

## Chapter 18

### THE LANGUAGE OF NON-ATHENIANS IN OLD COMEDY

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#### I

In Nicolas Roeg's film *The Witches*,<sup>1</sup> a comedy-thriller aimed at children but equally enjoyable for grown-ups, Anjelica Huston plays the evil and glamorous chief witch, whose wicked plan is to turn all children into mice (the film is an adaptation of Roald Dahl's book of the same name). The action is set in England and Norway; the child protagonist is an American with a Norwegian grandmother. What is striking is that, in this slightly mixed ethnic setting, Angelica Huston plays her role with a heavy and gratuitous German accent, addressing her cat ('familiar') as *mein Liebchen*, and so on. The conclusion to be drawn, though unpalatable, is unavoidable: the makers of the film (following Dahl's original text, which is characterized by 'phonetic' spellings such as *Inkland*) felt that at the end of the twentieth century it was still part of the dramatic convention of English-language cinema that a 'baddie' could be marked with a German accent – even when there is no dramatic reason for a German character to be introduced. The use of marked language (i.e. forms which are felt to be linguistically deviant) to associate literary characters with particular moral or intellectual qualities has a long pedigree in English literature: one need only think of Dr Caius ('A French Physician') or Sir Hugh Evans ('A Welsh Parson') in Shakespeare's *Merry Wives*. Since a certain tribalism seems to be built into the human way of looking at the world, even if it may have outgrown its evolutionary usefulness, and since linguistic variation is one of the easiest ways in which one social group may mark itself off from another (or be defined by another), the association of language and ethics in literary activity is common in cultures across the world. Nevertheless, the claim of this phenomenon to be a 'linguistic universal' is weakened by the wide variations which are found in the practice. First, it is clear that the extent to which language plays a role in ethnic identity, and the association of moral or other characteristics with linguistic characteristics, are sociopolitical issues, and will reflect the prevailing ideologies of the community. Secondly, literary form and convention vary from culture to culture, and this will influence the presentation of linguistic variety and deviation.

When we examine the presentation of linguistic variety in Old Comedy we are naturally inclined to find a range of meanings similar to that which we might expect to find in our own comic literature (who are 'we' anyway? Modern western literatures are by no means uniform on this point). In defence of this approach one might advance (i) the frequent (supposedly universal) association of out-group language with negative characteristics, and (ii) the link (whether conceived as genetic or ideological) between ancient Greek and modern western culture. We need not spend too long on (i) in view of the caveats raised above, and especially when we consider that even within the history of English literature the implications of dialect and non-standard language have changed from period to period: it is not clear, for example, that the northern dialect of the students in Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale* is a target of ridicule or censure; and in D.H. Lawrence dialect may be a sign of spiritual integrity. The link in (ii) is more interesting: it is undeniable that aspects of political thought and literary convention have been 'inherited' from classical antiquity by the modern world, including perhaps the notion of *barbarismos* with which the Greek and later the Roman world sought to define itself in the face of alien cultures. A nice example of the projection of later attitudes to dialect and language on to the ancient world is furnished by the luscious opening scene of Flaubert's *Salammbô*, the banquet of the army of Hamilcar:

*On entendait, à côté du lourd patois dorien, retentir les syllabes celtiques bruissantes comme des chars de bataille, et les terminaisons ioniennes se heurtaient aux consonnes du désert, après comme des cris de chacal.*

Side by side with the heavy Dorian patois, Celtic syllables could be heard ringing out, clattering like battle-chariots, and Ionian terminations came up against the consonants of the desert, harsh as the cry of the jackal.<sup>2</sup>

When we consider, however, that the ethnic and linguistic jokes of Old Comedy hardly survived into the Middle period of that genre, partly owing to changed social and political circumstances, and partly no doubt because of developments in literary taste, it becomes clear that modern intuitions about the comic potential of foreigners and barbarians should be tested very thoroughly against the available evidence. This is particularly important in the case of Greek dialect, firstly because attitudes towards the dialects seem to have changed radically in the Hellenistic period (owing to the spread of the *koinē*), and secondly because, owing to the peculiar political and cultural structures which underpinned them, the dialects had no real equivalents in the Roman or medieval worlds.

