

**Defining the Comic Plot: Genre and Storytelling  
in Aristophanes**

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I, Naomi Scott, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

## Abstract

This dissertation examines the relationship between inter-generic interaction and plot structure in the plays of Aristophanes. Scholars have long observed that Athenian comedy engages with other poetic forms as part of its self-definition; however, studies have largely treated this as a highly localised phenomenon. By contrast, this thesis will argue that comedy's sustained reflection on its own generic status informs the construction of plot. The dissertation focuses primarily but not exclusively on the text; I also seek to integrate a consideration of staging, costume, and other visual aspects of Old Comedy into the discussion, and to examine the plays not only as poetic texts but as enacted drama.

The dissertation aims to show firstly, that inter-generic interactions are deeply embedded in the plot structures of Aristophanes' plays; secondly, that these interactions are not exclusively parodic, but rather operate along a spectrum from the overtly antagonistic, to the merely contrastive and even incorporative; and thirdly, that sustained intergeneric engagement is not limited in Aristophanes to 'high' genres, such as tragedy and epic, but also encompasses 'low' discourses such as Aesopic fable.

The dissertation suggests that Aristophanes' plays display a marked interest in not only the formal differences between genres, in the form of their poetics, aesthetics, or cultural status; but also in the kinds of narratives and modes of storytelling which belong to, and define, different genres. This interest in narrative, plot, and storytelling is in turn self-reflexive, as the plays investigate their own generic status through the prism of their plots, and the kinds of stories which they tell. The dissertation argues that the plays make a series of incursions into modes of storytelling associated with genres other than comedy; and that these different modes are accordingly incorporated not only into the comic plot, but into an expanding and deeply competitive definition of what constitutes comic storytelling.

Each of the three chapters examines a different sub-genre of comic plot, namely animal comedy (in the *Wasps*); mythic comedy (in *Peace* and *Birds*); and 'women on top' plots (in the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Ecclesiazusae*).

All translations of Aristophanes are taken from Alan Sommerstein's Aris & Phillips series (Aristophanes: Volumes 1-11). All other translations are taken from the relevant volume of the Loeb Classical Library, except where indicated.

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## Introduction

This dissertation examines the relationship between storytelling and genre in the plays of Aristophanes. The dissertation suggests that Aristophanes' plays display a marked interest in not only the boundaries and intersections between genres in terms of their poetics, aesthetics, or cultural status; but also in the kinds of narratives and modes of storytelling which belong to, and define, different genres, and particularly comedy. I argue that the plays make a series of incursions into modes of storytelling associated with genres other than comedy; and that these different modes are accordingly incorporated not only into the comic plot, but into an expanding definition of what constitutes comic storytelling.

Recent scholarship on Old Comedy has rightly stressed the genre's remarkable and persistent self-reflexivity. Comedy's impulse towards self-examination is most obviously formalised in the self-referential parabasis, in which the chorus 'step forward'<sup>1</sup> to address the audience directly. Earlier scholarship often treated the parabasis as a digression, otherwise irrelevant to the plot and structure of the play, and theorised that it may have been the remnant of an older ritual tradition;<sup>2</sup> or otherwise ignored it all together.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to this earlier view, Thomas Hubbard's 1991 monograph *The Mask of Comedy: Aristophanes and the Intertextual Parabasis* dismissed the argument that the parabasis was the fossil of an earlier cultic element of Old Comedy, and instead suggested that it should be seen as a central component of a play's structure which, far from being a digression, is in fact integrated into the plot and themes of the play as a whole. Additionally, a series of important publications have argued that overt self-consciousness in Aristophanes is not limited to the parabasis, but rather that metapoetic and metatheatrical reflection is a consistent feature of the plays, and a fundamental characteristic of Old Comedy as a genre. Among the most notable publications

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1. Cf. Sifakis 1971: 62-66 for a discussion of the exact meaning of the verb παραβαίνειν, and the act of 'stepping forward' in the parabasis.

2. Cf. for example Murray 1933, Cornford 1934. The arguments against this view of the parabasis are outlined in Hubbard 1991: 23-7.

3. Note in particular that Whitman's highly influential 1964 monograph, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero*, contains almost no discussion of the plays' parabases.

on this topic is Niall Slater's 2002 book *Spectator Politics: Metatheatre and Performance in Aristophanes*, which argues that metatheatricality is not only a core element of comedy's aesthetics, but is (in Aristophanes at least) tied to the plays' function as an act of political discourse embedded in and actively engaged with the institutions and operation of the Athenian state; and Zachary Biles' 2001 book *Aristophanes and the Poetics of Competition*, which argues that the plays make constant reference to their agonistic context, and that an engagement with their status as competitors in the annual dramatic contest, along with a sustained agonistic manoeuvring against and critiquing of comic rivals, is integrated into the plays' dramatic action. In the field of Old Comedy more broadly, Emmanuela Bakola has in her 2010 book *Cratinus and the Art of Comedy* argued for the importance of poetic self-presentation in the plays of Cratinus; Ian Ruffell's 2002 article 'A Total Write-Off: Aristophanes, Cratinus, and the Rhetoric of Comic Competition' has demonstrated the extent to which competitive intra-generic discourse could be instrumental in shaping the plots of comic plays; and Biles's chapter in the 2014 *Cambridge Companion to Greek Comedy*, entitled 'The Rivals of Aristophanes and Menander', again stressed the importance of rivalry and contest to not only Old, but also New Comedy.

Much of the recent work on comedy's self-reflexivity has emphasised the authorial persona, and the construction of poetic voice. Goldhill's 1991 book, *The Poet's Voice*, which included an extensive section on Aristophanes, emphasised the importance of the representation of poetry and the poet in Greek literature; and this focus on the figure of the poet is central in particular to Biles' work, whose reading of Aristophanes and Old Comedy within the context of the dramatic competition stresses the construction of poetic identity as a central component of this agonistic mode. Articles by Ruffell (2002, above) and Bakola (2008) have likewise focused on the poetic persona as a central issue of comedy's self-reflexivity. Similarly those studies which focus on the play's awareness of their festal and performative contexts emphasise the role of authorial voice and the figure of the poet; Biles' primary concern is with the degree to which festal agonistics permeate the plots of Aristophanes' plays, and emphasises the figure of the poet as a participant in the comic competition; while Slater's study of metatheatre in Aristophanes examines the way in which

the plays investigate their own status as theatrical performance, and accordingly emphasises the role of the figure of the poet-director, or *chorodidaskalos*, in the plays.

By contrast, the role of plot and storytelling (what Aristotle calls a play's *μῦθος*),<sup>4</sup> and their relationship to comedy's impulse towards self-examination, have been comparatively overlooked. What kinds of stories does comedy tell? How do these stories in both their form and content differ from the stories of other genres? And how do plays use this central component of storytelling to investigate their own generic status? This question of what defines the comic plot, and how the comic plot can in turn be used as part of comedy's own process of self-definition, is the central issue of this thesis. The fact that this question has previously received relatively little attention is perhaps a consequence of the way in which comedy's self-reflexivity has often been understood as a localised phenomenon within the text. With the exception of Biles and Slater, whose studies emphasise the extent to which comedy's self-awareness of its status as performance permeates the plays, much of the scholarship on comedy's metadiscursivity has focused primarily on those moments of overt, explicit, or surface-level self awareness within the text, such as the parabasis, or passages in an overtly parabolic mode.<sup>5</sup> This dissertation will argue that, far from operating only at surface level, comedy's reflection on its own generic status informs the construction of plot, and is deeply embedded in the story-structures of Aristophanes' plays.

Comedy's self-reflection on its generic status inevitably looks outwards to other genres, as well as inwards to its own features; and Aristophanes' interactions with other genres, including of course comedy's indirect 'rival', tragedy, will accordingly be a central concern

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4. Aristotle defines the *μῦθος* as the "arrangement of deeds/acts" (1450a 3-4: λέγω γὰρ μῦθον τοῦτον τὴν σύνθεσιν τῶν πραγμάτων). On the concept of *μῦθος* in Aristotle, cf. Halliwell 1987: 96-108, 138-148, and Belfiore 1992 ch. 3; Janko 1984: 168-7 discusses the term with particular relation to comedy.

5. Cf. for example Dicaeopolis' speech at *Ach.* 496-555, in which Dicaeopolis' speech to the chorus appears to also contain an element of 'authorial voice' (a problem which has been discussed at length, most notably by Goldhill 1991, Hubbard 1991, Biles 2011); or Praxagora's speech at *Eccl.* 583-5, where she directly addresses the audience on the subject of her radical new ideas.



of this thesis. Since the first ancient commentaries,<sup>6</sup> the extensive and wide-ranging allusiveness of Aristophanes and the other Old Comedians has been acknowledged, and this has in turn been recognised as a central component of the genre's often parodic humour. This allusiveness has often been framed as Bakhtinian dialogism, and this is the formulation favoured by both Goldhill, who uses Bakhtinian theory to root Aristophanes' plays in their festal, 'carnivalic' context; and Charles Platter, whose 2007 monograph *Aristophanes and the Carnival of Genres* uses Bakhtin's theory of dialogism extensively. Platter's approach to Bakhtinian dialogism in particular frames relationships between genres as primarily agonistic, arguing that "the adversarial relationship between carnival spirit and the world of everyday life... is paradigmatic for the interactions of literary genres" (2007: 2). This emphasis on competitive intertextuality intersects with the increasing understanding of Old Comedy as an inherently, and overtly, agonistic genre, as the works of Hubbard (1991), Biles (2001), Ruffell (2002), and Bakola (2008) all emphasise.

However, while comedy's essential agonistic nature is undeniable, the prevalence of this model of comic intertextuality has perhaps led to an over-emphasis on intertextual interactions, both inter- and intra-generic, which conform to this framework (in that they are defensive, aggressive, or otherwise overtly evaluative or critical); while conversely, interactions which are not primarily agonistic or parodic have been relatively overlooked. It is certainly true that there can be a competitive element to Aristophanic intertextuality, and that such a stance is to a degree inevitable in interactions not only between rival comedians, but also between comedy and its indirect rival at the dramatic festival, tragedy, with whom comedy had literally to share the stage. However, even interactions with tragedy (whose status as both a 'high' or 'serious' genre, and as an indirect competitor with comedy, often leads to some of the most antagonistic interactions in Aristophanes) are varied in their tone, and are not only not always parodic, but do not always even (*pace* Silk) draw overt attention

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6. Cf. Pfeiffer 1968 on the early commentary tradition (and esp. pp. 160-3, 189-194 for commentaries on Old Comedy and Aristophanes). A more recent discussion of the early commentaries on Aristophanes can be found in Miles 2016.

to the discontinuity between the two genres.<sup>7</sup> This thesis will suggest that Aristophanes' interactions with tragedy are not uniformly agonistic, but that elements of tragedy and the tragic may be incorporated and even assimilated into the comic plot.

Another way in which this emphasis on comedy's agonistic qualities has tended to distort is the privileging of tragedy as intertext. While it is clear that tragedy looms large in Aristophanes' intergeneric interactions, this is not to the exclusion of sustained engagements with other genres and modes, some of which are of similarly high status to tragedy, but others of which are more comparable to comedy in status and register. By expanding my focus to include interactions with a variety of genres, including tragedy, but also epic, fable, and even religious texts such as the Orphic hymns, I hope first of all to emphasise the importance of recognising the sheer range of Aristophanic intertextuality; and secondly, to show that Aristophanic intertexts sit on a spectrum from the openly a(nta)gonistic and parodic, to the constructive and incorporative. Although where a specific interaction sits along this spectrum may be influenced by the kind of genre implicated in that interaction (in that genres with a higher status, such as epic and tragedy, are more likely to generate a competitive or parodic stance; while genres such as fable with a similar or even lower status to comedy are more likely to be incorporated in other ways), there is no consistent correlation between a genre's status, and the stance taken towards it.<sup>8</sup> This thesis therefore will attempt to move beyond a

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7. Cf. Silk 1993, 2000a: 137-9 who argues that even those instances of paratragedy which are not parodic operate by foregrounding the distance between tragic and comic tone, thereby creating a 'collision' between the two. Such collision are certainly one mode of interaction with tragedy found in Aristophanes; however, as this thesis will suggest, interactions may be incorporative rather than discontinuous. Silk's emphasis on discontinuity and collision is perhaps a consequence of his particular focus on Aristophanic language, which leads to an emphasis on localised, as opposed to sustained, interactions with tragedy.

8. The idea of a hierarchy of genres from lowest to highest dates back at least to Aristotle (cf. *Poetics* 4.1448b ff.), who in particular characterises tragedy as a high form along with epic, and comedy as low; and the formulation of generic hierarchy found in Aristotle appears to have persisted to some degree throughout the Classical period. For a discussion of the relationship between Aristotle's theory of genre and Augustan poetry in particular, cf. the introduction to Harrison 2007, in particular pp. 2-10. For a broader discussion of the idea of generic hierarchy cf. Fowler 1982 ch. 12. Fowler argues that while the exact organisation of any hierarchy of genres might differ between periods, and that indeed "it would be hard to

discussion of Aristophanic intertextuality which privileges parody and particularly ‘paratragedy’ above all else,<sup>9</sup> towards a model which recognises the full breadth of intergeneric interaction in Aristophanic comedy, and the variety of modes it may take.

The question of to what degree this model of intergeneric interaction is specifically Aristophanic, and to what degree it is only indicative of the practices of Old Comedy as a whole, is difficult to answer. The completion in 1983 of Kassel and Austin’s *Poetae Comici Graeci* was a crucial catalyst for studies on non-Aristophanic Old Comedy; and in particular, since the landmark publication in 2000 of *The Rivals of Aristophanes*, studies of Old Comedy have increasingly looked beyond Aristophanes towards other poets. In addition to Bakola’s 2010 study of Cratinus, Ian Story’s 2003 monograph *Eupolis: Poet of Old Comedy* provides an in-depth study of another of the major figures contemporary with Aristophanes. Furthermore, thematic studies of Old Comedy have increasingly included some consideration of the fragments of other comic poets in addition to Aristophanes’ plays; Ian Ruffell’s 2001 book *Politics and Anti-Realism in Athenian Old Comedy*, while it focuses more extensively on Aristophanic comedy, also encompasses a variety of Old Comic poets and their works.

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maintain that a single, all-embracing hierarchy ever existed” (219), the idea that hierarchical relationships exist between genres is fundamentally sound. Fowler emphasises in particular that the idea of a hierarchy of genres is a strong thread of ancient literary criticism, and one which persisted into the Renaissance and even beyond. The idea of ‘low’ or ‘popular’ literature is discussed again in ch. 1 of this thesis with particular reference to fable.

9. The exact definition of the term paratragedy has tended to be rather inexact. It is usually deployed as, in Silk’s words, a “cover term for all of comedy’s intertextual dependence on tragedy, some of which is parodic, but some is not” (1993: 479). For further discussion of paratragedy, cf. Rau 1967; Foley 1988; Ruffell 2011 ch. 8; and, for a discussion of paratragedy beyond Aristophanes, Bakola 2010 ch. 3. A number of discussions of paratragedy limit the term to mean only the parodic use of tragedy, in particular Platter 2007 *passim* (discussed above; this is largely the product of the particular way in which Platter utilises Bakhtinian theory and emphasises the antagonism of relationships between genres in general, and especially in comedy) and Ruffell 2011 *passim* (who treats paratragedy as a subcategory of parody). However a broader definition of paratragedy as encompassing both the parodic and the non-parodic, as discussed in Silk 1993, is widely accepted. Despite this, many studies of even non-parodic paratragedy emphasise the antagonistic relationship between comedy and tragedy in Aristophanes, for example Silk 2000a: 137-9 which argues that paratragedy is inherently disruptive even when it is not overtly parodic. Given the lack of consensus on what exactly constitutes ‘paratragedy’, this terminology will largely be avoided in this thesis.

Most recently, Stephen Kidd's 2014 monograph, *Nonsense and Meaning in Ancient Greek Comedy*, is extremely wide in its scope, discussing not only poets of Old Comedy, but also Middle; and the 2014 *Cambridge Companion to Greek Comedy* integrates some discussion of the comic fragments throughout its study of both Old and New Comedy. Despite these recent advances however, the fragmentary nature of the evidence for other comic poets makes any study of sustained intergeneric interaction problematic; and a study of plot and storytelling more difficult still. It is for this reason that, while the works of other of the Old Comedians will be considered where possible, the primary focus of this thesis is by necessity Aristophanes.

A further problem inherent to the study of Old Comedy is that even those texts which are technically categorised as having survived intact are in fact only ever partial records of the original play. Music, dance, costume, props, scenery, and other forms of staging and dramaturgy, constituents of a play which are no less important than the spoken text, can only ever be reconstructed indirectly, using the evidence of the play-scripts themselves, as well as visual evidence, for example from vases.<sup>10</sup> Some scholarship on Aristophanes in the mid-twentieth century did give attention to questions of dramaturgy and staging, most notably Russo's 1962 volume, *Aristophanes: An Author for the Stage*, which offered a reconstruction of elements of Aristophanes' staging, and which is still a vital resource for any study of Aristophanes' plays. The publication in 1977 of Oliver Taplin's monograph *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* presented a comprehensive study of dramaturgy in Aeschylus, and provided a methodological model for how similar studies of other dramatists, both tragic and comic, might be conducted. Both Russo and Taplin focus particularly on how the entrances, exits, and the blocking of actors might be managed. More recently, Martin Revermann's 2006 monograph, *Comic Business: Theatricality, Dramatic Technique, and Performance Contexts*

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10. While my suggestions usually take the spoken text of the plays themselves as their primary starting-point, archaeological evidence, particularly in the form of vases, will be considered where relevant. A full integration of textual and archaeological evidence in the study of performance in Old Comedy is a feature of Taplin 2007, Hughes 2006, Rothwell 2007, and Compton-Engle 2015, all of whom provide vital models for how visual and archaeological evidence can most usefully be deployed to supplement evidence internal to the texts themselves.

of *Aristophanic Comedy*, applies contemporary theories of performance criticism to Aristophanes' plays, and offers both a theoretical discussion of Aristophanic dramaturgy, and a detailed reconstruction of three specific plays (namely the *Clouds*, *Lysistrata*, and *Wealth*) which together span the length of Aristophanes' career. Kenneth Rothwell's 2007 volume, *Nature, Culture, and the Origins of Greek Comedy: A Study of Animal Choruses*, examined the comic chorus, and specifically animal choruses, in greater detail, and is an example of the successful integration of visual evidence (particularly from vases) into the study of dramaturgy. Finally, in 2015, the publication of Gwendolyn Compton-Engle's monograph, *Costume in the Comedies of Aristophanes*, offered a detailed and illuminating study of not only the form of costume in Aristophanes' plays, but its importance for the dramatic action. However despite these valuable contributions to the study of dramaturgy in both comic and tragic scholarship, many studies of Aristophanes have limited themselves primarily to the textual and linguistic aspects of the plays. In particular, the recent monographs by Ruffell (2011) and Kidd (2014) largely focus on comedy as language, rather than as enacted drama. This thesis by contrast hopes to build on the work of Slater (2002) and Bakola (2010), both of whom integrate a consideration of dramaturgy, staging, and costume into their broader studies of comedy.

Reconstructions of the visual elements of a play are of course by nature always speculative, and attempting such speculations inevitably raises the difficult question of the degree to which the on-stage action and visuals are linked to the spoken text of the play. When dealing with tragic performance, Oliver Taplin has suggested that we may take it as a rule of thumb that "the significant stage instructions are implicit in the words" (1977: 28); and that those actions and visual effects (of costume, stage-machinery etc.) which occur are those necessitated by the spoken text which accompanies them. This formulation requires some modification before being applied to comedy. As Gwendolyn Compton-Engle has argued, comedy is both more frenetic, and less consequential in its action than tragedy; and therefore firstly, it is "nearly impossible... for each and every action to be verbalized" (2015: 8); and secondly, since unlike tragedy whose action is governed by "a tightly constructed logic in which emotions, gestures, entrances, and exits have meaning and

consequence” (ibid.), comedy’s more disjuncted, sequential nature allows for action which is inconsequential and absurd (if not insignificant).<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, when dealing with comedy it is important to consider not only what visual actions and effects would be necessary in order for the words to make sense, but also what would be funny. Revermann has argued in his detailed study of comic stage-business that we must give some consideration to the specifically comic possibilities of staging, costume, and other visual effects.<sup>12</sup> In other words, when reconstructing these elements of performance we should favour solutions which are funny, and assume that opportunities for visual humour, in the form of costume or comic business, would not be passed up without good reason, even when they are not explicitly referenced in, or required by, the text itself. To take one example from the *Peace* (discussed further in chapter two of this thesis), although it is not strictly necessary that when Trygaeus claims that he has an oar which will save him from drowning (*Pax* 142-3) he should indicate his phallus, since the term ‘oar’ has a history of euphemistic usage we should not dismiss this comic possibility simply on the grounds that the text makes sense without it.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, when attempting to reconstruct stage visuals, it may also be helpful to consider not only what is necessitated by their direct, localised context, but also the “patterns or themes particular to that play” as a whole;<sup>14</sup> the visual aspects of Aristophanes’ plays are not incidental, but are integral to their plots and storytelling, and we can therefore expect them to interact with the themes otherwise expressed in the text. Indeed, the plays’ own reflections on the relationship between story and genre also encompass these visual aspects of the drama; this thesis will suggest that interactions between comedy and other genres, in particular tragedy, often have

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11. The so-called ‘significant action hypothesis’, and indeed the term ‘significant’, is discussed by Revermann 2006: 49-50, who argues that the term ‘significant’ is misplaced in the context of drama, since “[t]here is... no meaningless sign on stage, as anything generated within a theatrical framework, even if unintentionally, will automatically be constructed by the collaborating decoder to mean something” (36); and that there can therefore be no such thing as an ‘insignificant action’.

12. Cf. Revermann ch. 2.3, esp. pp. 64-5, in which Revermann uses this consideration of visual comic possibility to argue for the likelihood of a visible frog-chorus in the *Frogs* (for which see also ch. 1 n. 9 of this thesis)

13. Cf. chapter 2 64 & 65.

14. Compton-Engle 2015: 9. Compton-Engle makes this suggestion in relation to costume; however it holds good also for other visual elements of the plays.

visual and performative elements, as plays engage with not only with the kinds of stories which comedy and tragedy tell respectively; but also with how they tell, and stage, these stories.

This question of performance is one of the reasons why a straightforward model of intertextuality cannot be applied to Aristophanes' works without some modification. Barring some initial resistance,<sup>15</sup> the term intertextuality, coined by Julia Kristeva (1980: 66) partly in response to Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, has been enthusiastically adopted by Classicists to describe the interrelatedness and inter-referentiality of Greek and Latin literature. However, the initial focus within studies of Classical intertextuality on the Augustan poets, and particularly Vergil and Ovid, has at times led to a rather narrow understanding of the term; and intertextuality is often taken to mean primarily a specific (and often specifically marked) reference at one discrete point in a text to a specific and discrete point in another.<sup>16</sup> Stephen Hinds' 1998 monograph, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry*, in particular provides an important discussion of the vexed question of intentionality in intertextual studies; and Hinds' argument for negotiating a middle ground between a theory of 'allusion' which privileges the figure of the intention-bearing author, and a theory of 'intertextuality' which privileges the meaning created by the reader at the point of reception, has been highly influential; however, Hinds' focus on specifically Roman poetry necessarily shapes his discussion and conclusions. This specifically 'literary', Augustan model is not always appropriate in a performative context, in which costume, props, dramaturgy, and other visual signifiers generate meaning alongside the spoken text, and which may likewise be

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15. Cf. for example Fowler 1997, whose defence of the term intertextuality begins with an example of some of this resistance, specifically the 1995 Presidential Address to the Classical Association by David West, polemically titled *Cast Out Theory*.

