Μὰ τὴν Ἀλεμάκα: Types of Verbal Humour in the Mime of Charition (P.Oxy. 413R)

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1. Introduction

The καθόλου, in the Aristotelian sense of the term[1], of *Charition*, the surviving mime on the *recto* of *P.Oxy.* 413[2], is as follows: a girl is held captive in a barbaric country and assumes the role of a priestess; her brother, with the aid of a band of men, tries to set her free[3]; thanks to an ingenious stratagem, the situation ends happily and their return to their native country is secured. The sequence of actions reveals the dynamic form of a drama that draws on *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and depends freely on other Euripidean plays, the epic and the ancient Greek novel[4]. The eclectic affinities with well-known models, along with other textual evidence and technical elements, support the suggestion that the surviving part derives from a complete and genuine drama[5], now lost, and in its

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[1] Aristot. *Poet.*1455a 34-1455b 3; cf. Butcher 1932, 62-63.

[2] For the description of the papyrus, cf. mainly Grenfell/Hunt 1903, 42; Andreassi 2001a, 17-19.

[3] The papyrus has Greek numerals and abbreviations to mark the actors' roles: cf. Gammacurta 2006, 20-23; Tsitsiridis 2011, 4-5 and nn. 10,12; Perrone 2013, 138-139. In this dramatic mime, the following characters participate: Charition, her brother, the Fool (μωρός or *stupidus*, playing a slave), the Captain, the steersman, the Indians (men and women).

[4] For the rich intertextual *substratum* of *Charition*, cf. Santelia 1991, 12-34; Andreassi 2001a, 31-35.

[5] Cf. Andreassi 2001a, 27-28. For a full and coherent analysis, cf. Tsitsiridis 2011, 199-206; for a different opinion, oriented towards the prevalence of improvisation and the absence of a dramaturgically elaborated

actual form serves as a technical manuscript, constituting an organic part of the theatrical play[6].

The data from the preserved text confirms that the *Charition* mime, in order to fulfill its function[7] as a comic theatrical form[8], relies primarily on the potential of different identities, the bipolar duets of national and social nuance (such as Greeks *vs* Indians, priestess *vs* slave). The conflict emerges from this dynamic and serves as a fundamental structural pattern that enhances the creation of perplexed situations, significantly enriching the scenic action. Within the variety of these opposing pairs, beyond the visually and scenically generated humour, lies the opportunity for further exploitation of forms of humour that operate at the axes of language; undoubtedly, one of the more interesting and appealing aspects of *Charition* mime consists of the imaginative blend of Greek and Indian languages. The mime is penned in *koine*, but as its plot is set in India, the mimographer engrafts the text encompassing sections written in, most probably, imaginary Indian dialect. In this piece, I will delve into the various types of verbal humour[9] used in a playful and innovative manner to achieve the primary goal of the genre of mime under the Roman Empire: entertaining the audience during performances[10].

2. Humour through obscenities and double entendres

Before proceeding to the textual evidence of verbal humour, it may be helpful to provide a brief synopsis of the plot of the drama,[11] displaying the content of each of the three columns preserved on the *recto* of the papyrus and the fourth on the *verso*[12]. (col. I) Charition is held captive by the King of an Indian tribe and serves as a priestess to a Goddess.

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text, cf. Wiemken 1972, particularly 22-24, 75, 157 and Wiemken 1979, 411-412; for further bibliography on the point, cf. Cicu 2012, 112-114.

[6] The technical-theatrical character of the manuscript has been underlined by Rostrup 1915, 78- 79. On various opinions regarding the nature and utility of the manuscripts, cf. Reich 1925, 86; Melero 1981/1983, 106; Webb 2008, 113; Hall 2010, 394. For the comparison of *Charition* as a technical and dramatic text with texts from later genres and epochs, e.g. with the French comic *vaudeville* and the manner of work of professional theatrical groups of the Elizabethan Era, cf. especially Tsitsiridis 2011, 200, 221-222.

[7] On the function of mime in the Imperial Age and its connection with the heterogeneous national and sociolinguistic identities of the audience cf. Tsitsiridis 2011, 218 and Andreassi 2002, 45.

[8] On the relationship of comedy with mime, cf. Kehoe 1969, 6-8; Freyer 1999, 152-176.

[9] On verbal humour in ancient Greek comedy and in Doric comedy and mime, cf. respectively Silk 2000, esp. 98-159, and Tosetti 2018; on the comic use of language by Aristophanes, cf. Willi 2003.

