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Men or Animals? Metamorphoses and Regressions of Comic Attic Choruses: the Case of Aristophanes's *Wealth*

Abstract

This article starts from a reconsideration of the different theories that, since the last decades of the nineteenth century onwards, have discussed the issue of origins of the animal choruses disseminated in the comic Attic production of the fifth and fourth century BC. Nonetheless, it refrains from advancing solutions to a question which is destined to remain open, as well as from scrutinizing the more significant peculiarities of the choruses from the surviving and fragmentary plays by Aristophanes and other comedians of *archaia* and *mese*. It focuses instead on a particular case, the *parodos* of *Wealth* (*Plutus*), the last surviving comedy by Aristophanes, where a human chorus of old farmers temporarily regresses to a grotesquely wild animal state: a phenomenon which carries interesting implications for the metamorphic potentialities shown by an Attic comic chorus in an age of transition from *archaia* to *mese*.

The issue of the origin of the animal choruses disseminated in the comic Attic production of the fifth and fourth century BC has always attracted the interest of scholars for the variety of historical, iconographic, literary, performance-related, as well as ritual, and even anthropological perspectives that it opens on the theatrical phenomenon in the ancient world. Such critical interest and responsiveness have also been demonstrated by the publication (with an interval of almost forty years between them) of two monographs specifically dedicated to this topic by Grigoris M. Sifakis (1971) and Kenneth Rothwell Jr. (2007). Albeit methodologically different in their approach and coming to different results, these studies contributed to re-establish the centrality of this issue in the critical debate on Attic comedy. Sifakis's enquiry represents

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the first systematic investigation of the nature and genesis of theriomorphic choruses in relation to the origins of ancient Attic comedy and its canonical structural nucleus, the parabasis. Although his starting point is the reconsideration of the best-known interpretative theories about animal choruses, he actually focuses his analysis on the evaluation of the few objective data that we can derive from Attic vascular iconography and from the fragmentarily surviving comic production of the *archaia*. If on the one hand, this kind of choruses appear between the forties of the fifth century¹ and the early decades of the fourth, on the other hand, the iconographic presence of animal choruses occupies a limited time-span, between the second half of the sixth century and the first two decades of the fifth (that is, meaningfully in advance of the official acknowledgment of comedy in the programme of the *Dionysia* in 486 BC). Rothwell's viewpoint is completely different. Starting from a revision of the documentation coming both from Attic ceramics and comedies, he aims at demonstrating that: 1) the presence of animals in comedies, be they hybrid creatures (like men-bulls or satyr-roosters), 'amphibians' (like dolphins, having a double aquatic and mammal nature) or real animals, like horses or ostriches, ridden by men (in a way, hybrids themselves) did not allude to the state of nature but rather to the symbolic journey of humans from primitivism to civilization; 2) the phenomenon must be traced back to the sphere of the aristocratic symposium: an assumption that clearly implies a drastic re-evaluation of the cultic-ritualistic element generally predominant in the traditional interpretation. Indeed, the most prevalent theory identifies animal choruses with theriomorphic demons linked to totemic earth-fertility rites,² in which such choruses were hardly distinguishable from the procession of satyrs and *sileni* (somehow also theriomorphic) usually connected with the Dionysian cult.³ A second theory reduces the *kômoi* of zoomorphic 'demons'

1. The only possible, and yet problematic, precedent would be the one of Magnes's choruses. According to the scholiasts, the participles in Aristoph. *Eq.* 522-3 would refer either to the title of his comedies (including three with an animal chorus, *Birds*, *Gall-Flies* and *Frogs*) or to their peculiar performative aspects, which probably envisaged the presence of the playwright himself as an actor (see Imperio 2004: 188 f.)
2. This interpretation can be linked to the hypothesis early formulated, among the others, by Cook (1894), Eitrem (1936), Gelzer (1960: 230, n. 2), Pickard-Cambridge (1962: 152), and later resumed by Lawler (1965: 58-73) and Ghiron-Bistagne (1976: 259-62).
3. This hypothesis, originally suggested by Poppelreuter (1893: 16), and substantially shared by Kranz (1919), Herter (1947: 32-3) and Giangrande (1963: 12, 21-3), defines the Dionysian phallophoric and ithyphallic processions as zoomorphic *kômoi*: that is to say, enacted by a chorus performing mimetic dances disguised as animals. This position has been later radically challenged by Reich (1903: 480-3), who denied every link between the theriomorphic choruses and the primeval totemic animal dances. According to him, this relationship could be traced back to the single actors, the only ones who bore the fertility symbol of the phallus and therefore had demonic connotations.

to ritual processions of beggars, in which the participants, accompanied by animals or provided with animal attributes, solicited gifts by alternately flattering and insulting the bystanders. This practice reminds of the one carried out in Rhodes and documented by Athenaeus (VIII 360b-d) and Hesychius (κ 3747 Latte e χ 324 Hansen-Cunningham). Singing petitioners went about to collect alms ‘for the Crow’ or ‘for the Swallow’, and were consequently identified as κορωνισταί and χελιδονισταί.⁴ Hence derives Paul Mazon’s combinatory hypothesis. Mazon tries to bring together beggars’ processions and totemic rituals by imagining the presence of groups of young people who would tour villages soliciting gifts and improvising drolleries and jokes; they would hold little animals (birds or fish) in their hands or would sometimes disguise themselves as animals, “imitant ainsi sans le savoir de vieux *cômoi* rituels, restes de cultes zôomorphiques où les fidèles s’assimilaient au dieu qu’ils célébraient” (Mazon 1951: 15) [“imitating unawares the old ritual *kômoi*, that is, the remains of zoomorphic cults in which the faithful identified themselves with the god they celebrated”].