16. The classic example of this kind of intertextuality in Latin literature is Ovid's use in *Fasti* 3.469-75 of Cat. 64.130-35, in which Ariadne's words in the Catullus poem are given to her again by Ovid, and the intertext is marked by the use of the word *memnimi*, which both draws attention to the intertext whilst simultaneously disrupting the artistic illusion. This example is discussed at length by Conte 1986: 60-3, and Hinds 1998: 3-11.

utilised in any given intertextual interaction.<sup>17</sup> There are many instances in Aristophanes' plays in which it is not only the spoken text of a tragedy which becomes the subject of parody, but also their staging; for example, it will be argued in chapter two that the interaction between the *Peace* and Euripides' *Bellerophon* at points rests as much on the audience's knowledge of the tragedy's staging as on their knowledge of its text. Even those interactions which do not focus on performative genres (such as tragedy and satyr drama) may bring the performative elements of comedy into play; in particular, chapter one will argue that the *Wasps* engagement with the Aesopic tradition of animal fable makes extensive use of comic costume and dramaturgy in a series of acts of one-upmanship, as the potential of animals for visual display and absurdity in comedy is contrasted with their more limited possibilities in fable.

The performative nature of comedy should not, however, lead us to expect that its capacity for intertextual referentiality is necessarily more limited. The experience of watching a play is unlike that of reading a book, in that one cannot slow down, stop, or refer backwards if the text becomes dense in order to appreciate its details more fully; however, it does not follow that a performed text must necessarily be less complex than a written one, and that Aristophanes' audience could not therefore have appreciated the full range and implications of the plays' wide-ranging intertextuality. In her study of the relationship between literacy and orality in the Greek world, Rosalind Thomas argues that, unlike modern audiences in a more textualised culture, the Athenian audience would have been accustomed to receiving complex information aurally, whether in the form of speeches, plays, or other poetic performances (for example epic or dithyramb). Thomas suggests that "the evidence indicates that ancient audiences were more attuned to listening carefully to complex prose (or poetry) than we are" (1992: 107), and that indeed the Athenian audience seemed to have a particular

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17. Note that despite its name, the term intertextuality is widely used of non-textual forms, including the visual arts and (as will be discussed) music. For a summary of the uses of intertextuality within non-textual fields, cf. Allen 2011: 174-181. This term will therefore be retained in the context of non-textual interactions.



taste for clever and complicated speeches.<sup>18</sup> Thomas has further argued against a model in which orality is gradually replaced by an increasingly textualised culture, and suggested instead that orality and literacy co-existed substantially: “Fifth-century Athens was not a ‘literate society’, but nor was it quite an ‘oral society’ either” (1992: 4). This combination of oral and textual literary culture is critical for understanding the wide intertextual competence of the Aristophanic audience. On the one hand, in a culture where poetry was as likely (if not more likely) to be committed to memory as it was to be read, the audience would be well placed to recognise other poetic texts within the texture of a comic play; while on the other, the emergence of what is sometimes called a ‘book culture’ in late fifth-century Athens to complement the existing oral and performative culture would have given at least some of Aristophanes’ audience access to a wider range of texts,<sup>19</sup> so that an individual could have a degree of familiarity with, for example, early tragedies which they could not have witnessed in their original performance.

The intertextual competence of the Aristophanic audience was also in all likelihood aided by an increasing culture of tragic reperformance which eventually culminated in the

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18. Cf. also Silk 2000a: 3, who similarly argues that we should be cautious not to dismiss particular interpretations of plays as being too complicated for the original audience to apprehend.

19. On Aristophanes as both evidence for and participant in the emergent book culture of the late fifth and early fourth centuries, cf. Lowe 1993, and Slater 1996. Lowe argues firstly, that Aristophanes’ plays make unusually frequent reference to books and reading; secondly, that Aristophanes’ own practice (apparently attested for example at *Nub.* 528-31) of writing plays to be produced by others was instrumental in the progressive separation of the roles of poet, director, and actor which is itself indicative of the progression from an entirely oral to a more textual medium; and finally, that Aristophanes was also at the forefront of the practice of revising scripts for publication, as appears to be the case with the version of *Clouds* which is preserved, and which Lowe argues “seems to have been explicitly conceived as a book rather than a performance text” (71). Lowe’s assertion of the textuality of Aristophanic comedy is perhaps extreme; however, even if one does not accept all his conclusions, there is clearly an argument for seeing Aristophanes within the context of an incipient textual culture. Slater 1996 in his analysis of the topic of literacy and writing in relation to Old Comedy takes a more circumspect view, and in fact detects a strain of anxiety in Aristophanes’ plays surrounding the development of literacy, despite the clear importance of an emergent literate culture in the plays’ transmission.

institutionalisation of reperformance as part of the City Dionysia in 386 B.C.<sup>20</sup> There has been some resistance to the idea that reperformance was widespread at the time of Aristophanes' career in the middle to late fifth and early fourth centuries, and in particular Zachary Biles has expressed scepticism on the grounds much of the evidence for the reperformance of particularly Aeschylean tragedy at the City Dionysia in the later fifth century comes from later sources such as the *Vita* of Aeschylus.<sup>21</sup> However, although Biles' scepticism is perhaps justified when considering each of the testimonia in isolation, the frequency with which reperformance is mentioned in our sources makes it unlikely that reperformance was unheard of before 386 B.C.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, recent scholarship has taken a less sceptical approach to the question of reperformance in the fifth century. A 2015 volume of *Trends in Classics* (7.2) approached the topic of reperformance from the early fifth century onwards; in particular, Anna Lamari argued in this volume that a culture of reperformance was established even before Aeschylus' death in 456 B.C.; and Patrick Finglass presented an argument in favour of Sophocles' plays being widely reperformed during the tragedian's lifetime. Indeed, even Biles accepts that reperformance must have been a feature of the Rural Dionysia festivals, and that such performances would have played a role in the theatre audience's ongoing familiarity with older tragedies throughout the fifth century.

It is important to recognise that 'the audience' is of course not monolithic, nor did Aristophanes treat them as such. This is the case not only in direct discussions of the audience within the plays, which often recognise the existence of different types of spectators (e.g. *Nub.* 518-27), but also in the way extended intertextual and parodic passages are developed. Let us take for example the parody in the *Acharnians* of the Euripides' *Telephus*, which is quoted at line 8; whose parody begins more in earnest at 317 (the reification of the

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20. cf. *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 2318, col. viii. *Fasti*.

21. Biles 2006-7: 212 argues that despite the frequency of references in our sources to a decree ordering the reperformance of Aeschylus' plays after his death, we should consider the "strong possibility that all of these testimonia derive from a single report, which is secondary, if not tertiary or further, from the supposed decree itself", since "[t]he uniformity of terms and factual details that appear in the testimonia encourages us to posit their common origin."

22. For an overview of the evidence for reperformance both in Attica and elsewhere, cf. Csapo & Slater 1995: 11-17; Montanara & Rengakos 2015.

metaphor, found in *Tel.* fr. 706, of speaking with one's head on the chopping-block); and which culminates in Dicaeopolis' famous speech given in the disguise of Telephus (procured from Euripides' own costume stores) beginning in line 497. While the initial quotation, and even the hostage-taking parody which begins at 331 (in which a charcoal basket replaces the infant Orestes) might not be recognised by some, or even most, of the audience, the scene with Euripides makes no fewer than four references to Telephus (twice in 430, and at 432, 446), and by the time Dicaeopolis has requested and been given the costume of Telephus by Euripides (430-4) even those who are unfamiliar with the play should recognise that a parody of Euripides' *Telephus* is underway. At this point, those audience members with some familiarity with the plot (or even just the myth on which it was based) should be able to read the parody back into the previous scenes; while those who correctly identified the intertext before it was explicitly named are able to congratulate themselves on their cleverness. Lest anyone still be in doubt, Dicaeopolis reminds the audience of the parody once more at the close of his speech (555-6: ταῦτ' οἶδ' ὅτι ἄν ἐδρᾶτε· τὸν δὲ Τήλεφον / οὐκ οἰόμεσθα;). The structure of the parody therefore assumes (and perhaps even makes an advantage of) a stratified audience, who will need different levels of cueing depending on the extent of their knowledge, and how adept they are at applying it in context.<sup>23</sup>

My discussion so far has been limited in one important respect, in that like much scholarship on the topic of intertextuality, it has focused primarily on a model of intertextuality as the interplay between specific texts. Such a model fails to account for the full range of intertextuality as we find it in Aristophanes, and which is both more expansive, and more pervasive, than this model allows. While there are certainly instances of an interaction targeting a specific text, or even a discrete moment in a specific text, in a manner at least superficially similar to the examples modelled by Conte and Hinds (cf. n. 16 above), interactions in Aristophanes may also target for example the overall style of an author; or even the broad conventions of a genre. Within the Greek context, this more expansive practice of intertextuality is arguably facilitated by a highly developed and

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23. Revermann 2006: 163-175 discusses in further detail Aristophanes' ability to play to different audiences both simultaneously, and between plays.

formalised system of generic convention. This issue of formalised categories of genre is not only central to the scope of this thesis and its investigation of inter-generic interaction, but is also an important point at which modern theories of intertextuality, and their application in a Classical context, diverge. This problem is highlighted concisely in a passage by Ian Ruffell:

“One of the principal differences between classical practice and (post)modern theory is genre. In much (post)modern understanding of self-reflexivity generic distinctions have largely broken down or have atrophied, whereas when dealing with Classical Athens (or indeed Rome), the notion of genre or, perhaps, cultural form remains indispensable, particularly within the circumscribed institutional performance context of the dramatic festivals.” (2011: 315).

While there is an argument to be made that in the case of modern, or even post-Renaissance, literature, ‘genre’ is an externally imposed category,<sup>24</sup> in the Greco-Roman tradition, genre is usually understood as being, to at least a degree, internally generated by a text. Segal described genre as not an external category imposed by the critic (modern or ancient), but rather as “the ancient poet’s instrument for reaching the reader, organising content and projecting thought in forms intelligible to the audience.”<sup>25</sup> This assessment of genre as a kind of code or language with which the author or text may communicate with the reader is followed by both Depew and Obink (2000) and Harrison (2007) in their respective discussions of ancient genre, and its relevance for literary analysis. Despite the importance of recognising genre as a category, and system, in ancient literature, it is simultaneously important to recognise the extent to which genre is not fixed, but is rather constantly evolving and metamorphosing. As Fowler (1982: 23) states, “All genres are continually undergoing metamorphosis.... However a work relates to existing genres —by conformity, variation, innovation, or antagonism— it will tend, if it becomes known, to bring about new states of these genres.”<sup>26</sup> However, this recognition of the labile nature of genre in operation does not undermine its significance as a mode through which ancient texts function. Furthermore,

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24. For a discussion of the arguments concerning the understanding of genre as an externally imposed, vs. an internally generated category, cf. Fowler 1982 (in particular ch.3), who in fact argues against the prevailing idea in modern criticism that genre is an artificially imposed classification.

25. Segal in his foreword to Conte 1994: xiii.

26. This metamorphosis of genre is discussed by Fowler in greater detail in 1982 ch. 9, 10, and 11.

ideas of the categorisation and systemisation of genre were emergent at the time of Aristophanes' career, before crystallising more fully shortly afterwards in the early fourth century with the publication of, among other things, Plato's *Symposium* and Aristotle's *Poetics*, both of which discuss categories of genre, and the kinds of content appropriate to each.<sup>27</sup>

In such a context of increasingly recognised boundaries between genres with highly developed internal markers, norms, and formulae, identifying when a similarity between texts of the same or similar genre results from a strategic intertextual reference, and when it is the result of a shared generic language can be problematic. Similarly, intergeneric intertextuality is as likely to take the form of an interest in contrasting traditions, modes, and patterns of speech and poetry, as it is to be a specific allusion; and even the most distinct references and quotations evoke not only the text in question, but also its associated generic language and cultural mode. In order to fully account for the complexities of the interaction between texts in the context of a system of highly defined and formalised generic norms, in which individual innovation is always balanced against the formulae, patterns, and conventions of genre, it may be useful to adopt theoretical perspectives from other non-literary fields; and in particular fields which have to contend with a conception of genre which is radically different to that posited by critics of modern literature. One such field in which the study of intertextuality is problematised by the complex relationship between individual style and generic convention is that of musicology. The strictness of form of the (pre-modernist, pre-twentieth century) musical genre-type is in many ways a useful comparison to Greek literary genres, in that any individual composer writing for example a minuet or gavotte, or even a sonata or symphony, must work within a highly developed and formalised generic language. In the case of music, this language regulates for example rhythmic patterns, scale systems, and harmonic sequences; but also affects larger-scale structures, as with the use of sonata

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27. For a detailed discussion of the emergence of literary criticism as a formal discourse in the 5th century, cf. Ford 2002, and especially ch. 8. This idea that different kinds of stories are appropriate to different kinds of genre also appears later in Horace's *Ars Poetica* 73-98. This passage, and its relationship to Aristotle's theory of genre, is discussed by Harrison 2007: 2-10. Comedy's relationship with this emergent discourse is explored in Wright 2012.

form, or the highly conventionalised sequence of movements in the Classical symphony. When attempting to identify intertextual references in music, most particularly within the context of the heavily formalised high-Classical period (c.1720 - c.1820), the strong influence of generic and stylistic convention must be acknowledged, and similarities between works may therefore be the result of their shared languages, rather than of any particular allusion or otherwise significant referentiality.

Robert Hatten in his 1985 study of the significance of intertextuality for the study of music offers an analysis of the relationship between genre, style and intertextuality whose conclusions may be of particular use to the study of Greek texts, and particularly comedy. In his model, Hatten distinguishes between ‘style’, which he defines as “competency in symbolic functioning presupposed by a work of music”, and in the “principles and constraints” which characterise a given musical form; and ‘strategies’ which he defines as “particular manifestations of those possibilities” afforded within a particular style. “Thus, a given work will typically be in and of a style, while playing with or against it strategically” (1985: 70). Within this context of common style and individual strategies, Hatten suggests that not all similarities between works can or need be construed as intertextuality. Similarities between works can be considered to be due to common stylistic language rather than specific and meaningful intertextual reference to all or any of the works which contain such patterns, and this is particularly the case in works within the same style; however, such ‘anonymous’ inter-referentiality may be of intertextual concern if “those patterns have a special status through their conspicuous use in a prior, exemplary work. In the latter case, comparison with the earlier work is inevitable, and one may investigate the nature of their relationship along a continuum ranging from mere citation-as-homage to an ongoing, possibly ironic, dialogue or confrontation with the earlier work” (1985: 71). Conversely, Hatten argues that when works make reference to the conventions and patterns of works outside their own style, this is necessarily of intertextual significance, whether the referentiality concerns a pattern which is associated with the strategies of a particular (perhaps exemplary) work; or whether the intertextual reference is simply to the conventions

of another style without concern for any particular example from within that style, and which is therefore perhaps better classified as ‘intergeneric’ as opposed to specifically ‘intertextual’.

In the case of Aristophanic comedy, this model translates as follows. The use of patterns and formulae common within the genre of comedy need not be construed as meaningful intertextual references to other specific works or authors, except in those cases where a pattern has come to be associated with a particular work or author, possibly due to their status of exemplarity within the genre. Rather, such inter-referentiality can be considered as a common stylistic language, which each individual work may play with or against, or even simply replicate. Alternatively, references to non-comic stylistic conventions should always be considered meaningful intertexts. Such inter-generic intertexts need not refer to a specific work or author within a genre, but may rather invoke the conventions or register of the genre more broadly. When applying this model to Greek literature, it is also important to note that in the case of some genres, an author may be so emblematic of that genre and its conventions that to evoke that author is also to evoke the system of generic conventions for which his works have come to stand; thus a specific intertextual reference to, for example, Hesiod, may both create a direct relationship with the text alluded to, whilst additionally evoking the language of epic (or perhaps, depending on the example and the context, of specifically didactic epic), poetry *in toto*; inter-referentiality between texts may therefore be at once generic and specific. Distinguishing between the individual practice of an author and the conventions of the genre in which that author writes is unfortunately more difficult when dealing with Classical literature rather than Classical music, since the fragmentary state of our evidence makes the comparison between individual and generic characteristics at times almost impossible. It can be difficult to identify when an intertext is targeting the characteristics of a specific author, and when the target is that author’s genre more broadly; and this is particularly challenging when an author is the only fully extant representative of his genre. This problem is to a degree insoluble; however, by ensuring that as far as possible equal consideration is given to fragmentary examples of a given genre as to fully extant texts, this thesis will at least remain alert to this difficulty, even if we cannot hope to surmount the problem to any significant degree.

A further problem raised when dealing with intertextual and intergeneric interactions in a specifically comic text is the question of how to distinguish between intertextuality and parody, which may itself be considered a subcategory of intertextuality. In his discussion of the *Peace*, Ruffell suggests that in parody “there is a marked incongruity involved in the appropriation” (2011: 326); and this is similar to Hatten’s definition of parody, which he describes as “not an absorption of new material and/or accompanying associations into a new context, but rather a collision of the two contexts” (1985: 72-3). However, in practice, identifying when a text creates such a collision between its own generic mode and that of its intertext(s) and when it does not may prove difficult; and the distinction between parodic and non-parodic intertexts is inevitably to some extent subjective. The relationship between parodic and non-parodic intertextuality is not in fact binary, but exists on a spectrum from overt parody to incorporation, and a single genre or text may be used in a variety of ways even within a play. Additionally, although there is some degree of correlation between genre types and whether or not their use in Aristophanes is likely to be parodic, it is not true to say that certain genres are always used parodically and certain genres non-parodically. Rather, even those texts whose genres lend themselves to the kind of parodic use which draws attention to their incongruity within a comic context (such as epic, tragedy, and other ‘high’ forms) are sometimes assimilated (largely or wholly) non-parodically into the texture of a play.

Interactions in Aristophanes not only run along this spectrum from the parodic to the assimilative, but also vary from the specific to the highly generalised. One aspect of the theoretical implications of dealing with intertextuality in the context of a highly formalised system of genre is not discussed by Hatten, namely that within such a system each genre is accompanied by a network of strong linguistic, literary, and cultural associations; and therefore to incorporate a text from one genre within another is simultaneously to evoke that genre’s broader associations: its conventions, its style or language, and its cultural status. These associations of genre may to some degree be disassociated from any particular example or text from within that genre; and may even come to be independent of the texts



which constitute that genre.<sup>28</sup> Any evocation of tragedy as a genre in Aristophanes evokes simultaneously the genre's broad associations both literary and cultural; and this evocation of status and style may at times be independent of any more specific intertextuality. This is particularly true in the case of parody. To parody tragedy may mean as much to parody tragedy as a concept or idea independent of any particular example of the genre as to parody a specific poet or play; and mockery of tragedy within comedy often focuses on its cultural status as much as its specific stylistic characteristics.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, this process is itself implicated in the development of a genre's associative networks. When Aristophanes plays on, for example, the associations which accompany tragedy, he has himself (along with others in his genre) been instrumental in shaping those associations through previous parodies and intertexts.<sup>30</sup>

Comic interaction with other texts, genres, and models may therefore be highly specific in its targets, in referring to a specific moment in a specific text; it may target only the style of an author more broadly; or the conventions of a genre; or, at its most generalised, comic

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28. Cf. Most 2000. Most argues that "a genre of 'tragedy' was hypostasized and conceived as though it were somehow independent of all particular instances of tragedies" (32); and that this is particularly the case for the modern conception of 'tragicness'. Most's particular argument that in the 5th century tragedy and tragicness had no particular connotations of terrible and sad events, but was rather associated with grandness of style, and that such associations are more modern developments, will be argued against in chapter 2 of this thesis. However, Most's suggestion that the idea of a genre is to a degree disassociated from the actual examples of that genre, and rather operates independently and on the basis of broad cultural and literary generalisation, is fundamentally sound.

29. This practice of targeting a genre's broad cultural associations is not specific to comedy. Swift 2010: 374 argues that tragedy's use of lyric similarly often relies not on specific allusions to specific texts, but rather on the nexus of social and cultural associations which surround lyric genres, and on "the idea that lyric genres embody a certain set of values".

30. This is true not only of whole genres but specific categories within them. When Aristophanes for example brings the tragedian Euripides on stage, previous incarnations of Euripides in Aristophanes (whether as a character or simply as a feature of a play's parodic and intertextual texture) are often as important to the parody as anything ever written by Euripides. For an example of this cf. *Thesm.* 22-24 (discussed in chapter 3), where the joke is not only on the stereotype of Euripides as a creator of lame characters, but also on the extent to which Aristophanes' previous parodic stereotyping of Euripides has been instrumental in creating said stereotype (for which cf. *Ach.* 410-11, *Pax.* 147-8).

interactions with other genres may target the associations of that genre, which are to a degree removed from the actual examples from within that genre. This spectrum is convenient given the potentially stratified nature of the Aristophanic audience (which, on any projection of the scale of the theatre in the fifth century, numbered in the thousands),<sup>31</sup> since at the more general end of the spectrum there is little requirement for in-depth literary knowledge; and indeed, even a single instance of interaction may operate at multiple points along this spectrum. Therefore, while some may recognise a specific quotation, others will only know that it is Euripidean (perhaps because it is identified as such explicitly in the play), and others will appreciate it only as an example of tragic (as opposed to specifically Euripidean) style. While in the case of tragedy it can be assumed that the audience would be likely to have a good working knowledge of the genre in addition to a sensitivity to its broader literary and cultural associations, in the case of, for example, sympotic poetry, it can be further supposed that while some of the audience may know at least the genre in broad terms, others will primarily engage with it through the social and cultural associations which it evokes.<sup>32</sup>

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31. The estimates as to the number of audience members in attendance at the theatre in this period vary wildly, from as few as 3,700 (Dawson 1997: 7) or 5,500 (Korres 2002: 540); to as many as 10,000-15,000 (Moretti 1999-2000: 395); while Csapo's estimate (2007: 97) of 5,000-7,000 lies somewhere in the middle. Given that population estimates for this period (a contentious issue in itself; Cf. Gomme 1933; for a more recent analysis, and slight revision, of Gomme's figures, cf. van Wees 2011) suggest c. 200,000 total occupants of Attica, and 30,000 adult male citizens, even the lower figures (which suggest a theatre of around the same scale as the Albert Hall in London, whose maximum capacity is just short of 5,300) would have held a significant proportion of the populace. The audience was therefore likely to have comprised a relatively representative cross-section of Athenians, even allowing for a degree of self-selection. The importance of thinking of the theatre audience as a diverse collection of individuals and groups, rather than a single 'mass' of people, is discussed in greater length in Roselli 2011, in particular pp. 2-5.

