

<i>ACTA CLASSICA UNIV. SCIENT. DEBRECEN.</i>	<i>XLIV.</i>	<i>2009.</i>	<i>p. 15–28.</i>
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TILTING SCRIPTS

INCONGRUENCE AS A SOURCE OF HUMOUR IN THE PARODOS OF THE *FROGS*

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Abstract: The purpose of the following study is to decode the semantic layers of ancient Greek texts and scripts introducing the well-defined “General Theory of Verbal Humour”. Classical tragedies, the *parodoi* of the texts used by Aristophanes and the dialogues following them, are all formed according to a (more or less standardised) script. Via putting frogs on the stage, Aristophanes parodies the patterns of the chorus songs and agons in Greek tragedies. Although the setting – the River Styx – could not be more sublime, and the winner of the debate is Dionysus himself, his adversaries are “only” frogs. The Frog Song reveals that the unity of content and form is not to be broken up without serious damage to the effect, as their separation from each other results in the reverse of the original catharsis. This parody, however, does not only refer to the emptiness and anachronistic quality of certain forms, that is, it does not only ridicule the genre, but can also function as the continual self-correction of Aristotelian mimesis. Aristophanes’ parody of a *parodos* is a meticulously constructed text, a faithful image of the prototypical scripts functioning as source texts, and abundant in humorous effects. Parody is enjoyable in itself, however as any good parody works with the mechanisms creating the parent text; it can only appear comic if it really reveals the patterns underlying the original, and it can only reach its aim if these patterns really bring the original work of art to the recipient’s mind.

Key-words: Aristophanes, conceptual integration, humour, incongruence, Old Comedy, *parodos*, parody, script-analysis

The linguistics of humour has a long history dating back to Plato and Aristotle; however distinguished its ancestry, nonetheless no significant breakthrough is detected until the 1980s.¹ Even though it was not the first theory of humour in linguistics, Raskin’s “Semantic-Script Theory” (SSTH, 1980) constitutes a radical departure from the traditionally taxonomic approach of most linguistic studies conducted in the area of humour. This theory argued that the central aspect of humour was semantico/pragmatic and moreover presented an articulated conception of semantics to implement this claim. Raskin’s theory of semantics is based on earlier scripts, however with significant differences from the

¹ *S. Attardo*, Cognitive Stylistics of Humorous Texts. In: *E. Semino – J. Culpeper* (eds.), *Cognitive Stylistics: Language and Cognition in Text Analysis*. Amsterdam–Philadelphia 2002, 231.

Schank–Minsky–Fillmore approach, later to be completed by cognitive views. Raskin claimed that no operational boundary was to be identified between the semantic (lexical) and the pragmatic (encyclopaedic) information. Although the semantic view appears to dominate Raskin’s approach, the SSTH involves quite a significant pragmatic component, which interprets humour as a violation of Grice’s co-operative principle.

Raskin’s theory of humour points to two separate claims: on the first hand that each humorous text is interpretable according to (at least) two distinct scripts, on the other hand that the scripts are opposed being local antonyms. Controversially to Raskin’s views, Attardo claims that the SSTH can be reduced to an incongruity model (the leading psychological model of humour); this incongruity can be simply defined as a mismatch between what is expected and what is actually perceived. Raskin’s analysis concentrates only on jokes, the simplest and least complicated type of humorous text, while this methodological restriction suggests some problems for the analysis of longer texts. The “General Theory of Verbal Humour” (GTVH, Attardo and Raskin 1991) profoundly influenced by cognitive linguistics focuses not only on the opposition between target- and source-text, but on the textual material evoked by the scripts of joke, which are not necessarily funny. The GTVH also applies narrative strategy to define the “genre” of the joke such as riddle, structure, question and answer, etc. Supposing that there exist special narrative strategies creating humorous texts, the GTVH postulates a text-typology applied for verbal humour. The GTVH assumes that the reader of a text elaborates a Text World Representation (TWR), which is similar to a mental space or a counterfactual situation/possible world, involving and organising pieces of information about the narrative events contained in the text. This mental representation serves as a starting point for such non-literal semantic components as inferences and mappings. However, linguistic-based humour theory was one of the few fields in which script/frame-based semantics continued to be employed; recently, this kind of semantic approach has returned due to its adoption within the “cognitive” approaches to the study of language and literature.

