

## STUDIES IN COMEDY

### I. THE USE OF THE ADJECTIVE ΤΑΛΑΣ AND THE FORM ΤΑΛΑΝ, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ARISTOPHANES AND MENANDER

Τάλας is a tragic adjective, seldom found in prose, and mainly used in the nominative and vocative singular<sup>1</sup>. Homer uses only the vocative τάλαν twice (*Od.* v 327 and ξ 68); it is said to Odysseus by Melanthe and it is meant to have a humiliating and insulting sense. Τάλας — an ancient present participle<sup>2</sup> — is a man under a burden<sup>3</sup>, taken metaphorically, i.e. suffering, and so miserable, unhappy. In the passages of Homer the word takes on a scornful meaning from Melanthe's character and attitude towards Odysseus. The lyric poets, too, very seldom use this adjective, which mainly occurs in Tragedy. It naturally applies to tragic heroes, who are called by this adjective by other characters as well as by the Chorus. Cf. Aesch. *Pr.* 595 Io to Prometheus; *Ag.* 1070 Chorus to Cassandra. Soph. *El.* 879, 887, 924 Elektra to Chrysothemis; *OR* 1211 Chorus to Oedipus. Euripides uses this adjective very often, not only in reference to his protagonists, but also to many other characters, so he uses compounds with τάλας, when he wants something stronger for special cases, like δυστάλας (for Theseus and Iphigenia) and παντάλαινα (for Hecuba). There are cases where this adjective takes a different shade of meaning; e.g. Aesch. *Th.* 262 σίγησον, ὦ τάλαινα, μὴ φίλους φέθει. Eteokles tries to calm the women, who are not yet in fact «miserable». So this adjective is used in this context with a coaxing purpose. Soph. *OC* 318 τάλαινα, οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλη. Antigone calls her sister Ismene τάλαινα, when she sees her coming. Ismene is not more miserable than Antigone, they are in the same misery;

<sup>1</sup> See *F. Solmsen*, *Indogermanische Forschungen*, 1912, p. 497.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *ταλάσσαι*, *τληναι*.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Τάλας* of Mythology, and for the literal meaning the *τάλαντον* and *\*Ατλας*.

the adjective is here a word of tenderness and affection. No translation can give these shades of meaning, but certainly good actors can.

In Tragedy the cases are more frequent when a hero calls himself *τάλας* in moments of pain and despair, many times with an interjection and a cry of suffering, which frequently belongs to a *kommos*. The examples are numerous, almost all the tragic heroes call themselves *τάλανες*. In Euripides it is a common adjective; his characters call themselves *τάλανες* again and again, not only the heroes but also unheroic characters; e.g. the messenger of the *Phoen.* 1335 ὦ *τάλας* ἐγὼ, τίς εἶπω μῦθον; and 1337 ὦ *τάλας*, δισσωδὲς αὐτῷ. So this is the particular tragic use of the adjective: when someone calls himself *τάλας*.

In Aristophanes the use of this adjective shows that it must have passed into the spoken language, but at the same time it keeps its tragic colour when it is applied to the person speaking. The comic heroes of Aristophanes call themselves *τάλανες*, when they are in difficulties, like the tragic heroes. Sometimes in these cases the context clearly suggests a parody of the tragic style; e.g. *Ach.* 1191 στυγερὰ *τάδε* γε κρυερὰ πάθεα· *τάλας* ἐγὼ. 1210 *τάλας* ἐγὼ συμβολῆς βαρείας. *Nu.* 1504 οἴμοι *τάλας* δείλαιος ἀποπνιγήσομαι. *Th.* 1038 ὦ *τάλας* ἐγὼ *τάλας*. Only women use *τάλας* for addressing other persons<sup>1</sup>, and this shows that this kind of use must have been common in the spoken language, but only in the women's vocabulary. When used by women of or to someone else, this adjective does not have its literal meaning, but it appears as an expression of feminine tenderness and sympathy, which also implies either reproof or mockery. In the latter case the sympathy and tenderness can be affected; e.g. *Ec.* 90 πληρουμένης *τάλαινα*; (reproof); 156 μὰ τῷ θεῷ; *τάλαινα* ποῦ τὸν νοῦν ἔχεις; (reproof); also *Pl.* 684, 706, 1064. *Lys.* 914 ἔπειτ' ὀμόσασα δῆτ' ἐπιροκήσω *τάλαν*; (mockery), also 970; *Th.* 760 *ταλαντάτη* Μίκαα τίς ἐξεκόρησέ σε; *Ec.* 658, 919.