In the eighth chapter of his book, Sifakis pointed out the shortcomings of these otherwise thought-provoking interpretations. His conclusion reads:

None of these theories is satisfactory – though they are not useless either. Their inadequacy is due to the scarcity of facts, which are combined and arranged in a scheme imposed by the application of a principle (e.g. totemism) or a more inclusive theory about animal cults, the nature of primitive animal dances, or the origins of comedy. Their value lies in their pointing out many possibilities of interpretation. But their variety shows how inconclusive the evidence is. (1971: 85)

As regards Rothwell’s enquiry, it has been already remarked how it supplies an original and stimulating contribution to the evaluation of the phenomenon of animal choruses, provided that the albeit plausible prospect of an archaizing reinvention of the aristocratic komastic-symposial tradition is not perceived as an ‘ideologically’ and politically oriented reproposal of the original combination symposium-upper class. Such coupling would prove mechanic as much as misleading, especially when referred to the Athenian society of the late fifth century (see Imperio 2010). As several scholars have remarked,⁵ in this historic phase the symposium, and with greater reason the *kômos*, was not an exclusively aristocratic event anymore. Lower class citizens had access to it, had grown familiar with this form of entertainment and were therefore perfectly able to grasp the main points of the most famous symposial scenes in Aristophanes’s comedies.

4. This supposition, originally introduced by Radermacher (1954: 7-9), has been later favourably re-considered, among the others, by Pickard-Cambridge (1962: 155-6; see also 159 for Webster’s criticism on it).

5. See, for instance, Pütz 2007.

This contribution will refrain from advancing solutions to a question inherently destined to remain open, as well as from scrutinizing the more significant peculiarities of the choruses from the surviving and fragmentary plays by Aristophanes and other playwrights of *archaia* and *mese*. These peculiarities have already triggered accurate inquiries dealing with the existence (or co-existence) and nature of: a) possible direct or indirect relations between comic texts and vascular paintings; b) recognizable polarities in the dramatic treatment of the animals-*choreutae*, whose features are sometimes clearly defined as theriomorphic or, alternatively, anthropomorphic, and are sometimes characterized as hybrid and ambiguous, thus representing the whole range between a wild state and a civilised, advanced one; c) the never-ending dialectics between the issues of power, violence, and oppression and the ones of cohesion, solidarity and shared ideals, interests, and goals that inform plots and themes of the comedies that include an animal chorus; d) the subversively utopian-surreal intents and the antithetical realistic-satirical projections which probably inspired the playwrights with the idea of putting on the comic scene, making the different (and never human) choruses act, speak, dance, and sing, either in respect or in antagonism to the several ethological rules presiding over the natural behaviour of the various animal species.

We will focus instead on a single case: the chorus of *Wealth* (*Plutus*), which constitutes a unique example in the surviving comic production. In the course of the *parodos* (its only meaningful apparition is at ll. 253-301), this chorus seems to undergo a degrading metamorphosis in which the human *choreutae* regress to an animal state. Whether this is a case of a 'regressive metamorphosis' and to what extent it operates will be the topic of our discussion.

Following a mode already employed by Aristophanes in the *parodoi* of *Knights* (ll. 242-77) and *Peace* (ll. 296-345), the chorus appear on the stage, and immediately engage in the action, after an actor has summoned them by means of conflict, as in the *Knights*, or dialogue, as in *Peace* and *Wealth*. This typology of *parodos*⁶ is characterized by a plea for help. Metrically marked by a switching from the iambic trimeters of the prologue to the catalectic trochaic tetrameters in the *Knights* and in *Peace*, and to the catalectic iambic tetrameters in *Wealth*, in which this change is even more emphatically marked by the chorus accessing an empty stage, this appeal is delivered by a character already present in the prologue (see *Eq.* 242-46; *Pax* 296-300) and is addressed to the chorus in order to involve them in the comic action. Relying on the

6. Following the codification suggested by Zimmermann (1985: 29-33); see also Zimmermann 1984: 14-17 now in Segal 1996: 183-6, and, with regard to the *parodoi* of *Knights*, *Peace* and *Wealth*, 1985: 57-64).