## II

The role of marked language in the fragments of Old Comedy is often difficult to evaluate owing to the loss in most cases of the dramatic context. There are two problems in particular: (i) without the immediate context it is difficult to

see whether a form which looks like Doric or Ionic indicates the presence on stage of a foreigner, or is (for example) paratragic; (ii) even when a foreigner can be identified with certainty, without the larger dramatic context it is difficult to see what sort of role the character is playing, and hence what effect the linguistic marking is supposed to have. There is a further, practical worry: non-standard language such as dialect is vulnerable to scribal corruption, and this is particularly serious in the case of fragments, which are typically short quotations taken out of context (cf. Arnott in this volume, pp. 2–3, and Page 1951, 103). Serious cruces are noted without comment in the following discussion.

Given the parallels which Aristophanic and Menandrian drama provide, a list of potential dramatic situations for the exploitation of non-standard Attic might include the following:

- (a) Barbarians on stage, speaking either unmarked or barbarized Greek;
- (b) Slandered politicians on stage, speaking unmarked or barbarized Greek;
- (c) Non-Attic Greeks on stage, speaking in dialect, or unmarked Attic, or conceivably barbarized Greek;
- (d) Slaves and rustics, speaking unmarked Greek, or dialect, or barbarized Greek, or substandard Greek;
- (e) 'Stock' figures such as the Doric-speaking doctor on stage.

If we can match the fragments against the above list it may be possible in some cases to use the Aristophanic parallels to flesh out the dramatic possibilities. Although the titles of plays which have not survived give a good idea of the fascination exerted by the foreign on Old Comedy, they do not necessarily give much indication of the potential for characters speaking non-standard Greek in the plays: titles such as *Helots*, *Lydians*, *Thracian Women*, *Laconians* etc. (Eupolis, Plato, Nicochares, Eubulus) are obvious candidates for foreign characters, but we need only consider the Aristophanic titles which actually contain extended passages in non-standard Greek (*Acharnians*, *Lysistrata*, *Thesmophoriazusae*) to realize how deceptive the exercise is likely to be.

(a) *Barbarians*

In the Aristophanic corpus two types of Barbarian speech have survived: occasional representation of Barbarian language (i.e. gibberish, as at *Acharnians* 100),<sup>3</sup> and (more commonly) barbarized but intelligible Attic. No clear examples of barbarians speaking barbarized Greek have survived in the fragments of the Rivals. This is not surprising in view of the nature and purpose of the quotations in which most comic fragments have survived: later writers interested in Attic terminology were unlikely to be interested in quoting barbarized Greek, whether they were literary in inclination (Athenaeus) or grammatical (Apollonius Dyscolus). That the humorous treatment of foreigners and their language was as popular with the other comic playwrights as it was with Aristophanes is indicated only obliquely in the fragments, by the preservation of occasional glosses such as the Phrygian βέδν 'air' in Philyllius fr. 19.1, ἔλκειν τὸ βέδν

σωτήριον προσεύχομαι ('I pray that I may breathe deep the healing air'): this does not appear to be part of a rendering of barbarized Greek, but seems to involve use of a Phrygian gloss to give a mystic (perhaps Orphic)<sup>4</sup> flavour to the speech of an Attic-speaking character, who is no doubt being mocked for this display of *alazoneia* (pretentiousness).

If plays with titles like *Lydians* and *Thracian Women* contained foreign characters, it is worth reflecting that the roles played by characters speaking barbarized Greek are unlikely to have been substantial (the longest extant example is the Scythian archer at the end of *Thesmophoriazusae*), since short scenes extracting humour from barbaric Greek will have been more in keeping with the spirit of Old Comedy (compare Dover's principle (1976/87, 238) of one joke at a time) than extended representation. If such plays were named after their choruses, the foreign characterization is likely to have consisted of hoots, ululations and unusual glosses rather than faulty phonology or morphology, perhaps like a comic version of the chorus in Aeschylus' *Persians*.<sup>5</sup>

A fragment (83) from the *Metics* of Plato Comicus may contain a solecism which Plato put into the mouth of a foreign character (a resident alien?), but the absence of context makes this no more than a guess. Apollonius Dyscolus warns that one cannot use the nominative of ἐμαυτοῦ (i.e. ἐμαυτός instead of ἐγὼ αὐτός), adding that it is found in the *Metics* ἴσως ἔνεκα τοῦ γελοίου, 'perhaps for the sake of a joke'.

