

Yvonne BOROWSKI

BÔMOLOCHOS IN ARISTOPHANEAN COMEDY

DER BÔMOLOCHOS IN DEN KOMÖDIEN DES ARISTOPHANES

Dieser Artikel diskutiert die Rolle des Narren in den vollständig erhaltenen Werken des Aristophanes. Zu Beginn wird die Bedeutung des Begriffes „bômolochus“ analysiert, um daraufhin die Charakteristika einer solchen Person herauszuarbeiten. Anschließend erfolgt die Untersuchung der in den Komödien des Aristophanes auftauchenden Narren, die in zwei Kategorien eingeteilt sind: (1.) der Narr in der Nebenrolle und (2.) der närrische Protagonist. Neben den für einen Narren typischen Techniken der Komik, spielt die Obszönität eine wichtige Rolle. Die Hauptaufgabe des Narren in den Werken von Aristophanes ist es, eine derbe Form des Humors zu kreieren.

Key words: laugh, buffoonery, Aristophanean comedy, Aristotle.

To laugh is human. This is a truth acknowledged ever since Aristotle and remains prominent till today¹. To laugh at another person or other people is recognized as a universal human behaviour, as well. In this case, the most suitable object for laughter is man himself². It is no wonder, then, that one may exploit this fact in purposeful manner, thus making oneself the object of the laughter of others. Often, the way of achieving such effect is by the use of non-serious actions, namely, silly words and expressions as well as ridiculous conduct. This type of behaviour is defined as “buffoonery”, whereas the person acting in such manner is known as a “buffoon”, “lampoon” or simply “fool”. In ancient Greece, a person whose non-serious conduct elicited amusement in others was called βωμολόχος³. It comes as no surprise, then, that such a type of

¹ Aristotle, *Parts of Animals* III. 10, 673 a 8 (London–Cambridge, MA 1961): τὸ μόνον γελᾶν τῶν ζῴων ἄνθρωπον. Today, the same idea is expressed by J. O. Hertzler, *Laughter. A Socio-Scientific Analysis*, New York 1970, p. 27: “True laughter, like true language, exists only among human beings”. For the tradition of this Aristotelian premise, see A. Parvulescu, *Laughter. Notes on a Passion*, Cambridge, MA 2010, pp. 4–5.

² Cf. H. Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. by C. Brereton, F. Rothwell, New York 1911/2005, pp. 3–4.

³ An early definition of the term βωμολόχος is presented by Harpocration in his *Lexicon in Decem Oratores Atticos*. Here, the grammarian adduces a fragment of Pherecrates’ lost comedy

person, whose words and actions are of laughable quality, was suitable to become a standard stock-figure in Old Comedy. Hence, in this paper, I would like to discuss the comic figure of the *bômolochos*⁴ in the extant works of Aristophanes and the role he plays in creating the humour⁵ within the comic dramas.

1. What is a *bômolochos*?

A general view on the nature of such a person considered to be a *bômolochos* is presented by Aristotle. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, the philosopher points at the buffoon's purpose of action – to evoke laughter in others, as he writes: “the buffoon cannot resist a laugh, sparing neither himself nor others if he will produce laughter, and saying the sorts of things that a refined person would never say”⁶. In the same work, a little earlier (*Eth. Nic.* 1108a, 24–25) Aristotle explains that the buffoon is a person who is concerned with the pleasant side of speech, and not necessarily in the truth. This excessive concern with pleasant verbal interaction is called then buffoonery. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle disapproves of such excessive behaviour, as he says that “irony is more respectable than buffoonery, for the former makes the joke for his own sake, but the buffoon for another's”⁷. Hence, in the Aristotelian passages we may denote a *bômolochos* as a type of person who is in the need to evoke laughter at the

Tyrannis in which a βωμολόχος is defined as a person who lurks at the altar to snatch the remains of offerings (76, 14):

κάπειθ' ἵνα μὴ πρὸς τοῖσι βωμοῖς πανταχοῦ
 ἀεὶ λοχῶντες βωμολόχοι καλώμεθα,
 ἐποίησεν ὁ Ζεὺς καπνοδόκην μεγάλην πάνυ.

