

ZEUS ON A SEE-SAW: ADDITIONAL REMARKS ON COMIC THEMES*



ABSTRACT: The Paestan vase-painting of Zeus on a see-saw (from an unidentified mythological comedy) represents a type of comic scene known in ancient Greek theatre: erotic flirtation between two personages (an aspiring lover and his ladylove) is theatrically rendered through an actual game played by those two characters on stage. Parallels include Platon Comicus fr. 46 and 47 (Heracles playing *kottabos* with a prostitute), Antiphanes fr. 57 (possibly an enamoured god teaching the *kottabos* to young Aphrodite), Diphilos fr. 74 and Plautus, *Asinaria* 904ff. (hetaira and lovers playing dice). The Paestan picture parodies the traditional mythical image of Zeus weighing the fates or souls of opposed warriors in his divine scales, to determine the outcome of a fight (see e.g. *Iliad* 8.69–74, 22.209–213, Aeschylus' *Psychostasia*). In comic reversal, Zeus himself is now put “in the balance”, rising and falling on the see-saw like the heroes placed in the scales. Such laughable inversion of traditional mythical roles was a staple technique in ancient mythological comedies.

THE PAESTAN VASE BY ASTEAS newly published and discussed by Professor J. R. Green represents a very amusing snapshot from a comic play on a mythological theme.¹ Zeus and an ugly stocky woman are shown on a see-saw, alternately jumping up and down. As Professor Green demonstrates, this kind of game had clear erotic connotations in antiquity. The

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1. Generally on mythological comedy in ancient theatre, its main themes and comic techniques, see the monograph by F. Casolari, *Die Mythentravestie in der griechischen Komödie*, Münster 2003. See also my recent surveys: I. M. Konstantakos, “Comedy in the Fourth Century I: Mythological Burlesques”, in A. C. Scafuro - M. Fontaine (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Comedy*, Oxford/New York 2014, 160–180; id., “Από τον μύθο στο γέλιο: Θαυμαστά μοτίβα και κωμικές στρατηγικές στη μυθολογική κωμωδία”, in M. Tamiolaki (ed.), *Κωμικός Στέφανος: Νέες τάσεις στην έρευνα της αρχαίας ελληνικής κωμωδίας*, Rethymno 2014, 75–102. Regarding especially the illustrations of this comic genre in vase-paintings, see now D. Walsh, *Distorted Ideals in Greek Vase-Painting: The World of Mythological Burlesque*, Cambridge 2009.

scene thus appears to belong to a comedy treating one of Zeus' love adventures — a theme frequently exploited in the mythological burlesques of the late 5th and the 4th century. In the extant textual remains there is evidence or indications for twenty comic plays of this type, revolving around Zeus' amorous liaison either with a mortal woman (Alkmene, Danaë, Europe, Io, Kallisto, Leda) or with the beautiful boy Ganymede. The relevant mythical traditions obviously offered ample scope for comic treatment and hilarious effects. As a result, this sub-genre of mythological comedy was cultivated with relish by several playwrights, both top-ranking (Platon Comicus, Euboulos, Anaxandrides, Antiphanes) and lesser ones (Alkaios, Anaxilas, Amphis, Apollophanes, Sannyrion, Sophilos).²

Since the female character on the vase-painting wears the mask typical of the comic housewife, the corresponding figure must have been represented in the play as a married woman. This would seem to restrict her identity to two possibilities: either Alkmene or Leda; these are the only married ladies in the list of Zeus' ladyloves, in so far as the extant comic fragments are concerned. It is of course practically impossible to identify with certainty the particular play from which the illustrated snapshot stems. The few attested Greek comedies about Alkmene and Leda are surveyed by Professor Green: *Laconians or Leda* by Euboulos, *Tyndareos or Leda* by Sophilos, *Long Night* by Platon Comicus, *Amphitryon* by Archippos, and the Greek original of Plautus' *Amphitruo*. Apart from them, there may conceivably have been several other plays treating those same mythical stories, which did not happen to leave any trace in extant sources. Especially with regard to the vastly productive major poets of Middle Comedy, it must be kept in mind that we do not know the titles of many of their works. For example, Alexis is reported to have produced 245 plays, but only 138 of his titles are attested. Euboulos wrote a total of 104 comedies, of which only 58 titles are known. For Antiphanes the corresponding figures are 260 or 280 plays and 140 recorded titles. The same phenomenon occurs in connection with other celebrated dramatists (Anaxandrides, and later Diphilos and Philemon) and may be assumed to have also affected the arithmetical data pertaining to lesser representatives of 4th-century comic theatre.³ Overall, there must have