oracle of Apollo (ll. 40-3; ll. 212 f.), the rustic Chremylus has taken home the blind Plutus promising to help him regain his sight, so that wealth may be fairly distributed. Unlike the events in the *Knights* and in *Peace*, the chorus's help is not invoked by the main character, but by his slave, Cario, who has been charged with summoning the poor peasants (ξυγγέωργοι, l. 223) from the fields. In *Wealth* the *Hilferuf* ('plea for help') to the chorus is better motivated than in the *Knights* and in *Peace*, thus foreshadowing a tendency attested in the *mese*, where the alien and unreal presence of the chorus sometimes needs to be justified. Here the chorus is formed by humble, hardworking (see ll. 219-24, 281 f., 627 f.) elder peasants, natural allies to the main character; they carry on with their frugal existence by labouring in the fields and harvesting nothing but thyme (ll. 252, 283), and that is why Plutus's healing is expected to bring wealth to everyone (ll. 627-40).

After such a well-motivated entry and well-defined identity, one would expect the chorus to play a decisive role in the realization of Chremylus's scheme. Yet, these expectations go unfulfilled: the *parodos* is followed by a quick exchange with Chremylus, who comes back on stage to greet the chorus affectionately and renew his request for help; on his part the coryphaeus confirms his willingness to stand by him and fight together as aggressively as Ares (ll. 322-31). However, *Wealth's choreutae* appear in fact only as passive recipients of a new state of things that the main character alone would achieve (see ll. 221-6, 262 f.). After the *parodos*, the chorus limit themselves to a short exchange with the actors (in iambic trimeters, ll. 328-31, 631 f.), to the *katakeleusmós* of the *agon* (487 f.), to an explosion of joy at the news of Plutus's recovery (in dochmiacs, ll. 637, 639 f.), and to the announcement of the end of the comedy (ll. 1208 f.).⁷ Only forty-six out of 1209 lines are assigned to the chorus. Here, as well as in the *Assemblywomen*, the annotation χοροῦ (or κομμᾶτιον χοροῦ) – repeatedly attested by the Ravennas and/or by the Venetus, as well as by Byzantine scholia and manuscripts, and, as for ll. 958 f., by *POxy.* 4521 –⁸ does not signal the parabasis and the post-parabatic songs but marks the presence of interludes that partly contribute to reconstruct a division of the comedy into five acts.⁹

7. The statement δεῖ γὰρ κατόπιν τούτων [τούτοις R] ἄδοντας ἔπεσθαι at l. 1209 – as already hypothesized by Meineke (1860: II, xxxii) – seems to introduce a song of exodus on the part of the chorus. This follows a manner well documented in the finale of *Acharnians* and *Lysistrata*, where the chorus is given strict directions about the oncoming κῶμος (see *Ach.* 1233 f.; *Lys.* 1320 f.). For a general commentary on the choral songs in the *exodoi* of *Lysistrata*, *Peace*, *Birds*, *Assemblywomen*, *Wasps* and *Frogs*, see Calame 2004: 157-84.
8. For further details on the exact position and the disputed nature of these annotations, see Imperio 2011: 121 f., 131-42.
9. Although differently formulated, this hypothesis has been acknowledged by Sommerstein (1984: 140-4) and Hamilton (1991: 352 f.). It appears unnecessary to postulate, with Bergk (1857: 2,

However, it has been rightly pointed out that

After trimeters 328-31, the coryphaeus's activity is slighter but more sustained ... The characters also focus their attention fairly constantly on the chorus and the coryphaeus: apart from 627-30, 802-22, 959-61 and 1171, addressed to the chorus, see the indirect mention of the chorus and the coryphaeus in 341 and 641. One should note that this did not take place in *Assemblywomen*, where the chorus is remembered in the finale alone. In *Plutus*, therefore, the treatment of the chorus is more coherent: whilst it may be more modest, it has found a new equilibrium. (Russo 1994: 231)

As scholars have frequently conjectured, the question arises of whether this peculiar way of dealing with the chorus could carry possible traces of the homonymous lost comedy staged by Aristophanes in 408 BC (that is, twenty years before), of which the surviving *Plutus* is sometimes believed to be no more than a rewriting.¹⁰

At the beginning of the *parodos*, Cario, inviting the chorus to hasten, has a chance to clearly define their identity: "You, who have often fed on the same thyme as my master, friends, labour-loving fellow countrymen, come on, be quick, hurry up: this is not the time to be slow, this is the crucial moment when your helping presence is needed" (ll. 253-6). Following a dramatic model recurring in the tragic *parodoi* (see Pattoni: 1989) the *choreutae* rush sympathetically at Chremylus's call: they have often shared their thyme with him (l. 253), meaning that they are poor peasants as he is (l. 224). Being Chremylus's friends and fellow-villagers (see δημόται, l. 254, repeated afterwards by Chremylus at l. 322, in clear connection with Cario's *Hilferuf* when introducing them on the stage), they share his love of fatigue (ll. 252 f., 282 f.); therefore, their willingness to assist the main character is naturally and deeply connected with their condition. Chremylus calls them "collaborators" (συμπαραστάται, l. 326) and "true rescuers of the god" (σωτήρες ὄντως τοῦ θεοῦ, l. 327). However, as he has declared when addressing the god at ll. 218-21, they look forward to becoming rich and respected ξύμμαχοι. How much their intervention is expected to be at least potentially decisive can be clearly inferred by the pressing request with which Cario entreats them to hasten to bring help "in the present situation" (παρόντ' ἀμύνειν, l. 256), "in the crucial moment" (ἐπ' αὐτῆς τῆς ἀκμῆς, l. 256). This sympathetic disposition is shared by this chorus and by those of Aristophanes's three 'feminine' comedies: the *Women at the Thesmophoria*, the most intrinsically 'choral' of his surviving plays,¹¹ *Assemblywomen*,¹² and *Lysistrata*.

