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## Cratinus' Pytine and the Construction of the Comic Self

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## Cratinus' Pytine and the Construction of the Comic Self

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# THE RIVALS OF ARISTOPHANES

Studies in Athenian Old Comedy

edited by  
David Harvey  
and  
John Wilkins

With a foreword by Kenneth Dover

*Illustrations by Myfanwy Tristram*

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*Frontispiece.* Four terracottas of comic actors  
Courtesy British Museum.

1 *Mon.* A(ttic) T(erracotta) 9b (p. 46); BM 1865.7–20.37. Old nurse in a *himation* (mantle), holding a baby on her arm. The child is swaddled, and wears a pointed cap. Early 4th cent.; from Athens (?); height 7.5 cm.

2 *Mon.* AT 26b (p. 69); BM 1842.7–28.752. Herakles, cross-legged, with club, lionskin, bow and quiver. He wears a dotted *chiton* (tunic) and looped phallos; same mask as A. Early 4th cent.; from Melos; height 9 cm. From a mythological burlesque? (see Bowie in this volume, pp. 319–24).

3 *Mon.* AT 10c (p. 47); BM 1907.5–18.7. Woman hiding her face with her *himation*. Early 4th cent.; provenance unknown; height 9.5 cm.

4 *Mon.* AT 6b (p. 43); BM 1880.11–13.3. Traveller wearing cloak and *pilos* (pointed felt cap), carrying flask and basket. Looped phallos; same mask as B. He has a 'slightly aggressive attitude' (Green & Handley 60). Early 4th cent. from Tanagra (?); height 9 cm.

### Chapter 3

## CRATINUS' *PYTINE* AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE COMIC SELF

*Ralph M. Rosen*

One of the most continually engaging problems in the study of Old Comedy is the deployment of the poet's own voice in his plays. Comic genres across many cultures and periods, of course, have a tendency to encourage the author to pretend that he or she is breaking a fictive illusion and establishing some sort of personal relationship with the audience. Such authors may cajole or abuse their audience, or collude with them against imagined threats from competitors. Often they claim to be revealing actual details of their own autobiography, in an attempt to deceive the audience into thinking that the reality before them – whether it be on a stage, in a text, or on a screen – corresponds to a lived, 'historical' reality. To a certain extent, as has often been pointed out, all literature strives for this effect.<sup>1</sup> But the moment the figure of an author intrudes explicitly into a work, the usual criteria for establishing the line between literary artifice and lived reality break down: suddenly a figure we know to exist in real life, the very individual responsible for the work in front of us, is playing a role within a context we know to be fictive. This tension between an author's autobiographical claims and a work's fictionality can be extremely disorienting for an audience in its attempt to construe literary meaning. If the ruse succeeds, the audience will have no choice but to conclude that the author must have had good reason to 'depart' from the fictionality of the work and communicate a meaning that can somehow be separated from the work itself.

Old Comedy, of course, is famous for teasing its audience in just these ways. Of the various means by which comic dramatists could play out their relationships (or more accurately, the *claim* to a relationship) with an audience, the parabasis was surely the most sustained and overt. The parabasis, after all, was that moment in the play in which the audience could count on catching something of the poet's own voice, even if only obliquely through the mouth of the chorus leader. In the case of Aristophanes, virtually an entire biography, purporting to be historical, has accreted to the poet over the centuries on the basis of his parabases. As responsible scholars we remind ourselves that however autobiographical the parabases may appear, they still remain poetic creations composed for a dramatic competition, and delivered by fictional characters

decked out in masks and costumes. Nevertheless, it is fair to assume that most scholars of Old Comedy, when all is said and done, believe that they have at least a minimal handle on some real details of Aristophanes' life: he was bald, he hated Cleon, and was even prosecuted by him after *Babylonians* in 427, he was angry at the Athenians for rejecting the original version of *Clouds*, and so on.<sup>2</sup>

Even scholars who are well aware of the pitfalls of unreflective biographical criticism seem to make an exception when it comes to Aristophanes. A footnote in Thomas Hubbard's recent book on the Aristophanic parabasis illustrates this tension well: '[The] sch[olia on] *Ach.* 378 (and Sch. *Vesp.* 1284) speak of a "lawsuit" Cleon brought against the poet; but it is quite clear that this is merely an inference from this text and from the parabasis' (1991, 46 n. 18). But Hubbard then says that, despite the evident fact that the two scholia did not have access to a historical source (they disagree even on who the defendant was – the poet or his producer, Callistratus), it is 'not right to reject the historical reality of this conflict completely... The insistent repetition of this allusion, in both Dicaeopolis' speeches *qua* comic poet and in the poet's parabolic self-defence, indicate that it must have had some basis in reality.' Now, Cleon may very well have taken Aristophanes to court; but, as even Hubbard implies, we will never know this from the text itself, and even Hubbard's compromise solution – that the allusions to a lawsuit must have had 'some basis in reality' – suggests to me, at least, that we should contextualize all Aristophanic self-reference first and foremost as a function of his chosen literary genre.<sup>3</sup> If a document surfaced which affirmed that Cleon in fact prosecuted Aristophanes, grateful as we might be for another shred of historical information from the period, it would have little effect on how we understand Aristophanic poetics. The play, after all, will always retain its status as a literary work, and any aspects of it that may be demonstrably 'autobiographical' cannot suddenly transform it into an ingenuous and unmediated narrative of personal history.

