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THE BIRTH AND TRANSFIGURATION OF COMEDY IN ATHENS

I

The Greek theater produced not only a single triumphal procession of Dionysus. The god of tragedy made his way into the Renaissance and the baroque period through the story of Orpheus, given new dramatic and musical life. This was the theme of my study in *Diogenes*, 1959: "The Birth and Rebirth of Tragedy." But the god of comedy was none other than the god of tragedy, and his path led, already in ancient times, to a particular dramatic genre: a genre which in its last, mild form became at the same time the vehicle of humanity, as the actual, great herald of Greek culture, and the model for European drama, inasfar as the latter did not purport to be a continuation of Greek tragedy.

The proclamation of humanity from the stage is a characteristic of modern drama without which it is unthinkable. Comedy in Athens was not born with this characteristic, but received it, rather, in its transfiguration in the work of Menander: one of the

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two greatest poets who come to mind when we hear the words: Greek, Athenian or Attic comedy. The other, earlier poet was Aristophanes. I would like to try to reconstruct before our very eyes the astonishing, vari-colored arc, an unbelievable marvel in the history of the human hind, which leads from the origins of Attic comedy to its second great representative. The circumstance that a completely preserved Menander play found its way into our hands three years ago for the first time turns our eyes to this climax of the development, before we follow the earlier stages of the road (which are by no means limited to low levels of the mind).

Goethe had already attributed great stature to this other great comic poet, so unlike Aristophanes, on the basis of the quotations which, from the Renaissance on, were the only thing, known of Menander's work. He spoke to Eckermann with great enthusiasm about Menander: "After Sophocles," he said, "I know of no one who would appeal to me so much. He is thoroughly pure, noble, great and serene, his grace is unattainable. It is regrettable, of course, that we have so little of his work, but even that little is a treasure, and talented people can learn much from it." The first longer section of his dramas, on leaves of parchment, and then the fragments of papyrus book that became more and more frequent since the turn of the century, were most exciting to all friends of antiquity. The discovery of these papyri extended the valuable contributions of the ancient world beyond the strictly classical epoch. The literature of post-classical centuries, of the so-called Hellenistic period, achieved new outlines before our very eyes. For in it was discovered the Greek equivalent of "modern literature." The contents of Menander's plays, so true to life, were welcomed with the greatest joy. They confirmed the exclamation of a Greek literary critic: "Menander and life! Which of the two imitated the other?"

Now, finally, for the first time, thanks to the discovery of the founder of the Library for World Literature at Cologny near Geneva, Mr. Martin Bodmer, we have the first complete play by Menander. Only a few lines are missing, and very few lines are short. The comedy is called *Dyskolos.* Later it was also called *Misanthropos*, "The Misanthrope." "Dyskolos" is the man whom others find difficult, the opposite figure to "Eukolos," a character who mixes easily and agreably with others. He is, above all, the

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irritating surface of man as he ought to be. "What a dear thing man is—when he is human!"—runs one of Menander's sayings, a line that is unsurpassable in its beauty of sound as well: certainly the culmination of what the poet said, and wanted to say, to humanity.

The entire newly found play—the above quotation is from another source—demonstrates through a different example that the line, wherever it was originally placed, was not lightly spoken. Menander, even if in another form than his childhood friend Epicurus, was a wise man, a radiant Greek wise man, who philosophized from the stage, and whose main teaching is summarized as follows: "What a dear thing man is—when he is human!" The contents of *Dyskolos*, in comparison with this loftiness of its author's mind, seem quite modest. The idea that the boor has to fall into a well, and be fished out by his stepson and his daughter's suitor, before he will listen to a human word, presents a very childish drama. It is simply an excuse that at that time—circa 317 B. C.—Menander was only twenty-five years old. He had occupied himself with writing for the theater and with the production of comedy since he was eighteen; and he was crowned a victor for *Dyskolos*.

If this very simple fable has any political meaning at all—which at this time would be the exception—it would be simply to pillory a certain type of Attic peasant. But the play is directed not against the peasants, but against boorishness. One would have to be particularly narrow-minded to search for a political tendency beyond this. Another approach is obviously necessary here, not in order to achieve a positive judgment, but in order to do justice to the radiance and aura of the play, which has the brilliance of a genuine work of art. Did this radiance and brilliance, this simultaneously simple and wise joviality, come from a Dionysian source?

II

The first known form of the genre comedy, the Old Comedy, proceeded to its highest bloom from the year 486—the year in which the competition of comic choruses became a state affair in Athens. The comic play, and even competitions between comic choruses, must have existed even earlier. They were unregulated

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affairs, more private than official. This corresponded, also, to the much greater freedom of these plays as compared with tragedy. The fact that the *archon basileus*, the highest religious official of the state, presided over these comic productions is sufficient proof that these occasions were, in spite of their typical liberty, a holy affair. These comic productions and competitions, *agones*, presided over by the *basileus*, belonged to the festivals of the Lenaea, the feast of Dionysus in January—although comic competitions also took place during the Great Dionysia in March, in addition to the competition of the tragic choruses and poets, and although tragedy for its part was not excluded from the Lenaea.

The flourishing of the Old Comedy, the *archaia*, began, then, in the year 486 B. C. and lasted until the political collapse of Athens at the end of the century. The New Comedy did not arise before 320 B. C. The intervening period from 400 on was occupied by the Middle Comedy. Not a single example of this period remained in its Greek form. As an example of the poets of the Old Comedy we have Aristophanes, with his eleven plays preserved out of the forty that he himself produced, and out of the more than one hundred plays that the other forty-one poets of the *archaia* produced in approximately eighty years. The later poets surpassed these older ones in the number of productions. Menander alone composed more than one hundred comedies. But the art that reached its climax with his opposite pole, Aristophanes—that special ecstasy, an extraordinary Dionysian condition—never returned. The many-colored arc which, simplified and sublimated, becomes the serenity of a refined humanity in the work of Menander, develops while still close to its source as the manner of the greatest poet of the Old Comedy, which only a great poet can describe in a few sentences: Hugo von Hofmannsthal in his prologue to *Lysistrata*:

> Imagine something, compared with which Mozart's *Figaro* is tame, and a Rubens bacchanale coarse! Imagine a dance, a real dance, devised according to an enchantingly clever plan—and everything which you call setting in your language nothing but moments and figures of this dance, the whole world masked in dominoes and dancing, carried away by the most uninhibited gestures—the whole burden of life not, as in Shakespeare, transformed into darkly shining dreams, but into dizzy movement, the freshest impertinence ennobled by a nameless force—imagine all this, and shimmering over it the dew of early times, and breathing through it the wind of the Greek sea, the breath of saffron and crocus and the

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pollen of the bees from Hymettus. And all this born of what a world! Imagine the world that goes with it, the bloody lances of the Peleponnesian War, Socrates' poison-goblet, the impostors slinking about in the dark, the ten-thousand-headed gatherings of the people, Alcibiades' hetairas, colorful and lively as the lightest birds, and above all this the golden shield of Athena. Imagine all this together: in the maelstrom of such a world this comedy, dancing along like a merry-go-round whipped into a frenzy by wild children.