Such definition remains prominent till today, cf. J. Wilkins, *The Boastful Chef. The Discourse of Food in Ancient Greek Comedy*, Oxford–New York 2000, pp. 88–90. However, recently Stephen Kidd gives convincing arguments to the misunderstanding of the term's etymology stating that in Classical Greek βωμολόχος simply meant “fool”, see S. Kidd, *The Meaning of “bômolokhos” in Classical Attic*, “Transactions of the American Philological Association” 142 (2012), pp. 239–255.

⁴ In this paper, I use the transliteration *bômolochos* in reference to a person defined as “foolish”, “buffoonish”, and especially in regard of the comic stock character.

⁵ I employ the word “humour” according to the current use in Anglo-American research, i.e., a neutral umbrella-term for all comically related phenomena. Cf. W. Ruch, *Foreword and Overview. Sense of Humor. A New Look at an Old Concept*, [in:] *The Sense of Humor: Explorations of a Personality Characteristic*, ed. W. Ruch, Berlin 1998, pp. 5–11.

⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1128, 4–7, trans. with an interpretative essay, notes and glossary by R. C. Bartlett, S. D. Collins, Chicago 2011, p. 88 (hereon as *Eth. Nic.*).

⁷ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1419 b 9, trans. by R. Janko, [in:] *Aristotle, Poetics I with the Tractatus Coisilanus. A Hypothetical Reconstruction of Poetics II. The Fragments of the On Poets*, Indianapolis–Cambridge 1987, p. 170.

expense of others or even his own. He achieves this, basically, by means of speech. According to the philosopher, such conduct is considered to be excessive, thus not appropriate to a decent citizen.

In order to understand the characteristics of the comic buffoon in Aristophanean comedy, it will be useful to explore the meaning behind the Greek term βωμολόχος and its cognates from a set of passages in the extant comedies. From the seven instances of the term in the preserved comic dramas, the word is used twice to describe a character within the play, usually an adversary with whom one character is in an *agôn*. For instance, in the *Clouds*, the Better Argument regards the Worst Argument as a βωμολόχος (*Nu.* 910), an “impudent trickster”⁸, or simply “a clown”⁹. Similarly in the *Frogs*, the character of Aeschylus applies the same term “buffoon” (*Ra.* 1521) in regard of his rival Euripides whom he has defeated in the *agôn*. In these two cases, βωμολόχος is used to depreciate the opponent by considering his words or actions as non-serious, hence foolish. Regarding the other instances, βωμολόχοι are enlisted amongst people of moral and social shortcomings, such as gluttons, thieves and kidnappers (*Th.* 818). In a similar fashion, the term βωμολόχος occurs as a critical description of politicians (*Ra.* 1085) and magistrates (*Eq.* 1358) who do not fulfil their social duties properly, only in a trivialized way¹⁰. The last two instances of the word βωμολόχος occur as adjectives in reference to items. In the *Knights* (*Eq.* 1194), the Sausage Seller is pondering on “some impudent trick” (βωμολόχον τι), whereas in the *Frogs* (*Ra.* 358), the Chorus mentions men who speak “words of buffoonery” (βωμολόχοις ἔπεσιν) without recognizing the inappropriateness of such behaviour at the time (μὴ ἔν καιρῷ)¹¹.

In the Greek language, the act of behaving foolishly is encompassed in the verb βωμολοχεύω which different forms occur three times in the extant works of Aristophanes and once in a fragment of a lost comedy. In this case, the verb more often occurs in the context of making foolish jokes which are not

⁸ Unless stated otherwise, in this paper, the passages of Aristophanic plays are cited from the edited texts and English trans. by A. H. Sommerstein; [in:] *The Comedies of Aristophanes*, vol. 2: *Knights*, Warminster 1981 (hereon as *Eq.*); vol. 3: *Clouds*, Warminster 1982 (hereon as *Nu.*); vol. 5: *Peace*, Warminster 1985 (hereon as *Pax*); vol. 6: *Birds*, Warminster 1987 (hereon as *Av.*); vol. 7: *Lysistrata*, Warminster 1990 (hereon as *Lys.*); vol. 8: *Thesmophoriazusae*, Warminster 1994 (hereon as *Th.*); vol. 9: *Frogs*, Warminster 1996 (hereon as *Ra.*); vol. 10: *Ecclesiazusae*, Warminster 1998 (hereon as *Ec.*).