There are cases where the form *τάλαν* does not refer to any person, but it expresses a feminine reaction towards a situation or event, which implies tender sympathy with reproof or mockery; e.g. *Lys.* 120 ὁ γοῦν ἐμὸς ἀνὴρ πέντε μῆνας, ὦ *τάλαν*. *Ra.* 559

<sup>1</sup> The only exception: *Ach.* 454 τί δ' ὦ *τάλας* σε τοῦδ' ἔχει πλέκουσ χροῖος; which is a parodied Euripidean verse (cf. Eur. *Fr.* 714).

Μὰ Δι' οὐδὲ τὸν τυρὸν τὸν χλωρόν, τάλαν. *Ec.* 124. The scholiast on Plato *Theaet.* 173e says that «ὦ τάλαν» like «ὦ μέλε, παρὰ τοῖς νεωτέροις ὑπὸ τῶν γυναικῶν λέγεται μόνον»<sup>1</sup>. But already in Aristophanes not only the form ὦ τάλαν, but also generally the adjective τάλας is indeed used only by women for addressing other people. It is perhaps not mere coincidence that the vocative form τάλαν is rather rare in tragic poetry, where the form τάλας is used as a vocative more frequently. So it can be assumed that already from the 5th century the form τάλαν was used in the everyday language, and that this τάλαν has nothing to do with the tragic adjective τάλας. The form τάλαν is considered by the ancient grammarians Apollonius Dysc.<sup>2</sup> and Herodianus<sup>3</sup> as an adverb. However, the modern grammarians do not seem to consider τάλαν as anything else but a form of the adjective τάλας<sup>4</sup>, but it is clear already in Aristophanes that τάλαν, in some cases, is not an adjective but an adverbial interjection, or exclamation. Semantically there is no difference between the various forms of the adjective τάλας and the adverbial interjection τάλαν, both used only by women.

Menander presents the same picture as Aristophanes. He also uses τάλας in two ways: 1) When someone calls himself τάλας; 2) when someone calls another person τάλας, or uses the adverbial interjection τάλαν. In the first case the adjective keeps its tragic sense; the men usually say οἱμοι τάλας: *Epitr.* 613, *Sam.* 253, *Dysk.* 177, 597, *Fr.* 742. The women usually say τάλαιν' ἐγώ: *Epitr.* 353, 535, *Perik.* 380, *Sam.* 30, 43, 183, 223, *Georg.* 49, *Dysk.* 189, 203, 620. Of the second use there are three examples in Menander, besides the cases of τάλαν: *Her.* 69 οὐ τάλαινα, *Epitr.* 260 τάλας οὗτος and *Fr.* 389 ὡς ἀεὶ σιφρὰς ἐσομένας καὶ νέας ταλάντατος. In *Epitr.* 260 it is said by Habrotonon; the only line of *Fr.* 389 does not show who the speaker is. The third, *Her.* 69, is in Koerte's edition (ed. by Thierfelder) ascribed to a man (Laches). But as *Her.* 69 is in a small fragment preceded and followed by very mutilated and therefore unintelligible lines, the

<sup>1</sup> See U. von Wilamowitz, *Menander, Das Schiedsgericht*, Berlin 1925, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> De Adverbiis 160, II, *Schneider*.