The main reason why scholars have always been tempted to extract autobiography from Aristophanes is because the subjective 'I' of the comic dramatist (or those said to represent that 'I', such as a chorus leader) is not easily assimilated into a plot that is nearly always so clearly fictional, so *unreal* to begin with. The parabasis itself (when there is one) surely does much to distinguish itself, as a formally self-referential device, from a plot to which it often appears only subtly, if at all, connected.<sup>4</sup> And when the poet surfaces in the play especially as a voice of satire or personal ridicule, his ultimate success is best gauged by how well he has convinced an audience that their own reality and the reality of the performed poet are coterminous.

The debate over Aristophanes' autobiographical voice has produced a wide range of opinion and interpretation among scholars over the years,<sup>5</sup> but even those who want to see the real Aristophanes behind a parabolic 'I' must confront the fact that not once in all the surviving plays does a character by that name

actually ever appear. Dicaeopolis in *Acharnians*, who has often been seen as a cipher for the poet, is about as close as we get.<sup>6</sup> The casual observer might conclude from this that Old Comedy simply did not allow the poet to place himself within his plots, and that any self-reference had to be oblique or mediated by the chorus. Certainly most of Aristophanes' comedies – with their parabases set off from the episodes by means of metrical signals and verbal cues<sup>7</sup> – are constructed in such a way as to highlight a line between a fictional plot and authorial intrusions. But in fact we do know of a comic play in which a character explicitly represents the poet, and whose very plot is alleged to enact details of the poet's own life, namely the *Pytine* ('Wine Flask') of Cratinus.

Cratinus' play, produced in 423 BC, is surely most famous for having upset Aristophanes when it defeated *Clouds* in competition that year, and the relatively few fragments that survive routinely surface in discussions of Aristophanes' literary rivalries.<sup>8</sup> *Pytine*, after all, was supposedly composed in reaction to Aristophanes' ribbing of Cratinus in the parabasis of *Knights* (lines 526–36), which appeared the year before in 424. Scholars have of course duly noted that *Pytine* portrays its author embroiled in a feud with a rival,<sup>9</sup> but virtually no one has fully realized the broad, and what I find to be rather remarkable, implications of the mere existence within Old Comedy of a play in which the *poet himself*, named and incarnated *as himself*, is the main focus, if not the actual protagonist, of the work.<sup>10</sup>

In what follows I shall argue that *Pytine* allows us a first-hand glimpse of how a comic poet might go about constructing a specifically *poetic* identity for himself, an identity that may or may not have a basis in autobiographical reality, but which develops primarily in accordance with generic expectations. What distinguishes *Pytine* from our extant Aristophanic corpus is the way in which Cratinus merges the autobiographical pretence with the plot itself: the 'voice of the poet' is no longer sharply demarcated from the fictionalized plot, as it so often is in Aristophanes, and as such it becomes easier for us to see the poet's role in the play as itself a fiction. This fictionalized self in *Pytine*, then, provides us with an excellent example of the way in which a writer of comedy can transform his own biography into comic material. As we shall see, the comic poet effects this not by dramatizing a transcript of his actual life – however comical it might in fact have been – but by subjecting himself to the same poeticizing treatment that he would accord to any other character in a comic plot.

However disingenuous and stylized a poet's self-presentation might be, he certainly wants to create the *illusion* that his actual autobiography is being played out on the stage. As we saw in the case of Aristophanes, it is often impossible to distinguish historical fact from poetic fiction. With *Pytine*, however, there can be no doubt that at least some of the details of plot and *dramatis personae* are fictional, and that Cratinus crafted the play in accordance with conventions that governed not only plot structure, but, more specifically, the very construction

of a comic self. This comic self, as I suggest, is a poetic role not limited to Old Comedy, but can be found in most Greco-Roman comic genres, as well as in many other literatures as well.

Although only twenty-four fragments of *Pytine* have reached us, a reasonably detailed summary of the plot exists in a scholion to Aristophanes *Knights* 400. The Lemma discussed by the scholiast is a passing joke about Cratinus in a choral passage of insults against the Paphlagonian in *Knights*:

ὅπερ μοι δοκεῖ παροξυνθεὶς ἐκεῖνος, καίτοι τοῦ ἀγωνίζεσθαι ἀποστάς καὶ συγγράφειν, πάλιν γράφει δρᾶμα, τὴν Πυτίνην, εἰς αὐτὸν τε καὶ τὴν μέθην, οἰκονομία τε κεχρημένον τοιαύτη. τὴν Κομφιδίαν ὁ Κρατίνος ἐπλάσατο αὐτοῦ εἶναι γυναῖκα καὶ ἀφίστασθαι τοῦ συνοικεσίου τοῦ σὺν αὐτῷ θέλειν, καὶ κακώσεως αὐτῷ δίκην λαγχάνειν, φίλους δὲ παρατύχοντας τοῦ Κρατίνου δεῖσθαι μηδὲν προπετὲς ποιῆσαι, καὶ τῆς ἔχθρας ἀνερωτᾶν τὴν αἰτίαν, τὴν δὲ μέμφεσθαι αὐτῷ ὅτι μὴ κομφοδοίη μηκέτι, σχολάζει δὲ τῇ μέθῃ.

(Schol. Ar. *Knights* 400 = Suda κ 2216 = K-A T ii [IV p.219])

Stung by this, I believe, although he had given up competing [at dramatic festivals] and writing, he wrote another play, the *Pytine*, against himself and his drunkenness, of which the plot was as follows: Cratinus represented Comedy as his wife; she wanted to divorce him, and was lodging a case against him for ill-treatment; Cratinus' friends turned up and urged him not to do anything rash, but to ask her why she hated him; she complained that he was no longer involved with Comedy, but was devoting himself to drunkenness [or Drunkenness].

