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ARISTOPHANES AND AGATHON.

IN this paper I propose to inquire what estimate of the tragic poet Agathon may be derived from the plays of Aristophanes; to consider how far the view thus inferred can be confirmed from independent sources of information; and to touch lightly upon the general question of literary criticism in Aristophanes.

Aristophanes possesses so many higher titles to fame that it is easy to forget that he may from one point of view be regarded as the earliest of literary critics, and that to his poems, either directly, or indirectly through the scholiasts, we owe much of our knowledge of certain aspects of Greek literary history. It is true that, as a poet-critic, he confines his criticisms almost entirely to the poets. But among these he refers by name to some forty or fifty,—one or two of them epic poets, a few lyric, a larger number writers of comedy, and a still larger number writers of tragedy. Familiarity is apt to blind us to the number, variety, and brilliance—in words, metre, scenes—of the literary allusions, the parodies and travesties, found in all the plays of Aristophanes and pervading some of them from end to end; but we have only to turn our thoughts for a moment from the great wit of the ancient to the great wit of the modern world, and we see at once how vast a difference there is in this respect between Shakespeare and Aristophanes. We think of the play-scenes in *Hamlet* and in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, and of certain passages in *Love's Labour's Lost* and in *As You Like It*. We may recall, too, single lines which have all the appearance of parody, such as those of Falstaff in the First Part of *King Henry IV.*:—

and Weep not, sweet queen; for trickling tears are vain;
 For God's sake, lords, convey my tristful queen;
 For tears do stop the flood-gates of her eyes.

But on the whole there remains a striking contrast between the comparative rarity of literary allusion in the broadly human drama of Shakespeare, and the amazing opulence of fancy and ingenuity shown in the parodies of Aristophanes.

Of the use of parody as a means—indirect but effective—of literary criticism we find a good example, at the expense of Agathon, in the earlier part of the *Thesmophoriazusae*. Before Agathon himself appears, his retainer,

who has come forward in order to offer preliminary sacrifice in behalf of the poet's literary efforts, describes his method and echoes his manner in the following anapaests :--

- ΘΕ. εὐφημος πᾶς ἔστω λαός,
 στόμα συγκλήσας· ἐπιδημεῖ γὰρ
 θίασος Μουσῶν ἔνδον μελάθρων
 τῶν δεσποσύνων μελοποιῶν.
 ἐχέτω δὲ πνοὰς νήνεμος αἰθήρ,
 κύμα δὲ πόντου μὴ κελαδείτω
 γλαυκόν· ΜΝ. βομβάξ. ΕΥ. σίγα. ΜΝ. τί λέγει ;
- ΘΕ. πτηνῶν τε γένη κατακοιμάσθω,
 θηρῶν τ' ἀγρίων πόδες ὑλοδρόμων
 μὴ λυέσθων. ΜΝ. βομβалоβομβάξ.
- ΘΕ. μέλλει γὰρ ὁ καλλιεπῆς Ἀγάθων
 πρόμος ἡμέτερος
 δρυόχους τιθέναι δράματος ἀρχάς.
 κάμπτει δὲ νέας ἀψίδας ἐπῶν,
 τὰ δὲ τορνεύει, τὰ δὲ κολλομελεῖ,
 καὶ γνωμοτυπεῖ κᾶντονομάζει
 καὶ κηροχυτεῖ καὶ γογγύλλει
 καὶ χροανεύει.

Thesm. 39–56.

- RET. In reverent silence be all folk stilled,
 Tied be each tongue ;
 For my lord's halls, haunt of the Muses, are thrilled
 By the spell of their song.
 Let the windless welkin refrain its breathing,
 Let the azure sea roll slumbrous-seething
 Hush-hushing along !
- MNES. My eye ! EUR. S—sh ! MNES. What is the game he's a startin' ?
- RET. Let sleep all pinions of winged things cumber,
 Let the forest-prowlers be bound by slumber
 As in fetters strong !
- MNES. Oh my eye and Betty Martin !
- RET. For mellifluous Agathon, chief of our choir,
 On his dockyard-stocks will have presently got
 The keel of a drama, a dream of the lyre !
 He is bending words to the shape of a tyre :
 He has some on the lathe, some clamped and cemented,
 Maxims minted, and terms invented,
 Models in wax, and moulds indented,
 And castings fused in his melting-pot.¹

¹ For this verse translation, as well as for those which follow I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. Arthur S. Way.

Thus does his body-servant, a close observer, depict the industry with which Agathon, concentrating in himself the skill not of one craftsman but of many, polishes and refines his compositions.