32. In the particular case of Iambus, Rotstein 2010 (esp. ch. 1, 'Approaching Genre', and ch. 10, 'Archilochus as a Prototype of Invective Poetry') has established the gap between the 'idea' of Iambus as characterised by invective, and the reality of generic practice, in which invective was neither limited to, nor always a feature of, iambographic poetry. This topic is further examined in a collection of essays, entitled 'Iambus and Elegy: New Approaches' (Carey & Swift (eds.): 2016); Carey (2016) in particular discusses the greater variety of actual generic practice beyond the 'canonical' examples of Hipponax, Archilochus, and Semonides.

Such interactions which, rather than being specifically intertextual, rely on a high degree of generalisation about a given genre, are inevitably reliant on a conception of genre which is distinctly static. While Conte's suggestion (1994:127) that "[n]othing would be more useless than to conceive of genres as simple, immobile abstractions" is certainly true for the critic or theorist, the opposite is perhaps true for a poet such as Aristophanes, since in order for him to get a hit on 'tragedy' he must first make 'tragedy' stand still long enough for him to take aim and fire.<sup>33</sup> This stands in contrast to comedy's construction of its own genre, which, this thesis will argue, continually expands to encompass the elements of other genres which the plays incorporate within their plots. Comedy's construction of genre is therefore fundamentally two-faced; on the one hand emphasising a conception of other genres which is static and immobile; while on the other hand itself relying on a conception of its own genre which is labile and constantly metamorphosing through a process of integration and assimilation.

Finally, just as the plays' interactions with other genres run along a spectrum from the highly specific to the general, so too does comedy's reflection on its own status. Metatheatricality in Aristophanes often takes the form of a discourse on the concrete elements of staging and dramaturgy, as the plays explicitly name their props, costumes, and machinery such as the *mechane* (as for example in the *Acharnians* when Dicaeopolis borrows a costume from the tragedian Euripides); or explicitly discuss their plots and characters (as in the introductions to *Knights*, *Wasps*, and *Peace*). However, other instances of metatheatricality in Aristophanes are not tied to concrete elements of dramaturgical practice, but rather take the form of drawing attention to a moment's status as drama (as with the enactments of scenes from the *Telephus* in *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazusae*), or even as performance more generally (as with the law-court speeches in the *Wasps*, which function as acts of

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33. On the constant metamorphosis of genre in practice, cf. also Fowler 1982, n. 22 above. The necessity of downplaying generic variation and metamorphosis within intergeneric allusions and interactions is discussed by Swift 2010. Swift's study of tragedy's use of lyric features argues that in its interactions with lyric genres, tragedy "tends to smooth over variations within any given genre genre, and to present a uniform picture characterized by clear identifying features. This is a feature inherent in allusion (or parody)."

performance within the play).<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, generic metadiscursivity may similarly be highly specific, or heavily generalised; plays may variously investigate their status as Aristophanic comedy (in opposition to the works of other comedians); as comedy (as opposed to tragedy or satyr play); as drama (as opposed to non-dramatic genres); or simply reflect (on) their own fictionality and status as storytelling. All of these modes of self-referentiality will be explored in this thesis, which will in particular emphasise those kinds of self-reflexivity which are not overt (as for example the parabasis and the explicit construction of poetic persona), but are rather more embedded within the structure of the plot.

### **The Plays: Selection and Organisation**

In order to examine the full range of intergeneric interactions found in Aristophanic comedy, and the ways in which a variety of genres are used to explore different aspects of comedy's own generic identity, five plays which span the length of Aristophanes' writing career have been chosen. These are the *Wasps*; *Peace* and *Birds*; and the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Ecclesiazusae*. The chapters are organised both chronologically and thematically; and each focuses on the relationship between comedy and a specific genre or group of genres. The chronological scope of the thesis aims to show that metageneric discourse, and its embeddedness in plot-structure, are a constant of Aristophanes' career, albeit in different forms. In particular, the inclusion of the often-derided *Ecclesiazusae* is intended to demonstrate that this aspect of Aristophanic comedy is evident even in his late period.<sup>35</sup> While tragedy inevitably looms large, plays have been chosen which demonstrate the variety of genres with which Aristophanic comedy interacts, and in particular which show that sustained interaction is not restricted to 'high' genres such as epic and tragedy, but also includes 'low' genres, such as Aesopic fable. Moreover, the plays demonstrate great diversity

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34. Cf. Slater 2002: 96-8 for a more detailed analysis of the overt performativity of this scene.

35. For dismissals of the *Ecclesiazusae*, cf. for example Whitman 1964: 9 ("It is hard to read any play, except possibly the *Ecclesiazusae*, and feel that it is falling apart."), Dover 1972: 195 n. 7 ("The possibility that Aristophanes had had a stroke cannot be completely excluded."), and Sutton 1990: 91 ("The play's deficiencies can probably be attributed to the poet's declining powers. At most, these deficiencies might perhaps be taken as symbolic of the declining vitality of Old Comedy.")

in their stance towards even tragedy, as they variously assert their similarity or difference to tragedy; and focalise their investigation of the relationship between tragedy and comedy through the lens of politics, storytelling, and dramaturgical practice.

The plays have been grouped into three chapters, each examining a different facet of intergeneric interaction in Aristophanic comedy. Chapter One focuses on the relationship between the animal-plot of the *Wasps*, and the play's parallel engagement with the Aesopic animal fable. Chapter Two concentrates on the engagement with ideas of fictionality and myth in the *Peace* and *Birds*, both of which take tragic models as the starting point for an exploration of mythic storytelling, but which also incorporate a wide variety of different genres including satyr drama and epic; and the final chapter, focusing primarily on the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Ecclesiazusae*, argues that in Aristophanes' 'women' plays, gender is used as a means of examining the divergent generic and dramaturgical conventions of tragedy and comedy.

### **Scope of the Thesis: Politics and Genre**

The scholarship on the political aspect of Old Comedy is extensive; and Aristophanes has not infrequently been used as a historical source in studies of the politics and culture of Athens in the fifth century.<sup>36</sup> There is moreover a strand of scholarship which aims to reconstruct Aristophanes' own political leanings from the plays. Henderson (1990, 1993) has argued for Old Comedy as a fundamentally populist genre, and a demonstration of the power of the *demos* in this period; Sidwell (2009) has similarly argued for Aristophanes as a figure of the political 'left', and a supporter of the democracy; while Sommerstein (1996) conversely sees Aristophanes as a conservative, and suggests that the plays' political targets are usually populist figures, and in particular those who worked against the interests of wealthy Athenians. Most recently, Aristophanes has attracted the interest of a number of political scientists; and 2014 saw the publication of a collection of essays, entitled *The Political Theory of Aristophanes*, which examine the plays from the perspective of this field. The aim

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36. For an example of such use of Aristophanes as a historical source, cf. de Ste Croix 1972: 355-376.

of the thesis is not to provide a political reading of Aristophanes; however, neither is it possible to entirely divorce the genre's aesthetic and political properties. The case for taking issues of aesthetics and politics in Aristophanes to be at least to some extent symbiotic has been convincingly made by Goldhill (1991: 167-222) and Slater (2002 *passim*), and to an extent also by Silk (2000a: 301-349), who cautions against attempting to parse Aristophanic comedy too exactly into the 'serious' and the 'only-joking'. The plays' political engagement will therefore be addressed in those instances where this intersects with issues of genre, and generic self-definition; however, I will not otherwise offer a reading of the plays from a political perspective. The *Wasps* is in particular usually read primarily as a political play engaged with the workings of the Athenian *polis*, and while this is undoubtedly true, I hope to suggest that this play may also be productively read as an exploration of animal comedy as a sub-genre of Old Comedy.

Despite its broadly chronological organisation, the thesis does not propose a teleological reading, or one which charts an evolution in either the Old Comic plot itself, or the plays' discourse surrounding comic storytelling. While I find elements of both continuity and change between plays, and even between periods of Aristophanes' career, I do not attempt to map this on to any transformation of the genre. The question of the evolution from Old, to Middle, to New Comedy is somewhat fraught; and what once seemed to be discrete categories have begun to collapse in light of the increasing study of the contemporaries of both Aristophanes and Menander, as well as the poets in between. While not entirely dismissive of the idea of generic evolution, Sutton's discussion of the relationship between Old and Middle Comedy (notably written before the publication of Kassel and Austin's *Poetae Comici Graeci* was fully completed) accepts that "[s]ome of the characteristic features of Middle Comedy are already foreshadowed in Old Comedy and, contrariwise, some features that we are accustomed to consider characteristic of Old Comedy were slow to disappear from the comedy of the next century" (1990: 95). More recently however, Csapo has suggested that the style of comedy associated with the later periods already existed in the fifth century, and that instead of a model of linear evolution, "[t]he changes in comedy from fourth to fifth century are best understood, not as a succession of qualitatively distinct

products, but as a shift in the dominance of one style over another” (2000: 133). Henderson (2014) emphasises that a narrative emphasising a transformation from ‘political’ Old Comedy to ‘domestic’ New Comedy, with Middle Comedy as a transitional period, is unsatisfactory, since firstly comedians such as Crates and Pherecrates wrote ‘domestic’ comedy in the fifth century; and secondly, ‘political’ comedy persisted long after the period of Old Comedy, and was even present in plays in the late fourth century. Sidwell (2000; 2014) goes so far as to suggest that the categorisation of comedy into three phases should become redundant, with the term ‘Middle Comedy’ abandoned altogether, in favour of a model which treats New Comedy not as the direct descendant of Old, reached through a single process of gradual evolution and transformation, but rather as the product of generic cross-fertilisation. Given the degree of uncertainty about the development of the genre, and in particular the increasing breakdown of the periodisation of comedy into Old, Middle, and New, to attempt to relate the developments in the works of one author to the evolution (or otherwise) of the genre as a whole did not seem a productive approach. This is especially true given the difficulty in plotting trends in even Aristophanic comedy when only eleven plays survive intact.

This thesis does not of course attempt to provide an exhaustive reading of Aristophanes, or even of the Aristophanic plot. When dealing with such relentlessly polyvalent texts as those of Old Comedy, no one reading can possibly be definitive, and indeed the plays necessarily invite various and divergent interpretations. I hope in this thesis only to suggest one possible way in which the plays of Aristophanes, their plots, and their construction of their generic identity, may be productively approached.

## **Chapter Synopses**

Chapter One, ‘Animal Comedy and the *Wasps*’, examines the relationship between Aesopic fable and comedy through the lens of animal imagery. Although often read solely in relation to its engagement with the law courts, the *Wasps* additionally contains an unusual prevalence of animal imagery and characters, including the chorus of juror-wasps themselves; and the play’s own menagerie is accompanied by frequent allusions to the animal fables associated

with the Aesopic tradition. It will be argued that this intersection of the comic tradition of ‘animal comedy’, and particularly animal choruses, with the language of Aesopic fable forms the centrepiece of the play’s interrogation of its own generic status. The chapter first gives an overview of comedy’s own claim to the animal chorus as an integral component of the genre’s conventions and history, and suggests that ‘animal’ plays were not only a key sub-genre of comedy, but one to which Aristophanes returned with notable frequency. The chapter then examines the presentation of the language of animal fable in the play, and argues firstly, that while the presence of animals is not a *sine qua non* for the definition of the Aesopic, there is a strong association between this mode and the use of animal imagery, both in Aristophanes and elsewhere; and secondly, that the play emphasises the purpose of animal fable as a means of communicating a clear message through a code of symbolism which was near-universally used and understood. This semiotic stability of animal imagery in fable contrasts directly with the play’s own more varied use of animals; the comic animals of the *Wasps* have a multiplicity of functions, as they are used as a prism through which to present a series of typically comic modes and conventions, including coded political symbolism, but also self-conscious performativity, and absurd visual display. The *Wasps* repeatedly deemphasises the status of animal imagery in comedy as a fixed symbolic code; and this culminates in the play’s final descent into total absurdity (complete with dancing crabs). The chapter will argue that in its use of animal imagery to express a multiplicity of comedy’s generic features, the *Wasps* therefore enacts a typical comic one-upmanship over Aesop and fable; and the use of an animal chorus in particular ties animal imagery firmly to comedy’s own history as a genre, as the play asserts a claim to the animal plot as a definitive feature of Old Comedy.

Chapter Two, ‘Mythic Storytelling in the *Peace* and *Birds*’, examines the tension between invention and retelling in comic myth-making. Both *Peace* and *Birds* take a tragic model (Euripides *Bellerophon* and Sophocles’ *Tereus*, respectively) as the starting point for new comic myths, in which their heroes take flight beyond the city of Athens to take on the gods themselves; and both plays rework traditional story-patterns, combining elements drawn from a wide variety of genres, models, and sources, to create stories which are at once



familiar and entirely new. The chapter will argue that both *Peace* and *Birds* in different ways attempt to categorise true mythic innovation as impossible in tragedy, and to claim radical mythopoiesis as a definitive characteristic of comic storytelling. The first half of the chapter focuses on *Peace*, and its relationship with tragedy and (to a lesser degree) satyr drama. The chapter first explores the process of reuse, recombination, and reformulation on which the play's comic myth-making is founded. This section argues that that the play creates a contrast between tragedy as a genre which retells existing myths, and comedy as a genre free to invent new ones. The *Peace*'s exploration of the limits of what is possible on the tragic and comic stage is in particular examined through the lens of the dung-beetle's flight. It is suggested that the play's central set-piece may rely for its parodic impact on a possible technical innovation, namely Euripides' use of the *mechane* to depict Pegasus in flight; and that this instance of attempted, but most probably unsuccessful, innovation is used in the play to assert the limitations of tragic storytelling on stage. The second section argues that the *Peace*'s engagement with Euripides' *Bellerophon* displays an interest not only in how comedy and tragedy can tell stories, but also what kinds of stories they tell. The play's characterisation of tragedy as a genre of failure and misery, and comedy as a genre of celebration and success, is examined in light of Aristotle's later comments on the nature of tragic storytelling, and in particular his comments on happy endings.

The second half of the chapter moves on to investigate mythic storytelling in the *Birds*. Premiered seven years after the *Peace*, the *Birds* relies on a similar mythic patchwork to create its plot, and if anything draws on an even wider variety of genres and models than its predecessor. The chapter argues that unlike in the *Peace*, in which the more problematic aspects of tragic and mythic models are conspicuously discarded and replaced with an assertion of comic celebration, the *Birds* integrates the more unpleasant elements of the Tereus-myth into its own mythic plot-line. The play's foregrounding of mythic themes of theomachy and patrilineal violence is accompanied by a repeated silencing of female characters which mirrors the violence enacted in the Tereus-myth, as well as in the play's additional Hesiodic models. The final section of this chapter examines the use of space and the creation of the fictional world on stage in the play. Throughout the *Birds*, the movement

towards rootedness and stability, as the birds abandon nomadic flight to occupy a single location which exists within set boundaries, pulls against the more fluid relationship between fictional and dramatic space which is necessitated as the grand scale of the imaginary world grows beyond that which can easily be represented within the limits of the comic stage. The chapter suggests that, despite the insistence on comedy's total freedom of myth-making, the *Birds*' simultaneously recognises the practical restrictions of the comic theatre, as the play repeatedly emphasises the fact that Nephelokokkugia exists only in the collective imagination of its audience.

Chapter Three, 'Women On Top in the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Ecclesiazusae*', examines the increasing prominence of female characters on the Aristophanic stage, and the implications of this development for the plays' conception and construction of the comic genre. The first half of the chapter focuses on the *Thesmophoriazusae*, and its competitive interactions with tragedy. The chapter suggests that, unlike in the later *Frogs* in which it is the difference between tragedians which is the primary focus of the play, the *Thesmophoriazusae* flattens the distinctions between different styles and periods of tragedy, in order to better position itself against the genre as a whole. It is argued that the play uses the figure of Agathon, whose reputation for effeminacy is widely attested elsewhere, to characterise tragedy as a whole as displaying effeminate qualities; and that this is contrasted with the play's presentation of comedy as an inherently masculine genre, epitomised through its identification with the phallus on stage; and that the play's characterisation of tragedy as feminine is linked to its depiction of tragic dramaturgical conventions as deceptive and illusionistic, qualities which are often ascribed to women and femininity in Aristophanes' plays, including the *Thesmophoriazusae*. Conversely, it is suggested that the figure of In-Law is in the play associated with comic modes of performance and speech, and is used to characterise comedy as a primarily phallic genre, whose metatheatrical exposure of its own workings is akin to the bodily revelation which is characteristic of the genre. The chapter goes on to examine the implications of this model for In-Law's attempts at cross-dressing, both at the council of the women, and in the series of tragic parodies which conclude the play.

The second half of the chapter turns to the *Ecclesiazusae*, the final of Aristophanes' three surviving 'women' plays. Unlike the other four plays examined in this thesis, the *Ecclesiazusae* does not engage in sustained inter-generic interaction, but, it is suggested, looks primarily inwards to the characteristics of its own comic plot, and its relationship with the, by now well established,<sup>37</sup> conventions of the genre. It is argued that the *Ecclesiazusae* is the fullest manifestation of the 'women on top' theme found in Aristophanes, and that this more complete assertion of female power in the play sits uneasily with some of the conventions of the comic plot, and particularly the triumph of masculine sexuality and fertility which often concludes comic plays. It is suggested that the rise of women in the play is accompanied by a repeated disempowerment of male characters, as the usual celebration of the fulfilment of male corporeal desire in comedy is obstructed and inverted. The chapter focuses in particular on the use of scatology in the play, and examines the highly unusual constipation scene which forms the centrepiece of the plot.

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37. The play was premiered in 392/1 B.C., towards the end of both Aristophanes' career, and the period of Old Comedy. Indeed, the *Ecclesiazusae* is sometimes classed as an example of 'Middle', rather than 'Old' Comedy, for which cf. Sutton 1990. As discussed above, these categories are somewhat arbitrary; however, it is clear that by the time of the *Ecclesiazusae*'s premiere, Aristophanes was working within a genre which had been a part of the dramatic festivals in Athens for almost a century, and whose conventions were therefore well established, arguably more so than in the earliest part of Aristophanes' career.

## Chapter One: Animal Comedy and the *Wasps*

The use of animal imagery is a notable feature of the *Wasps* as a whole, and a variety of animals, including most prominently the wasps of the chorus the dogs in the trial scene, take to the stage throughout the play. Philocleon in particular seems to attract animal metaphors, and in the opening scene alone he is compared to a limpet (*Vesp.* 105), jackdaw (129), a mouse (140), a sparrow (207), a ferret (363), and a honeybee (107, 366). In addition to the theriomorphism of its human characters, the play also features anthropomorphised animal characters, in the form of the two dogs whose trial forms the centrepiece of the play. In sum, the richness and variety of the animal imagery in the *Wasps* is unequaled by any other of Aristophanes' (extant) plays.

In addition to the use of animals both on stage and in metaphors, the *Wasps* also features a surprisingly large number of Aesopic animal fables, which intersect with the play's own incursion into the territory of animal imagery and fable. This chapter will argue this juxtaposition draws an implicit comparison between comedy and the Aesopic tradition. These two genres share clear affinities not only in their use of animal characters on to whom human thoughts and actions may be projected (a feature which, it will be suggested, is strongly associated with the Aesopic tradition, and which has similarly been present in Old Comedy from its early history onwards); but also in their shared 'low' status within the hierarchical system of genre.<sup>1</sup> Animal fable is presented in the play as a relatively stable symbolic code; while in contrast, the comic animals of the *Wasps* have a multiplicity of functions, as they are

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1. Theories of generic hierarchy, and comedy's place within such a hierarchy, are discussed in the introduction n. 8. The status of fable as a 'low', 'popular' form is discussed extensively by Kurke 2010 (introduction, and esp. pp 2-16). Kurke argues that not only is fable itself a markedly 'low' form, but that it also occurs most frequently within genres of poetry which are of similar status within the generic hierarchy. "Thus beast fable never occurs in the heroic epic of Homer, but does figure in the middling, didactic epic of Hesiod. And fable proliferates particularly in Archaic iambic, the genre that ranks at the bottom of the hierarchy of poetic forms... while it is used much more sparingly or only alluded to in the higher poetic forms of elegy and choral lyric." (3-4).

used as a prism through which to present a series of typically comic modes and conventions, such as choral performance; political allegory; self-conscious performativity; and the overt, exuberant spectacle which is an integral part of comedy's overall aesthetic. The *Wasps* therefore not only asserts the greater possibilities for animal imagery in comedy, as opposed to their more static function in fable; but also embeds animal imagery, already associated with the comic tradition in the guise of the animal chorus, in the broader conventions definitive of the comic genre. In this way, the *Wasps* asserts a claim to animal imagery as a traditional feature of the comic stage, and presents its animal plot as an established sub-genre of Old Comedy, while also showcasing the full potential of this traditional feature of the comic stage.

### **Animal Choruses and the History of Comedy**

The exact relationship of the animal chorus to the history of Old Comedy is contentious. The place of animal performance in comedy has been examined most notably by G. M. Sifakis, whose 1971 monograph *Parabasis and Animal Choruses* discussed both the visual and textual evidence for the phenomenon of theriomorphic choruses; and K. Rothwell, whose 2007 monograph, *Nature, Culture, and the Origins of Greek Comedy*, revisited the evidence in order to examine the place of comic animal choruses within a broader socio-cultural context. A 2006 paper by J. Rusten on the topic of 'Who "Invented" Comedy?' further examined the animal chorus as one of a series of possible influences on Old Comedy's early history, alongside phallic processions, dithyrambic performance, and the parallel tradition of Doric comedy.

As with any topic pertaining to the early history of comic performance, the evidence surrounding animal choruses is, at best, laconic. However, the facts as we have them are as follows: a small number of vases<sup>2</sup> dating from the late sixth and early fifth century depict what appear to be animal choruses, showing either performers dressed as animals, or riding

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2. Rothwell 2007: 5 in particular notes that the relative paucity of such vases, which number only in the dozens (compared to e.g. depictions of satyrs, which number over 3,000), should encourage us to exercise caution.

on them. The earliest of these, dated to c. 540-530 B.C. depicts a group of men wearing identical headdresses, each riding on the shoulders of a man dressed as a horse.<sup>3</sup> Further to this, in addition to Aristophanes' four extant animal choruses, the titles or fragments of a further total of sixteen comedies suggest that they featured animal choruses; and animal choruses appear to have been particularly favoured by Magnes, the earliest of the Old Comedians.<sup>4</sup> Recent scholarship has tended to abandon the earlier, somewhat neater, view of Körte, who argued that the animal chorus was the only true Attic element of Old Comedy, and that the origins of the genre lay in the fusion of such Attic-style animal choral performances with elements such as the phallus and padded body drawn from the Dorian comic tradition.<sup>5</sup> Scholars such as Rusten and Rothwell have instead suggested that the comic chorus cannot be considered the direct descendant of choral animal performances such as those (perhaps) depicted on the vases; but rather argue that Old Comedy drew on a variety of sources and influences, including animal choruses and Dorian comedy, but also phallic performances (thought by Aristotle to be the origin of comedy),<sup>6</sup> and dithyrambic choruses;<sup>7</sup> and that animal choruses were therefore only one of several pre-comic choral traditions which influenced the formation of the Old Comic chorus. However, whether animal choruses were (one of) the origin(s) of Old Comedy, or whether performance in animal costume was simply an unrelated performative mode which was cannibalised by Old Comedy in its earliest days, it is clear that animal choruses were an integral and definitive aspect of the genre at the time of its formalisation as part of the establishment of the comic competition in 486 B.C.

