ASPECTS OF THE FIGURE OF THE ΑΓΡΟΙΚΟΣ IN ANCIENT COMEDY

I. Introductory remarks

The figure of the ἀγροικός seems to have been a stock character in Greek 4th-century comedy. Several poets of Middle and New Comedy wrote plays entitled Ἀγροικὸς (Antiphanes, Anaxilas, Augeas, Philemon, cf. Menander’s Ὑποβολιμοῦς ἢ Ἀγροικὸς) or Ἀγροικὸς (Anaxandrides); compare Plautus’ Agroecus and Pomponius’ Rusticus. Other 4th-century comic plays with ‘agricultural’ titles doubtless also featured rustics and countrymen among their characters (e.g. Alexis’ and Amphis’ Ἀμπελούργος, Alexis’ Ἀπόλοι, Antiphanes’ Κηπουρός and Προβατεύς, cf. Timokles fr. 38). Several farmers and countrymen appear in the comedies of Menander (Dyskolos, Georgos, Heros) and in the plays of the Roman palliata (Plautus’ Truculentus, Mostellaria, Terence’s Adelphoe). However, the definition of this comic figure appears somewhat problematic. In practice every comic countryman, i.e. every character of the comedies who lives permanently or chiefly in the country, may be included under the heading of the ἀγροικός. Unlike other stock figures of 4th-century comedy, such as e.g. the ‘professional’ types of the soldier, the parasite, the cook or the hetaira, the ἀγροικός is not a homogeneous ‘type’; indeed, it might be misleading to speak of him as a comic ‘type’ at all. The ἀγροικός is rather a convenient name for a broader category of comic figures, which may include characters of different age and status: old men (Knemon in Men. Dysc., Kleainetos in Men. Georg., Demea in Ter.

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1) I am grateful to Professor Richard Hunter for his many valuable comments on an earlier version of this essay; and to Professor James Diggle, who encouraged me to publish my discussion of the comic ἀγροικός.

2) On the figure of the comic ἀγροικός see in general Ribbeck; Legrand 72–80; Meineke I 332; Webster 56 f.; Ussher 55; Millis 18 f.

3) On these plays cf. Legrand 72 f.; Arnott, Alexis 81. Timokles fr. 38 is introduced by Clem. Alex. Strom. 4.7.1 with the words κατὰ τὸν γεωργόν Τιμόκλεους; this means either that Timokles’ comedy was called Georgos, or at least that it included a farmer as a speaking character.
young men (Gorgias in Men. Dysc., Georg. and Her., Strabax in Plaut. Truc.) and even slaves (Truculentus in Plaut. Truc., Gru- 
mio in Plaut. Most., Daos in Men. Dysc.). When he is a free man, the 
\(\text{αγροικός}\) may be of any financial standing (Gorgias in Men. 
Georg. is very poor and makes a living as a hired worker of Kleai-
netos; Gorgias in Men. Dysc. possesses a small farm but is poor;
Knemon in Dysc. and Kleainetos in Georg. are rather well off; 
Demea in Ter. Ad. is quite prosperous). The Greek word \(\text{αγροικός}\) 
often carries derogatory connotations, signifying a ‘boor’, a rude 
and coarse person. But this is not invariably a characteristic of all 
\(\text{αγροικοί}\) of Greek comedy: many of them display indeed traits of 
boorishness and crudeness (Knemon in Men. Dysc., Strabax and 
Truculentus in Plaut. Truc., Grumio in Plaut. Most.); but the word 
‘boor’ would be hardly appropriate for characters like e. g. Gorgias 
in Men. Dysc. and Georg.

Nevertheless, most of the \(\text{αγροικοί}\) of 4th-century comedy 
present certain basic common qualities, a sort of ‘ethological com-
mon denominator’ which Middle and New Comedy almost stan-
dardly associate with men from the country: these traits unify and 
distinguish the comic \(\text{αγροικός}\) as a particular figure. First and fore-
most among them is the inexperience in the refined ways and 
manners of the city: cf. Stob. Anth. 2.7.11k, II p. 103.24 ff. Wachs-
muth τὴν γὰρ \(\text{αγροικίαν} \text{ ἀπειρίαν} \) εἶναι τῶν κατὰ πόλιν ἔθων καὶ 
νόμων, Men. Georg. fr. 5 Sandb. εἰμὶ μὲν \(\text{αγροικός} \) . . . καὶ τῶν κατ’ 
\(\text{άστυ} \) πραγμάτων οὐ παντελῶς ἔμπειρος. This often results in some 
suspicion or prejudice against city-life and its pleasures and also in 
a certain clumsiness or coarseness in the manners and behaviour of 
the \(\text{αγροικός} \); but the degree in which each particular comic rustic 
displays these traits may vary considerably (contrast e. g. Knemon 
and Gorgias in the same play, Men. Dysc.). Another prominent 
characteristic of comic \(\text{αγροικοί}\) is a certain rigidity and clumsiness 
of language, which seems natural enough, since rustics would have 
little opportunity to practice the art of talk. This may take various

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4) In this sense it can be applied metaphorically even to persons or things 
which have nothing to do with the country (e. g. Ar. Plut. 705 \(\text{αγροικόν} \) ἄρα . . . εἶναι 
tῶν θεών, Vesp. 1320, Apollod. Car. fr. 5.14 \(\text{αγροικόν} \) οὕσαν ἡμῶν τὴν Τῆς ἡ, Pl. 
Phaedr. 229e etc.). Ancient grammarians distinguish between \(\text{άγροικος} \) (country-
man) and \(\text{αγροικός} \) (boor): see Pollux 9.12 \(\text{αγροικός} \) ὁ σκειός, καὶ \(\text{αγροικός} \) ἐν 
\(\text{άγρο} \) ζών, Ammon. Diff. 6. But the use of the words in classical texts does not sup-
port such a distinction (cf. Ussher 55, Millis 19).
forms. Many ἀγροικοί show a propensity for moralistic sententiousness, which is combined with maladroitness in the expression of their thoughts and manifests itself in comically pompous tirades (see e.g. Gorgias in Men. Dysc. 269–298, probably Kleainetos in Men. Georg. fr. 1–3, Grumio in Plaut. Most. 15–33, 72 f., Demea in Ter. Ad. 413–419).5 Aristotle (Rhet. 1395a6 f. οἱ γὰρ ἀγροικοὶ μᾶλιστα γνωμοτύποι εἰσὶ καὶ ἁρδίως ἀποφαινόνται) draws attention precisely to this trait. Other comic rustics show a predilection for emphatic language and absolute or exaggerated expressions: Kne-mon in Men. Dysc. and Demea in Ter. Ad. accumulate in their speech absolute expressions signifying ‘all’ or ‘nothing’ (e.g. Dysc. 155–159, 169, 175, 427–429, 483, 505–508, 713–747, 751 f., Ad. 84–96, 540, 855–876) and are prone to exaggerations and inflated statements (e.g. Dysc. 160–178, 466–486, Ad. 90–93, 111 f., 381–385, 396 f., 544–547, 721–723, 757–762, 898); such linguistic traits indicate their rigidity and narrowness of spirit and tally with their loud, coarse comportment.6 Strabax in Plaut. Truc. seems almost ‘linguis-