III

Hofmannsthal's words have evoked the world of the comedies of Aristophanes—and of the entire Old Comedy as well. But best of all, they have unsurpassably grasped the "dancing comedy," the essence of which I have called a special form of ecstasy. It is not the ecstasy of the Bacchantes, which Euripides brought to the stage—and he was not the first. It is the ecstasy of men, which for several reasons cannot simply be called intoxication: the lightness of the dances which they perform, and the difficulty of the artful, witty twisting of words which the poet puts in their mouths. Nothing characterizes this intoxication as much as the falling away of all inhibitions—including the inhibitions that fetter the mind. The laughter which is awakened by this topples other limitations over: it is annihilating, and completes the dissolution. Our expression becomes more concrete when we speak of the *ecstasy of the komos*, from which the action of comedy proceeds.

Aristotle's *Poetics* clearly reveal why it is impossible, today, to reconstruct a history of the birth of Attic comedy that would be as neatly ordered, and conceived in its own rhythm, as was possible in the case of tragedy or of the Italian opera. "The transformations of tragedy," says the philosopher, "and the men who caused them, are unforgotten. But comedy, because it was not seriously undertaken at first, was forgotten. For the *archon* recognized comic poets only at a later date; before that there were only volunteers. And only from the time at which comedy already had definite forms have the names of the men who were comic poets been handed down. We no longer know who introduced the masks or the prologue, or the quartet of actors, or whatever of that sort. Epicharmus and Phormis were the first to produce a continuous action. That therefore originated in Sicily. Crates was the first among the active poets in Athens to go

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beyond the merely mocking character and to create general fables and actions." By this Aristotle meant to say that the Old Comedy, before it underwent the influence of the mimic plays of the Dorians from Sicily, had no dramatic action. It was a great event in the history of the Attic genre when masks were introduced into the plays.

But we do have one signpost similar to that at the birth of tragedy. In the latter case, the name of the genre was a constant reminder of a stern and gloomy Dionysian action: *tragodia* meant the song occasioned by the goat, the sacrificial animal, that had to die as the representative and simultaneously the enemy of the god. The name of comedy is a similar reminder, indicating the *komos*: *komodia* is the song occasioned by the *komos*. The meaning of the word *komos* and of the occasion it described is to be seen from examples in the New Comedy, the latest and apparently no longer Dionysian form of the genre. Between the acts there enters a group of singing, dancing, drunken carousers, usually totally without relation to the drama, or related to it only by a very thin thread. In *Dyskolos*, and also in Menander's other comedies, the actors withdraw from this group. One actor draws the attention of the others to the approaching group with the words: "I see slightly intoxicated persons approaching this place. It seems to me that we should not disturb them."

That was the *komos*, from the beginning: a small group honoring the god of wine with dance and song, hardly ever according to a strict rite, let alone a dire one. But Dionysus is present in the action, no less than in the bacchic thriamb and dithyramb, even if in a different way: not triumphally, as in the former, and not with the high tension of the dithyramb, but relaxedly dedicated to freedom from inhibitions. For this reason the carousers were by no means always harmless. We have just heard that one did well to get out of their way. But on the other hand, they were not dangerous in the manner of the Bacchantes. The drunkenness of the men of the *komos* has become a unique musical play. An epigrammatic poet has called the goddesses of this play *phoberai charites*: "terrible Graces," Graces that induce fear. Aristotle remarked that comedy only gave up its character of pure mockery when the singers and dancers had already formed

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a chorus that went on the stage. And the Old Comedy never quite gave up this character. An ancient explanation connects it with a false etymology of the word *komodia*: as if the name were derived from *kome*, "village," thereby retaining its connection with the older method of masking the chorus—with a maskless disguise, the smearing of faces. It was supposedly poor peasants, who came into town at night to sing vengeful mocking songs at the houses of rich people who had done them wrong. And they were allowed to to this, the late interpretation adds, in public as well, in the theater. Gradually the expression of a private longing for revenge became a harmless, and indeed educational state institution.

This was *one* aspect of the *komos*: an aspect that is preserved only in the form of comedy. But what did they use to smear their faces on these occasions? They say with yeast. The Greek word for this is *tryx* or *trygia*, which can also mean new wine. But neither the birth of comedy nor its productions have been placed at the time of the grape harvest, when one can still find new wine. Comic poets jestingly called their genre *trygodia*, "song on the occasion of new wine"—a pun on the name *tragodia.* Probably this jesting relationship to the other stern and gloomy Dionysiac genre played a role in Attic comedy from the beginning, and Aristophanes was not the first to introduce it with his parody on tragedy. In tragedy, too, ghosts appeared, ghosts who frightened the spectators in a different way as they took up their path of suffering anew, filled with new blood and life. But the mocking apparitions were still not harmless: the laughter that rang at comic productions was often, and for a long period, a deadly laughter—and such was the intention of the poets.

IV

Both elements of the ecstasy of the *komos* which I have discussed thus far had a relation to Dionysus: the aggressive lack of inhibitions—after making oneself unrecognizable— and the occasion which gave rise to the disguising of the faces—to remain for the moment with this aspect. We will hear shortly of faces that were covered with soot, as well. But the great moment for smearing faces with yeast was the already mentioned festival of the Lenaea, with which comedy always remained closely connected: a winter

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holiday of Dionysus, comparable in more than one way with our Christmas. We may ask ourselves, indeed, in regard to Menander as well: what would the Lenaea have meant to the Athenians *without* comedy—always new comedies, never yet seen or heard? For—as others had already rightly observed—just as young, spotless, new animals had to be taken for sacrificing to the gods, so every comedy was produced only once. Exceptions were made only very rarely. In this way the comedy had also the character of a festive surprise; and this was more the case at the Lenaea than at the Great Dionysia, during which the tragedies had always occupied the foreground. What would Christmas be for us—we may ask in comparison—without the customs and surprises that do not take place in the church according to definite rites, but whose absence would leave a gap in the year not easily filled? These are otherwise harsh winter days—days that according to Hesiod "flay the cattle"—in that month in Greece, corresponding to our January. They are interrupted by this festive time with its joys, its customs that were not always bound to strict ceremonies. These customs raised Athenian life to its high point, and among these customs is the *komos.*