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2. On the comedies concerning Zeus' love affairs, see my discussion (I. M. Konstantakos, "Towards a Literary History of Comic Love", *C&M* 53 [2002] 156–167), also cited by Professor Green.
 3. Anaxandrides: 65 comedies reported in total, 40 attested titles. Philemon: 97 reported plays, 61 preserved titles. Diphilos: 100 reported comedies, 61 surviving titles. See in general I. M. Konstantakos, "Notes on the Chronology and Career of Antiphanes", *Eikasmos* 11 (2000) 177–178; id., "Conditions of Playwriting and the Comic Dram-

been hundreds of Middle Comedy plays whose titles are not preserved in our sources.⁴ These may have included further burlesque treatments of the myths about Leda and Alkmene.

Of course, the authors of mythological comedies were able to treat the mythical tradition with extreme liberty and make any imaginable change for comic effect. This becomes obvious with regard to Asteas' painting, whether the female figure is assumed to be Leda or Alkmene. In either case, Zeus approaches his ladylove in his own form, as indicated by the crown-like *polos* on his head; and this marks a clear divergence from the traditional mythical story. If the woman is Leda, Zeus has not been metamorphosed into a swan; if she is Alkmene, the god has not taken the form of her husband Amphitryon.⁵ Under those conditions, a comic writer might perhaps have thought even of turning a young virgin of the myth into a mature and ugly housewife, so as to exploit the humorous potential of such an unexpected and subversive transformation. Along this line of thinking, the woman depicted on Asteas' vase might conceivably correspond to a mythical maiden, such as Danaë, Io, or Europe, here amusingly transmuted into a portly comic matron.⁶

Attic mythological burlesques offer comparable examples. In Anaxilas' *Kalypso* the title-heroine or, in another interpretation, Kirke (in either case an ageless beauty according to traditional mythical conception)⁷ seems to have been portrayed as an old woman.⁸ This kind of comic travesty had very old roots in Athenian theatre, occurring already in 5th-century Old Come-

artist's Craft in the Fourth Century", *Logeion* 1 (2011) 158–159. E. Mensching ("Zur Produktivität der alten Komödie", *MH* 21 [1964] 15–49) has argued that the writers of Old Comedy must also have produced more plays than the total of their preserved titles; their unknown works presumably did not reach the Alexandrian library and hence were not available for excerption to Hellenistic and later authors.

4. The unknown titles of Antiphanes, Euboulos, Anaxandrides and Alexis (to take into account only the four greatest authors of the *Mese*) number together at least 298.
5. On the comic dramatist's practically limitless freedom vis-à-vis mythical data, cf. Konstantakos, "Towards a Literary History", 163–164.
6. The mask hanging in the background, as noted by Professor Green, is that of a mature male free citizen and may well represent another key character who featured in other scenes of the play. In a comedy about Zeus' adventure with Alkmene, that personage would doubtless be Amphitryon, the cuckolded husband. In a script concerning Leda, the mask might be identified as Leda's spouse Tyndareos (cf. the title of Sophilos' play, *Tyndareos or Leda*). If the woman is taken for a burlesque transmutation of a mythical maiden, the male figure might correspond to her father or brother (e.g. Akrisios for Danaë, Inachos for Io, Kadmos or Agenor for Europe).
7. See e.g. Hom. *Od.* 5.57–86, 215–218 (*Kalypso*), 10.220–231, 310–347 (*Kirke*).
8. Anaxilas fr. 10: *προγεύσεται σοι πρώτον ἢ γράῳς τοῦ ποιοῦ*. See A. Meineke, *Fragmenta Comicorum Graecorum*, vol. III, Berlin 1840, 343; I. O. Schmidt, "Ulixes Comicus",

dy. Phrynichos, a contemporary of Aristophanes, produced a parody of the myth of Andromeda, the young princess who was offered as expiatory victim to be devoured by a sea monster, but was rescued by Perseus. Instead of that beautiful maiden, the poet brought on stage a bibulous old hag in the same role as prey of the marine beast.⁹ As will be noted below, the authors of mythological burlesques delighted in overturning or reversing in various ways the familiar mythical stories and the standard attributes or roles of the heroes, as prescribed by mythical tradition. Transforming a young desirable girl into a ripe and unsightly housewife would have perfectly accorded with that practice.