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3. C.a. 550 B.C. Berlin Staatliche Museen F 1697. Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. This vase, along with other similar depictions of animal choruses, is discussed by Greene 1985.

4. For a full list, c.f. Rothwell 2007: 104. Of the 9 titles attributed to Magnes, a third suggest an animal chorus.

5. Cf. Körte 1893, 1921.

6. *Poetics* 1449a10-13.

7. On the possibility of dithyrambs being performed in costume, c.f. Rothwell 2007: 62. The place of dithyramb in comedy's origins, and the relationship between the depictions of men riding animals and in particular dolphins is discussed in more detail by Rusten 2006: 52-4.

Of Aristophanes' eleven extant plays, four (*Knights*,<sup>8</sup> *Wasps*, *Birds* and *Frogs*<sup>9</sup>) feature an animal chorus, and the title and fragments of a further play (*Storks*, date unknown) suggest with some certainty that its chorus also consisted of animals.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Aristophanes' career appears to have coincided with a period in which animal choruses, which had first reached their peak in the earliest period of comedy, were experiencing something of a revival, before their final decline and disappearance in the 4th century.<sup>11</sup> Alongside Aristophanes' repeated use of animal choruses, a 2003 monograph by Corbel-Morana, entitled *Le Bestiaire d'Aristophane*, has shown the prevalence of animals and animal imagery throughout the Aristophanic corpus. Aristophanes' apparent predilection for both animal choruses and animal imagery is particularly interesting in the light of the notable absence of animal choruses from the known corpus of his two most significant rivals, Cratinus, to whom no play with a straightforward animal chorus is attributed (although his *Cheirones* and *Dionysalexandros* most probably featured choruses of mythical animal-human hybrids);<sup>12</sup> and Eupolis, who to our knowledge produced only one play with an animal chorus, namely the *Aiges*, (c. 424-422 B.C.).<sup>13</sup>

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8. *Knights* is of course not strictly an animal chorus, but rather consists of men on horseback (or at least is likely to consist of men on horseback; the arguments for the presence of horses on stage, either as part of the chorus' costume, or played by actors, will be discussed further in this chapter); the horses are however presented in a distinctly anthropomorphised fashion by the chorus in lines 595-610.

9. On the argument concerning whether the frog chorus in *Frogs* was seen or unseen, c.f. Allison 1983 who argues for their invisibility; and MacDowell 1972 and Rothwell 2007: 136-7, who are both unconvinced by the arguments for an offstage chorus (evidence for which stems originally from a single scholion on line 209 of the play). I am inclined to agree that the frog chorus were unlikely to have been off-stage.

10. In particular fr. 446 PCG mentions a bird-cage, suggesting that birds featured in the play in some form.

11. Cf. Rothwell 2007: 104, who suggests that "[assuming] that the evidence of the vases and the literary fragments is representative", animal choruses flourished first between 510 and 480 B.C., and were then consciously revived by playwrights between 440 and 410. It is interesting to note that Aristophanes' *Frogs*, which dates to 404, falls outside the period of revival suggested by Rothwell.

12. On hybrid choruses, cf. Rothwell 2007: 91-2. For the argument that the *Dionysalexandros* featured a chorus of satyrs, cf. Bakola 2010 ch. 2.

13. For the date of the *Aiges*, cf. Storey 2003: 67

Aristophanes' first animal chorus appeared in the *Knights*, produced in the very early years of his career (424 B.C.). Although not strictly theriomorphic, the chorus of the *Knights* appears to be an example of an 'animal-rider' chorus. Both Sifakis (1971) and Rothwell (2007) in their exhaustive surveys of animal choruses in Old Comedy categorise these 'rider' choruses as a type of animal chorus; and accordingly, both in their studies consider the vases which show men riding animals (including horses, but also e.g. ostriches and dolphins), and which appear to date back to the very beginning of this type of animal performance, alongside those which show choruses in animal costumes. Furthermore, Sifakis and Rothwell similarly categorise the *Knights* of both Aristophanes and Antiphanes as examples of the tradition of animal choruses.<sup>14</sup> There is some uncertainty concerning whether in Aristophanes' *Knights* the horses did in fact appear on stage, since unfortunately there is no direct address to the horses, nor is their presence explicitly acknowledged. However, a mounted chorus would provide an element of visual spectacle otherwise comparatively lacking from the play; and Sifakis, Rothwell, and Russo are all in agreement that horses must have been represented on stage as part of the chorus in some way.<sup>15</sup> This conclusion is reached not only on the basis of the visual evidence for 'horse-rider' choruses (cf. n 2, above), but due to the military commands spoken by Demosthenes to the chorus at the point of their entry to the stage:<sup>16</sup>

ἄνδρες ἰππῆς, παραγένεσθε· νῦν ὁ καιρός. ὦ Σίμων,  
 ὦ Παναίτι', οὐκ ἐλάτε πρὸς τὸ δεξιὸν κέρασ;  
 ἄνδρες ἐγγύς. ἀλλ' ἀμύνου κάπαναστρέφου πάλιν.  
 ὁ κονιορτὸς δῆλος αὐτῶν ὡς ὁμοῦ προσκειμένων.  
 ἀλλ' ἀμύνου καὶ δίωκε καὶ τροπήν αὐτοῦ ποιοῦ.

14. Only one fragment is attributed to Antiphanes' *Knights*, and it is therefore difficult to speculate about the nature of the chorus in the play; however, the fragment does contain a reference to a horsecloth (PCG 108 1-2: τὸ μὲν ἐφίππιον / στρωμ' ἐστὶν ἡμῖν), suggesting that horses may well have played some role in the play, whether on stage as part of the chorus, or otherwise.

15. Russo 1962 (1994): 87-8, Sifakis 1971: 99-100, Rothwell 2007: 142-4. For the alternative argument cf. Sommerstein 1981: 4.

16. Although the attribution of the names Nicias and Demosthenes is of course doubtful, since these names are not mentioned in the text of the play but only in the later manuscript tradition, for practical reasons it seems better to refer to them by these names rather than Slave A and B or similar. Cf. Slater 2002: 68-9 for a fuller discussion of the slaves' names; and Dover 1967: 24 for a consideration of how the slaves may have been represented through masks.



Men of the cavalry, come here! Now's the moment. Simon, Panaetius! drive, drive for the right wing! They're near us. Wheel round again and defend yourself! The dust-cloud is plain to see; they're right close and attacking. Fight him, chase him, put him to flight!

(*Eq.* 242-6)

The use of the clearly military term κέρας (wing or flank of an army division), in combination with the instructions to 'drive on' (ἐλάττε) and 'wheel about' (κάπαναστρέφου πάλιν) seem to suggest some kind of cavalry manoeuvres on the part of the chorus;<sup>17</sup> and this in turn would strongly suggest that they appeared mounted.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, given the prominence given to the horses in the choral song in lines 595-610 in which the (anthropomorphised) horses are praised for their bravery in battle, some manner of visual presence on stage seems difficult to resist.<sup>19</sup> Throughout this passage, the horses are described taking on the role of

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17. The description of a dust-cloud accompanying the chorus' entrance (245: κονιοπτὸς) would to my mind also suggest a mounted chorus; however, it could conceivably be argued that the description of a non-mounted chorus of knights as raising dust, thereby characterising the knights as horses, might constitute a passing joke. However, in combination with the cavalry manoeuvres discussed above, such a joke seems unlikely to be the purpose of this description, and therefore on balance I follow Sifakis, Rothwell, and Russo (cf. n. 12 above) in arguing for a mounted chorus in this play.

18. The question of whether the horses were portrayed by actors or through the chorus' costume is even more difficult to answer with any degree of certainty. Russo and Sifakis come down strongly on the side of the chorus consisting half of the knights and half of their horses, while Rothwell does not strongly argue one way or the other. It is however worth noting that the existence of at least two comedies with centaur choruses (Cratinus' *Cheirones*, Apollonphanes' *Centaurs*. Cf. Rothwell 2007: 91 for animal-human hybrid choruses) suggests that man-horse composite costumes were used in other plays, and therefore it must also have been possible to use similar methods to create a man-riding-a-horse costume.

19. Rothwell 2007: 142 similarly considers this passage to be an argument for the visual presence of horses on stage. The anthropomorphism in lines 595-610 might also be used as an argument for actors playing the part of the horses (as opposed to the horses being represented as part of the chorus' costume. Cf. n. 18 above). The use of actors would provide greater possibilities for the horses to engage in comic business at this point, perhaps acting out the words of the choral song in some way. A skit involving men-dressed-as-horses acting out horses-behaving-like-men would certainly be very funny, but it is sadly impossible to draw any firm conclusions.

sailors,<sup>20</sup> manning the horse transports as rowers, taking the oars ‘just like us men’ (601: τὰς κώπας λαβόντες ὥσπερ ἡμεῖς οἱ βροτοὶ), and stocking up on the traditional soldiers rations of garlic and onions (both of which are in fact quite poisonous to horses)<sup>21</sup> in the agora (600: πριάμενοι... οἱ δὲ καὶ σκόροδα καὶ κρόμμυα).<sup>22</sup>

The extent of the anthropomorphism of the knight’s horses in the lines to a degree prefigures the treatment of the animal chorus in the *Wasps*. Unlike in the later *Birds* and *Frogs*, in which the animals, while anthropomorphised to some degree, still maintain an essentially animal quality, the identity of the *Wasps*’ chorus is far more liminal. While always (and, I would suggest, correctly) categorised as an animal chorus, the old men of the *Wasps* are not, like Aristophanes’ other animal choruses, anthropomorphised (to a greater or lesser degree) animals; but might better be described as theriomorphised men, in that the metaphorical wasp identity of chorus, created through language, dramaturgy, and costume, does not preclude their primary identification as old jurors. The wasp-chorus’ dual identity as both animals and humans appears to be a highly unusual modulation of the comic animal chorus;<sup>23</sup> however the *Wasps*’ atypical animal chorus seems fitting within the context of a play which in its entirety

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20. This unusual marine characterisation of the horses may perhaps have something to do with the dual role of the god Poseidon as the god of horses and the god of the sea; the god is invoked in the play with very high frequency, at *Eq.* 144, 338, 366, 409, 551, 609, 843, 899, 1035, 1201.

21. Cf. Thorp & Harshfield 1939

22. On the connection between onions and soldiers/war in Aristophanes, cf. *Ach.* 550, 1099-100, and *Pax* 1129.

23. Whether this type of animal chorus appeared elsewhere in Old Comedy is impossible to say. Certainly, none of the fragmentary evidence suggests another chorus of theriomorphised men as opposed to anthropomorphised animals. However, this explicit awareness of performativity is clearly emphasised on several of the vases which appear to show animal choruses, and in which the human actors are depicted under the animal costume, as for example in the Berlin vase (discussed above), in which the ‘horses’ are clearly shown as men in horse costumes; and this might lead us to expect that such explicit metatheatrical awareness was a feature built into choral animal-performance from its beginnings. But despite this, the *Wasps* is the only of Aristophanes’ extant plays which replicates this emphasis on performativity and illusion with regards to the chorus’ depiction of animals on stage.

experiments with the broad possibilities of animal imagery and performance within the comic context.

### **Aesop and the *Wasps***

In addition to the consistent use of animals as part of the chorus, plot, and imagery of the play, the *Wasps* contains an unusual number of references to the animal fables of Aesop; and Aesop himself is mentioned by name intermittently throughout the play (*Vesp.* 566, 1259, 1401, 1446). While Aesop does feature in other of Aristophanes' plays (e.g. *Pax.* 130-1, *Av.* 471-5), the *Wasps*' sustained engagement with Aesop and fable is notable in comparison with their more intermittent use elsewhere in his corpus.<sup>24</sup> The frequency with which fable stories appear in the play has drawn attention from Rothwell, who suggests that (with the obvious exception of Aesop in the *Life of Aesop*) Philocleon invokes Aesop with greater frequency than any other character in extant Greek literature (1995: 233); and Hall (2013), who examines the broader affinities between Aristophanes' plays and the Aesopic corpus, with particular reference to the *Wasps*. The play's engagement with Aesopic motifs has also been explored by Schirru, in his 2009 monograph *La Favola in Aristofane*; however, Schirru's interest is primarily in the *Wasps*' possible engagement with the biographical tradition

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24. It is important to note that as Lefkowitz 2014: 2 argues, "For Greek and Roman authors, the genre 'fable' and its legendary founder 'Aesop' are not mutually distinct categories." In support of this, Lefkowitz notes that Aristophanes specifically uses the adjective 'Aesopic' (*Vesp.* 1259: Αἰσωπικόν; cf. *Pax* 136: τραγικώτερος for the comparable use of 'tragic' as an adjective), showing that even those stories considered to be only in the style of Aesop (as opposed to specifically being attributed by the speaker to the figure 'Aesop' as author) could be designated as being associated with Aesop.

surrounding Aesop, rather than in the fables themselves, and his arguments therefore largely fall outside the scope of the present discussion.<sup>25</sup>

Animals are not of course a feature of all of the fables ascribed to the Aesopic corpus; however animals feature in roughly 75% of the *Collectio Augustana*, 65% of Phaedrus, and 80% of Babrius.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, in Aristophanes in particular, Adrados (1999: 14) notes that “almost all the ‘Aesopic’ material is animalistic”,<sup>27</sup> suggesting that in comedy at least there is an argument for considering that animals, though not a *sine qua non* for defining what is Aesopic, at least have a strong association with the Aesopic mode.<sup>28</sup> It may be instructive also to note that in iamboi, with which Old Comedy shares many features (even if one does not accept that the two genres are related),<sup>29</sup> the use of Aesopic material is similarly skewed towards animal fable.<sup>30</sup>

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25. Schirru’s central argument that the *Wasps* engages sustainedly with the *Life of Aesop*, and that a parallel can be drawn between the trial of the dog Labes and the trial of Aesop at Delphi, rests on the suggestion that a biographical tradition analogous to the later *Vitae* existed already by the 5th century. Despite the clear reference to a biographical tradition of some sort at *Vesp.* 1446-9, the case for an established, stable *Vita* tradition in the 5th century is far from clear. Although there are clear similarities between *Vesp.* 1446-9 and the *Vita G*, it has been suggested that Old Comedy may have significantly influenced the later tradition of the *Vita Aesopis* (cf. Goins 1989), and that therefore any similarities between the *Wasps* and the later biographical tradition may be evidence not of the existence of such a tradition in the 5th century, but rather of the *Wasps*’ influence on these later texts.

26. These figures are taken from Lefkowitz 2014: 5.

27. Adrados further suggests that in Aristophanes, fables lacking an animal element are classified as ‘Sybaritic’ rather than as Aesopic. Cf. Adrados 1979 (1999): 14.

28. Lefkowitz 2014 in his study of animals in Aesop reaches a similar conclusion, arguing that while in his opinion Adrados’ distinction between animal based Aesopic fables and non-animal Sybaritic fables is too neat (and too reliant on a single scholion on *Vesp.* 1259), there is clearly a strong association between Aesop and animal stories.

29. The precise relationship between iambographic poetry and the evolution of Athenian comedy is heavily contested. An overview of the issues at hand can be seen in e.g. Bowie 2002, and Carey 2009. A more detailed consideration can be found in Rosen 1988, who argues for a closer relationship between the two genres than others (in particular Bowie) have done.

30. The fragments of Archilochus contain traces of the fables of the fox and the eagle (fr. 174-181 W, Perry 1), and the ape and the fox (fr. 185-187 W, Perry 81), as well as possibly the wolf and the dog (fr. 237 W, Perry 346); and Semonides, whose famous diatribe against

In their respective discussions of the use of fable in Aristophanes, both Rothwell and Hall consider the status of fable primarily from the perspective of class and social position. Rothwell in particular locates fable within a specifically low-class discourse, and suggests that Philocleon's utilisation of fable reinforces his status as a poor 'everyman' character, in contrast to his son, who has higher aspirations; while Hall argues that, although fable might be a common language used by both low class and high class people, it is deeply embedded in the hierarchical structures of Greek society. The discussion surrounding fable-telling in the *Wasps* does indeed appear to display a preoccupation with the precise status of fable, and the kinds of situations in which it can properly be deployed. Throughout the scene in which Philocleon is tutored in sympotic etiquette, his son is concerned that his father should impress his fellow symposiasts. Philocleon is given expensive imported clothes in place of his tattered old cloak (1125-1167), and told to carry himself 'opulently' (1168: *πλουσίως*); and when Bdelycleon is instructing his father as to the kind of speech expected at the symposium, he is adamant that Philocleon must not tell stories about animals, calling him uneducated (1183: *καπαίδευτε*) and despairing that he would think to tell stories about mice and ferrets in the company of such men (1185: *μῦς καὶ γαλαῖς μέλλεις λέγειν ἐν ἀνδράσιν*);). According to Bdelycleon, instead of fables, Philocleon should tell 'impressive' (1186: *μεγαλοπρεπεῖς*) stories which present him as important and high status.

Rather, according to Bdelycleon, fables of this sort are appropriate for gentlemen to tell not to one another in a sympotic context, but to those people from outside the sympotic group whom one might have upset in the course of one's carousing. Bdelycleon suggests to his father that, in spite of his previous injunction against such animal stories, when he is among gentlemen (1256: *ἦν ξυνῆς γ' ἀνδράσι καλοῖς τε καὶ γαθοῖς*), something Aesopic might be used to win over someone injured or inconvenienced by the night's drunken revelry:

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womankind makes particular use of animal imagery, also seems to have used the fable of the eagle and the beetle (fr. 13, Perry 3), which appears in Aristophanes' *Wasps* (*Vesp.* 1446-9) and *Peace* (*Pax* 129-30), and of the heron, eel and buzzard (fr. 9 W, Perry 443). On the topic of animal fables in iambos cf. Dijk 1997 138-150; and on the connection between this aspect of iambos and Aristophanes, cf. Zanetto 2001: 67-72.

<Φι> μηδαμῶς.  
κακὸν τὸ πίνειν· ἀπὸ γὰρ οἴνου γίγνεται  
καὶ θυροκοπήσαι καὶ πατάξαι καὶ βαλεῖν,  
κᾶπειτ' ἀποτίνειν ἀργύριον ἐκ κραιπάλης.  
<Βδ> οὔκ, ἦν ξυνηῆς γ' ἀνδράσι καλοῖς τε κἀγαθοῖς.  
ἦ γὰρ παρητήσαντο τὸν πεπονθότα,  
ἦ λόγον ἔλεξας αὐτὸς ἀστεῖόν τινα,  
Αἰσωπικὸν γέλοιον ἢ Συβαριτικόν.

Phil: No no! Drinking's a bad thing! From wine comes door-breaking, striking and stoning, and then having to pay out money while the hangover's on you!

Bdel: No, not if you're in the company of gentlemen. Either they beg the victim off, or else you yourself tell him some witty story, something funny of Aesop or a Sybaritic tale.<sup>31</sup>

(*Vesp.* 1252-9)

This is precisely the strategy which Philocleon adopts, albeit unsuccessfully, in lines 1388ff., in which a female bread-seller takes the role of the injured party. Baker-women in Old Comedy appear to have carried specific associations of vulgar noisiness, with the phrase 'abusing someone like a bread-seller woman' (cf. *Ran.* 857-8: λοιδορεῖσθαι δ' οὐ πρόπει / ἄνδρας ποιητὰς ὥσπερ ἄρτοποιίδας) roughly equivalent to the English idiom 'screeching like a fishwife'. The specific use of a woman bread-seller in these lines therefore seems to add a class-based dimension to the use of fable, as the aspiring sympotic gentleman Philocleon deploys an Aesopic tale to talk down to someone whose profession marks them as being far removed from the sympotic class. This element of class was perhaps already implicit in Bdelycleon's earlier advice, in which he clearly drew a distinction between the kind of language used between members of the sympotic gathering (which was not to include fable, but rather something more impressive), and that used by gentlemen to address those on the outside of their sympotic set (where the use of fable is recommended).

However, despite Bdelycleon's injunction against telling fables at the symposium in lines 1183-9, both Bdelycleon's own later comments on the subject of fable, and Xanthias' description of the symposium attended by Philocleon, make clear that while fable-telling may

31. On the relationship between Aesop and Sybaritic tales cf. n. 27 above.

not be ‘impressive’ (1186: μεγαλοπρεπεῖς) among gentlemen, such stories are in practice an accepted feature of sympotic discourse. When he is instructing his father in how to use fable-telling to assuage any anger incurred by his drunken behaviour, Bdelycleon specifically describes these Aesopic and Sybaritic tales as ‘something witty/urbane’ (1258: ἀστεῖόν τινα), and something which Philocleon might have himself heard told at the symposium (1259-60: Αἰσωπικὸν γέλοιον ἢ Συβαριτικόν, / ὧν ἕμαθες ἐν τῷ συμποσίῳ). Further, when Xanthias describes Philocleon’s misbehaviour at the symposium, he recalls for the audience how one of the diners compared the old man to the (apparently proverbial)<sup>32</sup> ass in the bran-heap (1309-10 ἔοικας, ὃ πρεσβῦτα... κλητῆρι τ’ εἰς ἀχυρὸν ἀποδεδρακότι); and Philocleon’s retort comparing his companion to a locust (1311: πάρνοπι) is described as winning the applause and approval of most of his fellow symposiasts (1314: οἱ δ’ ἀνεκρότησαν, πλὴν γε Θουφράστου μόνου).

Therefore, although Bdelycleon seems to display reservations about its appropriateness in an elite context, fable is in the *Wasps* presented as being in practice a surprisingly pervasive mode of speech and thought;<sup>33</sup> and the play suggests that Aesop may be invoked at the symposium among friends, in the political context of the law-courts (*Vesp.* 564-6), or to diffuse a potentially volatile personal situation. Moreover, while Philocleon’s claimed lack of formal education (*Vesp.* 989: καθαρίζειν γὰρ οὐκ ἐπίσταμαι) seems to be no barrier to an extensive knowledge of Aesopic stories, they are similarly invoked by gentlemen (cf. *Vesp.* 1256) both, as Bdelycleon recommends, outside of the symposium to talk down to non-elites such as the baker-woman, but also, despite his instructions to the contrary, within the sympotic context between elites. This suggests that while there might be some ambiguity, or even anxiety, surrounding the proper place of fable, and particularly its suitability within

32. cf. Σ<sup>ΥΤ</sup>. Biles & Olson 2015: 465 suggest that the meaning of this proverb is roughly comparable to the English ‘happier than a pig in shit.’