324), a choral interlude after l. 1170, not mentioned in any manuscript, nor in the Triclinian metric scholia; about this issue, see Sommerstein (2001: 213 f.).

10. This supposition has been brought forward by MacDowell (1995: 324-7) and partially maintained by Henderson (2002: 415), while Sommerstein (2001: 28-33) opposed it following Rogers (1907: vii-xiii).
11. Also from a stage perspective (Russo 1994: 192).
12. On the 'feminine choralism' of *Assemblywomen* and particularly on the close relationship

In this last play the semi-chorus of old women, although not summoned by the protagonist, rush to the Acropolis to help her and the other women who are there entrenched.¹³ This characteristic is also partially present in the choruses of *Wasps*¹⁴ and *Peace*. In the latter, the composite, and yet fluid identity of the PanHellenic chorus¹⁵ does not prevent us from recognizing the peasants as Trygaeus's main interlocutors. Facing the sluggishness and reluctance of some of them (ll. 464-66, 478-80, 481 f., 484, 491-3, 500-7), the protagonist ends up by openly and effectively addressing his plea for help precisely to them (ll. 508-11); he argues that being peasants, just like him, they are directly, if not exclusively, concerned with the end of the war (l. 509) and, indeed, they will be the ones rescuing the goddess, as clearly stated at l. 511.

As Bernhard Zimmermann has pointed out, in the dialogue section of the *parodos* of *Wealth* (ll. 253-89, and in particular ll. 279-89), we can trace a relic of *Streitszene* ('quarrel scene'). This is how Cario addresses the coryphaeus:

A plague on you! you are a shameless knave at heart, you are fooling us and do not even take the trouble to explain us why your master has made us come. Although we had put up with weariness and did not have time to waste, we came here willing to help, and hurriedly traversed fields full of thyme roots.

Even before (at ll. 260, at 268, and eventually at 271 f.) the *choreutae* had also pestered the slave with questions, while he persisted in his reticent insolence about the reason for such a hasty call; at ll. 275 f., they ended up by threatening him to use the walking sticks they difficultly prop themselves on and to put him in chains. Evidently the *choreutae* do not grasp the elaborate wit that Cario employs to carry on with his buffoonery. He makes them foresee a prospective

between the chorus, essential to the accomplishment of the main character's project, and the 'comic theme', see Imperio 2011: 114-20.

13. See in particular ll. 331b-335 where the semi-chorus of Old Women peremptorily asserts "ταῖς ἐμαῖς δημότισιν ... βοηθῶ", while hastening to bring water in order to save the women from the fire set up by the men: a purpose later explicitly confirmed by the coryphaea at ll. 539 f. ("ταῖς φίλαις συλλάβωμεν").
14. Here the chorus of old dicasts, summoned by Philocleon, do not acknowledge his *Hilferuf*, but enter the stage much later and of their own will, when, at l. 230, they call on him on their way to the tribunal.
15. At the beginning the chorus is an undifferentiated Panhellenic group ("ὄ Πανέλληνες", l. 302), in which various professions (peasants, merchants, and craftsmen: see ll. 296 f.) and 'ethnicities' (metics, foreigners, and islanders, see ll. 297 f.) are easily recognizable; they later become a homogeneous company of Athenians (ll. 349-57), only to turn PanHellenic again (that is, citizens coming from different Greek cities: Boeotians, Spartans, Argives, Megarians, Athenians, see ll. 464-507) at the disinterring of Eirene's statue. From l. 508 onwards ("only the peasants remain", and it is unclear whether they are Attic or generically Greek peasants), the chorus acquire the dramatic identity of Attic countrymen. As for the contentious dramatic proceeding that brings the peasants to separate, even visually, from the rest of the chorus after l. 508, see Cassio (1985: 76), and Sommerstein (2005: xviii f.).

wealth worthy of Midas – donkey’s ears included – and evokes the myth of the king’s extraordinary riches, also ironically alluding to his sad destiny of starvation, directly caused by the privilege of turning into gold everything he touched.¹⁶ It is worth mentioning that the donkey’s ears,¹⁷ regarded by some as the legacy of Midas’s former status as a sylvan theriomorphic demon,¹⁸ would become a canonical literary and iconographic attribute of the Phrygian king precisely because of this Aristophanic reference.¹⁹ Moreover, they introduce a ferine trait in the characterization of the *choreutae*; this beast-like feature, further enhanced by the ‘mimetic’ confrontation in the following amœbaean song, resounds of the insulting animal apostrophes which were typical of satyr choruses.²⁰