The dramatic action illustrated in the Paestan vase-painting may be connected with a type of scene which occurs elsewhere in Greek comedy. In this form of comic episode, the erotic courtship or flirtation between two personages (usually an aspiring lover and the lady he desires) is theatrically rendered through an actual game or pastime played by those two characters on stage, before the spectators' eyes. The love play between the personages is thus scenically materialized as a visible playing process, the conduct of a real game; and the game in its turn is erotically charged by the amorous flirtation and emotions of the players. It is significant that in Greek the same verb, *παίζειν*, is regularly used both for playing an ordinary entertaining game and for amorous sport.¹⁰ This usage provided the linguistic basis for the comic writers' scenic metaphors. In every comic scene of this sort, the game involved was a well-known and cherished recreation in ancient Athenian society. Two of the extant specimens revolve around the famous sympotic game of the *kottabos*, a favourite after-dinner diversion in fashionable upper-class circles during the classical age.¹¹ Both these comic instances come from

Jahrbücher für classische Philologie Suppl. 16 (1888) 398–399; O. Moessner, *Die Mythologie in der dorischen und altattischen Komödie*, Erlangen 1907, 13.

9. Phrynichos fr. 77, from Ar. *Nub.* 555–556: *γραῦν μεθύσῃν ... ἦν Φρόνιχος πάλαι πεποίηχ', ἦν τὸ κῆτος ἦσθιεν*. Cf. Schol. in Ar. *Nub.* 555/6b (p. 126 Holwerda): *Φρόνιχος, ὃς εἰσήγαγε γραῦν ἐσθιομένην ὑπὸ κήτους κατὰ μίμησιν Ἀνδρομέδας διὰ γέλωτα τῶν θεωμένων*.
10. Examples of both idioms are provided in the corresponding entry of LSJ. Cf. J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy*, New York/Oxford² 1991, 157.
11. On this game see most notably O. Jahn, "Kottabos auf Vasenbildern", *Philologus* 26 (1867) 201–240; H. Heydemann, "Sopra il giuoco del cottabo", *Annali dell'istituto di corrispondenza archeologica* 40 (1868) 217–231; K. Schneider, "Kottabos", *RE* XI 2 (1922) 1528–1541; B. A. Sparkes, "Kottabos: An Athenian After-Dinner Game", *Archaeology* 13 (1960) 202–207; F. Lissarrague, *The Aesthetics of the Greek Banquet: Images of Wine and Ritual*, Princeton 1990, 80–86; E. Csapo – M. C. Miller, "The 'Kot-

mythological plays. One of them burlesques a love adventure of a mythical hero, and the other may have included a similar theme.

The first and presumably earliest passage belongs to the comedy *Zeus kakoumenos* (“Zeus badly treated”) by Platon the comic poet.¹² Heracles has apparently put up at an inn or brothel and there engages in a game of *kottabos* with a young girl who has caught his fancy (fr. 46 and 47).¹³ The game

tabos-Toast’ and an Inscribed Red-Figured Cup”, *Hesperia* 60 (1991) 367–382; P. Jacquet-Rimassa, “*Κότταβος*: Recherches iconographiques. Céramique italote. 440–300 av. J.-C.”, *Pallas* 42 (1995) 129–170; V. Pouyadou – P. Jacquet-Rimassa, “Cratère et Kottabe, objets symposiaques? ... Certes, mais aussi dionysiaques”, *Pallas* 63 (2003) 55–56, 62–70; P. Jacquet-Rimassa, “L’Image en Jeu ou l’Offrande Dionysiaque (le kottabe dix ans après...)”, *Pallas* 76 (2008) 67–80. On its representations in ancient drama (especially comedy) see mainly R. M. Rosen, “Euboulos’ *Ankylion* and the Game of Kottabos”, *CQ* n.s. 39 (1989) 355–359; R. Scaife, “From *Kottabos* to War in Aristophanes’ *Acharnians*”, *GRBS* 33 (1992) 25–35; J. Wilkins, *The Boastful Chef: The Discourse of Food in Ancient Greek Comedy*, Oxford 2000, 234–238; R. Campagner, “Il gioco del cottabo nelle commedie di Aristofane”, *QUCC* n.s. 72 (2002) 111–127; B. Pütz, *The Symposium and Komos in Aristophanes*, Oxford 2007, 175–192; R. Cowan, “The Smell of Sophokles’ *Salmoneus*: Technology, Scatology, Metatheatre”, *Ramus* 43 (2014) 19–21.