33. The surprising pervasiveness of fable-like discourse can arguably also be demonstrated by its frequent appearance in literature of various types. It is certainly worth noting that despite its apparent lowness, fable appears not only in low genres such as Iambos, but also in epic (e.g. Hes. *WD* 212ff.), and tragedy (e.g. Aesch. *Ag.* 717-36), albeit that the fables are here only alluded to rather than explicitly told as they are in iambos or comedy (cf. n. 1 above).

more elite contexts, as displayed by Bdelycleon, the use of fable in the *Wasps* largely aligns with the model of ‘popular culture’ suggested by Kurke, in which while high culture may be segregated, or available only to an elite minority, that same elite might participate equally in mass culture.<sup>34</sup> This is the conclusion reached also by Hall (2010: 296), who argues that fable “spoke with an equally loud voice to people on both sides of the power divide.”

However despite the *Wasps* seeming ambivalence about the place of fable in society, the function of fables within the play is considerably more stable, and aligns to a significant degree with definitions of fable (both ancient and modern), which invariably stress its didactic, persuasive, or riddling quality. Perry (1952), Adrados (1979) and Dijk (1997) in their monumental studies of the ancient fable each emphasise throughout their work fable’s association with explanation, instruction, and riddles. Nøjgaard (1964.I: 63-4) places an even greater emphasis on the didactic purpose of fable, arguing that the fictional world of Aesop is itself designed as a cue to the listener that the fable has a specific, allegorical message for them to decode. These modern discussions of the definition of fable mirror both the ancient terminology surrounding fable, and the observations of ancient commentators, which similarly suggest that fable was considered a means of conveying a message, whether playfully in the form of a riddle, or didactically in the form of a moral instruction. The terms αἶνος, meaning a riddle, proverb, or other kind of speech with a hidden meaning, and αἴνιγμα, meaning a riddle, are among the varied terminology used to designate fable in the ancient world,<sup>35</sup> and Aelius Theon II.72, writing in the second century A.D., gave the pithy definition of fable as λόγος ψευδῆς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν, similarly emphasising fable’s ability to convey

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34. Cf. Kurke 2010: 2-15. Kurke suggests that a parallel might be made with early modern mass culture in Europe, where, it has been argued by Burke (1978: 28), “the elite participated in the little tradition, but the common people did not participate in the great tradition”. While this model cannot be applied unmodified to an ancient context (in that, for example, much of what would be classified in even the ancient world as ‘high’ culture, such as epic and tragedy, was part of a culture of mass public performance), it is perhaps useful in the case of fable.

35. On the term αἶνος, cf. Dijk 1997: 79-80, who in his more extended discussion of the term defines it as ‘spoken words with a hidden meaning’, and argues that the word αἴνιγμα (LSJ: dark saying, riddle) is derived from αἶνος, thereby suggesting that the two words have a similar semantic range.



a specific message.<sup>36</sup> Fable's persuasive role is further codified in the later collections of Aesopica, in which stories are often concluded with a brief summary of the principal they might be used to demonstrate.<sup>37</sup> Recension I (also known as the *Augustana*), the oldest collection of Aesopica (cf. Perry 1952: xii), in particular concludes each fable with a sentence either describing the sort of man who would be a suitable audience for its moral lesson, or briefly summarising what the story shows (ὁ λόγος δηλοῖ...); and this is also a feature of other of the Recensions, particularly II and III.

While the *Wasps* presentation of fable similarly emphasises its persuasive or didactic potential, the play additionally stresses the funny or entertaining nature of the stories. Aesop is twice described as 'something funny' (566: Αἰσώπου τι γέλοιον, 1259: Αἰσωπικὸν γέλοιον); and Xanthias' description of the use of Aesop-like animal stories in the symposium highlights the approval and applause Philocleon receives from the other diners (1314: οἱ δ' ἀνεκρότησαν), who are apparently entertained by his fable-telling. Such an emphasis on the comic potential of fable is perhaps expected in the context of comedy, and this comic quality is often overlooked by modern commentators, in particular Nøjgaard whose model of *l'allégorie mécanique* (1964.I: 63-4) primarily emphasises the symbolic function of the fable. According to Nøjgaard's model, the amusing and fantastical elements of fable's fictional world are not an end in themselves, but exist only to act as a cue to the listener that the story has no meaning or function beyond the symbolic. This dismissal of fable's more humorous and entertaining qualities risks underplaying an important element of their function, particularly in the context of their use by Aristophanes.

However, despite this emphasis on fable as a form of entertainment, the *Wasps*, in common with the modern and ancient definitions of fable discussed above, also presents Aesop as a potentially useful persuasive device, both in the public context of the law-courts, and in private disputes between individuals. In lines 564-71, Philocleon describes how

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36. For a further discussion of Theon's description cf. Kurke 2010: 43, and Djik 1997: 47-51.

37. Cf. Perry 1952: 321-426. The presence of a specifically 'moral' message is considered by Perry to be one of the defining qualities of an Aesopic fable (1952: ix).

defendants in the courts might use fable as one of a number of devices, alongside exaggerating their poverty and misery; bringing out their children to beg for them; and telling jokes and stories, which help to persuade a potentially hostile jury to take their side:

οἱ δὲ λέγουσιν μύθους ἡμῖν, οἱ δ' Αἰσώπου τι γέλοισιν·  
οἱ δὲ σκώπτουσ', ἔν' ἐγὼ γελάσω καὶ τὸν θυμὸν καταθῶμαι.<sup>38</sup>

Others tell us stories, others something funny of Aesop's; others again make jokes in the hope that I'll laugh and lay aside my wrath.

(*Vesp.* 566-7)

In lines 1256-61, Bdelycleon's suggested use of fable in a personal dispute again emphasises the utility of fable as a persuasive device which can assuage the anger of an opponent. The situation described by Philocleon, in which drunkenness has led to 'door-breaking, striking and throwing' (1254: καὶ θυροκοπήσαι καὶ πατάξαι καὶ βαλεῖν), is clearly highly volatile, and it is in this context which Bdelycleon suggests that a fable can be persuasively deployed to diffuse the situation, turning hostility to laughter (1260-1: κᾶτ' εἰς γέλων / τὸ πρᾶγμα ἔτρεψας), just as Philocleon described in the law-courts. The *Wasps*' presentation of fable therefore maps on to the models suggested by both modern and ancient commentators, in that fable is presented firstly as a persuasive device; and secondly as something approaching a universal discourse, equally at home in the private space of the symposium or the public space of the law-court, and understood by gentleman and bread-seller alike.

Both fable's persuasive function recognised in the *Wasps* as elsewhere, and its status as an apparently universal mode of communication, are inherently reliant on fable's stable semiotic code. Furthermore, the deployment of fable in the *Wasps* in specifically volatile situations, directed at audiences prone to anger, appears to both recognise, and indeed amplify, this feature, due to an increased emphasis on the requirement under such circumstances for the predictability of meaning and interpretation provided by a stable, mutually understood code. In his study of animals in fable, Lefkowitz (2014: 11-15) has

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38. I take the purpose clause (ἔν'... καταθῶμαι) as relating not only to the joke-telling (σκώπτουσ', ἔν'...), but rather to each of the three clauses which precede it, due to the repetition of οἱ δὲ, would seem to imply that these three clauses are to be taken together as preceding the purpose clause.

noted that the symbolism of animals in Aesop is distinctly static, and often connected to a fixed set of stereotypes, in which for example the fox is cunning, the lion brave and regal, the stag vain, and so on. Even those animals without such stereotypical character traits assigned to them tend to appear in stories which exploit their most notable and stereotypical physical or behavioural characteristics, so for example the three extant fables about the crab take his sharp claws (Perry 196), sideways walk (Perry 322), and marine habitat (Perry 116) as their respective starting points. Furthermore, animals who do try to stray from their nature and change their characters usually come to a bad end, and “fable tradition frequently expresses the view that everyone... has an essential, unchangeable nature, and that it is dangerous to attempt to transcend the limitations of one’s character.” (ibid. 14).<sup>39</sup> This is the fate of the crab in the story of the crab and the fox (Perry 116): in trying to escape his natural habitat in favour of a life on land, the crab is eaten by the fox, and concludes that he deserved such a death since he had no business leaving the sea. Even those fables in which an animal is presented in a manner which specifically goes against their usual character traits (e.g. the brave lion frightened by the mouse, Perry 146) rely for their full meaning on the listener’s knowledge that the animal is acting against expected type.

The first appearance of animal imagery in the *Wasps* appears to fall into exactly this category of αἴτιον-like fable, in which animals function as symbols within a stable semiotic code, and the story carries a clear message to be deciphered by the listener. The *Wasps* begins (like its predecessor *Knights*, and the later *Peace*) with two slaves who introduce the play to the audience. The introduction involves a series of animal dreams, induced by the slaves’ drunken sleep, which they proceed to interpret for the benefit of the audience; and the content of these dreams, which feature a number of animals often used in Aesopic stories, is strongly

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39. This stability may also be related to the relatively close relationship between the characteristics of real animals and their depiction in fable. The relationship between the animals of fable and natural history is further discussed by Lefkowitz 2014: 15-18, who argues that fable occasionally shows a close interest in real animal behaviour.

reminiscent of fable.<sup>40</sup> The first dream-riddle, described by Xanthias, begins with an eagle (15: ἐδόκουν αἰετὸν...), an animal which features frequently in fables (e.g. Perry 1, 2, 3, 230, 275, 276, 395) including the fable of the eagle and the beetle which appears later in the play in lines 1446-9; before moving towards a more obviously comic satire of the stock figure Cleonymus:<sup>41</sup>

ἐδόκουν αἰετὸν  
καταπτάμενον εἰς τὴν ἀγορὰν μέγαν πάνυ  
ἀναρπάσαντα τοῖς ὄνυξιν ἀσπίδα  
φέρειν ἐπίχαλκον ἀνεκὰς εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν,  
κᾶπειτα ταύτην ἀποβαλεῖν Κλεώνυμον.

I fancied that a very big eagle flew down into the Agora and snatched up in his talons a shieldtail snake — a bronze-plated shieldtail— and was carrying it up into the sky; and then he turned into Cleonymus and dropped the bronze-plated shieldtail.

(*Vesp.* 15-19)

Sosias at once replies that this dream must be a riddle (20: γρίφου), suggesting (since a riddle implies a solution) that the animal imagery is here meant to be interpreted as having a specific symbolic value; and Xanthias is duly worried about what message the dream might be sending him (24-5). Therefore despite the addition of the completely un-Aesopic, but characteristically Old Comic, feature of *onomasti komodein*, the animal imagery of the dream appears to function symbolically in much the same mode as the fables which appear later in the play.

However, the scene quickly begins to diverge from this model as Sosias relates his own dream to the audience. Sosias first introduces his dream as one which concerns politics (29: περὶ τῆς πόλεως γάρ ἐστι, τοῦ σκάφους ὄλου). The use of the stock poetic metaphor of ‘the ship of state’ (τοῦ σκάφους), an image used for example by Aeschylus (*Septem* 2), Alcaeus

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40. The comparison is also made by Hall 2013: 278-9, who suggests that the opening scene of the *Wasps* primes the audience to expect that the animal symbolism which appears later in the play will require their interpretation.

41. For Aristophanes’ relentless mockery of Cleonymus’ shield-throwing, cf. *Knights* 1369-72, *Clouds* 353, *Peace* 444-6, 670-8, 1295-1304, *Birds* 290, 1480-1.

(fr. 6), and later Horace (*Odes* 1.14), suggests that the symbolism will be familiar, and easily understood; and the initial imagery of Sosias' dream is similarly predictable:

<Σω> ἔδοξέ μοι περὶ πρῶτον ὕπνον ἐν τῇ Πυκνὶ  
ἐκκλησιάζειν πρόβατα συγκαθήμενα,  
βακτηρίας ἔχοντα καὶ τριβώνια·  
κάπειτα τούτοις τοῖσι προβάτοις μούδοκει  
δημηγορεῖν φάλλαινα πανδοκεύτρια,  
ἔχουσα φωνὴν ἐμπεπρημένης ὕος.

<Ξα> αἰβοῖ.

<Σω> τί ἐστι;

<Ξα> παῦε παῦε, μὴ λέγε·  
ᾄξει κάκιστον τοῦνύπνιον βύρσης σαπρᾶς.

Sos: In the early part of the night, I dreamed there were sheep sitting together in assembly on the Pnyx; they had walking sticks and homespun cloaks. Then I dreamed that the sheep were being harangued by an omnivorous whale with the voice of an inflamed sow.<sup>42</sup>

Xan: Ugh!

Sos: What is it?

Xan: Stop, stop, say no more! Your dream has a horrible smell of rotting hides.

(*Vesp.* 31-8)

Sosias' dream of sheep taking to the Pnyx exploits a long metaphorical tradition, going back at least to Homer,<sup>43</sup> of representing the populace as a flock (πρόβατα); and, if this were not clear enough, attributes which clearly belong to the *demos* (31-2: ἐν τῇ πυκνὶ / ἐκκλησιάζειν, the act of gathering for an assembly on the Pnyx; and the sheep's human clothing, specifically the βακτηρίαί, walking sticks and τριβώνια, cloaks associated with attendance at the assembly)<sup>44</sup> are ascribed to the sheep.

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42. Note that φάλλαινα is not strictly 'whale', as per Sommerstein's translation, but can refer to any large sea-creature, aquatic monster, or leviathan.

43 . Cf. Haubold 2002: 17-20 on the metaphor of the leader as shepherd, with his people as his flock. Haubold states that "'shepherd of the people' was regarded as a standard example of metaphorical language in classical antiquity" (17), and suggests the possibility that it may originally have been imported from Mesopotamia and Western Asia .

44 . This suggestion is made by MacDowell 1971: 131, supported by *Eccl.* 74. Philocleon is described in *Vesp.* 115 as wearing a τριβώνιον when he goes to the courts; and the women in the *Ecclesiazusae* also steal their husbands' cloaks and walking sticks in order to attend the assembly in disguise (*Eccl.* 26: θαιμάτια τάνδρεϊα, 74: ἔχετε... βακτηρίας).

The use of familiar, stable animal symbolism is however disrupted by the imposition of the Cleon-whale. In the more predictable fictional world of Aesop, such an juxtaposition of sheep and whales would clearly be impossible, since the animal imagery of fable adheres more closely to the natural world, in particular with regard to the relations between species. Other than the clearly fantastical attribution of human speech to animals, Aesopic animals to a large extent mirror their real-world counterparts in their habitats, behaviours, and patterns of predation, so that for example the wolf preys on the lamb (Perry 155) and not vice versa; the mouse cannot form an alliance with the frog (Perry 384); and the crab cannot, unlike the Cleon-whale, make his home on the land (Perry 116). The image here of a land-dwelling sea-creature mingling with a flock of sheep is therefore in its absurdity quite un-Aesopic; rather, the intrusion of incompatible elements produces a discontinuity which, as Silk has argued (2000a: 136-159), is characteristically comic. Silk suggests (2000a:137) that Aristophanes in particular “does not favour transitions or indeed blocks: indeed, he *switches*. He does so persistently, and not only from one tone or register to another. His switches take a variety of guises, seeming to require only that there is a norm of some kind, established or assumed, from which he can create an instant departure”.<sup>45</sup> The unexpected insertion of a whale into the stock political metaphor of the *demos* as sheep is just such a departure, and creates a typically absurd comic incongruity. This discontinuity and absurdity of imagery is indicative of what is to come. Unlike the static symbolism of Aesopic imagery which, while it may be amusing or funny, primarily places its emphasis not on the symbols themselves, but their symbolic meaning, such absurdity of imagery is here an end in itself. While the dreams which open the *Wasps* therefore appear at first to be a code whose importance lies primarily in its interpretation, the increasing absurdity of the dreams begins to shift the focus away from what is signified, towards the comic possibilities of the signifiers themselves.

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45. The question of whether this feature is specifically Aristophanic, or is rather characteristic of comic language as a whole, is difficult to answer. Silk 2000b argues that this ‘switching’ and discontinuity is a specific feature of Aristophanes’ language, and does not characterise the language of other of the Old Comedians to the same degree, though he allows that it may appear occasionally appear in other poets’ work. Silk is however usually inclined to emphasise the differences between Aristophanes and the other poets of Old Comedy, and perhaps overstates the case for Aristophanes’ distinctiveness in this instance (as in others).

### **Performing the Animal Kingdom: Philocleon and the Chorus**

As this chapter has already noted, of all the characters in the *Wasps* Philocleon is most frequently associated with animal imagery, which is both used by him in his repeated invocations of Aesop and animal fable, and applied to him metaphorically by other characters. This section will argue first, that Philocleon's adoption of a series of animal identities in the opening scene in particular anticipates the porous boundary between animal and human which is a feature of the play's unusual animal chorus, who unlike for example the animal choruses of *Birds* or *Frogs* inhabit a dual animal-human identity; and second, that this adoption and performance of animal identities and characteristics by figures whose identity is primarily human is a form of metatheatricality which directs the audience's attention to the act of animal role-playing as a specifically theatrical mode. In this way, the *Wasps* shifts its emphasis from the animal image as symbol or signifier, as it is in the dreams which open, and the fables which populate, the play; towards instead the animal as a marker of the self-conscious performativity which is a defining characteristic of Old Comedy.

The early part of the *Wasps* sees Philocleon taking on a number of guises as he as he acts out a series of different tricks in an effort to escape from the house and join his fellow jurors. In this scene Philocleon is repeatedly assimilated to different animals in the speech of other characters, who describe the old man as 'like a limpet' (105: ὥσπερ λεπὰς), 'like a bee' (107: ὥσπερ μέλιττ' ἢ βομβυλιὸς), 'like a jackdaw' (129: ὥσπερ εἰ κολοιὸς), and 'scurrying like a mouse' (140: μυσπολεῖ). In parallel with this animal characterisation, Philocleon is presented as an overtly performative figure whose escape attempts take the form of a series of skits in which the old man pretends to be something or someone else in order to elude his captors. Philocleon's very first entrance in the play sees a rather surreal attempt to pass himself off as smoke in order to escape the house via the chimney (*Vesp.* 143-8); and these lines suggest that the impersonation is acted out on stage, as the actor comes out (144: ἐξέρχομαι) of the chimney, before being forced back down again (148: δούου πάλιν) by Bdelycleon.<sup>46</sup>

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46. Compare *Thesmophoriazousae* 51, where In-Law claims to be νήνεμος αἰθήρ 'the windless air', but there is no suggestion in the text that dramaturgy is employed in his impersonation.

Philocleon's next escape attempt in lines 179-196 sees the old man act out the role of a fictional character, namely Odysseus.<sup>47</sup> The story of Odysseus and his men escaping from Polyphemus' cave under the bellies of his sheep seems to be something of a favourite with Aristophanes (cf. also *Pl.* 290-301, where the scene similarly appears to be acted out/danced on stage in some way by Carion and the chorus); and here in the *Wasps* Philocleon utilises the household donkey in place of the more customary ram.<sup>48</sup> The self-conscious performativity of Philocleon's Odysseus act is further increased by the fact that Philocleon's Odysseus-guise acts out the process of Odysseus himself taking on a new identity, that of Οὐτις; and that this is the name adopted by Philocleon in his own Odyssean disguise (184-6; the name is repeated three times in these lines). Given that Philocleon is seen hanging underneath the donkey, and since (as anyone who has ever been in a nativity play with one knows) donkeys are rather stubborn and unpredictable creatures, it seems highly implausible that a real animal was used on stage.<sup>49</sup> The donkey must therefore be either a model on wheels, or, more likely since at line 179-80 the animal is required to bray on cue (179: κἀνθων, τί κλάεις;), some kind of 'pantomime' donkey similar to the 'pantomime' horses seen on the Berlin vase (discussed

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47. Again, comparison with the *Thesmophoriazusae*, in which the In-Law acts out a series of roles from Euripides' tragedies in an effort to escape his captors, is perhaps instructive. Although this scene in the *Wasps* lacks the explicit metatheatricality of In-Law's tragic acting, its emphasis on self-conscious role playing is similar. In-Law's Euripidean acting in the final scenes of the *Thesmophoriazusae* is discussed in greater detail in chapter 3 of this thesis.

48. On the shared Dionysiac associations of both asses and rams, cf. Davies 1990; and for the Dionysiac qualities of donkeys more specifically, as well as their broader cultural associations, cf. Griffith 2006.

49. For a consideration of the use of animals on the Greek stage, cf. Arnott 1959. Arnott suggests that, while it might be possible to use a real animal to represent the donkey in the opening of the *Frogs*, the *Wasps* could not possibly have used an actual donkey, not least because the actor might complain about the unpleasantness of hanging underneath one. Arnott concludes that, on balance, due to the requirement for the donkey to bray, a 'pantomime' donkey is a more likely solution than a model in this instance (while he considers that models were more likely used in for example Euripides' *Cyclops*, which requires a crate of sheep). Biles & Olson 2015: 143 similarly conclude that given the requirements for the donkey "to enter, exit, and hesitate on cue; tolerate carrying its rider in an extraordinary position; and even bray on cue"; and in particular due to "the unlikelihood that any real donkey would cooperate fully under such circumstances— or any others" it must have been played by an extra, or pair of extras, in costume.



above, cf. n. 3). A donkey represented by an actor or actors in costume would certainly be more in keeping with the play as a whole, in which actors perform a variety of animal roles, including the wasps of the chorus, but also the talking dogs in the trial scene, and the dancing crabs in the finale.<sup>50</sup> This raises the possibility that in this sequence the audience see Philocleon acting out the role of Odysseus, hanging underneath a man pretending to be a donkey, which is itself taking the role of a ram. These multiple levels of simultaneous role-playing are not only ridiculously comic, but also overtly acknowledge the act of performance, and in particular animal-performance (in the form of the pantomime donkey), in a manner which is to become a theme throughout the play.

With Philocleon now firmly established as both a figure associated with animal imagery, and an overtly performative, role-playing character, the play now brings these two strands together in the form of Philocleon's sparrow act, which unlike the previous assimilations of Philocleon to animals is actually embodied dramaturgically on stage. No sooner has Philocleon been chased back into the house with the donkey, he appears on the roof, and quickly dislodges a tile (203: πόθεν ποτ' ἐμπέπτωκέ μοι τὸ βωλίον;). The sparrow metaphor is introduced gradually over the course of a few lines, as Philocleon is first described as 'roof-dwelling' (206: ὀροφίας), an adjective more usually applied to animals,<sup>51</sup> before Bdelycleon exclaims in line 207 that his father has become a sparrow (στροῦθος ἀνὴρ γίγνεται), and is about to fly away (208: ἐκπήσεται). The use of the verb γίγνομαι in particular emphasises the idea of physical transformation, in contrast to the repeated use of ὡςπερ associated with the earlier theriomorphic descriptions of Philocleon. The physical enactment of Philocleon's transformation is pushed further in the following lines, as Bdelycleon apparently takes a net (208: τὸ δίκτυον) (an object associated strongly with birds

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50. MacDowell (1971) and Biles & Olson (2015) notably dismiss the idea that the dancers in the final scene were costumed as crabs. The arguments against this position will be considered in detail in the final section of this chapter, which will argue on the basis of both the scene itself, and the precedent set throughout the play, that crab costumes were in all likelihood featured.

51. Cf. LSJ, which notes the designation of the common mouse as μῦς ὀροφίας, and the description of a tame house-snake as ὀροφίας ὄφις.

in Aristophanes),<sup>52</sup> and uses it to shoo his father back inside (209: σοῦ, σοῦ, πάλιν, σοῦ). While Philocleon, unlike the wasp-chorus (whose costume in particular contains both animal and human elements), does not have a fully dual animal-human identity but is rather a human character with animal-like traits, the explicit enactment of his theriomorphic identity in these lines establishes the adoption of animal identity as a kind of performance; and this presentation of animal identity as self-consciously performative has important ramifications for the later role of the chorus in the play.