In these lyrics, as in those which Agathon himself presently (*Thesm.* 101–129) interchanges with the Chorus, a marked feature is the elaborate repetition both of vowels and of consonants. The general effect produced on the mind of the rude old-fashioned critic Mnesilochus is indicated by his comic ejaculations *βομβάξ* and *βομβαλοβομβάξ*, and further by his apt simile of the ant's mazy paths and his express references to the effeminacy and voluptuousness incident to poetry of this description.¹

It so happens that the fragments of Agathon's own poetry—some thirty in number—preserved by Aristotle, Athenaeus, Stobaeus and others, furnish evidence by which we can to a certain extent test the justice of Aristophanes' criticisms on the method of Agathon and its results. At this point it will be convenient to draw solely from Aristotle, who quotes the following lines :—

τάχ' ἄν τις εἰκὸς αὐτὸ τοῦτ' εἶναι λέγοι,
βροτοῖσι πολλὰ τυγχάνειν οὐκ εἰκότα.
(*Rhet.* ii. 24 cp. *Poet.* xviii. 6, xxv. 17).

This, one may say, is most to be expected,
That man's lot still will be the unexpected.

καὶ μὴν τὰ μὲν γε τῇ τέχνῃ πράσσειν, τὰ δὲ
ἡμῖν ἀνάγκη καὶ τύχη προσγίγνεται.
Rhet. ii. 19.

Our lives by will and skill in part we mould,
Yet more by fate and fortune are controlled.

τέχνη τύχην ἔστερξε καὶ τύχη τέχνην.
Eth. Nic. vi.

Skill is in love with luck, and luck with skill.

μόνου γὰρ αὐτοῦ καὶ θεὸς στερίσκεται,
ἀγένητα ποιεῖν ἄσσο' ἂν ἦ πεπραγμένα.
Eth. Nic. vi. 2.

One only thing is even to God denied,
To undo things done, to set the past aside.

φαῦλοι βροτῶν γὰρ τοῦ πονεῖν ἠσσωμένοι
θανεῖν ἐρώσιν.
Eth. Eud. iii. 1.

Base are the slaves who, fainting in life's toil,
Desire to die.

¹ μύρμηκος ἀτραπούς, ἢ τί διαμινύρεται ;
Thesm. 100.

ὡς ἡδὺ τὸ μέλος, ᾧ πότνια Γενετυλλίδες,
καὶ θηλυδριῶδες καὶ κατεγλωττισμένον

καὶ μανδαλωτῶν, ὥστ' ἐμοῦ γ' ἀκρωμένον
ὑπὸ τὴν ἔδραν αὐτὴν ὑπῆλθε γάργαλος.
ibid. 130–133.

These verses seem to show that Aristophanes was not far from the mark when, in the passage already quoted, he referred to Agathon's taste for the forging of maxims. And the balanced and antithetical form which most of the lines assume points to the relevancy of such parodies as:—

ὦ πρέσβυ πρέσβυ, τοῦ φθόνου μὲν τὸν ψόγου
ἤκουσα, τὴν δ' ἄλγησι οὐ παρεσχόμην.

Thesm. 146.

Old man, old man, I have heard thy censure hurled
At envy, but its pangs I have not proved.

τὰς συμφορὰς γὰρ οὐχὶ τοῖς τεχνάσμασι
φέρειν δίκαιον ἀλλὰ τοῖς παθήμασι.

ibid. 198.

Duty commands that not with craft's evasions
We meet misfortunes, but with suffering patience.

By such parodies as these Aristophanes clearly implies that Agathon's poetry was infected with the rhetorical spirit of the time. And of his susceptibility to rhetorical influences some confirmation is supplied by Plato in the *Protagoras* (315 E), where Agathon is represented as paying a visit to Prodicus, and in the *Symposium*, where his speech in praise of Love is made to conclude with the following passage: 'This is he who empties men of disaffection and fills them with affection, who makes them to meet together at banquets such as these: in sacrifices, feasts, dances, he is our lord—who sends courtesy and sends away discourtesy, who gives kindness ever and never gives unkindness; the friend of the good, the wonder of the wise, the amazement of the gods; desired by those who have no part in him, and precious to those who have the better part in him; parent of delicacy, luxury, desire, fondness, softness, grace; regardful of the good, regardless of the evil: in every word, work, wish, fear—saviour, pilot, comrade, helper; glory of gods and men, leader best and brightest: in whose footsteps let every man follow, sweetly singing in his honour and joining in that sweet strain with which love charms the souls of gods and men.'¹ In these words Socrates, with an ironical show of terror, at once perceives the influence of Gorgias, the traces of which are indeed not far to seek.²