12. Platon was an exact contemporary of Aristophanes, active from the 420s to the 380s. The date of his *Zeus kakoumenos* is uncertain. It might conceivably belong to Platon’s 5th-century productions. See S. Pirrotta, *Plato comicus: Die fragmentarischen Komödien. Ein Kommentar*, Berlin 2009, 124–125; I. C. Storey, *Fragments of Old Comedy*, vol. III, Cambridge MA/London 2011, 108–111. It is noteworthy, however, that the play presents strong similarities to the mythological burlesques of the 4th century. A date close to the end of the 5th or during the first two decades of the 4th century (exactly when the heyday of mythological comedy started) would thus seem more likely. Generally on this play, see R. M. Rosen, “Plato Comicus and the Evolution of Greek Comedy”, in G. W. Dobrov (ed.), *Beyond Aristophanes: Transition and Diversity in Greek Comedy*, Atlanta 1995, 124–126; Casolari, *Mythentravestie*, 267–268; Pirrotta, *Plato comicus*, 124–140; Konstantakos, “Mythological Burlesques”, 167–168.
13. Women (mostly hetairai) are shown engaging in the *kottabos* game in a number of literary sources and archaeological monuments. Apart from Platon’s comic scene, see Bacchylides fr. 17 Snell-Maehler; Kratinos fr. 299; cf. Kallimachos fr. 227.5–7 Pfeiffer. Examples from Attic and South Italian vase-paintings are adduced by Jahn, “Kottabos auf Vasenbildern”, 221–226, 230, 233, 235–236, 238; Heydemann, “Sopra il giuoco”, 221–222, 229; Schneider, “Kottabos”, 1538–1539; Sparkes, “Kottabos”, 202–207; Lissarrague, *Aesthetics*, 81–84; Csapo – Miller, “Kottabos-Toast”, 373–375, 377–380; Jacquet-Rimassa, “*Κότταβος*: Recherches iconographiques”, 132, 140–142, 144, 152, 160, 162–163; Jacquet-Rimassa, “L’Image en Jeu”, 70, 74–76. I am not willing to debate here whether hetairai actually participated in the *kottabos* in real-life social occasions (for conflicting opinions on this question see Csapo – Miller, “Kottabos-Toast”, 380; Scaife, “From *Kottabos* to War”, 29–30; Pütz, *Symposium and Komos*, 185; Pirrotta, *Plato comicus*, 129). For the present study, which is only concerned with

is set up by a third character, presumably the girl's master (possibly a pimp or procuress). This latter personage has cast his eye on a large and valuable drinking-cup which Heracles is carrying with him; he thus prescribes the cup as the prize of the *kottabos*, evidently hoping that Heracles will lose the game and forfeit his precious possession. Heracles is not pleased with this arrangement. However, he gets involved in the game, clearly because he cannot resist his sexual desire for the girl. From the preserved text it becomes evident that Heracles lusts for the young woman and hopes to enjoy her erotic ministrations. Indeed, Heracles' initial proposition was that the prize should be kisses (fr. 46.5) — a most propitious settlement for the philandering hero, whatever the outcome of the competition: if he wins, he gets to kiss the pretty female; if he loses, he will enjoy her smackers. The *kottabos* game was doubtless enacted on stage as part of the dramatic action. In fr. 46 Heracles cries out for the apparatus to be brought to the characters. In fr. 47 someone instructs the hero on how to bend appropriately his wrist, so as to achieve a smooth throw while playing the game.¹⁴

It is not known whether the female figure and her master are travesties of mythical characters or common mortals (e.g. a young prostitute or slave-girl and her pimp or owner). In mythological comedies, the gods and legendary heroes regularly appeared interacting with ordinary human personages. In any case, Heracles' erotic intentions towards the girl are clearly betrayed from the extant dialogue. The *kottabos* game represents the means by which the lustful son of Alkmene attempts to gain the sexual favours of the desired woman. Indeed, the *kottabos* was distinguished for its strongly erotic aspect and is often associated in ancient sources with Aphrodite and the pleasures of sex.¹⁵

motifs of the comic tradition, it suffices that hetairai were represented as playing the game in the collective imagination, expressed through diverse literary and artistic media (comedy, lyric poetry, iconography).