<sup>3</sup> Herodiani Technici Reliquiae 1, 508, *Lentz*: τὰ εἰς ἀν λήγοντα καὶ μακρὸν ἔχει τὸ α καὶ βαρύνεται, λίαν, ἄγαν... τὸ πάμπαν καὶ τάλαν συστέλλει τὸ α

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hesychius τάλα' μέγα.

reconstruction and interpretation of its text is extremely difficult; many suggestions are given by various scholars. On the grounds of the special use of this adjective, it may be suggested now that either two women are necessary in this scene (the second according to *dramatis personae* is Sophrone), and the one calls the other *τάλαινα*, while Laches, perhaps, overhears their conversation and speaks aside, or the punctuation must be changed to: *σύ, τάλαινα*; with the assumption that Myrrhine calls herself *τάλαινα* in the last part of the preceding line, and Laches doubts it ironically<sup>1</sup>. *Τάλας* is used sixteen times, and the speaker is a woman in all the cases (thirteen) where a sufficient part of the context exists to show the speaker, with the exception of *Dysk.* 438. In line 438 of the *Dyskolos* *τάλαν*, being corrected<sup>2</sup> from *τάλαινα* of the Papyrus, is uttered by the cook Sikon<sup>3</sup> according to the Papyrus. But it does not go with Sikon's attitude to turn from the indignation and impatience of lines 434-437 to the pleasantry of *τάλαν*, *οὐ περιμενεῖ τὴν σὴν σχολήν*. The one who is making fun of Sikon is the slave Getas, who must continue speaking from line 437 till the end of line 441, in spite of the double dots and the paragraph of the Papyrus. This is suggested already by E. W. Handley<sup>4</sup>, who puts dashes after the words *πρόβατον* and *τάλαν*; so the text is this: (v. 438-9) *τὸ γοῦν πρόβατον — μικροῦ τέθνηκε γάρ, τάλαν — οὐ περιμενεῖ τὴν σὴν σχολήν*. Getas replies to Sikon's indignation at the delay with the commonplace joke about the sheep for sacrifice: it is so thin and sickly that it could not wait and was about to die. Obviously Getas with the interjection *τάλαν*, expresses his comic tenderness for the sheep, imitating the feminine way of speaking, which so is being ridiculed<sup>5</sup>. Therefore there is no real exception to the rule of the use of *τάλαν* in the case of *Dysk.* 438.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Samia* 155 (Xp.) *θύσμορος*. (Δη.) *ναί, θύσμορος*. Prof. T. B. L. Webster has paralleled this scene of the *Heros* with *Samia* 155 ff. in *Studies in Menander*, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. princeps by V. Martin.

<sup>3</sup> H. J. Mette in his edition, following Ritchie, introduces a new person, Sostratos' mother, to whom he gives lines 438-441, in spite of the negative evidence of the *dramatis personae* of the Papyrus.

<sup>4</sup> *Bulletin of the Inst. of Classical Studies* 6 (1959) 68.

<sup>5</sup> This suggestion is corroborated if a female speaking person exists in this scene, as in the edition by H. Lloyd-Jones (*Oxford Classical Texts*).

In Menander the form *τάλαν* seems to be a fashionable Attic word in the vocabulary of women of a lower social level, because it is used by Habrotonon (*Epir.*), Glykera (*Perik.*), Doris (*Perik.*), Chrysis (*Sam.*), a nurse (*Sam.*), the old slave Simike (*Dysk.*). This does not mean that the word implies any social distinction, it may only be due to the fact that in Menander's fragmentary work women of the upper class do not have a chance to say much. Grammatically the form *τάλαν* in Menander is an adverbial interjection, although there are some cases where it can be taken as a vocative as well, because it refers to a man's action, opinion, etc.; cf. *Epir.* 370, 640, *Perik.* 305, <sup>x</sup>425. Its particular meaning in every case is as follows:

- 1) *Epir.* 258 f. οὐκέτι μ' ἔᾱ γὰρ οὐδὲ κατακεῖσθαι, *τάλαν*, παρ' αὐτόν: interjection of tenderness with pity for herself (Habrotonon).
- 2) *Epir.* 263 κανοῦν ἔμοιγ' οἶόν τε νῦν ἐστ', ὦ *τάλαν*: like *Epir.* 258 (Habrotonon).
- 3) *Epir.* 290 ὡς κομψόν, *τάλαν*: interjection of tenderness and pity for the baby (Habrotonon).
- 4) *Epir.* 370 *τάλαν*, τίνος ἔνεκεν παιδῶν ἐπιθυμεῖν σοι δοκῶ; : interjection of tenderness with reproof of the opinion of Onesimos (Habrotonon).
- 5) *Epir.* 533 f. κλαυμυρίζεται, *τάλαν*, πάλαι γάρ: like *Epir.* 290 (Habrotonon).
- 6) *Epir.* 640 πῶ; ἐγώ, *τάλαν*: interjection of tenderness with, probably, reproof of the opinion of Charisios (Habrotonon).
- 7) *Perik.* 305 εἶτ' οὐ λαθεῖν τούτους ἄν ἔσπευδον, *τάλαν*: exclamation of tenderness with reproof of the opinion of Pataikos (Glykera).
- 8) *Perik.* <sup>x</sup>318 οὐδ' ἄν, *τάλαν*, θεράπαιναν ἐργάσαιτό τις: interjection of pity for herself (Glycera).
- 9) *Perik.* <sup>x</sup>425 ὦ *τάλαν*, τί δρᾶς; : interjection of tenderness with gentle mockery at Polemon's flight (Doris).
- 10) *Sam.* 37 'λόουσατ', ὦ *τάλαν*, τὸ παιδίον': interjection of tenderness with reproof of the slave's negligence (the nurse).
- 11) *Sam.* 154 ποῖ γῆς, ὦ *τάλαν*; : interjection of pity for herself (Chrysis).
- 12) *Dysk.* 591 μὴ δῆτ', ὦ *τάλαν*: interjection of pity for herself (Simike).

13) *Dysk.* 875 ἐνταῦθα κατακείσει, τάλαν τοῦ σοῦ τρόπου<sup>1</sup>: it expresses pity and reproof of Knemon's character (Simike).

So the adjective τάλας in Aristophanes and Menander is used in two different ways: 1) with its proper sense it refers to the person speaking; this is the special tragic use. 2) Only by women of a second person, as an expression of tenderness, which may also imply pity, reproof, or mockery. In this case the original meaning has been very much weakened and the context gives the right meaning in every passage. The form τάλαν exists as an adverbial interjection and belongs to the second way of use. It seems that in Menander's time the interjection τάλαν was a fashionable word. The Comic Fragments do not give any clear evidence on this subject. It may be added that Herodas in his *Mimes* appears to use the adjective τάλης - τάλαινα as Aristophanes and Menander do; but he does not use the form τάλαν.

## II. THE INTERPRETATION OF "ΤΗΝ ΘΥΡΑΝ ΠΕΠΛΗΧΕΝ"

There is general agreement on the problem of how the doors were opened on the stage (inwards or outwards), that the doors on the stage corresponded both in appearance and in construction with the doors of real life, and that they were opened, of course, inwards<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, the difficulty in interpreting the expression τὴν θύραν πέπληχεν made scholars conclude that stage-doors opened outwards<sup>3</sup>, because of the use of the words for «strike» or «push» (πλήττω, *pello*) with reference to characters coming out of doors especially when in a violent temper. But this is strongly opposed by the archaeologists, and therefore the interpretation of this expression can not be based on such a supposition. *Dalman*<sup>4</sup> following *Gerkan's*<sup>5</sup> view assumes that these verbs (i. e. πλήττω, *pello*) merely denote the shaking which necessarily accompanies the opening of the door. Although this interpretation is basically

<sup>1</sup> As it is corrected in the Bull. of the Inst. of Class. St. 6 (1959) 71.

<sup>2</sup> See discussion in *W. Beare*, *The Roman Stage*, 2nd ed., London 1955, Append. G, pp. 275-287.

<sup>3</sup> *W. W. Mooney*, *The house-door on the ancient stage*, Baltimore 1914, p. 26 f.

<sup>4</sup> *De aedibus scaenicis comoediae novae*, Leipzig 1929, p. 22, n. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Das Theater von Priene*, Berlin 1921, p. 123, n. 3.

correct—τὴν θύραν πέπληχεν cannot mean a special stroke on the door, or a push from inside—it neither explains this strange use of the verb πλήττω, nor finds any special reason for the use of this expression in addition to the other ones, which have a similar meaning.