⁹ Trans. by J. Henderson, [in:] *Aristophanes: Clouds, Wasps, Peace*, Cambridge, MA 1988, p. 135.

¹⁰ For a discussion on the vices of *bômolochoi* in Aristophanean comedy, see S. Beta, *Il linguaggio nelle commedie di Aristofane*, Rome 2004, pp. 249–254.

¹¹ The question of who are these men misbehaving at the wrong time remains open. Alan H. Sommerstein considers two possibilities: comic poets or politicians. Cf. *The Comedies...*, vol. 9, p. 187, n. 358. However, for the purpose of our discussion more important is the characteristic of speaking buffoonery at improper timing, than indicating the author of such words.

necessarily of high quality. Such an understanding is noticeable in the preserved fragment of the *Gerytades*: “you make witty and playful jokes against us and play the buffoon” (χαριεντίζει καὶ καταπαίζεις ἡμῶν καὶ βωμολοχεύει)¹². In the *Knights*, Paphlagon dismisses the Sausage Sellers arguments as βωμολοχεύματα, namely “clowning behaviour or words” (*Eq.* 902). The last two instances appear in reference to comic poetry, especially comic techniques of low quality. In the *Peace* (*Pax* 748), the Chorus extols the latest work of Aristophanes explaining its high quality (τέχνην μεγάλην) by avoiding “such poor stuff, such rubbish, such ignoble buffoonery”. Similarly in the *Clouds*, as the Better Argument speaks of the good old times (*Nu.* 969), he dismisses those playwrights who “play the clown” (βωμολοχεύσαιο).

From the examples above, it becomes clear that two complementary ideas are expressed by the terms βωμολόχος, βωμολοχεύω and βωμολοχεύματα. Firstly, these terms refer to unusual or improper conduct which is discredited as “foolish”, “ridiculous” or “ludicrous”. Here, a βωμολόχος is considered to be a person who behaves in a non-serious way, whilst not expected due to (1) one’s public function, (2) moral customs, and (3) time for proper (serious) conduct. Secondly, these terms regard certain words and actions applied deliberately to amuse others. In both cases, the terms regard the object as “foolish”, however, the first meaning is more pejorative, as it accompanies expressions of scorn and contempt, the second regards more comic inappropriateness, hence the laughable. In any case, buffoonery is only worth a laugh.

2. Minor buffoons in Aristophanes

The *bômolochos* is one of the stock-figures¹³ in Aristophanic comedy. From the eleven extant plays we may divide the comic buffoons into two groups: (1) subordinate characters, and (2) the main protagonist of the comic drama.

In his work *The Origin of Attic Comedy* (1914), Francis Cornford distinguishes the first group of *bômolochoi* under the term the “minor buffoon”¹⁴. Usually, these are associates to the main characters, who support the realization of the hero’s “great idea”. In the *Birds*, for instance, the *bômolochos*

¹² Aristophanes, fr. 171 (Harpocration 76.9), trans. J. Henderson, [in:] *Aristophanes. Fragments*, Cambridge, MA 2007, p. 193.

¹³ Already antiquity discerns stock-figures in comedy. For instance, a “buffoonish” type (τὰ βωμολόχα) is enlisted among three types of comic characters (ἦθη) in the *Tractatus Coisilianus*, a short pseudo-Aristotelian account on ancient Greek comedy. The other two are “the ironical” (τὰ εἰρωνικά) and “the boaster” (τὰ τῶν ἀλαζόνων). Cf. trans. by R. Janko, [in:] *Aristotle, Poetics I...*, p. 45. Interestingly, the term “bômolochos” in the meaning of the buffoon stock-figure in comedy was introduced into classical scholarship by Tadeusz Zieliński in 1885, cf. S. Kidd, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

¹⁴ F. Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, London 1914, p. 139.

