OBSERVATIONS ON THE OPENING SCENE OF ARISTOPHANES' *WASPS*

ΞΑ. οἶδ', ἀλλ' ἐπιθυμῶ σμικρὸν ἀμομερμηρίσαι.
ΣΩ. σὺ δ' οὖν παρακινδύνευ', ἐπεὶ καὐτοῦ γ' ἐμοῦ
κατὰ τοῖν κόραιν ἤδη τι καταχεῖται γλυκύ.
ΞΑ. ἀλλ' ἢ παραφρονεῖς ἑτεὸν ἢ κορυβαντιᾷς;
ΣΩ. οὔκ, ἀλλ' ὕπνος μ' ἔχει τις ἐκ Σαβαζίου.
ΞΑ. τὸν αὐτὸν ἄρ' ἐμοὶ βουκολεῖς Σαβάζιον.
κἀμοὶ γὰρ ἀρτίως ἐπεστρατεύσατο
Μήδός τις ἐπὶ τὰ βλέφαρα νυστακτὴς ὕπνος.
καὶ δῆτ' ὄναρ θαυμαστὸν εἶδον ἀρτίως.

Aristophanes, *Wasps* 5–13

The lack of stage directions in surviving Greek comedy which might give a clue to comic 'business' not clearly signalled or confirmed in the text is a considerable disadvantage to us, not least in some of the opening tableaux of Aristophanes. One thinks of restless father and snoring son in bed at the opening of *Clouds*, the jokes involving the incongruous entry of master, slave, donkey and baggage in *Frogs*, the preparations for launching the dung-beetle into space in *Peace* – all scenes which demand visual as well as verbal effects in order to engage immediate attention and get the audience into a lively humour for what is to come. In the opening scene of *Wasps* between the slaves engaged in their nocturnal vigil over Philocleon, there are a number of points implied by the verbal references which seem to me to depend for clarification on their actions, and perhaps also the stage properties involved.

First, it is clear that both slaves in turn recognise the recurrent danger of their nodding – literally – off to sleep in a νυστακτὴς ὕπνος, and they acknowledge also that the responsibility for their readiness to do so lies with their devotion to the foreign divinity Sabazius. This Phrygian Dionysus, then becoming popular in Athens, probably among the less-privileged classes, is of course associated both with nocturnal vigils and with drinking, and the point has generally been taken by editors of the play. 'Sosias implies that it is the wine-god that has overpowered him' (Graves); his sleep is 'causé par ivresse' (van Daele). Alciphron (3.46), who so often draws on Old Comedy, clearly had this scene of *Wasps* in mind (note ὕπνος νυστακτής) when he describes drinking and drowsiness of even slaves at a banquet, and Aristophanes himself opens his *Knights* (95ff.) with another pair of slaves similarly indulging in drinking. Sommerstein, it is true, says cautiously 'the evidence linking Sabazius with wine is rather slight', but I should have thought that κρατηρίζων in Dem. 18.259 and ἐν θιάσοις καὶ μεθύουσιν ἀνθρώποις in 19.199, where he attributes all manner of licentious behaviour to devotees of Sabazius, even allowing for Demosthenes' hostile intentions, point well enough to such an association.[1] I assume therefore that the lines of conversation are punctuated by this pair of none-too-vigilant warders imbibing copiously and drowsing off to sleep – an action normally represented by nodding the head slowly downwards, and from time

[1] Cf. Hsch. ἐκρατηρίχημες· ἐμεθύσθημεν (= Sophr. fr. 106). For the equation of Sabazius with Dionysus, see especially Amphitheus *FGrHist* 431 F 1. In Ar. *Lys.* 388ff. the tipsiness of women in celebrating Sabazius and Adonis is taken for granted, and J. Henderson *ad loc.* comments 'his (Sabazius') worship involved intoxication'. As the choice of divinity in colloquial exclamations is often appropriate to the context (e.g. invoking Dionysus where wine and revelry is involved in Ar. *Ach.* 195, *Vesp.* 1046, 1474, Sophil. fr. 6, Xenarch. fr. 9), note how in Theophil. fr. 8, in a reaction to a description of the immense meals of a prize fighter, a second speaker exclaims 'by Heracles!' when the food was mentioned (his traditional gluttony, of course), and 'by Sabazius!' on hearing of his drinking ἀκράτου δώδεκα κοτύλας.

to time jerking it back sharply as the sleeper recovers consciousness in the nick of time. Their devotion to Sabazius is given a pseudo-justification by the use of the technical word *βουκολεῖν*, as if they were *bona fide* celebrants of the rituals of the god, and not simply beginning to feel the effects of their own over-indulgence.