(b) *Comic Slander*

The practice of ascribing barbarian and/or servile origins to one's poetic victims is already evident in archaic song (e.g. Anacreon 388), and all the surviving references to barbaric speech in the comic fragments come from this type of context rather than one involving 'real' barbarians (the distinction is slightly tricky in view of the Persian in the opening scene of *Acharnians*, who has a rather fluid identity). In Old Comedy the poetic victim is most often a leading politician (cf. MacDowell 1993 and Sommerstein in this volume), and the two most popular candidates for lampoon in the fragments are Cleophon and Hyperbolus: it is worth noting that most of our information on the activity of Aristophanic rivals in this regard comes from scholia on passages in the Aristophanic corpus where these two politicians are under attack. At *Frogs* 679–83 the chorus sings of Cleophon

ἐφ' οὗ δὴ χεῖλεσιν ἀμφιλάλους  
δεινὸν ἐπιβρέμεται

Θρηκία χελιδῶν,  
ἐπὶ βάρβαρον ἐζομένη πέταλον

...upon whose double-speaking lips the Thracian swallow shrieks horribly, perched on barbarian leafage (cf. Sommerstein 1996, 214).

A scholiast ad loc. tells us that Plato Comicus in his *Cleophon* portrayed the politician's mother speaking broken Greek to him (fr. 61: βαρβαρίζουσαν πρὸς αὐτὸν) and notes that she was called 'Thrassa'. A scholiast on *Clouds* 552 says that Hermippus in *Artopolides* did much the same with the mother of Hyperbolus, a politician who starred under the pseudonym Maricas in Eupolis' play of the same name (Lenaea, 421: see Sommerstein in this volume, pp. 440–2). Fragments from this play (e.g. 193) indicate that Hyperbolus himself did not in fact speak barbarized Greek: the playwrights seem to have portrayed him as a cultural rather than a linguistic barbarian, typical perhaps of the new class of politician. Quintilian (1.10.18), after identifying Maricas explicitly with Hyperbolus, says *nihil se ex musicis scire nisi litteras confitetur* ('he admits that he knows nothing of the liberal arts except for the alphabet'),<sup>6</sup> which suggests that the character was a coarse upstart similar to Cleon in *Knights*. It is interesting here to compare a fragment (183) from Plato's play *Hyperbolus*, quoted by the grammarian Herodian, who was interested in the phonology:

Πλάτων μέντοι ἐν Ὑπερβόλῳ διέπειξε τὴν ἄνευ τοῦ γ χρῆσιν ὡς βάρβαρον, λέγων οὕτως:

ὁ δ' οὐ γὰρ ἠττίκιζεν, ὦ Μοῖραι φίλαι,  
ἀλλ' ὅποτε μὲν χρεῖη "δητώμην" λέγειν,  
ἔφασκε "δητώμην", ὅποτε δ' εἰπεῖν δεοί  
"ὀλίγον", <"ὀλίον"> ἔλεγεν...

Plato however in his *Hyperbolus* mocked the dropping of *g* as barbarous, as follows: "He didn't speak Attic, ye Fates (Μοῦσαι (Muses) ci. Meineke), but whenever he had to say *diētōmēn* he said *djētōmēn*, and when he had to say *oligos* he came out with *olios* ...".

While the adjective 'barbarous' appears in the mouth of the grammarian, not the playwright, it certainly looks as though a notion of *attikismos* is already at work here in the lampoon of the politician. The barbarous or (to avoid begging a question) marked Greek looks like a substandard social variety ('sociolect') rather than an attempt to represent the idiosyncratic Greek of a foreigner (for which compare the Scythian in *Thesmophoriazusae*). Now it should be clear that a dialect or sociolect is not judged with value terms such as pleasant, harsh, vulgar, etc. on purely objective or 'aesthetic' grounds; our judgment on such matters is coloured by political, social and ideological factors. For the ancient Athenians, for example, a Laconian accent will have triggered a range of associations based on Athenian perceptions of Laconian society and history (anyone familiar with a range of Greek literature will realize that by no means all of the associations will have been negative, and that Flaubert's *lourd patois* – based perhaps on *belle époque* scorn for Spartan cultural achievement in the face of a romanticized view of Athens – is likely to have been closer to Athenian attitudes towards Boeotian). We can have a happy time speculating why it was