[10] On a second level, the weight and diligence the mimographer gave to the verbal arrangement as an essential feature for the success of the play – as seen in the various types of verbal humour, at least those preserved in the papyrus – further support the suggestion that the mime of the Imperial Era made use of written dramaturgy. This challenges the theory that it relied exclusively on improvisation.

[11] Throughout this article, I follow Andreassi's text, numbering and division of scenes (2001a). The English translation is quoted from Page 1950, 338-349.

[12] On the *verso* of the papyrus, in addition to the three columns containing the text of the mime called *Moicheutria*, a fourth column is preserved, which bears a re-elaborated and modified version of vv. 30-57 of the *recto*. On the differences between the two versions, cf. Knoke 1908, 29; in general terms, the fragmentary

Her brother, along with a group of fellows, arrives by ship to aid in her escape. They all gather in front of the temple, except for her brother, who is detained by the Indians because of the actions of the intoxicated ship's captain. This situation presents an opportunity for the Indians to launch an organized attack. However, the Fool, using the flatulence as his primary and extraordinary weapon, cleverly rebuffs the attackers, driving them towards the river Psolichus. He then assists Charition's brother in escaping and reuniting with her. (col. II) After a while, a new danger lurks in the return of the Indian women. A misunderstanding arises between them and the Fool, prompting him once again to employ his fart to scare them away. With the Indian women fleeing on terror, the Greeks, including Charition, are able to depart. However, the Fool complicates matters by involving himself in Charition's tasks and encouraging her to steal offerings intended for the Indian Goddess. While the priestess rebukes him, the Indian men and women reappear, posing a new threat to the Greeks. Charition's brother devises a plan to neutralize their hostility by getting them drunk, instructing the Fool to serve the barbarians undiluted wine to drink. (col. III) The King of the barbarians enters in a grand bacchanalian setting with dancing, drumbeats, cymbals, and copious amounts of wine. The Fool appears completely engrossed in the festive ambiance, actively participating by dancing and conversing with the Indians in their own language. The celebration culminates with the barbarians insensible, jovially inebriated. The propitious conditions allow the Greeks to organize their departure. They all board the ship and Charition offers a prayer to the goddess for assistance. The play concludes. On the *verso* in col. IV, a reworked version of the scenes depicting a) the repulsion of the Indian men and women to the Psolichus river and b) the formulation of the intoxication plan is presented.

It is *opinio communis* that providing a concise and precise definition of the comic theatrical genre of mime is almost unattainable due to its "protean"[13] quality and highly adaptable nature, which has evolved significantly over time, and the meager and exiguous literary and archaeological sources. However, a key characteristic that remains consistent in mime, apart from the emphasis on frenzied action and improvisation[14], is the use of obscene language and sexual references, particularly focusing on words related to bodily functions associated with the lower part of the body[15]. Even in *Charition*, whose central themes do not revolve around amorous intrigues and adultery, there are numerous references to sexual organs and biological functions. From the outline of the plot provided earlier, it is evident that the production of frenzied action on stage is achieved

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nature of the second version does not allow any valid conclusion to be drawn on the exact changes made and their strict function. However, it is apparent that there has been a mitigation of an ethical ambiguity regarding the priestess Charition.

[13] BEARE 1968, 178.

[14] Cf. REICH 1903, 569; WÜST 1932, 1730; WIEMKEN 1972, 17-20, 22-24, and WIEMKEN 1979, 406, 422.

[15] Cf. TSITSIRIDIS 2011, 217.

through the various crises and challenges that the Greek group must overcome. It is noteworthy that in the section known to us one encounters three out of the nine "primary obscenities"[16], each serving an important dramaturgical function. This justifies the frequency of their repetition and prevents the alteration of their comic potential through gratuitous reuses. The whole of the obscenities is credited to the low status slave, the Fool[17], a *dramatis persona* who absorbs various actions and engages in entertaining trickery. The Fool participates intensively in the execution of the intoxication plan, recognized *ex eventu* as the catalyst for the salvation of the Greeks, boasts about his glorious triumph, is the only one from the Greek band who interacts with the Indian tribe, even with their King, proceeds to profane suggestions, and gets involved in hilarious, yet risky situations. In this sense, it seems absolutely justified that the abbreviations/stage directions πορδ(ή) ("fart", the noun) and πέρδ(ει/εται) ("fart", the verb) are inextricably connected to him.[18].

