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I N D E X

|                         |  |     |
|-------------------------|--|-----|
| Barry Baldwin           | An Anonymous Latin Poem in Gellius...  | 5   |
| Paavo Hohti             | Monatsbericht der Sitologen des<br>Dorfes Toemesis.....  | 15  |
| Paavo Hohti             | Religion, Wissenschaft und Rhetorik<br>bei Michael Psellos.....  | 19  |
| Siegfried Jäkel         | Φόβος und σέβας bei Sophokles.....   | 31  |
| Maarit Kaimio           | Hypomnema an einen Erzleibwächter und<br>Strategen.....  | 43  |
| Iiro Kajanto            | Aspects of Spinoza's Latinity.....   | 49  |
| Saara Lilja             | Animal Imagery in Greek Comedy.....  | 85  |
| Bengt Löfstedt          | Zur Physica Plinii Bambergensis.....   | 91  |
| Teivas Oksala           | <i>Beatus ille - O fortunatos</i> . Wie ver-<br>halten sich Horazens zweite Epode und<br>Vergils Georgica zueinander?..... | 97  |
| Tuomo Pekkanen          | The Pontic <i>civitates</i> in the Periplus<br>of the Anonymus Ravennas.....   | 111 |
| Reijo Pitkäranta        | Zur Sprache des Andreas von Bergamo..  | 129 |
| Eeva Ruoff-Väänänen     | Zum Auftreten von römischen Personen-<br>namen in Ortsnamen.....   | 151 |
| Heikki Solin            | Analecta epigraphica LVII - LX.....  | 157 |
| Jaakko Suolahti         | A Submerged Gens.....  | 161 |
| Toivo Viljamaa          | Ebb and Flow - a Polybian Metaphor...  | 169 |
| De novis libris iudicia | .....  | 177 |

A N I M A L   I M A G E R Y   I N   G R E E K   C O M E D Y

S a a r a   L i l j a

James Thomas Svendsen's dissertation (University of Minnesota, 1971), *Goats and Monkeys: A Study of the Animal Imagery in Plautus*, is an investigation of Plautus' use of animal imagery as an artistic technique designed to produce a specific effect in terms of characterization and with regard to specific scenes and indeed entire plays. Only the Conclusion of this study is familiar to me,<sup>1</sup> but it seems sufficiently detailed (338-352) to convey a good idea of the author's achievements. First, a brief summary of the Conclusion.

After pointing out that "certain characters are more likely to use, and be described in terms of, animal imagery, than others" (338), Svendsen mentions such 'professional' roles as the *parasitus*, the *miles gloriosus*, and the *leno*, all apparently derived from Greek New Comedy. The two most important female roles in Plautine comedy, the roles of *meretrix* and *matrona*, are also particularly susceptible to the use of animal imagery, and the same is true of two male characters, the *senex libidinosus* and the *servus callidus*.<sup>2</sup> Further, animal imagery establishes and develops the basic plot action of several plays of Plautus. Of special importance is the author's observation "that plays with a significant erotic interest have the

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1 In addition to the summary published in *Dissertation Abstracts International A*, vol. 32, n:o 6, Dec. 1971.

2 Admitting that the evidence is inconclusive, Svendsen thinks it probable that "the actively scheming and successful *matrona* is a Plautine innovation" (339); he also points out that the *senex libidinosus* is "a character for which no analogues exist in Terence and Greek New Comedy" (341). Both are interesting statements, worth a fuller investigation.

most animal imagery and that this imagery tends to bestialize the characters in those plays, especially those around whom it collects" (348). Lastly, there is a marked difference in the artistic use of animal imagery between Plautus and Terence. Not only are the references to animals noticeably infrequent in Terence (Appendix II), but "in no play of Terence does animal imagery function as a unifying device and contribute significantly to reinforce plot structure, to establish characterization, or to develop a general atmosphere" (349).

I agree with all this. It is only the last part of the Conclusion in which one finds grounds for disagreement. Svendsen has compiled the animal imagery - or rather, as far as I can see, the names of animals - from the *Dyskolos* and major fragments of Menander (Appendix III); this compilation, according to him, "demonstrates that animal imagery occurs only infrequently in Menander" (349). There is, however, something to be added to the meagre list of eight words in Appendix III,<sup>3</sup> and I think that before saying anything definite about Menander's references to animals one should also consider the minor fragments.

One can perhaps disregard the imprecation ἐς κόρακας,<sup>4</sup> recurrent in comedy from Aristophanes onwards, since this must have become a mere cliché by the time of Menander - though even as such it could, of course, contribute to the characterization of particular roles. One should also perhaps disregard σκατοφάγος (dung-eater, i.e. country boor), since this term of abuse, which may refer to pigs,<sup>5</sup> can also be explained in other ways. But Appendix III should include some obvious occurrences of animal imagery. In the *Dyskolos*, when asking the miser

<sup>3</sup> And perhaps something to be expunged: while χορτάσω in *Dysk.* 424 might be a consciously comic allusion to ὄνων (403), the conjecture ὄνος (550) for ὄλος, though it has found favour, does not convince me (better ὄλως or, as suggested by W.E. Blake, ὄλην).