From this passage we learn that the play was evidently a partial allegory in which Comedy herself became Cratinus' wife. Quite possibly, Drunkenness (*Methē*) too is allegorically figured, depending on whether or not one understands τῇ μέθῃ as a proper name. Most likely, as many have suggested, the 'friends' who 'happen along' formed the chorus (Runkel 1827; Meineke 1839–57, I.48). *Pytine* was performed in 423 BC, the year after Aristophanes' *Knights*, and it has long been assumed that Cratinus composed his play in response to the ridicule he suffered in the earlier play. Although the scholiast whom we have just quoted states that *Knights* 400 inspired Cratinus to compose his play, more recent commentators have pointed to the *parabasis* of *Knights*, where Aristophanes accuses his rival of drunkenness and senility (Sidwell 1995, 59–60; Luppe in this volume). In its broader context, this famous passage claims to chide the audience for its fickleness towards comic poets, specifically the way it tends to reject them when they become old. At lines 526–36 the chorus leader adduces Cratinus as an example of the way in which a once vigorous poet has now fallen into obscurity. The implication is supposed to be that Cratinus' current status is unjustified – the fault of an unappreciative audience – but obviously the joke is on Cratinus, who is accused of mental and physical dissolution, brought on by old age and alcoholism (Sidwell 1995, 58; Luppe):

νυνὶ δ' ὑμεῖς αὐτὸν ὀρῶντες παραληροῦντ' οὐκ ἐλεεῖτε,

ἐκπιπουσῶν τῶν ἡλέκτρων καὶ τοῦ τόνου οὐκέτ' ἐνότος  
τῶν θ' ἀρμονιῶν διαχασκουσῶν· ἀλλὰ γέρων ὧν περιέρρει,  
ὥσπερ Κοινᾶς, στέφανον μὲν ἔχων αὐτὸν, δίψη δ' ἀπολωλώς,  
ὄν χρῆν διὰ τὰς προτέρας νίκας πίνειν ἐν τῷ πρυτανεῖῳ,  
καὶ μὴ ληρεῖν, ἀλλὰ θεᾶσθαι λιπαρὸν παρὰ τῷ Διονύσῳ.

And now you take no pity on him, though you see him drivelling, with his pegs falling out, his tuning gone, and joints gaping; in his old age he wanders about, like Konnas 'wearing a garland old and sere, and all but dead with thirst', when in honour of his former victories he ought to be drinking in the Prytaneum [the state dining-hall], and instead of spouting drivel, should be sitting sleek-faced in the audience by the side of Dionysus. (trs. Sommerstein)

As Thomas Hubbard has recently said (1991, 75), 'When Aristophanes presumes to commiserate and wish for better treatment...he only calls further attention to Cratinus' descent into drink.' Hubbard and others are probably right, then, to conclude that when Cratinus composed *Pytine* the following year (423), he did so in reaction to the drubbing he received in *Knights* the year before.<sup>11</sup>

The extent to which Cratinus' *Pytine* was actually autobiographical, however, has not been investigated with much rigour. Despite the fact that the ridicule of Cratinus in *Knights* occurs in a highly formalized and conventional section of the play, the *parabasis* (see n. 7 above), and that it forms part of a larger passage dealing with comic history and literary rivals, scholars have routinely assumed that Cratinus was personally offended by the attacks in *Knights*, that he was at least *perceived* by his fellow citizens as an alcoholic, and that *Pytine* represents a genuine apology by the poet in the face of such perceptions. Malcolm Heath (1990, 151) provides the one admirable exception to this trend: '...I think we should be cautious of the sentimental image some have constructed of the burnt-out old poet pulling himself together for one last heroic effort before he died. In reality we know nothing about the end of Cratinus' career.' Heath, however, does not address the crucial question that arises from his repudiation of an autobiographical reading of *Pytine*, namely, *why* Aristophanes and Cratinus might have concocted as elaborate and sustained a relationship of rivalry as they did, and, further, why Cratinus might have portrayed himself in *Pytine* in the compromised position of a drunk, however 'reformed' he might have become by the play's end.<sup>12</sup>

It seems unlikely that we will ever know whether or not Cratinus was in fact prone to excessive drinking, or whether he had such a reputation beyond that promoted on the comic stage.<sup>13</sup> But even if it turned out that he did have such a problem, this fact would be of only marginal relevance to the *manner* in which Cratinus dramatized it in the theatre. For when we examine in detail exactly how Cratinus seems to have represented himself in *Pytine*, we shall almost certainly conclude that his primary concern in the play was literary rather than confessional or forensic.

The first indication that *Pytine* has little to do with the poet's real autobiography

emerges when we consider the play as a response to the passage in *Knights*. What was the nature of Cratinus' defence against Aristophanes' charges? Although we have very few fragments, the testimonia can augment our inferences about certain details of the play: first of all Cratinus gives himself a wife Kōmōidia, in itself a fascinating move fraught with implication and comic potential. Obviously the choice of such a wife, to begin with, signals that the play is concerned with a version of Cratinus' literary career. Being married to the woman who allegorizes the entire genre in which one composes is a humorously arrogant stroke, since it implies special privilege and perhaps insight into the essence of the form. Such an attitude of poetic accomplishment and superiority is, of course, familiar enough to us from Aristophanes, who often makes similar claims for himself: one thinks, for example, of the parabases of *Acharnians* and *Clouds*. But Cratinus quickly undermines his own claims to power and success with another comic topos. His wife Kōmōidia, it turns out, is threatening to sue him for mistreatment (*kakōsis*) and seeking a divorce. Clearly, this scenario is itself a rather half-hearted attempt at a genuine 'defence': it essentially admits that Cratinus has been neglecting his poetic duties, and even abandoning the source of his inspiration in favour of drink. The fragments seem to indicate that Kōmōidia herself played a major role in the play, and probably effectively attacked her wayward husband with as much *Schadenfreude* as Aristophanes had done the previous year. Fragments 193 and 194 must surely come from a passage that lays out Kōmōidia's complaint. Fr. 193 is terribly corrupt, but, like fr. 194, it too contrasts a Cratinus of the good old days with his current state of dissolution:<sup>14</sup>