is Euelpides, who together with Peisthetairos leaves Athens in search for a new hometown; in the *Lysistrata*, this is Calonice, who supports the main protagonist's plan for bringing war to an end; in the *Knights*, the slave Demosthenes supports one of the main characters – the Sausage Seller in his fight against Paphlagon; whereas in the *Assembly Women*, the heroin's husband Blepyrus, though at first reluctant, accepts the reign of women in his own foolish way. Often, these characters appear in the first part of the play and remain until the *agôn*. After this, their assistance to the main figure is no longer required, since the hero's "great idea" has been carried out successfully and he/she controls the plot in the second part of the drama. An exception to this rule occurs in the *Assembly Women*, in which it is the buffoon Blepyrus, not the protagonist Praxagora, who reappears at the end of the drama¹⁵.

Although the minor buffoon is of little significance to the plot of the drama, however, he plays a vital role in creating the comedy's humour. This is chiefly achieved by the use of verbal humour, for the buffoon speaks in a manner described by Kenneth McLeish as "loud, irrelevant and often ludicrous"¹⁶. Such buffoonery of words is most noticeable in the comments made to the speeches of others, often when the hero reveals and explains his "great idea". For example, in the *Birds*, Euelpides makes foolish comments to Peisthetairos' story about the birds' divine origin (Av. 476, 492–498, 501–503, 507, 570). Also, he reacts with haste to his companion's ideas before the latter manages to finish revealing his whole plan in outsmarting the gods ("I'm buying a cargo-boat and turning ship-owner; I'm not going to stay with you!" Av. 598; "I'm selling that cargo-boat and getting a mattock, and digging up crocks of gold" Av. 602). A similar hasty reaction presents Calonice in the *Lysistrata*, while the main protagonist only begins to unveil her plan (*Lys.* 42–53):

CALONICE: But what can women achieve that is clever or glorious – we who sit at home all dolled up, wearing saffron gowns and cosmetics and Cimberic straight-liners and riverboat slippers?

LYSISTRATA: Why, that's exactly what I'm counting on to save Greece – our pretty saffron gowns and our perfumes and our riverboat slippers and our rouge and our see-through shifts.

CALONICE: How on earth do you mean?

LYSISTRATA: To make it that none of the men living today will take up the spear against each other –

CALONICE: In that case, by the Two Goddesses, I'm going to dye a gown with saffron!

LYSISTRATA: – or take up a shield –

CALONICE: I'm going to put on a Cimberic!

LYSISTRATA: – or even a little toy sword.

CALONICE: I'm going to buy riverboat slippers!

¹⁵ Cf. *Ec.* 1129f. In the *Knights*, the buffoon Demosthenes reappears at the end of the play to congratulate the Sausage Seller's victory and ask for a job (*Eq.* 1254–1256).

¹⁶ K. McLeish, *The Theatre of Aristophanes*, Bath 1980, p. 55.

During the *agôn* between the hero and opponent, the minor buffoon continues to make ludicrous comments. This is often done to support the hero's arguments with ridiculous statements which increase the humour of the scene through the comic transformation of the agonists' words. For instance, Calonice comically elaborates Lysistrata's criticism about warriors attending the food market in full armour (*Lys.* 561–564). Similarly Demosthenes in the *Knights* underlines the Sausage Seller's skill in cunning (*Eq.* 427–448, 431–432, 436–437), many times expresses his full support (*Eq.* 470, 482–487, 490–491, 493–497) and even comically reminds him of his role against the Paphlagon (*Eq.* 340–341):

SAUSAGE-SELLER: By Poseidon, no; I'll fight it out first for the right to speak before you.

PAPHLAGON: By god, I'm ready to burst.

SAUSAGE-SELLER: No, I *won't* let you.

DEMOSTHENES: In heaven's name, let him, let him burst!

In the case of Blepyrus of the *Assembly Women*, he is first sceptical about the idea of women governing the state. In the *agôn* between his wife and Chremes, it is he, not the opponent, who asks Praxagora about the women's plans for domestic politics¹⁷.