<sup>4</sup> *Dysk.* 112 and 432; *Epitr.* 24; *Heros* 70; *Perik.* 206; *Samia* 138 and 155. The numbering of lines and fragments in this paper follows J.M. Edmonds, *The Fragments of Attic Comedy III*, Leiden 1961.

<sup>5</sup> Compare βοῦς Κύπριος in Menander's *Kolax* (297A); σκατοφάγος occurs in *Perik.* 204 and *Samia* 205, σκατοφάγως in *Dysk.* 488. As regards 'pig' as a term of abuse, Menander calls Dionysius, tyrant of Heracleia, παχὺς ὄς (fr. 21); cf. fr. 917.

for a kettle and getting the angry retort θύειν με βοῦς οἷον; (474), the slave Getas answers: οὐδὲ κοχλίαν ἔγωγε σέ (475). Several big oxen and one little snail, stressing the contrast between rich people and poor,<sup>6</sup> nicely characterize a miser's nature. In the Epitrepontes, Simias describes his friend Chaerestratus by means of the simile ὡς περ λύκον ἰδὼν κωφός (663), which reflects the popular belief that to see, or rather to be seen by, a wolf struck a man dumb.<sup>7</sup> In the Perikeiromene, Moschion says derisively of the mighty soldier Polemon and his friend Pataecus that, in spite of their menacing spears, οὐκ ἄν δύναιτο δ' ἐξελεῖν νεοττιᾶν χελιδόνων (278f.).

The minor fragments of Menander offer such an abundance of references to animals that a detailed treatment could only be carried out in a separate study of considerable length. A selection of the most typical instances must suffice here.

Of the proverbial sayings used by Menander the following may be cited: λύκου πτερά (192), κατὰ μῦθος ὄλεθρον (219), πτωχότερος κίγκλου (221), κανθάρου μελάντερος (239), τρυγόνος λαλίστερον (416), and κριδὸς τὰ τροφεῖα (905). In a funny dialogue (305A), when remarking to his slave νοσεῖς γάρ; (line 6), a young man receives the answer ὡς κροτῶν (like a tick), explained in the next line by the word ὑγιής.<sup>8</sup> The most popular animal in the proverbial sayings used by Menander is the donkey: ὑπὲρ ὄνου σκιᾶς (153), ὄνου παράκυψις (246), ὄνος λύρας (344B), and ὄνος ἐν πλοθῆκοις (402, line 8). It is more the wretched fate of the donkey having to carry heavy burdens than its stupidity that Menander is thinking of, a typical example being found in fr. 534 (lines 3-6).<sup>9</sup> In The Girl Possessed (223), Craton's monologue

6 This instance contradicts the view suggested by Pierre Brind'Amour (Des ânes et des boeufs dans l'Aululaire, Maia 28 [1976] 25-27) that oxen as a symbol of wealth was a genuinely Roman feature introduced by Plautus; in this particular case, however, the sacrificial ceremony might explain a reference to oxen.

7 See Ph.-E. Legrand's comment on Theocr. 14,22 (Bucoliques Grecs I, Paris 1953, 111, n. 3).

8 Cf. ὑγιέστερος κροτῶνος (318). On this somewhat surprising simile, see S. Lilja, Vermin in Ancient Greece, Arctos 10 (1976) 63.

9 Cf. 291A, line 32. Another beast of burden is mentioned in the proverb ἀμνημονεῖ...ταῦρος ἀργήσας ζυγοῦ (698).

which compares the human being with different animals ends on this note of resignation: ὄνον γενέσθαι κρεῖττον ἢ τοὺς χεῖρονας ὄρν̄αν ἑαυτοῦ ζῶντας ἐπιφανέστερον. Animals in general symbolize an evil character and evil deeds. In the *Georgos*, for example, the slave Davus calls poverty a fretful beast: παύσεσθε πενία μαχόμενοι, δυσνοουθετήτω θηρῶ καὶ δυσκόλῳ (96A, lines 77f.). Of all the animals that live on land and sea, μέγιστόν (MSS.; κάκιστόν Edmonds) ἔστι θηρίου γυνή (488). Woman's quarrelsome nature is likened by Menander, as later by Plautus, to a dog's: τὸ δ' ἐπιδιδάκειν εἰς τε τὴν δόδον τρέχειν ἔτι λοιδορουμένην κυνός ἐστ' ἔργον, 'Ρόδη (546),<sup>10</sup> and πολὺ χεῖρόν ἐστιν ἐρεθίσαι γραῦν ἢ κύνα (802).

