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T H E   A P E   I N   A N C I E N T   C O M E D Y

S a a r a   L i l j a

W.C. McDermott's monograph, *The Ape in Antiquity*, is far superior to the brief treatment of apes by O. Keller, not to mention Oder's somewhat dated RE article.<sup>1</sup> In spite of McDermott's comprehensive study, however, there seems to be something more to be said about those passages in Greek and Roman comedy where apes are mentioned.

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In the extant plays of Aristophanes there are eleven references to apes. In the *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis abuses one of the two eunuchs, presumably Clisthenes, referring to him as a 'monkey' and ridiculing him for his lack of beard: τοιόνδε δ', ὃ πίθηκε, τὸν πώγων' ἔχων (120). This, with the substitution of πώγωνα for πυγὴν, is an obvious parody of a line of Archilochus,<sup>2</sup> who was the first Greek author to mention the ape. The Theban fowl-monger in the *Acharnians* compares a sycophant to a trained ape full of mischievous tricks: ἄπερ πίθακον ἀλιτρίας πολλᾶς πλέων (907). The Theban's subsequent comment on the sudden appearance of the informer Nicarchus, who was short in stature - μικρός

1 O. Keller, *Die antike Tierwelt I*, Leipzig 1909, 3-11; Oder, RE I, 1894, 706-708. McDermott's monograph was published by the Johns Hopkins Univ.: *Studies in Archaeology* 27, Baltimore 1938.

2 This parody of the line τοιόνδε δ' ὃ πίθηκε τὴν πυγὴν ἔχων (fr. 187 West) is classed by A.C. Schlesinger, *TAPA* 67 (1936) 296f., among those that may be unintentional, but in my opinion it is clearly "identifiable by vocabulary" (note that Dicaeopolis begins his speech to Clisthenes by addressing him as προκτὸν ἐξυρημένε). The lack of buttocks was considered ugly by the Greeks: Semonides describes the ugly woman created from the ape as ἄπυγος (7,76), whereas one of Aphrodite's epithets was καλλίπυγος (Athen. *Deipn.* 12,554 c-d).

γα μάκος οὔτος (909) - may echo the ape simile. In the Frogs, at any rate, the bath-keeper Cligenes is abused as πίθηκος (708) not only because of his knavish trick of adulterating soap, but also because he was μικρός (709). In the Birds, a cutler is called a πίθηκος (440) on account of his malice (διὰ τὸ πανοὔργον) according to the Scholiast, but he can, of course, have been small and ugly, too, as Coulon and van Daele explain.<sup>3</sup> In the Ecclesiazusae it is surely owing to her ugly appearance, and perhaps also to her sexual eagerness,<sup>4</sup> that an old harlot is described as πίθηκος ἀνάπλεως ψιμυθίου (1072).

In all the above passages the word used by Aristophanes for 'ape' was πίθηκος. There is a special compound in the Frogs, Aeschylus complaining that Athens was crowded with δημοπιθήκων (1085), which is explained in the following line by the words ἑξαπατώντων τὸν δῆμον αἰεί. This kind of deceitful flattery or, more generally speaking, trickery is also expressed by the verb πιθηκίζειν, as in the Wasps when the chorus declares with respect to Cleon: ἐπιθήκισα ... ἔξηπάτηκεν ἢ χάραξ τὴν ἀμπελον (1290f.).<sup>5</sup> The corresponding noun, πιθηκισμός, is used in the Knights by Paphlagon (Cleon), when he complains of the sausage-seller's wily tricks: οἷσις πιθηκισμοῖς με περιελαύνεις (887). In the same play we find the only other word used by Aristophanes to denote 'ape', namely, κυνοκέφαλος (416): while the sausage-seller identifies himself with a dog, Cleon likens himself, in a pun, to a far bigger and fiercer and more deceitful animal, the dog-headed

3 Aristophane III (Coll.Univ.Fr. 1928) 45 n. 1. The name of the cutler was Panaetius - if it was the same man who is called an ape in Aristophanes' Nesoi (fr. 394 K).

4 On the sexuality of apes, see McDermott, op.cit. 39f., 82ff. and 148. Referring to συμώτεραι (Eccl. 617) and ῥύγχος τριπιθήκινων (AP 11,196,1), R.G. Ussher only mentions appearance (ed. Eccl. 1973, 223). The thought itself was as old as Archilochus: οὐκ ἄν μύροισι γρηῦς ἐοῦσ' ἠλείφειο (fr. 205 West).