6) See Arnott, Language 152 f.; Arnott, Values 223; Arnott, Phormio Parasite. A Study in Dramatic Methods of Characterization, G&R n. s. 17 (1970) 54, 56; Arnott, The Modernity of Menander, G&R n. s. 22 (1975) 147–149; Del Corno 24 f. Compare Donatus on Ter. Ad. 88.2 (vide, qua pompa, qua vociferatione dilatatur accusatio de moribus Demeae nihil non in maius efferentis), 396.2, 397.1. The ἀγροικός in Antiphanes fr. 69 (on which see more below) also shows a propensity for emphatic language; note the accumulation of emphatic elements in vv. 8 f. (νὴ Δι’,
tically retarded’, as he talks in an extremely plain, indigent style and uses elementary syntax with brief and simple clauses (vv. 645–663, 922–924), which indicate his lack of education and underdeveloped faculties of expression. And the rustic slave Truculentus in the same play commits ridiculous linguistic mistakes.7

In the essay which follows I do not aspire to offer an up-to-date ‘Ribbeck’, a comprehensive ethological study of the ἄγροικος in ancient literature; nor do I attempt a full presentation of all the rustics in extant Greek and Roman comedy. I only intend to explore certain aspects of the comic portrayal of the ἄγροικος. I am chiefly interested in the comic technique, the devices employed by the comic poets to render the ἄγροικος a funny figure, and in recurrent comic routines, motifs and plot patterns involving this figure, especially in 4th-century comedy.

II. Aristophanes and the birth of the comic ἄγροικος

Many farmers and countrymen appear in the plays of Aristophanes and often have an important role: in some comedies (Acharnians, Peace, Wealth) the protagonist himself is a farmer or countryman and the Chorus is also composed of peasants.8 In Aristophanic plays, however, there is generally little or no trace of what will become later the usual attitude of comedy towards the ἄγροικος-figure.9 The farmers of Aristophanes are not normally laughed at for their uncouthness and rusticity. The poet does not ridicule or mock them e.g. for their ignorance of city-life, their bad behaviour and blunders when they find themselves in a refined urban environment, their simple-mindedness and naïveté,
their coarse manners, clumsy speech, unkempt appearance or any other such traits, which the playwrights of the 4th century will repeatedly exploit for comic purposes.\textsuperscript{10} On the contrary, just as country-life and its pleasures are often praised in Aristophanic theatre with great delight, so peasants and countrymen are portrayed quite favourably and sympathetically. Indeed, in plays like the \textit{Acharnians}, \textit{Peace} and \textit{Wealth} the farmer, the central hero, proves to be a figure of heroic dimensions, who overcomes all adversities, triumphs over his opponents and manages to impose his comic vision on reality. Dikaiopolis, Trygaios and Chremylos have little in common with the rustics of later comedy, like Kne-mon, Grumio or Strabax, or with the boorish \textit{áγροικος} of Theophrastus’ \textit{Characters} (nr. 4).\textsuperscript{11} Looking at the Aristophanic theatre from the point of view of later comedy, we might say that for most of the Aristophanic corpus the figure of the comic \textit{áγροικος} has not yet been ‘born’.

There is, however, one exception to this in the extant Aristophanic corpus: one play in which the countryman, being again the central figure, is made to appear laughable precisely for his rustic uncouthness and thus foreshadows the \textit{áγροικος} of 4th-century comedy. This play is the \textit{Clouds} – significantly a play which in other respects too forecasts themes and patterns of later comedy (note e.g. the conflict between the extravagant son, who is wasting his paternal property, and the avaricious father, who is worried at the prospect of ruin). Strepsiades, a countryman (see Nub. 43 \textit{ἐμὶν γὰρ ἄν \textit{άγροικος} ... βίος}; 47 \textit{άγροικος ὡν}; 138 τηλοῦ γὰρ οἰκῶ τῶν \textit{άγρων}), is the first true \textit{άγροικος} of extant comedy: he, and not Dikaiopolis or Trygaios, is the veritable forerunner of Theophrastus’ rustic.\textsuperscript{12} He displays several typical rustic qualities, which will recur in the later comic \textit{άγροικος}: he is a blockhead, simple-minded, uneducated

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\item Ribbeck 9 had already made concisely this point: „Auch ist es ja in den erhaltenen Stücken nirgends seine (= Aristophanes’) Absicht, diese Volksklasse als solche lächerlich zu machen oder in ihren Schwächen darzustellen“. Cf. Wilkins 31, 105–107 on the favourable portrayal of farmers and countrymen in Old Comedy.
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and uncouth, and raises laughter with his ignorance and coarseness. In order to heighten the comic effect of Strepsiades’ portrayal, Aristophanes has developed in the *Clouds* a particular comic technique, which we shall find again in the 4th century, especially in the poets of Middle Comedy. This technique is chiefly based on contrast and incongruity: the ἔγροικος, with all his rustic uncouthness, rough manners and ignorance of city-ways, is made to get involved in a characteristically urban, refined and sophisticated environment or situation, in which he obviously appears out of place. This incongruity in itself, the clash between the rustic’s uncouthness and the sophisticated surrounding environment, is a capital source of comic effect: the refined urban milieu, like a foil, highlights the shortcomings of the ἔγροικος. The poet may further enhance the comic effect by depicting in greater detail the rustic’s reactions in the unfamiliar situation. The rustic ignores the savoir vivre, the proper way to comport himself in the refined environment, and as a result he makes many mistakes: he breaks the rules, behaves badly or improperly and commits amusing blunders and misunderstandings.

