Ancient Comedy and Reception
Ancient Comedy and Reception

Essays in Honor of Jeffrey Henderson

Edited by
S. Douglas Olson
Foreword

This volume represents an attempt to offer not a systematic history of the comic genre from Graeco-Roman times to today, but a series of interconnected studies of some of the most important moments and figures in that history. These studies are dedicated to Jeffrey Henderson, whose *Maculate Muse* (1975) and critical edition and commentary on Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* (1987)—among other major scholarly contributions—have decisively shaped the way Athenian “Old Comedy” is read and received today.

The volume was conceived by Wolfgang Haase, Professor of Classical Studies at Boston University, who set its intellectual and geographic limits, issued the vast majority of the invitations to contribute, established the style-sheet and basic formatting standards, and did preliminary editorial work on a number of individual pieces. When Haase was forced to withdraw from the project for reasons of ill health at the end of 2012, I took over as general editor. My time and energy has been devoted primarily to line-editing material already in hand, making further organizing and formatting decisions and applying them throughout, and shepherding the project through the press. I would like to express my gratitude to the individual authors for consistently and cheerfully meeting the many deadlines set them in the course of this process. I would also like to thank Michiel Klein Swormink, De Gruyter’s Editorial Director for the Humanities (North America), and our project editor Emily Hough, for their assistance in bringing the volume into print.

S. Douglas Olson
Freiburg, August 2013
# Contents

S. Douglas Olson  
Foreword — V

## Ancient Comedy and Receptions

Zachary P. Biles  
**Exchanging Metaphors in Cratinus and Aristophanes** — 3

Ralph M. Rosen  
**Comic Parrhêsia and the Paradoxes of Repression** — 13

James Robson  
**Slipping One In: The Introduction of Obscene Lexical Items in Aristophanes** — 29

Heinz-Günther Nesselrath  
**Ancient Comedy and Historiography: Aristophanes Meets Herodotus** — 51

Oliver Taplin  
**Epiphany of a Serious Dionysus in a Comedy?** — 62

Giuseppe Mastromarco  
**Toponimi e immaginario sessuale nella Lisistrata di Aristofane** — 69

Mark Alonge  
**Dionysus’ Choice in Frogs and Aristophanes’ Paraenetic Pedigree** — 82

J.R. Green  
**Two Phaedras: Euripides and Aristophanes?** — 94

Charles Platter  
**Plato’s Aristophanes** — 132

Alan H. Sommerstein  
**Menander’s Samia and the Phaedra Theme** — 167

Michael Fontaine  
**Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Comedy: Menander’s Kolax in Three Roman Receptions (Naevius, Plautus and Terence’s Eunuchus)** — 180
Simone Beta
*Libera lingua loquemur ludis Liberalibus: Gnaeus Naevius as a Latin Aristophanes?* — 203

Eckard Lefèvre
*Plautus und die Techniken des Improvisationstheaters* — 223

Boris Dunsch
*Lege dura vivont mulieres: Syra’s Complaint about the Sexual Double Standard (Plautus *Merc. 817–29)* — 235

Keith Sidwell
“Letting It All Hang Out”: Lucian, Old Comedy and the Origins of Roman Satire — 259

Ian Ruffell
*Old Comedy at Rome: Rhetorical Model and Satirical Problem* — 275

Niall W. Slater
*Inventing Everything: Comic and Performative Sources of Graeco-Roman Fiction* — 309

Steven D. Smith
*From Drama to Narrative: The Reception of Comedy in the Ancient Novel* — 322

Sebastiana Nervegna
*Greek Culture as Images: Menander’s Comedies and Their Patrons in the Roman West and the Greek East* — 346

Niall W. Slater
*The Evidence of the Zeugma *Synaristosai* Mosaic for Imperial Performance of Menander* — 366

Medieval, Renaissance and Early Modern Receptions

Laura Kendrick
*Medieval Vernacular Versions of Ancient Comedy: Geoffrey Chaucer, Eustache Deschamps, Vitalis of Blois and Plautus’ *Amphitryon* — 377

Ludovica Radif
*Aristofane mascherato: Un secolo (1415–1504) di fortuna e ‘sfortuna’* — 397
Hélène Casanova-Robin
L’influence de Plaute sur la définition du comique chez Giovanni Pontano — 410

John Nassichuk
Strepsiades’ Latin Voice: Two Renaissance Translations of Aristophanes’ Clouds — 427

Francesca Schironi
The Trickster Onstage: The Cunning Slave from Plautus to Commedia dell’Arte — 447

Robert S. Miola
Aristophanes in England, 1500–1660 — 479

Maik Goth
Exaggerating Terence’s Andria: Steele’s The Conscious Lovers, Bellamy’s The Perjur’d Devotee and Terentian Criticism — 503

Adele Scafuro
Roman Comedy and Renaissance Revenge Drama: Titus Andronicus as Exemplary Text — 537

Philip Ford
Molière and the Roman Comic Tradition — 565

Gesine Manuwald
Jacob Masen’s Rusticus imperans (1657) and Ancient Theater — 580

Benjamín García-Hernández, Rosario López Gregoris y Carmen González-Vázquez
La recepción de Plauto y Terencio en la literatura española — 606

Robert Tordoff
Reform: A Farce Modernised from Aristophanes (1792) — 654

Modern Receptions

Bernhard Greiner
Polos und Polis: Aristophanes’ Vögel und deren Bearbeitung durch Goethe, Karl Kraus und Peter Hacks — 699
Maria Luisa Chirico
Translations of Aristophanes in Italy in the 19th century — 727

Gonda Van Steen
Close Encounters of the Comic Kind: Aristophanes’ Frogs and Lysistrata in Athenian Mythological Burlesque of the 1880s — 747

Timothy J. Moore
Rodgers and Hart’s The Boys from Syracuse: Shakespeare Made Plautine — 762

Kevin J. Wetmore
She (Don’t) Gotta Have It: African-American Reception of Lysistrata — 786

Peter v. Möllendorff
„Es ist, um aus der Rüstung zu fahren!“: Erich Kästners Adaption der Acharner des Aristophanes — 797

Marina Kotzamani
Lysistrata on Broadway — 807

Simone Beta
“Attend, O Muse, Our Holy Dances and Come to Rejoice in Our Songs”: The Reception of Aristophanes in the Modern Musical Theater — 824

Amanda Wrigley
Aristophanes at the BBC, 1940s–1960s — 849

Graham Ley
Cultural Politics and Aesthetic Debate in Two Modern Versions of Aristophanes’ Frogs — 871

David Konstan
Ionesco’s New and Old Comedy — 887

Martin M. Winkler
Aristophanes in the Cinema; or, the Metamorphoses of Lysistrata — 894

Martina Treu
Who’s Afraid of Aristophanes? The Troubled Life of Ancient Comedy in 20th-Century Italy — 945
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nurit Yaari</td>
<td><em>Aristophanes in Israel: Comedy, Theatricality, Politics</em></td>
<td>964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betine van Zyl Smit</td>
<td><em>Culture, Education and Politics: Greek and Roman Comedy in Afrikaans</em></td>
<td>984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Scharffenberger</td>
<td>*The Maculate Muse in the 21st Century: Recent Adaptations of Aristophanes’ <em>Peace</em> and <em>Ecclesiazusae</em></td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myrto Gondicas</td>
<td>*Eschyle et Euripide entre tragédie et comédie: polyphonie et interprétation dans quelques traductions récentes des <em>Grenouilles d’Aristophane</em></td>
<td>1022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Michael Walton</td>
<td><em>Business as Usual: Plautus’ <em>Menaechmi</em> in English Translation</em></td>
<td>1040</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Index of Names and Subjects  ——  1063
Ancient Comedy and Receptions
Zachary P. Biles

Exchanging Metaphors in Cratinus and Aristophanes

Abstract: Self-aggrandizing boasts and taunting exchanges between rivals are a noteworthy feature of comic poets’ response to the competitive format of dramatic production. While these exchanges are often couched in blunt, if imaginative, terms, close analysis of a series of passages (esp. Cratin. fr. 203; Ar. V. 1049–50; fr. 688) reveals a subtle antagonism based on adoption and control of the metaphors and flamboyant language rivals deploy to portray their poetic virtues for the audience. Underlying the discussion is an argument for expanding the content of Cratin. fr. 203 to include the first couplet of the Hellenistic epigram from which the words are drawn.

Cratinus fr. 203 in Kassel-Austin’s edition is drawn from the second line of a Hellenistic epigram:1

“οἶνός τοι χαρίζειντα πέλει ταχύς ἵππος ἁοιδῷ
 ὕδωρ δὲ πίνων οὐδὲν ἄν τέκχος σοφόν.”
 τοῦτ ἐλεγεν, Διόνυσσε, καὶ ἔπνεεν σὺ χ ἐνάς ἑταῖος
 Κρατίνος, ἀλλὰ παντὸς ὕδωδει πίθου,
 τοιγάρ ὑπὸ στεφάνοις μέγας ἔβρυεν, εἶξε δὲ κισσῷ
 μέτωπον ἄσπερ καὶ σὺ κεκροκωμένον.

“Wine, you know, is a fast horse for a graceful poet,
 and you could produce nothing clever by drinking water.”

That, Dionysus, is what Cratinus used to say, and he had the whiff
 not of a single wineskin, but reeked of the entire cask.
Thus did he burst forth into greatness beneath garlands,
 and he kept his forehead tinted yellow with ivy, just like you.

Whether a direct quotation of a Cratinean trimeter or an adaptation thereof, the verse suits the comic poet in light of contemporary (esp. Ar. Eq. 529–36) and later poets’ and

Among the many contributions Jeffrey Henderson has made to the study of Old Comedy is his attention, in his lexical work particularly, to the sophisticated use of vivid terms and the meanings they generate in different literary contexts. This study attempts to extend that effort to further enrich our understanding of the work of Aristophanes and his rivals. For Aristophanic passages, I offer the translations of Henderson’s Loeb’s throughout.

readers’ (Hor. Epist. 1.19.1–3; Lib. Ep. 1477.5) descriptions of his fondness for alcohol, and above all because a wine-induced inspiration was part of Cratinus’ own poetic identity. Moreover, as an iambic trimeter the second line can be easily ascribed to a specific play, Pytine (Dionysia 423 BCE), in which Cratinus notoriously made his alcoholism and poetic activity the centerpiece of the action in response to Aristophanes’ taunts in Knights (ΣVEΓΘ Eq. 400a = Pytine test. ii). This would explain why the statement does not take the form of an anapestic tetrameter or another long-line verse better suited to a self-reflexive poetic assertion in a parabasis.

Kassel–Austin, however, scale back the text offered by Meineke and Meier, who accepted the entire first couplet of the epigram as a quotation or rendering of Cratinean material, a position that accords well with the implicit connection of the statement in v. 3–4 to everything said up to this point: “Cratinus used to say the preceding.” One detail that appears not to have been taken into account supports this conclusion. The description in v. 1 stipulates a “fast” horse, which seems to presuppose an equestrian competition as the envisioned comparandum driving the metaphorical treatment of wine. Not surprisingly, “fleet” is a common epithet of horses in epinician poetry, as also in epigrams commemorating victories in equestrian events. That characterization of a poet’s interests accordingly is not only a fitting description of the competitive ambience of the dramatic festivals as Cratinus experienced and reflected on them, but points to the Hellenistic epigrammatist’s likely source for the sentiment, namely a Cratinean parabasis or a passage with parabatic overtones, in which the playwright squared off with his rivals by making poetic claims


4 See Kassel–Austin ad loc., with attempts to recast the verse in an appropriate metrical form. Cf. Sens, Asclepiades (above, n. 1), pp. 327, 328–9.

5 Epinician: Pi. O. 1.110; P. 11.46–8; N. 1.5–6; Bacch. 3.4. Epigram: CEG nos. 302.3; 820.2; cf. 379. In Homer, the combination ἵππος τοχύς is mostly associated with the chariot race in Patroclus’ funeral games (Il. 23.347, 545, cf. 287; elsewhere at 5.356; 22.464); more regularly, fast horses in Homer are ὀκύς (e.g. 3.263; 4.500; 23.516).

6 E.g. frs. 38; 342; 360; with Bakola, Cratinus (above, n. 2), pp. 24–9, 40–1, 48–9. Epinician imagery returns in the epigram’s final couplet with the image of Cratinus’ ivy-shadowed crown, for which cf. AP 13.28.4.
about the virtues of alcohol, likely in response to criticism like that found in *Knights* (Lenaia 424 BCE).

Indeed, a separate scholion tells us that Cratinus leveled specific charges of plagiarism against Aristophanes in *Pytine.* And while certainty is impossible, this play seems the likely place of origin for the ideas contained in the entire first couplet of the epigram, both because of its explicit concentration on poetry in such terms, and because the rivalry between Aristophanes and Cratinus probably reached its climax that year, shortly after which Cratinus ceased to compete at the Dionysian festivals.

If both verses of the epigram’s opening couplet depend on Cratinean passages having to do with his rivalry with Aristophanes, it is worth considering how two other passages might fit within an antagonistic dialogue between the two poets. Commenting on the defeat of *Clouds* by *Pytine* (*Nu. Hyp.* II Dover) one year after the event, Aristophanes at *Wasps* 1049–50 attempts to explain the upset by recourse to a related metaphor:

ὁ δὲ ποιητής οὐδὲν χείρων παρὰ τούτη σωφρος νενόμισαι,
εἰ παρελαώνων τούς ἀντιπάλους τὴν ἔπινοιαν ξινέτριψεν.

Though our poet is no worse off in the eyes of the sagacious
if, while overtaking his rivals with a novel conception, he took a spill.

Here too “the poet” is cast in a context of equestrian competition. Whereas the Cratinean passage only alluded to the competitive dynamic of dramatic performance, Aristophanes’ reference to his “rivals” at V. 1050 draws this function of the metaphor out into the open. The resonance is potentially more interesting, however, if *Pytine* is the source of the Hellenistic epigram, since in that case Aristophanes seems to be

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7 Although I assume that the Hellenistic poet can be credited with some manipulation of metrical form, see Bakola, *Cratinus* (above, n. 2), pp. 163 n. 138 (for hexameters perhaps mixed with other meters in Cratinus), 39–59 (for the voice of “Cratinus” in fragments belonging to poetic structures other than the parabasis).


10 For ἀντιπάλος in this sense, cf. *Pax* 739 with Olson, *Peace* (above, n. 9), ad loc.; *CEG* no. 811.
claiming that his own play (*Clouds*), although defeated by Cratinus’ play, was in fact the “faster” of the two, which is to say “better.” This at least is the poetological implication of claiming that he “was driving past his rivals.” The responsive relationship between the passages may be closer still, since in *Pytine* Cratinus presumably used the metaphor, either directly or implicitly, to address his two consecutive defeats by Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* (Lenaia 425 BCE) and *Knights* (Lenaia 424 BCE). So too, Aristophanes’ obvious attempt to restore his relationship with the *sophoi* in the audience in V. 1049 and especially in the *pnigos* that follows (V. 1051–9), smacks of a rebuttal to the assault on his credentials as an (over-) sophisticated poet, which Cratinus (fr. 342) must have made before the audience in the recent past and which the defeat of *Clouds* is taken by Aristophanes to have endorsed (esp. *Nu*. 525–35). It makes sense, finally, that Aristophanes’ intellectualizing *epinoia* (V. 1050) both recalls *dianoia*, a term used to refer to *Clouds* and its defeat a few lines earlier (V. 1044), and replaces Cratinus’ wine as the vehicle that ought to bring a poet across the finish line in first place. The metaphor and its redeployment in a modified form thus amount to a pointed, sophisticated exchange between rivals as they strive to pick apart one another’s poetic claims and simultaneously promote their own, all in an effort to win over the audience, as the *pnigos* in *Wasps* makes plain by weaving together blatant requests for support and touting the virtues of Aristophanic-brand poetic *sophia*.

A similar attempt to appropriate and control a feature of Cratinus’ poetic identity may exist in Ar. fr. 688. As part of a discussion of Pramnian wine, Athenaeus quotes Aristophanes as an authority for Athenian dislike of this vintage:


13 Aristophanes’ claim to a strategy of poetic retrenchment in *Wasps*, in response to his defeat with *Clouds*, is already adumbrated in the prologue, where terms activating his poetic persona as an “overly sophisticated” poet are prominent (esp. 64–6).


15 The fragment is transmitted without a play-title. Bergk assigned it to the lost *Thesmophoriazusae*, based on the mention of Pramnian and many other wine types in fr. 334 and flowery wine in fr. 351, but references to wine are ubiquitous in comedy; for Pramnian specifically, see also *Eq*. 107; Phryn. Com. fr. 68. The former passage may involve engagement with Cratinean comedy: Ruffell, “Total write–off” (above, n. 2), pp. 148–55. In any event, a date of production for the second *Thesmophoriazusae* within the period of Aristophanes’ rivalry with Cratinus is not impossible: James Butrica, “The lost *Thesmophoriazusae* of Aristophanes,” *Phoenix* 55 (2001), pp. 44–76; skeptical response in Colin Austin and
Aristophanes says that the Athenian people enjoy neither poets who are hard and dry nor Pramnian wines that contract the brows and the bowels, but prefer a rich bouquet and a taste of nectar.

Although it is unclear how the metrical form of the passage should be restored, interest in the current Athenian preference for poets strongly suggests that Aristophanes’ own positioning for the audience’s favor is involved. That he uses a metaphor that connects wine with poetics may also point to rivalry with Cratinus, whose poetic biography, as noted above, included a claim of inspiration through wine that was readily identifiable by the audience. It may not be coincidence, in that case, that the characterization of Cratinus’ poetic style by Platonius includes the same qualitative term “harsh” to describe his penchant for abuse (αὐστηρός ... ταῖς λοιδορίαις) that Athenaeus offers in his preface to the Aristophanic fragment to describe the “bitter” Pramnian poets/wine now out of fashion in Athens. At the very least, this point of comparison tends to confirm the literary critical interest of Ar. fr. 688. But Athenaeus’ prefatory remarks are also only a terse recasting of ideas that follow in the Aristophanic fragment itself, and it is accordingly worth recalling that the contribution of loidoria to Cratinus’ comic style attracted Aristophanes’ critical attention else-

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16 The phrase συνάγουσι τὰς ὀφρῦς (cf. Antiph. fr. 217.2) appears also at Nu. 582, for the Clouds’ disapproval of the Athenians’ support of Cleon.

17 See Kassel–Austin ad loc.

18 Less likely, a reference to Aeschylus is assumed by Ferruccio Conti Bizzarro, Poetica e critica letteraria nei frammenti dei poeti comici greci (Naples: M. D’Auria Editore, 1999), p. 48, based on Ar. fr. 663, in which the tragic poet’s sklēroτēs, i.e. “harshness” (on related terms for Cratinus, see below), is taken in the ancient scholarly tradition as the basis for Aristophanes’ likening him to “tough skin” (κόλλοπι). It is easier to believe that Aristophanes reserved the terms of approbation in fr. 688 for himself, and thus that the passage has to do with comedy; cf. the characterization of Aristophanes in Anon. De comoedia, Prolegomena de Comoedia III, p. 9.37 Koster, εὐφύια πάντας ὑπεραύρων (“surpassing all in genius”). But the connection with Aeschylus is perhaps not to be rejected entirely, given the use Cratinus may have made of Aeschylus in developing his own comic poetics: see Anon. De comoedia, Prolegomena de Comoedia III, p. 8.24 Koster; Bakola, Cratinus (above, n. 2), pp. 118–79.

19 De diff. char., Prolegomena de Comoedia II, p. 6.2 Koster. Platonius goes on to offer an immediate distinction from Aristophanes’ style in this regard, well in advance of his focus on the latter poet at the end of the passage, where Cratinus is described in similar terms as πικρὸς λίαν (p. 7.15).

20 So too in Phryn. Com. fr. 68, Pramnian wine is apparently used metaphorically to characterize Sophocles’ poetry; cf. Conti Bizzarro, Poetica (above, n. 18), p. 77.

21 ἐστι δὲ οὕτως γένος τι ὀίνου καὶ ἐστιν οὕτως οὕτε γλυκὸς οὕτε παχύς, ἀλλ’ αὕστηρος καὶ σκληρός καὶ δύναμιν ἔχων διαφέρουσαν (“This is a type of wine, and it is neither sweet nor rich, but is bitter and harsh, as well as exceptionally potent”).
where, most emphatically in *Eq.* 526–36, which simultaneously picks apart Cratinus’ adoption of the wine-poetry connection. The sheer, undiluted elemental power of Cratinus’ poetry is the point of the first part of the *Knights* passage, and that interest coincides with Athenaeus’ further description of Pramnian wine as “exceptionally potent”. And to the extent that in *Knights* Aristophanes is out to characterize overpowering *loidoria* as distinctive of his rival, the implicit claim is that his own poetry is not so extreme—the very point of *De diff. char.*., which places Aristophanes at a balanced position between the poles of comic style represented by Cratinus and Eupolis. In the same treatise, moreover, Platonius makes Cratinus’ bitter style a by-product of his emulation of Archilochus (ἁτε δή κατὰ τάς Ἀρχιλόχου ζηλώσεις). Cratinus’ self-proclaimed dependence on alcohol appears to have been bound up with that literary debt, based on the archaic poet’s notorious self-description in fr. 120 West:

\[
\text{I know how to initiate a fine song for Lord Dionysus,}
\text{a dithyramb, when my wits are thunderstruck with wine.}
\]

In short, these various sources likely lead back to the same point of origin, in the poetic posturing and banter between Aristophanes and Cratinus, making the latter a good candidate to represent the Pramnian poetic style of fr. 688.

Where the focus on Pramnian wine originated within this scenario, is impossible to say. It might go back to Cratinus himself, but it is equally likely that Aristophanes

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24 Cf. Kyriakidi, *Aristophanes und Eupolis* (above, n. 8), p. 48. At V. 56–66, Aristophanes likewise positions *Wasps* between the extremes of his own (too) sophisticated brand of poetry and the low-brow humor of others, i.e. his rivals. A similar balance is at stake in Aristophanes’ claims in fr. 488 about his dependence on Euripides, as he defended it against Cratinus (fr. 342); cf. Ar. fr. 706. For Eupolis and *charis*, Storey, *Eupolis* (above, n. 9), pp. 44–5, and below.


26 Fr. 195 eroticizes Mendaian wine in a way that suggested to Runkel that it comes from *Pytine*. 
recognized an opportunity to lend specificity to his older rival’s broad adoption of the metaphor of poetic inspiration with wine and thereby turn the image against him. At any rate, in a way far more daring than was suggested above in the manipulation of the equestrian metaphor, in fr. 688 Aristophanes takes hold of what may have been the most significant facet of Cratinus’ literary identity and exploits weaknesses in the equation of wine with poetry that allow him to co-opt the metaphor and recast it in a way that suggests the superiority of his own plays. But Cratinus’ quiver contained the same technique for taking aim at rivals. The central claim of Pytine, that personified Comedy is the wife of “Cratinus”, essentially exploits and one-ups the personification of Komoididodaskalia as a desirable lover that Aristophanes used to mock Cratinus one year earlier at Eq. 514–17.27 That kind of manipulation, which is perhaps an underlying dynamic of almost all variations of the evolving literary repertoire comic poets had at their disposal,28 may help resolve one further detail in the relationship between Cratinus and the Hellenistic epigram with which I began.

Cobet objected to attributing the first verse of the epigram to Cratinus because of the adjective χαρίεις: “sed si quis putat Cratinum se ipsum χαρίεντα οἰοδὸν dicere potuisse, is nondum Κρατίνου τοῦ ταυροφάγου γλώττης βακχεῖ ἐτελέσθη.”29 The objection may seem justified by the testimony of Platonius’ De diff. char., cited above, which at several points attaches the quality of poetic charis to Eupolis as the polar opposite of Cratinus in style, with Aristophanes falling between them in a mixed form. But the only support Cobet offers for rejecting the thesis is the mystic call for holy silence at Ra. 357, and his position is thus based on a characterization of Cratinus by a rival long after his death, which also serves first and foremost the literary interests of Frogs itself.30 The possibility—even likelihood—of an underlying tone of irony or sophistication of some other sort in Cratinus’ assumed declaration makes Cobet’s sweeping rejection hazardous. And while we cannot know precisely what charieis contributed in its original Cratinean context, a sensible explanation exists.

At Nu. 311–12, the chorus of Clouds sing of Athens, where in spring there is “the Bromian charis of melodious choruses competing” (Βρομία χάρις / εὐκελάδῶν τε χορῶν ἔρεθισματα). “Grace” and the Graces have a well-established connection with

29 “But if anyone thinks that Cratinus could refer to himself as a “graceful poet”, he is not yet ‘initiated into the bacchic rites of bull-eating Cratinus’ tongue.” Carel G. Cobet, Novae lectiones quibus continentur observationes criticæ in scriptores Graecos, Band I.1 (Leiden: Brill, 1858; reprint Hildesheim, 2005 [cited]), pp. 146–7. Kassel–Austin ad loc. tentatively assent, but sound a cautionary note based on χαρίεις ποιητής of Homer at Pl. Lg. 680c.
musical performance, but the specific association of charis with competition at the Dionysian festivals here is reaffirmed by Ec. 582:

 hastily wins the greatest amount of favor with the audience,
as well as by Ar. fr. 348 (from Thesmophoriazusae II):

 nor summon the curly-tressed Muses
 nor yell for the Olympian Graces to the dance,
 for our producer says they’re already present.

Charis and the Graces, who had it in their power to confer this quality on poetry, were in other words essential to the ideals of performance to which a comic poet might aspire in an effort to please the audience and ultimately secure victory in the contest. Self-positioning against rivals is thus implicit in these passages, and that antagonism rises to the surface in the final one, since the poet as didaskalos comes forward none too subtly through his chorus to assert the superiority of his play.

We can do little more than offer alternatives for how these assumptions might contribute to Cratinus’ portrayal of himself as a charieis poet, assuming the epigrammatist’s choice of terms in fact goes back to him. At a minimum, Cratinus might simply imply, like Aristophanes in fr. 348, that he is a legitimate candidate for the audience’s support. If, on the other hand, the association between charis and Eupolis in Platonius ultimately goes back to Eupolis’ own programmatic assertions, it may matter that he too fell within the ambit of Cratinus’ criticisms in Pytine (fr. 213). The adjective charieis might then allude to Cratinus’ attempt to usurp an element of a different rival’s poetic claims, although in that case the rhetoric of charis has left little mark in what

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31 E.g. Od. 24.197–8; hAp. 194; hHom. 24. 5; Hes. Th. 64 with West ad loc.; Pi. fr. 141; E. IT 1147; V. 1278; Lys. 1279; Ra. 334 (with Dover ad loc., citing PMG 871). Cf. Sens, Asclepiades (above, n. 1), p. 329.
33 Contrast the poet’s swaggering confidence here with the more traditional stance in summoning the Graces at Lys. 1279.
survives of Eupolis’ poetry. In any event, it ought to come as no surprise if Cratinus’ engagement with this other young, successful poet was every bit as intense and given to nuanced expression as his rivalry with Aristophanes.

An example of the latter sort of appropriation is perhaps available in Cratinus frs. 203 and 360. The handling of sophia in these passages patently relies on the generic association of poetry with sophia in the Greek literary tradition. But there may be more to it, since in fr. 360 in particular the attempted vindication of “our sophia” (i.e. that of “Cratinus”) has a markedly self-assertive quality about it. Indeed, this resonance gains force in light of the conspicuous interest in this passage in the audience’s reception of Cratinus’ plays and the implication that they had recently preferred other poets. The claim of sophia may accordingly involve a tone of hostile antagonism or even sarcasm. The explanation is perhaps that sophistication was a significant component in Aristophanes’ poetic claims via terms such as dexios, sophos/sophia and the like, and that Aristophanes was also chiefly responsible for the downturn in Cratinus’ rate of agonistic success in the final years of his career.

In other words, both elements of fr. 360 can easily be connected with Cratinus’ rivalry with Aristophanes. Finally, that Cratinus elsewhere took aim at Aristophanes’ claims to poetic sophistication (fr. 342) implies that this aspect of the latter’s poetic stance was “in play” in the tug-of-war between the two poets for the audience’s

35 Mentions of the Graces are found in Eup. frs. 16 (Goats) and 176 (Flatterers), neither obviously metapoetic. Charis makes a modest thematic contribution in fr. 172.5, 10, 12 (also Flatterers). Storey, Eupolis (above, n. 9), p. 367, believes that Platonius’ association of charis with Eupolis depends on attempts by (perhaps early) ancient scholars to impose a schematic division on the poets that has little or nothing to do with the poets themselves or their poetry. Be this true or not, ancient scholarly theories were often prompted by “information” taken direct from the poets themselves; see in general Mary R. Lefkowitz, The Lives of the Greek Poets (London: Duckworth, 1981) for a highly skeptical appraisal of the biographical content in these traditions (cf. Sidwell, p. 286 in this volume).


37 For the situation, cf. Cratin. fr. 38 (Didaskaliai). At Eup. fr. 392, the poet makes similar complaints against the audience for past disfavor of Eupolis and preference for “foreign, clever poets” (τοὺς ἕλεους ποιητὰς σοφούς), the latter likely implying Aristophanes: cf. Storey, Eupolis (above, n. 9), pp. 302–3, with doubts raised by S. Douglas Olson, Broken Laughter: Select Fragments of Greek Comedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 113.