A detailed analysis of all the minor fragments of Menander would certainly reveal more or less clear-cut patterns in the characterization of different roles by means of animal imagery. The same is probably true of many other New Comedy poets, for example Diphilus and Philemon (I am thinking of Plautus' models) and Apollodorus of Carystus (thinking of Terence).<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the fragmentary condition of New Comedy does not allow for any final conclusions concerning the use of animal imagery as a unifying device for plot structure in entire plays. The *Dyskolos* of Menander seems to prove that nothing of the kind exists, but a generalizing conclusion would be as imprudent as insisting that, if only the *Miles Gloriosus* had survived, Plautus' comedies did not contain any *cantica*. Neither does the fact that Terence did not use animal imagery as an artistic device to reinforce the characterization of important roles and to develop the plot action constitute convincing proof, for the reason may well lie in his possible lack of interest in animals, or again may simply be a question of personal taste.

<sup>10</sup> These reproachful words of a husband to his wife are reminiscent of the characterization of the *matrona* in the *Casina* and the *Menaechni* of Plautus. On 'dog' as a term of abuse, see S. Lilja, *Terms of Abuse in Roman Comedy*, Helsinki 1965, 33, and *Dogs in Ancient Greek Poetry*, Helsinki 1976, 21-25 and 86-88.

<sup>11</sup> All of them, esp. Philemon, seem to have been interested in animals: e.g. Diph. 54 and 126; Philem. 42, 62, 79 (lines 10-13), 86, 126 and 188; Apoll. 6 (p. 188) and 1 (p. 200).

There is, however, one Greek comic poet who unquestionably resembles Plautus in using animal imagery to achieve a desired effect with regard to specific characters, specific scenes, and entire plays, namely, Aristophanes. A detailed investigation of all his comedies from this point of view is impossible in a short paper, but a few representative examples of his technique may be illustrative.

In the *Knights*, Paphlagon (Cleon) identifies himself in the first of his three mock oracles (1015-1020) with a brave and faithful watchdog; it seems clear that Cleon was accustomed to calling himself the κύων of the Demus. The sausage-seller's corresponding description of the dog Cleon as Cerberus (1030-1034) concentrates on his voracity and slyness, and these traits of character are also complained of in the sausage-seller's oracle (1067f.) where he calls him κυναλώπηξ, a mixture of dog and fox. The oracle scene, based on the different aspects of 'dog', is made even more amusing by the fact that earlier in the play (409ff.) the sausage-seller had identified himself with a dog, whereas Cleon had appeared as a baboon, far stronger and fiercer than a dog, shamelessness constituting the point of comparison this time.<sup>12</sup> At the end of the play there is an echo of the dog scenes in the punishment the sausage-seller inflicts upon Cleon (1397-1401): he will have to sell sausages of an inferior quality, τὰ κύνεα μελγνύς τοῦς ὄνεύους, the point being that Greeks did not normally eat dog's or ass's flesh. The choral portrait of Cleon in the *Wasps* (1031-1035), depicted along similar lines, is preceded by the trial of two dogs, the Cydathenian (Cleon) and Labes (Laches); the entire trial scene (891ff.) abounds in comic ambiguity based on the contradictory views of 'dog' as revealed in the comments on the two dogs.<sup>13</sup>

12 On the dog-headed baboon, or cynocephalus, see W.C. McDermott, *The Ape in Antiquity*, Baltimore 1938, 35ff.

13 All these scenes in the *Knights* and the *Wasps* dealing with various aspects of 'dog' are discussed in detail by S. Lilja, *Dogs* (footnote 10) 70-74.

We have seen above that the scenes in the *Knights* and the *Wasps* of Aristophanes where a person is likened to a dog not only serve to characterize that particular person, but also contribute to the structure of entire scenes; in the *Knights*, 'dog' even functions - admittedly rather sketchily - as a leitmotif. Of the other references to animals made by Aristophanes for the purpose of characterization, the funniest are the relatively great number of vermin mentioned in the *Clouds* to ridicule Socrates' extraordinarily frugal habits.<sup>14</sup> There is also a play which is devoted in its entirety to the description of animals, namely, the *Birds*; "the chorus of birds, ludicrous in some ways, yet by their very names and number and by their descriptive songs bear witness to Aristophanes' love of nature."<sup>15</sup>

In the artistic use of animal imagery, there seems to exist a striking similarity between Aristophanes and Plautus. This question is discussed in an earlier study of mine, a study which concluded that many of the terms of abuse found in the plays of Aristophanes reveal a 'Plautine' fondness for playful coinages.<sup>16</sup> The fact to be stressed here again is that, in spite of the two hundred years that separate Aristophanes and Plautus, each wrote his comedies in the earliest stages of a long process of evolution. The sources of the contemporary religious rites and the different forms of manifestation of the popular drama are of equal importance, not to mention old proverbs and proverbial sayings, popular similes, the oral tradition of the fables, etc., and not to forget the possibility that Plautus followed his own instinct, just as surely as Aristophanes had done.

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<sup>14</sup> For details, see S. Lilja, *Vermin* (footnote 8) 59-61.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted from T.A. Sinclair, *A History of Classical Greek Literature*, London 1934, 304.

<sup>16</sup> S. Lilja, *Terms of Abuse* (footnote 10) 91-93.