14. Platon Comicus fr. 46: "(A) ... to play *kottabos*, until I prepare dinner inside / for the two of you. (Her.) I am quite willing. / But we have no bowl. (A) Well, then, you have to play in a mortar. / (Her.) Fetch the mortar, bring water, set cups / beside us. Let's play for kisses. / (A) I shall not let you play in an unworthy manner. / I set as prizes of the *kottabos* for the two of you / these platform shoes here that she is wearing / and your cup. (Her.) Wow! This contest that is coming up / is bigger than the one at the Isthmian games!". Fr. 47: "You must bend your hand a good deal backwards and throw the *kottabos* smoothly".
15. See e.g. Soph. fr. 277; Eur. fr. 631; Ar. *Ach.* 524–525, *Nub.* 1073, *Pax* 341–343; Theophrastus fr. 570 Fortenbaugh (= Athen. 10.427d); Athen. 15.668b–d; Schol. in Ar. *Pax* 343a and 343c (pp. 55–56 Holwerda); Schol. in Luc. *Lexiphan.* 3 (p. 195 Rabe); Hesychius λ 391; Suda κ 2153; Etym. Magn. p. 533.20–21; Jahn, "Kottabos auf Vasenbildern", 216–218, 238; Schneider, "Kottabos", 1538–1539; Scaife, "From *Kottabos* to War", 27–30, 35; Jacquet-Rimassa, "Κότταβος: Recherches iconographiques", 141–

Another comparable episode was contained in Antiphanes' *Aphrodites gonai* ("Birth of Aphrodite"), one of a sizeable group of comedies treating mythical stories about the unusual or miraculous births of various gods.¹⁶ The single surviving fragment (fr. 57) is a dialogue between two unnamed characters. One of them (A) endeavours to teach the other (B) the rules and the procedure of the *kottabos*. The second personage displays total ignorance of the game, as well as great simple-mindedness and naïveté. B appears quite bewildered by the unfamiliar sequence of actions required from the players, repeatedly misunderstands A's instructions, and ludicrously confuses the terminology of the game with irrelevant things. The teaching scene includes a full practical demonstration of the playing process. The apparatus of the *kottabos* is ready and standing before the characters on stage. The tutoring personage, after explaining the various paraphernalia and devices, shows his apprentice how to achieve a good throw with a drinking-cup.¹⁷ In fact, the scene offers a veritable rehearsal of the *kottabos* game or a mock enactment of it, similar to the rehearsed symposium of Aristophanes' *Wasps* (1208–1249).

Nesselrath, in his enticing analysis of the passage, has argued that the naïve apprentice in this comic episode is the title-heroine of the play, the newly-born Aphrodite herself. Her complete inexperience and almost childish ingenuousness is attributable precisely to her very young age: the divine girl has just come into the world, full of innocence and still untutored in the ways

142, 163–164; Campagner, "Il gioco del cottabo", 118–119; Jacquet-Rimassa, "L'Image en Jeu", 70–71; Pütz, *Symposium and Komos*, 184–187; Pirrotta, *Plato comicus*, 129; and cf. above, n. 13.

16. On this group of plays, quite popular in the early 4th century, see H.-G. Nesselrath, "Myth, Parody, and Comic Plots: The Birth of Gods and Middle Comedy", in G. W. Dobrov (ed.), *Beyond Aristophanes: Transition and Diversity in Greek Comedy*, Atlanta 1995, 1–27.

17. Antiphanes fr. 57: "(A) This is the one I mean. Don't you understand? This is the *kottabos*, / the lamp stand. Now pay attention. Five eggs / and < > will be the winner's prize. / (B) For what? That's funny! In what way do you propose to play the *kottabos*? / (A) I shall teach you. In so far as one throws the *kottabos* / and makes it fall on the disk — / (B) The disk? What is this? (A) This little thing that lies up here / on the top — (B) The small dish, you mean? / (A) Yes, this is the disk — so that person becomes the winner. / (B) And how would one know that? (A) If one barely touches it, / it will fall down on the *manes*, and there will be / a lot of clatter. (B) For god's sake, are you telling me that this *kottabos* / also has a *Manes*, like a servant? / (...) Take this cup and show me in which way it must be done. / (A) You have to crook your fingers like a crab's claws, just as a flute-player does; / take care to pour in only a little wine, not too much; / and then throw it. (B) In what manner? (A) Look here: / like that! (B) My goodness, how very high! / (A) Well, this is how you must do it. (B) But I could not possibly reach so high, / not even with a sling! (A) Come on, try to learn it!"

of fashionable society. If so, the teaching character (A) must be an older and experienced god, who undertakes to train young Aphrodite in *savoir vivre* and sympotic habits. According to Nesselrath's interpretation, the tutor god may well have been attracted to the charming young goddess of love, who was conceivably portrayed with a "Lolita-like" combination of apparent innocence and sex appeal. The teaching of the *kottabos* game would thus have represented for character A an opportunity to come into closer contact with the beautiful female creature, with a view to amorously pursuing or seducing her.¹⁸