Aristophanes uses amply this comic technique in the *Clouds*. It is introduced already from the prologue of the play, in the description of Strepsiades’ married life (Nub. 41–72): the ἔγροικος marries a refined lady from a distinguished city family, and his rusticity contrasts strongly with his wife’s elegance and luxury. Strepsiades is unkempt and ill-smelling (vv. 44 f., 50) but his wife is luxuriously attired and perfumed (vv. 48, 51 f.). When a son is born, Strepsiades imagines him as a rustic, pasturing goats in a διορέα, while his wife imagines him driving a chariot, dressed in rich clothes, like a gentleman (vv. 68–72). It is exactly this juxtaposition and contrast between the rustic’s uncouthness and the city-lady’s refinement that produces the comic effect. Strepsiades, the unkempt and stinking rustic with an elegant perfumed lady by his side, is the forerunner of later comic ἔγροικοι like Strabax in Plaut. *Truc.*, who, wrapped in his country clothes, straight out of farm-work and with the country smells and dirt still clinging on his body, goes to be entertained by a smart hetaira of the city. The same technique is employed at greater length later in the play, when the ἔγροικος goes to Socrates, in order to be taught his ‘subtle’ doctrines. Again, this situation proves too sophisticated for the ignorant rustic blockhead, who is unable to comprehend the philosophical learning. He continually misunderstands and distorts Socrates’ teachings and comically disfigures his syllogisms (e.g.
vv. 232–236); above all, he is entirely preoccupied with the material and lowly side of life, and so he constantly turns Socrates’ figurative expressions, abstract ideas and scientific endeavours into lowly or vulgar things (e.g. vv. 187–190, 201–217, 247–249, 380 f., 408–411, 478–481, 489–491, 638–646, 650–655 etc.). Socrates himself, to make Strepsiades grasp his theory about thunder, is obliged to draw an example from low bodily functions, because this is the only area which the ἄγροικος can understand (vv. 385–394). It is significant that Socrates, when he complains about his pupil’s slow-mindedness and ineptitude to learning, uses precisely the word ἄγροικος to describe him (Nub. 628 οὗτος ὁ ἄγροικος, 646 ὃς ἄγροικος εἶ καὶ δυσμαθής, cf. 655 ἄγρετος εἰ καὶ σκιώτης). It is Strepsiades’ ἄγροικία, his uncouth rusticity, that renders him out of place in the Socratic circle of ‘sophisticated’ learning. The incongruity produced by the presence of an ἄγροικος in such an environment is the source of the comic effect. The later comic poets will take over this technique for the portrayal of their ἄγροικος; and they will extend it to other urban milieus and situations, which are more suitable for 4th-century comic plots.

III. The ἄγροικος in Middle and New Comedy

a) Comic techniques and character portrayal

What was in Aristophanes a single exception becomes a common phenomenon in the 4th century. In Middle and New Comedy the ἄγροικος is very often made to look funny for his rustic qualities, although the degree in which this happens may vary considerably from one character to another: the tone of the comic portrayal may range from gentle irony to downright ridicule. However, the poets of the 4th century, especially those of New Comedy, do not always employ the technique introduced in Aristophanes’ Clouds. In many cases the comic effect depends simply on the presentation of the rustic’s uncouthness and coarseness per se, rather than on the incongruity and inappropriateness of such qualities in an urbane environment. The rustic may remain in the country (as in Men. Dysc.) or come to the city (as in Ter. Ad., Plaut. Most. and Truc.); he may come into contact with people of the city as well as with those of the country. But the comic effect
may still largely rely on the figure of the ἀγροικός in itself and the funny portrayal of his rustic qualities, not on the disharmony which ensues when he displays his ἀγροικία in a sophisticated situation, to which he proves ill-suited (e.g. a symposium of the high society, the circle of a fashionable philosopher or an affair with an elegant hetaira). This is the case e.g. with Knemon in Men. Dysc., Grumio in Plaut. Most. and the first appearance of the slave Truculentus in Plaut. Truc. 256–314. In these cases the comic technique is based on excess and caricature. Just as in a caricature drawing bodily defects or uncomely features are magnified to excess, so here the moral shortcomings of the ἀγροικός (e.g. coarse manners, rudeness, rough temper) and sometimes also his bodily deficiencies (unkemptness, dirt, bad smell) are highlighted and magnified for comic effect. Knemon in Dysc. provides a fine illustration of this technique: in him the coarse manners and irascible temper (typical traits of many comic ἀγροικοί) are carried to such excess, as to turn him for the largest part of the play into a kind of farcical ogre, producing amusing scenes of slapstick (note in particular his encounters with Pyrrhias, Getas and Sikon, Dysc. 81–144, 466–514). Similar is the conduct of Truculentus in his first encounter with Astaphium (Truc. 256–314): note his angry shouts (Truc. 252 clamore apterret, 286 quid clamas, insane?, 291 propter clamorem tuum)14, his rude or vulgar insults (vv. 260, 263, 276–279) and violent threats (vv. 268, 287 f.).15

It is such figures that illustrate best Aristotle’s remarks about the ἀγροικοί of his contemporary comedy. The most significant passage in this respect is Eth. Eud. 1230b18 ff., in which Aristotle

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13) On the other hand, in Truculentus’ second appearance in the play (Truc. 669–698) the comic technique is similar to that of the Clouds; see below.

14) Cf. Broccia 155. The loud voice and the shouting are also typical characteristics of many comic ἀγροικοί. Compare Grumio in Most. (6 quid tibi... clamitatiost?); Knemon in Dysc. (116 ἀγροικός τον ἀναβοδὼν τι, 586); Demea in Ad. (60 clamitans, 727, 789–791, cf. Donatus on Ad. 88.1, 88.2); and Theophrastus’ ἀγροικός (Char. 4.5 μεγάλη τῇ φωνῇ λαλεῖν). This loudness of comic ἀγροικοί tallies with their propensity for pompous speech, overuse of emphasis and exaggerated expressions.

15) With Truculentus’ threats to assault Astaphium physically compare similar threats of physical violence by Knemon (Dysc. 168, 205, 467 f., 502, 591 f.) and Demea (Ad. 571, 782). With Truc. 259 f., where Astaphium greets politely the boor and he replies angrily, turning her very greeting against her (AST. salve. TRUC. sat mihi est tuae salutis. nil moror. non salveo. aegrotare malum quam esse tua salute sanior), compare similar exchanges in Dysc. 512 f. (ΣΙΚ. χαίρε πόλλα'. KNHM. οὐ βούλο-
is discussing ἀναισθησία, i.e. insusceptibility or indifference to pleasures (ἡδοναί) and remarks: μάλιστα δ’ εἰσὶ τοιοῦτοι (= ἀναισθητοί), οίονς οἱ κωμῳδιδιάσκαλοι παράγουσιν ἀγροῖκος, οἳ οὐδὲ τὰ μέτρια καὶ τὰ ἀναγκαῖα πλησίαζοι τοῖς ἡδέσιν; compare similarly (although without special reference to comedy) Eth. Nic. 1104a24 f. ὃ δὲ πᾶσαν (sc. ήδονήν) φεύγων, ὠσπέρ οἱ ἀγροῖκοι, ἀναισθητός τις. According to Aristotle, then, the comic ἄγροικος is a man insensitive to pleasures, someone who avoids all pleasures, even moderate and necessary ones.16 This description is very suitable for figures like Knemon, Grumio and Truculentus (in his first appearance): these rustics appear not simply as averse to pleasures but as hostile or prejudiced against them; they not only avoid the ήδοναί but indeed condemn them as evil and corrupting and castigate those who indulge in them. This kind of ἄγροικος is an enemy of pleasure. So Knemon obstinately refuses to take part in the lunch-party at the end of Dysc. (see vv. 852–855, 867–870, 874–878), illustrating in an exemplary manner the Aristotelian definition: he keeps away from an occasion of moderate and sensible entertainment, which a civilized man would welcome. He is generally hostile to the luxury and elegance of the well-off people of the city: he despises leisureed life, fine clothing and culinary sumptuousness; he will react violently if he sees Sostratos in a fine χλανδίς with his air of leisure and luxury (vv. 355–357, 364–366) and he condemns animal sacrifices, because they provide an occasion for people to enjoy themselves in banquets and feast on the meat of the victim (vv. 447–453).