Why did slightly intoxicated groups swarm through the city and the countryside in those days? They were celebrating the Lenaea. This holiday—the Lenaea—derived its name from *Lenaion*, and meant actually "the feast of Dionysus at the Lenaeon," a shrine, at which the competitions also took place before the theater on the south side of the Acropolis was established and developed. The name of this shrine can be translated either as "house of the winepress," from *lenos*, "winepress;" or "house of the winepress women," from *lenai.* That was one name for the Bacchantes, the Dionysiac women in their quality as midwives of the wine. For wine was born twice, and accordingly mythology speaks of two births of Dionysus. (A third birth of the god, also known to mythology, goes beyond the parallel with the fate of wine). The first birth was a premature birth. Ripened by the glow of the hottest days, the grapes were brought to the winepress, trodden and mangled. The fate of the goat that was sacrificed at the arbors in the spring month of *Elaphebolion*, and then divided or torn apart, had represented this in anticipation. The grape harvest, which produced new wine—at approximately the same

time as the mysteries of Eleusis and as the birth of a child in the underworld—was not a joyful festival for the early Greeks. We know from Homer that a complaining song was sung on this occasion (*Iliad* 18.570). The true birth did not take place until the winter, with the help of the *lenai*, the Dionysian women, who celebrated the main act of the festival of the Lenaea in the Lenaeon.

According to the experience of the wine-growing peasants whom I questioned in Greece and in southern Italy, the fermenting of the new wine requires forty days. But even then the wine is not yet ready. After forty days one can already become intoxicated from the grape-juice. And so the Athenians did, to honor Dionysus at his shrine in the swamps. We do not know whether this is identical with the Lenaeon. The building which was excavated to the west of the Acropolis looks as if it had also served as a winepress house. But the first tasting of the wine and the first intoxication—combined with dance and song and invocations of the god—could not be bound to a specific day. After all, the harvesting of the grapes did not take place on a definite calendar day, but within a longer period, according to the ripeness of the grapes: and so the intoxication after forty days followed suit. It seems, according to the ancient descriptions but also according to the modern ones which I heard from the Cretans, that at the first tasting, one devoted oneself to intoxication simply for the sake of intoxication. In order to make pure wine from the still unclear juice, it was necessary to wait for cold weather, which usually came to Greece during the first days of January. The cold brought clarity, separating the wine from the *tryx*, the yeast. The latter remained as sediment in the containers, the great earthen *pithoi*, from which the wine was taken for real pleasure.

In the villagers they were more impatient than in Athens itself. There the peasants celebrated the Rural Dionysia a little earlier than the city people their Lenaea; but they too were not far from the winter equinox. The peasants did not produce comedies. At any rate we do not hear of them; but we do hear that the *komos* of one village competed with the *komos* of another, and that one was proclaimed victor. We can assume that this means that in the country, too, barrels of the new wine were already opened for this holiday. This was done in official and model

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fashion in Athens, with the solemnity of a high rite at the festival of the Lenaea in the Lenaeon. On vase paintings we see the Dionysiac women chosen for this office pouring the new wine from huge barrels that stand on a sacrifical altar before an idol of the god—an idol made from a mask, a garment and branches of yew. They serve the liquid very carefully, with ladles, as it must be done if, after the wine has been put in other containers, the yeast is to remain: after the drink comes the makeup.

Yeast offered itself irresistibly as makeup, to smear and mask faces while getting drunk on the new wine to celebrate the second, full birth of the Dionysus-child. The birth of the god, which was manifest in the condition of the wine but also in the cosmic point in time, was the reason for the festival. On one of the splendidly painted vases that can be recognized as a Lenaea vase, we see the divine child reaching out from the bosom of one of the celebrating women. This took place in the shrine—so the inner ceremony was interpreted—behind closed doors. The public rite took place outside, during the *agons* of the Lenaea—which were primarily dedicated to the competition between the comic choruses. The rite consisted in the sudden appearance (or advancing to the foreground) of the second priest from Eleusis, the Dadouchos, torch in hand, urging the people in a loud voice: "Call on the god!" Whereupon the people shouted: "Son of Semele, Iacchus, Giver of Wealth!" Dionysus was the son of Semele, who took part in the Mysteries of Eleusis as Iacchus, hiding behind this name as well as behind that of Plutus, god of wealth. He was born in the shrine, not, as in Eleusis, prematurely in the underworld, but brought completely outside for the living. While the birth took place, the people outside were entertained with dramatic competition—and in earlier times probably by the *agon* between the *komoi.* Even in the comedies it was still usual for two servants to toss nuts and figs from a cornucopia among the people. Aristophanes felt that it was beneath him to increase the joy and inclination to laughter in this way. His plays contained other presents in celebration of Dionysus' birthday—for that is what those dry winter snacks were, and the comedies as well.

A special day, on which all the *pithoi*, or winebarrels full of finished wine, were to be opened—the day of the Pithoigia—

followed in another holiday-cycle devoted to Dionysus, during the Anthesteria in February, the time of the first field blossoms. When the wine was poured from a few barrels at the Lenaea, that was an act representing the birth of the god. One did not become as intoxicated on this occasion as at the first tasting, nor as on the day of the Choes, which followed the Pithoigia in the holiday-cycle of the Anthesteria, when the men had a drinking competition. But it was said that at a time which can only have been the Lenaea miracles occurred in some Dionysiac shrines, expressing the birth of the god: water was turned into wine.

Exactly when thus took place has been handed down to us because of the yearly repetition of the wine-miracle on the island of Andros. The transformation of the water of a spring holy to Dionysus is supposed to have begun there on every fifth of January, according to the Julian calendar. By this they probably mean the night before the sixth of January. The miracle continued for seven days. The sixth of January was also considered to be Osiris' birthday. It is on this date that at the beginning of the second millennium B. C., around 1996 B. C., the winter equinox took place: a great moment of the year, which was considered the birth of a god in the cosmos. And it was celebrated as such in the Egyptian calendar until well into the Christian era. Christianity, for its part, took the sixth of January as the day of Epiphany, and originally as the day of the birth of the Saviour. The Dionysiac religion did this earlier, probably still in the second millennium B. C., on Crete. The Lenaea were celebrated in Athens around this date, even if not exactly on the sixth of January. And together with the god, in his honor and as a present in celebration of his birthday, the song of the intoxicated and made-up dancers, comedy, was born.