The minor *bômolochos* does not only make ludicrous comments during the *agôn*, but usually speaks in ridiculous manner. Thus, Demosthenes in a foolish way avoids answering Nicias' questions about what he is reading (an oracle about Paphlagon's future) and keeps asking for more wine (*Eq.* 85–126). Similarly Calonice proposes the women to take an oath on wine and then, in ludicrous fashion, repeats the words after Lysistrata (*Lys.* 194–236). Furthermore, the minor figures often react in an exaggerated way. For instance, Calonice vehemently asserts Lysistrata about her will to help bring an end to war ("We'll do it, even if we have to give our lives" *Lys.* 123), however, once she hears about the mean to achieve this ("we must abstain from – cock and balls" *Lys.* 124), she refuses with the same vehemence ("I won't do it. Let the war carry on" *Lys.* 129). The sudden change from one extreme reaction to another intensifies the comicality of the scene.

Buffoonish words can be of vulgar and obscene nature¹⁸. When Lysistrata tries to explain the reason for assembling Greek women, Calonice understands this at first ambiguously and asks in *double entendre* fashion (*Lys.* 21–25):

¹⁷ Throughout the whole conversation Blepyrus interrogates 27 times: *Ec.* 595, 597, 601–604, 611–613, 616–617, 619–620, 622, 624–625, 628, 630, 635–637, 640, 651, 653, 655–656, 662–663, 667–669, 672–673, 675, 677, 681, 687–688.

¹⁸ On the connection of humour and obscenity, see J. Robson, *Humour, Obscenity and Aristophanes*, Tübingen 2006, pp. 70–94.

CALONICE: What actually *is* it, Lysistrata dear, that you're calling us women together for? What is this thing? What's the size of it?

LYSISTRATA: It's big –

CALONICE: You don't mean big and *meaty*?

LYSISTRATA: – and meaty too, I tell you.

CALONICE: Then how come we're not all here?

LYSISTRATA: Not in *that* sense!

Obscene humour occurs when Euelpides, asked of his name by the Slave Bird, answers (*Av.* 68): “I am Shitterling, from the land of Phasis”. However, the longest scatological scene is dedicated to Blepyrus’ problem with constipation (*Ec.* 311–373). While the Athenian women attend their secret meeting dressed in their husbands’ clothing, Blepyrus wakes up in the middle of the night feeling pressed. Since he cannot find his own clothes, he puts on his wife’s dress and complaining out loud leaves the house (*Ec.* 315–319). In the middle of trying to defecate, he encounters a neighbour who laughs at his unusual appearance and position. During this discussion, Blepyrus constantly refers to his stomach and matters of digestion, and finally, once the neighbour goes away, cries out complaints about his constipation (*Ec.* 358–368). He ends his monologue with a comic prayer to the goddess of births, to come in his succour (*Ec.* 369–371): “O Lady Hileithya, don’t stand by and let me burst or stay blocked up like this; I don’t want to become a comic shitpot!” In this whole scene, obscene verbal humour is mixed with situational (encounter with the neighbour while defecating) as well as the character’s appearance (incongruous feminine clothing). Though this scene is of no greater significance to the development of the plot, nevertheless it is of great relevance to the humour of the comedy *Assembly Women*.

In general, the minor buffoon retains a secondary role without any significant impact on the plot of the drama, as he has, in the words of Cornfold, “no independent existence”¹⁹. He appears for two reasons: to support the hero, and to make the audience laugh by the use of foolish words and actions.

3. Hero *bômolochoi* in Aristophanes

An Aristophanean hero is a great idealist. Often, we may observe in the extent plays that the main protagonist, unsatisfied with his current affairs, comes up with a great idea how to change things. The plot, therefore, reveals the

¹⁹ F. Cornfold, *op. cit.*, p. 139. However, in the case of the *bômolochos* in the *Knights*, the assumption is doubtful. For it is Demosthenes who comes up with the plan to dismiss Paphlagon, engages the Sausage Seller and assists him throughout the *agôn*. He speaks of his helping role in his last, brief reappearance (*Eq.* 1254–1256).

realization of this plan and its consequences²⁰. Out of the eleven preserved comedies, we may consider three main characters as typical *bômolochoi*; these are: Strepsiades (*Clouds*), Dionysus (*Frogs*) and Mnesilochos (*Thesmophoriazusae*). The chief difference between these characters and the minor *bômolochoi* are twofold: (1) the main buffoon protagonist remains “on stage” throughout the whole play, and (2) not only do his words and actions create the humour of the comedy, but also have an effect on the development of the plot.

