

## COMMENTATIONES

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### ADESP. COM. 741 K.-A.: SOME ASPECTS OF COMIC STYLISTICS

ABSTRACT. Bartol Krystyna, *Adesp.* 741 K.-A. Some Aspects of Comic Stylistics (*Adesp.* 741 K.-A. *Niektóre aspekty stylistyki komediowej*).

This article explores the thematic and stylistic function of the anaphora in the anonymous fragment of Old Comedy (741 K.-A.). It also analyses an interpretation of Plutarch's comment on these lines.

Keywords: *Adesp.* 741 K.-A.; Old Comedy; anaphora; comic style; Plutarch

Three trochaic tetrameters transmitted by Plutarch (*Precepts of Statecraft*, 811F):

Μητίοχος μὲν < – > στρατηγεῖ, Μητίοχος δὲ τὰς ὁδοὺς,  
Μητίοχος δ' ἄρτους ἐποπταῖ, Μητίοχος δὲ τάλφιτα,  
† Μητίοχος δὲ πάντα κεῖται†, Μητίοχος δ' οἰμώζεται<sup>1</sup>

(Metiochus is a general, Metiochus oversees the roads, Metiochus inspects the bread, Metiochus keeps watch over the grain, Metiochus is involved in everything (?), Metiochus will lament),

are lines from a play of Old Comedy.<sup>2</sup> Scholars' endeavours to link them with Cratinus' *Archilochoi*<sup>3</sup> are not convincing and mostly depend, as it seems, on

<sup>1</sup> I quote the text after Rudolf Kassel's and Colin Austin's edition (1995: 213).

<sup>2</sup> Its attribution to Old Comedy is strongly supported by personal abuse and word play. See Storey's (2011: 362, 363) general diagnosis referring to the problem of the belonging of comic fragments to the oldest Attic phase of Comedy: "Personal humour provides an important criterion", and "plays of words".

<sup>3</sup> See Bergk 1883: 11: "Iam si satis recte statui ... non improbabili coniectura referam ad Cratini Archilochos etiam illos versus, qui neque poetae neque fabulae nomine adiecta servata sunt a Plutarcho".

Platonius' general statement that Cratinus' invective drew on Archilochus (*Diff. Char.* 1 p. 6 Koster).<sup>4</sup> Although they centre, with an abusive intention, around the idea of being ubiquitous, expressed in a similar way<sup>5</sup> (and also with reference to a political leader) by Archilochus in his iambic poem with the pun on Leophilus' name (Fr. 115 W.), we lack hard evidence supporting the hypothesis that the comic fragment on Metiochus<sup>6</sup> is a direct imitation of the Parian poet.<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of who the author of these lines really is, they are worth a bit of bother, since they appear to be a very interesting example of the comic use of figures of speech, i.e. of a problem that has been much less studied than it deserves.<sup>8</sup> I will mainly concentrate my attention on the anaphora and its function. Furthermore I will try to show that Plutarch's words which precede the quotation of these comic lines could be understood not only as a commentary on what statesmen of Metiochus' kind got from citizens, but also as a stylistic characterization of the cited fragment.

A six-time repetition of the proper name Metiochus at the start of the successive clauses is definitely an intentional repetition here.<sup>9</sup> It is also stressed metrically, since it occurs not only at the beginning of each line but also after the regular caesura in the middle of the lines. The repetition must be interpreted as a feature of literary language, although some scholars argue that anaphora in Old Comedy is a 'chunking device' only, which originated from oral discourse, and serves to enable the successful processing of the dense information by a listener.<sup>10</sup> The anaphora in our fragment does not seem to illustrate such a case. Metiochus is the individual that must have been known within the discourse

<sup>4</sup>Κρατινὸς ὁ τῆς παλαιᾶς κωμῳδίας ποιητῆς, ἅτε δὴ καὶ τὰ τοῦ Ἀρχιλόχου ζηλώσας, αὐστηρὸς μὲν ταῖς λοιδορίαις ἐστίν. For Cratinus' Archilochean inspiration exemplified in extant fragments of his plays see Bakola (2010: 4–5, 17–18, 20–22, 48–49, 57–59, 63–64, 70–79). One must, however, be aware of what Bowie said about the relationship between iambic poetry and comedy, Bowie (2002: 45): "The greatest similarity is not in details but in the overall range of linguistic registers in each".

<sup>5</sup>The significant difference between Archilochus' piece and the comic fragment is a lack of polypoton in the latter, which – as Anderson (2021: 7) says – „flattens the effect, as does the use of zeugma in the first two lines, and repetition of the name twice more than the original”(see n. 7 below).

<sup>6</sup>Plutarch (*Praec. gerendae reip.* 811F) says that Metiochus “was one of Pericles' followers and seems to have used the power gained through him in such a way as to arouse odium and disgust” (translated by Fowler 1936, reprinted 2002: 227).