The problem must be confined to Menander, because this expression is used only by him. The *pepulit* of Plautus and Terence is not always equivalent to the Menandrian πέπληχεν. In Plaut. *Amph.* fr. XI and Ter. *Ad.* 638, it means knocking on the front door (= *pulso*, κόπτω). Only in Ter. *Ad.* 788 *pepulit* refers to a person coming out, and can be considered as equivalent to πέπληχεν. Latin drama does not give any other examples.

This expression, which strangely enough no ancient grammarian or scholiast mentions anywhere, as far as we know, occurs five times in Menander: once in the *Epitr.*, three times in the *Sam.* and once in the *Dysk.* The perfect πέπληχα is a later form of the present πλήττω, which in its simple form is either very rare or non-existent in the Attic authors. Menander uses special terms for the announcement of persons, who come on the stage, either from the market, country, etc. (λέναι, προσιέναι, παρῆναι), or from the houses, etc. of the scenery (προῖέναι, ἐξιέναι). The expression τὴν θύραν πέπληχεν belongs to the announcement of a person, who comes out of a house, and there are thirteen cases of this kind of announcement. In seven cases we have τὴν θύραν ψοφεῖ τις (or ἐψόφηκεν) ἐξιῶν (*Epitr.* 555, *Perik.* 126, *Fr.* 766), ἐψόφηκε προῖων τὴν θύραν (*Sam.* 324), καὶ ψοφεῖ γε τὴν θύραν (*Dysk.* 586), τὴν θύραν ψοφοῦσιν (*Dysk.* 690), and simply τις ἐψόφηκεν; (*Dysk.* 204); once ἡ θύρα ψοφεῖ (*Sam.* 222); and five times τὴν θύραν πέπληχεν προῖων (*Sam.* 85), τὴν θύραν πέπληχεν ἐξιῶν (*Epitr.* 586), and simply τὴν θύραν πέπληχεν (*Sam.* 151, 210), τὴν θύραν πέπληχέν τις (*Dysk.* 188).

The same kind of announcement is found in earlier drama as well; e.g. Eur. *Ion* 515 τῶνδ' ἀκούομεν πυλῶν | δοῦπον, ἐξιόντα τ' ἤδη δεσπότην ὄρᾱν πάρα. *Orest.* 1366 ἀλλὰ κτυπεῖ γὰρ κληῖθρα βασιλείων δόμων, | σιγήσατ' ἔξω γὰρ τις ἐκθαίνει Φρυγῶν<sup>1</sup>. Aristoph. *Eq.* 1326 ὄψεσθε δέ· καὶ γὰρ ἀνοιγνυμένων φόφος ἤδη τῶν προφυλαίων.

<sup>1</sup> These verses are put in brackets by various editors (cf. the Oxford ed.) on the wrong evidence of a scholion. See A. M. Dale, *Seen and unseen on the Greek stage*, Wiener Studien 69 (1956) 103.

*Ra.* 604 δεῖν δ' ἔοικεν, ὡς ἀκούω | τῆς θύρας καὶ δὴ ψέφον. In these examples the noise of the door being opened is the indication that someone is coming out of the palace, house, etc.<sup>1</sup>. So, Menander follows traditional dramatic technique and terminology, to which he adds his own variations: the transitive ἐψόφηκεν τὴν θύραν τις (cf. Eur. *HF* 78 ὅταν πύλαι ψοφῶσι), and τὴν θύραν πέπληχεν.

Consequently the expression τὴν θύραν πέπληχεν cannot but refer to the noise of the door itself, when someone, coming out, opens and closes it. But it has also a special meaning, which explains its use as a variant term. It is used either when someone in temper or in a hurry comes out, and therefore τὴν θύραν πέπληχεν means he «slammed the door», i. e. a violent opening and closing of the door. The person, who uses this expression for announcing someone, knows in all the cases who this furious person is (*Epitr.* 522, *Sam.* 151, 210), or he is expecting him (*Sam.* 85); only in *Dysk.* 188 there is the indefinite pronoun τις. Miltner's interpretation<sup>2</sup> is that there is distinction between τὴν θύραν ἐψόφηκεν and τὴν θύραν πέπληχεν: in the first case the speaker does not expect any special person, while in the second knows who the person is, who comes out. This implies that in the second case the person is already visible and standing in front of the door, after having slammed it; in the first case the person coming is not yet visible, but still behind the door. But firstly the use of the perfect ἐψόφηκεν does not permit such an interpretation, because it means that the noise of the door is over and consequently the person who comes out must be already visible. Secondly this also implies that the actor, who makes the announcement, must stand facing the scenery and not the audience, in order to be able to make Miltner's distinction, which therefore is not acceptable.