¹ Plat. *Symp.* 197 C, D, E: οὗτος δὲ ἡμᾶς ἀλλοτριότητος μὲν κενοῦ, οικειότητος δὲ πληροῦ, τὰς τοιάσδε ξυνόδους μετ' ἀλλήλων πάσας τιθεὶς ξυνιέναι, ἐν ἑορταῖς, ἐν χοροῖς, ἐν θυσαῖς γιγνόμενος ἡγεμών· πραότῃτα μὲν πορίζων, ἀγριότητα δ' ἐξορίζων· φιλόδωρος εὐμενείας, ἄδωρος δυσμενείας· Ἰλέως ἀγαθοῖς, θεατὸς σοφοῖς, ἀγαστὸς θεοῖς· ζηλωτὸς ἀμοίροις, κτητὸς εὐμοίροις· τρυφῆς, ἀβρότητος, χλιδῆς, χαρίτων, ἱμέρου, πόθου πατήρ, ἐπιμελὴς ἀγαθῶν, ἀμελὴς κακῶν· ἐν πόμφῳ, ἐν φόβῳ, ἐν πόθῳ, ἐν λόγῳ κυβερνήτης, ἐπιβάτης, παραστάτης τε καὶ σωτὴρ ἄριστος, ξυμπάντων τε

θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων κόσμος, ἡγεμὼν κάλλιστος καὶ ἄριστος, ᾧ χρῆ ἔπεισθαι πάντα ἄνδρα ἐφουμνούντα καλῶς, καλῆς φθῆς μετέχοντα, ἣν ἄδει θέλων πάντων θεῶν τε καὶ ἀνθρώπων νόημα. Jowett's translation is given in the text.

² Plat. *Symp.* 198 C: καὶ γὰρ με Γοργίου ὁ λόγος ἀνεμίμησεν, ὥστε ἀτεχνῶς τὸ τοῦ Ὀμήρου ἐπεπόνθη· ἐφοβούμην μή μοι τελευτῶν ὁ Ἀγάθων Γοργίου κεφαλὴν δεινοῦ λέγειν ἐν τῷ λόγῳ ἐπὶ τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον πέμψας αὐτὸν με λίθον τῆ ἀφωνία ποιήσειε.

It has already been seen that some of Agathon's own fragments, as preserved by Aristotle, betray the same rhetorical tendencies. In iambs further confirmation and illustration will be furnished by the two following pairs of lines which Athenaeus quotes from Agathon :—

εἰ μὲν φράσω τᾶληθές, οὐχί σ' εὐφρανῶ·
εἰ δ' εὐφρανῶ τί σ', οὐχί τᾶληθές φράσω.

Athen. *Deipnosoph.* V. p. 211 E.

If I speak truth, I shall not please you well,
If I must please you, truth I shall not tell.

τὸ μὲν πάρεργον ἔργον ὡς ποιούμεθα,
τὸ δ' ἔργον ὡς πάρεργον ἐκπονούμεθα.

ibid. V. p. 185 A.

Our bywork as life's serious work we take,
And bywork of life's serious work we make.

In these two last lines can be detected each of the three figures of language which are commonly associated with the name of Gorgias, namely *antithesis*, *parison*, and *paromoion*; or parallelism in sense, form, and sound. Such lines are probably not isolated eccentricities, since we are expressly told that 'Agathon the tragic poet, known to Comedy for his subtlety of mind and elegance of diction, follows Gorgias in *many* of his iambic lines.'¹

For a similar example from the lyrics of Agathon reference may be made to a disputed passage of Dionysius of Halicarnassus. In his treatise on the eloquence of Demosthenes, Dionysius takes occasion to criticize Plato. Selecting the *Menexenus*, of which he does not question the authenticity, he finds in it 'antitheses and *parisoses*, those showy ornaments of Gorgias.'² And a little later, when commenting on a passage taken from the *Menexenus* (236 E), he says (according to a plausible restoration of the text): 'Here adverb corresponds to adverb and verb to verb—*ικανῶς* to *εὐμενῶς* and *ἐπαινέσει* to *παραινέσει*; and these *parisa* are found in the great master of expression, Plato, not in your Licymniuses or your Agathons, who can write such lines as :—

¹ Philostr. *Vit. Soph.* i. 9, καὶ Ἀγάθων δὲ ὁ τῆς τραγωδίας ποιητής, ὃν ἡ κωμῶδία σοφὸν τε καὶ καλλιεπῆ οἶδεν, πολλαχοῦ τῶν ἰάμβων γοργιάζει.—The fragments of Agathon are in some ways the best and most impartial authority of all. But (1) they are few and short, (2) they may owe their preservation rather to their peculiarities than to their representative character (hence the importance of collateral testimony such as that just quoted), (3) they are, in some cases, of doubtful ascription. Examined from the point of view last mentioned, they remind us of the many uncertainties which attend our

knowledge of the remains even of the three great tragedians. How glad, for instance, we should be to have a final determination of the authorship of that line about the wisdom of tyrants being derived from converse with the wise, which Plato in the *Republic* (viii. 568 A) ascribes to Euripides, but which later authorities (and most modern editors) assign to the *Locrian Ajax* of Sophocles.