A case study: Aristophanes, *Frogs*

1. The re-configuration of the text – the incongruence of scripts

1. 1. The structure of choruses

Originally, the term “script” means a sequence of instructions about how to execute certain actions. Used in linguistics, the definition of the term includes the moment of typical action; typical sequences of actions and those of events,

if based upon prescribed patterns, are both considered as scripts. In modern textual linguistics the term is applied in the latter sense, referring to typical sequences of actions pre-arranged in time.² The typical sequences of actions connected to the typical verbal utterances forming the script do not necessarily overlap.³ Taking this into consideration, the meaning of the term “script,” in textual linguistics, turns out to be a conception of patterns which make a typical sequence of actions to be realised in language.

Thus, the term “script” implies two different models, which are nevertheless linked to each other. Firstly, the pattern in language makes a certain kind of knowledge (the conception about a sequence of events) apprehensible and presentable in verbal communication. Secondly, this knowledge and the processing of the patterns of action realised in practice are themselves the results of a certain formation, impossible to be created without language.

Classical tragedies, the *parodoi* of the texts used by Aristophanes and the dialogues following them, are all formed according to a (more or less standardised) script. As the first step of my GTVH-analysis, I intend to approach classical Greek choruses and the *agones* following them according how they are realised in language. That is, we need to explore the typical sequences of events which form the pattern of a *parodos* and an *agon* following it. The detailed analysis of sequences should reveal that verbal conversion of events, since the verbal realisation of patterns necessarily includes stylistic and connotative variations as well as certain dramaturgic deflections from the pattern itself. Considering this, the general structure of the dialogue between the chorus and the actor(s) is as follows:

The reconstruction of the script of a classical chorus:

1. The chorus marches in
2. The chorus identifies itself
3. The standpoint of the chorus is defined
4. The dialogue unfolds: *Ἀμοιβαίον*
5. Epirrhema and anti-epirrhema
6. Agon
7. “Exhaustion”, the peak of the dialogue
8. The judgement of the chorus

² G. Tolcsvai Nagy, *A magyar nyelv szövegtana* [Introduction to the Hungarian Textology]. Budapest 2001, 75 and S. Petőfi, *A szöveg mint komplex jel* [Text as Complex Sign]. Budapest 2004, 57.

³ S. Kiss, *Elbillenő forgatókönyvek* [Tilting Scripts]. *Officina Textologica* 14 (2008) 49-57.

Dramaturgy defines three possible kinds of chorus entry songs, with the chorus arriving on either an empty stage or a stage full of actors. In the early tragedies of the first group the chorus is the protagonist, and its entry into the orchestra is accompanied by a special song written in anapests (sometimes iambs or trochees). All through the play, the chorus will stay on the stage; the rest of the characters may only occasionally and temporarily come into contact with it (e.g. *Suppliants*, *Persians*). In the second group of plays (a representative example of which is the chorus in *Oedipus at Colonus* [117-137]), the chorus arrives on an empty stage, as a preparation for the appearance of the characters. The third group includes plays in which the chorus will appear if a protagonist asks them to do so, while the potential adversaries of the agon are already on the stage (*Libation Bearers* [84-88], *Medea* [133-137]). From the circumstances of the chorus' entry it is possible to guess their subsequent role. The grand protagonist-choruses of the earliest tragedies are actively involved in, and actually direct the events. In the tragedies classified into the second group, the chorus will still influence the events more or less, giving instructions or guidance to the main characters. In tragedies of the third group (consisting mostly of Euripides' plays), the choruses – usually slave women or local women – do not take an active part in the plot, and will only passively watch the events. Their only task is to reflect or comment on the events, and pray to the gods.