With Philocleon finally chased back inside by his son, attention shifts towards the chorus, whose arrival Bdelycleon and his slaves now anticipate (214-6). Although the chorus' animal identity is considerably more concrete than the animal guises adopted by Philocleon in the opening scene, the *Wasps*' chorus are still, like Philocleon, old jurors, whose adoption of an animal persona does not fully override their primary, human, identity. In this regard, they are quite different from other animal choruses in Aristophanes, which are comprised not of theriomorphised men, but anthropomorphised animals. The chorus of wasps are characterised by a notably porous boundary between human and animal, as they shift between these two identities, and at times inhabit both simultaneously. As the initially human jurors take on their theriomorphic persona, the act of a human performing an animal character is explicitly thematised; and this in turn shifts attention on to the act of performance and theatrical transformation which lies at the heart of comedy's animal choruses.

When the chorus are first introduced, the emphasis is on their human characteristics, as Philocleon calls upon them as 'fellow jurors' (197, 215: ξυνδικασταὶ) to help him, and describes their habit of getting up well before dawn in order to arrive early at the courts (*Vesp.* 217-20). It is only at line 224, just before their entrance, that the chorus are first described as wasps. As with Philocleon's animal personas, which were initially introduced only descriptively (105, 107, 129: ὅσπερ), at first the chorus are only described as being 'like wasps' (224: ὅμοιον σφηκιᾷ) when they are angered. However, the metaphor quickly shifts

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52. For this association between birds and nets, cf. e.g. *Av.* 194, 528.

towards more concrete terms, as the old men are not only described as having a metaphorically waspish temperament, but begin to take on the physical characteristics of the animals:

ἔχουσι γὰρ καὶ κέντρον ἐκ τῆς ὀσφύος  
ὀξύτατον, ᾧ κεντοῦσι, καὶ κεκραγότες  
πηδῶσι καὶ βάλλουσιν ὥσπερ φέψαλοι.

They've even got a very sharp sting sticking out from their rumps, which they stab with, and they jump about and strike you like sparks of fire.

(*Vesp.* 225-7)

Despite Bdelycleon's insistence on the waspish characteristics of his father's fellow jurors, which leads the audience to expect some kind of animal costume, the first appearance of the chorus sees them in human guise, dressed in long cloaks; and other than addressing Philocleon as 'honey-bee' (ὦ μελίττιον) in line 366, there is little hint of their identity as insects,<sup>53</sup> as instead they complain about their poverty and reminisce about their glory days as soldiers. It is not until line 408 that the chorus remove their cloaks (ἀλλὰ θαιμάτια λαβόντες ὡς τάχιστα, παιδία) and reveal the wasp costumes they wear underneath. The exact form that this costume might have taken has been subject to some debate, specifically with regard to the relationship between the stinger and the comic phallus.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, in line with comedy's tendency towards literal representation, it seems certain that the chorus' costume comprised a sting (420: Ἡράκλεις, καὶ κέντρ' ἔχουσιν. οὐχ ὀρᾶς, ᾧ δέσποτα;), most probably

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53. The conflation of bees and wasps in this play is discussed at some length by Corbel-Morana 2003: 164-7.

54 . For a full discussion of the debate concerning whether the wasp-chorus had both a sting and a phallus, only a phallus which also represented a sting, or only a sting which also represented a phallus, cf. Rothwell 2007: 256-7. While there is a strong argument for some symbolic equivalence between the wasp-sting and the phallus, given the way in which the wasp-sting is equated with virile masculinity (for which cf. Reckford 1987: 236-8, Hubbard 1989: 100), it seems unlikely that (as Newiger 1957: 79-80 argues) the stings were in fact visually represented only metaphorically through the use of the choruses' phalloi, especially given the doubt surrounding the evidence for comic choruses wearing phalloi (cf. Rothwell 2007: 25-7). We must therefore conclude that the most likely solution to the problem of the chorus' costume in *Wasps* is that they were dressed with wasp stings, which are referred to metaphorically also as phalloi, and not conversely that the chorus' phalloi were used metaphorically to represent stings.

one which protruded from the back, as ἐκ τῆς ὀσφύος in line 225 suggests, but which was perhaps flexible so that it could be pulled through to the front when necessary.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, the chorus' later description of themselves as 'wasp-waisted' (1072: μέσον διεσφηκωμένον) suggests a costume which mimicked the shape (and presumably also the colouring) of wasps' bodies. The chorus' waspish identity is further dramatised in the lines surrounding the revelation of their costume, as they begin to enact their animal identity. They describe their stings bracing for action (407: κέντρον ἐντατέον ὀξέως), before using their stings as weapons in a stand-off with Bdelycleon and his slaves according to the orders of the chorus-leader (422-5); and Bdelycleon and his slaves in turn react to them as wasps, fighting them off using smoke (457: ἀλλὰ καὶ σὺ τῦφε πολλῶ τῶ καπνῶ), a method commonly used against wasp-nests.

However, the chorus' enactment of their wasp identity is accompanied by a continued emphasis in their speech on their characteristics as jurors and Athenian citizens. Their actions are described in military language (422: ἐπίστρεφε, 423: δεῦρο κάξειρας... ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἴεσο) as they mobilise as an army against an 'enemy of the city' (411: ἄνδρα μισόπολιν) to preserve their jury-rights (413-14) against the threat of tyranny (417: τυραννίς ἐστίν). The combination of this continued insistence in the text on the chorus' identity as Athenian jurors with the dramaturgical emphasis (both in terms of costume and movement) on their identity as wasps creates an even more porous boundary between human and animal than that seen in the earlier scene with Philocleon; and the subsequent spectacle of humans-who-also-embodiment animals mirrors the act of choral animal performance, in which human actors similarly embody animal roles.

The chorus' status as simultaneously both human and animal is increasingly made the focus of their presentation in the play, particularly in the passage from line 1071 onwards. The chorus begin by drawing attention to their wasp characteristics, saying that they will explain (1074: διδάξω) their appearance to the audience, who may be wondering about what

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55. Cf. *Thesm.* 643-8, where the characters' lines make it clear that In-Law's phallus is flexible and that he can therefore move it from front to back as he tries to hide it from view.

they see (1072: ὀρῶν), with the use of the verb ὀράω demonstrating again that the chorus must be costumed as wasps, with stings (1073: ἐγκεντρίδος) and wasp waists (1071: διασφηκωμένον). The sense of the chorus' complete duality of identity is increased through the suggestion that, far from the two characterisations being at odds, the chorus' waspishness is a sign of their status as proper, autochthonous Athenian men. The chorus first assert that, instead of undermining or conflicting with their characterisation as Athenian men, their wasp sting is in fact a confirmation of this status:<sup>56</sup>

ἔσμεν ἡμεῖς, οἷς πρόσεστι τοῦτο τοῦρροπύγιον,  
Ἄττικοὶ μόνοι δικαίως ἐγγενεῖς ἀτόχθονες.

We who have this kind of rump on us are the only genuine aboriginal native Athenians.

(*Vesp.* 1075-6)

The chorus then go on to claim that their race of wasp-men hybrids are 'the most manly race' (1077: ἀνδρικώτατον γένος), thereby making an animal characteristic emblematic of a quality which, as the use of a word for bravery which has ἀνήρ at its root suggests, is inherently human. The chorus' two identities, as both wasps and jurors, are therefore throughout this passage presented not as mutually exclusive, but rather mutually reinforcing.

The chorus' conflation of their animal and human identities continues with their description of their deeds in battle. As with Aristophanes' previous 'old man' chorus in the *Acharnians* (cf. *Ach.* 692-702), the wasp chorus use their participation in the Persian wars as a symbol of their status as true Athenians, quite unlike the modern effeminate youth who have not served their country. Given that the battle took place almost seventy years previously in 490 B.C., it seems unlikely that there were many veterans of the Persian wars surviving by the time of Aristophanes' early career. Rather, the Persian wars seem to be used by Aristophanes as an emblem of the golden age of Athenian manhood; and here the chorus'

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56. Corbel-Morana 2003: 157 suggests that the association between wasps and being earth-born may be based on the fact that hornets build their nests on the ground; and that the image evokes the belief that cicadas were born out of the earth. However, this rationalisation of the argument that wasp-stings are a sign of the chorus' status as Athenian men seems to somewhat miss the comic absurdity of the image.

waspishness is embedded within this narrative of archetypal Athenian bravery.<sup>57</sup> Unlike in *Acharnians*, where the battle of Marathon is given a fairly straight rendition, here the chorus' account of the battles of their youth is made part of the anthropomorphic/theriomorphic blend between Athenian and wasp. As they describe their part in defending their city against the Persians, military language and animal metaphor are again combined in a manner similar to the earlier passage where the chorus confront Bdelycleon's household, and the chorus continue to exploit the porous boundary between their animal and human identities. The Persians are first described as coming upon Athens with smoke and fire (1079: τῷ καπνῷ τύφων ἄπασαν τὴν πόλιν καὶ πυρπολῶν), presumably a reference to the burning of Attica by Xerxes' army (Cf. Herod. vii.i 50). However the language quickly shifts from human to animal, when in the next line the Persians are described as attacking not the city but ἡμῶν... τάνθρήνια, 'our nests' (1080), and the fire and smoke which seemed to belong to the chorus' human identity as soldiers under attack instead becomes associated with the act of smoking out a wasp nest (cf. *Vesp.* 457). Similarly, the chorus' description of themselves in battle presents them as hybrid wasp-men, since they are at once human soldiers standing 'man to man' (1083: στας ἀνὴρ παρ' ἀνδρ') with shields and swords (1081: ξὺν δορὶ ξὺν ἀσπίδι), and wasps who defend themselves with their stings (1088: κεντούμενοι); and the final line of the section concludes with a claim that they are 'the most manly of Attic wasps' (1090: Ἀττικοῦ... σφηκὸς ἀνδρικότερον), so that again their two identities are presented as being not in tension, but in alignment with one another, thereby reinforcing the idea that they do not switch between these two conflicting identities, but rather inhabit both at once.

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57. The impression that the military feats described by the chorus are archetypes or emblems is increased by the fact that the narrative seems to amalgamate several different historical events, including the Persian assault on Athens (*Vesp.* 1079: τῷ καπνῷ τύφων ἄπασαν τὴν πόλιν καὶ πυρπολῶν) described in Hdt. vii.i 50, Marathon (*Vesp.* 1078-88, which clearly describes a land battle), and possibly also Thermopylae (*Vesp.* 1084, which seems to recall events similar to those related by Hdt. vii. 226). For a further discussion of the assimilation of various battles in these lines, cf. MacDowell 1971: 271-2, and Carey 2013 who argues that the passage here also absorbs the naval countermeasures against Persia into its composite description.

By flipping the tradition of anthropomorphised comic animals on its head to present instead a chorus of theriomorphic men, the *Wasps* places the idea of theriomorphic embodiment centre stage. The consistent foregrounding of the chorus' status as simultaneously human and animal, both at the point of their introduction into the play, and in the parabasis, in turn foregrounds the idea of men-as-animals which is central to the performance of an animal chorus on stage; and the characters' dual human-animal status mirrors the similar status of the actors as men-playing-animals. In this way, the comic tradition of the animal chorus is embedded within the parallel comic tradition of self-conscious performativity; and by emphasising the act of theatrical metamorphosis inherent in the performance of animal roles, the play casts the animal chorus as one of the more conspicuous acts of fictionality in the comic tradition. Unlike the animals which populate the fables referenced in the play, and the dreams which open it, the wasps of the chorus are not a symbol asking to be interpreted; but rather, their status as humans-who-are-also-animals is a way of laying open the high level of fictional pretence intrinsic to the comic tradition of representing animals on stage with human actors.<sup>58</sup>

### **The Trial of Labes the Dog**

The trial of Labes the Dog which forms the centrepiece of the play at first seems to return us to the terrain of fable: a dog who steals cheese from the kitchen, doesn't share with his fellow dog, and either does or does not get his comeuppance has all the makings of a moral lesson in

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58. The relationship between animal performance and self-conscious fictionality in the *Wasps* arguably finds a parallel in the *Birds*. Slater 2002: 140-1 suggests that in that play "wings function as markers of self-conscious theatricality", as they are first acquired by Peisetairos and Euelpides, and then dispensed to other human characters. However, while Peisetairos and his companion do acquire wings, they are never characterised as birds, but despite their wings remain fully human in their presentation throughout the play; and conversely, the chorus' identity as birds is never undercut by any kind of secondary characterisation as humans. In this way, while a piece of animal costume, namely wings, is invested with self-conscious fictionality, the performance of animal identity is not itself made a focus to the degree that it is in the *Wasps*; and in particular, the self-conscious fictionality associated with wings in the *Birds* is not in that play connected explicitly to the tradition of the comic animal chorus.

the style of Aesop.<sup>59</sup> Further, in its overt political meaning (one which, lest there be any doubt, has already been mentioned in lines 240-4, where the chorus state that the trial they are going to that day is the prosecution of Laches by Cleon), the scene has parallels with the dreams which open the play, in which political figures, including Cleon, are alluded to in animal guises, within an αἴτιος-like riddling structure which to a degree mimics the model of fable. However, as it unfolds, the scene moves further and further away from these expected models, towards something more anarchic, in which the convergence between human and animal, seen most prominently in the presentation of the chorus, plays a central role.

The scene's animal imagery is used as a means for showcasing a tension central to the comic genre, namely that between clear, almost didactic, political symbolism on the one hand, and the joy of sheer comic absurdity and meaningless wordplay on the other. The representation of Cleon as a dog has some precedent, particularly in Aristophanes' previous play the *Knights*,<sup>60</sup> and additionally makes an appearance in the parabasis of the *Wasps* (1031-4) where Cleon is presented as (among other things) a monstrous, many-headed, jagged-toothed hound. In its presentation of Cleon as Kuon-the-dog, the trial scene employs a securely established, and therefore easily interpreted, political metaphor. The basic metaphorical structure of the trial scene, in which the household is used to represent the political world, also has parallels with the *Knights*' overall plot, in which household slaves are used as part of a political metaphor of οἶκος-as-πόλις. Furthermore, the political dimension of the trial scene are made almost explicit in lines 894 and following, as the indictment is read out, and it becomes clear that the dogs' names, Kuon of Kydathenaion and

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59. Corbel-Morana 2003: 129 suggests additionally that the trial scene in outline resembles the fable of the two dogs (Perry 92).

60. The metaphorical description of Cleon/the Paphlagonian as a dog in the *Knights* is discussed in detail by Corbel-Morana 2003: 119-124, who argues that unlike in the *Wasps*, which exploits the potential ambiguity of the symbolism of the dog (who can be both the shameless thief, and the honest watchdog), in the *Knights* the association between Cleon and the dog is entirely negative.



Labes of Aexone,<sup>61</sup> as well as the Sicilian origin of the stolen cheese,<sup>62</sup> allude to a recent dispute between Cleon and Laches concerning the latter's generalship in Sicily. At this point therefore, the dog trial seems to function in the same way as the animal dreams in the opening sequence of the play, in that there is a clear riddle which can be solved by understanding the symbolic value of each constituent part of the scene; Kuon is Cleon, with the similarity between the politician's name and the word for dog (here made into a proper noun) allowing for easy interpretation; Labes (which might usefully be translated as 'Snatcher') stands for Laches; and the theft of the cheese is to be understood as Laches' embezzlement of funds in Sicily.

However, despite this apparently clear super-structure, the scene repeatedly draws attention to its own absurdity, and at times verges on the nonsensical, as Kidd (2014: 69-77) has argued in his analysis of the scene. This element of nonsense is particularly notable in Kuon's prosecuting speech, in which the original metaphor increasingly breaks down.<sup>63</sup> Kuon's description of Labes' crimes in lines 924-5 switches incomprehensibly between the language of the trial's literal 'kitchen-sink' drama, and the political and military target of the

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61. In MacDowell's words (1971: 250), since it would have been well known that Cleon belonged to the deme of Kydathenaion, "this reference makes clear to the dullest that the prosecuting dog represents him". In this regard the scene's symbolism is therefore entirely transparent.

62. For the connection between Sicily and cheese, see also *Pax*. 242-255. When Polemos mixes together foodstuffs representing different cities (Megarian garlic, Attic honey), Sicily is represented by cheese which is grated into the mortar in lines 250-1.

63. Such metaphorical instability is also a feature of the *Knights*, whose central metaphor is used in a discontinuous fashion, as has been argued by Silk 2000a: 144-8. Further to Silk's arguments, which focus on the intrusion of tenor into vehicle and vice versa, the figure of the Sausage-Seller is also arguably an example of the breakdown of the initial metaphorical structure of the *Knights*' plot. Unlike Demos (= 'The People'), the Paphlagonian (= Cleon), and the slaves (possibly = Demosthenes and Nicias, cf. n. 16 above) who each carry a clear symbolic value within the political tenor of the metaphor, the Sausage-Seller does not have an analogous symbolic value in that he does not straightforwardly represent anyone other than 'a sausage seller'; although, as Ruffell 2011: 190-211 has argued, he is in other ways implicated in the series of metaphors and networks of associations (e.g. POLITICIANS AS SELLERS) which characterise the play, and is therefore not entirely meaningless or 'blunt' (cf. Kidd 2014: 73-7) within the play's metaphorical structure.

scene's satire, as he accuses Labes of 'sailing around the mortar in a circle' (924: περιπλεύσας τὴν θυεῖαν ἐν κύκλῳ), and 'eating the cheese-rind off the cities' (925: ἐκ τῶν πόλεων τὸ σκῖρον ἐξεδήδοκεν). In contrast to the fable-like structure which first appeared to be the basis of the scene, Kuon's speech here seems simply to revel in the absurd possibilities of the trial metaphor, as kitchen utensils without any clear interpretative value (referred to by Kidd 2014: 73-7 as 'blunt objects' in the metaphor) increasingly populate the scene.

The absurdity reaches its peak in lines 936-9, when Bdelycleon calls the Bowl, Cheese-Grater, Brazier, and Pot as witnesses, before subjecting the Cheese-Grater to a brief interrogation:

ἀνάβηθι, τυρόκνηστι, καὶ λέξον μέγα·  
 σὺ γὰρ ταμειούουσ' ἔτυχες, ἀπόκριναι σαφῶς,  
 εἰ μὴ κατέκνησας τοῖς στρατιώταις ἄλλαβες.  
 φησὶ κατακνήσαι.

Come up here, Cheese-grater. And speak up. You were actually the treasurer. Answer clearly whether you didn't grate out what you received to the troops. It says it did.<sup>64</sup>

(*Vesp.* 963-6)

The fact that Bdelycleon actually instructs the Cheese-Grater to take to the stand (963: ἀνάβηθι) suggests that it (along with, presumably, the other utensils) must have been represented in some way on stage, either with a real cheese-grater (perhaps escorted to the stand by a silent extra in the role of a slave) or, in common with the talking animals (as seems more likely), by an actor in a giant cheese-grater costume.<sup>65</sup> It is important to note that the

64. Sommerstein's (1981) stage directions here ("the cheese-grater comes to the platform"; "the cheese-grater nods") suggest that he too assumes that an actor in cheese-grater costume, as opposed to an actual cheese-grater, represented the character here. It is difficult to guess at what form a cheese-grater costume might have taken, but a large wooden board might perhaps be painted with a picture of a cheese grater (and possibly also cut out into the shape of the picture), and this could then be worn by the actor by means of leather shoulder straps.

65. Cf. *Eccl.* 730-45, in which a man addresses a speech to his household objects. There is however nothing to indicate that they make a response, suggesting that the anthropomorphism is merely rhetorical, rather than enacted, unlike in *Wasps* where (regardless of whether they were represented by props or actors) the utensils clearly take the podium as characters. The difference in the level of enactment between these two scenes does

kitchen utensils are at this point not only, as Kidd argues, ‘blunt objects’ which reduce the scene to nonsense on the level of the language; but they are also part of an overall aesthetic of visual and dramaturgical absurdity, as the stage is gradually populated by more and more actors, in more and more surreal costumes. As if the stage were not now busy enough, featuring at this point Bdelycleon, Philocleon, two men dressed as dogs, and a series of anthropomorphised kitchen utensils, the visual busyness is increased to an even more ridiculous level when in line 976, Labes’ puppies (at least two, as the plural *παῖδια* in line 976 indicates, but perhaps more, since a litter of puppies is usually at least four) take the stage to whimper (977: *κνυζούμενα*) and weep (978: *δακρύετε*) for their father.

In this context of absurdity, the convergence between the animal and human which in this scene mirrors the similar convergence found elsewhere in the play (most notably in the form of the chorus’ dual human-animal identity) takes on an additional level of ridiculousness. The convergence between animal and human begins before the dogs even take the stage, when Xanthias declines to act as Labes’ prosecutor, saying that the household’s other dog has volunteered for the task (841-2: *μὰ Δί’ οὐκ ἔγωγ’, ἀλλ’ ἄτερός φησιν κύων / κατηγορήσειν, ἦν τις εἰσάγη γραφήν*), and using two verbs which designate human speech (*φημί, κατηγορέω*) in close succession. Despite this, Kuon’s first words, if they can be called as such, are not human speech, but rather dog barks:

<Φι> ποῦ δ’ ἔσθ’ ὁ διώκων, ὁ Κυδαθηναίεὺς κύων;  
 <Κυ> αἶ αἶ.  
 <Βδ> πάρεστιν.

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suggest the likelihood that they were staged differently, with an actor portraying the utensils in *Wasps*, but not in the *Ecclesiazusae*. The absurdity factor of the scene would certainly be greater if the cheese-grater were represented by an actor in costume (not least due to the greater visual presence of a human-sized cheese-grater on the stage); however this absurdity would still be present if it were represented by a prop, since the cheese-grater still ‘comes to life’ as a character in a way that the utensils in the *Ecclesiazusae* do not (and note that in its general aesthetic, the *Ecclesiazusae* is not given to the same absurdity as *Wasps*), and this is the solution favoured by Biles & Olson 2015: 367.

Ph: But where's the prosecutor, the dog from Cydathenaeum?

Hound: Bow-wow!

Bd: He is present.

(*Vesp.* 902-3)

Bdelycleon's immediate interpretation of Kuon's barks sets up the expectation that this is how the scene will progress, with the dog advancing his prosecution in barks, conveniently 'translated' by Bdelycleon for the benefit of Philocleon (and the audience). It is therefore something of a surprise when only a few lines later, Kuon begins to set out his case in perfect, legalistic Greek, an act which is, to say the least, more human than canine in character.<sup>66</sup> This movement between dogs barks and human speech is accompanied by a slippage between the terms κύων and ἀνὴρ throughout the scene, sometimes within a single line (923: κυνῶν ἀπάντων ἄνδρα μονοφαγίστατον), in a manner which is reminiscent of the chorus' later description of themselves (1090: Ἀττικοῦ... σφηκὸς ἀνδρικότερον). As with the wasp chorus, the frequent identification of the dogs as simultaneously men draws attention to the fact that they are human actors in dog costumes; and our increasing awareness of this fact adds an additional level of absurdity to an already absurdly comic scene.