The word πορδή is more than a simple *vox oscena*, as it plays a prominent, organic role, being causally associated with the evolution of the plot through its function as a mechanism of refutation of the Indians. Throughout the surviving text, the word is repeated 6 times[19] and another 4 times[20] it is declared by abbreviations, the aforementioned *parepigraphai* πορδ(ή) and πέρδ(ει/εται). From the *incipit*, it is apparent that it occupies a position of dominance in the scene of the organization of the Greeks' attack against their enemies. The setting is as follows: Charition is in the temple, her brother under arrest, and the others are struggling to find a solution; the guide prompts the Fool to use his biological weapon and the *crepitus ventris* – as it has done in other critical phases of the plot – assumes the defense of the Greeks; its activation is accompanied by the percussion of drums and creates an exotic, orgiastic atmosphere, rich in acoustic effects[21]. Despite the significant corruption in the first column's content, the surviving part contains some sizeable indicators supporting the hypothesis that a prayer is being directed to a Goddess. The belief in the fart's effectiveness results in its deification, its glorification as a savior goddess with protective powers, and its elevation to the status of *dei averrunci* (v. 3), culminating in the promise of a voting offer (v. 8), as a gesture of gratitude for the favorable outcome. Within the context of Fool's' prayer, the use of the term κυρία (v. 7 "Lady") to address the fart is borrowed from formal prayer language and belongs to a

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[16] HENDERSON 1991, 35.

[17] On the type of *stupidus*, cf. KROLL 1931,422-423; WIEMKEN 1972, 67-68; HALL 2010, 393.

[18] On the symbols and abbreviations, cf. WINTER 1906, 32ff.; GAMMACURTA 2006,24-29.

[19] Vv. 1, 2, 7, 23, 28 on the *recto*, and v. 110 on the *verso*.

[20] Vv. 22, 39, 93 on the *recto*, and v. 130 on the *verso*.

[21] The intensity produced by the percussion of the drums and the entrance of the Indians creates an orgiastic and lively atmosphere. According to SKULIMOWSKA 1966, 177, the acoustic soundtrack is not just meant to produce a melody but instead to signify the beginning of a new scene, suggesting a sense of impeding danger.

specific linguistic style employed in a particular communicative setting. The obscene word, being aligned with the religious register, reflects an attested comic practice[22]. The term of address is reiterated a few verses later, this time in a fitting and anticipated environment concerning Chariton (v. 30), a sophisticated and venerable priestess[23], activating a comic scheme through the apparent contrast between the recipients.

The *crepitus ventris* proves itself to be effective, causing the enemies Indian men (v. 27) and women (v. 40) to flee in terror and seek refuge in the river. Particularly, the Indian women emit a foul odor, leading the Fool to liken them to χοιρίδια (v. 38, "little swines"). I suggest that, apart from the brief mention of the unpleasant smell of the barbarian women, which hints at the cultural differences between Greeks and Indians, the term is primarily used as a double entendre, hinting at female *genitalia*[24]. While the context of the scene and the drama in its entirety do not involve any sexual affair, the prevalence of obscenities and sexual metaphors as an inherent trait of the genre consistently documented, along with the Fool's tendency towards profanity justify the use of slang for female anatomy[25]. Additionally, the speaking name of the river, Ψώλιχος (vv. 27, 40), suggests that in this specific context the word χοιρίδια, as an ambiguity, operates linguistically on the paradigmatic axis[26], introducing a sexual connotation to its semantic meaning. The dramaturgical organization required the existence of a river – it might have been represented scaenographically as well – and the mimographer's inspiration led to the creation of the exotic river Ψώλιχος, serving both the plot development and audience entertainment through the sexual innuendo implied by its name. The river's name enhances undoubtedly the comic effect, as it derives from the fusion of a purely *vox oscena* for male genitals, the word ψωλή[27] – the second in the whole drama and the third regarding the order of its appearance on the text – with the verb λείχω ("lick"), and it is plausibly related to the χοιρίδια mentioned two lines above. It is reasonable to assume that the audience would have understood the connection between these terms within the context of just two lines and reacted accordingly.

The omnipotent fart, the most prominent *vox oscena* of the entire mime, does not confine itself to the text preserved in the *recto*, but expands its presence in the col. IV of the *verso* of the papyrus, providing another opportunity for its glorification. When the Fool

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[22] For the use of religious language in comic contexts, cf. ANDREASSI 2001a, 53 *ad* 7. On the parody of prayers and ritual language, see WILLI 2003, 8-50.

[23] Stupidus refers to Chariton using the term Lady also at v. 42. On the *verso* of the papyrus, the word is encountered 3 more times (vv. 107, 123,132), being closely connected to Chariton and describing her superior status. For the use of the term in the context of addresses, cf. DICKIE 1996, 91.

[24] Cf. Ar. *Ach*. 764-769; HENDERSON 1991, 131.