² Dionys. Hal. *de admir. vi dicendi in Demosth.* 1033 R: τὰ θεατρικὰ τὰ Γοργία (σχήματα)... τὰς ἀντιθέσεις καὶ τὰς παρισώσεις λέγω.

ὑβριν ἢ σε Κύπριν,
νομίσω ; πόθον ἢ μόχθον πραπίδων ;¹

Reviewing the evidence thus far presented, we may fairly claim that the literary estimate of Agathon indicated in the *Thesmophoriazusae* by the allusive method of parody receives considerable confirmation from the surviving fragments and from other sources. And if we are tempted to think that Aristophanes makes too much of the subject of style, we should at least remember Agathon's own view as expressed in the familiar and probably genuine story told by Aelian. When a well-meaning critic proposed to prune away the antitheses which abounded in his plays, Agathon replied: 'Why, my good sir, you fail to see that you would be robbing Agathon of all the Agathon!'²

We have next to inquire how far the *direct* judgment—for there seems to be a direct judgment—pronounced by Aristophanes himself in another play confirms or corrects the impression produced in the *Thesmophoriazusae* by the indirect process of parody. In the *Frogs* it is said of Agathon that he is 'a good poet and regretted by his friends.'³ This line, interpreted by the aid of its context, will be seen presently to possess considerable importance. But even as an isolated line it deserves attention. Some of Aristophanes' single lines are among his most descriptive.⁴ His thumb-nail sketches are sometimes better than his full-length portraits, in which obvious caricature often takes the place of the minute characterisation we should expect in a modern comedy. It may, however, be objected that the line here in question cannot be proved to convey the opinion of Aristophanes himself. This is true; and yet the personal touch—'regretted by his friends'—affords a presumption that Aristophanes is here, to some extent, speaking for himself. It may still be objected that this personal touch itself deprives the first half of the line of all critical value, since it points to the partiality of Aristophanes, who in the interval of six years between the production of the *Thesmophoriazusae* (411 B.C.) and of the *Frogs* (405 B.C.) may have had his feelings stirred by the prolonged absence in Macedonia, or possibly the death, of Agathon.⁵ In this objection there is evident force, and it therefore needs consideration in some detail and with special reference to Plato's account of Agathon. We must consider the poet's personal qualities.

One of the most striking characteristics of Agathon as he appears in

¹ *ibid.* 1035 R: οὐκοῦν ἐπίρρημα ἐπιρρήματι ἀντιπαράκειται καὶ ῥήματι ῥήμα, τὸ μὲν ἰκανῶς τῷ εὐμενῶς, τῷ δ' ἐπαινεῖσι τὸ παραινέσει, καὶ ταῦτα τὰ πᾶρισα οὐ Δικύμιοι εἰσιν οὐδ' Ἀγάθωνες οἱ λέγοντες 'ὑβριν ἢ σε Κύπριν νομίσω; πόθον ἢ μόχθον πραπίδων;' ἀλλ' ὁ δαιμόνιος ἐρμηνεύσαι Πλάτων. The words in inverted commas are an attempted restoration by Weil.

² Ael. *Var. Hist.* xiv. 13: ἀλλὰ σύ γε, γενναῖε, λέληθας σεαυτὸν τὸν Ἀγάθωνα ἐκ τοῦ Ἀγάθωνος ἀφανίζων, where τὸν Ἀγάθωνα is

clearly intended to imply τὸ ἀγαθόν.

³ *Ran.* 84, ἀγαθὸς ποιητῆς καὶ ποθεινὸς τοῖς φίλοις.

⁴ Such lines as:—

μικρὸς γὰ μακρὸς οὗτος ἀλλ' ἔπαν κακόν.

Ach. 909.

ὁ δ' εὐκολος μὲν ἐνθάδ' εὐκολος δ' ἐκεῖ.

Ran. 82.

⁵ The ambiguous expression is ἐς μακρῶν εὐωχίαν (*Ran.* 85), which in any case seems to glance at the convivial disposition of Agathon.

Plato is his great beauty of person; and in his tributes to this, Plato is followed by later writers.¹ To Plato he is also the young man of promise, the modest victor with his first tragedy, the gracious and considerate host.² Happy in the goods of fortune as well as in the gifts of nature, he can indulge his kindly instincts to the full. That he was a man of wealth is clear not only from the *Symposium* but also from the burlesque description in the *Thesmophoriazusae* of the state he kept and of the capacities of that wardrobe which could answer the exacting demands of his theory of the inner unity of dress and drama.³ Nor is it unlikely that as a rich man he is writing from personal experience in the three short fragments, preserved by Stobaeus, which denounce envy:—

ὀλοῖθ' ὁ τοῖς ἔχουσι τὰγαθὰ φθουῶν.