a bad thing for a politician to speak the substandard Attic that Plato accuses Hyperbolus of coming out with. For example, one of the very few references to a social variety of Attic occurs in a fragment of an unknown play of Aristophanes (K-A 706 = 685 Kock) quoted by Sextus Empiricus: ‘the grammarians say that...the ancient Athenian idiom is different again from the modern one, and the idiom of those who live in rural areas is different from that of city dwellers. Concerning which Aristophanes the comic poet says: “[his] language is the normal dialect of the city – not the fancy high-society accent, nor uneducated, rustic talk”’:

...καὶ οὐχ ἡ αὐτὴ μὲν τῶν κατὰ τὴν ἀγροικίαν, ἡ αὐτὴ δὲ τῶν ἐν ἄστει  
διατριβόντων. παρὸ καὶ ὁ κωμικὸς λέγει Ἀριστοφάνης:

[ΧΟΡΟΣ?] διάλεκτον ἔχοντα μέσσην πόλεως  
οὔτ’ ἀστείαν ὑποθηλυτέραν  
οὔτ’ ἀνελεύθερον ὑπαγροικότεραν.

Since, then, we appear to have evidence for a popular awareness of rustic language we might suppose that Hyperbolus’ speech is mocked by Plato for features which recalled the language of the Attic countryside. This seems an unlikely assumption. The evidence from Old Comedy points to a vision of the Attic countryside which was, on the whole, regarded as a repository of positive ideological values: although the Acharnians can be stiff-necked and quick-tempered, it is their gullibility that inclines them to support the foreign policy of a sleazy populist in the ekklesia rather than a shared sleaziness with its roots in the countryside (after all, the urban masses are inclined to make the same mistake, but this lends itself more easily to the plot of *Knights* or *Wasps*). The features of Hyperbolus’ speech picked out for comment are ones which could count as ‘sloppy’ speech, since they appear to be the result of an attempt to minimize the effort of articulation: the pronunciation of διητώμην and ὀλίγον which Plato attacks may have been approximately ‘d<sup>(i)</sup>ētōmēn’<sup>7</sup> and ‘oli(γ/y)on’. It seems more likely that Hyperbolus’ substandard is a ‘low urban’ rather than a rural variety of Attic: perhaps the nascent ‘international’ Attic of the city which was also attacked by the Old Oligarch (ps.-Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 2. 7–8, perhaps written c. 425 BC<sup>8</sup>) and which culminated in the *koinē*. If this is true, it is worth remarking that a type of Greek which is likely to have been heard quite commonly on the streets of Athens and Piraeus<sup>9</sup> is characterized by the playwrights (at least implicitly, and perhaps explicitly) as barbarous – a character with a Thracian mother reveals his low background by his low morals, his deficient *paideia*, and his substandard Greek.<sup>10</sup>

The category of slandered politicians, then, involves a double sense of ‘barbarous’: the first and most obvious is the common accusation (by no means restricted to comedy) that non-citizen blood in a particular public figure disqualified him for political office or public influence. The second

sense introduces the notion that a particular figure comes from a low social background and is therefore not fit to be a member of the ruling class due to lack of an appropriate education and (if this can be distinguished) the inherent criminality of his milieu. For this idea compare Demosthenes' taunts at Aeschines in the *De Corona* (Demosthenes had a liberal education, while Aeschines worked as a second-rate actor, etc.). Demosthenes himself, coming from a 'good' family, was not open to this line of abuse, but was the target of accusations that he had barbarian family connections for various contorted reasons.<sup>11</sup>

It is worth remarking, finally, that there are no fragments in which a slandered politician is associated with a non-Attic dialect of Greek: they are either no-good Athenians or barbarians.