[25] For a different opinion, cf. ANDREASSI 2001a, 63 *ad* 38.

[26] On the forms and functions of the paradigmatic humour, cf. WILLI 2014, 172.

[27] Cf. HENDERSON 1991, 35, 110.

releases his biological weapon and repulses the Indian men, Charition expresses grati-
tude to the Goddess for the assistance. The slave intervenes and credits the successful
outcome to the fart (v. 110). His coarse response, although triggers Charition's stern rep-
rimand, forms an amusing instance relying on the conflicting scheme Fart *vs* Gods. Evi-
dently, the formidable fart solidifies its position not only as a word with a simple come-
dic undertone, nor solely as a tool that enhances the auditory and visual aspects of the
performance, but almost as a character with the aspirations of a lead role. The fart is
closely linked to the πρωκτός (vv. 6, 17, "anus"), which nearly establishes its presence
as an autonomous entity, endowed with productivity and efficacy. This represents the
third term encountered in *Charition* – the second in terms of its appearance in the dra-
matic text – that inherently belongs to the category of *voces obscenes*, laden with excre-
mental and sexual connotations and functioning in a comic manner *per se*[28], without be-
ing required its insertion in any specific frame of reference. Considering the deployment
of the biological weapon within the context of the theatrical action and acknowledging
that movements and gestures are inherent features of mimic theatre[29], it is highly plau-
sible that the Fool would have experimented with unconventional positions and move-
ments to generate such a bodily sound that could rival the accompanying percussion of
the drums. However, this assertion remains also limited to the level of a mere specula-
tion, due to the lack of textual documentation in the form of relevant stage directions.

3. Humour through lofty discourse and incongruity

In the *Charition* mime, a dense net of verbal and thematic parallels, plot elements and
structure patterns ascribed to the code of other genres attests to the hypothesis that com-
ponents of the literary and theatrical tradition are duly amalgamated and skillfully inte-
grated with renewed dynamics to primarily cater to the audience's entertainment
needs[30]. This approach is also reflected in the use of terms typically associated with the
high genres, particularly tragedy[31]. This irrefutably important verbal mechanism is
broadly exploited by comedy and mime thanks to the incongruity[32] operating on the
syntagmatic axis[33] and the deliberate contrast of the stylistically elevated and grandilo-
quent language with coarse speech registers that usually precede or follow. As expected,
the ubiquitous Fool is a stable part of almost all of these. In col. II, the King appears and

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[28] HENDERSON 1991, 35, 201.
[29] Cf. REICH 1903,168.
[30] Cf. ANDREASSI 2002, 45.
[31] This use is covered by the term paratragedy, which refers to a wide range of intertextual dependence on
tragedy. On paratragedy and its function in comedy, cf. RAU 1967; SILK 1993; FARMER 2017.
[32] On incongruity as the result of conflicting ideas and frames, cf. ATTARDO 1994, 48, 199; ROBSON 2006, 16-
18.
[33] On the function of the syntagmatic humour in Old comedy, cf. WILLI 2014, 172.

interacts with the Indian Chorus, and the Fool attempts to decipher the meaning of their verbal interchange. Presumptuous and impatient by disposition, he decides to interfere and addresses the King with the phrase βάσκ᾽ ἄλαστε (v. 60, "get away, confound you"), commonly found in epic and tragic contexts. The laughter in this scene arises, on the one hand, from the *bathos*, the anticlimax relied on the deliberate juxtaposition of the elevated diction with the uncouth Fool's previous verbal vulgarity, and, on the other hand, the totally subversive and incompatible combination of the two sophisticated terms *per se*. While the first word of the phrase aligns with formal address conventions and the royal status of the recipient[34], the completion of the phrase with a term that bears negative connotations, either refers to a person or to a situation[35], deconstructs his attempt in its entirety and the stylistic shift to the high diction becomes the vector of a humorous collision. On a second level, this inexpedient and conflicting conflation in the limited context of a phrase makes part of a broader one, highliting the disparity between the habitat of the high genres, to which these words allude, and the chaotic setting of the bacchic drinking feast accompanied by the unintelligible exchanged verbal utterances in Indian.