V

The similarity between the occasion of the ecstasy of the *komos* and our Christmas goes rather deep. We shall see later how much of the *to-do about a child* remained in the New Comedy, when most of the original ecstasy—an exaltation rather than intoxication—and of the motivating spirit of the Old Comedy had already disappeared. But we reach the limit of the similarities with aspects of Christianity when we consider another aspect of the *komo*'s male lack of inhibition: the phallic element in this

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exaltation. Aristotle says in that section of the *Poetics* which deals with the origin of tragedy in improvised poetry—in dithyrambs—that comedy arises in a similar fashion from the phallic songs that at this time were still sung in many Greek towns. A Greek scholar of the third or second century B. C., the Delian Semos, gives us a good picture of these songs. According to his description, they were sung while people carried the phallus, an imposing wooden object, around in a festive procession.

At Semos's time it was usual in several Greek theaters—and probably also in the theater of Delos—for such a procession to go on stage at dramatic productions, and in a way to belong to them. A group of men would take part in this procession, some of them also equipped with erect phalluses, also on their foreheads and noses and at the ends of their staffs: we see them thus on a vase painting. They were usually disguised as drunkards, and their song demanded space for the god, who was particularly manifest in the exhibited object. The phallofores, who carried the object over their shoulders—sometimes on scaffolding—were differently dressed. Lush greenery and flowers, wreaths of violets and yew, covered their heads. They were a larger group than was necessary for carrying the phallus, and teased the onlookers in the theater. The man who carried the phallus was covered with soot: probably because the Dionysiac chorus itself used the ashes of the sacrificial fire, in which wood and pieces of meat were burnt, to smear their faces. The song which Semos quotes from such a chorus praises Bacchus, his own newness and the licentiousness of his muse.

It is exactly this element that we find among the poets of the Old Comedy. We meet both of these concrete elements, the phallic procession and the sooty faces, in an early play by the young Aristophanes, *The Acharnians*. The comedy was called that because its chorus was made up of people from Acharnai, old charcoal-burners from a village near Athens. These charcoal-burners were surely recognized by the fact that they smeared their faces with soot. At first they remained completely hostile towards the main actor. I shall quote only the scene with the small, rural phallic procession. You will see that such a procession as yet by no means implied particular liberty, let alone particular lack of inhibition, in Greek life. The higher lack of inhibition of the

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Old Comedy, which developed from the *komos*'s lack of inhibition, transcended the purely phallic by a great deal: it consisted of *thought*, breaking through all limit, given wings by desire. How would it be—that is the idea in this play—if a good citizen, in the middle of the hopeless Peleponnesian War that brought so much misery to the state—how would it be, if this ideal citizen of a well-ordered state made his own peace with the Spartans, and if he even succeeded?

The citizen is Dikaiopolis, the main character in the play. His name implies his natural devotion to a well-ordered state. And immediately, at the very beginning of the play, he succeeds in making a private peace. Because of this the group of charcoal-burners is persecuting him. Let us listen first to the chorus and the chorus leader:

> This scoundrel has dared, great gods, to conclude a truce, when I wanted the war continued with double fury in order to avenge my ruined lands. No mercy for our foes until I have pierced their hearts like a sharp reed, so that they dare never again ravage my vineyards...
>
> Here is he, whom we seek. This way, all. Get out of his way...[1]

They have stones in their hands. Soon the leader will urge them to persecute and stone Dikaiopolis:

> It is he, he himself. Stone him, stone him, stone him, strike the wretch. All, all of you, pelt him, pelt him.[2]

This urging reminds us, perhaps not contrary to the comic poet's intention, of the voice of the Maenads, when they pursue Orpheus on Pentheus. This parodying dependence on tragedy can express itself in non-parodying passages as well. We now become witnesses—the chorus watches the scene from the background—as Dikaiopolis and his household prepare for the first peacetime worship of the gods on his country estate.

[1] From *Aristophanes: The Eleven Comedies*, New York, Liveright Publishing Corp.

Unless otherwise indicated in the notes, the quotations are translated by T. Jaeger.

[2] *Ibid.*

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DIKAIOPOLIS - (*He comes out with a pot; behind him his wife, his daughter, two slaves carrying a phallos.*) Peace, profane men. Let the basket-bearer come forward (*that is, his daughter*), and thou, Xanthias, hold the phallus well upright (*Xanthias is one of the slaves*). Daughter, set down the basket, and let us begin the sacrifice.

DAUGHTER - Mother, hand me the ladle, that I may spread the sauce on the cake.

DIKAIOPOLIS - It is well! Oh, mighty Bacchus, it is with joy that, freed from military duty, I and all mine perform this solemn rite and offer thee this sacrifice; grant, that I may keep the rural Dionysia without hindrance and that this truce of thirty years may be propitious for me.[3]

The peace which he had concluded was to be of that duration. He now celebrates, as we have heard, the rustic Dionysia, the little Dionysia of the peasants. These precede the Lenaea, on which the play was given. The calendar time of the production plays no role, however, in the comedy itself. In the latter, time is non existent, and at the end of the play Dikaiopolis will celebrate the Feast of Choe, which belongs to the cycle of the Anthesteria. He turns now to his daughter:

Come, my child, carry the basket gracefully and with a grave, demure face. Happy he, who shall be your possessor and embrace you so firmly at dawn, that you belch wind like a weasel. Go forward, and have a care they don't snatch your jewels in the crowd.[4]

These words annul the gap between the country estate of Dikaiopolis on which the procession is moving, and which the onlookers are supposed to imagine, and the actual theater, where anything can happen in the crowd—even this thief's masterpiece. Now Dikaiopolis gives his orders to the slave who, together with another, will play the role of the phallus-bearer, carrying the wooden object. The object is not the god himself, but is nonetheless regarded as a person and addressed by the name of Phales.

Xanthias, walk behind the basket-bearer and hold the phallus well erect; I will follow, singing the Phallic hymn; thou, wife, look on from the top of the terrace. Forward! Oh, Phales, companion of the orgies of Bacchus, night reveller, god of adultery, friend of young men, these past six years I have not been able

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

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to invoke thee. With what joy I return to my farmstead, thanks to the truce I have concluded, freed from cares, from fighting and from Lamachuses![5]

The name of Lamachus is a pun: he was the Athenian general who had the word *mache*, combat, in his name. He is the friend of war, the opponent of Dikaiopolis, who is inspired by the Muse of phallic songs—and of comedy. He goes on singing:

> How much sweeter, Phales, oh, Phales, is it to surprise Thratta, the pretty wood-maid, Strymodorus's slave, stealing wood from Mount Phelleus, to catch her under the arms, to throw her on the ground and possess her! Oh, Phales, Phales, If thou wilt drink and bemuse thyself with me, we will tomorrow consume some good dish in honour of the peace, and I will hang up my buckler over the smoking heart.[6]

At this point the charcoal-burners interrupt Dikaiopolis' singing and fantasies. Suddenly it is a matter of life and death: they want to stone him. But he has a hostage in his hand: a wood-coal basket, a *larkos*. That was probably a nickname for the charcoal-burners. Dikaiopolis wants to cut the basket up. The charcoal-burners are frightened. It is one of them, after all! The distinction between man and object is annulled, Dikaiopolis is saved, and the play goes on.