In regard of the plot, the buffoon hero may come up with an idea and the rest of the comedy reveals the consequences of putting this idea into practice. Accordingly, in the *Clouds*, Strepsiades is disturbed by his son’s debts and searches for a way to avoid paying his creditors. He comes up with a cunning idea to learn how to outsmart the creditors by use of sophisticated rhetoric. Hence, he makes the decision to attend the philosophical school of Socrates. The rest of the comedy presents the comic consequences of this decision. In the *Frogs*, the god Dionysus is unsatisfied with the current state of Athenian drama. Being a passionate fan of the late poet Euripides, the god decides to descend to the Underworld and bring the deceased playwright back to Athens. Again, the comedy unfolds the comic events of his journey to Hades. A difference, however, occurs in the *Thesmophoriazusae*. In this comedy, the Athenian women feel indignant with Euripides because of his misogynist dramas and decide to plan a suitable form of revenge on him during the Thesmophoria. In order to avoid such wrath and uncertain fate, the tragedian searches for someone to attend the festival and speak in his favour. However, since this is a female festival, his helpmate may only attend in disguise of a woman. In the end, he convinces his kinsman, Mnesilochos, to be his aid. Here, it is the character of Euripides who initiates the events of the play, but its realization is chiefly carried out by Mnesilochos, the buffoon hero.

The hero *bômolochos* behaves and speaks in the same foolish manner as the minor buffoons we have discussed above. As Strepsiades encounters the disciples in the Thinkery, he makes ludicrous comments to their scientific explanations, e.g. the mechanics of a mosquito (“So the arsehole of gnats is a trumpet” *Nu.* 165) and philosophical actions (“Oh, I see, they’re looking for bulbs to eat!” *Nu.* 188–189). The same buffoonish reaction occurs in the company of Socrates, when the philosopher gives explanations to serious matters of philosophy (*Nu.* 372–374, 388–391, 394, 408–411) or attempts to teach words of wisdom to the old man, who mixes up the meanings of spoken words (*Nu.* 639–654). Certainly, the buffoonish way of thinking and perceiving things prevents Strepsiades from obtaining the skill of rhetoric. The poor effects of his

²⁰ On the hero in Aristophanic comedy although with greater emphasis on heroic *πονηρία* “cunning”, than *βωμολοχία* “buffoonery”, see C. Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero*, Cambridge, MA 1964, pp. 21–58.

training are revealed in the last scene in which Socrates interrogates his less talented pupil on ways of avoiding a lawsuit (*Nu.* 746–778). Here, the old man comes up with ludicrous solutions to avoid attending a court process. Particularly comic appears his last idea, namely, to hang himself (*Nu.* 779–783):

STREPSIADES: All right, I am. Suppose that when there were still one case pending before mine was called on, I were to run off and hang myself?

SOCRATES: You're talking nonsense.

STREPSIADES: Heavens above, it's perfect sense; nobody's going to bring a case to court against me when I'm dead.

SOCRATES: You're drivelling. Get the hell out of here. I'm not going to teach you any more.

Dionysus presents the same sort of behaviour in the *Frogs*. Here, it is the god who misinterprets Heracles' outburst of laughter for a shriek of fear ("Didn't you notice? [...] How terribly afraid he was of me" *Ra.* 40–41), understands Charon's order in a literal, buffoonish way ("What am I doing? Sitting on the oar, of course, where you told me to" *Ra.* 198–199), and complains about his fate exaggeratedly ("Ah me, from whence have these troubles fallen upon me? Which of the gods shall I hold guilty of being my ruin? The Sky, the dosing-place of Zeus? Or the foot of Time?" *Ra.* 309–311). Interestingly, the god's buffoonish behaviour is emphasized by his visual appearance: a lion skin thrown on a saffron gown (κροκωτός)²¹. The inappropriateness of the two wardrobes: an animal skin known to be a sign of virility and heroism juxtaposed with a female dress creates a strong comic effect²². As a typical buffoon, Dionysus behaves excessively. On one occasion he strongly manifests his higher status to Xanthias ("Hold it, you! You don't mean to say you're taking it seriously, my little joke of dressing you up as Heracles? Will you stop this ridiculous behaviour, and pick up the luggage again and carry it?" *Ra.* 522–524), but at misfortune he passionately seeks for his slave's help ("May I perish most miserably if I don't truly love Xanthias!" *Ra.* 579). Throughout the journey to the Underworld, Dionysus plays a significant part in creating the comedy's humour as it is he, not his associate slave Xanthias, who is the buffoon in the drama. This, however, changes in the second part of the play (*Ra.* 815 sqq.). Hereon, Dionysus' role is reduced to that of a minor