Apart from the Fool's incontestably misguided collocation of words which evoke high literary genres in a completely inappropriate setting of excessive alcoholic intoxication, two particularly notable cases of incongruity between high diction and setting are to be found in the mime. As to the first, in the surviving text, the respected Charition consistently conveys her thoughts in a manner that aligns perfectly with her esteemed status. The mimographer attributed to her formal and straightforward language, avoiding the stylistic exaggeration that can obscure both the *ethos* and the *dianoia*[36]. For instance, when she reproaches the slave for the arrogance implied in his suggestion to steal offerings dedicated to the Goddess, her reprimand is delivered in a stark and direct manner, with her statements being concise and to the point (vv. 44-48):

> **A.** ἐυφήμει· οὐ δεῖ τοὺς σωτηρίας δεομένους με-
> θ᾽ ἱεροσυλίας ταύτην παρὰ θεῶν αἰτεῖσθαι.
> πῶς γὰρ ὑπακούουσι ταῖς εὐχαῖς πονηρίαι
> τὸν ἔλεον μελλόντων παρ[ασπᾶ]σθαι; τὰ τῆς
> θεοῦ δεῖ μένειν ὁσίως.

> Hush! Those in need of salvation must
> not commit sacrilege in the moment of asking the
> gods for it. How are they going to listen to the

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[34] For an analysis of the two terms within their context, cf. ANDREASSI 2001a, 69 *ad* 60.

[35] LSJ *s.v.* ἄλαστος.

[36] Aristot. *Poet.* 1460b 4-5; cf. SIFAKIS 2002, 154.

> prayers of those who mean to snatch mercy through
> wrongdoing? The goddess's property must remain
> in sanctity.

The same is also true for the second version of these verses found on col. IV of the *verso* (vv. 138-142). While this version is not fully preserved, and therefore the extant part does not provide any definitive clues or persuasive suggestions regarding the purpose of the alterations, it is evident that there is a stylistic adjustment and enhancement of vocabulary that is specifically tailored to Charition[37]:

> **A.** σ[ω]φ[ρό]νησον, ἄνθρωπε· ο[ὐ δεῖ τοὺς σω-
> τηρία[ς] δεομένους μετ[ὰ ἱεροσυλίας
> ταύτην ἀπὸ θεῶν αἰτε[ῖσθαι.
> πῶς γὰρ ὑπακούσουσιν αὐ[τῶν πονη-
> ρίαι τὸν ἔλεον ἐπισπωμ[ένων;

> My good fellow, be sensible! Those in need
> of salvation must not commit sacrilege in the moment
> of asking the gods for it. How are they going to listen to men who try to win mercy
> with wrongdoing?

It is the differentiation achieved by the speaker in terms of content and ideas that, in these two different versions of the same scene, underscores the cleavage between Charition and the Fool, intensifying the feeling of discord and giving rise to the comic effect.

An equivalent incongruity seals the end of the play, this time through a growing disparity between the tragic diction and the non-tragic context of the chaotic commotion, caused by the captain's inebriation. Prior to the departure of the Greeks, Charition offers a prayer to the Goddess to ensure a safe return back home: this scene alludes strongly to her tragic counterpart, Iphigenia, who, fleeing from the Taurians on a ship with her brother, Pylades, and the crew, implores Artemis as an adverse wind hinders their departure[38]. Iphigenia's final words in the play consist of a brief and dignified prayer. Accordingly, the substance and style of Charition's religious utterance are precise and polished, meticulously composed with recognized tragic terms – ὦ τάλαιν[α (v. 104, "woe is me"), τρόμος (v. 105, "a mighty trembling"), παναθλίαν (v. 105, "unhappy") – that do not bear the slightest parodic nuance[39], remaining judiciously associated to Chari-

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[37] Cf. KNOKE 1908, 29.

[38] Eur. *IT* 1398-1402. On the similarities between the *IT* and the *Charition* mime, cf. WINTER 1906, 24-28.

[39] On the difference between paratragedy and parody, cf. SILK 1993, 479-480. Cf. also TSITSIRIDIS 2011, 218 and n. 86, who, by focusing on the function of the mimic *hypothesis* in the Roman Empire, is convincingly correct in arguing that "the use of themes and motifs from tragedy is only superficially parodic, since there

tion's earnest dedication to her role and the dire circumstances. However, when juxtaposed with the preceding chaos and disorder resulting from the captain's excessive alcohol intoxication in the midst of a perilous and highly insecure situation, a striking contrast emerges that enhances the comic element. In essence, this paratragic scene renders the very peak of the crew's comic turmoil and the anticipated audience's response remains the laughter[40].