VI

The removal of all limits and inhibitions in the ecstasy of the *komos* and especially in the higher licentiousness of the Old Comedy, goes far beyond masculine freedom. Neither the *komos* nor the comedy needed the carrying about of the indecent cult object, of the tangible symbol, to fulfill its phallic spirit. As a matter of fact it is typical of Attic comedy that it can contain such a scene as that quoted above without a break in its own style, and that it sometimes includes the leather phalluses that the actors wear among its props. But it does all this—and much more besides—only, so to speak, by virtue of *the universality of the comic lack of inhibition.* By comic, however, I do not mean that which modern aesthetics has abstracted from both ancient and modern comedy, but that which was essential and common both

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Ibid.*

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to the *komos* and to Attic comedy. Within the common ground there became possible, as well, the development and intensification which differentiates the comedy from the *komos.* Manliness, the limit of a single sex, was already overstepped in the *komos.* Women were allowed to dress themselves as men in the *komos*, and men as women.

The lack of inhibition in the ecstasy of the *komos* allowed the men to assimilate themselves to the Dionysiac women in an otherwise impermissible, indeed shameless fashion; to imitate the swarms of women from which they were otherwise excluded. The same lack of inhibition allowed the women, as men, to lose themselves in the masculine enjoyment of the *komos.* An Athenian vase of the sixth century shows choruses of men who, disguised as women, dance with each other or with other non-disguised men. What comic possibilities arose from this! The comic choruses were composed of men. The women's chorus in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* was composed of men. Half of the chorus in *Lysistrata* consisted of men dressed as women, the other half represented the men. A truly remarkable situation—comic, we may say, in the true sense of the word—occurs in the *Ekklesiazusae*, Aristophanes' "Women's Meeting." In this case men play the role of women who are in turn disguised as men: a double mask and costume that surpasses the disguising of Euripides and his companion as women in the *Thesmophoriazusae.* The saying, "the world has its limits," is not valid for the comic poet. The world of the Old Comedy has no limits.

There is also no division between the world of people and that of the animals. This is the best example of the universality of the comic lack of inhibition. And here too the *komos* probably preceded comedy. About seventy years before Aristophanes' *Birds* was produced, at a time when the comic choruses did not yet compete with each other officially, the potters already produced bird-mummeries. Aristophanes was greatest as a poet in the Dionysiac realm of suspended limits: where the world is not a limited world of people, but rather a spiritualized world of all life. But he says of his predecessor Magnes of Icaria, an older comic poet as well: "He who first set up the trophies of victory for the choruses with which he competed, when he offered you sounds of every kind, both harps and rustling feathers of birds and the

song of the bumblebee and the humming of mosquitoes and croaking of tree-toad disguises." Since the plays usually took their titles from their choruses, there were old comedies called *Frogs* and *Fishes*, *Ants* and *Griffins*, *Wasps* and *Gallwasps* and *Bees*, *Nightingales*, *Storks* and *Birds*, *Goats* and simply *Animals.*

But all this remained always a higher licentiousness. The animals' choruses led not into the world of bestiality, but into a fairy-tale world, into the better world of wish-fulfillment. This was especially the case in Crates' *Animals—Ta theria.* An animal, certainly an edible one and probably the bull as the world ruler decreed by the gods, gave mankind directions similar to those of Pythagoras:

> You may bring cabbages to the pot
> And fry yourselves fish, both pickled and fresh,
> but us? That you simply must not.

Frightened, the representative of mankind asks:

> Then is there no meat we may venture to eat,
> do you mean that? May we no more
> Come home from the town with hog's-puddings to brown
> and sweetened polonies galore?

The animals, apparently ruling the world, also do away with slavery. Mankind becomes still more frightened. Its question goes:

> Will poor old buffers do their chores themselves as best they can?

Then the new world rules announces the new state:

> "No fear; I'll make all that's required able to wolk about."
> Man: "What good will that do 'em, poor old things?"
> Animals: "You see, the whole outfit
> Will come when called for. Thus: Table, be thou spread!
> Frying-pan, prepare yourself! Trencher, knead your bread!
> Pour out, Decanter! Where's that Cup? here, rinse yourself a bit!
> Rise, Loaf! It's time the beef was done; Saucepan, deliver it!
> Quick, Mackerel! 'But my underside's not done; it's not my fault.'
> Then turn, and take a drop of oil and just a pinch of salt!"[7]

We know from Aristophanes what are the characteristic final

[7] Adapted from *The Fragments of Attic Comedy*, ed. and trans. by John Maxwell Edmonds, Leiden, E. J. Brill.

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scenes of the Old Comedy. They are weddings, although not bourgeois marriages, as in the new comedy, but rather something approaching a cosmic wedding. They are, at the least, full of warm eroticism. In these scenes feminine beauty even appeared on the Greek stage as a silent actor. The wedding of Dionysus and Ariadne was reflected in those sensuous finales. In Aristophanes' *Birds* two Athenians have emigrated because they could no longer bear their city's constant litigation: Euelpides who, according to his name, is full of hope, and Peithetairos who, also according to his name, has coaxed his friend into these adventures. He also coaxes the birds into founding a city in the atmosphere for the two friends. *Nephelococcygia*—Cloud-cuckoo-land—bars the way between heaven and earth and prevents the gods from receiving mankind's sacrificial smoke: the latter is diverted to the birds, the former rulers of the world. Talks take place, and a compromise is reached between Peithetairos, Euelpides and the birds on the one hand and the gods on the other hand. The gods give Peithetairos Basileia, the embodiment of heavenly rule, as his wife. A messenger announces the arrival of the new Zeus with his heavenly bride. The limits of the gods' world have fallen:

MESSENGER - Oh, you, whose unbounded happiness I cannot express in words, thrice happy race of airy birds, receive your king in your fortunate dwellings. More brilliant than the brightest star that illumes the earth, he is approaching his glittering golden palace; the sun itself does not shine with more dazzling glory. He is entering with his bride at his side, whose beauty no human tongue can express; in his hand he brandishes the lightning, the winged shaft of Zeus; perfumes of unspeakable sweetness pervade the ethereal realms. 'Tis a glorious spectacle to see the clouds of incense wafting in light whirlwinds before the breath of the Zephyr! But here he is himself. Divine Muse! let thy sacred lips begin with songs of happy omen.