²¹ For the κροκωτός as a traditional attribute of Dionysus, see I. Lada-Richards, *Initiating Dionysus. Ritual and Theatre in Aristophanes' "Frogs"*, Oxford 1999, p. 18, n. 3.

²² This is noticeable in the reaction of Heracles, as he sees his feminine brother attempting to appear fearsome through heroic clothing; the Greek hero bursts into laughter ("I just can't banish laughter, seeing a lion-skin worn on top of a saffron gown like that" *Ra.* 45–46). On the juxtaposition of the Dionysiac and Heracleian attributes, see I. Lada-Richards, *op. cit.*, pp. 17–44, esp. pp. 28–29.

buffoon, as he only makes ludicrous comments during the *agôn* between the characters of Aeschylus and Euripides²³.

By contrast, in *Thesmophoriazusae*, Mnesilochos at first only associates Euripides in his visit to the tragic poet, Agathon. Here, his initial role is that of a minor buffoon for we may notice such actions as: complaining out loud (*Th.* 1–4), understanding words literally in a buffoonish way (“I’m listening to the door *and* keeping quiet about it” *Th.* 28), and making ludicrous comments without relevance to the plot (*Th.* 59–62). The turning point occurs the moment Agathon refuses to attend the women’s festival, whereas Mnesilochos agrees to go in his place (*Th.* 212). This decision leads to a series of slapstick scenes in which the old man is being guised as a woman (*Th.* 215–265). Along with his change of appearance, Mnesilochos switches from a subordinate character into one of a main protagonist. He will maintain this leading role until the end of the comedy, whereas Euripides, the one who conceived the “great idea”, will accept a supportive role in the second part of the play.

Hereon, not only does the main plot develop through Mnesilochos’ actions (attending the festival in disguise, speaking in favour of his kinsman, having his true identity revealed, being captured and guarded by the police, and, in the end, attempting several times to escape from prison), but the humour of the comedy becomes based on the foolish conduct of the hero *bômolochos*. Again, verbal humour dominates. His speech at the festival is filled with ludicrous arguments about how right was Euripides to condemn women’s ill behaviours (*Th.* 466–565). In the exposure scene (*Th.* 610–651), the male intruder (Sommerstein translates him as the “Inlaw”) tries to hide his true identity with foolish arguments (*Th.* 628–635):

CRITYLLA: And you, tell me: which of the ritual items was first revealed to us?

INLAW: Let me see now, what was the first thing? We drank.

CRITYLLA: And after that, what was the second?

INLAW: We drank some toasts.

CRITYLLA: You’ve been told by someone! Well, what was third?

INLAW: Xenylla asked for a bedpan; there wasn’t a jerry.

CRITYLLA: You’ve no idea at all. Come here, come here, Cleisthenes! This is the man you were talking about.

The most creative examples of Mnesilochos’ buffoonery occur in his attempts of escaping the police after being discovered. Tied to a pole and still wearing female garments, Mnesilochos comes up with the idea to imitate a tragic heroin and summon her hero for help. As Kenneth McLeish notes: “The character of Mnesilochos and the direction in which the plot is moving *fuse together* and produce a single magnificently comic and superbly generative idea,

²³ On the god’s interjections, cf. K. Dover, *Aristophanes. Frogs*, ed. K. Dover, Oxford 1997, p. 24.

that of using Euripidean methods to escape from a situation brought about by Euripides in the first place"²⁴. This leads to the humorous parodies of Euripidean dramas, *Helen* (*Th.* 846–928) and *Andromeda* (*Th.* 1008–1134), during which the tragic hero is imitated by the character of Euripides who tries to save his kinsman. Here, verbal humour is based on the comic transformation of the passages from the famous Euripidean tragedies, i.e. paratragedy²⁵.