<sup>7</sup>As West (1974: 130) argues. See also Anderson (2021: 6) who calls these words “a comic parody of Archilochus' piece on Leophilus”.

<sup>8</sup>See Willi 2002: 17: “The comic use of figures and tropes other than metaphors and personifications is much less well studied”. Cf. also Zimmermann's (2011: 682) remark on Aristophanes' plays, which can be generally referred to Old Comedy: “Ein weiterer, nicht ausreichend erforschter Aspekt der aristophanischer Sprache ist die klangliche Dimension und die Verwendung Klang- und Stilfiguren”.

<sup>9</sup>See Fehling (1969: 38), who treats the anaphora as a conscious iteration of the word at the start of successive clauses.

<sup>10</sup>See Slings 1997: 171–172; 2002: 100–101.

(and probably also in the extratextual reality of Athens), and the six different phrases may be regarded as being ‘about’ him. In other words, the repeated constituent has the Topic function, while the varying constituents function as Focus, to use (as Slings did<sup>11</sup>) the concept of modern pragmatics here. The μέν ... δέ construction (μέν ... δέ ... δ’ ... δέ ... δέ ... δ’), as usually in the figure of anaphora, does not bear the antithesis (with the exception of the δέ in the last clause; to this point we will return later), but is similar in meaning to that of τε ... καί combination.<sup>12</sup> Metiochus’ name, emphatically repeated at the beginning of the clauses, is related in each clause to a constituent (mostly a verb) which is informationally new, i.e. adds a link to the chain of ambitious Metiochus’ services to the State. In fact, what we have here is a dynamic enumeration of the components of his successful career and one may expect that it would be elegantly climaxed with the mention of some final spectacular or important position of Metiochus, which would surpass all of what has been said so far.<sup>13</sup> It may be, then, that the playwright, when making the audience hear the syllable oi-, which together with the following μ (that opens the next syllable) gives οιμ-, after the sixth Μητιόχος, intends to create an ambiguity-effect:<sup>14</sup> it may be perceived as a starting part of the interjection οἴ or οἴμοι expressing astonishment, impatience, surprise or even a favourable appraisal or admiration (not often, it is true, but it does occur, especially in comedy!)<sup>15</sup>, perhaps accompanied by a gesture or certain paralinguistic signals of joy or astonishment.<sup>16</sup> One should be aware that the context of the utterance can strongly inflect the semantics of an interjection.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Slings 1997: 171–172; 2002: 100–101.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Denniston 1966: 370.

<sup>13</sup> The main function of the anaphora is to repeat emphatically a piece of information. In this aspect it is contrasted with the polyptoton which rather stresses the opposition. See Fehling 1969: 38: “Während die Anapher nachdrücklich wiederholt, haben wenigstens manche Polyptota ausgesprochen entgegengesetzte Funktion”.

<sup>14</sup> The phenomenon of the neat ambiguity or near-ambiguity of utterances spoken on the stage, intelligible to the Athenian audience, was known as early as in Aeschylus’ time. See Sommerstein 2002: 155–156: “This audience (...) was one accustomed to comedy (not to mention satyr drama), and even if it wasn’t yet quite as alive to the ludicrous possibilities of ambiguity or near-ambiguity as it was (...) later when the actor Hagesilochos said γαλήν ὀρῶ instead of γαλήν’ ὀρῶ (...), ambiguity was certainly something that Aeschylus himself knew a thing or two about”.

<sup>15</sup> See Dover (2002: 87) who convincingly argues that in the Old Comedy there are instances of using interjections, commonly expressive of fear or sadness, as joyful exclamations. He says: “Between happy and unhappy οἴμοι the difference would have been analogous to the English differentiation of species of ‘Oh dear’, which sometimes accompanies laughter”. Cf. Ar. *Nub.* 773 (οἴμ’ ὡς ἤδομαι) and Dover’s (2002: 87) translation: “οἴμοι, how delighted I am!”. Cf. schol. Ar. *Nub.* 773: ἐν τῇ συνηθείᾳ πολλάκις λεγόμενον τὸ οἴμοι χαίροντός τινος.

<sup>16</sup> For the body language as helping in the proper understanding of uttered words see Dover 2002: 87.

<sup>17</sup> As Nordgren (2015) has shown in many examples. See also Coulter’s (2016) review of Nordgren’s book.

Here, in the comic imitation of the colloquial language, the initial οἴμ- might be perceived, quite exceptionally,<sup>18</sup> as associated with οἴμοι as a cry of rejoicing or positive surprise. But the -ώξεται, immediately following the οἴμ-, makes the audience detect the teasing and change the interpretation of the passage: Metiochus will come to grief.<sup>19</sup> So the last δέ preceding the future οἴμώξεται introduces a strong antithesis in comparison with what was said earlier. The sixth anaphoric clause including clear abuse or wishing Metiochus ill causes one to find sarcasm also in the previous clauses displaying many of his achievements. The whole passage employing the anaphora as a key stylistic device is, then, an excellent example of tactical vituperation provided by an anonymous playwright of Old Comedy. The use of a literary figure coupled with a joke detectable in the aural perception of the text proves that both literary and oral aspects of comic stylistics were important to the audience's laughter and response to what was uttered from the stage.