The second case pertains to the Barbarian King: his speech is marked by the presence of highly esteemed poetic language, which, while entirely fitting for his regal status, boosts the comic element by starkly contrasting with the surrounding context. Specifically, the collision occurs in the juxtaposition of the *color tragicus* and *epicus* in the King's speech with the visual and auditory elements of the performance. When the Greeks distribute wine to the barbarians to quell their resistance, the Indian King enters the scene and interacts with them, speaking in the Indian language[41], a development that it is both expected and absolutely justified. The King's *staccato* of single words (vv. 61-64) exudes a mystical quality and a discernible poetic *grandeur*, evoking a palpable sense of solemnity and *gravitas*, reminiscent of the impressive catalogues of exotic names found in Aeschylus' *Persians*[42]. Suddenly, the King begins reciting, or even singing, in Sotadean verses[43], speaking Greek in a formal manner and incorporating words commonly found in high literary genres (v. 88 ἀνάγω χορόν ἄπλετον, "unconfined the dance I lead"; v. 90 πρόμοι, "chieftains")[44] and a unique term, the *hapax legomenon* ἱ[ε]ρόθρουν (v. 90, "of mystic sound"). All of the above, occurring during the bacchic feast and following a lively, exuberant verbal exchange in Indian (vv. 74-87), amidst the intense percussion of various musical instruments, undoubtedly add a vibrant comedic element, emphasizing the hilarity of the overall setting. Once again, it is the grandiloquent language, the terms evocative of high poetry and their flamboyant clash with the 'lightweight' surrounding, the lighthearted nature of the comic genre that extends the comic climax, purveying the drama with an insouciant tone and eliciting more laughter.

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is no interest in a 'dialogue' with specific plays, but only in parasitic exploitation of known and successful stories and themes".

[40] The comic contrast that arises with the help of the tragically coloured and dignified prayer concerns the macroscopic level of the structure as well. Although the *incipit* of the mime is severely corrupted and fragmentary, it is apparent that the surviving text displays a ring composition, starting and ending with a prayer – the Fool's prayer abundant with obscene words and Charition's prayer redolent of the tragic genre respectively. Given the acceleration in the evolution of the plot and the fast pacing of events, such audible divergences would have been obvious to most spectators.

[41] At the vv. 61-64, according to KNOKE 1908, 24, and CRUSIUS 1914,105, there are Indian words that ROMAGNOLI 1938, 209-210, attempted to translate in Greek.

[42] Aesch. *Pers*. 21-52, 302-327, 958-961, 994-997.

[43] On the Sotadean verse and its relation to the sub-genre of *kinaidoi*, cf. TSITSIRIDIS 2015, 229-232. For a lecture of the scene on the basis of the Sotadean verse, cf. SANTELIA 1991, 76.

[44] Cf. ANDREASSI 2001a, 74 *ad* 88 (ἀνάγω, ἄπλετον) and 75 *ad* 90 (πρόμοι).

4. Humour through a foreign language

The recruitment and exploitation of the humorous potential of foreign languages is a commonly used technique, well-documented in ancient Greek comedy, particularly in the Aristophanic corpus[45]. *Charition's* surviving text, specifically the second and third columns, is rich in Indian words that serve as the undeniable core of comic energy and represent one of the most striking, engaging, and functional elements of the mime. The presence of Indian phrases has sparked various discussions and concomitant interpretations regarding its authenticity. At one end of the interpretative spectrum lies the possibility of a pure and authentic Indian language[46], while at the other end is the theory that it is a largely fabricated, imaginary construct[47]. While a detailed examination of this aspect is beyond the scope of this article, there are compelling elements – such as the repetition of Indian words[48], the alteration of others (vv. 13, 14, 16), and primarily reasons linked to the comic nature of the play – that support the notion of a hybrid form, which, although may encapsulate original Indian terms, predominantly relies on an amalgam of barbarized Greek and Greek-influenced Indian vocabulary[49].

The Indian language is presented in the text in two distinct ways: a) as the language spoken by its native speakers, and b) as a language spoken by a foreigner (the Fool). Let us first consider the former. According to the content of col. II, the Greeks devise a plan to escape from the Indians. The stratagem of drunkenness plays a significant role in pacifying their hostility. After Charition exits the scene, her brother instructs the Fool to generously serve wine to the barbarians, who have returned following a ritual at the river. The arrival of their King prompts a dialogue with the Indian group, and consequently, vv. 58 to 87 predominantly feature words attributed to the Indian language. The unique ambiance of the orgiastic setting post the King's arrival, the mystical and frenzied dances, and the rhythmic beating of the drums, which almost accompany every utterance, are intensively receptive to a corresponding verbal outbreak. In this context, the creation of a significant number of surprisingly lengthy words (vv. 83-85 πανουμβρητι-κατεμανουαμβρητονουενι; v. 86 ολυσαδιζαπαρδαπισκουπισκατεμαναρειμαν)[50], within a dialogue conducted entirely in Indian language, is reasonably reminiscent of

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[45] Cf. COLVIN 1999; WILLI 2003, 198-225; KIDD 2014, 136.