Stob., *Flor.*, 38, 7.

Perish the man who envies others' weal.

σοφίας φθονῆσαι μᾶλλον ἢ πλούτου καλόν.

ibid. 38, 23.

Nobler is envy of wisdom than of wealth.

οὐκ ἦν ἂν ἀνθρώποισιν ἐν βίῳ φθόνος,
εἰ πάντες ἦμεν ἐξ ἴσου πεφυκότες.

ibid. 38, 12.

Never would envy haunt the lives of men,
If all men's birthright were equality.

From everything we hear it seems evident that Agathon was the kind of man his friends would have ample reason to regret, and that in their opinion of his plays the personal estimate may have coloured the poetical in no ordinary degree. It is not impossible, therefore, that Aristophanes, in the line found in the *Frogs*, was much influenced (in retrospect) by the charm of an amiable and attractive nature, and by that beauty both of body and of mind which appealed almost irresistibly to the Greeks.⁴

Another clue, of a very different nature, to the attitude of Aristophanes may be found in the points of contact between Agathon and Euripides. In the *Thesmophoriazusae* Euripides is made to regard Agathon—'the famous Agathon,' as he calls him—as his true and only representative. 'You alone can speak in a manner worthy of me,' as he puts it.⁵ And Aristophanes seems further to associate Euripides and Agathon, and Socrates as well, in a common ridicule when he employs similar stage-devices in presenting them

¹ Plat. *Symp.* 175 E, 198 A; *Protag.* 315 D. In later writers, ὁ καλὸς Ἀγάθων has become almost a stereotyped phrase.

² The dramatic date of the *Symposium* is 416 B.C., when Agathon won his first tragic victory. He may have been about thirty at the time.

³ Aristoph. *Thesm.* 148 ff. In the *Thesmophoriazusae* Agathon composes with his singing

robes about him and in the sun's genial glow.

⁴ Cp. Plat. *Protag.* 315 D, νέον τι ἔτι μειράκιον, ὡς μὲν ἐγῶμαι, καλόν τε ἀγαθὸν τὴν φύσιν, τὴν δ' οὖν ἰδέαν πάνου καλός.—For Antiphon's tribute to Agathon, reference may be made to Aristot. *Eudemian Ethics* iii. 5.

⁵ *Thesm.* 29, ἐνθάδ' Ἀγάθων ὁ κλεινὸς οἰκῶν τυγχάνει | ὁ τραγῳδοποιός. *ibid.* 187, μόνος γὰρ ἂν λέξειαι ἀξίως ἐμοῦ.

to the spectators' view and when he provides each of them with a follower whose devotion is excessive and ought to be embarrassing.¹ In the same way the description (already quoted from the *Thesmophoriazusae*) of Agathon's method of working may be compared with what is said later of Euripides in the *Frogs*.² The music, also, of the two poets is condemned and on similar grounds; and as far as Agathon is concerned, Aristophanes' criticisms are illustrated by the proverbial expression 'Αγαθώνιος ἀλλησις, and by the passage in which Plutarch states that Agathon introduced the chromatic modulations into tragedy for the first time when bringing out his *Mysians*.³

Aristotle, too, seems to class Agathon with Euripides. This, however, does not appear to diminish (perhaps it rather enhances) Aristotle's respect for him. At all events, where he criticizes Agathon, he criticizes him with considerable deference,—a deference which may also be implied in the number of his quotations from him. In the eighteenth chapter of the *Poetics*, Agathon's name is mentioned in close proximity to that of Euripides. Both poets, we are told, err in their treatment of the Chorus, to which Euripides assigns too subordinate a position, while with Agathon the choral songs have become mere interludes.⁴ In the same chapter it is stated, with due respect, that Agathon sometimes made the mistake of choosing for his plays subjects of epic rather than dramatic compass.⁵

Plato also, in an indirect way, brings Agathon into association with Euripides, making the former quote the latter in the course of the speech he delivers in the *Symposium*.⁶ It is yet more noteworthy (and here we must be allowed a short digression which is more apparent than real) that Plato shows us Aristophanes himself as a guest at the table of Agathon, and unites host and guest in a common defeat—at the hands of Socrates—before the *Banquet* closes. At the beginning it is made clear that the elegance of the young Agathon had not been lost on Socrates, who repairs 'fair to the home of the fair' as he expresses it, laved and sandalled, he the man who had marched unshod across the ice at Potidaea; later in the dialogue the *Clouds* of the baldheaded Aristophanes is mentioned without a trace of animosity; and in the final scene of all Socrates is victor over his former comic assailant and victor over even the tragic victor of the day.⁷

¹ Agathon is exhibited by means of the ἐκκύκλημα in *Thesm.* 96, and so is Euripides in *Ach.* 409. With the attitude of the θεράπων 'Αγαθωνος in the *Thesmophoriazusae* may be compared that of Cephisophon as described in *Ran.* 944, 1408, 1453, and in *Fragm.* 316.