(c) *Non-Athenian Greeks*

The depiction of non-Athenian Greeks in the comic fragments is particularly difficult to analyse, since as a result of the absence of dramatic context we generally have no idea of who is speaking the fragmentary lines that have been preserved. It is the presence of dialect which alerts us to the presence of a foreign speaker, and this leads to a danger of circularity. Neither is it possible to tell from fragments whether any of the comic playwrights introduced non-Athenians speaking perfect Attic, nor whether they ever presented such characters speaking Greek marked not with dialect forms but with barbarisms (such as ἐμαντός in (a) above). Thus, for example, a fragment of Eupolis (341, unknown play) preserves the line μὴ τρηχὺς ἴσθι ('Don't be difficult') where the Ionic form τρηχὺς might lead us to think that an Ionic character has been introduced. On the other hand, the form is found at *Peace* 1086 in pseudo-Epic diction as part of a parody of oracles. The most significant snatches of dialect are lines or short passages in Doric and Boeotian. Although 'choral' Doric does turn up in Old Comedy (in the parodos of *Clouds*, for example), if one has more than a single word it is generally much easier than in the case of Ionic to be sure that one is dealing with represented dialect rather than a literary/parodic form.

Doric dialect can be divided into two categories: Laconian and the rest. As a superpower dialect it is clear why Laconian should have a high profile in comedy: of the other Doric dialects too little remains for us to be able to tell how sharply they were distinguished from each other and from Laconian. The longest fragment, fr. 4, comes from Epilycus' *Coraliscus*:

ποττὰν κόπιδ' οἰῶ, σῶμαι.  
ἐν Ἀμύκλαισιν† παρ' Ἀπέλλῳ  
βάρακες πολλοὶ κάρτοι  
καὶ δωμός τοι μάλα ἀδύς...

I reckon I'll go to the Kopis [festival]. In Apollo's place at Amyclae there are plenty of barley-cakes, and wheaten loaves, and a broth that's really good...

In this short passage we are able to see that it is not lexical items alone that

characterize the dialect. The phonology is in line with Laconian, and also the syntax (in *παρ' Ἀπέλλω*, where an accusative replaces a dative). It is striking that the rendering of dialect features in these lines (as in other, shorter fragments) appears to be at the same level of accuracy as Aristophanes' fairly convincing rendering of Laconian in *Lysistrata*.<sup>12</sup> There are other fragments of Doric where it is impossible to guess which dialect is being represented (e.g. one line of Philyllius' *Cities*, fr. 10); while a line from Apollonophanes' *Cretans* (fr. 7) may have been spoken by one of the eponymous islanders.

Athenaeus quotes a three-line fragment (fr. 11) from Eubulus' *Antiope* (c. 380?) which is clearly uttered by a Boeotian. Enough survives for us to be able to tell that the Boeotian dialect is rendered rather less precisely than the Laconian of the fragments, which reflects the situation in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* quite closely (Aristophanes' Boeotian is not rendered as accurately as his Laconian or his Megarian). This may be because Boeotian had a greater proportion of peculiar features than other dialects to an Attic-speaker,<sup>13</sup> which would have been inconvenient and unnecessary to represent on the stage: the playwrights merely had to pick out a convincing number of salient features to identify the dialect to the audience. A well-known passage from Strattis' *Phoenician Women* (fr. 49) seems to attack the Thebans for the peculiarities of their dialect:

ξυνίετ' οὐδέν, πᾶσα Θηβαίων πόλις,  
οὐδέν ποτ' ἄλλ'. οἱ πρῶτα μὲν τὴν σηπίαν  
ὀπιτθοτίλαν, ὡς λέγουσ', ὀνομάζετε...

You understand nothing, all you people of Thebes, nothing whatsoever! First of all, they say that you call a cuttlefish *opitthotila*...

The passage continues in this vein for eight lines, highlighting the phonological, morphological and (as here) lexical differences between Attic and Boeotian.

The evidence from the fragments suggests that Aristophanes' use of dialect on the stage was not unusual. The playwrights seem to have known enough about the other Greek dialects to represent them convincingly, from which we can draw some conclusions: (i) we are not dealing with an artificial literary dialect (such as the comic west-country 'rustic' dialect found in some English literature) which the playwrights merely inherited from a literary tradition; (ii) there is no evidence for confusion between literary Doric and real Laconian; and (iii) so far as we can tell, the humour extractable from putting foreign Greeks on the stage was not based on dialect pastiche (i.e. inaccurate or barbarizing representation of dialect, or substandard Attic).