[46] Cf. VARADPANTE 1981, 98-110, 104-108; SHIVAPRASAD 1985, 320 -330; SALOMON 1991, 734. For a translation of the verses in Indian (Kannada), cf. SALETORE 1936, 592-597, and Sastri *apud* VARADPANTE 1981, 104-108.

[47] Cf. PAGE 1950, 337; WIEMKEN 1972, 75, 157; CREVATIN 2009, 199, who argues that the imitation of meaningless and unintelligible sounds that remind the audience of the Indian language, satisfies the need for laughter. For a synopsis of the various suggestions, cf. SANTELIA 1991, 71-72.

[48] Cf. KNOKE 1908, 22.

[49] The case of the Persian language in Ar. *Ach*. 100 is similar; cf. WEST 1968, 5-8.

[50] The text is written in *scriptio continua*; therefore, the claim that the Indian words are extended may seem questionable; yet, my argument resides in the maintenance of the length of the aforementioned words in the editions.

the 64 syllabes word found towards the cheerful conclusion of the *Ecclesiazusae*[51] and its purpose. As it has been aptly pointed out, in similar instances, the humour arises from the overall exaggeration, extravagance, and tension, with the long and elaborate words fitting seamlessly into the exuberant theatrical setting[52]. In essence, the overarching framework is conducive to expressions which operate neither to the paradigmatic, nor to the syntagmatic axis on linguistic terms, serving solely to elicit playful laughter. Only the Fool, bewildered by the exotic language and unable to comprehend the words, seeks their meaning and requests Charition's brother to interpret.[53] The interpretation provided by the brother serves a clear dramaturgical purpose, advancing the plot by suggesting the provision of more wine that leads to the gradual intoxication of the adversaries. In case the brother is unfamiliar with the meaning of the Indian sentences, the interpretation brings added humorous value through the whimsical explanation provided, serving as an enlightening example of the vast comic potential that conversing in a foreign language can offer.

Apart from the comic potential of the Indian language as spoken by the Indians and, at pivotal moments, interpreted by a foreigner, the primary source of humour appears to stem from the use of barbaric language by a Greek-speaking individual. This is achieved through the following methods: a) either by speaking in Indian sentences, or b) through the entirely paradoxical use of a foreign word within a Greek sentence. Once again, the Fool demonstrates himself to be the central figure in such forms of communication. During the wine distribution, the slave is swept away into dances by the Indian women, acting under the influence of intoxication amidst ecstatic music, experiencing a broad array of emotions and corresponding reactions to this state. Initially feeling bewildered, he listens to them speaking in a foreign, incomprehensible language and proceeds to make negative judgments (v. 72). To some extent, what is enjoyable for the audience becomes irritating for the Fool, but suddenly he begins speaking in Indian, responding enthusiastically (vv. 75-77, 79-80). This unexpected reaction can be explained by his immersion in the orgiastic festivities, but more importantly, it aligns well with his inclination to intervene and engage. The scene in which the Fool participates in the dances and speaks a language entirely unfamiliar to him not only enlivens the action and enhances the overall vividness but also culminates the comic, highlighting the contrast between his earlier inability to comprehend the Indian words (vv. 58, 66) and his subsequent fluency. In the previous scenario, the festive and joyful revelry facilitated the slave's engagement in a remarkable verbal exchange with the Indians. Conversely, in the subsequent situation, it was the chaos and looming threat that prompted him to incorporate

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[51] Ar. *Eccl*. 1169-1175.

[52] For the multi-syllable word found in the *Ecclesiazusae* and its connection with the enjoyable conclusion of the play, cf. KIDD 2014, 148-151.

[53] There is also an interpretation provided to the Fool by Charition's brother in col. III, vv.92-94.

Indian words into Greek sentences twice, thereby reinforcing the comic perspective. The pivotal Indian word in the first sentence is *Kottos*, and its articulation is prompted by the following circumstance: the slave becomes disoriented and bewildered during the conversation between the Indians and their King, as he struggles to grasp the meaning of their verbal interaction. The repeated utterance of the word *Kottos* by both the King (v. 64) and the Chorus (v. 64) elicits the Fool's dismissive retort κόττως ὑμᾶς λακτίσαιτο (v. 65, "may Kottos kick you hard")[54], wherein he playfully personifies a term whose significance eludes him entirely[55].