The most obvious form of self-identification is the members of the chorus clearly announcing to the audience who they are, where they are from, and how they are related to the people on stage. For instance, in Euripides' tragedy *Hecuba*, the chorus of the women carried off from Troy marches in and tells us how the women became slaves along with their queen Hecuba [98-103]. The chorus, however, does not always identify itself so unambiguously. From time to time only the name of the native land of the chorus members is supplied – in that case the chorus usually consists of local women or slave women (*Iphigenia at Aulis* [164-168]). Sometimes it is a character already on stage who identifies the chorus, for example Tecmessa in Sophocles' play *Ajax* [201-203].

According to Aristotle's definition, a parodos is ἡ πρώτη λέξις ὅλη χοροῦ.⁴ In classical tragedies and old comedies the parodos (the first chorus song) has several functions apart from being the entry song of the chorus (which is not always true, as the first song of the chorus does not always coincide with their entry). Following the parodos is the first chance to develop a dialogue (ἄμοιβαίον) between the chorus or the chorus leader and the actors. The participants of this dialogue are not necessarily friends or possible allies. In the first part of the agon the chorus initiates a debate by its song and dance, then, with a few lines

⁴ *Poet.* 1452b 23.

of exhortation, sends the first speaker of the agon into the dialogue. The first speaker who explains his or her opinion in the so-called epirrhema, will always lose in the end. The peak of the dialogue is the *πνῖγος*, a virtuoso tirade made up of the rhythm pattern of the epirrhema. The second speaker, who will win the debate, is granted the same dramatic opportunities as the first one.

The chorus may talk not only to the characters, but also to another group. Commonly, the chorus is divided into two half-choruses, replying to each other's song. Frequently, a chorus song written for two half-choruses is supposed to relate and comment on the events in the wings. In Euripides' tragedy *Alcestis* the chorus separates into two groups, and that is how the *ἀμοιβαίον* unfolds. From the dialogue of the two half-choruses (the elders) the audience can learn what is going on in Admetos' palace: Alcestis is ready to die for her husband, and the servants are already preparing the funeral decorations for her [93-111]. Sophocles, in his fragmentary satyr play *The Tracking Satyrs*, invents a special dramatic way of applying two half-choruses talking both to each other and Silenus as well as trying to involve the audience in the agon and the search for the lost herd.

In the beginning of the agon the chorus defines its attitude, and will often even commit itself to one of the characters.⁵ Depending on the relationship between the chorus and the characters on stage, the chorus may choose between several patterns of action. In some plays the members of the chorus expect the protagonist to support them (*Seven Against Thebes*); they often warn the protagonist benevolently to fulfil his/her duties in a critical situation (*Oedipus the King*); sometimes they try to restrain the protagonist from committing a fatal mistake (*Medea*), or attempt to give moral support to the protagonist in need (*Electra*). At times they may be plotting to disturb the protagonist's plans and openly set themselves against him/her. Especially in the Old Comedy, the chorus often appears as the comic protagonist's adversary, as in the *Birds*.⁶ Enraged, the birds want to tear the two intruders, Euelpides and Peisthetairos into pieces, together with Tereus the Hoopoe, who has let human beings in among them, thus breaking the laws and the ancient oath of birds (*Birds* 328-337).

Concluding the agon, the chorus voices its judgement concisely in tetrameters, preparing the following dialogue, which will show the results and consequences of the debate in the agon. The fulfilling the criteria of the role the chorus demonstrates involvement in the events of the play, the introductory chorus songs are divided into three groups.

⁵ Arist. *EN* 1123a 23-24.

⁶ B. Zimmermann, *The Parodoi of the Aristophanic Comedies*. Oxford Readings in Aristophanes. Oxford–New York 1996, 182.

2. The Frog Song

2.1. The Frog Song-pattern

The patterns of events, as they should follow from the configuration reconstructed in 1. 1., now appear somewhat modified. Some features of dramatic language suggest that the modified form was applied for the sake of a modified sequence of events. The typical sequence of events, taken from parent texts, is not perfectly congruent with the sequence of events in the target text; neither are the verbal formations specifically connected to the events. This incongruence, however, cannot be so great as to allow the audience to recognise the parallel structures and verbal formations connecting the target text (that is, the song of the frog chorus and the *agon* following the latter) and the parent text(s).