Let us now turn to line 8, and to the verbs *παραφρονεῖς* and *κορυβαντιᾷς*. B. B. Rogers' comment sums up the general interpretation of the line: 'The Corybants indulged in such wild, delirious orgies, that their name was identified throughout Hellas with madness and frenzy of every description.' This is commonly so, but Sosias, finding it hard to stop from 'nodding off' to sleep, is surely not to be envisaged leaping about the stage at this point like the traditional picture of a Corybant at the height of his frenzy (as memorably described in Plato, *Symp.* 215e),[2] nor even, as Starkie suggested, in order to rouse himself 'stretches his limbs energetically' with a 'wild movement of his arms'. (So Sommerstein adds 'he yawns and stretches'.) Nor do I agree with K. Sidwell in a recent article,[3] who, recalling the theme of 'the falling Maenad', suggests that 'by line 9 Sosias will be on the ground, beside the already recumbent Xanthias', and that in line 8 he 'is tottering and falling'. Rather, the regular nodding motion of his head, punctuated always more rarely with the sudden backwards jerk,[4] portrays the gradual 'unwinding' of the delirous state, as the Corybants calmed themselves after over-indulgence, and their eyes glazed over in a sort of hypnotic trance. The Greeks, reports the elder Pliny (*N.H.* 11.147), used the verb *κορυβαντιᾶν* of the hare which appears to be asleep, but with its eyes still open, the *οὐ μύοντα λαγῷον* of Callim. *hymn* 3.95. The proverb *λαγὼς καθεύδων*, according to the Suda, was used *ἐπὶ τῶν προσποιουμένων καθεύδειν*, and Aelian (*N.H.* 13.13) says of the hare *οὐδὲ νικᾶται τῷ ὕπνῳ τὰ βλέφαρα*. (See also Dio Chr. 33.32.)

With regard to the verb *παραφρονεῖς*, it is interesting to note how it is associated particularly with contexts describing wayward movement, or nodding, of the head through delirium, drunkenness, or deprivation of wits caused by blows. In Hdt. 3.34, Cambyses complains that the Persians attributed his manic disposition to wine – *νῦν ἄρα μέ φασι Πέρσαι οἴνῳ προσκείμενον παραφρονεῖν καὶ οὐκ εἶναι νοήμονα*. In *Od.* 18.240, Irus, dazed by Odysseus' blows, goes about *νευστάζων κεφαλῇ μεθύοντι ἐοικώς*, which resembles Theoc. 25.262, where Heracles observes the Nemean lion, whose skull he has just clubbed, *νευστάζων κεφαλῇ ... σεισθέντος ἐγκεφάλοιο ... ὀδύνῃσι παραφρονέοντα βαρείαις*. Oppian (*Cyn.* 4.204) draws a simile from a punch-drunk boxer *οἷα μεθυσφαλέων ἑτεροκλινέων τε κάρηνον*. Plato (*Leg.* 649d) describes various character defects *πάνθ' ὅσα δι' ἡδονῆς αὖ μεθύσκοντα παράφρονας ποιεῖ* (cf. 775d *παραφόρος ἅμα καὶ κακὸς ὁ μεθύων*). At Soph. *Phil.* 815 *τί παραφρονεῖς αὖ; τί τὸν ἄνω λεύσσεις κύκλον;* T. B. L. Webster observes in his note 'All Philoctetes can do is to jerk his head up towards the sky'.[5] The delirious head-wagging of Corybants is compared, or contrasted, to drunkenness in Luc. *Bacch.* 5 *μή με κορυβαντιᾶν ἢ τέλεως μεθύειν ὑπολάβητε*, Philo, *de mund. opif.* 23 *μέθῃ νηφαλίῳ κατασχεθεὶς ὥσπερ οἱ κορυβαντιῶντες ἐνθουσιᾷ*, Juv. *Sat.* 5.25 de conviva Corybanta videbis.

[2] For this, and other references to Corybants in Plato, see I. M. Linforth, *Univ. of Calif. Publ. in Class. Phil.* 13 (1946), 121–62, who does not, however, in my opinion, deal adequately with the *Wasps* passage under consideration.