Originally shifting from the comic pattern of the inverted slave-master relationship, the *choreutae*’s distrust for the promises made by Cario (l. 289) – who is both the prototype of the insolent slave and the double and mouthpiece of his master, Chremylus – is counterbalanced by his own cunning. Cario repeatedly mocks and, if only temporarily, belittles the chorus members, but when he tells them that Pluto is soon going to make them rich (ll. 284 f.), the peasants cannot hide their unrestrained enthusiasm and openly assert their willingness to dance (“ὥς ἡδομαι καὶ τέρπομαι καὶ βούλομαι χορεῦσαι / ὑφ’ ἡδονῆς κτλ”). In that, they follow a mode which is also present in the *parodos* of *Peace* (ll. 335 f.), where the coryphaeus declares: “I rejoice, I am happy, I fart and laugh for I escaped the shield, even more than if I had stripped myself of

16. A similar confrontational dynamics is also recognizable in the *parodos* of *Knights*, in which, however, the chorus’s hostility is not directed at the character who summons them on stage (that is, the Sausage-Seller) but at the one the chorus are meant to help, Paphlagon. They see him as an enemy both to them and to the Sausage-Seller, with whom they instinctively sympathize (see ll. 258-77; Zimmermann 1985: 12). Zimmermann singles out traces of *Streithandlung* (‘acted quarrel’) also in *Peace*, in which Trygaeus’s disapproval (see ll. 309 f., 318 f., 321 f., 326, 328, 330, 333, and 339 f.) of the chorus’s exuberant behaviour (see, in particular, ll. 301-8, 311 f., 316 f., 320 f., 324 f., and 334-6) implies a contrast, feeble and short-lived as it may be, between the character and the chorus: here, however, the sense of solidarity and common purpose between them is soon apparent (see ll. 339-45, and especially ll. 367-70), also as a result of Trygaeus’s prompt revelation of the enterprise to come which the chorus immediately recognizes as a shared goal. On the various ironic implications of Cario’s reference to the mythical king Midas and his morbid relationship with wealth, see Torchio (2001: 146 f.), with bibliography.
17. Perhaps, as hypothesized by Rogers (1907: 33), actors performing Cario hinted at them with a mocking gesture on stage.
18. See, for example, Kroll (1932: 1531).
19. See Miller (1997: 846); Miller specifically disagrees with the hypothesis of theriomorphic origin of this character’s iconography (850).
20. See Aesch. *Diktyoulokoï* (*Net-Haulers*) 775 (κνωδάλοις); Soph. *Ichneutai* (*Tracking Satyrs*) 147, 221, 153 (θῆρες, θηρία); Eur. *Cycl.*, 624 (θῆρες); and see Zagagi (1999: 190, n. 28).

the skin of old age” (“ἦδομαι γάρ, καὶ γέγηθα καὶ πέπορδα καὶ γελῶ / μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ γῆρας ἐκδύς ἐκφυγῶν τὴν ἄσπίδα”).²¹

In the *parodos* of *Plutus*, the same *topos* of the joyful rejuvenation we find in the *parodos* of *Peace* is shaped as an implicit echo of the motif of the gait which old age has made slow and hesitating, and consequently unable to keep up with the wish to take part actively in the action.²² This topic, often employed by the comic choruses of old men,²³ is related to the sorrowful lamentation for the loss of youth sung by the choruses of elders in satyr and tragic *parodoi*.²⁴ With regard to this particular aspect, the entrance of Silenus, father of satyrs, in Sophocles’s *Ichneutai* (*Tracking Satyrs*) proves especially meaningful. He appears running, or better, moving “at the pace an old man is allowed to” (l. 47), enticed as he is by the handsome reward Apollo promised to anyone who would give him back the cows that Hermes has stolen. Similarly, in *Wealth’s* *parodos*, the satyrs are allured by the promise of a μισθός. This μισθός will be a double one of gold (l. 51) and freedom (l. 63) to which the satyrs themselves allude while reciprocally urging to start the research (ll. 65-78) and finally enacting a quest scene triggered by an authentic commercial bargaining with Apollo.²⁵

However, it is apparent that, together with these outbursts of joy, the mimetic and unrestrained danced movements, previously announced and commented upon in the lyric section of this *parodos*, also played a major role in reviving, even visually, the traditional *topos* of rejuvenation. In my opinion, a meaningful evidence of this aspect is provided by Attic pre-dramatic iconography. In particular, a black-figured *skyphos*, probably coming from the