The same type of scene is also traceable in comedies with contemporary, non-mythological theme and setting. In Diphilos' *Synoris* (fr. 74) the title-character, a hetaira, was shown playing dice with a parasite.¹⁹ The context of their game may well have been a symposion.²⁰ In the brief preserved text there are no perceptible erotic undertones. The stakes of the game are monetary (one drachma, fr. 74.2), not kisses or other sexual services, as proposed in Platon's *Zeus kakoumenos*. The parasite does not overtly display any sign of lust for his game partner. However, only a small excerpt survives from the scene. It cannot be excluded that some erotic tension between the parasite and the hetaira might have emerged in the course of the dicing contest.²¹ Alternatively, a lover of the hetaira might also have taken part in the dicing, thus investing the game with an amorous or sexual dimension. A comparable scene in Plautus' *Asinaria*, in which the characters similarly play dice (904ff.), has both a sympotic context and strong erotic connotations. Young

18. See Nesselrath, "Myth, Parody", 20–22. For a different reading of the same scene, see I. M. Konstantakos, "Aspects of the Figure of the *ἄρροικος* in Ancient Comedy", *RhM* 148 (2005) 16–17.

19. Diphilos fr. 74: "(Parasite) You come off very well with this throw of the dice. / (Synoris) Ha-ha, you are funny! Just bet a drachma. (Par.) I have already put it up. / (Syn.) Now, how could I throw the best result, a 'Euripides'? (Par.) No way! / Euripides would never come to a woman's rescue. Don't you see / how much he loathes them in his tragedies? / But he loved parasites. Remember his verses: / 'As for the man possessing a substantial fortune, / if he does not keep at least three people gratis at his table, / may he be doomed and never find safe return to his fatherland'. / (Syn.) Where are these lines from, for god's sake? (Par.) What does it matter to you? / It is not the play but his thought that we are considering".

20. See W. Süß, "Zwei Bemerkungen zur Technik der Komödie", *RhM* 65 (1910) 458; H.-G. Nesselrath, *Die attische Mittlere Komödie: Ihre Stellung in der antiken Literaturkritik und Literaturgeschichte*, Berlin/New York 1990, 234, 316, 320–321; and generally on the fragment S. D. Olson, *Broken Laughter: Select Fragments of Greek Comedy*, Oxford 2007, 179–181.

21. The parasite in Menander's *Sikyonians* is similarly in love with a woman called Malthake (145, 411–423, fr. 12 Arnott).

Argyrippus and his sweetheart, the prostitute Philaenium, are enjoying together a banquet in the lena's house. Argyrippus' father, the lewd *senex* Demaenetus, is also taking part in the festivity and does not hide his own desire for the pretty *meretrix*; he keeps hugging and kissing her, inciting his son's jealousy (828–906). It is in this sexually saturated atmosphere that the gambling game is set: the young lover and his licentious old rival take turns in throwing the dice.²² Clearly, this latter game was as apt to be charged with erotic emotions as the *kottabos* or the see-saw.

All these comic scenes are based on the same essential pattern, which also underlies the episode depicted on the Paestan vase. In this latter case as well, the see-saw game carries erotic connotations. Zeus engages in such a hazardous kind of exercise probably with a view to amorously approaching the female he desires. Once again, the enactment of a popular game offers the means for the scenic representation of love play.

The spectacle of Zeus on the see-saw may also acquire another ironical dimension in the context of a mythological burlesque. It offers a hilarious parody of a very famous mythical image, often exploited in earlier Greek poetry and art. The oldest surviving specimens are two awe-inspiring scenes of the *Iliad*, in which Zeus puts on the scales the fates (*κῆρε*) of opponent warriors and weighs them, in order to determine the outcome of an impending fight. In *Iliad* 8.69–74 the supreme god weighs the fates of the two opposed armies, the Achaeans and the Trojans, who are clashing on the battlefield. In 22.209–213 the same process is individualized. The weighed *κῆρε* now belong to specific heroes, the two greatest champions of the epic: Achilles and Hector, who are facing each other before the walls of Troy, in their final and fatal duel. In both passages Zeus stretches out a pair of golden scales and places on them the “dooms of death” (*κῆρε τανηλεγέος θανάτοιου*) of the two confronted warriors or parties. Then he grasps the scales by the midst and holds them up. The fate (*αἴσιμον ἡμαρ*, “day of destiny”) that sinks downwards, proving to be the heavier one, belongs to the losing side and heralds the latter's doom: the Achaeans will be defeated in the battle, and Hector is definitively condemned to be slain by Achilles. The scales (*τάλαντα*) of Zeus are also mentioned in *Iliad* 16.658 and 19.223–224.²³

22. For the parallelism between this Plautine scene and Diphilus fr. 74, see Süß, “Zwei Bemerkungen”, 458; T. B. L. Webster, *Studies in Later Greek Comedy*, Manchester² 1970, 237. On the possible Greek background of this and other Plautine staged banquets, see I. M. Konstantakos, “The Drinking Theatre: Staged Symposia in Greek Comedy”, *Mnemosyne* 4th ser. 58 (2005) 183–217 (especially 190).