39 E.g. Ach. 629; Nu. 520–22, 547–8, 561–2; V. 64–6, 1049–59. In support of this interpretation, this feature of Aristophanes’ poetic persona is most distinct in plays performed or originally composed in or close to the period of his rivalry with Cratinus.

favor.\textsuperscript{41} In short, Cratinus’ assertions of \textit{sophia} in frr. 203 and 360 attempt to wrest back into the common pool a quality in which his rival had gained the upper hand by connecting it with himself. Cratinus’ attempt to associate himself with poetic \textit{charis} may amount to a similar effort, albeit with Eupolis as the primary target.

In addition, the adjective \textit{χαρίεις} reactivates the terms of the rivalry between Aristophanes and Cratinus as set by the former in \textit{Knights}, for the image at the center of \textit{Pytine} (Cratinus’ marriage to Comedy) adopts and extends Aristophanes’ self-serving embodiment of comic production, \textit{Komoidodidaskalia}, whose varying fascination with individual poets based on the pattern of sexual pursuit explains why they tend to lose more in the contests as they age. The critical explanation comes at \textit{Eq. 517}:

\begin{quote}
\begin{small}
\text{πολλόν γὰρ δὴ πειρασάντων αὐτήν ὀλίγοις χαρίσασθαι.}
\end{small}
\end{quote}

for [although] many [comic poets] have courted this muse, few have enjoyed her favors.

Within this erotic paradigm,\textsuperscript{42} the bestowal of \textit{Komoidodidaskalia’s charis} both rewards the poets’ sexual advances and simultaneously wins them audience support (518–19)—and thus ultimately the contest itself, as the remainder of the parabasis demonstrates, by describing the agonistic careers of Magnes, Cratinus and Crates (520–40). In other words, this passage develops differently the association of \textit{charis} with poetic performance and poetic competition noted above, by layering on a new metaphorical component, sexual “favor”. The adjective \textit{charieis} describing Cratinus in the Hellenistic epigram might then be authentic to Cratinus and even \textit{Pytine}, in which case it served to reestablish Cratinus as a dapper and “pleasingly potent” comic poet in a play that looked to the reinvigoration of his relationship with Comedy and thereby reestablished him as a successful competitor.\textsuperscript{43}

Aristophanes’ claim in fr. 688, finally, to know just “what sort of poets the Athenians now take pleasure in,” only reframes the assertions at stake in all these other contentious exchanges over poetic \textit{charis}, so that his own poetry now exudes sweetness (νεκταροσταγεῖ). Altering terms and adjusting metaphors was one way poets sought to gain the upper hand over their rivals by taking advantage of unnoticed possibilities and reinvigorating debates about poetic merit. It also guaranteed that audiences would always be delighted by such displays.

\textsuperscript{41} Cf. again Eup. fr. 392. To some extent, the grafting of \textit{sophia} onto \textit{sophrosyne} in the parabasis of the revised \textit{Clouds} (520–26, 529–37; cf. V. 56–66) can be seen as Aristophanes’ attempt to counteract the negative spin created by Cratinus’ jeers in fr. 342. Cf. Biles, \textit{Aristophanes} (above, n. 30), pp. 208–10.

\textsuperscript{42} Cf. Hdt. iii.53.4.

Ralph M. Rosen

Comic Parsonsia and the Paradoxes of Repression

Abstract: Comic satirists such as Aristophanes thrive on the tension that arises from their need to ridicule prominent figures of contemporary society and the possibility that this ridicule will cause genuine offense. The history of satire is full of complaints by authors that they work in a dangerous profession, and that their detractors fail to appreciate their high-minded, often explicitly didactic intentions. In such moments, satirists attempt to leave the impression that those who try to repress their freedom to mock and abuse are unwelcome obstacles to their enterprise. It is precisely such allegations of risk and danger, however, that make for effective satire and allow satirists to present themselves as comically “heroic” in the first place. And if satire requires a fraught, antagonistic relationship between author and target, we cannot trust the satirist’s account of the relationship or accept the claim that the alleged oppression is unwelcome. This study begins with such conundras in Aristophanes, and examines comparative evidence from other periods and literary forms, including Homer’s Thersites, Horace, Socrates and Lenny Bruce.

In “The Dêmos and the Comic Competition,” one of the most significant studies on Aristophanes to appear in the last several decades, Jeffrey Henderson put his finger squarely on what is perhaps the central question at the heart not only of Athenian comedy but of all comic genres that specialize in satirical mockery and personal ridicule: “Among the honour-sensitive Athenians ... the distinction between abuse and jesting often called for nice judgement ... One man’s joke is another man’s slander, depending on the skill of the jester and the butt’s reaction. Comic poets, like orators, had to be able to sail very close to the wind.”1 Indeed, it is the moments of risk-taking on the comic stage that make the greatest impression on audiences, since this is where poets push the limits of social decorum or acceptable speech in their quest for laughs and literary supremacy. These moments of dramatized ridicule play to an audience’s taste for Schadenfreude against public figures and titillate them with words and actions normally repressed in daily life. Successful poets of comic satire, such as Aristophanes, generally learn how to walk the fine line between aggressive but benign humor with widespread audience appeal, and speech that offends rather than amuses, or even becomes legally actionable.

Aristophanes was aware how deftly he had to manage his satire if he was to please audiences and win prizes at the dramatic festivals. But he also knew that any form of satire required the freedom to create plots and characters intended to address contemporary affairs and ridicule people who would have been known to the audience and may even have been present during a performance. Satirists work in a fundamentally didactic mode, whether explicitly or implicitly, and like the best teachers, they need to tell the truth about how the world is, even if this means making fun of reprehensible people in ways that might seem cruel and unfair in real life. When Aristophanes has Dicaeopolis tell the audience at Acharnians 501 that comedy speaks “what is just/true,” it is in a defensive moment, explaining why satirical comedy must sometimes say “shocking things” (deina) as well. The price the audience has to pay for hearing the truth, distorted as it may be in the service of the poet’s agenda, is tolerating speech that risks offense. This is why the chorus warns in the opening of the parodos of Frogs that anyone who is hyper-sensitive to comic ridicule should stay far away from the comic theater.

The most famous example that Aristophanes himself offers of what can happen when a comic target fails to appreciate the satirist’s mockery is his supposed feud with the politician Cleon. Indeed, this narrative, recounted across three plays (Acharnians, Knights and Wasps), has become emblematic of the risks posed by free speech in the service of comedy’s notional goals of instruction and correction. In these early comedies, Aristophanes complains that Cleon took him to court, first for slandering the démos and its magistrates in front of foreigners present for the City Dionysia in 426 BCE, and then again—for unspecified reasons—after the performance of Knights in 424 BCE. We can only take Aristophanes’ (and a scholiast’s) word about the historical details of these lawsuits, but whatever happened between the two men, the story of

2 See the anecdote (late 2nd c. CE) in Aelian (VH 2.13) reporting that Socrates went to see Aristophanes’ Clouds and stood up for the entire play to identify himself as the figure represented onstage. See K.J. Dover (ed.), Aristophanes: Clouds (Clarendon: Oxford, 1968), p. xxxiii, and, on the comic potential that another character in Clouds, Megacles, might have been in the audience, Charles Platter, Aristophanes and the Carnival of Genres (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), p. 67 with n. 8.

3 As Aristophanes enjoys reminding us, as at e.g. Ach. 634–5 (the poet has prevented the Athenians from being deceived by foreigners) or Ra. 686–7 (the comic chorus “advises and teaches” the city).

4 Ra. 354–5 (“whoever is inexperienced with this sort of discourse ... should stand apart from our choruses”). Aristophanes ends his list of people unsuited to appreciate his comedies by mentioning a political speaker (rhêtor) who tries to reduce the pay for poets after he has been mocked (kômôidêtheis) (367–8). Clearly such a man cannot take a joke and has no business at a comic performance.

their relationship effectively highlights the dilemma all satirists confront at one point or another in their careers. As Henderson has put it, “Cleon’s suit against Aristophanes for slander ... may indicate either that Aristophanes’ abuse was seriously intended or that Cleon was over-sensitive to jesting.” The poet himself would surely say that both alternatives were true: he would claim that he was “serious” in his abuse of his target, but also that Cleon’s reaction to this abuse was unjustified and unfair. The protocols of Athenian dramatic festivals and the literary conventions of Old Comedy, after all, provide ample license for freewheeling mockery, so when a poet encounters significant pushback in the form of lawsuits, for example, his indignation is systemically and generically indicated. Indignation, in other words, becomes an expected part of an ongoing drama that pits the biting jests of a self-righteous poet who claims the protection of comic license against targets who object to being the butt of his jokes.

To hear a satirist such as Aristophanes tell his tale of woe, angry responses from injured targets or other offended listeners are, simply put, a bad thing. How dare anyone threaten, even censor him, when his only goal is to expose bad behavior and show his audience what is right and true while making them laugh? The position seems clear and simple, and it is easy to sympathize with the satirist’s plight. How nice it would be, if the Cleons of the world would disappear and stop harassing the poor poet, who could then get on with his work as a comedian! Such, at any rate, is the pretense of the poet’s complaints about the risks he claims to face in his work and the limitations on his speech he occasionally encounters. But how straightforward and serious are such complaints? Should we really believe that satirists would benefit from utterly unrestricted and indemnified freedom of expression, with guarantees that no one will seriously object to anything they say? This is a simple question but is rarely asked, even though it raises a host of questions about the very nature of comic satire.

As I hope to show in what follows, constraints on speech are simultaneously reviled and embraced by satirists in what amounts to an intractable, often unsettling contradiction. In a very real sense, these genres could hardly exist—or at least they would have little rhetorical efficacy as satire—if they did not at least present themselves as constantly at risk. Indeed, to be actually harassed or prosecuted in the real world for one’s satire may turn out to be a desirable outcome for a literary career, since it vindicates the satirist’s original fears and makes the audience even more
sympathetic to his “causes.” But this situation also encourages the very question Henderson presses in his study of the interaction between the Old Comic poets and the Athenian dēmos, and in particular how “serious” poets such as Aristophanes were in their political comedy, which was rife with satire. Aristophanes certainly seems serious, and the dēmos seems receptive to his political humor (at least when he wins the competition). But since the relationship between poet and audience is structurally determined by the dynamics of satirical poetry even before the poet decides what bothers him about the world, how can we assess the actual content or truth of Aristophanes’ pretense of seriousness? If a satirist must always present himself as a bold risk-taker, willing to suffer for the sake of his comic métier, to what extent is the content of satire a function of the literary strategies a successful satirist must deploy, and to what extent is it a reflection of “sincere beliefs”?

The generically embedded tension between a satirist’s desire for parrhēsia and his fear of its consequences suggests the possibility of some disingenuousness in the stance of beleaguerment typical of satirists in all periods. Was Aristophanes “really” upset (as Acharnians, Knights and Wasps claim he was) that Cleon prosecuted him for his unbridled personal and political attacks? Or did he adopt the rhetoric of danger and repression as a strategy of captatio benevolentiae, intended to affirm the potency of his work as a function of the risk parrhēsia might incur? As we shall see, a comparative approach to such questions makes it clear that such literary conundra affect satirical artists and genres well beyond Old Comedy. Precisely because Aristophanes purports to insert his own voice forcefully into his plays, and because these autobiographical flashes seem genuinely and persuasively wedded to contemporary reality, it is difficult to think abstractly about the poetics governing such moments. A comparative approach will free us for the moment from the historical particularity of an Aristophanic comedy, and allow us—if only as an ahistorical, synchronic experiment—to view his satirical enterprise as a function of an abstracted comic poetics of parrhēsia and repression.

In the open societies of the West, where “freedom of speech” is often singled out as the main prerequisite of progress and justice, the idea that someone might welcome repression seems odd, if not even blasphemous. American culture offers a particularly strong version of this ideology; one thinks immediately of the First Amendment to the Constitution, guaranteeing the right of freedom of expression. Americans, at least, find it difficult to think of this right as anything other than positive. We recognize that in a few extreme contexts, such as when irresponsible speech will lead to explicit harm to others, constraint is called for and even legislated. But at root, Americans put a premium on their right to free speech, broadly defined; the fact that it has been difficult to legislate against hate speech in the United States, for example, suggests a belief that this abstract principle in the end trumps even considerations of civility and decorum. Most Americans would likely find it easy to sympathize with J.M. Coetzee’s position: “Nothing in either my experience or my reading persuades me that state censorship is not an inherently bad thing, the ills it embodies and the ills it fosters
outweighing, in the long run and even in the medium run, whatever benefits may be claimed to flow from it.”

Greek parrhêsia and Roman libertas or licentia were never conceptualized as rigidly or with the same uniformly positive evaluation as the free speech of the American First Amendment. The first occurrence of the term parrhêsia in Greek literature, in fact, is distinctly negative: at Euripides, Orestes 905, the messenger describes an orator as relying on his “ignorant free expression” (amathês parrhêsia). In other contexts, especially in the discourse of Athenian democracy, parrhêsia can be a positive term. But the number of negative assessments of parrhêsia in 5th- and 4th-century Greek literature is not negligible. In such cases—there are many in Plato, for example—parrhêsia takes on the meaning “frankness,” with the implication that this is often indecorous or offensive to the audience. In all these cases, an author implies that someone’s “freedom of speech” ought to be suppressed, because the speech in question is illegitimate or offensive. In short, constraint of speech is regarded here as positive, and the offending parrhêsia is presented as negative.

In such cases, the polarities are reasonably straightforward. Free expression is good as long as it is not offensive or harmful; when it becomes offensive, it becomes bad and should be constrained. But what happens when we hear the perspective of the person whose speech is constrained, and this constraint is presented as unjust, as often in satirical authors? Our first inclination in such cases is to recur to a traditional formulation with familiar premises: such a person is imagined to be claiming, “What I have to say is legitimate; I should be allowed to say it; this is freedom of expression, and it is ‘good.’ When some external force prevents me from saying what I want, this is unjust and therefore ‘bad’.” A long list of examples from classical satirists can be produced, beginning with Aristophanes’ complaints about Cleon in Acharnians. I discuss others in detail below, but for now it is worth pointing out that all such apologiae for offensive speech present the audience with the same paradox. Prima facie these authors want the audience to agree with them that the threat to their speech is bad and unfortunate, but the audience’s aesthetic experience of the work (chiefly, in the case of satire, laughter) is at the same time inextricably linked to the “badness” of the author’s alleged plight. Often in real life, and certainly in satirical literature, constraints on speech have consequences that defy the categories “posi-

10 See Marlein van Raalte, “Socratic Parrhêsia and its Sequel in Plato’s Laws,” in: Sluiter and Rosen, Free Speech (above, n. 9), pp. 279–312. Plato has Socrates in particular play with various conceptions of parrhêsia in his Gorgias, as van Raalte discusses in detail, especially in the interchanges with Callicles.
11 As e.g. with the drunken erōmenos in Plato’s Phaedrus (240e), with his “wearisome and unrestrained explicit speech” (παρρησία κατάκορεί και ἀναπεπταμένη).
tive” and “negative,” and that can be profound not only for the person whose speech is allegedly suppressed but also for audiences or readers—real or imagined—who happen to be listening when offended parties voice their indignation.

For the discourse of repression, the moment when someone asserts that his or her free speech has been constrained contains yet another paradox: the absence of speech gives rise to a whole new discourse that not only contains traces of the suppressed speech (its own form of praeteritio) but takes on a life of its own as an autonomous production. A modern example will demonstrate what I mean. In the early 1960s, the stand-up comedian Lenny Bruce was continually dogged by obscenity charges. After Bruce was arrested for a single offensive word ("cocksucker") used in his act at the Jazz Workshop in San Francisco in 1961, District Attorneys across the country sent undercover agents to transcribe his speech crimes and prepare indictments. Why, one might ask, would someone use obscenity in any form of speech to begin with? We use the term “obscenity” to refer to speech that transgresses a linguistic norm and that, as such, implies the potential for its own suppression. Obscenity implies something one “should not say”—the Greeks called it aischrologia, implying that such words brought shame on speakers and listeners alike—and if one uses such a word, one can always imagine (whether or not this actually occurs) someone waiting to censor. In the case of Lenny Bruce, audiences (and here I mean the people who attended his performances voluntarily, not as agents of the law) laughed at his obscenities precisely because they knew he should not be using such words and that in doing so he was continually inviting the threat of censorship. The more real this threat became to him, as the indictments became increasingly costly to his wallet as well as his reputation, the more obsessed Bruce became with his those trying to silence him, and the more he worked this obsession into his act. Toward the end of his life, in fact, Bruce spent much of his time onstage rambling about his own research into First Amendment law. This did not play well as comedy,¹² not because real life was crossing over into comic fiction and the line between the two had become blurred, but for the opposite reason, precisely because that line was now so sharply demarcated. Bruce’s disquisitions about the law were now obvious extensions of his actual life, no longer fodder for a fictional persona whose “real” identity would—when his comedy functioned normally—remain tantalizingly elusive.

When Bruce died of a heroin overdose in 1966, he was a pitiable, abject figure.¹³ Even if we find ourselves sympathizing with his detractors, it is difficult not to see pathos in his demise. The constraints on his speech (actual or hypothetical) seem at first glance a “bad” thing; Bruce himself presented them as negative, and he assumes

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that we, his audience, are sympathetic. The implication is that in a “better world” he would have had complete freedom to say what he wanted, with no worries about censorship or prosecution. But let us for a moment try to imagine what such an allegedly better place might be like for Bruce: imagine a milieu, for example, in which no one cared at all about obscenity, where District Attorneys were happy, paying customers instead of hostile informers, and so forth. What are we left with? Very little, for Bruce’s act can only exist so long as the threat of suppression looms large; when it does not, there would be no paying customers, let alone undercover agents of the law, because there would be no act to begin with.

Bruce’s creativity, in short, like that of many comedians whose humor relies on scandalous speech, exists only as a function of the threat of constraint. How “bad” can it be, then, that Bruce was continually hauled before puritanical judges? It does little good to reply that these magistrates were mindless functionaries with no sense of humor. The fact is that Bruce must simultaneously collude with them and construct them as adversaries, if his speech is to have its intended transgressive effect. This is a recipe for disaster, and the consequences were tragic for Bruce; few at the time did not believe that his overdose was an indirect result of his legal battles. The suppression of free speech in fact proved lethal for him. The usual positive-negative binaries around parrhēsia and suppression are meaningless in the face of these constraints. Bruce lived his life symbiotically with the factors that eventually killed him, and although one might say that he died a martyr to the cause of free speech, it is perhaps more accurate to say that he died a martyr to the abjection he paradoxically sought and repudiated at the same time.

Many readers may by now have begun to think of a figure from Greek literature with a strikingly similar career and a somewhat analogous death. I refer to Thersites, most famous from Homer’s depiction of him in Iliad 2, but a figure whose story had an equally interesting afterlife in other ancient authors and genres.14 Thersites appears early in Iliad 2, after Agamemnon has oddly decided to “test” his troops by disingenuously urging them to abandon Troy and leave for home. Odysseus manages to restore the soldiers’ resolve and muster them again for battle. But from the ranks, Thersites emerges to attack Agamemnon for softness and venality, in a speech of fierce mockery and invective (Il. 2.225–42). Odysseus responds not only with his own counter-invective but with physical blows that successfully humiliate Thersites and squelch further dissent from him. This passage is enormously rich, and has been analyzed in a variety of ways. Its narratological framework is particular complex, for Homer offers several competing perspectives on Thersites: Odysseus’, the narrator’s and Thersites’

own—and it makes a difference which perspective we adopt in deciding how to assess this famous episode of suppressed speech.  

Gregory Nagy first suggested that Thersites can be conceptualized in Homer as a “blame poet,” analogous to the Greek iambic poets Archilochus and Hipponax, who were infamous throughout antiquity as satirists. Thersites was not composing poetry in his fictionalized life as a soldier at Troy, of course, so calling him a “blame poet” is not entirely accurate. He is certainly “satirical” in his attack on Agamemnon, but whether he can be considered a bona fide “satirist” as he is depicted in Homer, is a tricky question we cannot pursue here. As I have argued elsewhere, insofar as true satirists blame from a stance of self-righteousness, from Homer’s perspective Thersites is more the target of blame than the self-righteous blamer himself—a role assumed (again, from Homer’s point of view) more by Odysseus. But leaving such narratological conundra aside, Thersites (from his perspective) would certainly regard himself as a satirist, and he employs typical satirical tropes: vituperative indignation at the hypocrisy of those in power, and an attempt (which fails here, as Homer tells it) to enlist the sympathies of his audience as an in-group. Like most satirists, moreover, Thersites constructs a persona of abjection, as Homer tells us at Iliad 2.212–16, here in Stanley Lombardo’s penetrating translation:

... ἀμετροεπής ἑκολία, ὃς ἔπεα φρεσίν ᾧν ἑκοσία τε πολλά τε ἡδη μάφ, ἀτάρ οὐ κατά κόσμον, ἐριξέμεναι βασιλεύσιν, ἀλλʼ ὃ τι οἱ εἰσαίτο γελοῖον ἄργειοισιν ἐμμεναι.

... a blathering fool
And a rabble rouser. This man had a repertory
Of choice insults he used at random to revile the nobles,
Saying anything he thought the soldiers would laugh at.

Thersites, at least, thought of himself as a comedian, and the blurred lines between performance and lived reality typical of satirists across the ages are visible here as well. But epic cannot comfortably sustain comedy for long, and Thersites is quickly silenced by Odysseus, who finds his outburst far from amusing.

This is not the last time Thersites’ parrhesia gets him into trouble. Like Lenny Bruce, he too was evidently drawn to a mode of expression that guaranteed censure from his targets. From the point of view of their detractors (which would include the narrator Homer in Thersites’ case, and judicial functionaries in Bruce’s), Thersites

15 See further Rosen, Making Mockery (above, n. 15), pp. 73–8.
and Bruce practiced the kind of *parrhēsia* that would be translated as “indecorous, inappropriate frankness”—the negative form of the word. But from their own perspectives, it was something like “honest, open and self-righteous speaking.” If we allowed ourselves to imagine an interior life for Thersites, we would likely find that he characterized his own speech as legitimate, and Odysseus’ as a perfect example of the arrogance he was railing against in the first place. Both Thersites and Bruce, however, exercised their free speech knowing full well that they would receive—and, it seems, even require—rebuke from an antagonistic party. This is certainly what happened on the other occasion that epic records when Thersites’ *parrhēsia* took an unexpected turn, in the fragmentary *Aethiopis*, a narrative of events that occur after the *Iliad*. Here the ever-cantankerous Thersites engages in his final act of mockery, inciting his target Achilles to kill him in response. Proclus in his summary of the *Aithiopis*, which began where the *Iliad* left off (*Chrestomathia* p. 67.25–6 Bernabé = p. 47.7–12 Davies), offers the following outline of the story of Thersites’ death:

καὶ Ἀχιλλεύς θερσίτην ἀναιρεῖ λοιδορθεῖς πρὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ ὑνειδισθεις τὸν ἐπὶ τὴν Πενθεσιλεία λεγόμενον ἔρωτα· καὶ ἐκ τούτου στάσις γίνεται τοῖς Ἀχαιοῖς περὶ τοῦ θερσίτου φόνου. μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα Ἀχιλλεύς εἰς Λέσβον πλεῖ, καὶ θυσάς μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα Ἀχιλλεύς εἰς Λέσβον πλεῖ, καὶ θύσας Ἀπόλλων καὶ Ἀρτέμιδι καὶ Λητοὶ καθαίρεται τοῦ φόνου ὑπ’ Ὀδυσσέως.

Achilles killed Thersites after having been reviled by him and reproached for the love he allegedly felt for Penthesileia. As a result, *stasis* arose among the Achaeans over the murder of Thersites. After this, Achilles sailed to Lesbos, and after making a sacrifice to Apollo, Artemis and Leto, he was then purified of the murder by Odysseus.

This depicts a situation rather different from the one in *Iliad* 2, for there Thersites’ opposition to Agamemnon was cast by the narrator as a self-generated minority view, whereas in the *Aithiopis* Thersites evidently takes up the popular critical opinion on a pre-existing controversial issue of the day—the report that Achilles had fallen in love with an enemy warrior—and repackages it as a form of comic mockery directed at the main perpetrator.19 Like all good satirists, Thersites ridicules a conspicuous lapse of a prominent figure, pointing out that Achilles, smitten with an erotic attraction to the dead Penthesileia, came close to compromising his heroic stature, and so to jeopardizing the entire Greek mission. Nevertheless, like Bruce’s persecutors, Achilles failed to “get it,” and the consequences were the ultimate in suppression: homicide. A number of interesting details about this story lie beyond our scope, but it does indicate that some Greeks *did* view Thersites here as a true satirist, and his murder by Achilles as unjust. And just as the governor of New York, in an act of public expiation, formally pardoned Lenny Bruce on 23 December 2003, thirty-seven years

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19 See now Fantuzzi, *Achilles in Love* (above, n. 15), pp. 271–3.
after his death, Achilles too had to seek ritual purification for his crime against Thersites.  

We might ask Thersites the hypothetical question we posed for Lenny Bruce—what would happen if we granted him complete *parrhēsia* with no consequences whatsoever? “Go ahead, say what you like with impunity about Agamemnon and Achilles; no one will care and no one will stop you.” Is this what he craved? It might seem almost an absurdity to contemplate the matter, partly because Homer placed Thersites in a narrative context in which unbridled *parrhēsia* is unthinkable, but also because such a character cannot exist except as a figure someone will want to censor. Homer curiously acknowledges that Thersites was conscious of his constructed, performative persona, when he notes that he would say “anything he thought the soldiers would laugh at,” and one can only conclude that for Thersites to have been Thersites, he cannot really have wanted to speak without inviting at least the threat of constraint.

Our hypothetical question may in the end seem too artificial to ask of those already identified as parrhesiasts suffering for speaking freely. But a few centuries later we find an actual example of someone who comes close to asking this question of himself: the Roman poet Horace in his capacity as the author of his two books of satires, the *Sermones*. All the Roman satirists, certainly those after Lucilius, thematize the dilemma of the parrhesiast in one way or another: they claim to compose satire because their indignation at the state of the world compels them to, but they also (claim to) fear the retaliation of their targets and detractors. Both Horace and Juvenal look back to Lucilius as an author who was relatively unconstrained—for them, he lived in a kind of romanticized Golden Age of free speech, when a satirist could excoriate the unjust and wicked with impunity. In *Serm.* 1.4, Horace famously traces this tradition in turn to the poets of Athenian Old Comedy, who could speak *multa cum libertate*. How free these predecessors actually were is a topic for a different study, but Horace certainly constructs them as a contrast to the constraints he claims to feel in his own time. To judge from this attitude, one might think that Horace would answer our hypothetical question in the affirmative, and say that, yes, he would give anything to be like Eupolis or Lucilius, who could say whatever they wanted without repercussions. But what parrhesiasts—in literature or real life—really want their speech not to ruffle feathers? And what satirist can be considered genuinely successful if he cannot at least claim to have upset the *status quo*? One suspects that Horace’s

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21 See Susanna Morton Braund, “*Libertas* or *Licentia*? Freedom and Criticism in Roman Satire,” in: Sluiter and Rosen, *Free Speech* (above, n. 9), pp. 409–28, who discusses the tension between the *libertas* all Roman satirists craved, and the accusations of *licentia* (the Roman equivalent to the “bad” *parrhēsia* discussed above). Braund concludes (p. 426): “Satire likes to have it both ways. It draws attention to the tension between *libertas* and *licentia* not to resolve that tension but to replay it, over and over.”
nostalgia for the good old days of “safe satire” really amounts to a strategy to highlight his own stance of comic abjection and the ultimate efficacy of his own parrhêsia.

In Serm. 2.1, Horace all but confirms this, depicting a conversation with a lawyer friend named Trebatius, in which the poet asks Trebatius how he should respond to popular criticism of his satire:

\[
sunt quibus in satura uidear nimis acer et ultra
\text{le\textgreek{gm}em tendere opus; sine neruis altera, quidquid}
\text{composui, pars esse putat similisque meorum}
\text{mille die uersus deduci posse.}
\]

Some people think that I’m too sharp in my satire, and that my work transgresses its laws; but another group thinks whatever I compose is anemic, and that a thousand verses like mine could be spun out in a single day.

These are charges Horace himself made against Lucilius in the first book of the Sermones, and he now complains that people accuse him of the same thing. Trebatius offers a simple, rational bit of advice: if you feel oppressed, don’t write satire: quiescas. But Horace implies that what he really wants—since he proceeds to claim that he would be unable to sleep if he gave up satire—is to speak with impunity as Lucilius could. He knows he cannot have this, but he refuses to abandon the licentia he feels constitutionally compelled to adopt in his writing.

Adopting a disingenuous no-first-strike policy typical of satirists, Horace claims that he is harmless as long as no one annoys him (2.1.39–40):

\[
sed hic stilus haud petet ultro
\text{quemquam animantem et me ueluti custodiet ensis}
uagina tectus.
\]

But this pen will not of its own accord attack any person who’s alive, and it will protect me like a sword kept in its sheath.