ἀλλ' ἔπενατρέψαι βούλομαι εἰς τὸν λόγον·  
πρότερον ἐκεῖνος πρὸς ἑτέραν γυναῖκ' ἔχων·  
τὸν νοῦν, ἄκακός εἰποι πρὸς ἑτέραν· ἀλλ'  
ἅμα μὲν τὸ γῆρας, ἅμα δέ μοι δοκεῖ --  
τοῦδέ ποτ' αὐτοῦ πρότερον (fr. 193)

†But I want to return to the story†. Before, when this man doted on another woman, [at least] he †had nothing good† to say about the other woman; but now partly his old age, partly <his drinking?> seems...

γυνὴ δ' ἐκεῖνου πρότερον ἦ, νῦν δ' οὐκέτι. (fr. 194)

I used to be his wife, but not any longer now...

Fr. 195 suggests that Cratinus' drinking was part of the formal accusation:

νῦν δ' ἦν ἴδη Μενδαῖον ἠβῶντ' ἀρτίως  
οἰνίσκον, ἔπεται κάκολουθεῖ καὶ λέγει  
'οἶμ' ὡς ἀπαλὸς καὶ λευκός. ἄρ' οἶσει τρία;

But now, if he just sees a little bit of young Mendaeian wine, he follows it around and tags after it, and says, 'Wow! how soft and pale! Will it take three?'

Earlier commentators detected in these fragments the discourse of homosexual courtship, and some have supposed that the poet had left his wife for young boys: 'Will it/he take three?' could have a sexual connotation as well as a sympotic one ('Can it be diluted with three parts of water?'). If fr. 193 were not corrupt, it would surely be able to illuminate this question.<sup>15</sup> But whether it was women or boys that provided fodder for the joke about Cratinus' infidelity, his most crippling distraction seems to have been wine, as several other fragments corroborate (cf. frs. 196, 197, 199, 201, and 203). Indeed, fragment 199, one of the longest fragments of the play, is spoken by a character (possibly a member of the chorus) scheming to rehabilitate an alcoholic Cratinus:

πῶς τις αὐτόν, πῶς τις ἄν  
ἀπὸ τοῦ πότου παύσειε, τοῦ λίαν πότου;  
ἐγὼ δα· συντρίψω γὰρ αὐτοῦ τοὺς χοᾶς  
καὶ τοὺς καδίσκους συγκεραυνώσω σποδῶν  
καὶ τᾶλλα πάντ' ἀγγεῖα τὰ περὶ τὸν πότον,  
κούδ' ὀξύβαφον οἰνηρὸν ἔτι κεκτήσεται

How could anyone – how could anyone get him to stop his drinking? Well, I know what to do! I'll smash his pitchers, and pulverize his jugs like a lightning bolt, along with all the other vessels he's got for drinking; from now on, he won't have so much as a wine saucer to use...

At least at this point in the play, rather than building a case to counteract the image of himself as an old drunk, Cratinus is in fact playing up to the whole idea, raffishly appropriating all the negative qualities ascribed to him and refining them into a dramatic narrative with an autobiographical patina.

It is true, of course, that we have only a desperately few fragments of *Pytine*, and we must be cautious at every turn in reconstructing details of the play. Some might respond to my view of Cratinus' self-portrait in the play by supposing that he was presenting a commonly held negative opinion of himself expressly in order to counteract it with a rhetorical *tour de force* somewhere in the play. Many have imagined that the play included such a spirited response that would restore his credibility as a poet, and expose the passage in *Knights* as slanderous. Fragment 198 is often explained as a reaction to a speech of this sort:

ἄναξ Ἀπολλων, τῶν ἐπῶν τοῦ ρεύματος,  
καναχοῦσι πηγαί· δωδεκάκρουνον <τὸ> στόμα,  
Ἴλισσός ἐν τῇ φάρυγι. τί ἂν εἶποιμ' <ἔτι>;  
εἰ μὴ γὰρ ἐπιβύσει τις αὐτοῦ τὸ στόμα,  
5 ἅπαντα ταῦτα κατακλύσει ποιήμασιν.

Good God, what a flow of words!  
streams splattering, mouth twelve-spouted,  
Ilissos in his gullet. Words fail me!  
If someone doesn't shut his gob  
he'll flood the whole place with his poetry!

This passage, however, has such an unusual intertextual provenance that it would probably remain ambiguous even if we were to recover the complete play. Let us take a closer look at these lines. Fr. 198 has been culled from a scholiastic remark on the following lines from Aristophanes *Knights* (526–8):

εἶτα Κρατίνου μεμνημένος, ὃς πολλῶ ρεύσας ποτ' ἐπαίνω  
διὰ τῶν ἀφελῶν πεδίων ἔρρει, καὶ τῆς στάσεως παρασύρων  
ἐφόρει τὰς δρύς καὶ τὰς πλατάνους καὶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς προθελύμους·

Then he remembered Cratinus, who once, gushing with your lavish applause, used to flow through the broad plains of artlessness, and uproot oaks, plane trees and rivals, sweep them from their places and bear them downstream.  
(trs. Sommerstein)

The image of Cratinus here ‘gushing with your lavish applause’ reminded the scholiast of the lines now found in fr. 198, which also exploit the metaphor of the rushing stream to characterize Cratinus’ style. The scholiast makes the odd claim that *Aristophanes* borrowed the conceit from Cratinus:

δοκεῖ δέ μοι Ἀριστοφάνης ἀφ' ὧν εἶπε Κρατίνος περὶ αὐτοῦ μεγαληγορῶν, ἀπὸ τούτων καὶ αὐτὸς τὴν τροπὴν εἰληφέναι. ὁ γὰρ Κρατίνος οὕτω πῶς αὐτὸν ἐπήνεσεν ἐν τῇ Πυτίνῃ·

It seems to me that Aristophanes himself took the metaphor from the boastful things that Cratinus said about himself; for Cratinus praised himself in *Pytine* something like this...