23. On this epic motif, see E. Wüst, “Psychostasie”, *RE* XXIII 2 (1959) 1441–44, 1448; W. Kullmann, *Die Quellen der Ilias (Troischer Sagenkreis)*, Wiesbaden 1960, 32–34,

In Aeschylus' lost tragedy *Psychostasia* Zeus applied the same method of fatal judgement to another pair of adversaries: Achilles and Memnon, the son of Eos and king of the Ethiopians, who came to fight as an ally of the Trojans, only to meet his death at the hands of the invincible Greek champion. This time the supreme god put on the scales the souls (*ψυχαί*) of the two heroes.²⁴ This latter scene, with Zeus (or more frequently Hermes, as Zeus' representative) weighing the souls or spirits of Achilles and Memnon, is depicted on a number of vases from the 6th and 5th century B.C. The *ψυχαί* of the two heroes are represented as tiny figures (*eidola*) placed on the scales. It is often argued that the episode of the *psychostasia* was already included in the *Aithiopsis*, a poem of the epic cycle which provided a sequel to the storyline of the *Iliad*, including Memnon's exploits and death at Troy.²⁵

Thus, according to mythical, epic and tragic tradition, Zeus is the god that places the destinies or the souls of men in the balance; he makes *κῆρε* or *ψυχαί* counterpoise each other, hover and fluctuate as they are put on the fateful pair of scales. By the will of this god, the fates of the heroes fall or rise up, along with the corresponding disks of the weighing apparatus, precariously equilibrating or outweighing one another, as though on a grand metaphysical see-saw. In this respect, the comic scene of the Paestan vase represents a burlesque reversal of the traditional mythical concept. Now Zeus himself is put "in the balance", as he counterpoises his female partner on the see-saw. The great god moves upwards and downwards, rises and falls, just like the souls or fates placed in his divine pair of scales. The god who used to weigh destinies and dooms is now submitted in his turn to a weighing and counterweighing procedure, as he and his fellow-player alternately outweigh

316–318; R. Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, IV: *Books 13–16*, Cambridge 1992, 394.

24. See Plut. *Mor.* 17a; Schol. in Hom. *Il.* 8.70 and 22.210 (II p. 313, V pp. 312–313 Erbse); Pollux 4.130. See the collected testimonia and further bibliography in S. Radt, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, vol. III: *Aeschylus*, Göttingen 1985, 374–377. Cf. also Wüst, "Psychostasie", 1446–1448; H. J. Mette, *Der verlorene Aischylos*, Berlin 1963, 112; O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy*, Oxford 1977, 431–433. Whether the weighing scene was acted out on stage (as implied by the ancient testimonia) or simply described in the play (as argued by Taplin) is of slight importance for the present discussion.
25. See Wüst, "Psychostasie", 1442–1446; Kullmann, *Quellen der Ilias*, 32–34, 214, 316–318; L. D. Caskey – J. D. Beazley, *Attic Vase Paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, vol. III, Boston 1963, 44–46; Taplin, *Stagecraft*, 431; M. E. Clark – W. D. E. Coulson, "Memnon and Sarpedon", *MH* 35 (1978) 67–71; A. Kossatz-Deissmann, "Achilleus", *LIMC* I 1 (1981) 172–175 (nos. 797–806); C. Weiss, "Eos", *LIMC* III 1 (1986) 779–781 (nos. 293–299); A. Kossatz-Deissmann, "Memnon", *LIMC* VI 1 (1992) 449–453 (nos. 14–25); T. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*, Baltimore/London 1993, 623–625.

each other. The balancer of men's souls ironically becomes himself a character in the balance.