In the same way, Grumio rebukes harshly the life of pleasure which Philolaches and Tranio lead, castigating their feasts on expensive food and drink, their affairs with prostitutes and their use

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16) Elsewhere, Aristotle defines the ἄγροικος more specifically as a man deficient in and averse to a particular kind of pleasures, those which have to do with παιδιά, i.e. amusement and jokes: the ἄγροικος is a man who shuns every kind of humorous entertainment and neither makes himself jokes nor puts up with those made by other people; so Eth. Nic. 1108a23–26, 1127b33–1128a10, 1128b1–4, Eth. Eud. 1234a5–10, Magn. Mor. 1193a11 ff. In these passages too, though in a more limited sense, the ἄγροικος appears as hostile to a certain kind of pleasures, and indeed to moderate and necessary ones, since, according to Aristotle himself, δοκεῖ … ἣ ἀνάπαυσις καὶ ἡ παιδία ἐν τῷ βίῳ εἴναι ἀναγκαῖον (Eth. Nic. 1128b3 f.).
of exotic perfumes (Most. 20–24, 41–45, 64 f.). Truculentus, in his first encounter with Astaphium, seems to be infuriated above all at her ornaments and cosmetics: he rants against her jewels, her daintily arranged curly hair, her perfumes and make-up (Truc. 270–272, 287–294), significantly taking notice of them all in some detail. Perhaps he feels in fact attracted to the woman (note his later advances to her, vv. 669–698), and this is precisely why he attacks her so vehemently: as an ἐγροίκος he is a sworn enemy of refined urban pleasures, so his sudden attraction to the meretrix, the incarnation of those pleasures, makes him furious; it is his struggle to fight against temptation that makes him behave so fiercely.17 Demea in Ter. Ad. lives parce ac duriter (v. 45) and praises this sort of austere life (vv. 94 f.), while he is contemptuous of the life of leisure and pleasures (vv. 863–865); he is infuriated when his sons indulge in such ‘corrupt’ pleasures as love-affairs with courtesans, drinking, good food or fine clothes (vv. 61–63, 82–92, 355–360, 379–392, 742–754, 789–801). One emblematic passage sums up most characteristically his hostility to pleasures (vv. 845–849): he declares that he will take the pretty harp-girl, his son’s girlfriend, to his farm and put her there to hard labour, till she becomes a dirty slave-woman, soiled with ashes and smoke, as dry and black as a lump of charcoal – a dreary fate for the girl who symbolizes his son’s deviation into the life of enjoyment.18 Compare the ἐγροίκος in Alciphr. Epist. 2.14, who has yielded to temptation and spent a night with a flute-girl, drinking and sleeping softly; but as soon as he soberes up, he coarsely abuses the girl, because she dared offer him a night of rest and entertainment; his own indulgence in pleasure has infuriated him, and, like Truculentus, he overreacts. Even Gorgias in Men. Dysc., perhaps the most sympathetic among the ἐγροίκοι of extant comedy, who never really displays coarseness or bad temper, retains some traces of this typically rustic prejudice. He looks with suspi- 


18) Compare the same motif in Aelian, Epist. Rust. 19.
cion upon someone who is richly attired (vv. 257 f., note the strong expression κακούργος εὖθυς ἀπὸ τοῦ βλέμματος); he has no time for love-affairs (vv. 341–344); and he too is very reluctant to join the lunch-party (vv. 611–619, 871–873).

The examples discussed above come from plays of New Comedy or Roman adaptations of them. But Aristotle’s remarks on the rustics οἶνος οἱ κομῳδοδιδάσκαλοι παράγουσιν no doubt refer to his contemporary comic playwrights, presumably those who were active in the Attic theatre during the 330s and early 320s, i.e. the last representatives of the so-called Middle Comedy. Although the scanty remains of the comic production from that period do not offer any clear example of an ἅγροικος shunning or condemning pleasures, Aristotle’s testimony is significant: this kind of ἅγροικος, the killjoy and enemy of pleasure, must have been developed already in Middle Comedy.

In other cases of 4th-century comic ἅγροικοι we find again the technique used in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*. The ἅγροικος, with all his ignorance of city manners, coarse conduct and naïve simplicity, gets involved in an urbane, sophisticated environment or situation; in this he behaves naively or inappropriately, commits blunders or misunderstandings and thus produces comic effect. The poets of the 4th century seem to have developed in particular two such comic situations: the ἅγροικος at the banquet and the ἅγροικος in an affair with a hetaira.

**b) The ἅγροικος at the banquet**

In this comic scenario the ἅγροικος is invited to an elegant dinner-party or symposium, to enjoy the fine food and wine, the company of smart guests, the cultured conversation, the perfumes, the games and all the other pleasures of such an occasion. But being unaware of the proper manners required there, he can only display his own ignorance and uncouthness and amuses the audience with his blunders.19 This situation occurred in Anaxandrides’ *”Αγροικοι*, as fr. 1 suggests:20

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19) On this comic theme see in general Fisher 356 f.; Ribbeck 43–45; Webster 178; Cooper / Morris 77 f.
20) On this fr. cf. Millis 20; Cooper / Morris 78; Fisher 357; Wilkins 222.
The character B. is an elderly ἀγροίκος about to participate in a drinking-party, probably together with one or more other rustics who accompany him (note the plurals in vv. 1–4). The character A. is presumably the host. The vocative πάτερ in v. 4 need not mean that he is the son of B.: πάτερ and its diminutives (παππά, πατρίδιον) are commonly used as a deferential, ingratiating or affectionate form of address by someone younger to an elderly man.21 A. is apparently a ‘man of the world’, experienced in sympotic manners, and asks B. about his preferred manner of drinking (vv. 1 f.). The ἀγροίκος, however, knows nothing about the various different ways of drinking and sympotic rituals: so he does not know what to say and gives a vague answer (vv. 2 f.). The host suggests then a particular way of drinking (τὸν ἐπιδέξα etc.), which must refer to some known practice of ancient symposia (drinking a toast to the guest seated at one’s right, or passing the cup to him and saying something in his praise while he is drinking).22 But the ignorant ἀγροίκος misunderstands this and takes it for some sort of funerary custom (v. 6).23 His blunder humorously underlines his ignorance and naïveté. Fr. 2 of the same play (ὡς δ’ ἐστεφανώθην,
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The character here designated as B. is clearly an ἀγροικός who has come to the city (vv. 6 ff.), and he is most probably male (pace Kassel-Austin, who take him for a woman named Φιλούμενον).