Whoever crosses him, however, is in for trouble (2.1.44–6):

\[
at ille,
qu\text{e me commorit (melius non tangere, clamo),}
flebit et insignis tota cantabitur urbe.
\]

But that one who stirs me up (I shout out, “It’s better not to lay a hand on me!”) will weep and be sung about, an infamous figure in the whole city.

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22 Serm. 1.4.9–13, 1.10.1–2.
Trebatius warns Horace later, however, that if he persists in speaking out in his verses, he might well meet an early death, at least metaphorically speaking, since he could jeopardize the delicate social relationships he depends on (2.1.60–2), and he even reminds him of the existence of specific laws against defamation (2.1.82–3):

\[
\text{si mala condiderit in quem quis carmina ius est}
\]
\[
\text{iudicumque.}
\]

If someone shall have composed bad verses\(^{23}\) against another, there’s always the law and the lawcourts.

The tone of this satire is lighthearted and ironic, and the issue of constraint and verbal libertas is deployed more as a trope than as a somber cri de coeur. But the trope derives from some of the paradoxes of suppression we have been considering, in which a person might feel an almost perverse thrill at the threat of constraint or censorship even as he complains about it, and at the peculiar co-dependent relationship that can develop with the censoring agent.

Up to this point, I have focused on characters who seem to invite suppression, taunting and almost daring an antagonist to try to keep them from speaking. These characters have been drawn largely from literature, where generic forces often explain the behavior of a narrator or character whose fictional roles are supposed to mimic historical realities. As my final example will show, however, even with bona fide historical characters, suppression of speech implies a complex relationship between the suppressor and the suppressed with consequences that can be as productive as they are unintended.

The case of Socrates and the indictment against him for “corrupting the youth of Athens and introducing foreign deities” is usefully considered in the context of the paradoxes of repression isolated above. The defense Plato puts in Socrates’ mouth in the Apology makes it clear that this is a essentially a case about free speech. The charges leveled against Socrates are certainly motivated by political and ideological undercurrents, as is often noted, but what his accusers really want is to shut him up for good. Socrates knows that what irks them most is his relentless questioning and his attempts to convince people to pay attention to the moral condition of their souls: “I spend my time,” he says at Ap. 30b, “wandering around trying to persuade young and old not to bother about their physical or financial well-being until they’ve worked on making their souls as good as possible.” Not unlike the satirist’s recurrent claim that he feels compelled to speak his mind in the face of a morally degenerate world, Socrates maintains that he has no choice: the gods themselves command him to

\(^{23}\) The pun on mala (“bad” = “hostile, aggressive” or “bad verses”) has been noted by e.g. Kirk Freudenburg, Satires of Rome: Threatening Poses from Lucilius to Juvenal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 105–9.
“examine men,” e.g. at Ap. 33c: “in oracles and in dreams and in every way in which the divine ever commands a man to do something.” It was Socrates’ speech—indeed, the relentlessness of it, which was a form of “bad” parrhēsia for the Athenians—that made him a dangerous man. When he imagines for a moment (Ap. 29c) what he might say if the court allowed him to go free on the condition that he give up the practice of philosophy—which is to say, that he accept restrictions on his speech—he regards this as unthinkable. And with a resolve that has resonated across the ages, he says at Ap. 30c that he would not change his ways even if were “to die many deaths.”

In the two famous Platonic dialogues that address the charges explicitly, the Apology and the Crito, Socrates displays a complex and, to us, often frustrating attitude toward his speech and the constraints upon it. In the end, he almost makes us feel that his predicament was not only inevitable but even welcome. Much of the Crito, in fact, poses a variation on the question that we have hypothetically asked the other victims of suppression considered above: Socrates’ influential friends offer him the opportunity to escape prison and go into exile abroad. Crito even tells Socrates (Cr. 45c) that if he goes to Thessaly, he has friends there who can see to it that no one disturbs him (implying that if Socrates set up shop elsewhere, his parrhesiastic ways will soon make him as unpopular there as he is in Athens). Readers have often found Socrates’ response both utterly predictable and almost perverse: he rules out escape and willingly submits to the legal procedures ahead of him. The response is predictable in the sense that escape would imply a fear of death, something Socrates strenuously repudiated in the courtroom speech recounted in the Apology, so he would naturally want to avoid charges of cowardice and hypocrisy. But it is perverse in that the indictment and conviction were so clearly unjust (at least to hear Plato recount it) that it is difficult to understand why, with a viable option of escape, one would actively choose to submit to the verdict, especially when the outcome will be death. But Socrates’ objection to Crito’s proposal is subtle and seemingly recognizes that even failed parrhēsia can in the end have the power of exemplarity.

We may remember that Plato has Socrates close the Crito by imagining the Laws of Athens taking on human form to address him as he contemplates escape. Socrates conceptualizes the laws as stern parents or masters, and citizens as children or slaves. As such, Socrates is duty-bound to respect the Laws and not retaliate even if he feels that they have treated him unjustly. The central principle he imagines the laws to have on their side is that—in their capacity as laws in an “open” society—they have provided citizens like Socrates a lifetime of privileges and benefits, making it unjust for him to try to destroy them if he grows displeased with their conduct. Ultimately, the Laws say, one ought to honor one’s country and its laws even more than one’s real

parents, and “yield to it and flatter it when it is angry at you even more than you would a father” (Cr. 51b). As they say, citizens have ample opportunity to leave Athens voluntarily if they do not like what the Laws stand for. Chief among the benefits they cite, is the opportunity to persuade them that they are acting unjustly (51c): “In war and in the lawcourt and everywhere, you must do whatever your state and your country tell you to do, or you must persuade them that their commands are unjust.”

Given the circumstances, these are poignant words: Socrates has spent his life trying to persuade his fellow citizens to avoid the trappings most men regard as the keys to virtue—status, money, glibness of speech, material possessions—trying, in other words, to persuade them to live a good and just life if he sensed that they were not. Something has gone wrong, however, since the very people who made and administered the laws remained sufficiently un-persuaded by his discourse to turn them against him and prosecute him unjustly. At the end of Crito, therefore, Socrates is proud and brave, as Plato surely wanted him to be, but also melancholic and abject, like an indignant satirist but without the palliative effects of humor. He has availed himself of the freedom of speech Athens offers, but he seems to have little to show for it.

Or does he? It now becomes clearer why Socrates, like other figures whose speech is suppressed, could never choose the hypothetical “second chance” we have offered them, with their free speech assured and no one to bother them about what they say. If this were the case for Socrates in his life, it would mean that the people he talked to in the streets of Athens—about goodness and justice and their morally corrupt lifestyle—simply would not care. They would ignore him and go about their existence just as before. Since Socrates’ stance is essentially antagonistic and censorious, as soon as they began to pay attention and care, their reaction would be at least some degree of irritation, and in extreme cases, a desire to suppress his speech entirely. Callicles in the Gorgias famously predicted just such an outcome for anyone who insisted on practicing philosophy into adulthood.25 In a very real sense, therefore, Socrates requires the threat of the suppression he suffers, because it means that his philosophizing is having some effect. He may not be converting souls to justice, but his speech is hitting home with others. For Socrates not to have felt compelled to engage in the parrhēsia that led to his demise, Athenians would have had to be thoroughly just—an obvious adynaton. In the end, therefore, he does have something to show for his suffering, for his death validates the need for the very thing that got him into trouble, a need for unconstrained, freewheeling philosophic dialectic in response to the moral deficiencies of his interlocutors.

Socrates’ martyrdom to the cause of parrhēsia demonstrates why he would not— even could not—change how he conducted his life if given the chance, and his escape is unthinkable precisely because he gains more by submitting to silence than by

escaping and continuing to speak. His *parhēsia* may ultimately have failed him, in that he failed to persuade much of the Athenian public to live justly. But his trial and death illustrate that he was right all along to think that the Athenians were in critical need of moral instruction, and he must have thought that this legacy would have enormous staying power—as it has. In a breezy passage, easy to miss, in Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates seems to acknowledge this desire for his failure at persuasion to serve nonetheless as an emblem of the philosophical enterprise. At 498c–d, he has been arguing for the importance of philosophy in a person’s education; his interlocutors are mildly incredulous, and point out that someone like Thrasymachus will surely object to such a view. Socrates responds:

μὴ διάβαλλε ... ἐμὲ καὶ Θρασύμαχον ἀρτιφίλους γεγονότας, οὐδὲ πρὸ τοῦ ἐχθρῶς ὄντας, πείρας γὰρ ὦδὲν ἀνήσουμεν, ἦς ἢ πείσωμεν καὶ τοῦτον καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους, ἢ προϊδρογοὺς τι ποιήσωμεν εἰς ἕκεινον τὸν βίον, ὅταν αὐθίς γενόμενοι τοῖς τοιούτοις ἐντύχωσι λόγοις.

Don’t rile up me and Thrasymachus ... who have just recently become friends—though we weren’t enemies before. I’ll never give up my efforts until I either convince him [πείσωμεν] and others, or do something that will be useful for that life when people of future generations may encounter words like these.

This is a variation of what we see in *Crito*—the necessity Socrates feels to persuade his interlocutors of what he believes to be just, and never to give up, even (as *Crito* makes clear) if that means having to face death. In the *Republic* passage, however, Socrates is more explicit about what he imagines might happen if his attempts at persuasion fail. In that case, he will at least be satisfied if his antagonists remember that they once sparred in conversation with Socrates and perhaps take away from the experience some understanding of dialectic.

Socrates was not a professional satirist in the way that Aristophanes, Lenny Bruce, Horace and even Thersites were. The *telos* of his strategies of mockery and irony was not so much laughter as moral instruction. But like Aristophanes or Lenny Bruce, Socrates too cannot be effective without imagining a constant threat of constraint. The difference between the comic satirist and the satirical philosopher on this point comes down to the nature of their respective claims to moral didacticism and more generally their “seriousness.” Despite an apparent wariness of Socrates himself,26 Aristophanes would claim that comedy was in some sense “philosophical” or at least “moral” (τὰ δίκαια), and he would want the audience to believe that he is fully serious when he ridicules politicians such as Cleon for their misbehavior. Dicaeopolis, at any rate, speaking explicitly for the poet in *Acharnians*, is willing to put his head

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literally on the chopping-block for the comic cause—telling it like it is, performing his self-righteousness on the Athenian comic stage. Dicaeopolis in this scene presents himself as every bit as much the martyr as Plato’s Socrates in *Apology* and *Crito*. The difference is that Dicaeopolis does not end up dead, either in real life or even within the comic plot, while Socrates does. Comic satire, in short, *plays at* being philosophical and *mimics* moral posturing, but gets its laughs—wins its prizes at the competition—from its thwarted didacticism. Cleon may well have prosecuted Aristophanes in real life in an attempt to punish him for speaking out with his characteristically self-righteous didactic mockery, but in the comic world, this cannot be the end of the story. The comic poet Aristophanes, now “victimized,” must have the last word, a position that paradoxically gives him the upper hand with his audience even at the moment when he has been effectively smacked down by a greater power. The same holds true for Socrates: only through his own experience of repression can he too have the final word, making evident what his detractors attempted to silence. The difference between the two, however, reflects a difference between two major genres of discourse, the comic and the philosophical. While some “good” seems to arise from being repressed for each of them, Aristophanes, like all satirists of his ilk, will continually feed his audiences as much evidence of repression as he can, even if he must exaggerate or fictionalize to do so. The consequence is that every claim to seriousness of purpose behind his ridicule is complicated (one might even say “tainted”) by the possibility that he is motivated by the purely ludic forces at the foundation of satiric performances. There is no call to deny Aristophanes, or any other comic performer, his own personal beliefs and political opinions.\(^27\) The question is rather whether these beliefs and opinions are truly accessible from a work of literary satire, or perhaps even more important, whether it matters much to any audience that they are.

\(^27\) An interview conducted by Fox News Network’s Chris Wallace with the comedian Jon Stewart (June 2011) is instructive on this point. Wallace charges Stewart with ideological partisanship in his comedy, something Stewart continually denies, even as he freely admits that his personal views “inform” his act. Consider this exchange: Wallace: “I think ... you’re pushing more of an ideological agenda than you pretend to.” Stewart: “I disagree with you. I think that I’m pushing comedy and my ideological agenda informs it, at all times.” Elsewhere in the interview, Stewart retorts to one of Wallace’s attempts to get Stewart to commit to promoting a political agenda of his own, by saying, “I’m not an activist, I’m a comedian.” I discuss this interview at greater length in Ralph M. Rosen, “Efficacy and Meaning in Ancient and Modern Political Satire: Aristophanes, Lenny Bruce and Jon Stewart,” *Social Research* 79.1 (2012), pp. 22–5.
Abstract: This chapter examines the way in which Aristophanes introduces obscene words into his comedies both at the beginning of the plays and subsequently, following more heightened and/or more sober sequences. The Aristophanic norm is to introduce obscenity unsignaled, the “obscenity out of nowhere” technique, often employed to signal abuse, crudeness, buffoonery and/or freedom from inhibitions. Alternatively, the poet sometimes employs the “build-up” technique, in which double entendres and sexual allusions occur with increasing intensity before a climactic primary obscenity is finally introduced. Examples of both techniques are analysed, and some of the challenges that Aristophanic obscenity present and the relationship between obscenity and paratragedy are explored.

The publication of Jeffery Henderson’s *The Maculate Muse* in 1975 marked something of a turning point in Aristophanic studies. Scholars like Kenneth Dover may have paved the way for the frank discussion of classical sex and sexuality in English, but Henderson provided the Anglophone world with something novel and distinct: its first book-length treatment of obscene language in Old Comedy. As he outlines in the introduction to the 1991 reprint of the book, Henderson met resistance from a number of academics when he embarked on the project in the early 1970s, including advice to write in Latin and the indignant question from one professor, “How could you do this to Aristophanes?” But Henderson’s work was part of a cultural shift that would change the landscape of Aristophanic studies forever. The propensity of previous generations of classicists “annoyingly [to] offer no comment on obscene passages” (as one of Henderson’s reviewers put it) gave way to a new wave of scholarship that embraced the erotic and scatological scurri-

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3 Henderson, *Maculate Muse* (above, n. 1), p. vii. The conditions under which K.J. Dover’s *Greek Homosexuality* (London: Duckworth, 1978) was produced serve as a useful reminder of the legal situation regarding obscenity that prevailed in the U.K. at the time. I am reliably informed that Duckworth, the book’s publishers, sent staff to the British Museum to collect the images to be used in *Greek Homosexuality* in person for fear that, by sending them by post, the firm might be prosecuted under Section 11 of the Post Office Act 1953 (United Kingdom).
lity of the plays. Times were changing and *The Maculate Muse* blazed a trail for others to follow.

The continuing influence of *The Maculate Muse* is apparent to contemporary students of Aristophanes and Greek sexuality alike. Nearly 40 years after its first publication, the book is still widely cited by those working on topics such as gender, sex and language both in Old Comedy in particular and antiquity in general. But for all the avenues of enquiry *The Maculate Muse* has opened up for scholars of the classical world, one topic has remained relatively underexplored since its publication: obscene language itself. This is regrettable, since where scholars have looked into obscene language post-Henderson, rich studies have emerged, such as those that investigate the precise meaning of obscene lexical items and document their occurrence in literary sources, and others that focus on the gendered use of obscenity in Aristophanes and beyond. It is nonetheless intriguing that more has not been written on obscenity itself, not least because obscene expression is a distinctive, central component of Old Comedy and potentially a productive area of academic enquiry.

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After all, the presence of words representing taboo objects and acts in a theatrical performance—the most public of contexts—raises fascinating issues concerning the boundaries between public and private in classical Athens and how the audience might have assimilated and responded to the plays when they were staged.

In this chapter, I examine a very specific topic pertaining to this public/private divide and the way the audience is invited to engage with Old Comedy in performance, by focusing on how Aristophanes introduces obscene words into his plays—hence the “slipping one in” of the title. As Henderson’s own analyses demonstrate, obscene language is not a constant presence in any surviving Old Comic play but a variable one. In other words, risqué and obscene expression is a tap Aristophanes can turn on—either gradually or suddenly, as we shall see—but also off, leaving long sections of his plays obscenity-free. My key area of interest, then, is how the poet introduces obscene language into the beginnings of his plays (how does he slip the first obscenity in?) and how he reintroduces it following heightened and/or more sober sequences (how does he slip one in later?).

The bulk of this chapter is given over to the examination of individual passages, in order to gain an impression of the range of techniques Aristophanes employs when handling obscene language. To anticipate my conclusions, an important point of interest is the way the shock obscenities can cause is either exploited or, alternatively, avoided. As we shall see, patterns emerge not only in how obscene language is introduced and reintroduced, but also in how obscenity is juxtaposed with high-register—often tragic—language on the one hand and low-register, risqué linguistic features such as double entendres on the other. Before looking at individual passages in detail, however, I first outline what is to be understood by obscenity for the purposes of this discussion, and consider some of the challenges of defining and categorizing obscene expression in a classical Athenian context.

**Defining Obscenity**

One of the first tasks Henderson sets himself in *The Maculate Muse* is to outline his definition of obscenity.10

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8 Henderson, *Maculate Muse* (above, n. 1), pp. 56–107, discusses the shifting, thematic use of obscenity in the extant plays. A striking example of the flow of obscenity being checked is the final third of *Birds* where, Henderson remarks, “there is no obscenity at all” (p. 85).

9 In this chapter, all quotations of Greek are accompanied by an English translation (either taken directly or adapted from Sommerstein’s Aris and Phillips editions of the plays). Greek words have been transliterated in the main text but kept in the original in parentheses and footnotes. Key items of obscene vocabulary are also given in transliterated form within the English translations, allowing the Greekless reader better to engage with the discussion.

By obscenity we mean verbal reference to areas of human activity or parts of the human body that are protected by certain taboos agreed upon by prevailing custom and subject to emotional aversion or inhibition. These are in fact the sexual and excremental areas. In order to be obscene, such a reference must be made by explicit expression that is itself subject to the same inhibitions as the thing it describes. Thus, to utter one of the numerous words, to be found in any language, which openly (noneuphemistically) describe the tabooed organs or actions is tantamount to exposing what should be hidden.

Henderson goes on to differentiate between our modern concept of obscenity and the Greek concept of aischros, “shameful,” the shame connected with taboo words resulting from the fact that not only the deeds and objects themselves but also the words that represent those deeds and objects “stand for what one keeps to oneself.”¹¹ He also suggests that what he calls “primary obscenities”—words like peos, “cock,” and kusthos, “cunt”—can be usefully distinguished from other forms of expression referring to the same objects. These include both medical terms, such as phallos, “penis,” and metaphorical expressions and double entendres, such as balanos, “pin,” and kerkos, “tail” (used as a double entendre for “penis” at Lys. 410 and Ach. 785, respectively), which characteristically evoke the objects and actions to which they refer in a less direct way. As Henderson remarks, “there was no special term” in classical Greek for taboo words.¹² Faute de mieux, I shall nevertheless follow the practice of other scholars by using the terms “obscenity” and “obscene” in the context of Aristophanic as well as contemporary expression.

We have already begun to list some of the obscene words that feature in the passages discussed in this chapter, but what other lexical items in Aristophanes can be usefully categorized as primary obscenities? The Maculate Muse only goes part way to answering this question; indeed, as Sommerstein comments when considering obscenity in his study of “The Language of Athenian Women,” the lengthy catalogue of sexual and scatological terms in Henderson’s book “(very properly, given its aims) includes many euphemistic and/or metaphorical expressions which taken literally are not obscene at all.”¹³ For the purposes of his own survey, Sommerstein therefore draws up a list of 16 words he regards as primary obscenities, distilled from the three “women” plays that concern him (Lysistrata, Thesmophoriazusae and Assembly-women)—a list which, in addition to the obscene terms already encountered (peos, “cock,” and kusthos, “cunt”), includes binein (plus its derivatives), kinein (in its sexual sense), proskineisthai, lēkan and splekoun (all signifying “to fuck/screw”); psōlos/psōlē (“hard-on”) and stuesthai (“to have a hard on”); dephesthai (“to wank/

¹¹ Henderson, Maculate Muse (above, n. 1), p. 5, who later develops this idea by introducing the Freudian concept of “exposure” into his discussion (pp. 10–13).
¹² Henderson, Maculate Muse (above, n. 1), p. 5.
jerk off”); laikazein (“to suck cock”);\(^{14}\) katapugōn (“bugger”) and pugizein (“to bugger”); prōktos (“ass(hole),” plus its derivatives and compounds); perdesthai (“to fart”); and chezein (“to shit,” plus its compounds).\(^{15}\) In characteristically pragmatic fashion, Sommerstein thus creates two neat categories: primary obscenities on the one hand and all remaining lexical items on the other.

Sommerstein’s approach has practical benefits, since it allows him to specify with admirable clarity which terms his discussion will cover. But drawing a sharp distinction between obscene and non-obscene items begs an important question: in addition to black and white, did obscene lexical items not come in various shades of gray for classical Athenians? Indeed, even Sommerstein’s short list throws up interesting issues concerning the relative obscenity of certain terms. For example, it includes both binein, “to fuck,” and its near-homonym kinein (in its sexual sense, that is; kinein can also boast a whole range of non-sexual meanings, such as “set in motion,” “remove,” “stir up,” etc.).\(^{16}\) As Bain notes when discussing these verbs, “there must be some difference between an outright vulgar word [viz. binein] which has virtually no secondary connotations ... and a word [viz. kinein] which is extremely common in contexts without a sexual reference and which is used because it suggests the other word.”\(^{17}\) In a similar vein, the fact that dephesthai, “to wank/jerk off,” has an active form, dephein, which simply means “to soften,” potentially sets it apart from verbs like stuesthai, “to have a hard-on,” and chezein, “to shit,” whose field of reference is exclusively obscene.\(^{18}\) Furthermore, one might legitimately ask whether perdesthai, “to fart,” and the activity it describes, would have attracted the same quality of taboo in ancient Athens as a verb like laikazein, “to suck cock.”\(^{19}\)

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\(^{14}\) On the meaning of this verb, see Jocelyn, “ΛΑΙΚΑΖΕΙΝ” (above, n. 6); cf. Henderson, Maculate Muse (above, n. 1), pp. 153–4 n. 12, and Bain, “Six Verbs” (above, n. 6), pp. 74–7.

\(^{15}\) Sommerstein, “Language of Athenian Women” (above, n. 7), p. 79. McClure, Spoken Like a Woman (above, n. 7), pp. 208–9, reuses Sommerstein’s list of primary obscenities for her analysis of female obscenity in the same three plays.


\(^{17}\) Bain, “Six Verbs” (above, n. 6), p. 64; see also Robson, Humour, Obscenity and Aristophanes (above, n. 5), p. 175.

\(^{18}\) For the distribution of στώω and χέζω outside Old Comedy, see Bain, “Six Verbs” (above, n. 6), p. 52.

\(^{19}\) Interestingly, Jocelyn, “ΛΑΙΚΑΖΕΙΝ” (above, n. 6), p. 15, collectively dubs the verbs βδείν, πέρδεσθαι, χέζειν and βινείν “mild obscenities” in comparison to λαικάζειν. For data on the spread of κύθος, πέος, πέρδομαι, πρωκτός, στώω, χέζω, ψωλή/ψωλ-, βινέω, κινέω, προσκίνεμαι, πυγίζω, ληκό, οίφω and ΛΑΙΚΑΖΟ in extant literature and beyond, see Bain, “Six Verbs” (above, n. 6), p. 53, who comments that “some no doubt were regarded as more or less offensive than others.” In the 11 extant plays, πέρδεσθαι occurs seven times: Ach. 30; Eq. 115; Nu. 9; V. 1177; Ec. 78, 464; Pl. 176. cf. ἀνταπόπερδεσθαι (Nu. 293); ἄποπερδεσθαι (V. 394; Av. 792; Ra. 10; Pl. 699); ἐπιπέρδεσθαι (Eq. 639); καταπέρδεσθαι (V. 618; Pax 547; Pl. 618), προσπερδεσθαι (Ra. 1074) and ὑποπέρδεσθαι (Ra. 1097).
sure, with no native speakers to interrogate, we can never be certain of the precise resonance a particular term or expression might have possessed at any given time (and different speakers may well have varied in their opinions in any case). We are thus faced with the challenge of judging from what is often meager data (frequency of use in literary sources, distribution, context) what the relative force of different obscenities was. Seen in this light, obscenity becomes a more slippery linguistic category than Sommerstein’s simple division between obscene and non-obscene allows, so that the investigation proposed here is rendered more challenging, its results more tentative. But it remains possible, I suggest, to use Henderson’s catalogue and Sommerstein’s list productively as starting points for identifying such primary obscenities, metaphorical expressions and double entendres as occur in Aristophanes.

Lastly, it is necessary to stress the relative prevalence of obscene language in modern Anglophone culture compared to that of classical Greece. The situations in which obscenity is found in Greek culture are few and far between: iambic poetry, the rites connected with certain cults and festivals (chiefly Demeter and Dionysus), curse tablets, magical texts, graffiti—and, of course Old Comedy. These contexts also raise the important issue of the uses to which obscenity was put in classical Greek culture. In the introduction to The Maculate Muse, Henderson emphasizes the ability of taboo words to “shock, anger and amuse,” and further functions of obscenity are usefully set out by Adams (albeit in the context of Latin material), whose four major categories are “apotropaic and ritual” purposes, “aggression and humiliation,” “humour and outrageousness” and “titillation.” The special festival license the Old Comic poets enjoyed is also relevant. Indeed, much of what follows amounts to an investigation of how this license was both carefully negotiated and mercilessly exploited by Aristophanes in his plays to surprise and shock his audiences.

The “Obscenity out of Nowhere”

Let us first remind ourselves of the most common way Aristophanes introduces obscenities into his plays, that is to say, abruptly and largely unsignaled—a technique I will call the “obscenity out of nowhere.” The unsignaled introduction of an obscenity par excellence comes early in the action of the Thesmophoriazusae, the item in

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21 Henderson, Maculate Muse (above, n. 1), p. 7.
22 Adams, Latin Sexual Vocabulary (above, n. 5), pp. 4–8.
question being *binein*, “to fuck.”

Euripides and his unnamed relative are outside the house of the tragic poet Agathon, where they have the following exchange (Th. 29–35).

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**Eur.** ἐνταῦθ᾿ Ἀγάθων ὁ κλεινὸς σίκών τυγχάνει ὁ τραγῳδοποιός.

**Κη.** ποίος οὗτος Ἀγάθων;

**Ευ.** ἐστιν τις Ἀγάθων—

**Κη.** μῶν ὁ μέλας, ὁ καρτερός;

**Ευ.** οὐκ, ἄλλ᾿ ἐτερός τις οὐχ ἔορακας πώποτε;

**Κη.** μῶν ὁ δασυπώγων;

**Ευ.** οὐχ ἔορακας πώποτε.

**Κη.** οὗτοι μὰ τὸν Δι’ ὅπετε κάμε γ’ εἰδέναι.

**Ευ.** καὶ μὴν βεβίνηκας σὺ γ’ ἄλλ’ οὐκ ὀίσθ’ ἵσως,

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**Ευ.** Τοῦτος ἐστις Ἀγάθων—

**Κη.** ὁ μέλας, ὁ καρτερός;

**Ευ.** οὐκ ἔορακας πώποτε.

**Κη.** οὗτοι μὰ τὸν Δι’ ὅπετε κάμε γ’ εἰδέναι.

**Ευ.** καὶ μὴν βεβίνηκας σὺ γ’ ἄλλ’ οὐκ ὀίσθ’ ἵσως.

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Eur. This is where the famous Agathon has his residence, the tragic poet.

Inlaw What Agathon is that?

Eur. There is one Agathon—

Inlaw You don’t mean the bronzed, muscular one?

Eur. No, a different one; haven’t you ever seen him?

Inlaw Not the one with the bushy beard?

Eur. You haven’t ever seen him!

Inlaw I certainly haven’t—at least not that I know of.

Eur. And yet you’ve *fucked* him (*bebinēkas*)—but perhaps you’re not aware of the fact!

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This passage comes at almost the beginning of the play and there is little in the preceding discussion to suggest that Euripides will utter the obscene “fuck” in 35. Indeed, Silk chooses this very moment to illustrate the concept of what he calls a “recreational” figure (as opposed to a “realist” figure); that is, a figure whose character and speech are liable to change drastically, or as Silk succinctly puts it, are “inconsistently inconsistent.”

Up to this point Euripides ... has spoken in a restrained idiom. His remarks to Mnesilochus [i.e. the Inlaw] have been equable in tone, and there is nothing now to suggest that his mood has changed. Nor is there anything in his characterization to come which would suggest that obscenity is a feature of his idiom, as it is, by contrast, of Mnesilochus’.

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This unsignaled introduction of an obscenity no doubt serves to attack and undermine the figure of Agathon. It is noteworthy, too, that once one obscenity has been delivered (at 35), others follow in quick succession (βινεῖσθαι, “to be fucked,” 50; λαϊκάζει, “he is sucking cock,” 57; πέος, “cock,” 62).