This kind of ludicrous inversion of time-honoured mythical data was a favourite technique of mythological comedies, especially in the 4th century. Extant testimonia and excerpts offer a range of relevant examples, revealing the resourcefulness of comic poets handling the mythical material in such an irreverent and subversive manner.²⁶ Myths with a traditionally grievous outcome were provided with a happy ending on the comic stage, resulting in reconciliation and general contentment. Aristotle in his *Poetics* (1453a 35–39) presumably reports a specimen from such a comic parody, which he may have witnessed in the Athenian theatre sometime in the 340s or 330s. In the comedy he describes, Aegisthus and Orestes, the deadliest enemies of myth, became friends in the end; they left the stage like good pals, and no murder took place in the comic action.²⁷ Apart from the finale of the play, comic reversal might also affect the main incidents and storyline, i.e. the very core of the mythical tradition. In Alexis' *Odysseus hyphainon* ("Odysseus at the loom") the crafty Ithacan king undertook weaving, an activity *par excellence* connected with his wife Penelope: Odysseus replaced Penelope in her rightful role, in a topsy-turvy rendering of the mythical story.²⁸ In Euboulos' *Bellerophon* the title-hero flies in the air on Pegasus' back, as in the myth, but this time the flight takes place against the hero's will: Bellerophon reacts to his own ascent with terror, cries for help and calls for someone to hold him down (fr. 15).²⁹ The comic scene depicted on a fragmentary Paestan calyx crater by Asteas (*PhV*² no. 86, dated ca. 340s) offers another side-splitting inversion of standard mythical roles. Cassandra, instead of being dragged away from the sanctuary of Athena and raped by Ajax of Locri, now appears in the aggressor's role: it is she who assaults and manhandles Ajax, while he is seeking refuge to Athena's cult statue.³⁰

26. For a general overview and analysis of this technique, see Konstantakos, "Mythological Burlesques", 172–173, 175–176.

27. On this passage, see Webster, *Studies*, 57; R. L. Hunter, *Eubulus: The Fragments*, Cambridge 1983, 27; Konstantakos, "Mythological Burlesques", 172–173 with more such examples. Cf. Konstantakos, "Conditions of Playwriting", 149–151 for a similar hypothesis concerning the finale of Aristophanes' *Aiolosikon*.

28. See W. G. Arnott, *Alexis: The Fragments. A Commentary*, Cambridge 1996, 465–466.

29. See Konstantakos, "Mythological Burlesques", 175–176.

30. See L. M. Catteruccia, *Pitture vascolari italiote di soggetto teatrale comico*, Roma 1951, 37–38; A. D. Trendall – T. B. L. Webster, *Illustrations of Greek Drama*, London 1971, 139 (and fig. IV, 30); O. Taplin, *Comic Angels and Other Approaches to Greek Drama through Vase-Paintings*, Oxford 1993, 81–82, 114 (and plate 17.17); Walsh, *Distorted Ideals*, 81–85, 99, 296–297, 348 (no. 19.15 and frontispiece)

The comic snapshot of Zeus balanced on the see-saw is a highly entertaining addition to the hitherto known repertory of this comic strategy. In the topsy-turvy universe of myth burlesque, Zeus ends up subjected to a weighing and counterbalancing act similar to the one he used to perform in epic and tragedy. In a comic manner, he suffers himself the process he was imposing on men. The see-saw routine was evidently more vigorous and boisterous than the dignified *psychostasia*, but this is precisely the point of comic distortion: the grave and awe-inspiring metaphysical act is turned into a piece of rowdy, knockabout stage business.

Indeed, this latter factor is bound up with another usual practice of mythological comedy. What was a solemn and grievous event in the mythical tradition and in the serious genres treating it, this now becomes a playful, merry instance of scenic sport. In Homer and Aeschylus, whenever Zeus weighs fates or souls on the scales, death and destruction are bound to follow: one of the champions will lose his life in the duel; one of the confronted armies will suffer defeat and enrich the realm of Hades with many dead warriors. In the world of comedy, by contrast, the corresponding process is no longer applied to bloody conflicts with mortal outcome but to love play and enjoyable flirtations. The setting is not the field of battle but the meadow of *eros*. The instrument used is not the awe-inspiring golden scales of destiny but a toy of the playground. Zeus is not the terrible supreme divinity meting out doom to humanity but a ridiculous figure laughably enamoured to an ugly hag.³¹

In this comic view of the cosmos, the father of the gods finally sheds his epic paraphernalia, dons the comic padding and phallus, and makes love instead of war. Laughing and grief, like eternally equilibrating counterpoises on the scales, or like competing partners in a game of see-saw, will always rise and fall in alternation, each one in turn outweighing the other in the great tragedy and comedy of life.

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31. The see-saw, in the way it was practised in antiquity, could also be a hazardous activity prone to accidents (see Professor Green's remarks). Still, it was enjoyed as a game and apparently invested with a light-hearted, merry ambience, given its humorous and erotic connotations in iconography. Its dangers will have been those of an intense but frolicsome sport: they were not comparable to the epic doom and bloodshed which Zeus' fateful scales herald for the losing party.