The scene follows the same pattern as Anaxandrides fr. 1. The character A. is again an urban host who invites the ἀγροικός to a banquet (like the host in Anaxandrides fr. 1) and requests his opinion on the menu. He asks the ἀγροικός what is his favourite fish (just as the host in Anaxandrides asked his rustic guest about his preferred manner of drinking). But the ἀγροικός has no idea of the gastronomical variety offered in the city-market, and his first answer is a vague πᾶσι (compare the vague first answer of the rustic in Anaxandrides fr. 1.2 f.). When the host insists, the ἀγροικός can only recall the μαϊνίδας and τριγλίδας which he has once eaten. These are cheap fishes, regarded as poor food and despised by the

26) The ms. of Athenaeus (Marcianus gr. 447), in which the fr. is preserved, gives contradictory indications as to the gender of character B.: in v. 12 it reads ὁ φιλτάτη and in v. 15 οὖτος (which refers again to B., the only person who has mentioned μαϊνίδας and τριγλίδας, vv. 7 f.) and so it presents B. as a male character. But in v. 4 it reads Φιλούμενον, which can only be a woman's name. Kassel / Austin have chosen to retain Φιλούμενον and make B. a woman, emending φιλτάτη in v. 12 into φιλτάτη; but οὖτος in v. 15 cannot be emended away, and so the text printed by Kassel / Austin suffers from an unacceptable inconsistency, since their female Φιλούμενον is referred to in the end as οὖτος, i.e. plainly as a male person. Since the transmitted text offers two indications that B. is male and only one that B. is female, it seems more economical to emend Φιλούμενον into something suitable for a man than to try to change the gender of both φιλτάτη and οὖτος. Meineke emended Φιλούμενον into Φιλούμενε, taking this as B.’s personal name. I propose, alternatively, to emend into φιλουμένε (with minuscule φ), an adjectival participle addressed as a term of affection from A. to B., like φιλτάτη in v. 12: “my friend”, “my dear”; cf. Pl. Symp. 201c, Hieroth. Art. Sacr. 163 (II 340.29 Ideler), [Joh. Damasc.] Barlaam and Ioasaph xxv 221 (p. 368 Woodw. / Matt.), Theocr. 3.3. For a more detailed discussion of all this see Nesselrath 288–291; Konstantakos 27–30; and my forthcoming article mentioned in the previous note. In any case, even if one follows Kassel / Austin and takes B. as a female character, this would make little difference to the argument of the present article: B. will still be a rustic character (although this time a female one, a countrywoman), who is visiting the city.
gourmets of the city (and even by the host’s slave, vv. 13 – 15); but they are presumably the only seafood that the ἢγροικος has ever tasted, and in his ignorance he regards them as the summit of culinary delight (vv. 8 f.). On the other hand, big fishes (the most expensive ones and the most esteemed by connoisseurs) terrify him: he refuses to taste them, because they are ‘man-eaters’. This shows again the ignorance and simple-mindedness of the ἢγροικος and provokes the sarcastic comments of the witty urban slave Pis- tos (vv. 13 – 15).27 The scene of fr. 69 initiates the preparations for a banquet, for which the slave is sent to buy provisions. Later in the play this banquet would doubtless take place and the ἢγροικος would participate in it. Given the ignorance and naïveté which he displays in fr. 69, he would most probably make similar blunders in the banquet too; these could then be narrated (by the host, a slave etc.) or even shown on stage (if the banquet was staged) and amuse further the audience.

Other fragments from Antiphanes’ Ἀγροικος-comedies also indicate that a banquet formed part of the plot.28 Fr. 1 (a high-style description of foodstuffs) is presumably spoken by a cook (doubtless hired in order to prepare the food for the dinner-party). Fr. 3 describes the beginning of a symposium, with a libation to Zeus Soter, the singing of a paean and of a skolion.29 And other fragments indicate the participation of the ἢγροικος himself in the symposium. Fr. 4 ([A.] ὅλην μύσας ἐκπινε. [B.] μέγα τὸ φορτίον. / [A.] οὐχ ὅστις αὐτής ἐστὶν ἐμπείρως ἔχων) places emphasis on the inexperience of the character B. in drinking; it is clearly suggested that he is unaccustomed to wine (not ἐμπείρως ἔχων, v. 2) and this is why he finds the cup offered to him ‘a heavy load’ (μέγα ... φορτίον). This inexperienced character may well be an ἢγροικος,

27) Antiphanes fr. 127, from Kouris, comes from a similar scene. One of the characters is an ἢγροικος (v. 1 ὃ μὲν ἢγρῳ τρεφόμενος) and he is said to eat only those fishes who have their habitat close to the land (vv. 1–4) and to abstain from all other fishes because they are ἐνθρωποφάγοι (vv. 5 f.). The situation seems similar to that of fr. 69: the ἢγροικος was presumably asked about his culinary preferences (perhaps again in view of a dinner party), and he replies again in a way which comically reveals his ignorance and naïveté. But much in fr. 127 is unfortunately obscure.

28) On all these fragments see Konstantakos 41–60 and my forthcoming article mentioned in n. 25.

who is here shown in a drinking scene, perhaps a staged drinking-party.\textsuperscript{30} If in the end he accepted the cup and drank up the wine, he would presumably get drunk, unaccustomed as he was to it, and would perhaps behave badly in the party (like Philokleon in Ar. \textit{Vesp.} or the \textit{άγροικοι} in Anaxandrides fr. 3). Fr. 6 (κραμβίδιον ἔφθον χαρίν, ἀστεὶον πάνυ) also points to the theme of drinking: boiled cabbage was commonly used as a remedy or prophylactic against drunkenness and the resulting hangover.\textsuperscript{31} So here it is probably suggested for someone who has drunk too much and suffers from the consequences (cf. Alexis fr. 287, Anaxandrides fr. 59, Euboulos fr. 124, Nikocharis fr. 18). This may have been again the \textit{άγροικος}, who is likely to drink immoderately, in his ignorance of sympotic good manners, but unaccustomed to heavy drinking. Finally, fr. 7 (ῥαγδαιός, ᾧμαχος, πρόγαμο μεῖζον ἡ δοκεῖς) might belong to a description of the violent behaviour of the \textit{άγροικος} in the symposium, after he has got drunk (compare the description of Philokleon in the same situation, \textit{Vesp.} 1299 ὁ γέρων ἀτηρότατον ἀρ’ ἦν κακόν, 1303).