*Pytine* was, of course, produced the year *after Knights*, so if the scholiast is correct that Aristophanes was alluding to Cratinus in *Knights* 526, then this must mean that Cratinus’ original boasting occurred in a play earlier than *Knights*. There is almost no scholarly comment on this little scholion, probably because it seems like such an obvious mistake (cf. Edmonds 1957–61, I. 87 note c). That is, the scholiast simply reversed the direction of influence: *first* came the *Knights* passage, *then Pytine*. But I am not entirely convinced that the scholiast necessarily implies that the boasting of Cratinus to which Aristophanes alludes was in fact the fragment from *Pytine* he proceeds to quote. The phrasing of the scholion is hardly, after all, unambiguous: he does not actually say that Aristophanes borrowed the river metaphor from *Pytine*; rather he says that Aristophanes adopted it from ‘boastful things that Cratinus said about himself’. These ‘things’ are not explicitly said to come from *Pytine*. The next sentence begins with an explanatory γάρ clause: ‘for Cratinus praised himself in *Pytine* something like this...’ Could it be, then, that the scholiast in fact knew of passages in Cratinus that predated *Knights* and *Pytine* in which Cratinus boasted of himself, and that *Pytine* is here simply cited as another example of Cratinus’ habit of self-praise? In other words, the scholiast might well be saying: ‘When Aristophanes spoke of Cratinus as a rushing stream in *Knights*, he adopted an image that Cratinus had already used in an earlier play

or plays – possibly as a kind of *sphragis* or signature conceit. A good example of the trope can be found in *Pytine* as well.’

The possibility that this is actually what the scholion means, while admittedly difficult to confirm, is at least worth pursuing, I think, especially since it might help resolve a nagging problem with fr. 198: why would Cratinus, in an effort to praise himself, employ a metaphor from Aristophanes that originally spoke negatively about him? Indeed, the very relationship between fr. 198 of *Pytine* and the Aristophanic passage in *Knights* to which it allegedly responds needs to be re-examined. Did, in short, the image of the rushing stream found in *Pytine* necessarily allude to *Knights* alone? Or did fr. 198 allude more pointedly to an earlier play by Cratinus in which he used the image? These questions have a direct bearing on whether we should understand fr. 198 in *Pytine* as part of a positive, self-congratulatory defence, or rather as humorous, possibly ironic self-deprecation – i.e., a further appropriation of Aristophanes’ negative characterization of Cratinus for comic purposes.

Related to these questions is a more fundamental one: if Cratinus employed this image in an earlier, now lost, play, as the scholiast suggests, was it there intended as completely positive? That is, did Cratinus really take pride in a style that he himself likened to the uncontrollable rush of a mountain stream? Aristophanes almost certainly regarded the metaphor as a backhanded compliment, not unlike the way in which Horace, in his *Satires*, compared Lucilius’ style to a muddy river (e.g. *Serm.* 1.4.21, 1.10.50): he admired Lucilius’ passion and power, but found his torrential style prolix and unrefined. The *Knights* passage certainly begins as if it is intended to pay homage to his older contemporary, but when Aristophanes begins to fixate on Cratinus’ drinking and old age, it is clear that the whole passage is really Aristophanic braggadocio humorously masquerading as literary history. Does Cratinus’ fragment 198, then, allude to this very passage in *Knights*, which was intended as a slam at Cratinus? Several possibilities remain open to us, and even though we are entering into the realm of speculation, I think it is worthwhile for us to lay them out, if only to illustrate the various intertextual strategies that both Aristophanes and Cratinus might have employed.

Kaibel remarks on fragment 198: ‘It is uncertain whether these words come from Comoedia or the chorus, in response to Cratinus’ defence.’<sup>16</sup> Kaibel’s instincts here seem sound: the lines almost certainly comment on some sort of poetic display by Cratinus. But, again, are they positive? abusive? or deliberately ambiguous? If, as the scholiast to *Knights* suggests, the metaphor of the rushing stream derives ultimately from Cratinus himself, who used it positively to describe his vigorous style, one might expect that by recycling it in *Pytine*, he is similarly orchestrating a positive spin on his style. But two factors seem to argue against this possibility. First of all, the passage in *Pytine* (fr. 198) cannot avoid being mediated by its link with the passage in *Knights*, which was so obviously critical of Cratinus; second, the expression εἰ μὴ γὰρ ἐπιβύσει



τις αὐτοῦ τὸ στόμα, 'if someone doesn't shut his gob', seems unlikely to be anything but pejorative. It is possible, therefore, that we have the following intertextual relationships:

(1) An original passage in an unknown play by Cratinus employing the stream metaphor to boast about his own style.

(2) A parody of that passage in Aristophanes' *Knights*, which converts the original context of praise into one of blame (although this blaming emerges from another layer of blame directed at the audience).