5 "The trick which Aristophanes played was to pretend to give up attacking Kleon," comments D.M. MacDowell (ed. Wasps 1971, 300). A barbarous form of πιθηκίζειν is found in Thesm. 1133, the policeman calling Euripides a foul fox and exclaiming: οἶον ἐπιτήκιζέ μοι.

baboon. This passage<sup>6</sup> may seem to suggest that χαροποιῖσι πιθήκοις in Peace 1065f. refers to the ferocity of the Spartans as contrasted with the Athenians, who are called doves, τρήρωνες (1067), but the other animal image applied to the Spartans in the same context, ἄλω-πεκιδεῦσι ... ὧν δόλιαι ψυχαί, δόλιαι φρένες (1067f.), shows that what Aristophanes had in mind was their deceitfulness.

In addition to the eleven references to apes - all of them abusive - found in the extant plays of Aristophanes, there are two in Old Comedy fragments, one in Aristophanes' *Nesoi* (see n. 3) and the other in *Frynichus' Monotropos* (fr. 20 K). In the latter fragment, when somebody abuses Lyceas, Teleas, Peisander and Execestides as μεγάλους πιθήκους, another person comments: ἀνωμάλους ... πιθήκους, one being δειλός, the second κόλαξ, and the third νόθος. While Lyceas is unknown to us, the other three are mentioned in Aristophanes' *Birds* and *Peace*.<sup>7</sup> Concluding from those Aristophanic passages, it seems that the coward was Peisander, the flatterer Teleas, and the foreigner Execestides.<sup>8</sup>

In Middle Comedy fragments there are two references to apes. One is from *Eubulus' Charites*: πόσῳ κάλλιον ... τρέφειν ἄνθρωπον ... ἢ πίθηκον, ἐπίβουλον κακόν (fr. 115 K). This is the first time in Greek comedy that an ape is clearly spoken of as a pet, since the trained ape to which Aristophanes compares a sycophant in *Acharn.* 907 (see above, p. 31) was probably an animal exhibited for money. In any case, the custom of keeping apes as pets was known in Greece at least as early as Pindar, who compared a rival of his - Bacchylides, according to the Scholiasts - to a little (or young) ape, πίθων, contemptuously described as καλὸς ... παρὰ παισίν, αἰεὶ καλός (*Pyth.* 2,

<sup>6</sup> For a fuller discussion of the whole passage, see S. Lilja, *Dogs in Ancient Greek Poetry*, Helsinki 1976, 71f. On the dog-headed baboon, or cynocephalus, see McDermott, *op.cit.* 35ff. and *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> Teleas in *Birds* 168 and 1025 and in *Peace* 1008, Peisander in *Birds* 1556, Execestides in *Birds* 11.

<sup>8</sup> Edmonds (I fr. 20) adds ⟨ὁ δὲ ξένος⟩ to the text, perhaps unnecessarily, since in Athens νόθος could mean the child of a citizen father and an alien mother (Liddell and Scott, s.v. νόθος). Any closer definition of Lyceas remains a mystery to us.

72).<sup>9</sup> Certainly, not only children, but also older people kept apes as pets, although this practice was often criticized, as here by Eubulus, who applies to the ape the epithet 'mischief-making'.<sup>10</sup> The other Middle Comedy reference to apes is from an unknown play of Crobylus, a passage where chickpeas are said to be the proper food for a miserable monkey: τράγημα δὲ ἔστιν πιθήκου τοῦτο δήπου δυστυχοῦς (fr. 9 K = Athen. Deipn. 2,54 e). Owing to the lack of context, it is impossible to say anything definite about this unhappy πίθηκος, as to whether a term of abuse is intended or whether a real animal kept as a pet is meant.