[3] 'Was Philocleon cured?', *Cl. et Med.* 41 (1990), 18.

[4] So LSJ, s.v. *Κορυβαντιάω*, 'of a drowsy person nodding and suddenly starting up'.

[5] Note also in Eur. *Hipp.* 232 the nurse's *παράφρων* to describe Phaedra's distracted state, after she has shaken off her head-dress, lets her hair fall over her shoulders, and indulges her fantasy of throwing javelins *παρὰ χαίταν*. At 143–4 the Corybants and Rhea were thought to have been responsible for her condition.

Wild tossing of the head or hair is, of course, ubiquitously associated with the maenads of Dionysus, but in the case of humans subject to Corybantism, one must remember that they were not only characterised by initial frenzied delirium, but were believed to be able to cure this condition by gradually establishing a more controlled rocking motion, which Plato (*Leg.* 790d) compares to the rocking to sleep by their nurses of disturbed children, until they reach a state of equilibrium. Corybantism is therefore both madness and its cure, as in the Hesychian gloss *Κορυβαντιασμός· κάθαρσις μανίας*. It is the former manic state which features in so many literary descriptions, and invites comparisons from other civilisations and periods with dervishes, shakers, 'holy rollers', and – most recently – the bizarre disco craze of 'head-banging'.[6] But there is no lack of evidence also for the belief in the homeopathic cure (usually accompanied by a certain type of music),[7] and indeed in *Wasps* itself, shortly after our passage (119–20), Xanthias refers to an unsuccessful attempt to allay Philocleon's mania by Corybantic initiation (schol. *ἐπὶ καθαρμῷ τῆς μανίας*) which merely provokes him to take his drum to the jury courts!

In this context, I might refer to an interesting papyrus fragment, first published in 1965 by V. Bartoletti under the title *Inni a Cibele*,[8] but subsequently attributed conjecturally to Menander's *Theophoroumene* by E. W. Handley[9] who places it alongside other fragments of this play, which involves an investigation of an apparently demonically-possessed girl. In lines 7–11 invoking Corybants as attendants of the Phrygian mother-goddess and her *tympana*, the unusual adjectives *σεισικάρηνοι* and *ἀδυπρόσωποι* are used – which reminded me very much at the time of publication of the quasi-Corybantic condition (whether self-induced by constant repetition, or feigned, in imitation of an exotic ritual from the east) displayed in the odd cult adopted by young men in monkish robes and with shaven heads, who danced down city streets with bells, tambourines and cymbals, smiling happily and wagging their heads, precisely as in the Menander (?) papyrus.[10]

It is worthy of note that, in the way of unscientific ancient etymology, rotation of the head is invoked to explain the very names of both Cybele and her Corybantic acolytes. One of the etymologies recorded by Servius (on Verg. *Aen.* 3.111) has *alii Cybele ἀπὸ τοῦ κυβιστᾶν τὴν κεφαλήν, id est, a capitis rotatione, quod proprium est eius sacerdotum*. And Strabo (10.473), quoting the second-century B.C. historian Demetrius of Scepsis, derives the name of Corybants *ἀπὸ τοῦ κορύπτοντας βαίνειν ὀρχηστικῶς*! One recalls also Lucretius' description (2.632) of the nodding (*numen*) of the Phrygian Curetes (as he calls them – the two names are of course often interchanged),[11] *terrificas capitum quatientes numine cristas*.[12]

[6] See Aldous Huxley, *The Devils of Loudun*, Appendix, who describes 'many sporadic outbreaks of involuntary and uncontrollable jigging, swaying and headwagging'. Years ago, G. F. Creuzer (*Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker besonders der Griechen*, Leipzig (1822), p. 272) described the Corybants as Kopfschütteler.

[7] There is, of course, the famous example of indulgence in the tarantella as a cure for 'tarantism'. For another interesting parallel, see Grace Harris, 'Possession "Hysteria" in a Kenya Tribe' (*American Anthropologist* 59 (1957), 1047–8), who describes how therapeutic dancing accompanied by singing and drumming induces a trance-like state in those suffering an attack of *saka*: 'While the shoulders shake rapidly, the head is moved rhythmically from side to side... the eyes may close and the face becomes expressionless.'