(3) When we arrive at Cratinus' *Pytine*, then, we see a parody of Aristophanes' parody of the original Cratinean passage. In *Pytine*, then, Cratinus parodies his own metaphor and distorts its original context of praise, and simultaneously parodies its appearance in Aristophanes.

What is remarkable about all this, is that within a play composed by Cratinus about Cratinus, we have a character who is made – again, by Cratinus – to criticize the style of a character playing Cratinus by alluding to a passage by his rival, Aristophanes, that also criticized Cratinus' style.<sup>17</sup> The irony is made all the more palpable, moreover, by the fact that the very rationale for Cratinus' play is supposed to lie in the poet's desire to detoxify the criticisms of Aristophanes.

Some might legitimately object that we have simply too little of *Pytine* to make much of the intertextual implications of fr. 198: even if it does criticize Cratinus, for example, there is a good chance that elsewhere in the play, the character playing Cratinus successfully repudiated that criticism and somehow demonstrated his true artistic distinction. This is entirely possible, and fragment 200 suggests, in fact, that Cratinus was made at some point to 'come to his senses' and perhaps repent of his past unsavoury ways:

ἀτὰρ ἐννοοῦμαι δῆτα τὰς μοχθηρίας  
τῆς ἡλιθιότητος τῆς ἐμῆς.

σκαλιότητος Bergk ἡπιότητος Cobet alii alia

...and now I'm aware of the wickedness of my foolish behavior...

Yet even if in the end Cratinus transforms himself just as Demos does at the end of *Knights* (cf. line 1355: αἰσχύνομαι τοι ταῖς πρότερον ἀμαρτίαις, 'You know, I'm really ashamed of my former errors'), nothing can alter the fact that along the way Cratinus will have had himself described on stage by various characters in deliberately unfavorable (and no doubt highly comic) ways: as a kind of vaudeville drunk, a delinquent husband and probably a washed-up poet.

Without a context, of course, it is difficult to say what fr. 200 indicates. It could even have been spoken by a submissive and repentant *Kōmōidia*, after all, after deciding to be more tolerant of her wayward husband. In fact, there remains the distinct possibility that Cratinus ended up defending himself by actually revelling in his inebriated, rakish role. Fragment 203 certainly sounds

as if it might have been spoken by a loud and intoxicated poet who insists that his substance abuse must be tolerated in the name of high art:

ὕδωρ δὲ πίνων οὐδὲν ἄν τέκοις σοφόν.

you couldn't create anything clever if you drank water

Norwood certainly realized that this fragment really might call into question the notion of a repentant poet in the play. 'In a speech that was probably the culmination of the drama,' Norwood asserts rather over-zealously, 'Cratinus explained, or defended, or glorified in his new way of life: it contains the famous line: "but if he drinks water he can create nothing wise".' This fragment was first attributed to *Pytine* in 1824 by M.H.E. Meier, and even the sternest sceptic must admit that a play about a drunken comic poet is an obvious choice for it to occur. Unfortunately, however, the attribution is not secure: it certainly belongs somewhere in Cratinus, but in fact none of the testimonia specify *Pytine* as its original locus. On the other hand, I think there are good reasons for accepting both that the line belongs to *Pytine*, and that Cratinus spoke it.

The conceit itself, as Kassel-Austin indicate with copious parallels in their note on this fragment (see also Gudeman 1934, 308), became very popular in Greco-Roman literature, and Cratinus' version of it was always quite well-known. Horace, in fact, opens his *Epistles* 1.19 with a reference to Cratinus:

prisco si credis, Maecenas docte, Kratino,  
nulla placere diu nec vivere carmina possunt  
quae scribuntur aquae potioribus. ut male sanos  
adscriptis Liber Satyris Faunisque poetas,  
vina fere dulces oluerunt mane Camenae. (1-5)

Learned Maecenas, if you trust Cratinus of old, anything written by people who drink water can't possibly be any good or last very long. When Bacchus enlisted practically mad poets among his satyrs and fauns, the sweet Camenae [Muses] began to smell of wine in the morning.

It is unclear whether Horace draws the detail of *Liber* (i.e. Dionysus) from Cratinus,<sup>18</sup> but the specific association of Dionysus, god of wine, with successful poetry stretches back even further, to Archilochus fr. 120 West:

ὡς Διονύσου ἄνακτος καλὸν ἐξάρξαι μέλος  
οἶδα διθύραμβον οἶνω συγκεραυνωθείς φρένας

...since I know how to lead off the fine song of lord Dionysus, the dithyramb, when my mind has been thunderstruck with wine

Even in antiquity, Archilochus was thought to be an important literary influence on Cratinus: Cratinus' comedy entitled *Archilochi*, which almost certainly concerned matters of poetic style, certainly suggested as much.<sup>19</sup> It seems likely, therefore, that no matter who spoke fr. 203 in Cratinus, it alluded to the

Archilochean fragment, which itself can be construed as a defence of a poet drinking on the job.

In the case of the Archilochus fragment, it seems very likely that the poet refers to *his own* compositional habits. Callimachus at any rate thought as much when he referred to that 'proem of a *wine-struck Archilochus*' in fr. 544 Pfeiffer (τοῦ < - > μεθυπλήγος φροίμιον Ἀρχιλόχου). If Cratinus adopted the conceit with the Archilochean precedent in mind, it seems most appropriate that he would retain its primary force as a *self-defence*; and where other than in *Pytine* would Cratinus have the best opportunity to portray *himself* as an inspired, if tipsy, poet in need of apologetic rhetoric? If fr. 203 *does* belong in Cratinus' *Pytine*, therefore, and if within that play it was spoken by Cratinus himself as part of a justification of his bibulous tendencies, surely a link with Archilochus would serve to tailor his drinking to his particular style: like Archilochus, in other words, Cratinus adopted a vigorous, antagonistic, sometimes vituperative style – like the rushing stream of fr. 198 – and even Archilochus (so Cratinus may have maintained) could only sustain it by altering his mental state with alcohol.