In the New Comedy fragments of known authors there are two proverbial sayings which deal with apes. In Menander's Plokion, an old man describes his ugly wife as ὄνος ἐν πιθήκοις (fr. 402 K, line 8), which means 'ugly among the ugly',<sup>11</sup> and in Apollodorus' Adelfoi there is the saying ἐν θηρίοις δὲ καὶ πιθήκοις ὄντα δεῖ εἶναι πίθηκον (fr. 1 K), i.e. with evil men you must be evil yourself. In view of the fact that we did not find any proverbial sayings in Old or Middle Comedy, it would seem inviting to attribute the anonymous fragment 561 of an unknown date (K III 510) to New Comedy: λέων ὄπου χροῖ, καὶ πίθηκος ἐν μέρει.<sup>12</sup> Using the same, admittedly precarious, argument I am also inclined to attribute to New Comedy a fragment where the ape is considered an evil omen: ἄν τις εἰσίδῃ βάκηλον ἢ πίθηκον εὐθὺς ἐξιῶν τῆς οἰκίας, ἐπὶ πόδ' ἀναστρέφει τε κάπανέρχεται (fr. 350 K). This tentative suggestion is corroborated by the fact that in Roman

9 This may be the origin for the use of the word καλλίας for 'ape', in which case it would not be a contemptuous euphemism, as Liddell and Scott suggest (s.v. καλλίας), but an affectionate pet name (cf. McDermott, op.cit. 132f., and I.C. Cunningham, ed. Herodas 1971, 113). On the identification of πίθων with Bacchylides, see C.M. Bowra, Harv.St.Cl.Ph. 48 (1937) 9-21.

10 Another critic was Theophrastus making fun of the man of petty ambition who kept an ape (Char. 21,15). For details of the ape as a pet, see McDermott, op.cit. 131-140.

11 App. Prov. 4,24 (Corpus Paroem. Graec. I 439): ἐπὶ τῶν αἰσχροῶν ἐν αἰσχροῦς.

12 Macarius 4,18 (C.P.G. II 168): ἐπὶ τοῦ πρὸς τὰ πράγματα καλῶς μεταβαλλομένου. Cf. Plat. Rep. 9,590 B.

Comedy, which was based on New Comedy, the ape frequently appears as an evil omen.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, there are certain anonymous fragments of an unknown date which I would rather attribute to Old (or Middle) than New Comedy. One of these, δειπνοπίθηκος (fr. 321), is attributed to New Comedy by Kock and by Edmonds, Kock giving the following reason (III 466): "Non antiquae comoediae est, ut Meinekius indicavit, sed novae. Est enim nomen parasiti." Without any doubt, however, parasites formed the chorus in the *Kolakes* of the Old Comedy poet Eupolis, and in Middle Comedy there were several plays entitled *Parasite*. The playful term δειπνοπίθηκος can very well have been coined as a contemporary counterpart to the Aristophanic δημοπίθηκος (*Frogs* 1085). Further, nothing prevents us from assuming that ψιμυθίω πίθηκος έντετριμμένος (fr. 517 K) and διεπιθήκισεν (fr. 980 K) were used by Old Comedy poets as readily as πίθηκος άνάπλεως ψιμυθίου (*Eccl.* 1072) and έπιθήκισα (*Wasps* 1290) by Aristophanes.<sup>14</sup>

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Plautus twice uses the ape as an omen in a dream foreshadowing the dramatic action. In *Mercator* 229-251, Demipho dreams that he buys a charming kid (his son's beloved) and gives it to a male ape (his old neighbour, who is kind but ugly) to be watched; that as a result the ape gets into trouble with his wife and blames Demipho for it; and that a young buck (Demipho's son) kidnaps the beautiful kid. The ape in this dream is clearly considered an evil omen, as can be seen from lines 269f. and 274-276. In *Rudens* 598-610, Daemones dreams that an ape tries in vain to kidnap two young swallows (two beautiful girls) from their nest; at last he succeeds in putting *bestia nequissima* in irons (610). The ape of this dream is later (771-773) identified with the villainous procurer Labrax. In the *Miles Glo-*

13 See below, pp. 35f. For the ape as an evil omen, see McDermott, *op.cit.* 149-157. Cf. Lucian, *Pseudolog.* 17.

14 These three Aristophanic passages have been discussed above, p. 32.

riosus, a slave pursuing an ape over the rooftop<sup>15</sup> complicates the plot several times (162, 179, 261, 284 and 505); though obviously a pet (162), this ape is described as an evil animal, *nihili bestia* (180).<sup>16</sup> The Poenulus offers a concrete example of the uncertain temper of the ape, prone to bite viciously, Agorastocles being recognized by a scar on his left hand *ludenti puero quod memordit simia* (1074); the ape seems to have been a pet the boy was playing with.