Via putting frogs on the stage, Aristophanes parodies the patterns of the chorus songs and *agons* occurring in Greek tragedies. Although the setting – the River Styx – could not be more sublime, and the winner of the debate is Dionysus himself, his adversaries are “only” frogs. They are not some inferior sort of animals, though, for they are the favourites of Zeus: that is what makes the scene infinitely comic even after thousands of years. Both the situations and the form come from the “original” script, which leads to the conclusion that the “original” and emptied forms called *parodos* and *agon* are capable of carrying any kind of contents. However, the members of the chorus as well as the actual debate (the not-too-deep-in-thought croaking of frogs) prove to be entirely humiliating for the god. Thus, the song reveals that the unity of content and form is not to be broken up without serious damage to the effect, as their separation from each other results in the reverse of the original culminating point of genre of tragedy, i.e. the essential catharsis. This parody, however, does not only refer to the emptiness and anachronistic quality of certain forms, that is, it does not only ridicule the genre, but can also function as the continual self-correction of Aristotelian mimesis.

The re-configuration of the classical chorus song-pattern:

1. The chorus gives a sign – self-identification
2. The chorus appears
3. Opinion defined: Why do we croak?
4. The dialogue unfolds: *Ἀμοιβαίον*
5. Epirrhema and anti-epirrhema
6. A reduced *agon*
7. “Exhaustion”; the frog-song is silenced
8. The chorus is defeated

2. 1. 1. The croaking is heard

Aristophanes' frogs are singing on the banks of Styx, bestowing themselves on no less cardinal persona than Dionysus himself, who has descended to the Underworld for Euripides. The god is in a bad temper: he has a stomach-ache, and furthermore his bottom is sore from the hard seat of the boat.⁷ Not long after that, the frog-song resounds, as Charon forewarns us, *ῥᾶσ' ἀκούσει γὰρ μέλη κάλλιστ', ἐπειδὴν ἐμβάλης ἄπαξ* [*Batr.* 206-7].⁸ The appearance of frogs is a brilliant parody of the *παρόδος*, the entry song of ancient drama, revealing the chorus marching in and identifying itself. In the chorus song of the *Frogs*, although Charon has already driven Dionysus' attention to the presence of frogs, it is the onomatopoeia, that is, the croaking that functions as a self-identifier, returning again and again as a refrain in the text:

βρεκεκεκέξ κοᾶξ κοᾶξ,
βρεκεκεκέξ κοᾶξ κοᾶξ.

2. 1. 2. The chorus appears

Similarly to the chorus songs of tragedies, the chorus songs of comedies can also be classed into three groups. Naturally, the three groups are not always clearly definable in all comedies or tragedies; some pieces, like the chorus songs of the *Clouds* or the *Birds*, may bear the features of more types than one.

In comedies of the first type – most characteristically represented by the choral song of the elders in *Lysistrata* [254-386] – the chorus arrives at an empty stage, as a preparation for the appearance of the main characters. After the two half-choruses converse with each other, the chorus of the women arrives, initiating a fierce debate, only to be ended by *Lysistrata*. In comedies of the second group (*Knights*, *Peace*), the chorus comes to help, summoned by one of the actors already on the stage, and tries to actively direct the events: *Peace* [296-308], *Knights* [242-254]. As far as the choruses of the third group are concerned, they do not play an important role in the plot, neither as a helper, nor as an in-former of the actors struggling on the stage; the members of the chorus even want to prevent the protagonist from reaching his aim: *Wasps* [242-247].

In this case the chorus does not appear at the explicit request of a character – although Charon is a fairly keen to hear the croaking – ; they only appear because they only appear because they are supposed to do so. Neither does it influence the course of events later, except that the unskilled Dionysus has to pull the oars to the quick rhythm of the frog-song, which will only make him feel worse. Later

⁷ *Batr.* 221 and 236-37.

⁸ “It’s easy. You’ll hear songs / most delightful, when once you lay into it”. All translations by M. Dillon (Perseus Digital Library, 1995).

on, the frog-chorus will be replaced by another chorus, a more “serious” one, if possible under the present circumstances: the chorus of the initiates.