The trial therefore deploys its animal imagery to display two competing impulses in comedy, on the one hand political satire, and on the other comic absurdity both verbal and visual. The scene veers away from its initial fable-like structure, firstly in the un-Aesopic addition of specifically political, and characteristically Old Comic, *onomasti komodein* (a feature also of the opening dream-sequence); and secondly in its ultimate abandonment of αἴτιος-like meaning in favour of nonsense, and an obvious delight in the more ridiculous visual and dramaturgical possibilities of the initially straightforward metaphor.

### **Dancing Crabs and the *Wasps*' Grand Finale**

The *reductio ad absurdum* of a single animal image which is one of the central themes of the dog-trial metaphor is also a feature of the *Wasps*' final scene. An extravagant and celebratory

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<sup>66</sup> Bdelycleon does speak on behalf of Labes, who in 945-9 seems to be struck by a fear of public speaking. This is however surely due to the fact that there are already three speaking actors on stage, and Labes' sudden stage-fright therefore constitutes a rather clever metatheatrical joke on the limit to the number of speaking roles at any one time.

finale concludes the majority of Aristophanes' plays, often taking the form of a marriage (as for example in *Peace* and *Birds*); or featuring dancing and song (e.g. *Lysistrata*) and other festal celebrations (e.g. *Acharnians*). The finale of the *Wasps*, which centres round an exuberant dance routine, is no exception, and the chorus go so far as to claim that it is an entirely new sort of send off.<sup>67</sup>

In lines 1497-1500, Philocleon, who by now is performing an elaborate dance routine which mimics the style of the old-fashioned tragedians (1478-9) with which he claims to challenge the modern tragic performers (1480-1), calls for any tragic performer to join him in a dancing contest. Almost at once, a dancer, the first of three, enters the stage, and is identified by Xanthias as the middle son of the tragedian Carcinus (1501-2: υἱὸς Καρκίνου / ὁ μέσσατος). The tragedian Carcinus is a frequent target of Aristophanes (cf. *Nub.* 1260-1, *Pax* 780-95, 864), with his sons' dancing coming in for particular censure in the *Peace*. The exact staging of this encounter in the *Wasps* has until recently only rarely been discussed in any detail; in particular both Borthwick (1968) and MacDowell (1971: 326-7) do not consider the idea of any particular costume, simply assuming that the performers either were, or straightforwardly represented, the sons of Carcinus; Vaio (1971) in his extended consideration of the *Wasps*' final scene discusses the issue of costuming only briefly (350 n. 69), and concludes that crab costumes would be more likely, given their comic potential; and finally, a very brief overview of the arguments on each side is given by Stone (1981: 345). A more extended consideration of costume can be found in Biles and Olson's recent (2015) commentary. Biles and Olson suggest that Philocleon's challenge (1497-1500), in which he calls on any tragic performer who thinks himself a better dancer (1498: τις τραγωδός φησιν ὀρχεῖσθαι καλῶς) to come and join him in a contest, is directed specifically at the audience; and that accordingly, "three audience members rise from their seats and enter the orchestra to

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67. On the exact meaning of the final lines (1536-7: τοῦτο γὰρ οὐδεὶς πω πάρος δέδρακεν, / ὀρχούμενον ὅστις ἀπήλλαξεν χορὸν τρυγωδῶν.) cf. Sommerstein 1983: 248, who suggests that the claim may either be that no comedy has ever had a chorus dance off stage, or that no comedy has introduced dancers specifically for the purpose of leading the chorus in their dance off-stage. Sommerstein additionally notes that there is no way of knowing whether either claim would have been justified. The line therefore may simply be typical comic bluster.

accept Philocleon’s challenge” (2015: 506). This reconstruction of course eliminates the possibility of any special costume, and Biles and Olson therefore find the possibility of the dancers being dressed as crabs unlikely. However, nothing in lines 1497-1500 would specifically require these lines to be directed externally towards the real audience of the theatre, as opposed to an assumed internal audience. Furthermore, while concealing performers among the audience is not uncommon in modern theatre, I can find no clear precedent in Old Comedy (or in Greek drama more generally) for performers emerging from the audience in this way,<sup>68</sup> and this suggestion by Biles and Olson is therefore highly speculative.

Conversely, the arguments in favour of the dancers being costumed as crabs are considerably more compelling.<sup>69</sup> The entire final scene is dominated by marine, and in particular marine animal, imagery, which plays on the literal meaning of Carcinus’ name, ‘Crab’; and throughout the scene, the dancers are identified as crabs. As the final son takes the stage, he is described as crawling on (1509: προσέρπων), named a ‘pinna-crab’ (1510: πιννοτήρης), and the dancers are together addressed as ‘sons of the sea’ (1518-9: τέκνα τοῦ θαλασσίοιο), and shrimp (1522: καρίδων). Philocleon even orders that Xanthias should stir up some salt water for him in case of his victory (1515: ἄλμην κύκα τούτοισιν, ἦν ἐγὼ κρατῶ), suggesting that he plans to cook and eat his crab-adversaries should he win. As Vaio (1971: 350 n. 69) suggests, crab costumes would add considerably to the comic effect of the dance, since “[i]f the dancers’ arms are used for the claws, four legs hanging down each side

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68. It has been suggested by MacDowell 1983: 147 that Dicaeopolis in the opening scene of the *Acharnians* “sits beside or among the audience, and keeps popping up from the audience to make objections on their behalf.” This idea is also discussed by Slater 143 n. 2, who regards it as an attractive possibility (and one which would be effective for a modern staging of the play), but ultimately concludes that there is no way of proving one way or another how the character of Dicaeopolis was placed in relation to the audience. Even if Dicaeopolis did in fact sit among the audience, this scene opens the play (rather than closing it, as here in *Wasps*), and so this would not be quite comparable to Biles & Olson’s suggestion above that the crab dancers were concealed among the audience for the entire duration of the *Wasps*, emerging only in these final lines as a surprise to the audience.

69. Note that this conclusion is also reached by Sommerstein 1983, who in his stage directions suggests that the dancers were costumed as such.

would flop about ridiculously during leaps (1520) and pirouettes (1517)". Furthermore, while the image of the poisonous spider (1509: φάλαγξ) makes little sense if the crab imagery is only a matter of language, given the visual similarities between crabs and spiders, this description is more easily reconciled if it is directed at a dancer in a crab costume complete with multiple legs.<sup>70</sup> Finally, given firstly the prevalence throughout the play of actors dressed in animal costume, and secondly the tendency of comedy towards literal, visual representation,<sup>71</sup> it therefore seems inconceivable that the dancers were not in some way costumed as crabs, with this elaborate costume adding to the scene's clearly spectacular visual display.

Unlike in the dog trial, where the scene's ultimate nonsense and absurdity does at least stem from an original metaphor with a clear, symbolic significance, the crab imagery which ends the play appears to have no broader symbolic meaning whatsoever, but rather to simply take a silly pun on the name Carcinus to its absurd conclusions. In particular, unlike the dog trial where the initial animal pun of Cleon-Kuon is accompanied by a broader exploration of the possibilities of the dog as political image/metaphor (e.g. *Vesp.* 952-5, the politician as watchdog),<sup>72</sup> the use of crab imagery, despite being linked (as in the dream sequences and trial scene) to named individuals, appears to have no political or satirical purpose.<sup>73</sup> Rather,

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70. On the difficulties of making sense of the animal descriptions in this line, cf. Borthwick 1968, who emends the line to ὄϊτος ἢ σφάλαξ, 'an owl or a mole'. Borthwick's difficulty in reconciling the rather haphazard animal language in this scene is in part a symptom of his approach, which does not give consideration to the staging, or to the possible visual effect of the scene, but rather focuses only on the text.

71. To take only two examples, in *Acharnians* 94-7 Dicaeopolis' description of The King's Eye clearly demonstrates that the actor is costumed with a giant eye; and the daughters of the Megarian who enters at line 729 are also clearly costumed as piglets, so that the visuals mirror the obscene verbal joke. On comedy's preference for mimetic, as opposed to purely diegetic, representation, cf. Revermann 2006: 126, who argues that "Comedy, by contrast with tragedy, indulges in mimetic space, and will normally give preference to mimetic over diegetic space. In other words: comedy enjoys 'acting it out', thus creating visual comic busyness".

72. Cf. Corbel-Morana 2003: 119-124 on the symbolism of the dog in Aristophanes, in particular the *Knights* and *Wasps*.

73. Indeed, note that MacDowell 1071: 327 argues that "[n]othing in the scene.... suggests that Ar. intends any kind of parody or attack here; 1518-34 is complimentary".

the crabs are utilised purely for their visual impact, not only with regard to their costume, but also the dancers' movements which presumably in some way mimicked the sideways gait of crabs (cf. *Vesp.* 1509: προσέρπων). That the focus is primarily on the visual aspects of the scene, rather on any particular symbolism associated with the dancers' identity as crabs, is further suggested by the fact that the identification of Carcinus' sons shifts throughout the scene, as they are designated variously as crabs (1507: καρκίνους), pea-crabs (1510: πινοτήρης), shrimp (1522: καρίδων), and even wrens (1513: τῶν ὀρχίλων) and buzzards (1532: τοῖς τριόρχοις).<sup>74</sup> In its complete move away from symbolic imagery, towards instead visual busyness, the *Wasps*' final extravaganza of animal costume and dance appears to have left behind any last vestiges of the Aesopic fables with which the play's animal imagery was originally connected.

## Conclusions

Throughout the *Wasps*, there is a sustained engagement with Aesopic animal fable, and an equally sustained use of comic animal imagery. However, while at first the *Wasps* own animal symbols appear to function at least in some ways like the animals of Aesop, as the play continues, its use of animal imagery increasingly diverges from the Aesopic model, and instead becomes the focal point for a variety of different comic modes. Each use of animal imagery brings into focus different facets of the comic genre, including political symbolism, satire, and *onomasti komodein*; self-conscious performativity; nonsense and word play; and extravagant visual display. The inherent semiotic stability of Aesopic discourse, and its function as a universal code easily understood by both speaker and listener, is recognised in its use throughout the *Wasps*; and this functions as a point of contrast for the play's own use of animal imagery, which mirrors neither the semiotic stability, nor the emphasis on meaning and interpretation, associated with fable as a mode of speech.

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74. The Σ suggests that τῶν ὀρχίλων is a pun on ὀρχηταί or ὀρχεῖς, however this is discounted by MacDowell, who suggests instead that the final designation of buzzards uses this same suggested pun on the verb, describing it as “a feeble pun; it is just as well that the audience's attention was probably distracted from it by the dancing.” (1971: 332). MacDowell's comment here suggests a recognition that from the point of view of the audience, the primary focus of this scene is on its visuals, and not its language, which might easily be lost among the spectacular theatrics.



The play therefore shifts the emphasis of its animal imagery and symbolism away from the relationship between signifier and signified which is so crucial to fable, and instead focuses primarily on the comic potential of the signifiers themselves; and this shift is most evident in those sections of the play which amplify not only the linguistic possibilities of animal imagery, but also the absurd visual and dramaturgical potential of animal performance on the comic stage. This privileging of the signifier over the signified has been argued by Kidd (2014 ch. 2, “Nonsense as ‘no-reference’: riddles, allegories, metaphors”) to be characteristic of Old Comedy. Kidd suggests that the genre’s frequent use of, for example, riddles without solutions, and metaphors without tenors, suggests that Old Comedy has an interest in the comic potential of disrupting the relationship between signifier and signified. However, as this chapter has shown, this privileging of the comic potential of symbols over and above their actual symbolic value is not limited to examples of ‘nonsense’ in Kidd’s terms, but is a feature of even images and symbols which do not lack a clear symbolic meaning, such as the Cleon-whale in the opening sequence of the play.

In contrast to the stability of the Aesopic imagery referenced throughout the *Wasps*, the play’s own animal imagery is therefore considerably more flexible and polyvalent, with a single image sometimes being exploited within different comic modes, as for example the dog trial, which utilises animals not only for their value as political symbols, but also for their possibility for word play and ridiculous costume. In its use of animal imagery to express a multiplicity of comedy’s generic features, the *Wasps* therefore enacts a typical comic one-upmanship over Aesop and fable; and the use of an animal chorus in particular ties animal imagery firmly to comedy’s own history as a genre. Despite the strong association between animals and Aesopic story-telling, the play appropriates this feature for itself, and for comedy, by emphasising not only the historic link between comedy and animal storytelling, but also the far greater possibilities of animal stories on the comic stage in comparison to their relatively limited potential in fable. Indeed, since Aristophanes returned again and again to animals throughout his career, from the choruses of *Birds*, *Storks*, and *Frogs*, to the pig-girls of the *Acharnians* and the flying beetle of *Peace*, the *Wasps*’ claim to animal imagery as

an inherent and definitive comic, and perhaps even Aristophanic, feature seems to be well founded.

## Chapter Two: Mythic Storytelling in the *Peace* and *Birds*

*Peace* and *Birds* premiered seven years apart, in 421 and 414 B.C. respectively. Falling neatly at the beginning and the end of the short-lived Peace of Nicias, the two plays are the only extant examples of this middle period of Aristophanes' career.<sup>1</sup> Given the incomplete state of the evidence, it is difficult to deduce overall trends; however, both *Peace* and *Birds* demonstrate a shift away from the *polis*-centred plays which appear to have characterised Aristophanes' earlier career, towards plots which draw more heavily on mythic material,<sup>2</sup> and which quite literally take flight beyond the city. Both *Peace* and *Birds* similarly involve their characters making an assault on Olympus, and feature gods as characters; and both conclude in a *hieros gamos*, with their heroes taking goddesses as brides. Additionally, the structure of the two plays rely on a notable degree of tragic underpinning, as they derive the initial impetus for their plots from an interaction with Euripides' *Bellerophon* (in the *Peace*) and Sophocles' *Tereus* (in the *Birds*).

The particular prominence of tragic models in the plays is accompanied by a wide-ranging intertextuality, which even by the standards of Aristophanic comedy incorporates an unusual variety of genres. *Peace* utilises not only the *Bellerophon*, but also epic hexameter,

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1. Unfortunately, no plays can be securely dated to the period between *Peace* in 421 and *Birds* in 414. However, *Amphiaraus*, of which a few fragments survive, premiered at the Lenaia in 414 (cf. Hypothesis IV to Ar. *Av.*), only a few months before *Birds* was performed at the Dionysia. This play apparently took place at the temple of the hero Amphiaraus, in which the characters undergo incubation similar to that which took place also at the temple of Asclepius (cf. Ar. *Pl.* 627-748). Given the religious setting, it is likely that this play also contained some kind of mythic material, albeit of a very different character from that found in *Peace* and *Birds*.

2. Such mythic plots were not of course an innovation of Aristophanes', but had been a prominent sub-genre of comedy from its earliest days, with Cratinus notably writing a number of plays with mythological themes. On mythic plots in non-Aristophanic comedy, and for a list of plays which seem to have had such plots, cf. Bowie 2000. While following the *Peace* and *Birds* Aristophanes appears to have moved away from these mythic plots, the latter part of his career saw a resurgence, with the *Frogs* and *Wealth* both featuring mythic subject matter. Both of these plays feature gods as characters, and rely heavily on mythic tropes of *katabasis* (in the case of *Frogs*) and the golden age (in the case of *Wealth*, which in this regard shares some similarities with the earlier *Peace*). On the continued prominence of mythic plots in Middle Comedy, cf. Nesselrath 1995.

choral lyric, and satyr drama; and Trygaeus' employment of different forms of song and metre has led Edith Hall, in a 2006 chapter entitled 'Casting the Role of Trygaeus in *Peace*', to characterise the hero as a kind of rhapsode figure, whose encounters in the second half of the play take the form of a series of singing contests. The *Birds*' cross-genre interactions are similarly broad, and the play draws on models from tragedy, epic, dithyramb, and even prose genres such as historiography and ethnography.

The use of tragic models is a consistent feature of Aristophanic comedy of all periods; the *Acharnians* makes extensive use of Euripides' *Telephus*; and it is the later period of Aristophanes' career which features those plays, such as the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Frogs*, in which tragedy itself is most overtly a theme. In the *Acharnians*, the relationship between tragedy and comedy is examined primarily through the lens of politics, as Dicaeopolis famously asserts that comedy too has the right to advise the city (*Ach.* 496-500), and to take its place at the centre of civic life. In this regard, *Acharnians* is notably different from all the later manifestations of paratragedy in that it at least to some degree asserts comedy's similarity to, rather than difference from, tragedy: τὸ γὰρ δίκαιον οἶδε καὶ τρυγῳδία, "comedy too knows what is right" (*Ach.* 500). As in the later *Thesmophoriazusae*, *Peace* and *Birds* foreground not the similarities between comedy and tragedy, but their differences. However, the interaction with tragedy in the *Peace* and *Birds* is distinctive for its specific focus on plot and narrative. By contrast, the later plays see a shift of emphasis on to the actual practice of tragedy, critiquing costume, staging, and poetry,<sup>3</sup> and examining not what kinds of stories the two genres tell, but rather the means by which they tell them.

This chapter will argue that within the extant Aristophanic corpus, *Peace* and *Birds* most explicitly focus on the relationship between storytelling and genre. The two plays each take a

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3. In this regard these two later plays arguably bring out an aspect of Aristophanes' interest in tragedy already present in the *Acharnians*, which also shows an interest in tragic costume. The play contains an extended scene in which Dicaeopolis borrows and then puts on the costume of a Euripidean tragic hero, and in this way to a degree prefigures the more extended use of this idea in *Thesmophoriazusae*, where In-Law and Euripides utilise costume (among other things) to act out a series of Euripidean tragic scenes.

tragic myth as the starting point for their plot. *Peace*, which of the two plays engages more persistently with tragedy, begins with an extended parody of the end of Euripides' *Bellerophon*,<sup>4</sup> as the tragic hero's flight on the back of Pegasus is recast as a spectacularly grotesque comic set-piece; and *Birds* takes the metamorphosis of Tereus and his wife into birds, the point at which the existing mythic and tragic (in the form of Sophocles' *Tereus*) narratives conclude, as the beginning of its story, which finds two Athenians seeking out the newly-transformed king to ask his advice. The use of mythic storylines, already the subject of tragic plays, brings into focus how comic myth making differs from the use of myth in other more 'serious' genres. This chapter will suggest that in these two plays, Old Comedy's apparent narrative freedom to re-write traditional storylines to create new myths which diverge radically from their original source material is construed as a defining feature of the genre, and one which differentiates it in particular from tragedy.

In the period directly following Aristophanes' career, the idea that the nature of comic stories is unique, and is in particular divergent from tragic plots, became the subject of explicit discussion. The comic poet Antiphanes, in fr. 189 (attributed to his play *Poiesis*),<sup>5</sup> complains that when it comes to both the composition of plots, and the task of setting them out in such a way that the audience can follow them, the tragedian's task is far easier than the comedian's. Since tragedians simply follow existing and well-known *logoi*, not only do they not have to invent their plots from scratch, they can also expect their audience to know the details in advance:

μακάριόν ἐστιν ἢ τραγωδία  
ποίημα κατὰ πάντ', εἴ γε πρῶτον οἱ λόγοι

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4. For a full discussion of the plot of the *Bellerophon*, which is unfortunately attested only fragmentarily, see below. It is however almost certain that Bellerophon's doomed flight on Pegasus featured at the end of the play in some form.

5. An extended discussion of this fragment can be found in Lowe 2000. It is generally assumed that, since this passage apparently complains about the difficulty of not only writing comic plots, but of also having to explain them to the audience, this fragment belongs to a prologue (i.e. the part of the play in which this initial explaining is done). However for the suggestion that the fragment could also plausibly be from an *agon*, cf. Hunter 2008: 630.

ὑπὸ τῶν θεατῶν εἰσιν ἐγνωρισμένοι,  
πρὶν καὶ τιν' εἰπεῖν· ὥσθ' ὑπομῆσαι μόνον  
δεῖ τὸν ποιητὴν· Οἰδίπουν γὰρ ἂν μόνον  
φῶ, τᾶλλα πάντ' ἴσασιν· ὁ πατὴρ Λάιος,  
μήτηρ Ἰοκάστη, θυγατέρες, παῖδες τίνες,  
τί πείσεθ' οὗτος, τί πεποίηκεν.

Tragedy is a glorious kind  
of poetry in every way. For one thing, the stories  
are familiar to the audience,  
before anyone's opened their mouth. So all the poet has to do  
is remind them. If I say "Oedipus",  
they know all the rest: father Laius,  
mother Jocasta, who his sons and daughters were,  
what will happen to him, what he has done. (trans. Lowe)<sup>6</sup>  
(fr. 189 PCG: 1-8)

The comic poet, unfortunately, has none of these advantages, since he must always find (18: εὑρεῖν) his own plots, and invent new characters (18: ὀνόματα καινά). This idea that comic plots are invented, while tragic plots are simply retold, is not unique to Antiphanes, but appears also in Aristotle's *Poetics* (9.1451b11-16), in which comic poets are described as composing, or arranging, their stories (συστήσαντες γὰρ τὸν μῦθον), neither (like the Iambic poets) using the names of real individuals, nor (like the tragedians) keeping to existing names (τῶν γενομένων ὀνομάτων), but assigning names at random (τὰ τυχόντα ὀνόματα ὑποτιθέασιν).<sup>7</sup>

Nick Lowe (2000: 259-272) in his discussion of the nature of fictionality in comedy uses these two passages from Antiphanes and Aristotle as a starting point from which to argue that ancient commentators and poets were alert to the idea that comic μῦθοι were somehow different from other kinds of μῦθοι,<sup>8</sup> and in particular from tragic μῦθοι; and that rather than an idea of fiction based on the truth or falsity of the story, ancient discussions of fiction,

6. Cf. Lowe 2000: 168.

7. Note that in the following lines Aristotle does accept that some tragedies contain one or two well-known (γνωρίμων) names, with the rest invented; and that on occasion, some poets even invent a whole tragedy from scratch (Aristotle mentions in particular Agathon's *Antheus*). However it is clear that Aristotle considers this kind of invention to be particularly characteristic of, even if not entirely limited to, comedy.

8. On the term μῦθος cf. Introduction n. 4.

particularly in relation to comedy, were concerned primarily with the idea of autonomous invention. Lowe argues that “comedy’s distinctive trademark was to deal in unretold stories: events that not only never happened, but which made no claim to have even been recounted before” (2000: 161-2). However Lowe notes that in practice autonomous invention in fiction is surprisingly elusive, and it is in fact very difficult to base any definition of fiction in the ancient world on a clear distinction between traditional myth on the one hand, and invented fiction on the other. According to Lowe, the difficulty is due in part to the importance of retelling, and of traditional mythic stories, to the literary and narrative culture of the ancient world. This prominence of narrative reuse and retelling provides a useful context for considering the more specific phenomenon of intertextuality and allusion; and the relationship between narrative retelling and literary intertextuality is a particularly important consideration for comedy, which (as a parodic genre, at least in part) is heavily reliant on relationships with secondary texts for the creation of meaning. Old Comedy is, as Wright (2012: 90) puts it, “an inherently secondary, parasitic... form”, whose jokes even when they are not directly or specifically parodic often rely for their humour on the audience’s awareness that generic tropes and traditions, both those of comedy and of other genres, are being reworked and re-presented.