CHORUS - Fall back! to the right! to the left! advance! Fly around this happy mortal, whom Fortune loads with her blessings. Oh! Oh! what grace! what beauty! Oh, marriage so auspicious for our city! All honour to this man! 'tis through him that the birds are called to such glorious destinies. Let your nuptial hymns, your nuptial songs, greet him and his Basileia! 'Twas in the midst of such festivities that the Fates formerly united Olympian Here to the King who governs the gods from the summit of his inaccessible throne. Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus! Rosy Eros with the golden wings held the reins and guided the chariot; 'twas he, who presided over the union of Zeus and the fortunate Here. Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus![8]

[8] From *Aristophanes* cit.

Now the arrogant Athenian appears with Basileia in his chariot, suspended in the air by a theater-machine. He is equipped with wings. His wedding has been compared by the chorus with that of Zeus and Hera. He holds the lightning of the Olympian king of the gods in his hand. And he demands—with the most uninhibited impertinence—that the birds sing the praises of thunder and lightning, that is of him as the new, true Zeus.

PEITHETAIROS - I am delighted with your songs, I applaud your verses. Now celebrate the thunder that shakes the earth, the flaming lightning of Zeus and the terrible flashing thunderbolt.

CHORUS - Oh, thou golden flash of the lightning! oh, ye divine shafts of flame, that Zeus has hitherto shot forth! Oh, ye rolling thunders, that bring down the rain! 'Tis by the order of *our* king that ye shall now stagger the earth! Oh, Hymen! 'tis through thee that he commands the universe and that he makes Basileia, whom he has robbed from Zeus, take her seat at his side. Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus!

PEITHETAIROS - Let all the winged tribes of our fellow-citizens follow the bridal couple to the palace of Zeus and to the nuptial couch! Stretch forth your hands, my dear wife! Take hold of me by my wings and let us dance; I am going to lift you up and carry you through the air.[9]

VII

The political side of the Old Comedy has been intentionally relegated to the background. We should be aware of how much other, essential material there is in addition, and of how Dionysus triumphs precisely in this other material. This whole world in disguise—disguised as gods, men, animals—is truly something that only Hofmannsthal was capable of rendering worthily in a few words: "and dancing, carried away by the most uninhibited gestures... like a merry-go-round whipped into a frenzy by wild children." We may also be reminded of the merry-go-round of the Dionysiac child, with which it played in the orphic myth—although Hofmannsthal probably was not. His phenomenological description developed this image of its own accord. But comedy was clearly connected with the birthday of Dionysus. Both everything fairy-tale-like and the most uninhibited longing for the return of the Golden Age were proper on that day. One can easily become dizzy with the dance of such figures before one's eyes,

[9] From *Aristophanes* cit.

with such ideas in one's head. But what happened in Athens when not only politics and history were silent, but the magic of the Dionysiac merry-go-round as well, when the original ecstasy of the *komos* and the liveliness of the best comedies seemed to burst and flow away? When, instead of an historically significant period, only a holiday remained? What did the comic poets undertake? It could have ended in the crudest phenomena—as it sometimes seems to do in the Middle Comedies. It is time now to look more closely at Menander.

Before turning to the new find, the complete play, let us look at a scene from a partially preserved Menander comedy, *The Arbitration.* We come face to face here with characters that are almost familiar: a woman with a small child, similar to the Dionysiac woman on a vase representing the celebration of the Lenaea in the shrine. This, however, is a simple charcoal-burner's wife. To one side of her stands the charcoal-burner, to the other a shepherd. They have come into the village from a less civilized part of Attica and are quarreling in the street.

CHARCOAL-BURNER - You're afraid of a fair trial.
SHEPHERD - It's a put-up game of yours, curse you..
CHAR. - You've no right to keep what's not yours. We must get someone to arbitrate.
SHEP. - I'm willing; let's argue it out.
CHAR. - Who's to decide it?
SHEP. - Anyone will do for me. It serves me right though. Why did I give you anything?
CHAR. - How about that man? Does he suit you as a judge?
SHEP. - Yes, good luck to it.[10]

Smikrines, a wealthy man who comes down the street, has no idea yet that the child carried by the charcoal-burner's wife is his own grandchild, the reason for the quarrel and indeed separation between his daughter and her husband. Nor do the quarreling parties realize this as they address him.

CHAR. - If you please, sir, could you spare us a minute?
SMIK. - You? What for?
CHAR. - We have a disagreement about something.

[10] From *Greek Literature in Translation,* ed. by Whitney J. Oates and Charles T. Murphy, New York, Longmans, Green and Co.

SMIK. - Well, what's that to me?

CHAR. - We are looking for someone to decide it impartially. So if nothing prevents, do settle our dispute.

SMIK. - Confound the rascals. Do you mean to say that you go about arguing cases, you fellows in goatskins?

CHAR. - Suppose we do. It won't take long, and it's no trouble to understand the case. Grant the favour, sir. Don't be contemptuous, please. Justice should rule at every moment, everywhere. Whoever happens to come along should make this cause his own concern, for it's a common interest that touches all men's lives.

SHEP. I've got quite an orator on my hands. Why did I give him anything?

SMIK. - Well, tell me. Will you abide by my decision?

CHAR. - Absolutely.

SMIK. - I'll hear the case. Why shouldn't I? (*To the Shepherd*) You speak first, you that aren't saying anything.

SHEP. - I'll go back a bit first—not just my dealings with this fellow—so you'll understand the transaction. In the scrubland not far from here I was watching my flocks, sir, perhaps a month ago today, all by myself, when I found a baby left deserted there with a necklace and some such trinkets as these.

CHAR. - The dispute is about them.

SHEP. - He won't let me speak.

SMIK. - If you interrupt, I'll take my stick to you.

SHEP. - And serve him right, too.

SMIK. - Go on.