(d) *Slaves, rustics, mechanics*

Although many slaves in Athens were foreign (either Greek or barbarian), and slaves' names such as *Thratia* ('Thracian girl') turn up in comedy, it does not seem to have been part of the convention of the comic stage to characterize

slaves' language as foreign.<sup>14</sup> This is perhaps best explained in terms of their dramatic role: their foreign-ness is not important for the comic drama, and is not emphasized linguistically. An obvious exception is the Scythian archer in *Thesmophoriazousae*, who speaks barbarized Greek: the reason for this is perhaps connected with the unusual behaviour permitted to this body of public slaves (such as certain powers of corporal restraint over citizens). It seems also to emphasize his stupidity and to help in the reconciliation of the two estranged citizen groups (Euripides' team and the women). It is tempting to see a reference to the linguistic difficulty caused by a household slave of foreign origin in fr. 74 of Pherecrates' *Corianno*, quoted by Athenaeus to illustrate the name of a fig:

A: ἄλλ' ἰσχάδας μοι πρόελε τῶν πεφωγμένων.  
[καὶ μετ' ὀλίγα δέ·]  
οὐκ ἰσχάδας οἴσεις; τῶν μελαινῶν; μανθάνεις;  
[?B:] ἐν τοῖς Μαρνανδυνοῖς ἐκεῖνοις βαρβάρους  
χύτρας καλοῦσι τὰς μελαίνας ἰσχάδας.<sup>15</sup>

Fetch me some of the toasted figs! [and a little further on] Won't you fetch the figs? The black ones! Do you understand? Among those barbarian Mariandyni they call blackened figs 'pipkins'.

The last two lines (perhaps spoken by a second party) look like an explanation of the slave's inaction in terms of a failure to understand the Greek, but since the slave's own words are not preserved (if there were any) it is difficult to comment on the linguistic characterization: as the passage stands it looks like a comic version of the scene between Clytemnestra and Cassandra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. The abuse of stupid and incompetent slaves is in any case a perfectly normal ingredient of Old Comedy.

The absence of any convincing parallel in Old Comedy to the rustic English of Shakespeare's 'Pyramus and Thisbe' scene in *Midsummer Night's Dream* was touched on under (b) above: apart from the special case of sleazy politicians, it was not in the interest of the playwrights to focus attention on the low linguistic habits of a particular part of the citizen population (the foppish Ionicisms of the *jeunesse dorée*, τὰ μειράκια... τὰν τῷ μύρῳ ('the young men who hang out in the perfume shops', *Knights* 1375–81) were a safe target). It would be interesting to know if metics could be characterized with a low variety of 'Piraeus Greek' similar to the politicians, but the evidence is lacking.

(e) 'Stock' figures such as the Doric-speaking doctor on stage

Stock figures such as the foreign doctor are particularly associated with the later development of comedy in the fourth century, the best-known surviving example being in Menander's *Aspis* 439–64. However, the gap between the foreign doctors that we hear were typical of early Doric farce (Athenaeus 14. 621d) and the later stock figures of Middle and New Comedy is filled by an instance from Crates, who, according to Aristotle (*Poetics* 1449b5–9) was the

first of the Attic comedians to move towards 'plots of a general and non-personal nature' (since doctors were notorious for fraud and incompetence, it may be that the dialect markers pointed not only to professional but also to moral character). Fragment 46 of Crates (from an unknown play) is a line in medical Doric: ἀλλὰ σικύαν ποτιβαλῶ τοι καὶ τὸ λῆς ἀποσχάσω ('...but I shall apply my cup, and lance it too if you like'). We have also a likely Ionic-speaking doctor (or impostor) in a fragment of Ameipsias' *Sling* (*Sphendonē*, fr. 17) quoted by Athenaeus: λαγὸν παράξας πίθι τὸν θαλάσσιον ('Stir in the hare of the sea and drink'), where the markers of Ionic are the word λαγός (the object of Athenaeus' comment) and the -σσ- in θαλάσσιον. These two examples illustrate that already in the fifth century dialect could be used to identify a stock character, which is not a situation one might have guessed on the basis of Aristophanes' surviving work, where the prevailing ἰαμβικὴ ἰδέα (the comedy of invective, or lampoon) is such that specific individuals only are presented speaking in dialect, and the dialect indicates provenance rather than profession or moral character (of course, Thebans may be hated and considered stupid, but this does not mean that any hateful or stupid character is for that reason given a Theban accent). If we had a more extended passage of medical Doric or Ionic it might be possible to tell whether the dialect is intended as a representation of a real epichoric dialect (Coan, for example), or whether it is merely 'generic' Doric/Ionic, based on a mish-mash of dialect features.