Another interesting passage in this respect is Antiphanes fr. 57 from 'Αφροδίτης γονάτι: in that scene one character, A., teaches the game of the \textit{kότταβος}, a favourite game in ancient Attic symposia\textsuperscript{32}, to another person, B., who is completely ignorant of it. The responses of the ignorant character to A.’s instructions reveal great simple-mindedness and naïveté, similar to that which characterizes many comic rustics. Note especially vv. 11–13, in which A. mentions the μάνθω, a part of the equipment of the \textit{kότταβος}, but B. ludicrously misunderstands this, taking Μάνθως for a slave-name (compare the same pattern in Anaxandrides fr. 1, in which the \textit{άγροικος} misunderstands the ἐπιδέξια manner of drinking). Moreover, B. demonstrates notable slowness in learning (see his bewildered questions in vv. 4, 7 f., 10, 17 f., 19 f.), which suggests a certain thick-

\textsuperscript{30} Cf. Ribbeck 10 n. 2; Legrand 75; Webster 178; Fisher 357.
\textsuperscript{31} See e.g. Amphix fr. 37, [Arist.] Probl. 873a37–b23, Theophr. Hist. Plant. 4.16.6, Diosc. Mater. Med. 2.120.1, Eupor. 1.25, Ath. 1.34c, Geopon. 5.11.3, 7.29, 7.31.1, 7.33.1, 12.17.21 etc.
headedness; this recalls the rustic blockhead Strepsiades in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, who proves similarly incompetent to learn Socrates’ teachings. Finally, since the κόττοβος was a fashionable game in symposia, B.’s complete lack of knowledge about it indicates that he has never previously attended a symposium, or at least not an elegant and opulent one, in which that game would be played. Such ignorance of refined sympotic entertainments was a distinctive trait of ἀγρωικοὶ in 4th-century comedy, as Antiphanes’ Ἀγρωικοὺς-plays and Anaxandrides’ Ἀγρωικοὶ suggest. Nesselrath speculates that the ignorant B. is the newly-born Aphrodite of the title, her complete inexperience and naïveté being due to her very young age. However, given the qualities mentioned above, which are typical of comic rustics, another suggestion, made by Legrand and other scholars, is equally interesting: namely, that this ignorant character is an ἀγρωικος – another addition to the list of rustic inexperienced guests in 4th-century comedy. Since Ἀφροδίτης γοναί was presumably a play about gods, this ἀγρωικος-figure too would most probably be a god who could be represented as a rustic fellow (e.g. Heracles or Pan). This rustic god is to participate in a drinking-party (perhaps related to the celebration of the birth of Aphrodite); in connection to that party a more experienced god tries to teach to him the fashionable sympotic game. But the naïve reactions of the ἀγρωικος reveal his ignorance and amuse the spectators. It is noteworthy that Heracles was indeed shown playing the κόττοβος on stage with a girl in Platon’s Ζεύς κακοδεμας, and there too he showed inexperience in the game (see fr. 46, 47, 48). In comedy and satyr-play Heracles was often portrayed as a mythological prototype of the ἀγρωικος and as a guest behaving inappropriately in a symposium (see below).

Certain traits included in Theophrastus’ character-sketch of the ἀγρωικος may also point to the same theme of the rustic in the

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34) See Legrand 75; Fisher 357; cf. Cooper / Morris 78; Pütz 223, 225.
banquet: they show the ἀγροίκος behaving badly or ridiculously when he is eating or drinking, and we might well imagine him doing such things in a dinner-party. So for instance Char. 4.9 καὶ προσώρον δὲ τι ἐκ τοῦ ταμείου δεινὸς φαγεῖν, καὶ ζωρότερον πιεῖν (compare the rustics of Antiphanes and Anaxandrides, who drink immoderately in the symposium); cf. also 4.10 and 11. A sympotic context is possible also in 4.3 καὶ τὸ μύρον φόσκειν οὐδὲν τοῦ θύμου ἡδίου ὃς ἐτεῖν. Perfumes were usually distributed to the guests at the beginning of the symposium: we might thus imagine the ἀγροίκος in a party, receiving the perfume offered to him, smelling it with some curiosity and then declaring something like "Bah! Thyme smells better". Variations of this theme occur also in some of the Letters of Rustics by Alciphrhon (book 2), who often draws material, themes and characters from Attic comedy. 36 In Epist. 2.30 the ἀγροίκος drinks too much in a symposium and suffers from a hangover for two days (compare again the rustics of Antiphanes and Anaxandrides, who are similarly thrown out of balance by immoderate drinking). In Epist. 2.15 an ἀγροίκος offers himself a banquet to his friends, but this proves to be a ludicrous parody of what a refined, elegant symposium should look like. Together with the guests the dog is also present as a δαιτμῶν. Instead of orderly drinking, the guests gulp down wine immoderately, until they get drunk (cf. again the comic rustics). And instead of civilized and fine entertainment, they amuse themselves by dancing the indecent κόρδας. These ἀγροίκοι have their own symposium, like gentlemen of the city; but in it the rules of urbane symposia are turned topsyturvy.37

It so happens that the theme of the ἀγροίκος behaving badly in a banquet hardly appears in extant New Comedy. Menander


37) Compare also Epist. 3.34: a parasite has spent some time in the country, working in the fields with an ἀγροίκος patron. When he returns to the city, the rich hosts, who previously used to invite him to their banquets, find him too coarse and rustic (ὄρειος καὶ τραχὸς καὶ ἀπηχής) and send him away.
only plays slightly with it in Dysc. 871–873: Gorgias is reluctant to join Sostratos’ lunch-party, presumably because he is conscious of his inexperience and unsure of how to behave in such an occasion.\(^\text{38}\) This, in a way, reverses the traditional comic motif: instead of rushing to the banquet to make himself ridiculous with his blunders, here the ἀγροικος keeps away from the banquet in order to avoid making blunders. Another brief instance may occur towards the end of the play: in vv. 954–958, if we follow the stage action as reconstructed by Lloyd-Jones and Sandbach, Getas and Sikon pull Knemon to his feet and try to make him dance with them. Knemon is indeed compelled to dance a few steps, but he does so with such clumsiness as to provoke Getas’ comment ἀγροικος εἶ (v. 956).\(^\text{39}\) But apart from such slight instances, Menander makes no extensive use of the theme, in spite of the great opportunities offered to him by the plot of the Dyskolos (with two major ἀγροικοι-characters and a lunch-party going on backstage during almost half of the play). Perhaps the theme belonged to the stock repertoire of earlier comedy, which Menander strove to use only sparingly and in moderation, just as he has restrained e. g. the stock comic figures of the parasite and the cook and employed very economically the traditional humour associated with them (see e. g. Dysc. 57–70, 393–426).