SHEP. - I will. I picked it up and went back home with it and was going to raise it. That's what I intended then. In the night, though, like every one else, I thought it over to myself and argued it out: "Why should I bring up a baby and have all that trouble? Where am I going to get all that money to spend? What do I want with all that worry?" That's the state I was in. Early next morning I was tending my flock again, when along came this fellow, he's a charcoal-burner, to this same spot to get out stumps there. He had made friends with me before that. So we got talking together and he saw that I was gloomy and said: "Why to thoughtful, Davus?" "Why indeed, said I, I meddle with what doesn't concern me." So I tell him what had happened, how I found the baby and how I picked it up. And he broke in at once, before I had finished my story, and began entreating me: "As you hope for luck, Davus, he kept saying every other thing, do give me the baby, as you hope for fortune, as you hope for freedom. I've a wife, you see, says he, and she had a baby, but it died." Meaning this woman who is here now with the child. Did you entreat me, Syriscus?

CHAR. - I admit it.

SHEP. - He spent the whole day at it. Finally I yielded to his coaxing and teasing and promised him the child and he went off wishing me a million blessings. When he took it too, he kissed my hands. Didn't you?

CHAR. - Yes, I did.

SHEP. - He took himself off. Just now he and his wife happened on me and all of a sudden he claims the objects that I found with the child—it was some small matters, tomfoolery, nothing really—and says he's cheated because I don't consent and lay claim to them myself. I say, though, that he ought to be thankful for the share he did get by his entreaties. Though I don't give him all

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of it, that's no reason why I should have to stand examination. Even if he had found it while we were going about together and it had been a case of share-your-luck, why he would have got part and I the rest. But I was alone when I found it and you weren't even there and yet you think you ought to have all and I nothing.

To conclude, I have given you something of mine. If you are satisfied with it, you may still keep it; but if you aren't satisfied and have changed your mind, then give it back again to me and take neither more nor less than your due. But for you to have the whole business, part with my consent, the rest forced from, is not fair. That's all I have to say.

CHAR. - Is that all?

SMIK. - Didn't you hear what he said? He has finished.

CHAR. - Good. Then I'll take my turn. He was alone when he found the baby. He is right about everything that he has mentioned. The facts are as stated, sir. I dispute nothing. I got the child from him by entreating and imploring him. For his story is true.

Information came to me from a certain shepherd that he had been talking to, one of his fellow-workmen, to the effect that he had also found at the same time some trinkets. To claim these has come, sir, in person, my client here. Give me the child, wife. This infant claims from you his necklace and his tokens.[11]

The charcoal-burner stands there now, with the child in his arms, and demands its rights. And the child will get them, together with his parents, who will be reconciled after new, exciting misunderstandings on all sides.

In another Menander play, *The Woman of Samos*, the father of Moschion, the romantic hero of the comedy, comes to suspect that all is not as it seems with the child that was supposedly born to his Samian mistress in his house. In this case, too, things are not so bad, and it will turn out that the infant is the grandchild of the speaker, born to his son's future wife from the house next door. But let us listen to him. He comes out on to the street and says to the audience:

Something odd just happened to me, that I can't make head nor tail of yet. As soon as I was in the house, since I was all intent on getting ready for the wedding, I merely mentioned the situation to the household, and gave orders to get ready what ever would be needed, clean up, bake cakes, have the rites in order. It was all promptly under way, you may be sure, but the fact that they were hurrying operations produced some confusion, naturally. There was the baby, screaming on a couch, where they had tossed it out of the way, and at the same time they kept shouting: "Give me some flour, water, olive oil, charcoal." Now

[11] *Ibid.*

I was handing out one thing and another myself and lending a hand, so, as it happened, I had gone into the pantry and was sorting out a number of things and investigating, so that I didn't come straight out again at once.

In the meantime, however, down from the floor above comes a woman into the room in front of the pantry. For there happens to be a weaving-room, which you must pass through either to get upstairs or into the pantry. Moschion's nurse the woman was, she's an old woman, who has been a slave of mine, but has her freedom now. So when she saw the bab screaming unattended to, since she had no idea that I was in there, she thought it was quite safe to speak freely and went to it. Then after she had made the usual remarks: "Darling baby! Precious blessing! But where's its mamma?" she kissed it and walked up and down with it until it stopped crying. Then she exclaimed: "Oh my goodness, only day before yesterday Moschion himself was like that and I used to nurse and fondle him; and now here's a babe of his for someone else to nurse (and see grow up to be a father...)." Just then a slave girl ran in from outside and the old woman said to her: "Give the baby his bath, for goodness' sake. What does it mean? Don't you look after the baby when his father's married?" Then the girl says quickly: "Confound you, how loud you're talking! The master's in there!" "Indeed he isn't? Where?" "In the pantry." Then raising her voice: "The mistress wants you, nurse. Move and be quick about it. He hasn't heard you. That's very lucky." And the old woman exclaiming: "Heaven help me, how I chatter!" took herself off somewhere or other.

I meanwhile sauntered out very quietly, just the way you saw me come from the house, as if I had heard nothing and hadn't noticed a thing. As I came along, however, I took note that it was the girl from Samos herself who had it and was suckling it, so one thing's certain, it's her baby, but who the father is, whether it's mine or—But I refuse to pronounce the words to you, gentlemen, or to think them either. I simply state the case and report what I heard myself without upraiding anyone for the present. I can bear witness, before God I can, that the boy has always behaved himself up to now, and has recognized his duty to me perfectly. On the other hand, though, when I realize that the words were spoken, in the first place, by his old nurse, and, in the second place, that she didn't mean me to hear; and then when I call to mind how the woman fondled it and insisted on keeping it in spite of me, I'm absolutely furious.[12]

VIII

Such scenes, which are characteristic of the New Comedy, show how literally my thesis is to be taken, that in this stage of Attic comedy much of the action is nothing more than *to-do about a child*. Other Menander plays could be cited as well in support of this thesis. The exposed child, whose fate it is to be found again, became an almost irritatingly consistent motif of the genre. The

[12] From Menander, *Three Plays*, trans. by L. A. Post, New York, E. P. Dutton and Company.