[8] In *Dai papiri della Società Italiana: ommagio all' XI Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia* (Florence, 1965), no. 1.

[9] *B.I.C.S.* 16 (1969), 88–101.

[10] The phenomenon has been studied by J. N. Bremmer, *Greek Maenadism Reconsidered* (*ZPE* 55, 1984, 267–86), who collects many classical references on pp. 278–9, and also observes how autistic children enter into their own hypnotic dream world by continual wagging of the head.

[11] See J. Poerner, *De Curetibus et Corybantibus* (Halle, 1913).

[12] Violent head-tossing in the cult of Cybele has recently been studied in connection with Catullus 63 by K. M. W. Shipton in *CQ* 36 (1986), 268–70.

A final point about the slaves' dialogue in *Wasps*: why does Xanthias (lines 11–12) describe his sleep as a *Μῆδος ὕπνος* which *ἐπεστρατεύσατο* against him? The editions generally acknowledge some sort of allusion to 'the great campaigns of the Persians against Hellas' (Rogers). 'The mention of barbarian deities suggests the attack of a barbarian foe' (Graves), etc. But I should not be surprised if, in his picturesque choice of metaphor to describe his sleep and resultant dream, Aristophanes had in mind something even more specific – the striking dream sequence of Xerxes and Artabanus, graphically recounted in Herodotus' *Histories* 7.12–19, about whether the Persians should *στρατεύεσθαι ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα*. It will be remembered that it was in his *Acharnians* three years before that Aristophanes already displayed his familiarity with the *Histories*,[13] doubtless by now circulating in Athens, and perhaps popularised from the historian's own visit in the 430s, and *Wasps* editors usually refer to Herodotean echoes, both thematic and linguistic, in the patriotic passage of the *Wasps parabasis* (1071–90) recalling the Athenians' 'finest hour'.

Moreover, the same military metaphor is used later in the play, when the stubborn old patriot Philocleon refuses to put off his old Attic *τρίβων*, and dress in the hated enemy clothing, a Persian *καυνάκης*[14] and Laconian shoes. His old cloak, he says, protected him in the ranks *ὅθ' ὁ Βορέας ὁ μέγας ἐπεστρατεύσατο* (1124). It is generally accepted that, following closely on the back references to the Persian campaigns in the *parabasis*, in the metaphor, 'great Boreas', who is *βασιλεὺς ἀνέμων* (Pi. *P.* 4.181) and *ἄνεμος μέγας* (Hdt. 6.44), replaces tacitly the 'great (Persian) king',[15] and the scholia even take the naming of the specific wind to allude to the destruction of the Persian fleet at Artemisium, also notably related by Herodotus (7.188–9), in gratitude for which the Athenians erected a temple to Boreas.[16] Some editors of *Wasps* are sceptical about so specific an allusion, but in any case, a few years later, Philocleon, in his younger days, seems to have seen military service – presumably in the campaigns of 478–6 – at Byzantium (236), with his old comrades of the chorus, who had to take steps then to keep a fire going, just as Herodotus (9.117) refers to the winter privations of the Athenian besiegers of Sestos shortly before, when great Boreas must have again blown hard and often.

The dream of Xanthias in his Median sleep may not have been the only one that occurred to Aristophanes from famous literature,[17] for in Aeschylus, *Persians* (181ff.) one recalls Atossa's alarming dream which prefigures the potential failure of the same expedition; and even if Xanthias' dream about an eagle (which turns into Cleonymus the shield-dropper) dropping a snake is most obviously drawn from *Il.* 12.200–29 –

[13] The Great King's Eye (*Ach.* 92, Hdt. 1.114), whole oxen baked in Persian ovens (*Ach.* 85–7, Hdt. 1.133), luxurious *harmamaxai* (*Ach.* 70, Hdt. 7.41, 83), the parody of war beginnings (*Ach.* 524 ff., Hdt. 1.1–4), and, if my emendation of *Ach.* 709 is right (*B.I.C.S.* 17, 1970, 107–10), the reference to the Persian giant Artachaies (Hdt. 7.117).

[14] I am reminded of the account in Plut. *Ages.* 14 of how the Asiatic Greeks admired Agesilaus for his indifference to Persian luxury, and his wearing of a *τρίβων λιτός*.