The case of *Sam.* 85 needs separate consideration, because Parmenon after he had slammed the door, hurrying to his master, turns back and speaks through the door to Chrysis. This means that he reopens the door a little and speaks through the opening, which is a frequent technique in New Comedy. The *Dyskolos* gives

<sup>1</sup> This is not the only way; cf. Eur. *Ba.* 638 — φοφεῖ γοῦν ἀρβύλη δόμων ἔσω — | εἰς προνόπι' αὐτίχ' ἦξει. Arist. *Pax* 232 καὶ γὰρ ἐξίέναι γνώμην ἔμην | μέλλει' θορυβεῖ γοῦν ἔνδον.

<sup>2</sup> *Mitteil. Ver. klass. Phil.* 1927, p. 61, n. 9.

a good example in v. 204 ff., where Daos speaks to Sostratos's mother through the opening of the door after his exit on the stage. Miltner<sup>1</sup> speaks about a «Sprechöffnung», which «naturally, the ancient door had», through which, he says, Parmenon speaks to Chrysis. But his reference to a South-Italian krater<sup>2</sup> is no sufficient evidence to support the existence of a hole in the doors for speaking through, even if the two rather big square designs on the stage-door, which is painted on that krater, are really holes (one in each wing of this door) and not merely decorative squares. (If they are holes for speaking, then why two on one door?)

The *pepulit* of Terence *Ad.* 788, which is the only example in Latin drama of something equivalent to the Menandrian πέπληγεν, is left to be considered. We have already seen that *pello* in two other cases, where it occurs (Plaut. *Amph.* fr. XI and Ter. *Ad.* 638), means «*pulso* = κόπτω». Terence reading in his Greek original by Menander (*Ἀδελφοὶ Β'*) τὴν θύραν πέπληγεν, misunderstood it and translated it *pepulit fores*, although he had, 150 lines above, used the same verb with the clear meaning of knocking on the door for entering it<sup>3</sup>. Donatus, afterwards, reading in *Ad.* 788 quisnam a me pepulit tam graviter fores? thought that this *pepulit* must also mean a deliberate knocking, so he remarks in his commentary: «cum pulsandae fores exituro foras, Demea sic eas pulsavit, ut et his ipsis irasci videretur». But *pulso* means knocking on the door to enter the house; the misunderstanding is clear. Therefore there is no Latin equivalent to the Menandrian τὴν θύραν πέπληγεν; the Latin dramatists use only the term ἐψόφηκεν (or ψοφεί), usually translated as *crepuere* (or *crepuit*).

It is necessary to explain, now, the operation of this kind of announcement on the stage, in order to show the dramatic importance of this technique. A person speaking on the stage is facing, of course, the audience, so that when someone comes out of one of the houses, which the scenery generally represented, he is naturally not visible to the person, who is already on the stage. But the latter is supposed to hear the noise of the door,

<sup>1</sup> Loc. cit. n. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Baumeister*, *Denkmäler* III, p. 1754. But cf. p. 1753.

<sup>3</sup> V. 638 *tunc* has *pepulisti fores*?

which indicates that someone comes out, and he announces it, not in order to inform the spectators about the fact, which they see, but because he must stop speaking and face the newcomer, or step aside, or quickly leave the stage, according to the special situation. This way of going from one scene to another could work perfectly well on the stage, which in Menander's time had not much depth (9 ft.), but a considerable width (66 ft.)<sup>1</sup>, and at the same time has all the vivacity and naturalness, of which Menander cares very much.

Athens

CHRISTINA DEDOSSI

---

<sup>1</sup> See *T. B. L. Webster, Greek Theatre Production*, London 1956, p. 20 f.