Fig. 7(a).

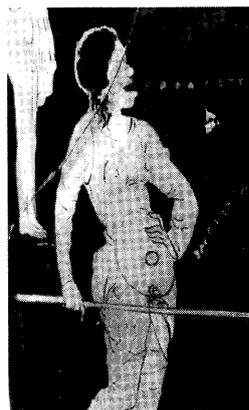


Fig. 7(b).

III

The fragments confirm that there was in Old Comedy enormous scope for marking up language for various dramatic effects. This is a feature shared by modern comic and light-hearted drama, perhaps by coincidence, or perhaps because the humorous manipulation of language is universally found in such contexts. Whatever the truth of this, it is worth noting some of the specific ways in which linguistic jokes in Old Comedy work, for this seems to be very closely tied to particular cultures and political circumstances.

The inadequate command of Greek by foreigners was clearly considered a legitimate source of mirth by the Greeks, as by many moderns, despite

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*Fig. 7(a). The New York Goose Play*

Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Calyx-krater by the Tarporley Painter, painted in Taras c. 400 BC. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 24.97.104. Height 30.6 cm.

(b) Policeman on the Beat?

Detail of the New York Goose Play.

An old man stands in the middle, naked (i.e. wearing a padded body-stocking with comic phallos) and on tip-toe, with his arms stretched above his head. He says *KATEΔΗΣΑΝ-ΩΤΩΧΕΙΡΕ*, 'He has bound my hands up', and looks apprehensively towards a younger, uncouth-looking man on the left. He too is naked, holds a stout stick, and is saying *NOPAPETTEBAO*. On the right an aged woman on a stage-like structure extends her arm and says *ΕΓΩΠΑΡΙ-ΕΞΟ*, 'I will hand <him> over'. In front of her lie a dead goose, two(?) kids in a basket, and a mantle. At the extreme left stands a smaller figure, labelled *ΤΡΑΓΟΙΔΟΣ*, whose stiff pose suggests a statue; a comic mask floats in space.

It is generally agreed that the old man must have stolen the objects on the right, and that he is about to be beaten by the younger man as a punishment for his theft. 'The man with the stick', says Beazley, 'has disordered hair and a rough face; and what he says is not Greek. He has always been recognized to be a barbarian, a foreign policeman or the like.' It is not clear why he is naked: perhaps his clothes (including the mantle) are among the stolen goods. 'The sense [of *NOPAPETTEBAO*] is dark', Beazley continues. 'Characters in Aristophanes may speak (1) dialect Greek, or (2) pidgin Greek, or (3) a foreign language, or (4) make noises that sound like a foreign language. This seems to be either (3) or (4).' In that case, this scene from an unknown play by a contemporary of Aristophanes forms a fascinating visual complement to the literary evidence discussed by Stephen Colvin in this chapter.

But the old man's hands are *not* tied, and Beazley sees him as the victim of a binding spell, a *katadesis* (*defixio*): he is literally spell-bound. Could *NOPAPETTEBAO* be the words of the magic spell? If so, the man with the big stick need not be a barbarian.

Beazley J.D. 'The New York "Phyx-Vase"', *AJA* 56 (1952) 193–5 with pl. 32.

Gigante M. *Rintone e il teatro in Magna Grecia*, Naples 1971, 71–4.

