

This paper offers a new interpretation of a claim made by the anonymous compiler of the *Prolegomenon* III *On Comedy* about the fifth-century comic poet Cratinus:

γέγονε... ποιητικώτατος, κατασκευάζων εἰς τὸν Αἰσχύλου χαρακτῆρα ('he was highly poetic, constructing his plays in the style of Aeschylus') III.24 p.8 Koster.

This association of Cratinus with Aeschylus has been treated with scepticism by modern scholars (Silk 2000: 304 and 310, Bowie 2000: 323), and has usually been dismissed as post-classical overschematisation. The widespread impression is that Cratinus did not engage with tragedy to any considerable degree, and thus it has been assumed that no reliable information concerning Cratinus' comedy can be deduced from the claim in question.

Nevertheless, recent research has shown that the *Prolegomenon* III *On Comedy* is far from an unreliable source, and in fact, it offers some remarkably accurate information (Konstantakos 2000). Furthermore, systematic research in Cratinus' fragments has revealed that Cratinus did have an extensive interest in the tragic genre, and was especially prone to allude to works of Aeschylus (Bakola 2006). On the other hand, Cratinus' demonstrable familiarity with Aeschylean plays (such as *Hiketides*, *Theoroi* or *Isthmiastai* and, probably, *Eumenides*) is only a single element in the present interpretation of the anonymous compiler's claim. The compiler's words (and presumably his source's) clearly do not refer to Cratinus' parody of tragedy but his poetic style (*χαρακτῆρα*).

This paper argues that the anonymous compiler's note about Cratinus and Aeschylus contains one of many strands of Cratinus' *own rhetoric about his poetic style* in the context of comic competition. It has recently been shown that in his comedies Cratinus advertised his poetics as being of the Dionysiac type (Biles 2002). Cratinus thereby placed himself within an existing tradition of Dionysiac/intoxicated inspiration as a metapoetic concept, a *topos* used by poets throughout antiquity. But in the context of his poetic rivalry with Aristophanes, Cratinus also implicitly denied such inspiration to the younger poet, as the celebrated *euripidaristophanizein* fragment shows (Cratin. 342KA). In this fragment, Cratinus labels Aristophanes' poetic style as merely 'technical' (as opposed to his own 'genuinely inspired' style), and associates it with a certain popular perception of the Euripidean style, the best source of which for us is Aristophanes' *Frogs*. The binary approach to poetry which is evoked in fr. 342 – namely 'inspired' against 'technical' poetry – and which had been used in contexts of poetic rivalry as early as Pindar (cf. *O.* 2.86-88) is key to the argument offered in this paper. Another manifestation of this binary approach, namely the contrasting portrayals of the styles of the two tragic poets Euripides and Aeschylus in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, and, in particular, certain elements about Aeschylus' portrayal can explain what lies beneath the association of Cratinus with Aeschylus preserved in the *Prolegomenon* III.

Bibliography:

BAKOLA, E. (2006) *Cratinus and the Art of Comedy*, diss. London

BILES, Z. P. (2002) 'Intertextual Biography in the Rivalry of Cratinus and Aristophanes' *AJP* 123, 169-204

BOWIE, A. (2000) 'Myth and ritual in the rivals of Aristophanes' in Harvey and Wilkins (edd.) *The Rivals of Aristophanes: Studies in Athenian Old Comedy*, London, pp. 317-39

KONSTANTAKOS, I. (2000) 'Notes on the Chronology and Career of Antiphanes', *Eikasmos* 11, 173-96

SILK, M.S. (2000) *Aristophanes and the Definition of Comedy*, Oxford