[15] Cf. A. *Pers.* 24, Hdt. 1.192, 5.49.7, 8.140b, Xen. *An.* 1.2.8, Sud. s.v. *μέγας βασιλεύς*, and Aristophanes himself, *Pl.* 170.

[16] Military metaphors of winds are not uncommon – e.g. Pi. *P.* 6.12 *στρατός* of a rainstorm, id. *P.* 4.210 *ἀνέμων στίχες*, Alciphr. 1.14.2 *διαμάχεσθαι* of an armed force engaged in battling with winds and waves. The passage from Hdt. 6.44 quoted above associated Boreas also with the earlier Persian naval disaster at Athos in 492, and Tim. *Pers.* 132 refers to the part played by Boreas in the third, and greatest, Persian rout at Salamis, where Edmonds, not implausibly, conjectured *κατακυμοταγεῖς* 'marching in serried ranks over the waves' for MS. *-τακεῖς*, rather odd in view of the breezes of *freezing* Boreas, in a passage with Homeric military overtones, such as *διαρραίω*, *ἀναρρήγνυμι*, found in fighting sequences in the *Iliad*.

[17] Mr J. G. Howie reminds me of yet another 'Median dream' in Herodotus – the two significant dreams of Astyages in 1.107–8.

as MacDowell says 'a traditional omen of failure in an enterprise', and so exploited by Aristophanes also in *Eq.* 197–210 – Atossa's dream is followed by the omen in which the Persian eagle is similarly humiliated by the Greek hawk. The choice of eagle, almost certainly by Aeschylus, and possibly by Aristophanes, is of course connected with the symbolism of the royal house of Persia (Xen. *Cyr.* 7.1.4, *An.* 1.10.12, Philostr. *Im.* 2.31, Quint. Curt. 3.3.16).

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THE COMPLEXITY OF SOCRATIC IRONY: A NOTE ON PROFESSOR VLASTOS' ACCOUNT[1]

Professor Vlastos argues that Socratic irony was responsible for a momentous change in the way in which irony was understood in ancient times. Before Socrates, he argues, irony is connected with lying and deceit, but after Socrates it is associated with wit and urbanity. Vlastos claims that Socratic irony is distinctive and complex. According to Vlastos, Socratic irony involves no hint of deception; it consists simply in saying something which when understood in one way is false, but when understood in another way is true.

I wish to cast doubt on the idea that the term 'irony'[2] changed its meaning, by pointing out an important aspect of Socratic irony which Vlastos overlooks. Socrates has two audiences, the 'in-crowd', Socrates' entourage who follow him around the market-place appreciating the wit and wisdom of his remarks, and the 'outsiders', those hapless interlocutors of Plato's early dialogues who are completely befuddled by Socrates' questioning. The in-crowd discern Socrates' true meaning; the outsiders do not. The in-crowd can see the humour in the outsiders' bumbling attempts at understanding; the outsiders cannot. The outsiders are justified in feeling cheated. They engage in discussion in good faith, while Socrates and his friends share a private joke at their expense. When Socrates says at his trial that he deserves free meals at the Prytaneum for the rest of his life,[3] he must have expected the outsiders to disagree with a vengeance.

In Plato's hands, Socratic irony takes on an added dimension. For the purposes of *dramatic* irony, Plato fully exploits the fact that Socratic irony amuses and pleases those in the know, while deceiving and angering those on the outside. Plato writes for those readers who, like Professor Vlastos, will understand what Socrates is saying, and who will become members of the in-crowd, enjoying the wit and humour of Socrates' remarks. Like Socrates, Plato makes no special effort to aid those who will not understand and who will identify with Socrates' accusers and feel angry and betrayed, for example, I. F. Stone.[4]

Quintilian and Cicero, whose comments Vlastos cites as evidence for a change in the ancients' understanding of irony, would have identified with the in-crowd. As orators, they not only appreciate irony, but are adept at dispensing it themselves. Therefore it is not surprising that Cicero thinks of irony as witty and urbane, and that Quintilian fails to mention its ability to deceive.[5] For the outsider, however, irony

[1] G. Vlastos, 'Socratic Irony', *CQ* 37 (1987), 79–96, now chapter 1 of his book, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, New York, 1991), pp. 21–44.

[2] In Greek, '*εἰρωνεία*', in Latin, '*ironia*'.

[3] Plato, *Apology* 36d.

[4] I. F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates* (Boston, 1988).

[5] Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.67; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 9.22.44.