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charcoal-burner in *The Arbitration* even invokes mythical examples of such action in the tragedies. However, the poet did not wish to stress the likelihood of his invention. Given his audience, that was not necessary. The dreadful custom of disposing of unwanted children in this way, without incurring a penalty, was as accepted fact of life. It did not take an uninhibited imagination to substitute human foundlings for the children of heroes, or for the little Dionysus himself—to conventionalize the divine child, to secularize the mythological theme. This is the end of *the universality of comic lack of inhibition.* In its place Menander puts *the universality of philanthropy*, of good will toward men. This appears inseparably bound to the Dionysiac aura, and effects *the transfiguration of comedy.*

The "Dyskolos," the type described by the newly found and complete play, is by no means inhuman in every respect. He is the non Dionysiac human—the human being without Dionysus—and therefore so difficult and annoying to himself and others. He detests above all those who don't work as hard as he does. He is one of those peasants who is capable of cultivating the rocky ground near Phyle, in the high mountains north of Athens. Menander himself stresses this repeatedly, as if he wanted to prevent us from relating the character of his hero to that of Timon, the proverbial misanthrope, or to a philosophical handbook of characterology. "A man thrice defeated by his fate!" the urban slave says of him. "What a life he leads! He is a real Attic peasant: he has to struggle with the rocky ground that produces nothing but thyme and sage!" His first action, even before entering onto the stage, is to throw stones at a servant who was sent to him with the best intentions—as did the wild charcoal-burners in Aristophanes' *Acharnians.*

His neighbors, nonetheless, are gods: Pan and the nymphs who are worshipped together in a cave. Votive reliefs of indescribable charm were recently found in just such a grotto on the Pentelikon. There could be very Dionysiac goings-on in such a cave dedicated to Pan, and so there were in Menander's play. It is Pan who causes the action and is present behind it: present in the ecstatic aura which he spreads about him and in the dreams which he sends. In the prologue to the comedy, he himself tells how he took pity on the daughter of this inhuman man, who had

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been so harshly brought up by him. While a rich young man was hunting in the vicinity and the girl was affectionately praying to the nymphs, Pan caused the young man to fall in love with her—indeed, Pan possessed him as only he could. He also saw to it that the entire rich family came out to make a sacrifice and feast in the grotto. The mother was a pious lady, who liked to make sacrifices all over the neighborhood; and it was she who dreamed that her son had been taken prisoner by Pan.

The arrival of the possessed young man's family greatly simplifies the development of the story. The young man has already made friends with the girl's half-brother, who is prepared to accept him as a brother-in-law. But it is precisely the presence of so many people in the neighborhood that makes the father even more difficult. He looks at the procession of women and servants who are accompanying the rich lady to the sacrifical feast, and grumbles:

> These nymphs are a damned nuisance. It'd be a good idea to take down my house and build another one as far away from here as I can. When these thieving rogues sacrifice, they bring their boxes and their bottles not to serve the gods but to serve themselves. Their religion extends as far as the incense and the sacrificial cakes, that's all, the gods do get that, once it's been put on the fire. But as for the rest, well, it's the end of the backbone and the guts that they set aside for the gods—just because they can't eat it themselves. And all the rest they swill down like pigs.[13].

He is the enemy of the feast; not only, however, because of his greed but because of his harshness: he is stingy because of his envy. It is a hopeless matter for a young man to whom working with a hoe, if he were to try it, would be a comic martyrdom, to ask him for anything, and most of all his daughter. The stingy man refuses to lend a post to the sacrificers, who had left theirs at home. When his old maidservant drops first a pail and then a hoe into the well, he goes down into it personally at the risk of his life to fetch them out. In this way the insuperable problem of character is solved—character being for Menander, as for Heraclitus, the decisive god within man himself. The old man would have drowned if he had not been pulled out by his stepson. Thus

[13] From Menander, *Dyskolos*, trans. by W. G. Arnott, London, The Athlone Press.

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comes, for him as for Menander's other heroes, the great moment of *metanoia*: conversion to humanity, inasmuch as this is possible at all, given his character. He sits there and talks to his family, whom he had tormented or even, as in the case of his wife and her son, his savior, rejected altogether:

> I want to explain to you why I chose my present mode of life. Now don't fidget and fret—none of you's going to make me change it, you'll just have to put up which it. Perhaps I made one mistake, when I thought I was the one man in the whole, wide world who could be independent, who needed no assistance from anyone else. And now I've discovered that death can strike swiftly and without warning. I didn't realise that before. Everybody ought to have a man standing by, to help in case of an emergency. You know, it was a violent moral shock to me, to see the way that people lived their lives, the petty calculations they made to ensure a petty profit. It made me think that there was no kindness from man to man on this earth. That was the barrier between myself and others. But one man, and one man alone—that's Gorgias here—has just about managed to prove me wrong, by an action that shows a truly noble character. I was the man who never let him come near my door, I never helped him in any way. I never talked to him, never said "Good morning," and yet, in spite of all this, he was decent enough to rescue me. He could have acted quite differently, he could have justified himself by saying: "You won't let me come near you; all right, then, I'm not coming. You've never done anything for us; well, I won't do anything for you, either." So what's to be done about it? Well, young man, I may have a few more years to live, or I may die quite soon. Probably the latter: I may be pretty badly injured. But in either case, I make you my legal heir. Everything that I possess is yours. This daughter of mine I put in your care. Find her a husband, will you; for even if I recover again, I shan't be able to find anyone myself. Nobody will ever satisfy me. And just let me live in the way I desire. You take all the rest of my property, and act as you think fit. God willing, you're a sensible lad, and it's only natural that you should protect and care for your sister. Now split my estate into two halves. Reserve one half as her dowry, and take the other for yourself: you can look after your mother and myself with that.
>
> Now, daughter, help me to lie down. I don't hold with people saying more than they need; but there is just one thing more, my child, that I'd like you to know. I just want to say a few things to you about life, and the way people behave. You know, if we were all kind to one another, there'd be no need for law courts, there'd be no arresting people and putting them into prison, and there would be no more war. Everyone would have his little bit, and be content. But maybe you like modern ways better? Well, live in that way, then! This difficult and bad-tempered old man will soon be out of the way.[14]

Thus the mild light of the poet's philanthropy falls even on this insupportable character. Everything is as easy as in a simple

[14] *Ibid.*

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Christmas play. Preparations are made for two weddings. For not only does the daughter get the husband whom Pan chose for her, but her brother marries her fiance's sister. But one thing is not spared the all too sober, broken old man who knows himself so well. He would like to absent himself from the feast that unites the two families in the holy grotto. The cook and the servants, all of whom he had always insulted, drag him out of the house. A violent final scene? By no means! To the accompaniment of flutes and dancing the nondionysiac man is dragged to the celebration in the grotto, where "the old winegod and the rustling nymphs—wine and water—go to be mixed." The care-ridden old man is defeated. Triumph, triumph!

The song of victory is sung on stage. It is a special, new kind of triumph for Dionysus: the triumph of his philanthropy in the New Comedy which reaches its highest point with Menander. This philanthropy was "comic" inasmuch as, even in this newly serious form of comedy, man was not a tragic figure: not a hero, for whose fate one wept, but always *a slightly comic figure*, from whom one could derive amusement—cheerful and relaxed, as one should be on the birthday of Dionysus.

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