2. 1. 3. The standpoint is defined; epirrhema

The frogs, as one will expect from a classical Greek chorus, spick to the pattern of the idealised script when they duly explain why they have appeared, and on whose side they are. They are completely harmless, merely wishing to sing to Nysian Dionysus, as they do every year anyway, in Limnae, at the Feast of the Jars, when the people gather to share in a joyful revelry at the sanctuary of the god [214-220]:

BAT. κοᾶξ κοᾶξ,
ἦν ἀμφὶ Νυσηίου
Διὸς Διόνυσον ἐν
Λίμναις ἰαχήσαμεν,
ἦνίχ' ὁ κραιπαλόκωμος
τοῖς ἱεροῖσι Χύτροισι
χωρεῖ κατ' ἐμὸν τέμενος λαῶν ὄχλος,
βρεκεκεκέξ κοᾶξ κοᾶξ.⁹

Unfortunately, the god does not appreciate the hymn; angrily, he croaks back as an anti-epirrhema. In-between the strophes of the chorus song, dialogic parts are inserted, matching each other like antistrophes [225-227]:

ΔΙΟ. ἀλλ', ἐξόλοισθ' αὐτῶ κοᾶξ
οὐδέν γάρ ἐστ' ἀλλ' ἦ κοᾶξ.¹⁰

The croaking functions as a jab-line, as, according to stereotypes, a god from Olympus should not be croaking. Thus, the conceptual model of the god and his deeds as they are handled in the text are incongruent, which will result in laughter. The croaking returns again and again, as if in poetic parallelism, which keeps the text open to the unfolding of the “basic idea.” This idea is repeated over and over, generating the figure called *reditio*. The “topic sentence” results from the same idea, systematically returning at the end of each episode, before the community croak back in applause. The repetition does not only function as a means of giving emphasis; it will also become an effective way of forming the text, following the pattern of parallelism, which is quite common in ancient poetry. The croaking also emerges as a means of arranging the text proportionally: each

⁹ “Let us sing, my sweet / song, Koaxkoax / which for Nysian / Dionysos, son of Zeus, / we sang at Limnae / when in drunken revelry / at the Feast of the Jars / the crowd of people marches to my sanctuary. / Brekekekex, koax, koax.”

¹⁰ “Go to the hell with your koax / koax and nothing but koax!”

croaking indicates the appearance of a new theme and idea. Thus, the onomatopoeic passages do not only separate but also connect parts of the text.

The scene, however, does not make it explicit whether the frogs are actually aware of the fact who is descending into the Underworld. Concluding from the unfolding dialogue, they have no idea that it is their worshiped Dionysus sitting in Charon's boat. It is true, though, that the god is travelling in disguise, in clothes similar to Hercules': a lion's hide, under that a purple robe, and women's shoes. Once such clothes have brought Hercules luck, Dionysus, wearing them, is not likely to come back empty-handed either. His intention explains the disguise: just as Hercules wanted to bring up Cerberus, he wants now to bring up a playwright, Euripides, just deceased [66-69], since he is in need of a good poet [72-73]. Although Euripides is not the best in his job – he cannot even be a patch on Sophocles –, he is the easiest to bring up, because he would escape by himself anyway [80-82]. Neither does the masked god reveal his identity to the boatman, who even gets him to pull the oars [196-205].

2. 1. 4. The agon between the god and the Amphibians

From the dialogue (accompanied by croaking) of the chorus and the god, a kind of agon unfolds, reduced to two participants. While the god tries every means to silence the frogs, they will always start again, claiming that the frog-folk is highly favoured by gods, especially Pan, Apollo and the Muses, as it is frogs that produce the reed for Pan's syrinx [229-233]:

*ΔΙΟ. ἀλλ', ἐξόλοισθ' αὐτῶ κοᾶξ
οὐδέν γάρ ἐστ' ἀλλ' ἢ κοᾶξ.*

*ΒΑΤ. εἰκότως γ' ᾧ πολλὰ πράττων
ἐμὲ γὰρ ἔστερξαν μὲν εὐλυροί τε Μοῦσαις·
καὶ κεροβάτας Πάν, ὁ καλαμόφθογγα παίζων·
προσεπιτέρπεται δ' ὁ φορμικτὰς Ἀπόλλων,
ἔνεκα δόνακος, ὃν ὑπολύριον·
ἔνυδρον ἐν λίμναις τρέφω.
βρεκεκεκέξ κοᾶξ κοᾶξ.¹¹*