The principle that an “obscenity out of nowhere” can be used to attack and undermine also holds good for the Sausage-seller’s snipe at Paphlagon at Eq. 1010, “he can go bite his cock (peos)” (τὸ πέος οὔτοσι δάκοι), or Dicaeopolis’ use of the words “cock-suckers” and “buggers” (λαϊκαστὰς and κατατύγγονος) at Ach. 79 in response to the self-important Athenian amabassador. The memorable exchange at Nu. 733–4 is perhaps a variation on this theme—a hostile deflation rather than an all-out attack. The obscenity comes when Strepsiades (who is lying under a cover in bed) is asked by Socrates whether he has had any intelligent thoughts:

| Σω.  | ἐχεῖς τι;  |
| Στ.  | μὰ Δί’ οὐ δῆτ’ ἐγώγ’.  |
| Σω.  | οὐδὲν πάνυ;  |
| Στ.  | οὐδὲν γε, πλὴν ἢ τὸ πέος ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ.  |

Socr. Have you managed to get hold of anything?
Streps. No, I really haven’t.
Socr. Nothing at all?
Streps. Nothing—except my cock (peos) in my right hand.

Attack and deflation are not the only uses to which “obscenities out of nowhere” are put. They can also serve to emphasize a figure’s non-conformity with social conventions and/or lack of social sophistication. Indeed, Nu. 734 is a good example of this, in that Strepsiades’ crudeness and rusticity (in contrast to the high-minded Socrates) is underlined by his masturbation and use of the word “cock.” The relative freedom with which Demos’ slaves use obscenity in the prologue of Knights no doubt contributes to their characterization as both lowly figures and would-be iconoclasts (δεφόμενος, 24, and δεφομένων 29, “wanking”; χέζομεν, “we shit,” 70; πρωκτός, “ass-hole,” 78; λαϊκάσεις, “you will suck cocks,” 167), whereas the Sausage-Seller’s obscenities underline his status as a crude aggressor and challenger of Paphlagon (ἐγὼ δὲ βυνήσω γέ σου τὸν πρωκτόν ἀντί φύσες, “I’ll stuff your ass like a sausage case,” Eq. 364). Indeed, as Henderson notes, a number of key figures in Aristophanes’

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plays from the 420s “make use of ... outrageous mechanisms in accomplishing their overturning of society” including “the unrestrained use of obscene language.”

Nor are obscenities out of nowhere uttered only by characters with major roles in the plays. At Ach. 1052, for example, an obscenity of this sort is voiced by a figure quite tangential to the action, a Groomsman who appeals for a newly-wed husband to be granted a share in Dicaeopolis’ private peace so that he can “can stay at home and fuck” (βινοή μένων) rather than go off to war. Nor are such obscenities voiced only by socially inferior or downtrodden characters: at V. 739, for example, Bdelycleon suddenly announces that he will provide his father with πόρνην, ἥτις τὸ πέος τρίψει, “a whore to massage his cock.” The buffoonery of Dionysus and Xanthias is also brought out by the abrupt use of obscenity in the arresting comic sequence that opens Frogs. In a comment addressed to Xanthias, Dionysus uses chezêtiais, “you need a crap” (Ra. 8), Xanthias’ response to which contains the scurrilous apopardésumai, “I’ll have an ass-burst” (Ra. 10). In short, obscenities out of nowhere (and the further obscenities that often follow in their wake) are used in a wide variety of contexts. These are the Aristophanic norm.

**Obscenity and the Deflation of High-Flown Language**

One particular use to which “obscenities out of nowhere” are put is to deflate high-flown—most often tragic—language. A good example comes at Lys. 706–15, where the high tone established by a passage of tragic pastiche is neatly thrown into relief by the sudden introduction of an obscene lexical item. The effect is that of humor para prosdokia.

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27 Henderson, *Maculate Muse* (above, n. 1), p. 58, who identifies similar figures in all of Aristophanes’ early plays.

28 A request soon followed by the Bride’s appeal (reported by Dicaeopolis) for her husband’s cock (πέος) to stay at home (Ach. 1060).

29 As J. Henderson (ed.), *Aristophanes Lysistrata* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) ad loc., observes, while the address ἀνασσαπράγους τοῦδε καὶ βουλεύματος, τί μοι σκυθρωπός ἐξεληλυθας δόμων ... and the dilemma expressed in lines 713–14 are, according to the scholiast, borrowed from Euripides’ *Telephus*, “the whole passage is typically tragic and we need not suppose that the spectators were supposed to recall any particular source(s).” Tragic features identified by Henderson include the omission of the article in 707 and 708 and the suspense-building *kommata* of 710–11. Elsewhere, however, περιπατεῖν (709) is attested only in prose.
Λυ. ἀλλ’ αἰσχρὸν εἰπεῖν καὶ σιωπήσαι βαφύ.
Χο. ἢ μὴ νῦν με κρύψῃς ὁ τι πεπόνθαμεν κακὸν.
Λυ. βινητῶμεν, ἢ βράχιστον τοῦ λόγου.

Women’s Leader. O Sovereign of this action and this scheme,
Pray, why cross-visaged com’st thou from thy halls?
Lys. ’Tis worthless women’s deeds and female hearts
That make me walk despondent to and fro.
Women’s leader. What say’st thou? What say’st thou?
Lys. ’Tis true, ’tis true.
Women’s leader. What is ’t that troubles thee? Speak to thy friends.
Lys. ’Tis shame to say, yet grievous to conceal.
Women’s leader. Then do not hide from me the ill we suffer.
Lys. In brief the tale to tell—we need a fuck.

This Aristophanic technique of establishing an elevated, tragic tone only to deflate it
with obscenity has parallels elsewhere. In the prologue of Peace, for example, a
paratragic exchange between Trygaeus and his slave gives way to a short lyric that
starts tonally high but then dips low (an example of what Silk calls “hybrid lyrics” or
“low lyrics plus”).30 The flight of Trygaeus’ dung-beetle to heaven is inspired by that
of Pegasus in Euripides’ Bellerophon, and paratragic resonances run throughout the
play’s prologue.31 Here, however, the worlds of tragedy and excrement collide specta-
cularly (91–101).

Τρ. σίγα σίγα.
Οι. β ποί δήτ’ ἄλλως μετεωροκοπεῖς;
Τρ. ὑπέρ Ἑλήνων πάντων πέτομαι
tόλημα νέον παλαμησάμενος.
Οι. β τί πέτει; τί μάτην οὐχ ὑγαίνεις;
Τρ. εὐφρεινέῃς χρή καὶ μὴ φλαῦρον
μηδέν γρύζειν, ἀλλ’ ὀλολύζειν
tοῖς τ’ ἀνθρώποις φράσον σιγάν,
tοῖς τε κοπράνας καὶ τὰς λαύρας
cαινῆς πλάνθοισιν ἀποικοδομεῖν
καὶ τοὺς πρωκτοὺς ἐπικλήσειν.

Tryg. Be silent, be silent!
Slave Then why are you senselessly beating the air?
Tryg. I am making a flight on behalf of all the Greeks;
I have planned a venture without precedent.

and the Definition (above, n. 24), pp. 180–201. The principle of undercutting high-flown language is the
very essence of “hybrid” lyrics as defined by Silk (p. 189); interestingly, however, his examples show
that the subversion of high-register expression does not routinely involve obscene expression.
Slave Why are you flying? Why are you sick with mad folly?
Tryg. You should speak fair and not utter
the least ill-omened sound, but shout for joy;
and bid all men keep silence,
and as for the privies and the alleys
shut them off with new brickwork –
and close up their asses (próktous).

As in the Lysistrata passage, Aristophanes here stakes a claim to high-flown expression only to undermine it with obscenity. Interestingly, however, the bump down to earth is softened a little: the tragic spell begins to fade with the introduction of “privies” (κοπρῶνας), which is in turn followed by some more rather than less prosaic words: “alleys” (λαύρας), “shut off” (ἀποικοδομεῖν) and “brickwork” (πλίνθουσιν).

Something similar occurs in miniature in a much-cited passage from the beginning of Acharnians (27–30).

ὢπόλιςπόλις.
eγὼδ’αἰεπρῶτοςεἰςἐκκλησίαν
νοστῶνκάθημαικ’αὐτ’,ἐπειδὰνὦμόνος,
στένω,κέχηνα,σκορδινῶμαι,πέρδομαι.

O my city, my city!
For myself, I always make my way to the Assembly before anyone else
and sit here; then, when I’m alone,
I sigh and yawn, stretch and fart.

As Silk has demonstrated, this paratragic ὢ πόλις πόλις is built up to carefully: the lexical restraint (as well as the tightened meter) that proceed it make it into a miniature tragic moment—one that blends with and grows out of Dicaeopolis’ wistful laments to create a heightened moment of urgent poignancy.32 But the elevation is rapidly undercut by a series of increasingly colloquial items, until within three lines we reach the earthy (semi-obscene?) perdomai, “I fart.”33 In contrast to the abrupt “obscenities out of nowhere” encountered previously, in the last two extracts there is

32 See Silk, Aristophanes and the Definition (above, n. 24), pp. 33–7. Aristophanes presumably employs tragedy and tragic language in contrast to obscenity for a number of reasons. For example, tragic language (and indeed other poetic and heightened language) provides a clear counterpoint to obscenity: the two lie at either end of a spectrum, and the proximity of tragic language in the text highlights obscenity’s sheer crudeness and heightens its potential for bathos. A further reason is no doubt that tragic poets and tragic language and idiom—along with other high genres—may conveniently be cast as something pompous to be deflated by obscenity.

33 According to Olson, Peace (above, n. 31), on 28–31, for example, πρῶτιστος (28) is “almost exclusively poetic,” appearing in both comedy and tragedy, while the parallels he cites for κέχηνα and σκορδινῶμαι are purely comic. Henderson, Maculate Muse (above, n. 1), p. 195, talks of the “harmless ... and sometimes even ... netural” tone of fart jokes,” which indicate “rusticity and vulgarity” [Henderson’s emphasis].
certainly a bump down to earth produced by the juxtaposition of tragic language and low expression, but one that is ever so slightly softened. In sum, obscenities out of nowhere come in an array of forms, ranging from “abrupt” at one extreme to “softened” at the other.

Building up to a Climax: Lysistrata’s meaty peos

Let us now turn to an introduction of an obscenity that is very different in kind from those examined so far, by looking at what is arguably one of the most celebrated uses of a primary obscenity in Old Comedy, in the prologue of Lysistrata. Lysistrata herself utters the first obscene lexical item of the play, as she reveals her plan for peace (Lys. 119–24):

Lys. I will say it: there’s no need for the idea to stay hidden. What we must do, women, if we mean to compel the men to live in peace, is to abstain—


Lys. You’ll do it then?

Cal. We’ll do it, even if we have to give our lives.

Lys. Well then: we must abstain from—cock (peos).

Lysistrata’s utterance is a prime example of obscenity used for humorous purposes.34 Not just the nature of the proposition—a quest for peace—but also its scope, involving all the women in Greece, endow her plan with a certain gravitas. What is more, this gravitas is heightened by the women’s comments directly preceding this passage: Calonice asserts, “I’d split myself in two” (115–16), Lampito that she would “climb to the top of Mount Taïgetus” (117–18), if that would bring peace. In the passage quoted above, Calonice acts as the women’s spokesperson, enthusiastically agreeing to Lysistrata’s plan even before it has been articulated (123). The women’s comments also add

34 On the use of πέος in Aristophanes, see Henderson, Maculate Muse (above, n. 1), pp. 108–9, who speaks of the word’s “shock value” and “blunt force” (p. 108). On the use of πέος outside Old Comedy, see Bain, “Six Verbs” (above, n. 6), p. 52.
to the suspense that has been building since the beginning of the play. The action has been gearing up to this moment, but even now Aristophanes does not have Lysistrata reveal her plan straightaway—instead, Calonice interrupts. At long last, the climax is reached: the plan is revealed and we meet *peos*, the first primary obscenity of the play. The tension created by the suspense is released, and at the same moment the world inhabited by such noble projects as plans for panhellenic peace collides with the lowly world of taboo vocabulary.

In one sense, then, *peos* at *Lys.* 124 comes as a surprise. But to introduce a distinction, the introduction of an item of taboo vocabulary into the play at this stage can hardly be said to come as a shock. There have been no primary obscenities so far, but scurrility has nevertheless abounded. In the lines leading up to this passage, the audience has been tantalized by the prospect of the women sitting at home wearing make-up and sexually enticing clothing (such as saffron gowns and exotic shoes, 42–8) and has had its attention drawn to the fine Spartan “backside” (*πυγά*, 82)\(^{35}\) and “breasts” (*τιτθῶν*, 83)\(^{36}\) of Lampito. More risqué still are *double entendres* such as those concerning the Boeotian woman’s “fine lowland region” (*καλὸν...πεδίον*, 88) with its mint-shoots neatly plucked (89),\(^{37}\) or the women from the island of Salamis who have been conscientiously “crossing in boats”/*bestriding their mounts” since early morning so as to get to the meeting (*ἐπὶ τῶν κελήτων διαβεβήκας*, 59–60).\(^{38}\) To top all this, we have Lysistrata’s nostalgia for adulterers (*μοιχοῦ*) and Milesian dildos (*ὄλισβον*) at 107–9, both of which are said to be in short supply because of the war. In fact, the trail of lewdness can be traced back over 100 lines, to the point where Calonice originally asks Lysistrata the purpose of the meeting (21–5):


36 I discuss the spread of *τιτθός* in classical literature in *Humour, Obscenity and Aristophanes* (above, n. 5), pp.168–9, where I conclude that it is “neutral” in tone (and therefore roughly analogous to English “breast” or “bosom”).

37 On the removal of pubic hair, see M. Kilmer, *Greek Erotica on Attic Red-Figure Vases* (London: Duckworth, 1993), pp. 133–41.

38 A complex joke, relying on the multiple meanings of *κέλης*, which could signify a “racing-horse,” a type of “yacht,” and a sexual position for which the man lay down and was straddled by the woman. The act was notoriously expensive when performed by a prostitute (Pl. Com. Fr. 188.17–18; cf. Ath. 13.581c–f). A.H. Sommerstein (ed.), *The Comedies of Aristophanes: Vol. 7, Lysistrata* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1990) translates this phrase “working over on their pinnaces” (with a pun on “penis” and “pinnacle” [a kind of boat]). Cf. also *Pax* 900.
Lys. μέγα — μών καὶ παχύ;  
Kα. —καὶ νὴ Δίᾳ παχύ.
Lys. κάτα πῶς σύ ἤκομεν;
Kα. σύχ ὁὗτος ὁ τρόπος· ταχὺ γὰρ ἄν ξυνήλθομεν.

Cal. What actually is it, Lysistrata dear, that you’re calling us women together for? What is this thing? What’s the size of it?
Lys. It’s big—
Cal. You don’t mean meaty (pachus) too?
Lys. —and meaty too, I tell you.
Cal. Then how come we’re not all here?
Lys. Not in that sense! We’d have assembled fast enough if it was.

Having followed this trail of double entendres, sexual allusions and risqué references, we can plausibly claim that the audience has, in an important sense, been prepared for the advent of the obscene peos at 124. Nor is the principle of risqué foreplay restricted to this instance, this play or indeed this lexical item.

**Selling Pigs, Telling Porkies: The choiroi of Acharnians**

To broaden our canvas, let us turn to Acharnians and another scene notorious for its sexual content and obscene language. The relevant passage is Ach. 729–835, where the starving Megarian comes to Dicaeopolis’ new, makeshift marketplace with his two daughters. Within a few lines of his arrival, the Megarian announces his plan to disguise and sell the girls as choiroi (739). At this stage, it is not clear whether the feminine noun ἡ choiros, “piglet,” is meant or the masculine ho choiros, a “popular slang expression” for female genitalia. The stage action, however, with the girls dressing themselves in false hooves and snouts, provides a firm steer that choiros signifies “piglet.” Initially, then, the exploitation of choiros as a double entendre that occurs later in the scene is only a tantalizing possibility.

Once the girls are disguised, Dicaeopolis enters, and he and the Megarian discuss various matters briefly before turning their attention to the girls (764). When the

39 μέγας and παχύς are also in conjunction to describe the male member at Ach. 787, Pax 1351 and Ec. 1047–8. On the use of παχύς in these lines, see also Dover, Aristophanic Comedy (above, n. 2), p. 61.
40 Henderson, Maculate Muse (above, n. 1), p. 131. On the (essentially comic) spread of χοῖρος in extant literature, see S.D. Olson (ed.), Aristophanes Acharnians (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 261 (who further states that there is no primary evidence to support Henderson’s claim—based on Ach. 781–2—that the word designates “the pink, hairless cunt of young girls”).
Megarian brings one of his daughters out of the sack in which she has been concealed, Dicaeopolis reacts incredulously to the assertion that these are *choirous* ... *mustikas*, “pigs for the Mysteries,” the feminine adjective here indicating that *choiros* is to be understood “piglet.” As the conversation progresses, however, and Dicaeopolis continues to express doubts about his interlocutor’s claim that the girls are piglets, the gender of *choiros* is mostly left unspecified.\(^{41}\) The scene is thus set for the comic denouement at 771–3, where the Megarian says:

> ἀλλὰ μὰν,
> αἱ λῃς, περίδου μοι παρὶ θυμιτὸν ἁλῶν,
> αἱ μὴ ἑτὶν οὕτως χοῖρος Ἑλλάνων νόμῳ.

I tell you what:

if you like, I’ll bet you some salt flavored with thyme

that this is a porker, according to Hellenic usage.

This time *choiros* is used in apposition to the masculine pronoun *houtos* (“this”), suggesting that the word is to be understood in its sexual sense—a point reinforced by the Megarian’s appeal to “Hellenic usage” (Ἕλλανων νόμῳ).\(^{42}\)

This episode thus features an intricate build-up to the point where the earthy sense of *choiros* is revealed. Not that this use of a crude *double entendre* will necessarily have come as a huge surprise to the audience. In particular, the very presence of the girls must have raised expectations that sexual language was on its way (cf. the “mute nude female characters” discussed by Zweig who routinely appear as sexual objects in Aristophanes).\(^{43}\) It is striking, however, that only now—following this playful *choiros*

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41 While no gender is specified at 767, the Megarian does use a feminine adjective in 768, Μεγαρικά, in answer to Dicaeopolis’ question, “Where is this piglet from?” (ποικιλή χοῖρος ἢδς.). In 769, 770 and 771, while no definite article or adjective indicates the gender of χοῖρος, the word is nevertheless to be found (teasingly?) in apposition to versions of the feminine pronoun, ἢδς. On these lines, see Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (above, n. 2), pp. 63–5.

42 I thus find myself slightly at odds with Olson, *Acharnians* (above, n. 40) ad loc., who suggests that the masculine οὗτος of 773 amounts only to a “tacit … acknowledgement” of the sexual meaning of χοῖρος, with “explicit acknowledgement” delayed until 782. Certainly it is possible that some members of the audience will have got the joke sooner than others—perhaps even creating the kind of divided laughter that S. Goldhill, “The Thrill of Misplaced Laughter,” in” E. Medda, M. S. Mirto, M. P. Pattoni (eds.), *ΚΩΜΟΙΔΟΤΡΑΓΟΙΔΙΑ: Intersezioni del tragico e del comico nel V secolo a.C.* (Pisa: Einaudi, 2006), pp. 96–9, suggests was potentially provoked by comic moments in tragedy.

43 See B. Zweig, “The Mute, Nude Female Characters in Aristophanes’ Plays,” in: A. Richlin (ed.), *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 73–89, esp. 77–8; A.H. Sommerstein, “Nudity, Obscenity, Power” (above, n. 7). Aristophanes’ playful use of language, allusion and metaphor throughout *Acharnians* may also serve to heighten the audience’s awareness of the punning possibilities of *choiros*: certainly the initial exchange between Dicaeopolis and the Megarian is characterized by word-play and apparent misunderstanding.

Με. αὐτὰ ἵπτι χοίρος;  
Δι. νὸν γε χοίρος φαίνεται·  
ἀτὰρ ἐκτραφείς γε κύσθος ἔσται.

Sommerstein, somewhat tamely, translates:

Meg. Is that a porker?  
Dic. It’s got the look of a “porker’ now;  
but when it’s mature, it’ll be a beaver (*kusthos*).

Here, then, in a different play and with a different lexical item, we find a pattern similar to the one in *Lysistrata*. To spell this out once more, *double entendres* and sexual allusions are employed with increasing intensity before the primary obscenity is introduced. Put another way, the obscene word is only “slipped in” after extensive lubrication.

**“Build-up,” Climax and Continuation**

It may come as little surprise that this pattern is repeated throughout Aristophanes’ plays. Indeed, other obscene lexical items in *Lysistrata* occur in similar circumstances. There is a lengthy build-up to Cinesias’ use of *peos*, for instance, while in his state of sexual desperation (928), and the Proboulos’ use of the same word at 414 holds particular interest, since it might be usefully thought of as an example of the phenomenon in miniature. In his speech, which is replete with *double entendres*, the Proboulos imitates how husbands unwittingly ask to be cuckolded (408–18).

“ὦ χρυσοχόε, τὸν ὄρμον ἰν ἐπεσκέψασας,  
ὀρχουμένης μου τῆς γυναικὸς ἐσπέρας  
ἡ βάλανος ἐκπέπτηκεν ἐκ τοῦ τρήματος.  
ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐν ἔστ’ εἰς Σαλαμίνα πλευστέα·  
σὺ δ’ ἴν σχολάσῃ, πάση τέχνη πρὸς ἐσπέραν

44 κύσθος appears just four times in Aristophanes: twice in this passage and at *Lys*. 1158 and *Ra*. 430. See further Bain, “Six Verbs” (above, n. 6), p. 52; Robson, *Humour, Obscenity and Aristophanes* (above, n. 5), p. 179 n. 146.  
45 The obscenity prior to this one, ἔστυκα (869), is addressed by Cinesias to Lysistrata in *absentia*. Once the conversation between Myrrhine and Cinesias begins at *Lys*. 870, sexual matters are discussed only in euphemistic terms prior to 928, e.g. “the rites of Aphrodite” (τὰ τῆς ἀφροδίτης ἱέρ’, 898) and “lying down” (κακλίνηθι, 904; κατακλίνῃς, 906; κακακλίνε, 910; κατακλινώ, 918). That said, Cinesias presumably has an erect phallus during the scene, to which attention is specifically drawn at 937 (and possibly 876).
“Goldsmith, that necklace you mended—
last night my wife was dancing,
and the pin’s slipped out of the hole.
Now I’ve got to cross over to Salamis;
so if you’re free, could you without fail come over in the evening
and fit a pin in her hole, please?”

Another man talks like this to a strapping shoemaker
A young man with a cock (peos) that’s certainly no chicken:
“Shoemaker, it’s my wife’s foot—
the strap is hurting her little piggy-wiggy,
because it’s tender; so, in the middle of the day,
could you come over and loosen it up so as to make it wider?”

Worthy of note in this short passage is how the sexual language is sustained—albeit briefly—once the primary obscenity, peos, is introduced.46

The Probloulos’ speech contains a single obscene lexical item, which is both built up to and followed by double entendres. But as with obscenities out of nowhere, when the build-up technique is employed, it is also common for one obscenity to follow hot on the heels of another. After the peos of Lys. 124, for example, we find another peos just 10 lines later. Calonice says (133–5):

Anything else you want—anything! And if need be, I’m willing
to walk through fire—rather than cock (peos)!
There is nothing like it, Lysistrata dear!

Similarly, following the kusthos of Ach. 782 there is a flurry of risqué expression—including the punning use of choiros once more and kerkos, “tail,” as a

46 It is shortly after this speech, too, that we find the much-discussed threat of Lys. 440, where one of the old women tells the Probloulos that if the archers lay a hand on Lysistrata, “you’ll get such a pasting you’ll shit (ἐπιχεσεῖ) all over the place!” As Sommerstein, “Nudity, Obscenity, Power” (above, n. 7), p. 13, notes, this is the only instance outside Ec. (and only one of four examples in the whole of Aristophanes) where a woman utters an obscenity in the presence of men; cf. McClure, Spoken Like a Woman (above, n. 7), pp. 210–11. To be sure, the Probloulos’ peos is not as climactic as the other “build-up” obscenities discussed here.
"double entendre" for “penis”\textsuperscript{47}—capped by another \textit{kusthos} just seven lines later (784–9).

\textit{Δι.} ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ θύσιμός ἐστι αὐτηγί;  
\textit{Με.} σά μάν;  
\textit{Δι.} πά δ’ οὐχὶ θύσιμός ἐστι;  
\textit{Με.} κέρκον οὐκ ἔχει.

\textit{Δι.} νέα γάρ ἔστιν. ἀλλὰ δελφακομένα  
\textit{Με.} ἐξεῖ μεγάλαν τε καὶ παχιάν κήρυβράν.  
\textit{Δι.} ἄλλ’ α’ τράφειν λῆς, ἀδε τοι χύρος καλά.  
\textit{Δι.} ὡς ξυγγενής ὁ κύθος αὐτῆς υπάρχα.

\textit{Dic.} [\textit{Inspecting one of the “piglets”}] But this one isn’t even fit for sacrifice.  
\textit{Meg.} Why not?  
\textit{Dic.} How isn’t it fit for sacrifice?  
\textit{Meg.} No, it’s young. When it’s full-grown it’ll have a long, thick, red one.  
[\textit{Bringing out the other girl} But if you want one to rear, here’s a fine porker.  
\textit{Dic.} What a family resemblance her cunt (\textit{kusthos}) has to the other one’s!

In both the \textit{Lysistrata} and \textit{Acharnians} passages, then, the introduction of the primary obscenity is followed by further obscenity and sexual allusion. That is to say, once Aristophanes has used a lengthy build-up technique to slip one dirty word in, he routinely finds room for at least one more.

\section*{Harvest and Holiday: The Blessings of \textit{Peace}}

In light of this observation—and to take matters a stage further—let us look at one last scene in which Aristophanes carefully builds up to the introduction of a primary obscenity, \textit{Peace} 819–908.\textsuperscript{48} In this passage, which follows directly after the \textit{parabasis}, Trygaeus arrives back from heaven bringing with him two young women, Opora and Theoria (or as Olson suggests, “Harvest” and “Holiday”).\textsuperscript{49} With the presence on stage of “mute nude female characters,” expectations of obscene expression are surely raised.\textsuperscript{50} Trygaeus’ slave arrives at 824, and the subsequent exchange initially takes the form of a question-and-answer routine between the stooge slave and the funny-man, Trygaeus, the tone of which may be judged from its beginning (824–6):

\textsuperscript{47} Pace L. Edmunds, “Aristophanes’ \textit{Acharnians},” \textit{Yale Classical Studies} 26 (1980), p. 17, who suggests that “tail” here stands for “clitoris.”  
\textsuperscript{48} For a sustained discussion of this passage, see Robson, \textit{Humour, Obscenity and Aristophanes} (above, n. 5), pp. 132–86.  
\textsuperscript{49} Olson, \textit{Peace} (above, n. 31), on 819–20.  
\textsuperscript{50} See n. 43 above.
The banter continues in a similar vein for 20 lines before the presence of the girls is acknowledged (842). At this point, Trygaeus announces that he is going to marry Opora, and instructs his slave to take her inside and begin preparations for the wedding. (Marriage has its own erotic connotations, reinforced here by reference to the κουρίδιον λέχος, “nuptial couch,” at 844). Once introduced, the sexual theme is developed further in the lines that follow, with the slave (who has now assumed the role of funny-man) suggesting that the gods perhaps act as pimps (πορνοβοσκόυσ’, 849), if Opora and Theoria have been residing in heaven. So far, the sexuality has been muted, but in 851–5 the expectations raised by the presence of the naked women are finally realized, when the audience is treated to its first full-blown double entendre.

51 In vase painting, for example, the bride becomes an increasingly eroticized figure in wedding imagery as the 5th century progresses: thus R.F. Sutton Jr., “Pornography and Persuasion on Attic Poetry,” in: Richlin, Pornography and Representation (above, n. 43), pp. 19–20.


53 Λείχειν is used elsewhere in Aristophanes to denote cunnilingus (e.g. Eq. 1285; cf. fr. 425). With this double entendre, the slave presumably points at his phallus: thus Robson, Humour, Obscenity and Aristophanes (above, n. 5), p. 161.
The dialogue reaches something of a climax here, marked by a brief sung exchange between the chorus and Trygaeus, in which the bridegroom-to-be looks forward to sleeping with (ξυνών) Opora while holding her “titties” (τιτθίων, 863) close, while the chorus offer up a risqué kinein (“screw”, 867). After this, the slave and Trygaeus resume their dialogue, and the obscenity comes thick and fast. In a now familiar pattern, we find peos, “cock,” three lines into their exchange (870), followed by a welter of double entendres, sexual allusions and, significantly, further primary obscenities: “quadrennial ass” (πρωκτοπεντετηρίδα, 876), “cock” (πέι, 880 and 898), a risqué “thrust against during sex” (προσκίνησεται, 902) and an obscene “with retracted foreskin”/“with a hard-on” (ἄπεψωλημένοι, 903). These last three items occur within a wild and lengthy sexual assault fantasy voiced by Trygaeus and focused on the mute, nude Theoria.

In this scene from Peace, we thus have an extended example of what was observed earlier: sexual language and obscenity being sustained once an initial primary obscenity has been carefully introduced. The pattern comprises build-up, climax and continuation. In these lengthy build-up sequences, it is as if the right to use obscene language must be carefully fought for, but once the battle is won, the victory is fully exploited.