If Cratinus did remain defiant until the end of the play, asserting that wine was essential for his success as a comic poet, how can we reconcile this attitude with the fact that *Kōmōidia* (i.e. an allegory for his chosen genre) felt abandoned by a poet-husband given over to drink? What we know of the plot, after all, implies that excessive drinking caused Cratinus to abandon comedy, or at least that it adversely affected the quality of his comedy. If the point of the play is to defend his literary merit, how would the poet end up defending the very vice that was the alleged cause of his demise? Horace's *Epistle* 1.19, cited above, provides a clue to a possible answer. The opening of that poem, as we saw, illustrates the Cratinean idea that good poetry can only come from inebriated poets. But at line 10, Horace complains that once other poets saw him endorsing this conceit, as, for example, in some of his *Odes*, they themselves began to take up drinking, and did so excessively:

hoc simul edixi, non cessavere poetae  
nocturno certare mero, putere diurno.  
exiguacque togae simulet textore Catonem,  
virtutemne representet moresque Catonis? (10–14)

As soon as I said this, poets couldn't stop their nocturnal drinking competitions, and they smelled like wine all day long. Do you think one can just put on Cato's modest cloak and suddenly have his virtue and moral character?

The poetasters whom Horace chastises here are those who take *literally* what he, at least in part, regarded as a metaphor useful for describing the altered mental state from which great poetry seems to arise. Drinking oneself silly, in other words, might or might not inspire a great poet to compose great poetry, but it will never, according to Horace, turn a mediocre poet into a great one. Cratinus' *Pytine*, then, may very well have ended with the poet making a similar sort of

distinction between a great poet like himself, who requires wine for inspiration, and bad poets who end up with nothing to show for their carousing except a hangover. Just as Aristophanes seems to revel in the role of the 'misunderstood poet' (a term I borrow from Hubbard 1991, 88–112), so might Cratinus also have faulted the audience – itself a trope of Old Comedy – for mistaking his high-minded love of wine for vulgar and meaningless boozing. At the end of *Pytine*, then, we might imagine a reconciliation between Cratinus and his estranged wife-cum-genre, *Kōmōidia*, in which the poet agreed to temper his drinking (without abandoning it), and his wife agreed that Cratinus' 'affair' with *Methē* was necessary for the continued 'productivity' of their own 'marriage'.

All speculation aside, I return to one incontrovertible and extraordinary fact: however the play ended, Cratinus portrayed himself throughout *Pytine* in a consistently unflattering light. As a so-called 'defence' or 'response' to serious personal attacks by Aristophanes the year before, the play is an obvious failure. But as a play in which the poet ironically exploited the enormous comic potential of an unsympathetic role that his rival (or rivals) had fabricated for him, it was clearly a success – its victory at the City Dionysia shows that at least the Athenians judged it so. In portraying himself in this way, Cratinus was manipulating his own autobiography in a manner entirely consistent with a whole range of comic and satirical traditions, in which the poet's 'I' often self-consciously asserted itself to its audience. Within the Greco-Roman tradition, Cratinus' oppressed, beleaguered and ultimately misunderstood persona was one that was adopted by poets working in a variety of comic genres from Archilochus to Juvenal. It was a complex and often subtle literary trope, usually functioning as a prolonged *captatio benevolentiae*, by means of which the poet enlists the sympathies of the audience in his valiant but comical struggle to assert his cosmic worth. The audience, in its turn, understands that the more abject and maladroit the poet makes himself, the more they laugh; and the harder they laugh, the greater the chance that the lowly poet will rise to the top.<sup>20</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gorgias' famous formulation (82 B23 DK) which locates the power of tragedy in its ability to deceive (ἀπατᾶν). For Gorgias, the audience that succumbs to poetic deception is the wiser for it (καὶ ὁ ἀπατηθεὶς σοφώτερος τοῦ μὴ ἀπατηθέντος).

<sup>2</sup> On the biographical tradition of Aristophanes see Lefkowitz 1981, 104–16; the testimonia, for what they are worth, are now collected in K-A III 2 pp. 1–17. Lefkowitz stresses that virtually all the details of Aristophanes' *vita* derive from his plays, though it is not her purpose to judge the veracity of the details. Just because a biographical item comes only from a text does not, of course, necessarily mean that it is false. Its appearance in a literary context, however, does complicate any attempt to judge its historical 'truth' or 'falseness'.

<sup>3</sup> On the alleged quarrel between Cleon and Aristophanes as a literary construction, see Rosen 1988, 59–82; cf. Carawan 1990. To say that the quarrel was a literary construction

does not, of course, necessarily imply that the quarrel never existed in real life; but it does imply that any historical reality it may have had is only casually relevant to its function within its dramatic context.

<sup>4</sup> The debate over the precise relationship between the parabasis and the rest of the play is vibrant and long-standing. The relevant bibliography is conveniently collected in Hubbard 1991, 16–40.

<sup>5</sup> Of the many scholars who have addressed this problem, some of the most influential have been Gomme 1938, de Ste. Croix 1975, 355–76 (Appendix XXIX), Halliwell 1984, Heath 1987, Foley 1988 and Hubbard 1991; cf. also Goldhill 1991, 188–201, and Rosen 1988.

<sup>6</sup> For discussion and bibliography, see Hubbard 1991, 45–53. Recent discussions include Bowie 1988, Olson 1991 (esp. 200 n. 1), Parker 1991 and Storey 1995, 388–92.