Moreover, repeating the proper name in our passage seems to be additionally intended to create a *pnigos* effect here.<sup>20</sup> The last two syllables of Μητίοχος must be resolved in the trochaic sequence, which significantly accelerates the rhythm. This is what the bravado of *pnigos* is based on.<sup>21</sup> The *pnigos*-like run of trochees,<sup>22</sup> ending with οἴμώξεται uttered on the rest of a "long breath" or "without pausing for a breath" that makes impression of a sigh of relief after throwing out from the mouth at speed a "chocking-speech," stresses the comic mood of the whole statement.

Plutarch's statement introducing the comic quotation with the words: τὸ θαυμαζόμενον (...) ἐν ἀρχῇ (...) εἰς χλευασμὸν ὑπονοστεῖ καὶ γέλωτα (what was admired at the beginning was turned into mockery and laughter) is usually (and rightly) taken as indicating that citizens admired statesmen when they began to hold office and then mocked and ridiculed them. However, the words of this statement suggest that he additionally might have wanted to expose the stylistic characteristics of the quoted passage. The τὸ θαυμαζόμενον directly referring to the content of the first five anaphoric clauses (the catalogue of the multitude of offices held by Metiochus enumerated at the beginning of the passage) turns into a special kind of irony and joke. It means that the

<sup>18</sup> See Nordgren (2015), s.v. οἴμοι – oimoi (section 3.6.3.3).

<sup>19</sup> Anderson (2021: 7) believes that we are dealing here with "the concatenation of 'o' sounds" which "transforms the name of Metiochus into a droan or wail" and adds: "this mirrors the sense of the verb even as it emphasizes the material features of the repeated name".

<sup>20</sup> I owe that thought to Jerzy Danielewicz (private discussion). I express my sincere thanks to him for his suggestion.

<sup>21</sup> Some interesting parallels of this effect from modern patter-songs have been mentioned by Marshall (2020: 67); there also his observation capturing the essence of *pnigos*: [*pnigos*] intended as „a kind of showpiece”.

<sup>22</sup> On the *pnigos*- effect of trochaic sequences see Parker 1997: 228.

*chleusmos* denotes here not only the collective mockery of Metiochus from the part of the citizens, but, from Plutarch's perspective,<sup>23</sup> is also a literary device used by the playwright to blame the hero. Additionally, being a mockery (οἰμώζεται) which – after hearing the initial οἰμ- perceived in the context as the beginning of the positively evaluating interjection – might be mistakenly (for a while) taken for praise,<sup>24</sup> it produces a comic effect, i.e. the laughter of derision (γέλως). So what Plutarch seems to have captured in his introductory commentary on these three anonymous comic lines is the essence of their content as well as the strategy of its presentation. It makes him not only an expert on Old-Comedy-audience tastes<sup>25</sup> but also a specialist in the rhetorical aspect of comic language.\*

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<sup>23</sup> For Imperial authors' interest in "comic byplay" making the *demos* laugh and the rhetorical devices employed in Old Comedy see Hunter (2014: 385). See also Russell (1989: 317) who says that "The study of figures (...) naturally goes far beyond the bounds of practical rhetoric" and pays attention to the fact that "the application of the [rhetoric] doctrine (...) led to subtle and sometimes illuminating analyses of Classical writing".

<sup>24</sup> For the function of *chleusmos* as a figure of speech see Anon. *De figuris* 213 Spengel (*Rhetores Graeci ex recensione L. S. Spengel*, vol. III, Lipsiae 1856): χλευασμός – (...) λόγος μετὰ μεδιάματος προφερόμενος.

<sup>25</sup> However, he did not appreciate them and found Old Comedy very unsuitable for convivial occasions. See Russell 2001: 53.

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##### Summary

The insistent repetition of the proper name Metiochus in the anonymous fragment from Old Comedy (Fr. 741 K.-A.) is an interesting example of anaphora in which five repetitions and their linguistic contexts are intended to emphasize Metiochus’ power, and the sixth one is used with a different purpose, i.e. as suggesting his defeat and failure. It seems, however, that the play with the οἴμ- (perceived in aural reception of the text) creates a powerful comic surprise effect here, which transforms the expected praise into blame or mockery, and as a result causes, strong laughter on the part of the audience. Plutarch, when making observations on this comic passage, seems to have recognized this structural device: his τὸ θαυμαζόμενον, γλευσμός and γέλως explain the technique of stylistic presentation of the content. The rhetorical praise which unexpectedly turns into blame or vituperation, when recognized by the audience, causes their laughter and pleasure.