Taplin O. *Comic Angels*, Oxford 1993, 20, 30–2, 62; bibliography at 112–3 (the two items listed above are the most helpful); plate 10.2

evidence that the Greeks themselves were lazy at learning foreign tongues (Momigliano 1975, ch. 1). There is also evidence that villains (politicians) could be associated with substandard Greek. The implication that a speaker of this substandard Greek lacks an appropriate Hellenic *paideia* may point to its association with a low socio-economic background; such characters are also routinely given barbarous family connections. Apart from this special case, however, we do not find much evidence for the comic spotlight being turned on linguistic differences between the various social classes in the citizen body or even between citizens and slaves. The small amount of dialect which survives suggests that dialect alone was not used to attack: other Greeks might be hated for various reasons, but the fairly careful depiction of non-Attic dialects indicates that they do not seem to have been represented as speaking inadequate or substandard forms of Greek. This is in sharp distinction with many modern western literatures, where before the nineteenth century dialect was routinely treated as a substandard variety of the standard language.

### Acknowledgement

I am grateful to David Harvey for many helpful comments on this paper.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jim Henson Productions/Lorimer Films 1990.

<sup>2</sup> These characteristic terminations which the Ionian mercenaries were using included, presumably, the adjectives in -ικός and the abstract nouns in -σις which began to invade the old Attic language in the fifth century (for the comic potential cf. *Knights* 1375–81).

<sup>3</sup> There have been attempts to make sense of this passage (see e.g. Dover 1963, 7–8 = 1987, 289–90). It seems to me most likely that it is ‘gibberish made from Persian noises’ (West 1968, 6). See also the discussion by Morenilla-Talens 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the context of the fragment: Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* 5.46.3–6, printed in K-A ad loc.

<sup>5</sup> *Frogs* 1028–9 with Sommerstein ad loc. (1996, 247), Hall 1989, 83–4 and Hall 1996, 23, 152–3 with the quotation from Cavafy facing the title-page. Cf. Ar. *Babylonians* fr. 81 K-A = 79 Kock ἢ που κατὰ στοίχους κεκράξονται τι βαρβαριστί, ‘standing in formation they’ll scream something foreign’ – a reference to a similarly constituted chorus, and Ar. *Danaides* fr. 267 K-A = 253 Kock.

<sup>6</sup> A similar boast is made by the sausage-seller at *Knights* 188–9.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Woody Allen’s worry in *Annie Hall* that one of his colleagues is saying ‘Jew eat yet?’ instead of ‘D[id] you eat yet?’ (United Artists 1977, dir. Woody Allen).

<sup>8</sup> The date is controversial: see the literature cited by Mattingly 1997, who himself argues for a later date (414).

<sup>9</sup> e.g. for ὀλίος see Thraette 1980, 440 and Teodorsson 1974, 266.

<sup>10</sup> See Cassio 1981 and Brixhe 1988 for the connection between low-prestige Attic and the type of mistake attributed to foreigners. At *Clouds* 876 Socrates implies that

Hyperbolus was launched into public life as the result of a sophistic education which remedied his deficient education and disagreeable linguistic habits.

<sup>11</sup> Demosthenes on Aeschines: 18 (*de Corona*) 258–62, 265; Aeschines on Demosthenes: 3 (*In Ctes.*) 171–3.

<sup>12</sup> Dialect evidence can be checked in the standard handbooks, such as Thumb-Kieckers 1932, or Blümel 1982. There is a brief discussion of Aristophanic accuracy in Colvin 1995, with a fuller account in Colvin 1999; see also Harvey 1994, §vi.

<sup>13</sup> See Coleman 1963 for a statistical analysis of shared features among the Greek dialects.

<sup>14</sup> The scholia at *Knights* 17 see τὸ θρέττε as a barbarism characteristic of a slave (θρέττε γὰρ βαρβαρικῶς τὸ θαρρεῖν. βαρβαρίζει δὲ ὡς δοῦλος). θρέττε looks like slang (so Sommerstein 1981, 145 ad loc.), but is more likely part of a low social register than a barbarian idiom.

<sup>15</sup> People complain about the language of their servants, but may in fact prefer a distinction to exist; see Plato *Laus* 777cd and Aristotle *Pol.* 1330a25–8 on the unwisdom of having slaves who speak the same dialect as their masters, and cf. George Orwell's expatriate businessman in colonial Burma: 'Don't talk like that, damn you – "I find it very difficult!" Have you swallowed a dictionary? "Please, master, can't keeping ice cool" – that's how you ought to talk. We shall have to sack this fellow if he gets to talk English too well.' (*Burmese Days* ch. ii, New York 1934).

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