Lastly, a comic feature accompanying the hero buffoon is obscenity²⁶. For instance, in the *Clouds*, Strepsiades in a crude way expresses his foolish understanding of matters (“And I really used to think that it was Zeus pissing through a sieve!” *Nu.* 373; “Ah, that’s why the two words sound alike, *brontē* ‘thunder’ and *pordē* ‘fart’!” *Nu.* 395). The addition of an obscene gesture increases the comicality of his misunderstanding of the word δάκτυλος (*Nu.* 652–654):

STREPSIADES: Digital? But, by Zeus, I know that.

SOCRATES: Then tell me.

STREPSIADES: Well, in the old days, in my boyhood, it was this [*sticking out his middle finger at Socrates*].

SOCRATES: You’re a stupid peasant.

Scatological sayings and behaviours occur with the character of Dionysus. The god of wine makes crude comments about his rowing Charon’s boat (“I’ve got blisters, I have, and my arsehole has been oozing for a long time” *Ra.* 236–237), defecates twice out of fear (*Ra.* 308, 479) and gives foolish arguments for him not being a cowardly person (“If he was really a coward, he’d have just stayed on the ground smelling his own stink. Whereas I, I stood up, and what’s more, I wiped myself clean!” *Ra.* 489–490). Curiously, the opening lines of the *Frogs* set ground to such type of coarse humour, as the two main characters discuss upon the appropriate style of comic jokes (*Ra.* 1–4, 9–11):

XANTHIAS: Shall I say one of the usual things, master, that the audience always laugh at?

DIONYSUS: Yes, indeed, whatever you like, only not “What a weight!”. Mind out for that, because I’m thoroughly sick of it by now [...].

XANTHIAS: Can’t I even say that I’m carrying such a load on me, if someone doesn’t take it off me I’ll have an arse-burst?

DIONYSUS: No, I beg you, no, except when I’m just about to puke up anyway.

²⁴ K. McLeish, *op. cit.*, p. 138 (my emphasis).

²⁵ On the differences between parody and paratragedy, see M. S. Silk, *Aristophanic Paratragedy*, [in:] *Tragedy, Comedy and the Polis: Papers from the Greek Drama Conference: Nottingham, 18–20 July 1990*, eds. S. Halliwell, A. H. Sommerstein, J. Henderson, B. Zimmermann, Bari 1993, pp. 477–504.

²⁶ Though not characteristic only of the comic buffoon, cf. J. Robson, *Aristophanes. An Introduction*, London 2009, pp. 120–140. For a broad study on obscenity in Old Comedy, see J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse. Obscene Language in Attic Old Comedy*, New Haven 1975.

Similarly in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, the buffoonish Mnesilochos employs obscenity freely. First, he makes crude remarks towards Agathon's Servant (*Th.* 51, 57, 59–62), and continues towards the effeminate poet himself (*Th.* 97–98, 157–58, 200–201, 206–207). However, it is important to stress here that Mnesilochos uses more obscene language as the associate of Euripides, thus in the initial role of the minor buffoon, before accepting the one of the hero *bômolochos*.

The hero buffoon speaks and behaves in the same manner as the minor figure discussed above. The main difference is his significance to the plot of the play, which depends on his decisions and actions (attending a philosophical school, journey to Hades, creative attempts of escaping imprisonment). As the minor *bômolochoi* could be, in fact, eliminated without dire consequences to the development of the plot, however, this is impossible in the case of the hero buffoon.

In view of the examples above, we may conclude that the comic role of the *bômolochos*, whether a subordinate or leading character, is “to pick up everything and make a joke of it”²⁷. This type is employed in comedy to make the audience laugh. By exaggeration and inappropriateness of speech and behaviour, often in vulgar or obscene manner, the buffoon significantly contributes to the jovial humour of Aristophanean comedy which corresponds with the character of the Dionysiac festival.

²⁷ C. Whitman, *op. cit.*, p. 47.