² *Ran.* 826 :—
ἐνθεν δὴ στοματουργὸς ἐπὶ βασανίστρια λίσπη
γλῶσσ', ἀνελισσομένη φθονεροῦς κινούσα χαλινούς,
ρήματα δαιμένη καταλεπτολογήσει
πλευμόνων πολλὸν πόνον.

³ *Plut. Quaest. Coniiv.* 645 E : κατηγορῶν τοῦ καλοῦ 'Αγαθωνος, ὃν πρῶτον εἰς τραγῳδίαν φασὶν ἐμβαλεῖν καὶ ὑπομίξει τὸ χρωματικόν. For the

proverb 'Αγαθώνιος ἀλλησις, see Leutsch and Schneidewin, *Paroemiogr. Gr.* i. p. 2.

⁴ *Aristot. Poet.* xviii. 7.

⁵ *ibid.* xviii. 5.

⁶ *Plat. Symp.* 196 E : πᾶς γοῦν ποιητῆς γίγνεται, κἂν ἄμουσος ἢ τὸ πρῖν, οὐδ' ἂν 'Ερως ἄψηται. The words spaced are from the *Sthenoboea* of Euripides (*Fragm.* 663) :—

ποιητὴν δ' ἄρα
'Ερως διδάσκει, κἂν ἄμουσος ἢ τὸ πρῖν.

⁷ *Plat. Symp.* 176 A : λελουμένον τε καὶ τὰς βλαύτας ὑποδεδεμένον, ἃ ἐκείνος ὀλιγάκις ἐποίησε... ταῦτα δὴ ἐκαλλωπισάμην, ἵνα καλὸς παρὰ καλὸν ἴω. *ibid.* 221 B : ἔπειτα ἔμοιγε ἐδόκει, ᾧ

It will be remembered that when the narrator Aristodemus was roused towards daybreak by the crowing of the cocks he found all the rest of the company either asleep or gone, except Agathon and Aristophanes and Socrates, who were still awake, they and only they, and were drinking out of a great goblet passed from hand to hand. Socrates was conversing with his two companions. The whole of their discourse Aristodemus could not remember, for he had not been present from the beginning and he was still a little drowsy. The main point, however, was, he said, that Socrates was forcing the others to admit that skill in writing comedy and skill in writing tragedy went together, and that the artistic writer of tragedy was a writer of comedy also. To this they nodded their assent, under constraint and scarcely following the argument, and first of all Aristophanes fell asleep, and then, as day was dawning, Agathon the host. Socrates himself, having outwatched them, rose and departed; and after reaching the Lyceum he took a bath, and spent that day like any other, and when it was over went home towards evening to rest.¹

In this scene, so strangely full of imaginative truth, the chief interest for Plato manifestly lies in the final victory of Socrates as he issues forth to study the tragi-comedy of life in the streets of Athens, and to anticipate perhaps in his thoughts a time when a poet like our own Shakespeare, moving freely among all men, should prove himself not only a supreme artist in tragedy but a writer of comedy also. Of hardly less interest, however, is it to conjecture how this thesis of Socrates would, under ordinary conditions, have been received by Aristophanes and by Agathon. Aristophanes would assuredly have opposed to the uttermost any suggestion, if such he had suspected, that tragedy should trespass on the domain of comedy. Of Agathon we cannot speak so positively: at one time scholars used, but without sufficient evidence, to hold the view that he had himself written comedies as well as tragedies. All we can safely say is that he was at one with Euripides in overstepping the traditional limits of the art of tragedy. He had, in fact, in his remarkable experiment the *Flower* gone so far as to discard the received legends which were the recognized subjects of tragedy and to employ fictitious names and fictitious incidents.²

It has seemed worth while thus to dwell at some length upon the connexion between Agathon and Euripides because of the presumption it creates that if Aristophanes was drawn towards Agathon by personal regard, he was also repelled from him by artistic dislike. We feel sure that he could not at any time have said anything good of Euripides, for in regard to him he contradicts the princely maxim 'I war not with the dead.' His power he clearly recognized, but he did all that mockery could do to destroy it. Towards Agathon his attitude appears to have been somewhat different. His

¹ Ἀριστοφάνης, τὸ σὺν δὴ τοῦτο, καὶ ἐκεῖ διαπορεύεσθαι ὥσπερ καὶ ἐνθάδε, βρενθυόμενος καὶ τῶφθαλμῶ παραβάλλων. Cp. Aristoph. *Nub.* 362 :—

ὅτι βρενθῆει τ' ἐν ταῖσιν ὁδοῖς καὶ τῶφθαλμῶ

παραβάλλεις, κἄνυπόδητος κακὰ πόλλ' ἀνέχει κἄφ' ἡμῖν σεμνοπροσωπεῖς.