In the Miles Gloriosus there is a clear reference to the ugliness of apes. Commenting on a maidservant's looks as compared with her beautiful mistress, the slave Palaestrio exclaims: *pithecium haec est prae illa* (989).<sup>17</sup> The same diminutive, *pithecium*, is a maidservant's proper name in Truc. 477, probably also a reference to appearance. This fact corroborates the view that, when choosing the name Simia, which corresponds to the Greek Σιμίαις, for a trickster in the Pseudolus (744 and 905-1051), Plautus may have had the Latin word for ape, *simia*, in mind.<sup>18</sup> It is impossible to say whether *fastidit simia* in an abusive dialogue of two slaves in Most. 887 is used of character or of appearance or of both. In Truc. 269, on the other hand, *puendumst vero clurinum pecus* surely disapproves of a maidservant's ostentatious finery; this maidservant resembles the elderly strumpet described by Aristophanes in Eccl. 1072 (see above, p.32).<sup>19</sup>

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15 Cf. a mime of Herodas where a lazy schoolboy is sitting on a flat roof and looking down ὄκως τις καλλίης (3,40f.). For the term καλλίης see n. 9.

16 The slave is punningly placed on a level with the evil ape in lines *homo sectatu's nihili nequam bestiam* (285) and *condignam te sectatu's simiam* (505).

17 Cf. Enn. Sat. fr. 9,69 (Vahlen 211): *simia quam similis turpissima bestia nobis*. A. Otto (Die Sprichwörter ... der Römer 323) says that *simia* as an abusive term is only used of ugliness, but his first example, *quis hic est simia* (Afran. 330 Ribbeck), is concerned with trickery, as the following line (*qui me hodie ludificatus est*) shows.

18 See K. Schmidt, Hermes 37 (1902) 206f., and E.F. Wortmann, De comparationibus Plautinis et Terentianis ad animalia spectantibus, diss. Marburg 1883, 18.

19 On 'ape' as an abusive term in Plautus, see S. Lilja, Terms of Abuse in Roman Comedy, Helsinki 1965, 31, 47 and 66.



We have seen that all the eleven references to apes found in the extant plays of Aristophanes are abusive. Five of these allude to a person's mischievous character and two to ugliness, both shades of meaning being combined in three cases; in the identification of Cleon with a baboon (see above, p. 32), ferocity is apparently the salient point, but deceitfulness, of course, is what is ultimately meant. It is far more difficult, owing to the lack of context, to analyse the fragments of Greek comedy. Perhaps the most interesting observation is that the ape was mentioned as a pet for the first time in Middle Comedy, by Eubulus, although the practice of keeping apes as pets was much older. In New Comedy there are two proverbial sayings where apes appear as ugly and evil animals. A third proverb dealing with the ape is found in an anonymous fragment of an unknown date (561 K), which, therefore, may be attributable to New Comedy. Another fragment of an unknown date (350 K), where the ape is considered an evil omen, may belong to New Comedy because this motif was frequently used by Plautus. In two of his plays, *Mercator* and *Rudens*, the ape is an evil omen in a dream repeatedly foreshadowing the dramatic action, and in the *Miles Gloriosus*, a slave pursuing a pet ape over the rooftop complicates the plot several times. The *Poenulus* provides an example of a pet ape's viciousness. When used as a term of abuse in Plautus' plays, 'ape' refers twice to appearance, and once either to appearance or to character or to both.

It may seem odd that the ape, though generally considered an ugly and vicious animal and, moreover, an evil omen, was kept as a pet.<sup>20</sup> The chief reason for this practice can probably be attributed to the ape's intelligence and ability to perform amusing tricks. One would have expected to find funny examples of these traits in comedy, which, however, prefers to describe the ape's negative characteristics. It is of special importance to note, lastly, that Terence never refers to apes in his plays. In an earlier paper of mine, which attempted to

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20 On the similarly ambivalent attitude towards dogs, see S. Lilja, *Dogs* (n. 6) 126-128 and *passim*.

discover why Terence did not use animal imagery as an artistic device as Plautus and, long before him, Aristophanes had done, I simply suggested that Terence was perhaps completely uninterested in animals.<sup>21</sup> Here again we may assume a corresponding lack of interest in Terence and, on the other hand, a striking similarity between Plautus and Aristophanes in the frequent use they make of ape imagery.

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21 See S. Lilja, *Animal Imagery in Greek Comedy*, *Arctos* 13 (1979) 88-90. Cf. S. Lilja, *Terms of Abuse* (n. 18) 91-93.