21. This modality recalls the self-referential expressions of joy and grief employed by tragic choruses in order to show either their willingness or refusal to dance; these authentic declarations of independence, even of defiance, on the chorus’s part are discussed by Henrichs (1994/95: 56-111) in a well-known essay entitled after the famous τί δεῖ με χορεύειν in Soph. *OT* 896 (“why should I dance?”). See also Henrichs 1996: 58, where the occurrence in *Wealth* is mentioned as the last known appearance of the dramatic chorus’s *Selbreflexivität* (‘self-reflexivity’). For a general commentary on the relationship between self-referentiality and rituality in the performances of the comic, tragic, and satyr choruses, see Bierl (2001: 37-86).
22. See, in particular, the repetition of the adverb προθύμως (‘zealously’, ‘actively’) in *Wealth*. Used by the coryphaeus (ll. 257, 282) and by Chremylus (l. 324), it refers in both cases to the *choreutae* (see προθύμως in *Pax* 301).
23. See Aristoph. *Ach.* 210-22, *Vesp.* 230-9, *Lys.* 254 f. However, in these contexts the request to hasten is voiced by the coryphaeus himself.
24. The best-known examples are probably to be found in Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon* and Euripides’ *Heracles*: as for the latter, see in particular Pattoni (1989: 43, n. 19). See also Euripides *Cresphontes* fr. 448a Kannicht (see Cropp 1997: 140ff., *ad Eur. Cresph.* fr. 448a Kannicht, ll. 110-12). On the presence of paratragic patterns of βοήθεια and βοήδρομία in *Wealth’s* *parodos* see also Pagni (2013: esp. 189-96).
25. Following a pattern recognized as typical of comedy, especially of *nea* and *palliata*, but not extraneous to *archaia* (Zagagi 1999: 182-4).



Figure 1: *Skyphos*, Thebes 342 (side B). Courtesy of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Boeotia.

area of Tanagra²⁶ and dated between 530 and 510 BC and anyway not earlier than the first two decades of the fifth century,²⁷ shows (Figure 1) the acrobatic exhibition of a group of old men, probably *choreutae*, who, led by an *auletes*, dance standing on their heads. This suggests a performing situation which seems quite similar to the one that is conceivable starting from the numerous stage directions of both sung and recited sections of the *parodos* of *Wealth*.

In *Ichneutai*, Silenus censures both the mimetic activities of the satyr *choreutae* and the cowardice they show when hearing the unknown sound of Hermes's cithara; nevertheless, a few lines below (ll. 203-9) in a tightly woven repartee his criticizing will be thrown in his face by the *choreutae* themselves. With regard to this passage, Zagagi (1999: 199-204) has singled out yet another conventional comic technique which closely resembles Trygaeus's rebuke of the *choreutae*' mimetic dances in the *parodos* of *Peace* (ll. 318-36). Trygaeus worries that their joyful cries and unbridled stomping at the news of the forthcoming rescue of Peace may rekindle Polemos and call back Cleon-Cerberus from Hades. A similar dialectic dimension – characterized by a mutual censure of mimetic performances and a repeated reversal of roles and power relationships between the two contenders – can also be found in the lyric section of the *parodos* of *Wealth*, namely in the *Streitamoibaion* ('amœbaean quarrel's song'; see Zimmermann 1985: 167 f.), which follows the dialogued section between Cario and the coryphaeus. This lyric quarrel, during which the two antagonists (Cario and the chorus) repeatedly exchange their roles and carry on a mimetic dance accompanied by the onomatopoeic refrain θρεττανελο (ll. 290, 296)²⁸ and at the same time described by its own

26. I thank Vassilis Aravantinos who suggested this hypothesis in a letter dated 7 February 2015.

27. See Trendall and Webster 1971: 23, I 13; Green 1985: 102. About this vessel, see also Todisco 2013: 48.

28. As attested by the *scholia* on line 290 (*Sch.* in Aristoph. *Pl. vetera* 290c a, b, g Chantry, *recenti-*

‘actors’, is composed of two strophic couplets.²⁹ In the first (ll. 290-5 ~ 296-301), Cario assigns the role of Polyphemus to himself and the one of his flock to the peasants, thus assuming their lead; on their part, they soon turn against him, demanding for themselves the characters of Odysseus and his comrades and thus threatening to blind him. In the second (ll. 302-3 ~ 309-15), he takes over the identity of Circe,³⁰ attributing the one of pigs to the *choreutae*; he threatens to feed them with a dough of dung he has kneaded with his own hands. When they answer by promising a degrading and paradoxical revenge – that is, to hang the sorceress by her testicles (!) and to besmear ‘her’ nose with excrements – Cario exits the stage, after urging the chorus to give up the drolleries and to “ἐπ’ ἄλλ’ εἶδος” (ll. 316-21, “behave differently”).³¹

The consonances between the *parodos* of *Wealth* and the satyr genre also appear to be reinforced by the models hidden behind the two strophic couplets of the amœbaean song. Regarding the first, the hypotext has been already identified by the ancient scholiasts in the dithyramb *Cyclops or Galatea* by Philoxenus of Cythera (*PMG* 815-824),³² which was in its turn clearly based on the model of the homonymous Euripidean satyr drama.³³ As for the second,