The theme of the uncouth guest who behaves badly in a dinner-party was known and exploited already in 5th-century theatre, although it was not yet connected with the figure of the ἀγροικος. The most prominent comic example is Philokleon in Aristophanes’ Wasps. Philokleon is not technically an ἀγροικος, since he lives in the city, but in many respects he comes close and shares common qualities with figures like Strepsiades of the Clouds and the rustics of Middle Comedy: he too is uneducated, ignorant of refined society and polite manners, and uncouth in his comportment.\(^\text{40}\) Bdelykleon attempts to initiate him into fashionable society. For this purpose he rehearses with Philokleon the rituals of a dinner-party, but the old man displays such ignorance and coarseness of

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\(^{38}\) Cf. Handley 282; Ireland 168.


\(^{40}\) Although he is obviously more intelligent than Strepsiades and the Middle Comedy rustics; in all his uncouthness Philokleon possesses a kind of rough wit, which those rustic blockheads lack.
manner, that he ludicrously fails to conform to the required standards of civility (vv. 1174–1248: instead of fine and impressive stories, he can only relate vulgar or obscene tales; instead of reclining gracefully, he clumsily throws himself down; instead of continuing appropriately the sympotic songs, he turns them into insults against the other guests). Then Philokleon actually goes to a symposium, in which he drinks immoderately, gets drunk and behaves most improperly (vv. 1299–1323). It is significant that the slave uses the very word ἀγροίκως to describe Philokleon’s behaviour in the party (v. 1320). ἀγροίκως is here used metaphorically, but it suggests the sort of person who would be expected to behave so badly in a symposium. Philokleon, the uncouth guest who upsets the sympotic ritual with his blunders and coarse behaviour, is in this respect a forerunner of the ἀγροικοι of Middle Comedy.

Another such 5th-century forerunner of later comic rustics is Heracles, as we see him in Euripides’ Alcestis. Admetos receives him in his house and offers him a meal, during which Heracles behaves tactlessly and improperly (see the slave’s description in vv. 747–766): he eats and drinks greedily, constantly asking for more, gets tipsy and sings loudly in a coarse voice (Alc. 760 ἄμουρ’ ὑλακτών). Thus, in this scene Heracles appears unmistakably in the role of the coarse-mannered guest who behaves badly at dinner. This is interesting, because Heracles is in certain respects similar to the comic ἀγροικος, a mythological equivalent of that figure, at least in his portrayal in satyr-play and comedy: Ribbeck regards Heracles as a sort of ‘heroic prototype’ of the rustic. In satyr-play and in comedy (both in 5th-century Old Comedy and in the mythological travesties of the 4th century) Heracles was a favourite figure and he was standardly portrayed as a gross eater and drinker. So it seems likely that the theme of Heracles behaving badly

41) All this, of course, appears even more tactless amidst the mourning which prevails in Admetos’ house.

42) Ribbeck 5 f.: “der Typus des böotischen Grossknechtes, aber in heroischen Dimensionen ... Ideal eines Natursohnes”. Cf. Luc. Jup. Trag. 32, where Momes accuses Heracles with the words Ἀράκλεις ἀγροίκον τοῦτο ἐπηκας καὶ δεινῶς Βοιώτιον, and Heracles himself admits: ἐγὼ γὰρ, ὥς ὁ κομικὸς ἔρη, ἀγροικὸς εἰμὶ τὴν σκάρην σκάρην λέγων.

at a dinner-party, as found in Eur. *Alc.*, occurred in other plays as well. Of particular interest in this connection are the mythological comedies of the 4th century: some at least of the Middle Comedy plays which featured the glutton Heracles may have presented him as behaving coarsely or tactlessly in a banquet, and in this way they may have influenced the development of the ἢγροικός-figure in Middle Comedy. Heracles was the mythical ‘prototype’ of the ἢγροικός; so mythological comedies which showed him at a dinner-party could function as models for comedies which featured ἢγροικοῖ in a contemporary setting and could introduce into them the theme of the ἢγροικός in the banquet.

c) *The ἢγροικός in an affair with a hetaira*

This theme was foreshadowed in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, in which the boorish, unkempt and ill-smelling Strepsiades married a refined, luxuriously attired and perfumed lady of the city. In 4th-century comedy an elegant hetaira takes the place of the lawful wife, but the basic pattern remains the same: the ἢγροικός comes to the lovely lady with all his rustic ignorance, rough manners and unkempt appearance; the incongruity between those characteristics and the role of the gallant lover, which he undertakes, produces the comic effect. So in Plaut. *Truc.* the young rustic Strabax gets involved in an affair with Phronesium, the *meretrix*: he comes to her unkempt and squalid (vv. 930–934), straight from the farm, to which he had been sent in order to collect fodder for the cattle (vv. 645 ff.); and in such accoutrement, presumably still wrapped in his country-clothes, with the country dirt and smells clinging to his body, he enters the establishment of the *meretrix*, in which even slave-girls (like Astaphium) are elegantly attired and perfumed. As he approaches the lady’s house, he keeps on talking about his rustic affairs (vv. 645–662): the farm, the sheep and their fodder are what the ἢγροικός is thinking about on his way to become a gallant par-

amour. His behaviour as a lover is also markedly uncouth and tactless (note especially vv. 914–924, where he bluntly demands from his ladylove to “have some fun”).\(^{44}\) In the same play the rustic slave Truculentus changes his earlier attitude towards Astaphium in his second appearance (vv. 673–698): his attraction to her, against which he had fiercely fought earlier, has now taken over and made him yield to the temptation. Thus, he makes amorous advances to Astaphium and attempts to turn himself into a gallant \emph{amator}, but his clumsy manners and ignorance suit very ill such a role; note especially his ridiculous linguistic mistakes and barbarisms (vv. 675, 683, 686, 688). Truculentus professes himself a perfect urbane gentleman and experienced lover (vv. 677 f., 682 f.) but is all too obviously a coarse rustic; thus, his overconfident claims reveal only his naïveté and heighten the comic effect.\(^{45}\)

The same theme reappears in later portrayals of \emph{êgroikoi}, which may well draw inspiration from New Comedy. In Luc. Dial. Mer. 7.3 an Acharnian farmer goes to a hetaira, but he is dirty and ill-smelling like a goat (cf. Strepsiades and Strabax) and the girl sends him away\(^{46}\) (compare Alciphr. Epist. 2.24 and 25). In Alciphr. Epist. 2.31 an aged \emph{êgroikos} plays the gallant to a harp-girl, thus becoming the laughing stock of young people. In Ael. Epist. Rust. 7 and 8 an \emph{êgroikos} behaves towards a hetaira with rustic naïveté: he declares that what he loves above all is her name, Opura, because it reminds him of his farm and crops (in the mouth of the \emph{êgroikos} this is doubtless a compliment, but not one that a city courtesan could be expected to appreciate); and he sends to her as gifts figs, grapes and new wine, which the elegant lady scorns as vile and fit only for her slaves. In Ael. Epist. Rust. 9 an \emph{êgroikos} pays a visit to a hetaira, but he has no liking for foreplay and all he wants is to “get the business done” quickly and get back to his goats (\textit{ἐγὼ δὲ κατὰ χειρὸς ποιῶ πάντα καὶ σπεύδω καταλαβεῖν ἐν δύο τὰ σκέλη ἁρας καὶ ὑποστρέφειν ἐπὶ τὰς αἰγὰς πάλιν, as he admits in blunt and rather coarse terms). For \emph{êgroikoi} who get involved in


\(^{45}\) On this scene and its comic effects see Hofmann 16 f., 192–194.