Further Reflections on the “Build-up” Technique

The advantages to Aristophanes of this “build-up” technique are numerous. With it, he is able to tantalize his audience, indulge in extended word-play, create expectation and then achieve a verbal climax which he can go on to extend and exploit. Why the poet uses this technique on some occasions and not on others is less clear, and it may be most useful to speak in terms of tendencies, which link some but not all the passages concerned. First, the “build-up” technique tends to be used when sexualized—often mute and nude—female characters are onstage. The Peace passage fits this model, as does the scene from the end of Acharnians in which Dicaeopolis and his

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54 On the (restrained) tone of ξυνών and τιτθίων, see Robson, Humour, Obscenity and Aristophanes (above, n. 5), pp. 168–9. Olson, Peace (above, n. 31), on 863, comments that this diminutive of τιτθός “often has erotic connotations.”

55 It is often the case that manuscripts offer variant readings when it comes to βινεῖν/κινεῖν, but as Bain, “Six Verbs” (above, n. 6), p. 64, points out, no manuscript offers βινεῖν in this instance.

56 See above on the cognate κινεῖν and nn. 16 and 17. προοικεῖν is also used in a sexual sense at Lys. 227, Pherecr. fr. 138.3 and Xenarch. fr. 4.24: see Bain, “Six Verbs” (above, n. 6), p. 66–7.

57 Henderson, Maculate Muse (above, n. 1), p. 110, comments that ἄπεψωλεῖν “appears in uniformly coarse contexts:” cf. Ach. 161, 592; Lys. 1136; Pl. 295.

naked prostitutes share the stage with the wounded Lamachus (Ach. 1190–1226; cf. e.g. V. 1326–85); the Lysistrata passage too features women, albeit fully clothed, and sexualized girls also feature in the choiros-scene from Acharnians in the form of the Megarian’s dressed-up daughters. Second, the technique tends to be used when sexuality is simply part of the plot, most notably in Lysistrata, where obscenity accompanies the proposal for the sex strike and Cinesias’ sexual frustration as he is teased by his wife (870–928). But while the “build-up” technique is characteristically employed in such circumstances, obscenity is not always built up to in this way.59 Aristophanes’ literary techniques are rarely predictable or uniform throughout the plays, and both the “obscenity out of nowhere” and the “build-up” technique are arguably best viewed as resources on which he is wont to draw but by which his dramatic vision is neither restricted nor compromised. The length and intricacy of the build-up sequences also vary greatly, but this is perhaps only what we should expect from a poet who is not only responsive to dramatic context (as most playwrights surely are) but for whose art diversity and unpredictability are central features.

Conclusion

To conclude, I hope to have made some headway in mapping how Aristophanes “slips in” obscene words into his plays and to have identified two significant patterns: the “obscenity out of nowhere” (both “abrupt” and “softened”) and the “build-up” technique. As well as being revealing of Aristophanes’ dramatic and artistic practices, this analysis puts center stage the issues raised at the beginning of the chapter regarding how the audience is invited to engage with drama in performance. One key point is just how conscious Aristophanes is at times to manipulate spectator response, either warming the audience up and tantalizing them as he builds up to a climactic obscenity, or shocking them to signal abuse, attack, crudeness, freedom from inhibition, buffoonery or the like. A second is the challenge of assessing the relative taboo connected to different “obscene” lexical items. While Adams is no doubt right that “[i]n a dead language it is not possible to classify the degrees of offensiveness with any precision,”60 there is nevertheless scope for further research here, our main methods of assessing the resonance of lexical items being data on their distribution in extant literary texts (such as Bain compiles in “Six Verbs of Sexual Congress”) and careful observation of the context in which obscenities find use.61 I hope to have made a preliminary contribution to such discussions by suggesting one lens through which

59 See Lys. 1115-88, for example, where Diallage’s presence elicits obscenities at 1136 (ἀπεψωλημένος) and 1148 (πρωκτός) that contrast starkly with Lysistrata’s sombre speech.
60 Adams, Latin Sexual Vocabulary (above, n. 5), p. 2.
61 Bain, “Six Verbs” (above, n. 6).
to view the use of obscenities in Aristophanes. What the preceding discussion most effectively underlines, however, is the extent to which Jeffrey Henderson’s work still inspires and underpins scholarship on Old Comic obscenity. 40 years after its publication, *The Maculate Muse* not only remains a vital point of reference, but continues to stimulate new research and generate fresh perspectives on Aristophanes and his dirty words.

The fact that Aristophanes considers items such as πέος and suitable candidates to feature as the climax of the build-up technique plausibly suggests that they should be placed toward the more obscene end of the spectrum, for example (i.e. worth building up to)—notwithstanding the fact that both items are elsewhere used more casually, too, as “obscenities out of nowhere,” e.g. πέος at Nu. 734 (discussed above) and the Chorus’ κόσθος at Ra. 430.
Heinz-Günther Nesselrath

Ancient Comedy and Historiography: Aristophanes Meets Herodotus

Abstract: This paper is mainly concerned with two passages in Aristophanes (Ach. 524–9 and Av. 1124–62) in which the comic poet is often presumed to have alluded to or even parodied Herodotus. While in the case of the Acharnians passage this has been much contested, there is almost no contestation in the case of Birds. I try to show that in Acharnians Aristophanes relied on the knowledge of a lecture—or lectures—by Herodotus, while for Birds he used a written text of Herodotus’ work. I then evaluate what this might mean for Herodotus’ publication date and his general standing in late 5th-century Athens.

1. Herodotus’ impact on contemporary Athenian culture

Few things can be considered reasonably certain regarding the place and time in which Herodotus is supposed to have written his Histories, the first fully preserved Greek prose work of truly impressive size. A majority of scholars nowadays seems to agree that Herodotus gave the work its final shape during the final years of his life, but there is no agreement as to when these final years should be dated: in the first years of the Archidamian War, in its final years, or even after its end? Nor is the place

2 In recent decades the most vocal proponent for a late publication date of the Histories (after 421 BCE) has been Charles Fornara, “Evidence for the date of Herodotus’ publication,” Journal of Hellenic Studies 91 (1971), pp. 32–4, basing his argument on (a) three Herodotean passages that in his opinion could not have been written before 424 or 421 BCE, respectively (in 6.98.2, Herodotus presents a comprehensive view of the reigns of three Persian kings, Darius, Xerxes and Artaxerxes, the last of whom died in 424 BCE; in 7.235.2, the consideration of an anti-Spartan epiteichismos of the island of Cythera is presumably connected with Nicias’ occupation of Cythera in 424 BCE; 9.73.3 evokes the fact that the Attic deme Deceleia was spared from Spartan destructions during the Archidamian War, a statement that could only have been made after the peace of 421 BCE had been concluded); (b) denying any Herodotus parody in Acharnians (Fornara, “Evidence,” pp. 24–8; see also Charles Fornara, “Herodotus’ knowledge of the Archidamian War,” Hermes 109 (1981), pp. 153–5), while affirming extensive parody of Herodotus in Birds (Fornara, “Evidence,” p. 29), and concluding from this that Herodotus’ works became known only shortly before the staging of the latter; (c) trying to show that Euripides too shows a knowledge of Herodotus in plays written and staged in the years 414–412 BCE (Electra, Iphigenia in Tauris and Helen; Fornara, “Evidence,” pp. 30–1). Against Fornara, Justus Cobet, “Wann wurde Herodots Darstellung der Perserkriege publiziert?,” Hermes 105 (1977), pp. 2–27 (see also by the same
of Herodotus’ final literary activities clear: Did he, as ancient biographical tradition tells us, leave Mainland Greece for good in 444/3 BCE and settle down in Thurii for the rest of his life? Or did he come back to Athens (or other places on the mainland) for shorter or even longer periods? Certainly, as Robert Fowler has pointed out, “nothing precludes return visits to Athens.”

There is also more or less general agreement that Herodotus’ visit to Periclean Athens—i.e. at a time when the city was at the height of its political power and cultural influence in the Pentecontaetia—had a decisive impact on his outlook and work. The reverse, however, seems to be true as well: Herodotus—and what he had to say about the history (and geography and customs) of both Greeks and non-Greeks—had an impact on Athenian intellectuals. Herodotean influence on Attic Tragedy is widely acknowledged: there is the famous case of Sophocles’ Antigone privileging even her

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3 The inhabitants of Thurii in any case used to show Herodotus’ grave to foreigners (see Jacoby, “Herodotos” [above, n. 2], p. 214).
6 See most recently Simon Hornblower, “Herodotus’ influence in antiquity,” in: Carolyn Dewald, John Marincola (eds.), The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, reprinted with corrections 2008), pp. 306–7. The efforts of Fornara, “Evidence” (above, n. 2), pp. 30–1, to show that several plays of Euripides exhibit knowledge of Herodotus have already been mentioned (above, n. 2), although his attempt to use this as an argument for a late publication date has rightly been greeted with scepticism (see Hornblower, “Herodotus’ influence,” p. 307: “Talk of Euripides’ ‘sudden awareness of Herodotus’ is much too strong”). An unknown tragic poet made a play out of Herodotus’ tale about Candaules and Gyges (Hdt. 1.7.1–13.2; TrGF adesp. 664). There has been much controversy in the past as to whether this tragedy might even have pre-dated Herodotus (see Asheri in:
dead brother over other relatives along the lines of argument by which the wife of the Persian noble Intaphrenes chooses not to save her husband but her brother.7

2. Herodotus and Aristophanic Comedy I: Acharnians

Can we find similar traces in Attic Comedy? There are in fact two plays by Aristophanes in which scholars believe they have found evidence for the use of Herodotus by the comic playwright: Acharnians of 425 BCE and Birds of 414 BCE. The following pages take a closer look at these cases.

Acharnians is a controversial case. Older commentators believed that a considerable number of passages in the play pointed toward Herodotus, starting with verses 85–7 and 91–2,8 both from the report of the Athenian ambassadors returning from


7 See David Asheri, Silvio M. Medaglia, Augusto Fraschetti, Erodoto, Le storie, vol. III: Libro III: la Persia (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1990, p. 336 (= Asheri et al., Commentary [above, n. 6], p. 506); Stephanie R. West, “Sophocles’ Antigone and Herodotus Book Three,” in: Jasper Griffin (ed.), Sophocles Revisited. Essays presented to Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 109–10, 129–31; and most recently Hornblower, “Herodotus’ influence” (above, n. 6), pp. 306–7. Several scholars (most recently Peter Riemer, Sophokles, Antigone—Götterwille und menschliche Freiheit, Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur Mainz, Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse 1991 no. 12, p. 45 n. 85) have drawn attention to the fact that the reasoning of Intaphrenes’ wife in Hdt. 3.119.6 is also found in Eur. Alc. 293–4 (Gustav Adolf Seeck, Euripides, Alkestis, Hrsg., übers. und kommentiert [Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2008], p. 99, notes the similarity of these verses to Soph. Ant. 905–12). Alcestis was staged in 438 BCE, and for Sophocles’ Antigone a date in the late 440s BCE is usually assumed (based on Soph. test. 25 Radt = Argum. I Soph. Ant.), although also contested (see e.g. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Sophocles, Ajax /Electra /Oedipus Tyrannus [Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1994], p. 8). Taken together, however, these curious traces of an argument from Hdt. 3.119.6 surfacing in both Antigone and Alcestis might point to the fact that the Intaphrenes story became known around these years in Athens via Herodotus. See also Carolyn Dewald, Rachel Kitzinger, “Herodotus, Sophocles and the woman who wanted her brother saved,” in: Dewald et al., Cambridge Companion (above, n. 6), pp. 122–9.

their mission to Persia: in 85–7 they mention as a colorful detail that they were served “oxen baked whole in the oven” (trans. Sommerstein), to which one can compare Hdt. 1.133.1 (where wealthy Persians are said to entertain guests on their birthdays with “ox, horse, camel and ass,” ὀλούς ὀπτούς ἐν καμίνοιοι), while in 92 they introduce a Persian ambassador as “the Eye of the King,” which can be connected with Hdt. 1.114.2 (where young Cyrus plays at being king, designating one of his companions ὀφθαλμὸν βασιλέος εἶναι). More recent scholarship has rightly been suspicious of making too much of these connections; surely Athenians of Aristophanes’ time did not need Herodotus to tell them that certain high functionaries of the Persian imperial administration were called “eyes of the king” and that well-to-do Persians baked whole animals in their ovens.

The case is different with Ach. 524–9, which are part of Dicaeopolis’ great speech in which he defends his decision to seek an individual peace with the Spartans, while all of Athens is (and continues to be) at war with them. After assuring his audience—both the hostile Acharnian charcoal-burners and the Athenians in the Theater—that there is no love lost between himself and the Spartans (509–12), Dicaeopolis points out that certain Athenian “bent, ill-struck pieces of humanity” (517; trans. Sommerstein) took the first step toward the outbreak of the current war by making imports

Great King’s palace (Ἐτεικένων δ’ εἰς τὰ βασίλεια Ἑλλήνων) in Ach. 80 is compared by him to Herodotus’ statement in 5.53 that it takes three months (“ninety days”) to travel from Sardis to the King’s palace at Susa. The ambassadors’ follow-up detail—that on their arrival the king was absent because he had retreated to the privy for eight months (Ach. 81–2 ἀλλ’ εἰς ἀπόσατον ὑσσετε στρατιῶν λαβών, / κάθεξεν ὀκτὼ μήνας ἐπὶ χρυσῶν ὀρῶν)—is connected by Perrotta with Herodotus’ observation in 1.192 that the whole of Asia provides nourishment to the King for eight months of the year. Then follows the detail of “oxen baked whole in the oven” (see above) in Ach. 86, while in the big bird called phenax in Ach. 88–9 (καὶ ναὶ μὰ Δί’ ὄρνιν τριπλάσιον Κλεωνύμου / παρέθηκεν ἤμιν· ὄνομα δ’ ἦν αὐτῷ φέναξ) Perrotta detects a cunning allusion to the description of the phoinix in Herodotus’ Egyptian Logos (2.73). All this leads Perrotta to conclude: “tutta la scena dell’ ambasciatore è fatta a spese di Erodoto” (112). In several cases, however, these allusions are far from obvious, and we might well ask how long it has taken Perrotta himself to find them out—surely much longer than an Athenian in the Theatre had to hit upon them while the play was swiftly moving on.

9 Alan H. Sommerstein (ed.), Aristophanes, Acharnians (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1980), pp. 161, 162 only mentions the Herodotean parallels without drawing conclusions; Asheri, Erodoto I (above, n. 6), p. 337 (= Asheri et al., Commentary [above, n. 6], p. 160) on Hdt. 1.114.2, does not even mention the Herodotean parallel (and points out that the title “Eye of the King” was known to the Greeks at least since the time of Aeschylus), while Asheri, Erodoto I, p. 344 (= Asheri et al., Commentary, p. 168) on Hdt. 1.133.1, judges the hypothesis of an Aristophanic parody of this passage to have little weight. S. Douglas Olson (ed.), Aristophanes, Acharnians (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. liii–iv, also sees little significance in these coincidences. A lone dissenter is Evans, “Publication date” (above, n. 2), p. 146 (= Evans, Beginnings [above, n. 2], 90), who regards Ach. 85–7 and 92 as “admitted parodies”.

10 See also Hornblower, “Herodotus’ influence” (above, n. 6), p. 307 (“More controversial are the supposedly Herodotean passages near the beginning of Acharnians of 425. Little weight can be put on these …”).
from Megara illegal (515–22), and that the next phase of escalation was started by some drunk young Athenians who went to Megara and “stole” the prostitute Simaetha from there (524–5). After that, the Megarians retaliated by abducting two hookers from the household of Aspasia, the consort of the Athenian political leader Pericles (526–7), and this led to the start of the war (528–9), because Pericles enacted sweeping legislation against Megara, and the hard-pressed Megarians turned to the Spartans for help.

This sketch of reciprocal abductions of females leading into a major military confrontation has reminded many scholars of the famous opening chapters of Herodotus’ *Histories* (1.1–5), in which one abduction of a Greek princess (Io) by Phoenicians (1.1.1–4) is countered by two abductions of a Phoenician princess (Europa) and a Colchian one (Medea) by Greeks (1.2.1–3). This in turn prompts a non-Greek abduction (by the Trojan prince Paris) of a Greek queen (Helen; 1.3.1–2), to which the Greeks respond with all-out war against Troy (1.4.1–3). Commentators on both Aristophanes and Herodotus have assumed that *Ach.* 524–9 parodies Hdt. 1.1–5, but in recent times several interpreters have voiced objections. Fornara denied that Aristophanes intended parody of Herodotus in *Ach.* 524–9 (not least because this would undercut his attempt to date the publication of Herodotus’ work only shortly before *Birds* in 414 BCE). MacDowell believes that “it is most unlikely that many Athenians were familiar enough with it [i.e. Herodotus’ book] to be able to recognize a parody of one particular part of it unless Aristophanes had given very obvious signals indeed to warn them that a parody of Herodotos was coming. But in fact there are no such signals … Dikaieopolis does not use any Herodotean vocabulary or turns of phrase … There is really nothing in the speech which bears any resemblance to Herodotos at all.”

Johnson points out that Dicaeopolis’ story about tit-for-tat abductions leading

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11 Van Leeuwen, *Acharnenses* (above, n. 8), p. 91 ad *Ach.* 524; Olson, *Acharnians* (above, n. 9), pp. liii (“almost certainly a parody of Hdt. 1.1–5.2”), 209 (“seemingly … a parody of Hdt. i.1–5.2”). Starkie, *Acharnians* (above, n. 8), p. 109, however, was “not convinced that it [i.e. the allusion to Herodotus in *Ach.* 524–9] is intentional.” Interestingly, Sommerstein, *Acharnians* (above, n. 8) does not mention Herodotus when commenting on this passage.


13 Fornara, “Evidence” (above, n. 2), p. 28, and “Herodotus’ knowledge” (above, n. 2), pp. 153–5. In the latter paper, Fornara even considers the possibility that Herodotus might have taken his string of reciprocal abductions of women from *Acharnians*—a clear case of special pleading for transparent reasons.

to war “makes sense and is humorous without any knowledge of Herodotus.”\footnote{15} Most recently, Pelling has underlined (like McDowell) “the difficulty of thinking that Aristophanes could have expected his audience ... to catch the parody;”\footnote{16} he accordingly argues that “we should see not so much Aristophanes parodying Herodotus, but rather Herodotus and Aristophanes doing the same thing here. Both are ‘parodying’ popular mentality ... That pattern of popular historical explanation is what matters here.”\footnote{17}

The critics just quoted rightly stress that there are no unequivocal signs\footnote{18} in the wording of the \textit{Acharnians} passage that would make a parody of Herodotus in this passage a water-tight certainty. On the other hand, it remains tempting to see here a clever reworking of the Herodotean sequence by Aristophanes. Not only is the framing of the respective passages similar—both are set within a discussion about who is the guilty party in the development of a major war—but the core of the narrative sequence (abduction followed by abduction, finally followed by war\footnote{19}) shows remarkable parallels, possibly too remarkable to be coincidence. Moreover, both authors apply a similar “procedure of debasement” to their material. Herodotus strips his heroines of their mythical aura and debases them into more or less passive objects of their male abductors: Aristophanes tops this by replacing the princesses with prostitutes.\footnote{20} As long as we can point to no other stories of similar content (and no such story seems to have been pointed out so far), it remains plausible that Aristophanes did not develop his abduction sequence by himself but took inspiration from Herodotus. The argument put forward by McDowell and Pelling, that many (or even all) Athenians would

\footnote{15} William A. Johnson, “Oral performance and the composition of Herodotus' \textit{Histories},” \textit{Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies} 35 (1994), p. 244, although he hastens to add: “This is not necessarily an argument against the passage as a parody of Herodotus.”

\footnote{16} Pelling, \textit{Literary texts} (above, n. 2), p. 154.

\footnote{17} Pelling, \textit{Literary texts} (above, n. 2), p. 155.

\footnote{18} For the unsuccessful attempt of Sansone, “Date,” to detect such signs, see above, n. 14.

\footnote{19} Surely the Aristophanic sequence (two abductions) is less elaborate than the Herodotean one (four abductions), but this may be accounted for by the fact that Dicaeopolis’ plea in front of the hostile Acharnians had to proceed at a swifter pace than Herodotus’ nicely developed tales. Perrotta, \textit{Erodoto parodiato} (above, n. 8), p. 108 has pointed out that the fact that in Aristophanes the Megarians abduct two Athenian hookers in retaliation for the Athenians’ abduction of one of theirs may not be fortuitous but consciously reflect that in Herodotus one abduction of a Greek woman (Io) is followed by the abduction of two non-Greek ones (Europa and Medea), before the Asian side retaliates by abducting Helena.

\footnote{20} This, too, has already been pointed out by Perrotta, “Erodoto parodiato” (above, n. 8), p. 108.
not have been able to recognize this Herodotean inspiration in *Acharnians* is in the last resort only the statement of a belief that is difficult to prove. Certainly many Athenians would not have recognized the Herodotus parallel and could still have enjoyed Dicaeopolis’ colourful tale of how abducted women of dubious propriety unleashed the Peloponnesian War. But the same might be claimed for many other Aristophanic parodies, i.e. that even if their sometimes subtle “intertextual” dimension was not discovered, the play could be enjoyed nonetheless. Even today we can grasp the fun in *Thesmophoriazusae* without having to read exhaustive commentaries on all the Euripides parodies contained in the play.

The absence of any verbal echo of Herodotus in the *Acharnians* passage may nonetheless be significant, namely for the way in which Aristophanes (and other Athenians besides) had got to know Herodotus’ tale about mythical heroines’ abductions leading to war. There are various reports from antiquity to the effect that Herodotus gave lectures about the contents of his work. The reliability of these reports has been called into question, but the fact itself can hardly be doubted, as there are e.g. still indications in the extant *Histories* that Herodotus inserted comparisons of geographical features in Asia Minor, Attica and Southern Italy to give the audiences he lectured to in Asia, Attica or Southern Italy an understanding of similar features in lands unknown to them. There has also been debate about the relationship between these lectures and the extant text of the *Histories*, but there seems to be widespread agreement that Herodotus presented at least part of the material he (later) put together in the *Histories* in earlier lectures. In fact, one might regard the

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21 See Jacoby, “Herodotos” (above, n. 2), p. 278.
22 Johnson, “Oral performance” (above, n. 15) has argued forcefully against the idea that Herodotus’ lectures were based more or less on the text of the *Histories* as we still have them (264: “A public performance by Herodotus based on his *Histories* simply cannot be demonstrated”). Johnson, however, nowhere considers the possibility that Herodotus may have based his lectures on texts he had written down much earlier, perhaps already in the 440s, and which might have been considerably different in structure and size from the *Histories* we possess. On this, see the sensible positions of Michael A. Flower, John Marincola (eds.), *Herodotus, Histories Book IX* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 3 (“it is ... likely that his work became known to the public largely through recitations by the author ... much of his work would have been known from oral delivery”) and Angus M. Bowie (ed.), *Herodotus, Histories Book VIII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 30 (“we might guess that like the sophists he made money by peripatetic lecturing ... presumably it was then [i.e. “after his departure for Thurii”] that he shaped what had been the material for successful lectures into a continuous narrative”).
theme of his opening chapters as well-suited to a public lecture, especially in an environment that may have debated such questions with alacrity and eagerness and that was very much in the habit of looking for mythic-aetiological causes of present conditions. With his clever treatment of the “war guilt”-question, Herodotus might first have pandered to such expectations and then strikingly turned them on their head, first giving his listeners a vivid series of abduction tales (with some titillating details thrown in, like Io’s fear of having become pregnant by the Phoenician ship captain or the Persians’ sneering remark that women would not be abducted if they did not want it), and then telling his excited audience that all these tales are just that, i.e. tales, and that he, Herodotus, will now present the one historical figure who “really” started the wrongdoing against Greeks. Such a lecture might well be remembered for its humorous but also provocative content, and might therefore have been regarded by Aristophanes as well as something suitable to be reworked and integrated into a comedy.

3. Herodotus and Aristophanic Comedy II: Birds

While the parodic content of Ach. 524–9 has been much contested, there is well-nigh unanimous agreement that a passage in the second half of Birds was meant to parody passages in Herodotus. After Peisetaerus has proposed that the united birds build a great wall in the middle of the air, explicitly comparing it to the walls of Babylon (Av. 551–2), the completion of the monumental enterprise is reported in Av. 1124–62.

In both passages there are unmistakable signs that not only Herodotus’ description of the building of the walls of Babylon (1.178–9) but other parts of his work as well are targeted. Already in 552 it is said that the birds’ wall is to be built πλίνθοις ὀπταῖς, and kiln-baked bricks figure prominently in Hdt. 1.179.1. In the description of the wall building beginning in Av. 1124, Herodotean echoes become more numerous, and

support (“both ... assume or argue for extensive pre-publication of the Histories”); Olson, Acharnians (above, n. 9), p. liv, also thinks it possible “that Aristophanes may have been acquainted with some portions of Book I, perhaps as a result of recent public readings by Herodotus in Athens.”

24 Although Jacoby, “Herodotos” (above, n. 2), p. 484, would have none of it, humor is certainly an ingredient in Herodotus’ opening chapters; see most recently Carolyn Dewald, “Humour and danger in Herodotus,” in: Dewald et al., Cambridge Companion (above, n. 6), pp. 145–7.

25 A lone dissenter is Asheri, Erodoto I (above, n. 6), p. 370 = Asheri et al., Commentary (above, n. 6), p. 199.

26 It may also be no coincidence that the word πόλισμα in Av. 553, here referring to the result of the proposed construction, is found twice just at the beginning of Herodotus’ Babylon passage (1.178.1, 2), where it is used for Babylon and other Mesopotamian cities. Nan Dunbar (ed.), Aristophanes, Birds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 377, claims that πόλισμα is “common in trag[edy]”, but in fact the word is just as frequent in Herodotus (six times) as in Sophocles and Euripides combined (if we discount Prometheus Bound, even Aeschylus has only five attestations).
what is most interesting, they do not come from just one Herodotus passage but several.\textsuperscript{27}

1125: The messenger calls the completed wall a κάλλιστον ἔργον καὶ μεγαλοπρέπεστατον (the sole instance of the latter superlative in Aristophanes): Herodotus uses μεγαλοπρεπέστατος—which in classical times is very rare—in 7.57.1.\textsuperscript{28}

1127: The birds’ wall is so broad that it can accommodate two chariots drawn by horses the size of the Trojan Horse: this is clearly meant to outdo Herodotus’ statement (1.179.3) that the wall of Babylon was so broad that it could accommodate a chariot drawn by four horses.\textsuperscript{29}

1130: The messenger assures Peisetaerus that he himself measured the enormous height of the wall (ἐμέτρησα αὐτ’ ἐγώ): Herodotus gives similar assurances in 2.127.1 (ταῦτα ... καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐμετρήσαμεν) with regard to the pyramids of Cheops and Chephren.\textsuperscript{30}

1131: The measure given for this height (ἐκατοντορόγυιον) is again meant to outdo Herodotus, as it is twice as high as the ὕψος ... διηκοσίων πῆξεων given by Hdt. 1.178.3 for the height of the Babylonian wall.

1133–4: The messenger boasts that no Αἰγύπτιος / πλινθοφόρος took part in the building of the birds’ wall; the birds did it all by themselves. The “Egyptian brick-carrier” is singled out because Herodotus’ second book is full of Egyptians building impressive monuments. The majority of these monuments are built in stone, but in 2.136.3 King Anysis aims to outdo his predecessors in pyramid-building by erecting an entire pyramid ἐκ πλινθῶν.

1135: The messenger confesses his own astonishment and wonder at the birds building this mighty wall by themselves (ὦστε θαυμάζειν ἐμε). It is a truism that θαυμάζειν also plays a large part in Herodotus’ work: his very first sentence professes the intention of giving ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά their due praise.\textsuperscript{31}

1136–7 (τρισμύριαι / γέρανοι) and 1139 (πελαργοὶ μύριοι): The large numbers of cranes and storks participating in the building are surely to be extended to the other species of birds that take part as well. These numbers again recall the multitude of

\textsuperscript{27} The following paragraphs are much indebted to Dunbar, Birds (above, n. 26), pp. 595–600.

\textsuperscript{28} And possibly a second time, if 6.122.2 is genuine. For the combination of κάλλιστος with another superlative, see Hdt. 1.37.2; 2.136.1, 160.1; 3.20.1, 114, 116.3; 4.53.2, 91.2 (twice); 5.92.2, 7.9.β.1.

\textsuperscript{29} Giuseppe Mastromarco, “Le mura di Temistocle e le mura di Nubicuculia,” Quaderni di Storia 3.6 (1977), pp. 41–50, thinks that the detail of the two chariots points instead to Thucydides 1.93.5 (description of how the Piraeus wall was built by the Athenians at the instigation of Themistocles), but the wording there does not say that two chariots or wagons actually passed beside each other on the top of the wall; see the sceptical commentary of Antonio Maddalena (ed.), Thucydidis Historiarum Liber Primus, Vol. 2 (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1952), p. 208. It is also questionable whether Thucydides’ History (or this part of it) was already published in 414 BCE (when Thucydides himself was in exile).

\textsuperscript{30} Compare also 4.86.4: Herodotus gives his measurements of the Black Sea, Bosporus and Hellespont (οὕτω ... μοι μεμετρέατα).