It does require some courage to enter into a debate with frogs, as frogs are in their element while croaking, particularly if they need to croak down the great Dionysus himself in a grand contest [242-245]:

¹¹ “**Dionysos:** Go to hell with your koax / koax and nothing but koax! **Frogs:** Rightly so, you busybody. / the Muses of the fine lyre love us / and so does horn-crested Pan, playing his reed pipe. / And the harpist Apollo delights in us as well, / On account of the reed, which as a bridge for his lyre / I nourish in the water of the pond. / Brekekekex, koax, koax.”

*ΒΑΤ. μᾶλλον μὲν οὖν
 φθεγξόμεσθ', εἰ δὴ ποτ'
 εὐηλίοις ἐν ἀμέραισιν
 ἠλάμεσθα διὰ κυπείρου·
 καὶ φλέω, χαίροντες ὠδῆς
 πολυκολύμβοισι μέλεσιν.¹²*

2. 1. 5. Exhaustion: the frogs are croaked down

The wrathful god commands the amphibians to be silent, although, for a frog, that means horrible suffering,¹³ as “singing” is their element. Miraculously, the god will win the contest, by simply giving a good croak to the company – that is where the agon reaches its peak, the exhaustion or *πνίγος* [263-267]:

*ΔΙΟ. κεκράξομαι γὰρ
 ἄν με δῆ δι' ἡμερας,
 βρεκεκεκέξ κοᾶξ κοᾶξ,
 ἕως ἂν ὑμῶν ἐπικρατήσω τῶ κοᾶξ,
 βρεκεκεκέξ κοᾶξ κοᾶξ.
 ἔμελλον ἄρα παύσειν ποθ' ὑμᾶς τοῦ κοᾶξ.¹⁴*

The frogs willy-nilly grow quiet, admitting to defeat, and their silence is more telling than any conclusion (used in other plays at such points). The frog-chorus, now mute, surrender to Dionysus, but the traditional finale of the improvised agon (the “seal” expressing the judgement of the chorus) is only implicitly present. This implied judgement, “the silence of the frogs,” functions as a “punch line” concluding the elliptic agon.

2. 1. 6. Ellipsis: recognition failed?

What makes the situation even more comic is that the intruder, with his bad mood and the pain in his stomach, does not identify himself at the beginning of the dialogue, so the frogs may safely sing to him about their own might and power. Thus recognition, a crucial moment in the prototypical script of Greek drama, fails to appear,¹⁵ though it might have made Dionysus feel happier, and given the frogs an opportunity to pay their deference to the divinity they respect above all others.

¹² “No, all the more / will we sing, if ever / On a sunshiny day, / we leaped through the weeds / and the rushes, rejoicing in the song's / diving melodies.”

¹³ *Batr.* 254, *δεινὰ τᾶρα πεισόμεσθα.*

¹⁴ “Nor you me, oh no, / Never! For I will shout / if I have to, all day long, / until I vanquish you with this koax.”

¹⁵ *Poet.* 1554b-1555a

3. Mechanisms of incongruence

3. 1. Incongruence on the level of a conceptual integration: The cognitive model of frogs