   The same verbal play is encountered again in v. 125 of the *verso*[56], in a scene between the Fool and the Indian women, who have returned from the hunting in fighting equipment. A misunderstanding between the latter with the slave nearly led to a conflict. To defuse the tension and alleviate the crisis, Charition intervened by speaking in Indian, for the first and only time, simply uttering the word αλεμάκα. The women repeat after her and the Fool joined in by saying μὰ τὴν Ἀ[… (v. 125, "By A[...")). In the critical editions of the text, the lacuna of the *explicit* is either left as is[57] or filled based on assumptions related to invoking a Goddess, such as Athena[58] or Artemis[59]; yet, any of these terms can fill the lacuna without any significant change on dramaturgical grounds, as they are interchangeable. In this case, I believe that Andreassi's interpretative hypothesis and subsequently the integration with the word Ἀ[λεμάκα[60] is convincing and pertinent, functional on dramaturgical and theatrical level, advancing the comic effect through a play of words. The Fool is in jeopardy, confused because of his language deficiency and in a state of fear of the equipped women. He uses the word after its double repetition (v. 124), being unaware of its meaning. An invocation to Athena or Artemis would not bear any comic load, but the personification of an unknown term, the transformation of a mundane word into a Goddess, appears to humorously settle the dispute. The *ethos* and *dianoia* of the slave favour at the beginning of the surviving text a prayer to Lady Fart and in the middle of the action a vow to *Alemaka*. And this is truly comic, μὰ τὴν Ἀλεμάκα!

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[54] The Fool repeats also some words of Charition's brother in a previous scene (v. 59).

[55] Cf ANDREASSI 2001a, 69-70 and ANDREASSI 2001b, 41.

[56] Cf ANDREASSI 2001b, 41-42.

[57] Cf. CUNNINGHAM 2004, 46.

[58] Cf. GRENFELL-HUNT 1903, 51, and PAGE 1950, 340.

[59] Cf. CRUSIUS 1905, 108; KNOKE 1908, 11; MANTEUFFEL 1930, 131; ROMAGNOLI 1938, 194; WIEMKEN 1972, 58; MELERO 1981/1983, 113.

[60] ANDREASSI 2001a, 46, maintains the lacuna in his edition of the *Charition* mime. The inclusion of μὰ τὴν Ἀ[λεμάκα is a later conjecture (see above, n. 55).

5. Conclusion

The most suitable and methodologically appropriate tool for investigating cases of verbal humour is textual evidence. Notwithstanding, one can reasonably assume that in the *Charition* mime these cases would have been much more prevalent for the following reasons: firstly, the preserved text of the papyrus is of technical nature and emanates from a genuine, dramaturgically elaborated dramatic text. It is highly probable that there was a plethora of humorous linguistic techniques present in the dramatic text, unfortunately now lost. On a second but equivalent level, considering that improvisation plays an important role and constitutes a consistent characteristic of the genre, it is expected that the actors would have engaged in various verbal comic plays; yet, this also remains without textual documentation and thus is limited to the level of guesswork.

Returning to Charition's actual form, it is evident from the gamut of types of verbal humour, which the papyrus preserved, that the mimographer exhibited diligence towards the verbal arrangement as an essential feature for the success of the play. Accordingly, on the one hand, weight is given to the paradigmatic humour expressed through the Fool's gravitation towards obscene words, the river's speaking name and the double entendres, and, on the other hand, to the syntagmatic humour emanating from the incompatible and dissonant collocation of terms, and the collision of the lofty discourse with the hilarious setting. Additionally, the Indian language as used by both national groups and the concomitant comic schemes activated by its ingenious and inventive use, are in wondrous sync constantly serving and boosting the higher pragmatic function of the mimic comic genre: entertaining the audience.

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Abstract: The *Charition* mime, preserved on the *recto* of the *P.Oxy.* 413, is of major importance to the history and evolution of the genre under the Roman Empire. This case unifies most of the strands of research regarding the genre under discussion in a coherent vision proving that through a masterful generic assimilation of a wide range of patterns and devices the mime becomes a work of self-standing merit. Many scholars have illustrated the mime's rich literary *substratum*, the analogies it bears with a wide range of texts (epic, tragedy, ancient novel), its affinities to other theatrical forms (*melodramma*, *vaudeville*) and its linguistic merits; undoubtedly one of *Charition*'s more interesting and tantalizing elements consists in the imaginative and euphoric mixture of Greek and In-

dian languages. The aim of this paper is to elucidate several instances of the dramaturgical exploitation of both languages along with mimographer's verbal inventions to reinforce the comic effect. Under this prism, the words *porde*, *Psolichos*, *Kottos* and *Alemaka*, amidst others, seem to keep a key role to the play regarding its overarching aim, the laughter and entertainment of the audience.