\textsuperscript{31} Herodotus speaks of his own θωμάζειν with regard to Egyptian monuments in 2.148.6, 155.3, 175.3.
Egyptians involved in the building of the pyramids: in Hdt. 2.124.3, 100,000 men are employed at any one time to build Cheops’ pyramid.

1144: The messenger praises the clever way the birds got clay into basins to make bricks (τοῦτ’ ... ἔξηρήτο ... σοφώτατα); likewise Herodotus repeatedly stresses a particularly clever way of doing something (e.g. 1.63.2, 125.2; 2.4.2; 4.46.2).

1145: A very special reference is the word ὑποτύπτοντες (‘striking under’) used within the description of how bricks are made; the same word is used in Hdt. 2.136.4 for the same process.

The preceding list shows that Herodotean echoes in this Birds passage are surprisingly numerous and, moreover, that they do not take their cue only from one specific passage in the Histories (i.e. the one describing the walls of Babylon) but throw in allusions to Herodotus’ Egyptian logos (especially to where Herodotus refers to Egyptian monuments and their construction) and even contain elements of typically Herodotean writing found in other parts of the Histories as well. These observations make the conclusion that Aristophanes had access to a written edition of Herodotus’ work as a source so that he could put all these details into the Birds passage all but inevitable.

4. The consequences for the dating of Herodotus

If the lines of the preceding argument—that it is plausible that Aristophanes had in mind a lecture by Herodotus about mythical and “real” origins of the enmity between Persians and Greeks and the war against one other that ensued, when he composed Dicaeopolis’ speech in Acharnians about the “real” origins of the Peloponnesian War in 425 BCE, while 11 years later he made use of a written copy of Herodotus’ Histories when composing the description how birds built the mighty wall in the air in Birds—are correct, what conclusions can be drawn regarding the early “editorial history” of Herodotus’ work? Do these findings tip the balance in favor of Fornara’s position (that the Histories were published only a short time before Birds, so that the play could be the first piece of literature influenced by the “new” written Herodotus) or in favor of the position championed already by Jacoby (that the writing down of the Histories was finished by 424 BCE)? At first sight the argument that Aristophanes in 425 BCE made use only of an orally received Herodotus, while in 414 BCE he used a written one, might seem to favor Fornara. But on second thought, Jacoby’s position remains possible: Acharnians would then have been composed while the “written” Herodotus was still in its finishing stages and not yet available. This would, incidentally, tie in nicely with Evans’ position that “the evidence cited thus far would support a date for publication as late as 424 B.C., but not much later.”

32 Evans, “Publication date” (above, n. 2), p. 149 = Evans, Beginnings (above, n. 6), p. 93.
If Evans’ dating is right, we need not be much concerned about the fact that Aristophanes would in this case have waited nine or ten years before making use of the written Herodotus—why should a poet have to use a new work immediately after its publication and not when it suits him? There is, in fact, some evidence that Aristophanes “remembered” Herodotus also in plays after *Birds*. In verse 675 of *Lysistrata* (staged in 411 BCE) there is a reference to the Carian queen Artemisia,33 who had a prominent position in Xerxes’ invasion fleet in 480 BCE, and Herodotus gives her considerable room in his later books;34 so Aristophanes may once again got his clue from Herodotus’ narrative.

All in all, Herodotus seems to have left his imprint on at least three comedies by Aristophanes in the years 425–411 BCE.35 That is not a bad yield, considering that for the poets of Old Comedy, whose overriding subject-matter was the historical present, a historian whose theme is a time that ended about 50 years earlier is not an obvious choice. It is surely to Herodotus’ credit that his work in itself was interesting enough that Aristophanes felt repeatedly compelled to draw inspiration from him.

33 For this reference, see Hornblower, “Herodotus’ influence” (above, n. 6), p. 307. His suggestion that the enticing young prostitute Artemisia, whom Euripides uses in *Thesmophoriazusae* to lure the Scythian archer away from his kinsman (*Th.* 1172–1202; the name “Artemisia” is introduced only in 1200) is also named after Herodotus’ Carian warrior-queen is less convincing; see, however, Jan van Leeuwen, *Aristophanis Thesmophoriazusae cum prolegomenis et commentariis* (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1904), p. 150; Alan H. Sommerstein (ed.), *Aristophanes, Thesmophoriazusae* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1994), p. 235; Colin Austin, S. Douglas Olson (eds.), *Aristophanes, Thesmophoriazusae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 345–6.
34 See 7.99; 8.68–9, 97–8, 93, 101–3.
35 The yield might be higher if more plays of Aristophanes were extant.
Oliver Taplin

Epiphany of a Serious Dionysus in a Comedy?

Abstract: The painting on Cleveland 1899.73, which shows a beautiful monumental head of Dionysus framed by two comic actors, has generally been interpreted as having purely religious significance, with no direct relation to the actual theater. I argue that the epiphany of the goddess Eirene in Aristophanes’ Peace may have been presented in a similar way, and that we probably have here the evocation of a specific scene from an otherwise unknown comedy.

Toward the end of his long life, A.D. Trendall, the great expert on pottery from the Greek West, identified a new artist: the Choregos Painter, as he dubbed him, deserves to be recognised as one of the most talented craftsmen to decorate earlier Apulian red-figured vases. Quite apart from the minutiae of technique on which such attributions are based, this painter shows a fine confidence in draftsmanship and in well-laid-out composition, and a nice yet uncluttered sense of detail. Regrettably, Trendall could firmly identify only three pieces by his superior hand. He included them in the first, chronologically earliest chapter of RVAp, Supp 2, but dated them to probably nearer 380 than 400 BCE.

Two of these three bell-kraters are explicit scenes of comic theater (or “phlyax vases,” as they used to be known). One was excavated at Ruvo di Puglia in 1883 and is now in the Museo Civico Archeologico in Milan: the well-known “Milan Cake-eaters.”

1 An earlier version of this piece was published in Dioniso, Nuova Serie 1 (2011) 120–30. I am most grateful to Dick Green, Martin Revermann and Alan Sommerstein, and especially Douglas Olson, for their improving comments on that first shot (which was originally written for this Jeff Henderson offering).

2 See A.D. Trendall and A. Cambitoglou, Second Supplement to The Red-Figured Vases of Apulia (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 1991–2) (hereafter RVAp, Supp 2), pp. 7–8, 495. (I might add that it is not clear, in my amateur opinion, that a firm distinction can be made between early Apulian and Lucanian vase-painting; both labels are anachronistic.)

3 He thought (p. 8) that a bell-crater with a domestic scene in the Laing Museum, Newcastle might be by the same painter, see A.D. Trendall and A. Cambitoglou, The Red-Figured Vases of Apulia vol. 1: Early and Middle Apulian/vol. 2: Late Apulian, Oxford Monographs on Classical Archaeology (Oxford: Clarendon; New York: Oxford University Press, 1978–1982), vol. 1, p. 121 (hereafter RVAp). There is also another comic vase that might possibly, it seems to me, be his work: British Museum F 151, “Cheiron on the steps” (RVAp 4/252, where it is attributed to the McDaniel Painter).


5 This is what I called it in O. Taplin, Comic Angels and Other Approaches to Greek Drama through Vase Paintings (Oxford: Clarendon; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 56 (plate 12.5). A.D. Tren-
a delightful domestic scene with a couple (Philotimides and Charis), probably husband and wife, enjoying a tray of patisserie, while a slave (Xanthias) is purloining one of the cakes. They are on a stage supported on three columns, with a door to the left. All three have their names incised in a clear, confident hand. 6 The second, which led to the “Choregos” soubriquet, was first published in RVAp, Supp 2 in 1991. 7 Here four figures, all clearly labeled, stand on a skillfully painted wooden stage with steps at the front and a door to the left side. Whatever is going on, I would insist that the presence of “Aigisthos” is in no way incidental or marginal; his feet are firmly on the stage, so this “tragic” figure is somehow integral to the comedy.

The subject of this chapter is the third vase firmly attributed to the Choregos Painter (fig. 1). It scraped into RVAp, Supp 2 as an addition on p. 495 in volume 3 (1992); in the same year, Trendall published it in The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art, with color pictures on the front and back covers. 8 A good picture and description were published more recently in the book that accompanied the exhibit of theater-related art at the Getty Museum in 2010. 9 The reverse shows a procession of Dionysus with thyrsus preceded by a maenad with a tympanon and a satyr playing the aulos, a not uncommon kind of iconography with no evident theatrical association. The main side (the obverse) is more unusual—in fact unique. The scene is dominated by a monumental head-and-shoulders portrayal of Dionysus, which has an almost eerie beauty about it. It is perhaps especially the eyes, painted with dilute brown irises and large black pupils, that give this youthful three-quarters bust its sense of superhuman calm and inscrutability. Around the thyrsus sloping over Dionysus’ shoulder twines a stem, which branches across the top of the composition into two spreading vines heavy with grape bunches.


6 An unusual feature of this vase is that the other side also has a specific scene, and one that might well be related to a satyr play: satyrs steal Heracles’ weapons while he holds up the globe for Atlas.

7 See Taplin, Comic Angels (above, n. 5), pp. 55–63 (plate 9.1). Among later discussions I would single out M. Schmidt, “Komische Teufel und andere Gesellen auf der griechischen Komödienbühne,” Antike Kunst 41 (1998), pp. 17 ff. This is one of the vases returned to Italy by the Getty Museum (where it was 96.AE.29), so it lacks a firm location label at present. (It was included in the exhibition called NOSTOI mounted in Rome and in Athens in 2008.)


While there are no explicit stage-set features, the figures on either side of the god are unmistakably theatrical. To the left, beside a lighted *thymaterion* suggestive of a sacred setting, stands a typical comic actor in full outfit. He wears a wreath and is standing on tip-toe, looking up, not toward the god but to a bunch of grapes, which he is admiring and probably about to pick. On the other side of Dionysus, a bent figure stands on a block to gain some height and holds out a large *skyphos* decorated with “stick figures” such as are usual on “vases-on-vases.” It is unclear whether he is offering the vessel to the god or holding it under the particularly large bunch of grapes above. At first sight, one might describe this figure as Silenus or Papposilenus, the father of the satyrs, the standard character in satyr-plays. This portrayal clearly indicates, however, that this is not Silenus himself but a comic actor dressed up as
him. The decisive signals are his mask and the phallus that dangles between his legs; his rather battered tragic-style boots may also be a feature of his comic costume. Generic interplay between comedy and satyr-play is a documentable phenomenon, as has been well shown recently by Revermann and Bakola, both of whom bring this vase to bear on the topic.\(^\text{10}\)

So how are we to interpret this scene? There has not been much discussion since Trendall’s original publication in 1992, followed up with elaboration by J.R. Green soon after. Both saw it as primarily a scene of religious significance. For Trendall, it conveys with “considerable sensitivity ... the three essential elements of the divinity of Dionysos;” by these he meant “god of the mysteries,” “god of wine” and “god of drama.”\(^\text{11}\) He was quite clear that we do not have a theatrical scene here: “it is also the earliest example of a phlyax vase which has no direct connection with the stage.”\(^\text{12}\) Green put this in a larger context, expressing no doubt that here, “we have actors outside performance” in a pioneering example of how “actors become intermediaries between the world of the ordinary mortal and the more fortunate world of Dionysos ... the companions of the god in the same manner as satyrs.”\(^\text{13}\) Since then, there has been general acquiescence in this “sacred companion” interpretation.

The unrivaled expertise of Trendall and Green may in this case, I suggest, have led them to a misplaced interpretation. Because they are so familiar with the common later iconography, particularly from Paestum, which shows comic actors as part of Dionysus’ retinue, they have classified this as a forerunner of this pattern, indeed as “the earliest example” of such a scene. But this association has led them to neglect two substantial differences between this and the later groups. The less pressing is that, generally speaking, later Dionysiac actors are (as Green emphasizes) companions: they are not doing anything distinctly independent, such as reaching to grapes or holding out vessels. Much more important, the god himself in the standard iconography is of human size and usually walking in the company of his companions—as he is indeed on the reverse of this vase. What we have on the Cleveland vase is quite different, namely a gigantic, static bust.


\(^{11}\) *RVAp, Supp 2* (above, n. 2), with quotes from pp. 13 and 3.

\(^{12}\) *RVAp, Supp 2* (above, n. 2), p. 495.

The denial of any direct allusion to any actual play is shared by the rather different, characteristically playful interpretation of François Lissarrague.\textsuperscript{14} He sums up: “we have here at least three levels of representation: the god, as an epiphanic bust; the theater, through the presence of two different kinds of actors; the painted picture in the picture, on the skyphos. No specific play, or even theatrical performance is referred to here ...” My mission now is to question this almost universal acceptance of the “sacred companion” interpretation and its refusal of any specific theatricality.\textsuperscript{15}

The other two vases firmly attributed to the Choregos Painter are, as noted above, both explicit, scene-specific evocations of comic theater. So it must be at least worth exploring the alternative hypothesis that that is what we have here as well. If so, what might be happening in this comedy? The first step toward an answer is to observe that in Greek iconography, when figures are shown as only partly above the lower border-frame of the composition, this often signifies that they are emerging from the earth or have recently done so. There are, for example, several such “anodos”-scenes involving satyrs with hammers, who are astonished to see a female figure emerging from the ground.\textsuperscript{16} So might this Dionysus be an image of the god that has somehow emerged or protruded from the ground? Might it be a huge statue?

Once that question has been put, a scene from the surviving comedies of Aristophanes comes importunately to mind. In Aristophanes’ \textit{Peace}, the hero Trygaeus coordinates the chorus of men, especially farmers, drawn from all over Greece, to pull the goddess Eirene from a pit or cavern in which she has been buried with rocks piled on top (223–6). After clearing the stones, they all pull together on ropes (458–519). The task is spoken of as “moving” (490 κινο\(\mu\)μεν, 509–10 ὄρει), as “pulling her out” (294, 511 ἐξελκύσαι) and as “pulling up to the light” (307 εἰς τὸ φῶς ἀνελκύσαι). Eventually, at line 520, the goddess emerges.

However this was stage-managed, and whatever form she takes, Eirene never moves, unless she somehow literally turns her head away at 682.\textsuperscript{17} Her two attendants, Opora and Theoria, by contrast, are clearly played by human actors and are involved in quite a bit of physical horseplay, especially at 871–908. They were presumably enacted by men decked out with the usual comic caricature of female

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Art of Ancient Greek Theater} (above, n. 9), p. 55.
\textsuperscript{15} I note, however, that the two recent discussions already cited keep their options open. Revermann, \textit{Comic Business} (above, n. 10), p. 153 says, “regardless of whether the iconography is scene-specific or generic;” and Bakola, \textit{Cratinus} (above, n. 10), p. 112 writes, “Although we cannot be sure whether this painting represents a scene from inside or outside a performance (it could do either).”
\textsuperscript{16} These have often been associated with Sophocles’ satyr-play \textit{Pandora}; see e.g. A.D. Trendall and T.B.L. Webster, \textit{Illustrations of Greek Drama} (London: Phaidon, 1971), vol. II, pp. 7–10. But this is far from secure; see Bakola, \textit{Cratinus} (above, n. 10), pp. 109–10.
\textsuperscript{17} S.D. Olson (ed.), \textit{Aristophanes: Peace} (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. xlv, maintains that this movement was actually staged.
It is generally and plausibly supposed that Eirene, on the other hand, was represented by a statue (or a flat painting of a statue); it may be that she was portrayed as genuinely beautiful, since there would not be the same point in making her comically hyper-eroticized, and there is recurrent emphasis on her beauty and fragrance. An internal indication of the size of this statue may be the prolonged play at 657ff. with the idea that Eirene is whispering in Hermes’ ear. If the actor playing Hermes could pretend this on stage, Eirene’s mouth was likely more or less on a level with his ear. There is no indication of any comic by-play with Hermes stooping or kneeling to hear her, so probably she was represented by a human-size statue. Or else by a mega-statue that has only partially emerged? The latter may be suggested by Trygaeus’ prayer at 987–90 that Eirene reveal herself in her entirety (ἀπόφηνον ὅλην σαυτήν). Indeed, might a half-revealed statue have effectively suggested a peace settlement that had not yet, in historical reality, been fully achieved?19

A half-revealed statue might, then, have been something rather like the Dionysus on the Cleveland vase. While the internal evidence cannot settle which of these alternative stagings was the case, there is one important piece of external evidence. We are told by a scholion on Plato Apology 19c that this statue in Peace was so peculiar that is was made fun of by two other comedians, Eupolis and Plato Comicus: κωμῳδεῖται δὲ <ὅτι> καὶ τὸ τής εἰρήνης κολοσσικὸν ἐξῆρεν ἄγαλμα. There is no consensus on which element within this sentence it was that Aristophanes’ rivals found mock-worthy and hence what that means for the staging of the statue in Peace. Sommerstein thinks that the point lay in the combination of a statue with live attendants, i.e. in ἄγαλμα; Olson is inclined to home in on ἐξῆρεν, taking the joke to have lain in the way the statue was brought on.20 The problem with both interpretations is that they fail to account both for the inclusion of the epithet κολοσσικόν and for the word-order, which suggests that the target of the fun-making was the way the ἄγαλμα was κολοσσικόν.

Olson insists that this is not necessarily anything to do with the size of the statue, because the noun κολοσσός could denote plastic images any size, especially in the Classical period.21 But the adjectives κολοσσικός and κολοσσαιός are not found before the 2nd century BCE and do seem to have always been used specifically of giant size (perhaps in the aftermath of the “Colossus of Rhodes”?). So, while we cannot be sure that this is what was meant by Eupolis and Plato, the scholiast evidently supposes that they took the statue in Peace to have been monumentally large, and that that was what attracted their ridicule.

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19 I owe this suggestion to Alan Sommerstein.
21 Olson, Peace (above, n. 18); hence his use of “mannequin” on p. 183.
To return to the Aristophanes, the pulling out or up of the statue is given a big build-up; indeed, Trygaeus summons the chorus at 292–300 for this very purpose. It then takes a long time to get Hermes onside and to make preliminary prayers, but then there is heave-ing and ho-ing from line 459 onward, more than 60 lines before the eventual emergence of the statue. If after all this fuss Eirene had been e.g. small, primitive or aniconic, this would surely have been indicated in the text; what is emphasized is instead her beauty and lovability. While it remains far from certain, the most likely explanation of the κολοσσικὸν ὄγαλμα, and of its mockability, is that it was represented by a giant image. And in that case it is at least possible (remember the whispering to Hermes) that, instead of extracting the whole monumental image, only its head and shoulders were revealed on stage. In that case, it would have been this part-revelation that attracted jibes from Eupolis and Plato. How this was staged, we cannot (of course) say with confidence. Perhaps a deep enough space was provided under a platform to store the bust until it was pulled out; or, as many scholars suppose, it was extruded from the door on the ekkyklema; or it was hidden behind some sort of screen that was then removed; or the bust was two-dimensional rather than three-, and was pulled up from lying flat. I slightly incline to this last solution.

If what I have argued about Peace is along the right lines, at any rate, and however the colossal statue was staged, it would provide a precedent for a comedy with a giant head-and-shoulders of Dionysus, an image represented as beautiful and partly out of the ground. In other words, it would be a precedent and parallel for the scene-specific evocation of a comedy on the Cleveland Dionysus vase. In that case, we are seeing the upper part of a giant statue that has been drawn up or pulled out or revealed. The thymaterion would seem to indicate cultic invocation, so the comic actor interested in the grapes, and the comic Silenus with his empty vessel might well be attendants on the epiphanic Dionysus, not unlike Opora and Theoria in Peace.

Such a comedy would probably have been Athenian in origin. I am unaware of any other evidence bearing on it, although others may be able to shed more light. In any case, the striking inventiveness and atmosphere of the scene will be in part owed to the comic dramatist, who daringly followed in the footsteps of Aristophanes’ Peace, despite the mockery of the statue there. This is not to deny “religious sensitivity” to the artist, but to insist that the picture arises not simply from his personal spirituality but from his witnessing and celebrating comedy. This “vulgar” association does not reduce the artistic achievement of the Choregos Painter; to the contrary, it adds an extra complexity of tone and reference. And this is all part of the larger debate about what constitutes “comic” and “serious,” and about how the two are blended in Greek comedy.

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22 It is worth recalling that the spelling of the name labels on the two other comic vases by the Choregos Painter are compatible with Attic dialect (and incompatible with Doric).
23 See Trendall, RV Ap, Supp 2 (above, n. 2), as quoted above.
Giuseppe Mastromarco

Toponimi e immaginario sessuale nella *Lisistrata* di Aristofane

**Abstract:** In iambic poetry and Old Comedy, closely related genres, there are toponyms with a plain sexual meaning. In this paper, I consider nine examples from Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* in which this poetical element is well attested, and suggest a new interpretation, with a sexual meaning, of the mention of the city of Pellene at 996.

1. In Ipponatte sono citati due toponimi che hanno una chiara valenza sessuale: nel fr. 4b Degani, Συνδικον δίσφαγμα, «fessura sindica», indica metaforicamente il sesso femminile; e, nel fr. 95 Degani, Πυγή, «natica», è un hapax «ludricamente formato sui vari λυδιστί (‘in lidio’), δωριστί (‘in dorico’), similì, e, al v. 15, il locativo τοῦ Πυγέλησι, letteralmente «di Pigela» (città ionica sita nei pressi di Efeso e Clazomene), assume il significato metaforico di «deretano».

Ed è probabile che, se si accoglie l’integrazione di Diehl Στρυμόνος ῥέεθρ’ ἁγνοῦ, al v. 1 del fr. 83 Degani, ci troviamo dinanzi a un’altra sconcia metafora di natura geografica, in quanto lo Strimone vi avrà indicato «l’abnorme ‘apertura’ anale di un cinedo [...] forse grottescamente equiparata all’estuario del fiume divino».

2. È merito principalmente di Enzo Degani aver dimostrato, in vari contributi, che giambografia arcaica e commedia attica antica furono cognata genera, generi affini, e,

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4 Degani, *Ipponatte* (cit. in n. 2), p. 120.
di conseguenza, che significativi elementi della poetica ipponattea ispirarono la musa aristofanea: 5 si comprende, dunque, perché metafore sessuali di origine geografica siano ben attestate anche nella produzione superstite di Aristofane. In questa sede mi limiterò a esaminare questo elemento di poetica in una commedia, la *Lisistrata*, che presenta un cospicuo numero di termini, espressioni, metafore, topoi pertinenti alla sfera del sesso.

(1) vv. 56–60 (Salamina):

(Λυ.) ἀλλ’, ὦ μέλ’, ὃς τοῦ σφόδρ’ αὐτάς Αττικάς,
ἀπαντα δρώσας τοῦ δέοντος ὦστερον.
ἀλ’ οὐδὲ Παράλων οὐδεμία γυνή πάρα,
οὐθ’ ἐκ Σαλαμίνους.
(Κα.) ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖναι γ’ οἴδ’ ὅτι
ἐπὶ τῶν κελήτων διαβεβήκασ’ ὀρθρίαι.

LI. Mia cara, ti puoi rendere conto che sono delle vere donne attiche:
 fanno tutto in ritardo. E non c’è neppure una donna della costa, né di Salamina.
CA. Ma so bene che quelle si sono messe in viaggio, a cavalcioni dei loro ... uomini, ancora prima dell’alba.

Il sostantivo κέλης può significare sia «small boat used by pirates» 6 sia «cavallo (da corsa)»; per cui appare chiaro il gioco polisemico sotteso al v. 60: da una parte, κέλης indicherà il mezzo di trasporto navale con cui le donne di Salamina giungono ad Atene; dall’altra alluderà a uno schēma erotico (la donna che monta a cavallo dell’uomo), dal momento che il suo verbo denominale κελητίζειν ricorre anche altrove in Aristofane con questo significato sessuale. 7 E inoltre, come è provato da un altro passo aristofaneo (*Ecclesiazuse* 38–9), gli uomini di Salamina avevano fama di essere amanti instancabili, per cui il nome di quell’isola doveva essere sentito, nell’immaginario comune dei Greci, come «synonymous with

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sex»: si spiega così perché in *Lisistrata* 60 il sostantivo κέλης sia messo in relazione con le donne di Salamina.

(2) vv. 85–9 (Beozia):

(La.) ήδη δὲ ποδασὴ ἵθ’ ἢ νεάνις ἥτέρα;
(La.) πρέσβειρά τοι ναί τῷ συώ Βοιωτία ἵκει ποθ’ ὑμέ.
(Mu.) νὴ Δ’ ὡς Βοιωτία καλὸν γ’ ἔχουσα τό πεδίον.
(Ka.) καὶ νὴ Δία κομφότατα τὴν βληχώ γε παρατετιλμένη.

LI. E questa ragazza di dov’è?
LA. Per i due dèi, è una nobile beota: viene a visitarvi.
MI. Sì, per Zeus, è proprio una che viene dalla pianura della Beozia: ha un bel campo da...
CA. [alzandole la tunica] E, per Zeus, l’erbetta se l’è depilata con cura.

La Beozia è regione pianeggiante: ben si attaglia perciò alla ragazza beota il doppio senso fondato su πεδίον (vv. 87b–8a), che propriamente significa «pianura», ma che, metaforicamente, può indicare l’«organo genitale femminile».

E di origine agricola è la metafora del successivo v. 89: βληχώ, «mentuccia» (erba aromatica molto diffusa in Beozia) poteva assumere il significato metaforico di peli del pube femminile.

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(3) vv. 107–10 (Mileto):

(Ka.) ἀλλ' οὐδὲ μοιχοῦ καταλέλειπται φεφάλυς.

ἐξ οὗ γὰρ ἡμᾶς προδόσον Μιλῆςιοι,

οὐκ εἰδὼν οὐδ' ἄλισθον ὀκτωδάκτυλον,

ὅς ἦν ἂν ἡμῖν σκυτίνη πυκνοῦρα

CA. E di amanti non c'è rimasto nemmeno uno straccio. Da quando i Milesi ci hanno tradito, non ho visto neppure un fallo di otto dita che ci desse un sollievo ...

di cuoio.

Nell’estate del 412, Mileto si era ribellata agli alleati della Lega delio-attica (cfr. Tucidide, 8, 17), e la defezione aveva provocato, tra l’altro, una penuria in Atene degli olisboi, i falli di cuoio, prodotto tipico di quell’area dell’Asia Minore di cui Mileto era uno dei centri più importanti. I falli di cuoio, detti anche baubônes (cfr. Eronda, 6, 19), ispirarono scene di commedia e di mimo, ed erano molto ricercati non solo da prostitute, ma anche da donne sole, particolarmente numerose in tempo di guerra. La misura a cui si fa qui riferimento (otto dita) sembra essere troppo piccola rispetto alle misure canoniche di quegli oggetti: è perciò probabile che Lisistrata si stia lamentando del fatto che sono introvabili persino falli di cuoio di piccola misura (e, dunque, poco ricercati).13

(4) vv. 149–54 (Amorgo):

εἰ γὰρ καθήμεθα ἐνδὸν ἐντετριμέναι,

καὶ τῶν χιτωνίσι τῶς ἀμοργίνοις

gυμνὰ παραμένουσας δέλτα παρατετιμέναι,

στύοιντο δὲ ἄνδρες κάπηθιμοις ἀπλεκόντις,

ἡμεὶς δὲ μὴ προσιομένα, ἀλλ’ ἀπεχοίμεθα,

ὀπονδάς ποιήσαις ἂν ταχέως, εὖ ὁδ’ ὦτι.

LI. Se ce ne stessimo nelle nostre case tutte imbellettate, e ci mostrassimo nude, sotto le nostre sottovesti di Amorgo, con il pube depilato alla perfezione, a delta, gli uomini si arraperebbero e avrebbero una gran voglia di scopare; e se noi non ci avvicinassimo a

loro, ma li tenessimo a distanza, immediatamente stipulerebbero la pace: ne sono certa.14

Amorgo, isola delle Cicladi, celebre per la produzione di lino, avrà avuto, tra il quinto e il quarto secolo a.C., un ruolo importante nell’immaginario sessuale degli Ateniesi in virtù delle sue «sottovesti (χιτώνια)», delle quali parla anche Platone nella tredicesima Lettera, indirizzata a Dionisio di Siracusa (363a). Per l’analoga immagine di «fanciulle in vesti di velo sottile, con le rose depilate (κόραι ἐν ἀμπεχόναις τριχάπτοις ... / τὰ ρόδα κκαρμέναι)», si veda Ferecrate, Minatori, fr. 113.28–9.15

(5) vv. 850–2 (Peonide):

(Ki.) πρὸς τῶν θεῶν νυν ἐκκάλεσόν μοι Μυρρίνην.
(Av.) ιδού, καλέσω 'γώ Μυρρίνην σοι; σύ δὲ τίς εί;  
(Ki.) ἀνὴρ ἐκείνης, Παιονίδης Κυνηγάς.