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- ora* 290d-e Chantrý, *recentiora* Tzetzes 290, pp. 83a1-84a8, 83b1-84b13 Massa Positano), this expression reproduces the sound of the cithara that Polyphemus plays in the Philoxenus’s dithyramb here parodied (see below note 32) to accompany his song to Galatea. On this musical onomatopoeia and on others referring to animal sounds, which are contained in the amœbaean song of *Wealth’s parodos*, see Kugelmeier (1996: 257) and Wille (2001: 1, 359 f.). On the distinctly mimetic nature of this amœbaean song and, presumably, of Philoxenus’ hypotext, see Koller (1954: 46 ff.), and, more recently, Mureddu (1982-3: 78-84), Dobrov 1997, and De Simone 2006.
29. On this mode of commenting upon the mimetic activities of choruses or of other groups that recurs in the Plautine comedy, well in advance of Augustan pantomime, see Zimmermann 1995; on earlier instances of a similar attitude in Greek comedy, see Rossi 1978 (with special reference to the grotesque mimetic dance of Philocleon in the finale of *Wasps*).
 30. Circe is here identified with a famous Corinthian courtesan, romantically tied to Philonides, a rich and fat libertine from the demos Melite (*LGPN* II s.v. Φιλωνίδης, nr. 52, *PAA* nr. 957480). Philonides is repeatedly denounced as graceless, boorish, and ignorant by fifth and fourth-century playwrights, and especially by Plato Comicus (fr. 65.5f. Kassel-Austin), Theopompus (fr. 5 Kassel-Austin), Nichocares (fr. 4 Kassel-Austin), and Philyllius (fr. 22 Kassel-Austin). In the prologue of *Wealth*, he is also the target of ὀνομαστὶ κωμῶδεῖν (“ridiculize by name”).
 31. For the possible implications of this concise pronouncement, see Imperio 2011: 141.
 32. By alluding to the tyrant Dionysius the Elder of Syracuse, probably allegorized by Polyphemus while Odysseus would stand for the playwright himself, this text testifies to the ‘anti-Dionysius’ climate spreading among the Athenians at the very end of the fourth century (see, in this regard, Anello 1984; Caven 1990: 222-53; Sordi 1992: 83-91, 2003: 267-77; Pizzone 2006: 58-66; on the controversial compositional and performative nature of this text see Hordern 1999: 445-55, with bibliography). On this Philoxenus’s dithyramb see now Fongoni 2014: 107-10).
 33. “Notables parallélismes” (“notable parallelisms”) are detected by Melero Bellido (1997: 333-6), with special regard to the choral description of the scene of the blinding, between the choral song of the Euripidean *Cyclops*, starting at l. 656, and Cario’s invocation to the chorus at ll. 253 ff. Note also the wild displays of joy, both sung and danced, by the chorus of *Wealth* in

the individuation of a possible literary antecedent is much more contentious; since the Homeric source never alludes to any form of revenge on Circe, the enchantress, it is much more plausible to suppose (with Di Marco 1994) that Aristophanes drew his inspiration from a scene of coprophagy to be found in the satyr drama that Aeschylus dedicated to the witch of Aeaëa.

A degrading swine metamorphosis could indeed be hypothesized also in some other Doric and Attic comedies that in the fifth and fourth centuries focused on the Odysseiac theme: from Dinolochus, who wrote a *Circe or Odysseus*, to Ephippus and Anaxilas, both authors of a *Circe*. In such comedies Odysseus's companions could presumably have played the chorus. Fr. 13 Kassel-Austin of Anaxilas's *Circe* shows a clear reference to the piggy snout, undoubtedly caused by some sorcery that the witch practised in the course of the action, and to the bothersome itching deriving from it. Furthermore, in the Anaxilas's *Calypso*, somebody declares: "I realized I had a piggy snout" (fr. 11 Kassel-Austin).

Both these fragments, which derive from two comedies of the *mese*, as well as the more detailed example provided by the last surviving Aristophanic comedy show some kind of tendency towards zoomorphic mimesis; dignified by being the target of musical and literary parodies and experimentations, this mimetic leaning deeply influenced the aesthetic trends of fourth-century comic theatre,³⁴ but, as we have already pointed out, must have characterized also the early stages of Attic³⁵ as well as Doric comedy. To come to a conclusion, in both fourth-century comedies, *Circe* and *Wealth*, the choruses undergo a grotesque animal metamorphosis enacted, if not by actual camouflaging, by means of words, gestures, and mimetic dancing. The gap between these choruses and the anthropomorphizing attitude of the four surviving Aristophanic comedies which include an animal chorus (*Knights*, *Wasps*, *Birds* and *Frogs*) cannot go unnoticed. In these plays, insects or other animals classifiable as 'social' (in an Aristotelian sense) are active on stage, while others, considered to be unjust,

this *parodos* which is considered "le seul chant pastoral d'Aristophane" ("the only bucolic song of Aristophanes"); see, for example, the participle *παρενσαλεύων* in *Pl.* 291, reflected in the movements of the satyrs in the *parodos* of the Euripidean drama *ἄοιδαὶς βαρβίτων σαυλόμενοι* (see l. 40). In a more general sense, a link between the activities of the comic choruses in the sections preceding the *parabasis*, and especially in the *parodos*, and the satyr choruses that, as in the *parodos* of *Cyclops*, "pantomimically imitate the movements of a wild dance" ("ahmen Handlungen in wilden tänzerischen Bewegungen pantomimisch nach") is explicitly pointed out by Bierl (2001: 76-9; the quotation comes from p. 77).