\(^{46}\) On the relation of this Lucianic scene to comedy see P. E. Legrand (as n. 36) REG 20, 222 f.; P. E. Legrand, Les ‘Dialogues des courtisanes’ comparés avec la comédie (suite), REG 21 (1908) 47, 67; Leo 149.

There are indications that this theme was exploited also by the poets of Middle Comedy. We know of two mythological travesties entitled Anchises, by Anaxandrides and Euboulos, which probably burlesqed the encounter of the shepherd Anchises with Aphrodite; this might have been portrayed as a meeting between a simple peasant and a beautiful hetaira, in the manner of Plaut. Truc.47 One of Antiphanes’ Ο’ Αγροικοί-plays included an affair with a hetaira: fr. 2 (ἐστιν δ’ έταιρα τῷ τρέφοντι συμφοράν / εύφραίνεται γὰρ κακὸν ἐνοικεί μέγα) could be spoken by the hetaira’s lover himself at a moment when he is embittered by the conduct of his mistress; or it could be a warning or admonition to someone who is or intends to become involved in an affair with a hetaira.48

d) Menander and the ‘ennoblement’ of the Αγροικοί

It must be noted, however, that New Comedy at least did not portray the Αγροικοί solely as a ludicrous buffoon, meant to amuse the audience with his ignorance and uncouthness. Some Αγροικοί of New Comedy, especially in Menander, appear also endowed with notable virtues, which show their character in a favourable light and would evoke the sympathy of the audience.49 In certain cases both ludicrous and sympathetic elements are combined in the same character, who seems thus intended to elicit a complex response from the audience: laughter for his ignorance and rustic

47) See Hunter 88.
48) Cf. Nesselrath 323 and n. 106, 324 n. 112; Konstantakos 50 f. In later sources, which may be related to comedy, we find further variations of the theme of the ignorant rustic who visits the city and gets involved in situations unknown to him. So in Alciphr. Epist. 2.17 an Αγροικος is taken to the theatre, where he watches a variety of shows but is unable to recall them later (cf. the forgetfulness of the thick-headed Strepsiades in Ar. Nub. 627–631, 785–790); the only spectacle which has sufficiently impressed his simple mind is a conjuror, and he responds to his tricks with naïve wonder. Inexperienced rustics eager to taste the pleasures of the city appear also in Alciphr. Epist. 2.22 and 28. Some traits in Theophrastus’ sketch of the Αγροικος seem to be drawn from situations of this kind. So e.g. in Char. 4.2 the Αγροικος goes to the assembly after having drunk a κυκζεων, and presumably carrying its smell on his breath; in Char. 4.15 he goes to the public bath and sings (presumably in his coarse, loud voice, cf. n. 14 above).
manners, but also appreciation of his virtuous qualities. A memorable such figure is Grumio in Plaut. Most. He displays many of the rustic traits which comedy exploits in order to poke fun at the ἀγροικος (unkempt appearance, bad smell, loud and coarse voice, clumsy manners). But on the other hand he shows great loyalty and devotion to his old master and genuine concern for the welfare of the family, and it is these feelings that motivate his conduct throughout his scene; it is significant that precisely these virtuous qualities predominate in Grumio’s last words before he leaves the stage (vv. 76–83) and constitute the last impression that we get of him.

Menander in particular has gone far in that direction and has created sympathetic figures of ἀγροικοι, in whom the funny traits are drawn with gentle irony and combined with many likeable qualities. A prominent example is Gorgias in the Dyskolos. He displays some typically rustic traits, which Menander underlines with amusing irony (e.g. his prejudice against the leisured city people and their pleasures, his maladroitness of speech); but such traits are not pushed to laughable excess and do not turn Gorgias into a figure of fun. On the other hand, Menander has endowed him with a series of virtues (e.g. a sense of duty and responsibility, conscientiousness, honesty, good-heartedness and readiness to help)\(^{50}\), which attract the sympathy of the audience. The little that remains of Menander’s Georgos suggests that in that play too Gorgias must have been sympathetically portrayed. He may have displayed a certain irascibility and anger at some point (see fr. 3.3 τὸ δ’ ὀξύθυμον τοῦτο καὶ λίαν πικρὸν)\(^{51}\), which would indicate a rustic roughness of manner; but otherwise he appears as a hard-working youth of a kind and compassionate disposition (when his employer gets injured, Gorgias nurses him as though he were his own father, vv. 55–63). Just as he has done with other stock comic figures, like the soldier or the hetaira, Menander has tried, in some cases at least, to ‘ennoble’ the ἀγροικος, highlighting prominently his sympathetic qualities, avoiding caricature and excess and limiting the comic portrayal to occasional touches of irony.


In this essay I have tried to trace some themes and trends in the development of the comic ἔγροικος during the 5th and 4th centuries. In most plays of Aristophanes countrymen are portrayed in a favourable manner. However, the comic ἔγροικος too is ‘born’ in Old Comedy with figures like Strepsiades of the Clouds, the uncouth rustic who appears comically maladjusted in the urbane environment of the city. This pattern is further developed and standardized in the 4th century: the poets of Middle and New Comedy caricature the rustic’s ignorance and rough manners and place him in typically urbane situations (a high-class symposium, an affair with an elegant hetaira), in which his patent incongruity produces comic effect. The work of the comic poets may be reflected in Theophrastus’ character-sketch of the ἔγροικος and has influenced later humorists like Lucian, Aelian and Alciphron. Menander has given a splendid caricature of the rustic boor in the figure of Knemon; but in other cases, in accordance with his overall aesthetics of comic moderation, he has curtailed the buffoonery of other poets and invested the comic ἔγροικος with sympathetic qualities. Thus, in a way, the comic history of the rustic draws a full circle. It begins with the favourable portrayal of the farmer-heroes in Aristophanic comedy; and after a long period of ridicule and emphasis on the rustic’s uncouthness, it concludes with some farmers of Menander, who otherwise differ greatly from the exuberant Aristophanic heroes but are, like them, depicted in a sympathetic manner.

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