Cl. Per gli dèi, chiamami Mirrine: falla uscire.
LI. Come? Dovrei chiamarti Mirrine? Ma tu chi sei?
Cl. Suo marito, Cinesia del demo di Pe...nonia.


grafo contemporaneo, figlio del citarodo Melete), Cinesia, nel presente contesto, svolge la funzione comica di nome parlante, con esplicita valenza sessuale, in quanto è evidentemente messo in relazione paretimologica con il verbo κινεῖν, «fare l’amore», e, più precisamente, con κινηταῖν, il cui suffisso (ιᾶν) è specifico dei verbi indicanti una malattia: il nome Cinesia indicherà dunque chi è in uno stato di sofferenza in quanto non è in condizione di fare l’amore.17 D’altra parte, in questo contesto anche Mirrine, che pure era un nome storico,18 va messo in relazione etimologica con la pianta del mirto, dal momento che propriamente significa «Piccolo Mirto»; e, come è stato ben messo in evidenza da Marcel Detienne, il nome del mirto «è ricco di riferimenti erotici. Infatti è con i rami di questo cespuglio aromatico che in Attica intrecciano le corone degli sposi. Il nome di questa pianta, sacra ad Afrodite, serve a indicare sia la clitoride, sia il sesso femminile».19

(6–9 vv. 1161–71 (Pilo; Echinunte; Golfo Maliaco; Megara):

(Λυ.) τί δ’ οὐ διηλλάγητε; φέρε, τί τούμπωδόν;
(Λα.) ἀμέσα γὰς λόμες, αἱ τὶς ἀμίν τῶγκυκλον ἥ τοῦτ’ ἀποδόμεν.
(Λυ.) ποίον, ὡ τάν;
(Λα.) τῶν Πύλων, τάσπερ πάλαι δεόμεθα καὶ βλημάδδομες.
(Α.Θ.) μὰ τὸν Ποσειδῶν τούτο μὲν γ’ οὐ δρᾶσετε.
(Λυ.) ἀφετ’, ὠγάθ’, αὐτοῖς,
(Α.Θ.) κάθα τίνα κινήσουμεν;
(Λυ.) ἔτερόν γ’ ἀπαιτεῖ’ ἀντί τοῦτον χωρίον.
(Α.Θ.) τὸ δείνα τοίνυν, παράδοθ’ ἠμῖν τοῦτον πρώτωσα τὸν Ἐχινοῦντά καὶ τὸν Μηλία κόλπον τὸν ὄψισθεν καὶ τὰ Μεγαρίκα σκέλη.
(Λα.) οὐ τὸ σιώ οὐχί πάντα γ’, ὡ λισσάνει.

LI. E allora, perché non vi riconciliate? Suvvia, cosa ve lo impedisce?
AMB. SP. Noi in verità lo vorremmo: a condizione che ci restituiscano questo coso tondo [indica il sedere di Riconciliazione].
LI. Quale, mio caro?
AMB. SP. La fortezza di Pilo: è da tanto che ne abbiamo voglia e la tocchiamo.
I AMB. AT. No, per Posidone, questo non lo potete fare.

Lasciatela a loro, mio caro.

E noi chi ci sbatteremo?

In cambio di questa località, chiedetene un'altra.

E allora, per cominciare, dateci Echinunte: è qui [indica il pube di Riconciliazione]; e dateci il Golfo Maliaco, che sta dietro, e le gambe di Megara.

Per i Dioscuri, non se ne parla affatto, mio caro.

In questa scena ha luogo un fitto gioco di doppi sensi sessuali, fondati su nomi geografici, di cui sono protagonisti Lisistrata, l'Ambasciatore spartano e il primo Ambasciatore ateniese. Al v. 1162, con ἔγκυκλον, l'ampio, pesante mantello femminile, di forma arrotondata, che veniva confezionato con una stoffa bianca oppure colorata, 20 viene avviato un doppio senso che si realizza al verso successivo con la menzione della città di Pilo (τὸν Πύλον): in virtù della sua forma, l'ἔγκυκλον non solo doveva richiamare alla mente degli spettatori la città peloponnesiaca (in quanto circondata da mura), ma si prestava anche a una maliziosa allusione al sedere di Riconciliazione; e l'allusione è resa ancora più esplicita dalla circostanza che Πύλος richiama, per assonanza, il termine πύλη, «porta», che in commedia può assumere i significati metaforici di organo sessuale femminile e di ano. 21 Al v. 1169, la città tessalica di Echinunte (τὸν Ἐχινοῦντα) richiama, per assonanza, il termine ἔχινος, «riccio», che, nell'immaginario sessuale dei Greci, indicava il pube femminile. 22 La menzione, ai vv. 1169–70, del Golfo Maliaco (τὸν Μηλίαν / κόλπον), una evidente forzatura geografica, dal momento che, per quanti vi arrivano dall'Attica o dal Peloponneso, esso si trova non «dietro» (ὄπισθεν, v. 1170), ma dinanzi alla costa dove era ubicata Echinunte, prova che esso viene qui menzionato perché il termine κόλπος, che di norma significa «golfo», può anche indicare, nel linguaggio specialistico della medicina, la «vagina» (la quale si trova appunto dietro al pube), 23 e, per giunta, Μηλία richiama, ancora per assonanza, μῆλα, termine che, oltre al significato proprio di «mele», assume i significati metaforici di «seni» e di «natiche». 24 E, infine, il reciso diniego opposto dall'Ambasciatore spartano al v. 1171 alla richiesta dell'Ambasciatore ateniese di riprendersi le «gambe megaresi» (τὰ Μεγαρικὰ σχέλη, v. 1170), le doppie mura che, collegando Megara al porto di Nisea, evocavano l'immagine di due lunghe gambe, si spiega alla luce della circostanza che, nei rapporti omosessuali (praticati specialmente a Sparta), le gambe, e in particolare le cosce, assolvevano un ruolo di assoluto rilievo. 25

23 Per tale significato del γυναικεῖος κόλπος, cfr. Polluce 2.222.
24 Cfr. Henderson, Maculate Muse (cit. in n. 1), p. 149 e n. 211.
Nella *Lisistrata* sono dunque presenti nove toponimi che hanno una evidente valenza sessuale; ma è possibile che anche la città di Pellene, menzionata al v. 996, possa essere messa in relazione con la sfera del sesso.\(^{26}\)

Ai vv. 993–6, si ha il seguente scambio di battute tra Cinesia e un Araldo spartano, comparso in scena al v. 980:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{CI.} & \quad \text{Ma dimmi la verità, ché tanto la conosco: come vi vanno le cose a Sparta?} \\
\text{AR.} & \quad \text{Tutta Sparta è in stato di eccitazione, e gli alleati, nessuno escluso, l’hanno duro: c’è bisogno di Pellene.}
\end{align*}\]

Il significato della frase \(\text{Πελλάνας δὲ δεῖ} \) è oscuro, e nessuna delle varie proposte interpretative che sono state suggerite per chiarirlo appare convincente, prive come sono del conforto di adeguate argomentazioni.\(^{27}\) Un’eccezione, in tal senso, è rappresentata da un contributo di Enzo Degani, che prende le mosse dall’interpretazione suggerita da Q. Septimius Florens Christianus in una delle sue note critiche pubblicate postume nell’edizione ginevrina di Aristofane curata da Emilio Porto.\(^{28}\) Come attestano Pindaro (*Olimpica* 9, 97–8; *Nemea* 10, 44) e Simonide (*PMG* 514),\(^{29}\) Pellene

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\(^{27}\) Per una puntuale disamina delle interpretazioni precedenti, cfr. Enzo Degani, “Aristophane et les manteaux de Pellène,” in: Thierry et Menu, *Aristophane* (cit. in n. 14), pp. 107–10 (= *Filologia e storia* [cit. in n. 5], pp. 468–71). Non mancano studiosi i quali affermano drasticamente che è impossibile cogliere il senso dell’allusione a Pellene in *Lisistrata* 996: per esempio, a parere di Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, ci troviamo dinanzi a una «topical allusion to which we have lost the key» (“Notes on Aristophanes’ *Birds,*” *American Journal of Philology* 93 [1972], p. 237 n. 28).


era celebre in tutto il mondo greco per i suoi mantelli, che, dati in dono agli atleti vittoriosi alle feste che si celebravano nella città achea in onore del dio Ermete, erano divenuti così celebri da essere passati in proverbio; affermando, dunque, che «c’è bisogno di Pellene», l’Araldo spartano intenderà alludere, a parere di Degani, ai rinomati mantelli della città achea: «È infatti proprio la costante preoccupazione di nascondere con lo ἱμάτιον il proprio stato di ἐστυκότες il tratto comico che caratterizza gli uomini, da quando gli effetti della ’serrata’ sessuale cominciano a farsi sentire [...] Di qui l’opportunità—rilevata dal Coro—di coprire con gli ἱμάτια tali vergogne (v. 1093 εἰ σωφρονεῖτε θαύματα λήψεισθε), prima che possano attirare le mire di qualche ermocopida [...] a Sparta e nelle città alleate la situazione è tale che, per nasconderne le priapiche conseguenze, sarebbero necessari—mero ma indispen-sabile palliativo—gli ampli mantelli di Pellene. Ché la caratteristica veste nazionale spartana, il succinto τρίβων, non poteva che rivelarsi assolutamente inadatta allo scopo».31 E, a conforto della sua interpretazione, Degani rimanda a un passo degli Uccelli in cui a un Sicofante, il quale indossa un leggero mantello che non gli consente di ripararsi adeguatamente dal freddo, Pisetero chiede: «Pensi di volare diritto a Pellene? (μῶν εὖθυ Πελλήνης πέτεσθαι διανοεῖ;)» (v. 1421), alludendo così alla circostanza che nella città achea avrebbe trovato i morbidi, caldi mantelli che là venivano confezionati. In definitiva, secondo Degani, Leitmotiv comico dei vv. 980–1013 e 1072–96 della Lisistrata sarà la necessità, degli Ateniesi e degli Spartani, di indossare i mantelli di Pellene per coprire i loro membri in erezione.

Orbene, che da siffatto motivo comico siano regolati i vv. 1072–96 è indubbio: non appena compaiono in scena, gli Ambasciatori spartani si fanno notare per il notevole gonfiore all’altezza dell’inguine, sicché il Corifeo si chiede se non abbiano «una gabbia di porcelli intorno alle cosce» (v. 1073); e, dopo che lo stesso Corifeo chiede agli Ambasciatori quali siano le loro condizioni dopo il viaggio da Sparta ad Atene, essi mostrano i loro falli eretti («C’è bisogno di un lungo discorso? Lo potete vedere da voi in quali condizioni siamo arrivati (ὁρὴν γὰρ ἔξεσθ’ ὡς ἔχοντες ἱκομες;)», vv. 1076–7), suscitando l’attonito commento del Corifeo («Accidenti! Questa irritazione al nervo è davvero terribile, e si direbbe che l’infiammazione vada peggiorando», vv. 1078–9); poi, al v. 1082, compaiono in scena gli Ambasciatori ateniesi che, afferma il corifeo, «al pari dei lottatori, portano i mantelli scostati dai ventri: sembrerebbero malati di... ascite (ὡς παλαιστάς ἄνδρας, ἀπὸ τῶν γαστέρων / θαυμάτι ἀποστέλλοντας-ὡςτε φαίνεται / ἀσκητικῶν τῷ χρήμα τοῦ νοσήματος;)» (vv. 1083–5);32 e, dopo che, al

31 Ancora su Aristoph. (cit. in n. 28), pp. 330–1 (cfr. Aristophane et les manteaux [cit. in n. 27], pp. 111–12 = Filologia e storia [cit. in n. 5], pp. 472–3).
32 Etimologicamente connesso con askós, «otre», il termine medico «ascite» indica il versamento, causato da differenti patologie, di una eccessiva quantità di liquido (talora anche di vari litri) nella cavità peritoneale, sicché l’addome, tumefatto, assume la forma di un otre. Il riferimento, al v. 1083, ai
v. 1087, gli Ambasciatori atenesi si tolgono i mantelli per mostrare la forma di malattia che li affligge, il Corifeo li invita a indossare di nuovo il mantello: «Se avete senno, rimettetevi il mantello: non vorrei che vi vedesse qualcuno degli eromcopidi... (ei σωφρονέイトε, θαμάματα λήψεσθ, ὁπως/ τῶν ἔρμοκοπιδῶν μη τις ὑμᾶς ὄφεται)» (vv. 1093–4). L’Ambasciatore ateniese accoglie, al pari dei suoi compagni, l’invito del Corifeo («Hai ragione, per Zeus», v. 1095a), ed è immediatamente imitato dall’Ambasciatore spartano e dai suoi compagni («Assolutamente sì, per i Dioscuri: rimettiamoci il mantello (να τῷ σιώ/ πανταγα. φέρε τὸ ἔσθος ὀμβαλόμεθα)», vv. 1095b–6).

Diverso è il gioco comico cui si ispira il dialogo tra l’Araldo spartano e Cinesia: dopo il goffo tentativo dell’Araldo di nascondere il proprio membro in erezione che fuoriesce dal mantello (vv. 985–92),33 il dialogo, a partire dal v. 993, verte sullo stato di eccitazione sessuale in cui versano gli uomini a causa dello sciopero messo in atto dalle donne. Alla domanda, postagli da Cinesia, circa le conseguenze che quello sciopero sta provocando sugli Spartani e i loro alleati (vv. 993–4), l’Araldo risponde, ai vv. 995–6, con la frase del cui significato ci stiamo ora occupando; e, dopo che Cinesia gli chiede se sia stato Pan a procurargli quel malessere (vv. 997–8a), l’Araldo dà notizia delle forme con cui le donne spartane, guidate da Lampitò, stanno conducendo il loro sciopero: «e poi le altre donne di Sparta, tutte insieme, come se fossero scattate a un segnale di partenza, hanno scacciato i mariti dalle loro pelose (...),34 preso dunque atto che la congiura delle donne sta dilagando (cfr. vv. 1007–8a), Cinesia, ai vv. 1009–10,


34 Ho tradotto μύρτω con «rosa», dal momento che il mirto non ha in italiano (né, a quanto mi risulta, in altre lingue moderne) il significato metaforico di «organo sessuale femminile» che invece poteva assumere in greco (cfr. n. 19), laddove la rosa è ben attestata come metafora sessuale in greco (cfr. Henderson, Maculate Muse [cit. in n. 1], p. 135), al pari che in italiano e in altre lingue moderne.
invita l’Araldo a tornare a Sparta, affinché il suo governo possa inviare al più presto in Atene degli «ambasciatori con pieni poteri (πρέσβεις αὐτοκράτορας)» per trattare la pace.35

L’affermazione dell’Araldo ai vv. 995–6 si inserisce, dunque, in un contesto incentrato sulla necessità degli Spartani e dei loro alleati di dare sfogo ai loro impellenti bisogni sessuali. Stando così le cose, appare evidente che la menzione di Pellene non riguarderà la necessità di coprirsi il membro in erezione, ma andrà coerentemente messa in relazione con lo stato di eccitazione sessuale in cui versano gli Spartani e i loro alleati: la necessità, affermata dall’Araldo al v. 996b, di ricorrere a Pellene (Πελλάνας δὲ δεῖ) suggella la risposta (espressa ai vv. 995–6a in termini che rientrano esplicitamente nella sfera linguistica del sesso: ὀρφά, v. 995; ἐστήκαντι, v. 996) con cui egli reagisce alla domanda che, postagli da Cinesia al v. 994, si fonda, a sua volta, sul doppio senso sessuale del termine πράγματα.36

Si conferma così l’interpretazione in chiave sessuale del v. 996b: condivisa da vari studiosi, essa è stata fatta propria di recente da Jeffrey Henderson, a parere del quale Πελλάνας indicherà «either a place name with a sexual significance now lost, or a pun on an unattested word meaning vagina or anus».37 Si può dunque conclu-

35 Al v. 1013 l’Araldo abbandona di corsa il teatro; e, in seguito, al v. 1072, compaiono in scena degli «ambasciatori provenienti da Sparta (ἀπὸ τῆς Ἑλληνιδού οἰδὲ πρέσβεις)».

36 Per πρόγμα, con il significato metaforico, al pari dell’inglese thing, di «organo genitale maschile», si veda Henderson, Maculate Muse (cit. in n. 1), p. 116; e, circa il valore eufemistico di πράγμα, Alan H. Sommerstein afferma che Lisistrata 994 «is likely to contain a phallic pun at all» (The Anatomy of Euphemism in Aristophanic Comedy, in: F. De Martino e A.H. Sommerstein (eds.), Studi sull’eufemismo [Bari: Levante Editori, 1999], p. 205). Come è stato felicemente osservato a proposito dei vv. 995–6, «la eutematica a sua volta, sul doppio senso sessuale del termine πράγματα.»

dere che il tràdito Πελλάνας / πελλάνας alluda a un evento relativo alla città achea ovvero a un oggetto o a una parte del corpo umano comunque pertinenti alla sfera del sesso. E tuttavia, se, come è opinione prevalente presso gli studiosi, l’Araldo spartano sta menzionando Pellene, resta da chiederci perché mai la menzione della città achea potesse agevolmente evocare, negli spettatori presenti alla rappresentazione della Lisistrata, un significato sessuale che a noi risulta oscuro. E, sia pure con la dovuta cautela che richiede l’interpretazione di un passo tanto controverso, mi pare lecito proporre un’ipotesi che si fonda su una testimonianza di non meglio identificati esegeti antichi; testimonianza che è riportata in un papiro ossirinchita del secondo secolo d.C., che contiene, oltre a un elenco di bibliotecari alessandrini, varie notizie storiche e mitologiche.38 Ai righi 2–12 della terza colonna del papiro, l’ignoto compilatore del trattato, «a characteristic product of the Alexandrian erudition which exercised itself in antiquarian research and tabulation»,39 dà notizia di un terribile avvenimento che avrebbe avuto come protagonista la città di Pellene, allorché, nel sesto secolo a.C., fu conquistata dall’esercito di Clistene di Sicione:

Αριστοτέλης
de perì Πελλήνην φησι πρώτην τουτο συμβεβηκεναι
τινς δε ου μονον ἑξανδρα ποδισθηναι φασιν τήν Πελλήνην ὑπὸ Κλεισθένους οτ ε’
στρατευσεν μετα Σκύλωνων ὄν ἁλλα καὶ τὰς γυναικὸς αὐ"
5
των καὶ τὰς θυγατέρας αἰχμα λωτισθεισας καταπορνευθή ναι.40

A quanto afferma Aristotele, Pellene fu la prima città a cui capitò un siffatto evento [l’andrapodismós]; ma alcuni dicono che Pellene non solo fu ridotta in schiavitù da Clistene quando fece la spedizione con i


39 Grenfell and Hunt, Oxyrhynchus Papyri (cit. in n. 38), p. 100.
40 L’integrazione Αριστοτέλης (r. 2), che si deve agli editori principi del papiro (cfr. Grenfell and Hunt, Oxyrhynchus Papyri [cit. in n. 38], p. 109), è molto probabile, dal momento che lo Stagirita scrisse una Costituzione di Pellene (fr. 567 Rose), che era posseduta anche da Cicerone (cfr. Epistulæ ad Atticum 2, 2); καταπορνευθή ναι (rr. 11–12) è invece integrazione di Wilamowitz (cfr. Grenfell and Hunt, Oxyrhynchus Papyri [cit. in n. 38], p. 109).
Sicioni, ma che anche le loro mogli e le loro figlie, rese schiave, furono costrette a prostituirsi.

Allo stesso evento fa riferimento Eliano in *Storie Varie* 6, 1:

Σικυώνιοι δὲ Πελλήνην ἐλόντες τὰς τε γυναῖκας τῶν Πελληνέων καὶ τὰς θυγατέρας ἐπ᾽ ὀικήματος ἔστησαν. Ἀγριώτατα ταῦτα, ὦ θεοὶ Ἐλλήνιοι, καὶ οὐδὲ ἐν βαρβάροις καλὰ κατὰ γε ἐμήν μνείαν.

I Sicioni, avendo conquistato Pellene, rinchiusero in bordelli le mogli e le figlie degli abitanti di quella città. Questo bel comportamento, o deì degli Elleni, è del tutto disumano, e, a mia memoria, non trova riscontro neppure tra i barbari.

Non sappiamo se la forzata prostituzione delle donne di Pellene sia un evento storicamente fondato; e tuttavia è verosimile che, se anche si tratta di un aneddoto originatosi in una data successiva all’asservimento che della popolazione di quella città operò Clistene di Sicione dopo averla conquistata, esso sia entrato a farte parte della tradizione storica popolare relativa a Pellene, e, di conseguenza, dell’immaginario sessuale degli abitanti del Peloponneso e, più in generale, della Grecia. Ed è forse alla luce di questo episodio che può illuminarsi la battuta, a chiaro sfondo sessuale, dei vv. 995–6: riferendo a Cinesia che, in seguito allo sciopero sessuale delle donne, i suoi concittadini e i loro alleati soffrono di una sorta di priapismo, l’Araldo spartano come rimedio contro siffatta sofferenza avrà pensato a Pellene, la città che, nell’immaginario sessuale dei Greci, doveva avere assunto il significato antonomastico di ‘grande bordello’.  

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Mark Alonge

Dionysus’ Choice in Frogs and Aristophanes’ Paraenetic Pedigree

Abstract: The parabasis of Frogs appropriates the diction and substance of Greek advice poetry (parainesis), best represented by Theognis. Aristophanes’ adaptation of parainesis serves to situate his poetry within a long-standing tradition of poets who offered political advice to their cities. The borrowing of paraenetic tropes in the parabasis of Frogs anticipates the contest between Euripides and Aeschylus, which ultimately turns on the question of which poet can better advise Athens. Aristophanes’ characterization of both tragic poets is sufficiently negative to raise doubts about the viability of either as an effective teacher of the city and, by extension, about the didactic effectiveness of the tragic genre as a whole. Through his mastery of the paraenetic tradition, Aristophanes presents comedy as the superior poetic medium for civic wisdom.

In Frogs, Aristophanes employs motifs from Greek didactic poetry to stake a claim to a particular literary pedigree, the tradition of delivering political and moral advice through poetry, or parainesis. In doing so, he distinguishes comedy from tragedy, which cannot provide the teacher Athens needs, as becomes apparent during the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides. While Dionysus does not want to return to the world of the living empty-handed, neither tragic poet passes his ultimate test by proving his ability to give Athens proper counsel about her current political challenges. While Frogs is perhaps first and foremost a drama of literary criticism, it is nevertheless also a political play. Moreover, it is in Aristophanes’ development of the political dimension of the play that we find a solution to its problematic ending, Dionysus’ choice of Aeschylus over Euripides. Instead of one of the two tragic poets, Aristophanes presents himself as the best teacher of the city, by writing himself into the literary history of parainesis.

It is primarily in the parabasis that Aristophanes appropriates the paraenetic tradition. Here the chorus, speaking on behalf of its poet, offers political commentary and advice. In effect, the chorus anticipates Dionysus’ change of criteria at the end of the agón between the two tragic poets, from literary to political, giving the audience a chance to weigh Aristophanes’ ability to give good counsel against what Aeschylus and Euripides have been able to do. The parabasis epirrhema begins with the chorus

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declaring its right “to join in counseling (symparainein) and to teach (didasklein) the city what’s good.” Accordingly, the chorus goes on to dispense advice in the succeeding lines (687–705): citizenship should be reinstated for those Athenians who participated in the oligarchic revolution of 411 BCE; in 405 BCE, with Athens “in the embrace of waves,” the city needs all hands on deck, and the recently treasonous served Athens well before, as did their ancestors. Moreover, the lack of magnanimity toward fellow-citizens stands in stark contrast to the recent elevation to citizen status of slaves who fought for Athens at Arginusae in 406 BCE.

While the chorus expresses its opinion in the epirrhema in a straightforward manner, the corresponding antepirrhema (718–37) presents essentially the same advice, but couched in language and imagery familiar from paraenetic poetry. The antepirrhema contains several tropes of parainesis found, for example, in the surviving verses of Theognis, the Greek advice poet par excellence. While Aristophanes cannot be said to borrow directly from Theognis, Theognis’ poetry can safely stand in as a proxy for the paraenetic tradition. Rather than quoting Theognis or alluding to him or any other poet in particular, Aristophanes seems to recall the paraenetic tradition for his audience by cobbling together several clichés of the genre, presenting something approaching a caricature of archaic advice poetry. Most notably, he weaves together—in an innovative way, in fact—two “Theognidean” motifs: the division of the populace into “noble” and “base” citizens, and the use of the language of coinage to talk about personal moral excellence or the lack thereof. Aristophanes thus effectively marks himself as the heir to that poetic tradition—in contrast, as will be seen below, to the tragedians.

In the antepirrhema, the chorus speaks as follows:

πολλάκιςγ’ ἡμῖν ἐδοξεν ἢ πόλις πεπονθέναι
ταύτιν εἰς τά τῶν πολιτῶν τούς καλούς τά κάγαθος
eἰς τά τάρχαιον νόμισμα καί τό καινόν χρυσίον,
ουτέ γάρ τούτων οὖσιν οὐ κεκδηθηλευμένοις,
ἀλλά καλλίστοις ἀπάντων, ὡς δοκεί, νομισμάτων
καί μόνοις ὀρθῶς κοπείσι καί κεκδωσυναιμένοις
ἐν τά τών ἔλλησι καί τώς βαρβάροις πανταχοῦ
χρώμεθ’ οὐδέν, ἀλλά τούτως τώς ποιηροῖς χαλκίοις
χόδει τέ καί πρώην κοπεῖσι τά κακότων κόμματι.
τῶν πολιτῶν τ’ οὐς μέν ἵσαν εὐγενεῖς καί σώφρονας
ἀνδρὰς ὄντας καί δικαίους καί καλοὺς τά κάγαθος

1 686–7 τῶν ἱερῶν χορῶν δικαιών ἐστι χρηστὰ τῇ πόλει / ἐξυμπαραίνειν καί διδάσκειν.
2 704 κυμάτων ἐν ἀγαθά, borrowed from Archil. fr. 213 West².
καὶ τραφέντας ἐν παλαίστραις καὶ χοροῖς καὶ μουσικῇ, προσελοῦμεν, τοῖς δὲ χαλκοῖς καὶ ξένοις καὶ πυρρίαις καὶ πονηροῖς καὶ σφαλῇς. οὐδὲν ἡ πόλις πρὸ τοῦ οὐδὲ φαρμακόσιν εἰκῆ ῥήδιως ἔχρησατ᾽ ἄν. ἀλλὰ καὶ νῦν, ἄνωθεν, μεταβαλόντες τοὺς τρόπους χρήσαντες τοὺς χρηστοὺς καὶ κατορθώσαντες γὰρ ἐδοὺν, κἂν τι σφαλήτη, ἐξ ἄγου νοῦν τοῦ ἔγουν, ἤν τι καὶ πάσχητε, πάσχειν τοῖς σφαλοῖς δοκήστε.

It has often struck us that the city behaves the same toward those of its citizens who are fine and upstanding as it does with respect to the old coinage and the new gold. Though both of these coinages are unalloyed, indeed are considered the finest of all coins, the only coinages that are minted true and tested everywhere among the Greeks and among the barbarians alike, we don’t use them; instead we use these crummy coppers, struck yesterday or the day before with a stamp of the lowest quality. Just so with our citizens: the ones we acknowledge to be well-born, well-behaved, just, fine, and outstanding men, men brought up in wrestling schools, choruses, and the arts, we treat them shabbily, while for all purposes we choose the coppers, the aliens, the redheads, bad people with bad ancestors, the latest arrivals, whom formerly the city wouldn’t readily have used even as scapegoats. But even at this late hour, you fools, do change your ways and once again choose the good people. You’ll be congratulated for it if you’re successful, and if you take a fall, at least the intelligent will say if something does happen to you, you’re hanged from a worthy tree.⁴

The chorus bemoans Athens’ neglect of her “good” citizens, the chrêstoi, i.e. the oligarchic revolutionaries, and her recent reliance on the ponêroi, the “low,” i.e. newly emancipated and enfranchised slaves. Reversing this recent habit, the citizens should put their trust in their most talented compatriots; if the Athenians still lose the war, at least they will have no regrets about the leadership upon which they relied.

The chorus’ criticism of the mistreatment of the Athenian elite, passed over in favor of a new group of citizens of dubious origin, is reminiscent of a well-known passage from the Theognidean corpus that expresses a similar concern (53–8):

Κύρνε, πόλις μὲν ἔθ’ ἢδε πόλις, λαοὶ δὲ δὴ ἄλλοι, οἱ πρόσθ’ οὐτε δίκας ἤδεσαν οὐτε νόμους, ἄλλ’ ἀμφι πλευραῖσι δορὰς αἰγῶν κατέτριβον, ⁵

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⁴ Translations of Frogs adapted from Jeffrey Henderson (trans.), Aristophanes: Frogs (Newburyport: Focus, 2008).

⁵ The chorus bemoans Athens’ neglect of her “good” citizens, the chrêstoi, i.e. the oligarchic revolutionaries, and her recent reliance on the ponêroi, the “low,” i.e. newly emancipated and enfranchised slaves. Reversing this recent habit, the citizens should put their trust in their most talented compatriots; if the Athenians still lose the war, at least they will have no regrets about the leadership upon which they relied.

The chorus’ criticism of the mistreatment of the Athenian elite, passed over in favor of a new group of citizens of dubious origin, is reminiscent of a well-known passage from the Theognidean corpus that expresses a similar concern (53–8):
Cyrenus, this city is still our city, but the people are different; they are those who formerly knew neither legal cases nor laws but wore out goatskins around their sides, and they grazed outside this city like deer. But now they are “noble” (agathoi), son of Polyaos, while the formerly good are now “base” (deiloi). Who could put up with seeing this?