34. On this fundamental aspect of the comic production of the fourth century see especially Nesselrath 1990: 241-80; 1993.
35. Scholars have singled out an ideal *trait d'union* between the κῶμος derived from the chorus of the New Comedy and the κῶμος referable to the early stages of the κωμῳδία (see, in particular, Leo 1908; see also Fantuzzi and Hunter 2011: 407).

violent, wild, or endowed with demonic powers, or ‘anti-social’, as it were, are excluded. This distance is also reaffirmed by the fragments of lost comedies such as *Beasts* by Crates, *Fishes* by Archippus, and even *Goats* by Eupolis in which the animals, although genetically refractory to civilized behaviour, or organised in self-sufficient and self-referential worlds, speak with human voices and betray an undeniable interest in the typical features of civilization, such as writing, laws, politics, poetry, music, and dance, and feel the urge to recreate some micro-societies.³⁶

Following an inverted process of regression to a grotesque animal dimension, another ‘minor’ chorus, composed of the old peasants of *Wealth*, express an unexpected and unsuspected animality that, in the lyric section of the *parodos*, confers on them a both archaizing³⁷ and atypically avant-gardist patina, and positions them in a peculiar, or, one could say, liminal state in the transition from *archaia* to *mese*. Such formula, tied to tradition and yet inspired by a daring experimentalism aimed at the future developments of the comic genre, had already been adopted by Aristophanes fifteen years before by exploiting the mimetic potentialities of an intrinsically ‘liminal’ chorus: the *parachoregema* (‘secondary chorus’) of *Frogs*.³⁸

Men and animals, nature and culture, tradition and innovation: the metamorphic kaleidoscope of Attic comic choruses allows us to catch a glimpse of inexhaustible and unpredictable, although largely and irreparably lost outcomes.

English translation by Carlo Vareschi

36. Following a dynamics well described by Rothwell 2007.

37. As specifically pointed out by Pickard-Cambridge: “in the Middle and New Comedy the old grotesqueness was soon abandoned, and in so far as choruses appeared they appeared as ordinary human beings” (1962). As regards Aristophanes’s late production, Segal (1973: 135 now in 1996: 7) has underlined the greater slowness of this author, if compared to his contemporaries, in evolving towards what is usually defined as ‘middle’ comedy. For the problems originating from this term in relation to the canonical tripartite classification of Attic comedy, see, among the others, Csapo 2000, with bibliography.

38. On the peculiar nature and disputed presence on the stage of the secondary chorus in *Frogs*, see, among the most recent contributions, Andrisano (2010) and Corbel-Morana (2012: 233-48), with bibliography. As noted by one of my anonymous reviewers, whom I thank for the thought-provoking comments and precious suggestions, I intentionally leave the choice between these two options with the readers: a) identifying – as Bierl (1994) does – a ritual and regressive process in the metamorphosis of *Wealth*’s chorus; b) privileging its parodic and allusive dimension, related to the refined intertextual weaving of comedy, dithyramb and satyr drama that makes for the peculiarity of the regressive metamorphosis itself, and spotting in it the traces of a conscious change and reassessment of the role and function of the chorus in fourth-century comedy. I would prefer the latter hypothesis, although it still needs further study, which I intend to carry on in the future.

Abbreviations

- POxy.* Bernard P. Grenfell, Arthur S. Hunt et al. (1898-), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, London: Egypt Exploration Fund, then Egypt Exploration Society.
- LGPN* *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names I-V.A-B* (1987-2013), Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- LIMC* *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae I-VIII* (1981-1997), Zürich und München; *Indices 1-2* (1999) Düsseldorf, *Supplementum I-II [Abellio-Zeus]* (2009), Düsseldorf: Artemis.
- PAA* Traill, John S. (1994-2012), *Persons of Ancient Athens*, Toronto: Athenians.
- PMG* Page, Denys L. (1967), *Poetae Melici Graeci*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- RE* *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Neue Bearbeitung begonnen von Georg Wissowa, fortgeführt von Wilhelm Kroll und Karl Mittelhaus. Unter Mitwirkung von zahlreicher Fachgenossen, herausgegeben von Konrat Ziegler, abgeschlossen von Hans Gärtner. I Reihe (A-Q), 24 Bände, II Reihe (R-Z), 10 Bände; Supplemente I-XV (1893-1978), Stuttgart-München: Druckemüller.

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