Another source of humour, besides the classical text of the chorus song re-configured, is the conceptual integration of the speaker's identity. Mark Turner (literary history) and Gilles Fauconnier (cognitive studies) have created the theory of *blending* (conceptual integration): the mental mechanism which connects separate conceptual fields during the interpretation of a text.¹⁶ Owing to this ability, the reader's imagination can easily work out the rhetoric formulae in a text. The theory of blending examines and models the interpretational processes in the mind, suggesting that at the very first moment of encountering the text we create allusions between it and earlier mental models. These allusions are constantly checked during the process of reading. This strategy of interpretation helps us unravel the figures of a text. Everyone possesses the capacity of cognitive blending, which means that – as Aristotle also recognised – everyone is able to create and decode rhetoric figures in the same way, if not to the same extent.¹⁷ The process, which works on a mental level, only becomes conscious for accomplished writers, artists of language: they will consciously choose from among possible forms of a certain idea. Others use the possible forms instinctively, depending on their language competence. When encountering the text for the first time, recipients create a cognitive model (in this case a trivial one) about the concept of “frog” – that is, they identify the speaker. This activates a certain conceptual sphere (that of the frog) and retrieves a cognitive model, which causes the recipient to form expectations – never to be fulfilled, in our case. By merely activating the conceptual spheres, incongruence emerges, as, stereotypically, frogs are not considered the most perfect and attractive creatures of the world and few people enjoy their characteristic voice. What is more, these green creatures, croaking and jumping, appear as the chorus and participate in the realisation of a prototypical script: they name themselves, define their standpoint, and abruptly get into a debate with the protagonist, who happens to be divine. The incongruence between the parent text and the target text (the frog song) lies in the fact that, as a rule, amphibians do not argue with gods.

¹⁶ Cf. G. Fauconnier, *Mappings in Thought and Language*. Cambridge 1997; see also: M. Turner, *The Literary Mind*. New York 1996.

¹⁷ *Rhet.* 1405a 9: *Καὶ τὸ σαφές καὶ τὸ ἡδύ καὶ τὸ ξενικὸν ἔχει μάλιστα ἡ μεταφορά, καὶ λαθεῖν οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτὴν παρ' ἄλλου.*

3. 2. Incongruence reduced and growing – tilting moments

In the case of incongruent scripts, sequences of events and linguistic patterns connected to them appear as derived from their typical appearance; but differences between the two do not keep to the level of stylistic/connotative possibilities.¹⁸ The reason for these modifications is that, besides the congruent moments of continuation, other, *tilting* moments will occur. Classical books on rhetoric enumerate four devices to modify a “neutral” expression: addition (*adiectio*), detraction (*detractio*), replacement (*immutatio*) or interchanging the expression with another one (*transmutatio*).¹⁹ In the case of the chorus in *The Frogs*, certain elements of the sequence of action emerge as modified expressions or realisations of a modified pattern. In the part of the text examined here, differences are found between the imprints of the script and the expectations based on the standards stored in the reader’s mind.

3. 3. The pattern modified

3. 3. 1. Detractio

Out of the modifications listed in classical and modern books on rhetoric, detraction and replacement are both frequently used by authors. Detraction may take different forms: on the one hand, simply omitting one (otherwise widely used) moment from the script of the target text; on the other hand, reducing the utterances of the characters. In the first case, Aristophanes simply omitted the last moment of the parent script, that is, judgement: the chorus only admits to its defeat by silence. The other case is trivial: as the events of the scene are not important for the unfolding of the plot, there is no chance for an agon of the length commonly occurring in tragedies to develop.

3. 3. 2. Adiectio

Addition results more complicated patterns, more difficult to describe. In the target text, distorting the events suggested by the parent text does not end with a subversion of formulae familiar to each and every Greek theatre-goer. To the parent text, the author adds its negative image: this second sequence of events is not typical, as it is the god who stops his devout flock from fulfilling their sacred duty of praising him. This sequence of events emerges as the reverse of another, sacred sequence implied by the mythical figures and the setting.

A typical sequence of events may also expand by the addition of other events, even by interweaving different patterns. By means of introducing new

¹⁸ S. Kiss op. cit. (note 3), 52.

¹⁹ *Inst. orat.* I, 5, 38-41.

structures to the script which shows the basic sequence, a novel, non-conventional meaning is connected to the original and conventional one. In this case, the typical sequence of events (the debate of the protagonist and the chorus) is subverted by the different patterns woven into it, although the script of the parent texts is preserved, thus it still remains recognisable all the time.

3. 3. 3. Immutatio

Sometimes, one element in the typical sequence of events is replaced by another, that is, the events do not follow each other as one would expect them to, with the pattern of the parent text in mind. In the parodos of *The Frogs*, the reader can recognise the moments which are needed to identify the parodos and the agon in a Greek tragedy. To these moments, the author adds another pattern. While constructing a regular agon-script, this secondary pattern weaves the text through and through, croak by croak. Thus, the incongruence between the parent and the target texts is confirmed.

