the ground is well prepared for the obvious answer to my question of why *τραγωιδία* is used rather than *κωμωιδία*: in order to allude to *tragedy*. In the context of the parody of *Telephos* the pun would be obvious; and the audience will have taken the comic 'etymology' to be from either *τραγᾶω* 'to gather a crop', or *τρύξ* 'unfermented wine', or both. The former is perhaps more prominent to judge from the name Trygaeos in *Peace* and the fescennine metaphor in the final hymeneal (*Peace* 1337–40):

τί δράσομεν αὐτήν;
τραγγήσομεν αὐτήν.

Surely Pickard-Cambridge was right that *τραγωιδία* was in origin a comic pun. It is not impossible that Aristophanes invented the word in 425 B.C.

What this is leading up to is a new look at *καί* in *Acharnians* 500 *τὸ γὰρ δίκαιον οἶδε καὶ τραγωιδία*. I suggest that this does not mean 'even comedy knows what is right', as it is usually taken, so much as 'tragedy *too* knows what is right' – as well as tragedy, that is. If so, then this implies a priori that tragedy knows what is right. It assumes, moreover, that tragedy's acquaintance with justice is something that everybody knows about and takes for granted – the novelty is to claim the same for comedy. Once the theme is established Aristophanes presses it throughout the parabasis,⁶ especially at 645, 661–2, and, most directly, 655–6:

ἀλλ' ὑμεῖς τοι μὴ ποτ' ἀφήσθ'· ὥς κωμωιδῆσει τὰ δίκαια.
φησὶν δ' ὑμᾶς πολλὰ διδάξειν ἀγάθα...

Indeed, the Persian King makes on the comic poet's behalf the claim that twenty years later the tragic poets will make for themselves:

... τοὺς ἀνθρώπους πολὺ βελτίους γεγενῆσθαι... (Acharn. 650).

I suggest, though much less confidently, that a similar point may underlie *Wasps* 650 (passage v). Tragedy is known to be able to treat diseases in the body-politic, but it is unusual to claim the same for tragedy.

To claim that tragedy *τὸ δίκαιον οἶδε* is not by any means to re-erect the dogma that it was written to inculcate moral lessons. It is, however, a recognition of serious ethical concern as well as the 'dramatic effect', which is all that is allowed by many of those scholars who are still at the stage of reacting against the moralism of the nineteenth century.⁷

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⁶ See A. M. Bowie *CQ* n.s. 32 (1982), 27 ff. esp. 30; also L. Edmunds, *YCS* 26 (1980), 1 ff. esp. 10.

⁷ I am grateful to the *CQ* reader for helpful suggestions.