<sup>7</sup> On the formal aspects of the parabasis see Hubbard 1991, 23–7, with bibliography.

<sup>8</sup> Most recently, Sidwell 1995, discussed at greater length below; see also Luppe, this volume.

<sup>9</sup> Pieters 1946, 151 even suggested that Aristophanes and Eupolis were brought on stage in the play as well as Cratinus.

<sup>10</sup> In a discussion of Sidwell 1995, Storey (1996, 687) signals his intention to argue in a future work that Eupolis and Aristophanes figured as *dramatis personae* in Eupolis' *Autolykos*. The phenomenon of explicit self-referentiality may not, therefore, have been unique to *Pytine*, but it was surely infrequent, and so all the more significant when it does occur.

<sup>11</sup> Norwood (1931, 116) put it perhaps most passionately: 'Aristophanes spoke too soon. This stinging mixture of praise and pity brought the elderly genius to his feet... Next year at the City Dionysia he produced the *Wine-flask* and defeated his ambiguous eulogist with a play that boldly took up the imputations of Aristophanes.'

<sup>12</sup> Sidwell 1995, 65 thinks that the play 'resolve[d] the central issues, Cratinus' drunkenness and his inability to write', and suggests that Cratinus underwent some sort of 'rejuvenation' in the course of the play, analogous to that of Demos in *Knights*. This may well be the case (see p. 32 below), but the fact remains that in order for the poet's tribulations to be dramatized in *Pytine*, much of the play had to portray him in a decidedly unsavoury light.

<sup>13</sup> Sidwell 1995, 63 makes a good case that the allegations of drunkenness against Cratinus can be traced back to caricatures of the poet in a play (or plays) by Eupolis, pre-dating *Knights* and possibly *Acharnians*. All the more reason for us to wonder about Cratinus' motives in *Pytine* for taking upon himself the central features of this caricature.

<sup>14</sup> See Luppe 1968, who believes the first line belongs to the scholiast who quotes the fragment.

<sup>15</sup> We should remember, of course, that fr. 195 is not assigned to *Pytine* by name in the context from which it is culled (Ath. 1.29d). Runkel 1827, 84 first made the attribution.

<sup>16</sup> K-A IV 223 quote Kaibel's unpublished remark: '*audita Cratini defensione incertum Comoediae haec verba fuerint an chori.*' Cf. Norwood 1931, 116–17.

<sup>17</sup> There is, perhaps, a certain kinship between my argument and Keith Sidwell's general approach to the mechanisms of poetic rivalry in Old Comedy, advanced in a recent series of articles, esp. 1993 and 1995. Certainly in his article on *Pytine* (1995), he has argued convincingly that the portrait of Cratinus in *Pytine* relied on common perceptions about

the poet that predated the passage in *Knights*. On this point my argument corroborates his own. Whether Eupolis was the originator of Cratinus' caricature as a drunk, as Sidwell speculates (1995, 63), remains an open question. Sidwell's notion of 'paracomedy', however – a term he coins to refer to the technique of satirizing rivals 'by presenting his plays *as though by another poet*' (65) – seems to me overly schematic. Further, Sidwell seems to understand the rivalries of comic poets to be somewhat more 'serious' affairs, and more rigidly organized, than seems likely. As I suggest in this paper, it would be in the artistic interests of the poet to *revel* in a negative, abject self-portrait, rather than to try to engage in serious and systematic self-defence. Still, Sidwell seems justified in emphasizing the great extent to which comic playwrights played out their rivalries on the stage, whether through reciprocal allusion or parody.

<sup>18</sup> As Mayer 1994, 259 notes, the connection between Horace and Cratinus is more than superficial. *Epistle* 19, after all, like Cratinus' *Pytine*, was 'less concerned with inebriation than with independence and self-reliance in the face of criticism.' Cf. Nisbet & Hubbard 1978, 316–7 (on Hor. *Odes* 2.19) on the association between Dionysus and poetic inspiration.

<sup>19</sup> On the relationship between Cratinus and Archilochus, see Cratinus T 17 K-A (IV p. 116 = Platonius *Diff. char.* 1 in *Proleg. de Com.* II.6 ed. Koster), and the fragments of Cratinus' *Archilochi* (1–16) with the introductory note in K-A IV 121; for discussion, see Rosen 1988, 37–48.

<sup>20</sup> The persona of the author as underdog, often in the context of satire and/or transgressive poetics, has been studied profitably in other literary fields. Viewing the posture of beleaguement frequently adopted by poets of Old Comedy as a type of 'heroic abjection', for example, resolves many traditional questions about why poets might deprecate themselves in their work. As Bernstein 1992, 33 writes: 'In order to fascinate, the Abject Hero must first persuade us that in spite of the obvious unpleasantness – or, more accurately, exactly because of that unpleasantness – conversation with him will yield the benefit of an otherwise unavailable insight into both human nature and the workings of society.' By transforming, in other words, an author's abject stance into something empowering for the author, the audience need not 'explain away' his abjection as if it were an embarrassment. If we understand the dynamics of abjection in Old Comedy, we can spare ourselves anxiety over why, for example, Aristophanes might have highlighted so forcefully in the parabasis to *Clouds* the alleged shortcomings of the first version of the play. Sidwell 1995, 66 is right to claim in this case that the usual explanations of Aristophanic 'irony' require further explanation, but his own solution (that *Clouds* 'is being presented as though by a rival [i.e. Cratinus]') involves an elaborate effort to erase what I would argue to be an essential feature of a comic playwright's persona, namely its continual flirtation with comically exaggerated self-pity and abjection, all in the service of jocular and ironic self-aggrandizement.

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