Not only events, but also characters that realise those events or the settings in which the events are realised, may be replaced: for a true god crossing the Underworld waters, it is not the Elders of Thebes or the Wives of Corinth but a few croaking frogs that provide the chorus.

3. 3. 4. Transmutatio

A sequential change, that is, an exchange of elements conventionally fixed in the script, also appears in the text in question, subverting the conventional pattern again. The very appearance of the chorus and the introduction of the ritual parodos are themselves breaks with “canonised” dramaturgy. The chorus should introduce the appearance of the protagonist; here, the protagonist and his companion announce the appearance of the frogs instead, who, in turn, do not play any significant role whatever in the plot. The chorus appears for nothing but croaking (which equals a hymn to Dionysus).

Laughter is generated by the decreasing incongruence between the parent and target scripts, continually alluding to each other. The more plainly the parent text appears in the events and structure of the target text, the better it is for the comic effect. The points of the highest congruence between the target and the parent texts work as jab-lines, and the implied judgement concluding the parodos and the agon (“the silence of the frogs”) works as a punch-line. On a semantic level, on the other hand, this effect appears as reversed: humour emerges in its strongest form at the moments which show the strikingly obvious contrast between the patterns (conceptual models and expectations) stored in the reader’s mind and the target text – that is, at the moments of the least congruence between the parent text and the target.

Conclusion

Since Plato, it has been widely realised that every living being that overestimates its properties and does not recognise its own insignificance, becomes ridiculous.²⁰ Aristotle, on the other hand, shows that these amiably self-conceited frogs are absolutely harmless.²¹ The main source of comedy in the text is contrast (incongruence), always present, but not always to the same extent: the frog-language of the beginning suddenly changes into a human text, which, relying on its rhetoricity and systematically arranged narrative steps, should prove to be large-scale drama – except that it is sung by frogs on the banks of a river. Everything we know about the chorus song of a classical Greek tragedy is ridiculed by giving creative powers to loveably fallible amphibians and creating an almost epic perspective for their lives, with transcendental overtones. A parody of style gains its effect from the incongruence between form and content; that is what makes e.g. the *Batrachomyomachia* (supposedly written by Homer) a perfect parody of the *Iliad*. It contains all the epic characteristics, and its prosody is faultless, but instead of a battle of gods and heroes, it is about a fight between frogs and mice. The mirror-text (the parody), however, gains its true meaning only if the reader knows the parent text (in this case, Euripides' tragedies). Parody is not unenjoyable in itself; but as any good parody works with the mechanisms creating the parent text;²² it can only appear comic if it really reveals the patterns underlying the original, and it can only reach its aim if these patterns really bring the original work of art to the recipient's mind.

To draw a final conclusion, we may say that Aristophanes' parody of a parodos has proved to be a consciously and meticulously constructed text, a totally faithful image of the prototypical scripts functioning as parent texts, and abounding in humorous effects. In the *Frogs*, the author makes fun of both gods and heroes in Greek mythology, as well as the greatest playwrights. The latter aspect, finally, reaches far beyond the scope of making fun of chorus-scripts used in tragedies; it ridicules the myth itself and tragedy as such, as the myth's most sophisticated adaptation, together with the tragic world view, characters, and a tragic set of concepts.

²⁰ *Philebus* 1449c.

²¹ *Poet.* 1449a: Ἡ δὲ κωμωδία ἐστὶν ὡσπερ εἴπομεν μίμησις φαυλοτέρων μὲν, οὐ μὲντοι κατὰ πᾶσαν κακίαν, ἀλλὰ τοῦ αἰσχροῦ ἐστὶν τὸ γελοῖον μῶριον. τὸ γὰρ γελοῖον ἐστὶν ἀμάρτημα τι καὶ αἰσχος ἀνώδυνον καὶ οὐ φθαρτικόν, οἷον εὐθύς τὸ γελοῖον πρόσωπον αἰσχρόν τι καὶ διεστραμμένον ἄνευ ὀδύνης.

²² *I. Fónagy*, *A költői nyelvről* [The Language of Poetics]. Budapest 1999, 94.