As in the *Frogs* parabasis, Theognis bemoans the overturning of the old social order and the elevation of new citizens to high political status at the expense of tradition-ally better-established individuals. As is typical of the Theognidean corpus, and of the majority of social commentary in archaic poetry for that matter, an aristocratic perspective represents the division between mass and elite in strongly moral terms: the agathoi/esthloi are the well-bred and worthy elite, while the kakoi/deiloi represent the rest of the populace, who are characterized as dishonorable and inferior.5 The Theognidean corpus is particularly full of such terminology, although its use is widespread among archaic poets. Both Theognis and Aristophanes criticize a mistaken preference for the worse over the better, the new-fangled over the customary. By Aristophanes’ day, usage had evolved, as other late 5th- and 4th-century texts also show, with the dichotomy of chrêstoi versus ponêroi replacing that of agathoi versus kakoi.6 While evoking archaic parainesis, however, Aristophanes “translates” the pre-classical terminology of moral and social valuation, ”noble vs. base,” into his audience’s Greek.7 He also adapts his application of this opposition to fit the situation the chorus is complaining about; while the chrêstoi in the parabasis correspond to the traditional aristocratically-minded elite of Athens, Aristophanes singles out only the ex-slaves as ponêroi, while his contemporaries, adhering more closely to their archaic predecessors’ use of kakoi and deiloi, call all non-elite citizens ponêroi.

What Aristophanes does in the parabasis that is particularly striking and goes beyond his paraenetic predecessors, is to weave the ”noble vs. base” topos together

5 On agathos and kakos, see Walter Donlan, *The Aristocratic Ideal in Ancient Greece: Attitudes of Superiority from Homer to the End of the Fifth Century* (Lawrence: Coronado, 1980).

6 E.g. [Xenophon], *Constitution of the Athenians* 1.6 and *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* 6.3.

7 Robin Osborne, “An Other View: An Essay in Political History,” in: Beth Cohen (ed.), *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2000), pp. 21–42, esp. 23–8, explains this shift from agathos/kakos to chrêstos/ponêros as an elite response to the polis’ appropriation of the term agathos to mean “beneficial to the state.” Since agathos and kakos were now used with a utilitarian connotation, the elite had to find another set of socially evaluative terms.
with the language of coins and metals, the use of which here marks a departure from convention. The poetic tradition from which Aristophanes draws uses the language of metals in meditations on personal moral integrity. Theognis, for example, contrasts the ease with which we test the purity and consistency of metal with the difficulty of assessing individual character: do thoughts and intentions match outward behavior, or is the person “counterfeit” (kibdêlos)?

χρυσοῦ κιβδήλου καὶ ἀργύρου ἀναχετῶς ἄτη,  
Κῦρνε, καὶ ἔξεμυεῖν ῥάδιον ἀνδρὶ σοφῷ.

εἰ δὲ φίλου νόος ἀνδρὸς ἔνι στήθεσι λελήθη  
ψυχὸς ἐών, δόλιον δ’ ἐν φρεσίν ἦτερ ἔχων,  
τοῦτο θεὸς κιβδηλότατον ποίησε βροτοῖσιν,  
καὶ γνώναι πάντων τοῦτ’ ἀνιρότατον.

οὐδὲ γὰρ εἰδεῖς ἀνδρὸς νόον οὔτε γνωνικός,  
πρὶν πειρηθεῖς ὥσπερ ὑποζυγίου,  
οὐδὲ κεν εἰκάσοις ἵκον ροπτὸς ἐς ὑρίον ἐλθών·  
pολλάκισαργνώμην ἐξαπατῶς ἰδέαι. (Th gn. 119–28)⁹

The ruin that results from counterfeit gold and silver is endurable, Cyrnus, and it is easy for an expert to find out (that they are counterfeit). But if a friend’s intent is false and lies undetected in his breast, and if he has a treacherous heart, this is the most counterfeit object the god has made for mortals, and to recognize it costs the greatest pain of all.

For you cannot know the intent of a man or a woman until you make trial of it like a beast of burden, nor can you form an estimate of it by coming as it were at the right time (?), since appearances often deceive one’s judgment.

Similar concerns about rooting out untrustworthy “counterfeit” individuals are voiced elsewhere in the Theognidean corpus:

κιβδήλου δ’ ἀνδρός γνώναι χαλεπώτερον οὐδέν,  
Κῦρν’, οὐδ’ εὐλαβής ἐστὶ περὶ πλέονος. (117–18)

Nothing, Cyrnus, is more difficult to recognize than a counterfeit man, and nothing is more important than being on guard against him.

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⁸ Hesiod does use the language of metals to characterize whole generations in Works and Days. But the paraenetic tradition does not follow his lead by e.g. mapping the decline from the Golden Age to Silver to Bronze onto unwelcome political changes, like the usurpation of the political power of the agathoi by the kakoi. It is perhaps possible that Aristophanes drew inspiration from Hesiod.

Never praise a man until you know clearly what he is in temperament, disposition and way of life. Many in fact have a false, thievish character but keep it hidden, taking on an attitude appropriate to the day.

Anxiety over the difficulty of judging a person’s inner substance is also a popular sentiment in Greek poetry, and finds expression, for example, in a drinking song in which the speaker expresses a desire to open a friend’s chest to know his heart (PMG 889), and in Euripides’ Electra, where Orestes delivers a speech about the difficulty of assessing character (El. 368–90).

While a “counterfeit” person in Theognis, for example, is untrustworthy, in the parabasis of Frogs “counterfeit” (kekibdélooumenois 721) does not mean simply fraudulent, but suggests inferior quality. This new slant on a venerable poetic metaphor takes its cue from the contemporary monetary crisis in Athens, in which debased coins with a bronze core replaced the old reliable Athenian “owls” of pure silver. Following the Spartan establishment of a garrison at Decelea in 413 BCE, access to the silver mines at Laurium was cut off. Because of the resulting silver shortage, Athens resorted to using gold from dedications on the Acropolis, as well as silver-plated bronze coins. That situation provides the impetus for applying the imagery of metals to the Athenian political climate: the city has turned away from its best and brightest citizens, just as it has rejected “the old [silver] coinage and the new gold currency” (720). The analogy is imperfect. The gold coins are of unquestionably high value, and they accordingly complicate the point the chorus is trying to make: it is a mistake to rely on new and inferior citizens (and coins) in place of unimpeachable citizens (and coins) of long standing. But gold qua metal was above reproach in ancient Greece, and lumping gold in with bronze would make the analogy almost impossible to maintain. Aristophanes does his best to smooth over—or pass over—this awkwardness by repeatedly emphasizing the base and the bronze, while letting gold drop by the wayside.

10 Testing men is equated (or contrasted) with testing metals also in Theognis 415–18, 447–52, 499–502, 1105–6. Theognis also asserts that a reliable friend is worth his weight in gold or silver (77–8).

11 On kibdéllos and verifying a person’s character (a word itself originally meaning a “stamp of approval” on Greek coinage), see Seaford, Money (above, n. 3), pp. 153–5.

12 While kibdéllos is rare in archaic poetry, Theognis is probably at most an indirect source for Aristophanes’ kekibdélooumenois (721). The paraenetic tradition remained current in Athens during the late 5th century, and Aristophanes need not have had a specific predecessor or poem in mind. Words with the kibd- root also appear several times in Euripidean tragedy (Med. 516; Hipp. 616; El. 550; Ba. 475), one of the subjects of Frogs.
Neither in Theognis nor in other Greek advice poetry do we find the explicit correlation of “noble” to “pure” and “despicable” to “counterfeit” apparent in the parabasis of Frogs. But since Greek aristocratic discourse does attribute personal moral excellence at least in part to pedigree, the notion that someone of inferior birth might be of inherently dubious character must have been familiar to Aristophanes’ audience. The poet underlines the parallel between Athens’ use of inferior coinage and her disenfranchisement of the kaloi kagathoi, and between the two paraenetic topoi he has borrowed, at the verbal level by repeating significant words when describing the two scenarios in close succession. The chorus first rails against “worthless bronze coins” (725 ponêrois chalkiois) and then criticizes the wretched new citizens in the same terms: inter alia they are “bronze” (730 chalkois) and “worthless and from worthless fathers” (731 ponêrois kak ponêrôn). The Johnny-come-lately status of both the debased coins and the ignoble new citizens is also driven home by being repeated in both halves of the antepirrhema: the coins were struck only yesterday or the day before (726), while the citizens getting all the attention are “the latest arrivals” (732).

While Aristophanes may have Theognis specifically in mind, the purpose of the parabasis is not to quote the archaic poet per se, but to conjure up in the audience’s minds parainesis as a genre. What remains to be considered, is why Aristophanes referenced the archaic paraenetic tradition. His invocation of advice poetry in the parabasis can be meaningfully incorporated into a reading of the play as a whole and sheds light on the outcome of the contest between the two tragic poets at the end.

At the end of Frogs, after the long but exasperatingly inconclusive agôn between Euripides and Aeschylus, Dionysus seemingly out of the blue announces a new criterion for judging the contest, one that is political and paraenetic rather than literary and aesthetic: “Whichever of you is going to give some good advice to the city” will be taken back to the world of the living (1420–1 ὁπότερος οὖν ἄν τῇ πόλει παραινέσειν / μέλλῃ τι χρηστόν). Here we are surely meant to recall the chorus’ claim in the parabasis to advise the city, with which Dionysus’ announcement shares unmistakable verbal echoes (686–7 τὸν ἱερὸν χορὸν δικαίων ἐστὶ χρηστά τῇ πόλει / ξυμπαραινεῖν καὶ διδάσκειν). Just as the chorus claims its right and duty to teach the city well, Dionysus is looking for a poet who can do the same; as Aeschylus himself says, as teachers instruct children, so poets instruct adults. But when Dionysus finally makes his choice between Aeschylus and Euripides, it is not clear that the poets’ answers to his political questions have been decisive. Dionysus tells them, “I will pick the one my psychê wants” (1468), and his psychê apparently prefers Aeschylus (1471). Only a little earlier, Dionysus was unwilling to choose one tragedian

13 Personal moral character, good or bad, is innate in Theognis 429–38; on the anxiety about diluting the aristocracy through breeding with inferior but wealthy families, see Theognis 183–92.
14 1054–5 τοῖς μὲν γὰρ παιδαρίουσιν / ἐστὶ διδάσκαλος ὡστις φράζει, τοῖσιν δ’ ἡβώσι ποιταί.
15 1468 αἱρήσομαι γὰρ ὄντερ ἡ ψυχῇ θέλει.
over the other (1411), and nothing has changed in 60 lines to prepare the audience for the selection of Aeschylus. Some scholars, including Dover and Sommerstein, question whether Dionysus has found a good reason for choosing Aeschylus, and suggest that the god means to distance himself from the choice of Aeschylus by invoking his psyche.17

Attempts to understand Dionysus’ choice are complicated by the textual problems that plague the final agôn of political advice, especially 1435–66, which seem to consist of a mix of lines from two different productions of the play.18 While these verses have understandably been the focus of attention in scholarly examinations of Dionysus’ choice of Aeschylus, the questions about the text, especially which tragic poet speaks which advice and in what order—and in which performance—are probably insoluble. Moreover, the proposed restorations are problematized by the interpretive assumptions that motivate them. In this vein, Riu criticizes those who have reconstructed this scene “motivated by the need to justify Dionysus’ choice: if he takes Aeschylus, this must be because Aeschylus gives the best advice to the city.”19 Building an argument about Dionysus’ choice on any reconstruction of these lines thus risks circularity. What I take to be the best solution, however, to the problem of Dionysus’ choice fortuitously skirts the textual problems that plague the final round of the contest. As I argue below, by the end of the play any preference Dionysus might express would seem arbitrary, or even beside the point, because of the beating both tragic poets take during the agôn. Dover rightly characterizes Dionysus’ obedience to his psyche as “one more admission of inability to decide” and “an arbitrary, intuitive judgement, divorced from rational assessment of the poets’ answers to the questions he has just put to them,” and astutely compares this impulse of the god’s psyche to the pothos for Euripides that he says “struck my heart” (53–4) and inspired his journey to Hades in the first place.20 But Dover does not explore why Aristophanes presents

16 1411 ἄνδρες φίλοι, κἀγὼ μὲν αὐτοῦς οὐ κρινῶ.
20 Sommerstein, Frogs (above, n. 17), p. 292, makes a similar observation.
Dionysus’ decision as arbitrary. What matters most about the final round of the *agôn*—and the textual problems of the scene do not detract from this point—is Dionysus’ new political yardstick for measuring the poets’ worthiness. His emphasis on politics at the end of *Frogs* is crucial for fitting the paraenetic pedigree of the parabasis into an interpretation of the play as a whole.

Throughout the *agôn*, the characterization of both tragedians is sufficiently negative that in the end neither is redeemable as an adequate solution to Dionysus’ and Athens’ real need, for sage advice.21 Dionysus does distance himself from his *psychê’s* preference for Aeschylus, but the choice of Euripides would have been no less inexplicable. The harsh criticisms hurled back and forth by Euripides and Aeschylus, and at both by the chorus, raise serious doubts about either’s viability as an effective teacher of the city. In the end, the contest between the tragic poets proves something of a sham. To defend this interpretation, we must examine in detail the critiques of each tragic poet in the *agôn*.

The pre-agonic choral song (814–29) and the preliminaries of the *agôn* proper (830–904) establish the main points of difference between Euripides and Aeschylus and the major lines of criticism elaborated throughout the contest. When the chorus introduces the two contestants (814–29), they are left unnamed, but it does not take long to figure out who is who. The ill-tempered “thunderer” (814 ἐριβρεμέτας) subject to bouts of “terrible madness” (816–17) can be no one but Aeschylus. His rage is compared to the destructive power of a storm: “with a roar he will hurl utterances bolted together, tearing off timbers with his gigantic blast” (823–5). The blustery storm is a recurring metaphor for Aeschylus’ poetic style, employed even by Dionysus, who calls for the sacrifice of a black lamb to appease “the whirlwind” (847–8 τυφώς) and warns Euripides to avoid Aeschylus’ “hailstorm” (852–3 τῶν χαλαζών). Euripides for his part is described as “sharp-talking” (815 ὀξύλαλον), a poet with an over-refined, slick style, and defined entirely by his tongue, which is “smooth, mouth-working, word-testing … and utterance-dissecting.”22 Moreover, the ridiculously hyperbolic, mock-epic tone of the chorus’ words before the competition contribute to the proceedings a feeling that the imminent contest should not be taken too seriously.23

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21 At the same time, there is no need to descend to false equivalency. I agree with Biles, *Aristophanes* (above, n. 17), p. 250 n. 155, that Aeschylus does seem to win on points, even comfortably so. Yet Dionysus hesitates. The *agôn* between Better Argument and Worse Argument in *Clouds* presents a similar dynamic. Even if the values Better Argument represents have the Chorus’ (and our) sympathy, he is hardly impressive and his defeat is not undeserved; “Neither side in the great debate is given an admirable champion” (Jeffrey Henderson (trans.), *Aristophanes: Acharnians, Lysistrata, Clouds* [Newburyport: Focus, 1997], p. 154).

22 826–8 στοματουργὸς ἐπῶν βασανιστρια λίσπῃ / γλώσσα’ … / ρήματα δαιμομένη.

23 For example 818–21 ἐσταί δ’ ὑψιλόφων τε λόγων κορυθαίλα νείκη / σγινδάλαμοι τε παραξενίων σμαλεύματα τ’ ἐργιν’ / φωτὸς ἀμυνόμενον φρενοτέκτονος ἀνδρὸς ρήμαθ’ ἰποβάμονα (“We’ll have helmet-glinting struggles of tall-crested words, we’ll have linchpin-shavings and chisel-parings of artworks as a man fends off a thought-building hero’s galloping utterances.”).
The first words of the two tragedians anticipate the lines of attack they pursue against one other throughout the *agôν*. Euripides accuses Aeschylus of putting on airs (833 ἀποσεμνυνεῖται) and “marvel-making” (834 ἐτερατεύετο)—what Hubbard calls Aeschylus’ “preoccupation with the fantastic and unnatural.” Euripides returns to this critique when he defends his staging of domestic plots as something with which the audience is familiar and as a basis on which his skill can accordingly be tested (959–61). The same cannot be said for Aeschylus’ subject matter, which drove people out of their minds and scared them (961–3). Euripides is most comfortable, however, attacking Aeschylus for his style, which is raw, undisciplined and unclear (837–9).

The incomprehensibility of Aeschylus’ language is highlighted at 923–30, where “his pretentious and recherché diction,” filled with strange compound words, is “unknown to the audience” (925 ἄγνωτα τοῖς θεωμένοις) and “not easy to understand” (930 ὁ ζυμβαλεῖν οὐ ράδι ἤν). Euripides is able to get Dionysus to agree on this point: “By heaven, I myself have lain awake through long stretches of night trying to figure out the kind of bird a tawny horsecock is” (930–2).

Aeschylus’ initial reaction is to counterattack, not on the ground of style as initiated by Euripides, but on content and morality. Euripides is criticized for debasing tragedy, for putting inappropriate and unworthy characters on stage. With characteristically absurd compounds, Aeschylus calls him a “gossip-gatherer, beggar-maker and rag-stitcher” (841–2 ὁ στωμυλιοσυλλεκτάδη / καὶ πτωχοποιέ καὶ ῥακιοσυρρατάδη) and then “the cripple-creator” (846 τὸν χωλοποιόν). Euripides is also accused of corrupting his audience with immoral stories, for example by “introducing unholy marriages into our craft” (850). While Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes* taught the audience to want to be fierce in battle (1021–2), Euripides’ “whores,” Phaedra and Stheneboea, are improper role models for Athenian women (1043–51). According to Aeschylus, “the poet should hide what’s base (ponêron), not introduce it and not teach it” (1053–4). But Euripides responds by questioning whether the audience could ever understand Aeschylus’ instruction, obscured as it is by over-lofty expression (1056–60), to which Aeschylus responds by accusing Euripides of dubious subject matter (1061–6), and so on and so on. This pattern of Euripides emphasizing style and Aeschylus subject matter is consistent throughout the contest, and shows where each tragedian thinks the superiority of his *techmé* lies. But it is also the reason the contest goes nowhere, never reaching a productive conclusion. Even the “weighing of words,” in which Aeschylus is the clear victor, fails to produce a winner. The meandering, aimless quality of the contest is caused in part by each poet choosing a different criterion by which to define the contest of who is “more talented in the art of poetry.”

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26 Euripides twice describes Aeschylus as “unclear” (927 σαφὲς δ’ ἄν εἶπεν οὐδὲ ἤν, 1122 ἄσαφῆς).

27 767, 780 τὴν τέχνην σοφότερος. Similar expressions at 770, 831.
As the tragic poets talk past one another and run over the same ground again and again, they become increasingly petty and irritating, and the contest becomes more pointless and tiresome.

From the beginning of the contest, the dominant strategy of the two rivals is established. Euripides wastes no time going on the offensive: “Very well, as for myself, what kind of poet I am, I’ll reveal in my final remarks; but first I’ll expose my opponent for the charlatan and quack that he was, and how he hoodwinked his audiences, whom he took over from Phrynichus already raised to be morons” (907–10). Neither tragedian makes a serious effort to defend himself; both merely retaliate with counter-criticism. Aristophanes has arranged the contest this way, having the tragedians focus on one another’s faults, to maintain an overall negative tone, while allowing the respective merits of Aeschylus and Euripides to be passed over in virtual silence. This emphasis on “badness,” as Rosen calls it, allows Aristophanes to appropriate the virtues of each tragic poet’s sophia without praising either.28 While Aeschylus gets the better of Euripides in their exchanges, especially in the debate over prologues and in the weighing of words, he hardly emerges unscathed and is still roundly criticized by both the chorus and Dionysus, as was noted above. These exchanges between the competitors, and the often sarcastic comments by the onlookers, combine to undermine Euripides and Aeschylus alike. Even Dionysus’ praise of the dueling poets only serves to underline their inadequacies. Each has poetic talent, but it is incomplete. While Euripides is pleasing and Aeschylus wise,29 the implication here and throughout the contest is that neither is both. As was argued above, in the poets’ own speeches this polarity holds true: Aeschylus is preoccupied with moral issues and criticizes Euripides purely on such grounds, while Euripides focuses on the aesthetic aspects of tragedy, language and style. With the stature of both tragic poets diminished, and given these two and only these two options, Dionysus’ choice has been rendered irrelevant and the contest moot.30

But to say that both Aeschylus and Euripides fail as potential teachers of the city is to beg the question of who does qualify. In Frogs, Aristophanes claims that role for himself,31 and his use of paraenetic material, like that in Theognis, the teacher-poet

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29 1413 τὸν μὲν γάρ ἡγοῦμαι σοφόν, τῷ δ’ ἡδομαί.

30 The animated television series South Park offers a modern parallel in an episode that parodies the 2004 US presidential election as a pointless choice between a “giant douche” and a “turd sandwich” (Season 8, Episode 8).

par excellence, bolsters that claim. In the parabasis, Aristophanes proves that he is a competent heir to the legacy of didactic poetry Theognis represents. By convention, the parabasis represents the poet’s voice, and Aristophanes has chosen that opportunity in *Frogs* to “step aside” from the dramatic action and to anticipate Dionysus’ political concerns at the end of the *agôn*, by offering his own advice for Athens’ current political problems in quite “Theognidean” terms. And by adapting paraenetic themes, he shows his acquaintance with the poetic tradition he hopes to inherit and continue.

Ultimately, Aristophanes’ critique of the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides is a critique of tragedy as a genre. Where both Aeschylus and Euripides fail, in possessing a complete poetic art that comprises both the aesthetic and the moral, the “pleasing” and the “wise,” as Dionysus defines it (1413), Aristophanes succeeds. As Hubbard points out, Aristophanes, ironically, defines his poetics as a mix of the Aeschylean and the Euripidean: “Aristophanes’ own drama aims to embrace Aeschylus’ fantastic imagination and moral purpose without his obscurantism and seeming authoritarianism; it favors Euripides’ everyday realism without his apparent moral indifference.”

To reiterate a point made earlier, Aristophanes’ strategy of arranging a contest that amounts to little more than mutual slander allows him to borrow the positive elements of the two tragedians’ *sophia*, but without acknowledging their Aeschylean or Euripidean pedigree. Aeschylus, for example, speaks in accord with the chorus’ advice in the parabasis: he rejects putting “what’s base” (*ponêron* 1053) on stage, while they urge Athens to put an end to the political influence of the *ponêroi*. Aeschylus’ wisdom is never in doubt. But his style was an inappropriate vehicle for instruction, at least by the end of the 5th century.

The chorus confirm Aristophanes’ poetic program when they pray to Demeter for the ability “to say many funny things (*polla geloia*) and many serious things (*polla spoudaia*)” (389–90). Aristophanes seems to be arguing throughout *Frogs* that precisely this two-fold character of comedy, its ability to entertain and to advise wisely, makes it better suited than tragedy, as defined by its poles, Aeschylus and Euripides, to be the new poetic medium of civic wisdom, following in Theognis’ footsteps. Dionysus’ attempt to resolve Athens’ political crisis by reviving one of the deceased tragic poets has been a waste of energy; he is looking in the wrong place, or perhaps, we might say, on the wrong stage. The city’s solutions are to be found in the other dramatic genre, in comedy, or at least in Aristophanes’ brand of it.

J.R. Green
Two Phaedras: Euripides and Aristophanes?

Abstract: A “new” vase with a comic scene at the Nicholson Museum in Sydney is unique in its subject-matter. It shows a parody of tragedy, arguably of Phaedra and her Nurse from Euripides’ Hippolytus. It should be dated to about 400 BC or even a little before. While important for its own sake, it also prompts discussion of the staging of Euripides’ play.

The Nicholson Museum at the University of Sydney has recently been presented with a Lucanian red-figured bell-krater that bears an unusual comic scene (Figs 1–4).1 It is 28.3cm high and has a diameter at the lip of 28.8/29.1cm.2 The vase has been put

I am happy to express my debt to Francesca Silvestrelli for her help on issues relating to early Lucanian red-figure, as well as to Sophie Morton in Sydney for much practical assistance in the preparation of this article. Alan Sommerstein has made invaluable comments on an earlier version of this article. I also make grateful acknowledgement to the following for photographs and permission to publish them: S. Pasparlas and C. Avronidaki (Athens), M. Fodor (Boston), H. Pflug (Heidelberg), C. Sutherns (London), L. Grissom (Malibu), T.E. Cinquantaquattro, S. Saviana and A. Villone (Naples), A. Taylor (Oxford), T. Leroux (Paris), A. Pavone (Taranto), K.B. Zimmer (Tübingen) and I. Jung (Vienna).

Abbreviations:
IGD = A.D. Trendall and T.B.L. Webster, Illustrations of Greek Drama (London: Phaidon, 1971)
Wieseler, Theatergebäude = F. Wieseler, Theatergebäude und Denkmäler des Bühnenwesens bei den Griechen und Römern (Göttingen: Vandenhoech & Ruprecht, 1851)
1 Inv. 2013.2, presented by James Ede in my honor. I seek to repay his kindness in acknowledging his help and friendship (and that of his father) over many years. The photographs and the profile drawing are by Rowan Conroy. I am grateful too to Michael Turner for facilitating my access to the vase.
2 The difference is due to the pressure exerted on the sides of the vase by the application of the handles while the vase was leather-hard.
together from four or perhaps five large, sharp-edged fragments. Fortunately the joins do not occur at any critical points so far as the decoration is concerned. On the front, a break runs through the thighs of the right-hand figure; there is possibly some slight surface damage to the right hand of the left figure. On the reverse, an angled line runs through the right arm and shoulder of the left youth; there is some minor surface wear to the stele; on the right youth, a near-vertical line comes across his head, through his shoulder and down to the toes of his left foot. None of this makes any serious difference; in effect, the vase is near intact and in good condition.

Fig. 1: Lucanian red-figure bell-krater, University of Sydney, Nicholson Museum 2013.2, gift of James Ede in honour of Professor J.R. Green.
Fig. 2: Detail of Fig. 1.

Fig. 3: Reverse of Fig. 1.
The shape of the vessel is clear from the drawing (Fig. 4). In terms of its attribution and dating, we should note a pronounced in-curve in the upper wall. The zone running round the upper wall below the lip is offset above and below. There is a sharp edge at the top of the inner face of the lip. The handles are just slightly in-turned (a useful chronological indicator). The inner face of the foot meets the underside of the floor at a sharp angle, and there is also a fairly sharp carination at what one might call the shoulder of the inner face.

The clay is well worked, without obvious inclusions, and has a smooth finish; it is a pale reddish brown (Munsell 7.5YR 6/4 light brown). There are faint traces of a preliminary sketch for the right-hand figure, particularly in the area of her raised arm, but its use is not readily detectable elsewhere.

The black glaze is lustrous and fairly thickly applied, although less so on the handles, where it has fired more metallic. There is some crackling of the glaze in the
area below the bed on side A, and the glaze is slightly misfired in an area behind the upper body of the left-hand figure. Reserved are the inner faces of the handles and the handle-zones, a band at the junction of upper wall and lip on the inner face, and another just within the edge of the lip; also bands above and below the raised zone below the lip, an incised groove at the junction of stem and foot, the vertical face of the foot and the whole of the underside. There is no evidence of added color in the figure-work, nor is there any trace of labels for the figures.

All the reserved surfaces are reddened, in places somewhat unevenly, except for the underside where there are, however, two short strokes of strong red, probably ancient, on either side of the floor; their purpose is uncertain. There is also a modern drilled hole where a clay sample has been taken. There are no graffiti.

Side A has a two-figure composition with a female figure moving across from the left toward a woman who leans back on a bed. Their clothing comes to the ground, so that one sees nothing of their feet. The hands are simply done. There is plentiful use of relief line for details, and we may note it especially for the webbing on the horizontal frame of the bed and to show the roughness of the hair of the figure on the left. There is no relief contour.

The reverse has two cloaked youths about a stele. The hair of the left youth is curlier than that of the right. The form of his ear is original and not due to damage. On the reverse, the right youth has obvious footwear; for the left figure, shoes are indicated only by an oblique line on the left foot. (What seems to be a line on the right foot is in fact a minor crack.) Note that the outer edges of their cloaks are vertical so as to provide a clear edge to the scenes. The right youth has a zigzag in the bunch of drapery hanging behind him. In the laurel above the head of the left youth is a blob of miltos with a fine glaze line about it at the right. I do not know what, if anything, it was meant to represent.

There is a band of maeander with two saltire squares under the figure-scenes on each side; they do not extend around the vase, nor is there any decoration below the handles. Running round the vase in the zone below the lip is a band of laurel.

To try to pin down the vase’s date and stylistic context, it is worth looking briefly for other works by the same hand. Since the principal scene is so individual, it is easier to begin with the reverse, which has a standard scheme of cloaked youths facing each other about a stele. The hand seems to be the same as that on the bell-krater in the Getty Museum, 80.AE.139.2 (Fig. 5a). Compare the handling of the

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3 I use the term “laurel” in a conventional sense, regardless of whether it is laurel, olive or myrtle.