¹ Plat. *Symp.* 223 C, D.

² Aristot. *Poet.* ix. 7, 8.

literary tendencies he regarded as mischievous; but Agathon himself was not the prime offender, he was also (so the plot of the *Thesmophoriazusae* humorously suggests) a follower capable of revolt, he was still further a good host and a good friend. Artistic aversion being thus moderated by personal liking, there is paid to him, when his absence had made itself felt, a vague, tepid, and probably punning compliment to the effect that he is 'a good poet.' If the words stood alone, one might well think that the eulogy was too equivocal to be of any value. The line as a whole, interesting as it undoubtedly is, might seem to imply no more than that Aristophanes could have better spared a better poet.

But a reference to the context and a comparison of other plays will show that Agathon is clearly regarded by Aristophanes as a poet possessing a position and an importance of his own. The point to be observed is that, whatever his prejudgments and whatever the means he employs in order to excite ridicule, Aristophanes does really, whether willingly or unwillingly, leave the right sense of proportion upon the mind. After all, he is not only a dramatist, satirist, caricaturist; he is a poet of insight and of genius. And as modern interpreters we can have little doubt that he ranked Agathon next to the three great tragedians and would probably have placed him in a class apart. The argument to be drawn from the prominence given to Agathon in the *Thesmophoriazusae* and in the *Gerytades* is no doubt treacherous, though it hardly seems likely in itself that a satirist who possesses courage and discernment and at the same time is deeply in earnest would waste his powers on men of little mark.¹ But if we look at the context in the *Frogs* and compare the plays of Aristophanes generally, we shall see how clearly Agathon seems to stand above the crowd of contemporary minor poets. The position of Iophon is, indeed, left undetermined in the opening scene of the *Frogs* until it is ascertained whether his poetry rings true when Sophocles is not at hand to aid him; but it is worth notice that this poet is nowhere else even named in the extant plays of Aristophanes.² And it hardly needs saying that Agathon stands on quite another plane from those minor tragic poets whom Aristophanes in this and various other passages dismisses with some curt and cutting allusion,—the Theognis whose frigidity is mentioned in the *Thesmophoriazusae* and wittily indicated in the *Acharnians*, or the Xenocles—a member of the poetic family of Carcinus—who is so summarily dispatched in the *Thesmophoriazusae* and the *Frogs*, or the Pythangelus to whom in the latter play not even a word of notice is vouchsafed.³ Poets of this order belonged to the band of innumerable striplings, 200 yards ahead of

¹ The *Thesmophoriazusae* was produced in 411 B.C.; the lost *Gerytades* at an uncertain date, most probably in 407 B.C. For the *Gerytades* in relation to Agathon, cp. schol. ad Luciani *Rhetor. Praec.* ap. Cramer. *Anecd.* iv. p. 269, 20: 'Αγάθων τραγωδίας ποιητής εις μαλακίαν σκαπτόμενος Ἀριστοφάνει τῷ Γηρυτάδῃ. Of the *Thesmophoriazusae* there was a second edition (or rather a second version), in which occurred

the line (Fr. vii.) καὶ κατ' Ἀγάθων' ἀντίθετον ἐξευρημένον (so Otto Jahn for ἐξευρημένον, comparing Pers. *Sat.* i. 85, 'crimina rasis librat in antithetis').

² *Ran.* 73 ff.

³ *Thesm.* 170, *Ach.* 138-140, *Thesm.* 169, *Ran.* 85, *ibid.* 87. The names of [fifteen or sixteen of these minor tragic poets occur in Aristophanes.

Euripides in loquacity, who write tragedies, who murder their art, and who (in words parodied from Euripides) are described as 'song-temples of the swallows.'¹ It is abundantly clear, even from Aristophanes, that Agathon's note was something very different from the twitter of such temple-haunting martlets as these. It is not at all likely, either, that Agathon was excelled by those two poets—Ion of Chios and Achaëus—whose names, in obedience to the so-called 'Alexandrian canon' of five tragedians, are usually given next to those of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides in the modern histories of Greek literature. Achaëus is parodied (without mention) in three passages only of Aristophanes, while Ion is mentioned (laughingly) in one and parodied in two others.² The silence of Plato and Aristotle with regard to both of them points in the same direction; and of Ion one of the best of the later Greek literary critics suggests a low estimate.³ Ion would, in fact, seem to have been a writer who attempted many varieties of literature with fair but not distinguished success in every field.

The many uncertainties which beset literary problems of this nature are obvious. But in the present instance we are perhaps entitled to conclude that, notwithstanding much seeming divergence, an essential harmony unites the views which are expressed or implied with respect to Agathon by Aristophanes (in the *Frogs* and in the *Thesmophoriazusaë*), by Plato, and by Aristotle. All our authorities would apparently agree to give him too high a place to be consistent with his exclusion from the 'Alexandrian canon' if that were regarded as a strict classification according to merit. On the one hand, it is evident that he belonged to the innovators rather than to the servile imitators; he had a certain originality about him, and his *Flower* would be an interesting discovery were some of our energetic explorers to come across it. On the other hand, there are clear indications in his own fragments that he was a somewhat artificial and mannered poet, given to moralising and *Sicelising*; one who, in the trial which faces every artist, was carried, by his anxious desire to repudiate popular standards, into the opposite error of inclining to the faults of the coterie.⁴

In conclusion, I may perhaps be permitted to express the view that, if only as an aid to the better understanding of a great poet, the general question of Literary Criticism (or, Literary Allusion) in Aristophanes deserves a more systematic treatment than it has hitherto received. As no separate book upon the subject exists, there is no doubt good reason for the deficiency. But whatever the cause may be, it cannot be lack of matter. Something has been already said to show this in the case of one poet—a poet not of the very highest rank. A general inquiry would range over a far wider field. It would trace the history of Greek dramatic parody, showing that all periods of Greek literature from Epicharmus to Lucian afford traces of this tendency.

¹ *Ran.* 88 ff.

² *Vesp.* 1081, *Pax* 356, *Ran.* 184; *Pax* 835; *Ran.* 706, 1425.

³ 'Longinus,' *de Subl.* xxxiii. 5.

⁴ This weakness of Agathon we might perhaps have inferred from certain stray hints in the *Symposium* (e.g. p. 194 B, C), even if they had stood alone.

It would illustrate the fact that, with the Greeks, parody was no merely frivolous diversion but was cultivated as a fine art. Not sparing the great and celebrated, but rather singling them out for attack, it reminded all men that admiration and reverence should be sane and temperate, that raillery is wholesome, that the salt of humour is an excellent antidote against corruption. Such an inquiry would exhibit Aristophanes as the great master of parody, and the more a master that he employs the art not as independent, but as ancillary to the art of comedy. His parodies would be traced, collected, classified, and an effort made to discriminate (where possible) between such as are intended to convey literary criticism or satire and such as are simply meant to amuse. Some account would, moreover, be attempted of the literary criticism known to have been contained in the writings of other comic poets of the time of Aristophanes; and the historic point of view would also be consulted by a reference to the hereditary tragic poets, and the minor tragedians generally, whose names occur in Aristophanes himself—men who by him were rated at their real worth, though some of them had defeated Sophocles or Euripides in the public contests. An endeavour would further be made, not indeed to elicit a complete scheme of critical doctrine from a poet and a comic poet, but to bring into due relief any indications of Aristophanes' views with respect to the general features of the poetry of his time—passages such as the *locus classicus* (previously mentioned) in the *Frogs* about the new and worthless race of tragic poets, or the other in the *Birds* as to the dithyrambic poet-impostors, or the other in the *Wasps* with regard to the stale devices of the writers of comedy.¹ The Aristophanic criticism of individual poets would also be reviewed, and it would be shown, in the case of Aeschylus (let us say), what are the probable views of Aristophanes concerning the poetic genius in general of Aeschylus, and concerning his plots, his style, his prologues, his lyrics, his stage appliances, his gifts and powers as a teacher of civic virtue. And after this endeavour to recover Aristophanes' estimate of both the merits and the defects of Aeschylus, the inquiry would be extended lastly to his merciless criticism of Euripides, in which ridicule reigns everywhere and leaves little room for true appreciation.

It would be superfluous here to refer to the skill with which, as the assailant of Euripides, Aristophanes makes his point. But the point itself is of peculiar and permanent interest in the history of literary art, and it may be illustrated almost as well from the less obvious and hackneyed case of Agathon as from that of Euripides himself. We have only to recall the words of Aristotle with reference to the *Flower*. 'In Agathon's *Flower* incidents and names alike are fictitious, and yet they give none the less pleasure. We must not, therefore, at all costs keep to the received legends, which are the usual subjects of Tragedy.'² The words 'give none the less pleasure' and 'at all costs' mark excellently the contrast between the general

¹ *Ran.* 88 ff., *Av.* 904–958, *Vesp.* 57 ff.

² *Aristot. Poetics* ix. 7, 8 (S. H. Butcher's translation).

attitude of Aristotle and that of Aristophanes—between the wise tolerance of the later philosopher and the fine intolerance of the contemporary artist.

Intolerant Aristophanes undoubtedly is ; but it is impossible not to feel that his very prejudices are the prejudices of genius, and as such throw a flood of light upon those changes in the old life of Hellas which he deplored but was unable to arrest.

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