The impossibility of pure innovation seems to be recognised within Antiphanes fr. 189, even as it simultaneously declares comedy to be uniquely inventive. After outlining tragedy’s reliance on retelling well-known stories, the speaker goes on to explain that, due to the fact that the audience is not familiar with a comic play’s plot in advance, certain formalities are necessary in order to keep them in the loop. There must therefore be a prologue, spoken by a Chremes or a Pheidon, who cannot leave out (*παραλίπη*) any important information, at the risk of being booed off stage. Not only does this acknowledge the existence of stock characters or character-types, as the comic Chremes and Pheidon are compared to the tragic Peleus and Teucer; the speaker also alludes to the common practice in comedy of having a character outline the plot, by explaining the back-story (*τὰ διωκημένα πρότερον*), the present situation (*τὰ νῦν παρόντα*), and so on. Despite the claim of autonomous invention made here,

Antiphanes acknowledges the context of highly formalised generic convention within which comic invention takes place.<sup>9</sup>

This concern with the importance and yet fundamental impossibility of originality is in fact itself almost a trope within comedy, and one which Aristophanes himself repeatedly utilises.<sup>10</sup> Aristophanes repeatedly describes his own plays as *καινός* (e.g. *Nub.* 547: *καινὰς ἰδέας*, *Vesp.* 1044: *καινοτάταις... διανοίαις*), whilst damning his rivals for bringing out the same old jokes year after year (*Pax.* 739ff.); while they in turn accuse him of plagiarism, as in Eupolis fr. 89 PCG where the poet boasts of having given Aristophanes his *Knights* as a gift.<sup>11</sup> Even within Aristophanes' own declarations of newness and invention, these claims are often undercut by a simultaneous re-use of comic tropes just as their use is being denied. The prologue of the *Wasps*, for example, declares that there will be no more making fun of Cleon or Euripides again, before parodying Euripidean motifs,<sup>12</sup> and bringing on characters named 'Love-Cleon' and 'Hate-Cleon'; and the very same passage of the *Clouds* which describes the poet's 'new ideas' also acknowledges that this is in fact the second version of the play, which the poet has re-written in response to the apparent failure of the original.

The complex relationship between tradition and innovation in Old Comedy is even more clearly foregrounded in the context of a pseudo-mythic plot such as those of *Peace* and *Birds*. The mythic story-patterns of these two plays draw attention to the creativity and invention possible in comedy, since stories with such components (gods, heroes, monsters) are usually,

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9. For a discussion of this fragment with reference to differing comic and tragic conceptions and practices of intertextuality, cf. Ruffell 2011: 373-5.

10. Aristophanes' use of the trope of novelty is discussed in detail by Wright 2012 ch. 3. Wright argues that the Aristophanic discourse of novelty is highly problematised, and even suggests that Aristophanes can be read as rejecting novelty, with *καινός* best understood not as 'new' but 'newfangled'. While this presentation of Aristophanes as an anti-novelty poet is perhaps to push the argument too far, Wright does present a persuasive discussion of the tension between innovation and tradition which is evident in all of Classical literature, but which is particularly pertinent to Comedy.

11. Cf. Sidwell 1993

12. On the parody of the Euripidean 'sickness' motif in the *Wasps*, cf. Harvey 1971. The prologue also contains a direct quotation of Euripides' *Stheneboea* at lines 111-2. Harvey's arguments are discussed further below, n. 20.



unlike these, traditional. The plays' mythopoiesis is however grounded in the use of traditional elements. Both *Peace* and *Birds* are structured around a central idea of theomachy, which like for example katabasis or nostos stories is a common myth-type in the Greek as well as in other traditions.<sup>13</sup> The use of traditional myth-patterns to write an entirely new mythic storyline grounds the plays in a familiar underpinning and structure even in spite of the radical inventiveness (most particularly in the case of the *Birds*) of the plot as a whole. The plays' reformulation of mythic material demonstrates that comedy's relationship with the "culture of retelling" described by Lowe (2000: 269) is relatively loose, even while it is "ultimately unable to disengage" (ibid.) completely from the culture of traditional mythic storytelling in which it is embedded.

In addition to foregrounding the idea of mythopoiesis, the mythic plots of *Peace* and *Birds* also lend themselves to comparative relationships with the storytelling found in other genres. Unlike the polis-plays of Aristophanes' early career, whose basic storylines share

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13. For an overview of the theme of theomachy in Greek myth and literature, cf. Chaudhuri 2014 ch. 1. Theomachy stories feature in a wide variety of mythological traditions, and an overview can be found in Stookey 2004: 173-8. Examples in the near-Eastern tradition include the Enûma Eliš (the Babylonian creation myth), in which the god Marduk eventually wins supremacy after a series of divine power struggles; the struggle between the god El and his father Shamem in the Canaanite tradition, which ended in the son's castration of the father; and the contest between the brothers Osiris and Seth in Egyptian mythology. Although stories of theomachy have in the Hebrew tradition largely been suppressed (both in the Hebrew texts, and even more so in later Christian translations), remnants of earlier theomachic myth-patterns can be found in e.g. the book of Isaiah, in which Yahweh flies to Egypt on a cloud to make war on the local gods. Isaiah 51.9-10 in particular describes Yahweh fighting against Rahab, Tehom, and Yam, all primordial chaos deities in earlier Levantine mythology (although note that in the King James Bible, 'Yam' in Isaiah 51.10 is translated as 'sea', and 'Tehom' as 'great deep'; while these translations are superficially accurate, since the gods are indeed personified representations of these forces, the mention in Isaiah 51.9 of the Yahweh's defeat of a serpent strongly suggests the presence of the god Yam, who was in Levantine mythology often associated with the seven-headed serpent Lotan. We can therefore conclude with reasonable certainty that the Hebrew original alludes to Yahweh's conflict with these primordial gods). Furthermore, the later tradition of the fall of Satan/Lucifer which is the subject of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which was well-established by the time of the advent of Christianity and which is referenced in *Luke* 10.18 (εἶπεν δὲ αὐτοῖς Ἐθεώρουσιν τὸν Σατανᾶν ὡς ἀστραπὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πεσόντα), is clearly theomachic in theme.

little by way of common material with other genres such as epic, tragedy, or lyric, the mythic stories of *Peace* and *Birds* are similar in type, if not in actual detail, to the mythic stories which are widespread throughout all genres of Greek literature. This therefore creates an implicit comparison between the way this material is handled in comedy and in non-comic genres; and in particular draws attention to comedy's ability to reformulate and deviate from its mythic source-material to a greater degree than other genres.<sup>14</sup> As usual in Aristophanes, however, the dividing line between comedy and other genres is not as stark as the rhetoric of the plays would often suggest.

Despite both *Peace* and *Birds* singling out tragedy as a particular point of comparison, Sommerstein in his overview of the use of mythic storylines in tragedy has observed that “[m]yth was tragedy's framework, but never its straitjacket ” (2005: 177). Sommerstein argues that tragedy in practice had a long tradition of altering traditional myths, sometimes quite radically, or even perhaps of inventing entirely new storylines, as Sommerstein suggests was the case for Sophocles' *Antigone* (c. 441 B.C.), whose plot is not attested in any form prior to the play. In the period directly following the premier of *Birds* (414 B.C.), Euripides in particular wrote a series of plays which told lesser known versions of myths which diverged radically from the 'usual' stories. The *Helen* (412), *Iphigenia in Tauris* (414-12), and *Andromeda* (412), all produced in very close succession, were based on counterfactual tellings of the more usually accepted versions of famous stories, and were in this respect highly novel within the tragic tradition.<sup>15</sup> However, despite such clear examples of mythic innovation in tragedy, Aristotle in the *Poetics* suggests that a good tragic poet should not

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14. It is interesting to observe that, paradoxically, it is with mythic storylines (a kind of plot shared with almost all other genres of Greek literature) that Aristophanes most overtly insists on comedy's unique ability to invent new stories, and not the polis-plays which are in fact both the most obvious examples of true fictional invention in comedy, and the story-type in reality most unique to Old Comedy as a genre.

15. For a full discussion of these three plays and their treatment of myth, cf. Wright 2005 ch. 2, 'Myth, Fiction, Innovation', who argues that these tragedies were highly novel and innovatory, even when considered in the context of tragedy's tradition of mythic innovation. Such counterfactual versions of myths are however not unique to tragedy; Euripides' *Helen* for example draws on a well-established counterfactual tradition, attested in Stesichorus' *Helen*.

completely unravel the traditional stories handed down to him (*Poet.* 1453b22: τοὺς μὲν οὖν παρελιημένους μύθους λύειν οὐκ ἔστιν). This sense that there are limits to tragedy's ability to alter traditional stories may be related to the fact that, while plays may diverge from tradition in their plots considerably, they do so within a framework which tends to keep the beginnings and endings of traditional narratives intact. In particular, plays almost always conclude in such a way that their innovations do not disrupt further stories associated with the characters, for example by altering genealogies (Sommerstein 2005: 165-73). The use of a *deus ex machina*, derided by Antiphanes as providing tragedians with an easy way out (fr. 189: 13-16), in particular allowed tragedians to diverge significantly from their mythic models, before ending the play in such a way that realigned it with tradition (Sommerstein 2005: 166).<sup>16</sup> While comedy does have its own conventions regarding the endings of plays (as will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis), it is not subject to this limitation whereby its conclusions must be such that they do not disrupt, overturn, or contradict any traditional mythic narratives exploited by the play.

This chapter will argue that both *Peace* and *Birds* in different ways attempt to categorise true mythic innovation as impossible in tragedy, and to claim mythopoiesis as a definitive characteristic of comic storytelling. Both plays use tragic plots as a kind of structural 'scaffolding',<sup>17</sup> taking their initial idea from the plots of Euripides' *Bellerophon* and Sophocles' *Tereus* respectively, allowing for a clear contrast to be made between how tragedy and comedy treat their mythic source material. However, despite sharing this device, and despite their shared use of theomachy-plots, *Peace* and *Birds* in some respects differ markedly in their stance towards tragedy. *Peace* is overtly parodic in its use of Euripides' *Bellerophon*, a fact which is unmistakably signalled in the substitution of a giant dung beetle for the majestic Pegasus. Throughout the play, tragedy is characterised as a genre defined by

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16. However note that Dunn 1996: 26-44 argues that Euripides was in fact a great innovator with regard to the endings of his tragedies, in particular in his use of the *deus ex machina*. Sommerstein 2005: 166 similarly concludes that, on occasion, tragedies did overcome this apparent limitation, and that the endings of some plays do not leave their characters in a position consistent with their (traditional) future fates.

17. This term is taken from Dobrov (1997: 108, 2001: 160), who uses it to describe the process of constructing a comic narrative and plot on the basis of existing stories and texts.

failure, and in particular the failure of its heroes; and this is contrasted with the success of the hero Trygaeus, and of the play, in achieving a happy ending for a story which usually concludes with the hero plummeting to his death. In addition to this, this chapter will argue that despite the integration of a tragic storyline into its plot, *Peace*'s celebration of good things (ἀγαθὰ) steadfastly rejects the tragic ethos of its model, *Bellerophon*, whose hero insists in the prologue that the life of all men, whether rich or poor, fortunate or unfortunate, is characterised by suffering.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to *Peace* (and indeed to *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazusae*, both of which also structure scenes around events dramatised in Euripides' plays), the *Birds*' use of tragedy is less sustained; its engagement with tragedy is confined largely to the opening section of the play, and the remainder of the plot draws upon a far wider variety of genres than its predecessor. Furthermore, the play does not parody events taken directly from Sophocles' play, but imagines its characters after these events. The result is in some regards similar to *Odyssey* iii-iv, in which Helen and Menelaus are seen playing happy families; with the events of the Trojan war relegated to short secondary narratives, the couple's considerably less pleasant history hangs constantly over the proceedings, occasionally referenced but mostly present through its glaring absence. While in the *Birds* certain elements are taken from the specifically Sophoclean version of the myth,<sup>19</sup> and the tragedian and his play are specifically mentioned at the point of Tereus' first entry (*Av.* 100-1), the play's emphasis is primarily on the mythic material, as opposed to Sophocles' dramatisation of it, so that tragedy becomes at times more the vehicle for talking about myth than a focal point in itself. The lack of the parodic emphasis seen in *Peace* leads to a more incorporative use of the tragic material which does not highlight the discontinuities between the two genres to the same degree as in the earlier play. This chapter will argue that while *Peace* contrasts its celebration of ἀγαθὰ and

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18. Cf. Euripides *Bell.* fr. 285. This fragment, its attribution, and its placement are discussed in greater depth below.

19. The most notable of these elements is the presentation of Tereus as a hoopoe, rather than a hawk as seems to be the case in earlier versions of the myth. The relationship between Sophocles' *Tereus* and the mythic source material is discussed in further detail below.

festal plenty with its tragic model's bleak rejection of life's pleasures, *Birds* instead incorporates the darker aspects of its tragic and mythic models into its own fictional world.

While the two plays' stances towards tragedy do differ, they share similar storytelling strategies, in particular with regards to their construction of new myths. The plays' plots are to some degree patchworks which use a variety of intertextual borrowings, both inter- and intra-generic, as well as mythic, and other traditional, material. The plots are therefore examples of comic mythopoiesis, whilst also demonstrating their (albeit loose) ties to the "culture of retelling" identified by Lowe as intrinsic to literature of the period. While the overall effect is one of newness, invention, and imagination, the reformulation and recombination of existing elements drawn from a wide variety of sources is central to the construction of both plots. Despite the plays' ambivalent relationship with newness however, this freedom to distort and reinvent is an emphatic feature of comic storytelling, and one which the plays attempt to claim for the genre of Old Comedy alone.

### *Peace*

The year 421 marked something of a turning point in the political situation in Athens. With the Peace of Nicias on the horizon, and an end to the war with Sparta seemingly within reach, Aristophanes staged the *Peace*, his first (though of course, since the peace was short-lived, not his last) 'post-war' play. The play is one of his most heavily paratragic; in addition to the central parody of Euripides' *Bellerophon*, two further Aristophanic favourites, the *Stheneboea* (whose narrative is taken from the same group of myths as *Bellerophon*), and *Aeolus*, are also used as part of the texture of the opening section of the play. All three of these plays make multiple appearances in Aristophanes. *Bellerophon* is named explicitly in *Acharnians* (426-9), and alluded to in *Knights* (1249; cf. E. fr. 311 TrGF) and *Wasps* (757; cf. E. fr. 308 TrGF); the incestuous plot of *Aeolus* is referenced in both *Clouds* (1369-72) and *Frogs* (1079-81); and the similarly scandalous *Stheneboea* is attacked (alongside Euripides' depictions of Phaedra) in *Frogs* 1043-56, and is later quoted as an example of Euripidean prologues (1216-19). Alongside its engagement with tragedy, the play also engages with a series of non-tragic texts and stories drawn from a variety of genres, with a particular

emphasis in the opening scene on Aesopic fable and satyr play, two genres closer in tone to comedy.

Even before the *Bellerophon* parody is introduced in earnest, Euripidean motifs of sickness and madness, which appear to have been a feature of the *Bellerophon* but are not specific to this play alone, are worked into the prologue.<sup>20</sup> The specific target of the play is however revealed noticeably early, unlike for example in the *Acharnians*, which similarly bases the structure of an extended piece of the narrative on a paratragic intertext,<sup>21</sup> but in which the parody builds slowly from the implicit to the explicit.<sup>22</sup> At line 57, Trygaeus is described as raging at the sky against Zeus (ὠδὶ κεχηνῶς λοιδορεῖται τῷ Διὶ), essentially a summary of Bellerophon's opening speech (Eur. fr. 285-6 *TrGF*) in which the hero rages against the heavens and the gods.<sup>23</sup> Aristophanes' parodic target is made unambiguous only a

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20. Cf. Harvey 1971, who argues persuasively that the openings of *Wasps* and *Peace* interact with the Euripidean 'sickness motif' which opens plays such as *Medea* and *Hippolytus*, in which the afflictions of the protagonist are described by their slave. Harvey notes that *Wasps* in particular has a close intertextual relationship with this motif, since it repeatedly uses the words νόσος and νοσεῖν, echoing the language used by both the nurse and Aphrodite to describe Phaedra's love-sickness in the *Hippolytus*. While the exact content of the *Bellerophon* is contested (and this will be discussed further throughout this chapter), it seems likely that the hero was presented as mad and raging in the opening scene, and Dobrov (2001: 95) in his suggested reconstruction proposes that the play may have begun "like *Medeia*" with the same madness/sickness motif parodied here and in the *Wasps*.

21. On the broader similarities between *Acharnians* and *Peace*, cf. Whitman 1964: 104, Moulton 1981: 82.

22. The structure of the *Telephus* parody in *Acharnians* is discussed in more detail in the introduction. This delay in naming parodic intertexts is found also in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, which repeats the parody of the *Telephus*.

23. This fragment is assigned to Bellerophon by Dobrov (2001: 92-4) and Collard, Cropp, & Lee (1995: 105), all of whom also assign it to the play's prologue, in which they suggest that the hero Bellerophon wandering on the Aleian plain, raged against his misfortune and the unfairness of the world and denied the existence of the gods. Only Dixon 2014 diverges from the consensus, and suggests that this fragment should be assigned to Stheneboea, whom he (again in contrast to all other reconstructions, which presume the action to take part after her death) suggests was a character in the *Bellerophon*. Dixon's suggestion is based on two pieces of evidence. First, the name Stheneboea appears in the first, highly fragmentary, hypothesis of the play. However, since hypotheses often begin by giving backstory before setting out the actual events of a play, the appearance of Stheneboea's name is does not

few lines later, when Trygaeus is described as addressing the dung-beetle as “ὦ Πηγάσιόν μοι” (76), and ordering it to fly him up to Zeus.

As with the opening sickness motif, which is recycled from the similar parody which begins the *Wasps*, the explicit introduction of Euripides similarly interacts not only with the *Bellerophon* itself, but also with the *Bellerophon*'s previous incarnations in Aristophanes' own plays. As Trygaeus takes to the skies, his daughter warns him not to fall and become lame, thereby providing Euripides with his next tragic plot:

ἐκεῖνο τήρει, μὴ σφαλῆς καταρρυῆς  
έντεῦθεν, εἶτα χολὸς ὦν Εὐριπίδη  
λόγον παράσχῃς καὶ τραγωδία γένη

Watch out for one thing, that you don't slip off and drop from up there, and then be lamed and provide Euripides with a plot and get turned into a tragedy.

(*Pax*. 146-8)

The lameness of Euripidean heroes is a running joke in the *Acharnians* (as well as appearing in the later *Thesmophoriazousae* 22-24 and *Frogs* 846), and is specifically associated with the hero Bellerophon in the *Acharnians* (426-7). By filtering the tragic material which forms the basis of the opening plot structure through a previous comic reincarnation of that same material in the *Acharnians*, *Peace* thereby draws attention to the idea of re-usage and the re-purposing of existing stories which is so central to the play's narrative.

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necessarily point to her presence in the play itself; and indeed her name does not appear in the (also fragmentary, but less so) second hypothesis. Second, Dixon suggests that since in fr. 310 *TrGF* Bellerophon before his death seems to talk about his piety in life, this is inconsistent with having him also speak fr. 286, in which the speaker denies the gods' existence altogether. However, to begin with an expectation of consistency of characterisation in tragedy is to begin from a false premise. To take only one of many possible examples, Phaedra in the *Hippolytus* speaks of the importance of σωφροσύνη (e.g. in her speech 373-430), but her final act of accusing Hippolytus of rape in her suicide note is surely inconsistent with this in Dixon's terms. On the basis of this evidence therefore I see no reason to diverge from the otherwise accepted reconstruction in which fr. 285-6 *TrGF* is assigned to a prologue spoken by Bellerophon.

*Peace*'s most overt re-formulation of the Bellerophon myth/tragedy is of course the alteration to the hero's choice of steed. When Trygaeus is asked to explain why he has chosen to fly to heaven on a beetle, and not something more suitably tragic (136: τραγικώτερος), he replies that the replacement of Pegasus by a dung-beetle is key to his success, since in the stories of Aesop (129: ἐν τοῖσιν Αἰσώπου λόγοις) it is the only animal to have reached the gods in heaven (130: μόνος πετηνῶν εἰς θεοὺς ἀφιγμένος), referring to the fable of the eagle and the dung beetle (33-4).<sup>24</sup> The substitution of a dung beetle for the rather more majestic Pegasus is a characteristically comic move, and offers an opportunity for a great deal of scatological humour, as the play transforms its narrative model into a peculiarly comic myth. The dung-beetle, with its obviously scatological associations, appears with relative frequency not only in Aristophanic comedy (*Vesp.* 1446-9, *Lys.* 695), but also in Iambographic poetry, as well as in fable; and Steiner in her examination of the prevalence of the dung beetle in these genres suggests that it is an emblem of generic lowness,<sup>25</sup> and is used "to subvert or debase the symbols and conceits found in the 'higher' modes of discourse" (2008: 83). In particular, Steiner argues that in Hipponax fr. 92 W, the beetle is deployed as part of an interaction with, and debasement of, Iliadic insect imagery (cf. *Il.* 2.469-73). *Peace*'s substitution of Pegasus for the dung beetle therefore similarly inserts this typical symbol of low, scatological poetry into a previously more elevated narrative, both transforming traditional mythic material, more obviously at home in a tragic context such as the *Bellerophon*, into something unmistakably comic in tone; whilst also engaging with the existing poetic tradition of the beetle as a figure of low, parodic humour.

The dung beetle in the *Peace* is of course, unlike in Iambos, not only a feature of the poetry, but is also physically presented on stage in the play's (presumably quite spectacular, and quite grotesque) visual set-piece, involving an extremely comic deployment of the usually tragic *mechane*. The use of the *mechane* in tragedy was primarily associated with the *deus ex machina*; and it would therefore be unusual for a tragedy to utilise the crane for non-

24. Perry 3. Steiner 2008: 93-6 argues that Aristophanes in this passage amalgamates the previously distinct Aesopic and Iambographic traditions of beetle imagery.

25. A similar argument has been made by Hubbard 1991: 140-4, who suggests that the beetle in *Peace* similarly operates as a symbol of comic lowness.



divine characters.<sup>26</sup> However, the evidence suggests that in the *Bellerophon* Euripides in fact showed the hero riding Pegasus towards the heavens by means of the *mechane*. Fragment 306-8 strongly suggests that Bellerophon's ascent was staged, since the lines seem to be spoken by the hero in flight:

ἄγ', ὦ φίλον μοι Πηγάσου πτερόν

Come, my dear swift-winged Pegasus... ! (trans. Collard, Cropp & Lee)<sup>27</sup>

(fr. 306 *TrGF*)

ἴθι χρυσοχάλιν' αἴρων πτέρυγας  
σπεῦδ', ὦ ψυχή·

Go, with your golden bit, lifting your wings....!  
Hasten, my soul! (trans. Collard, Cropp & Lee)

(fr. 307-307a *TrGF*)

πάρες, ὦ σκιερὰ φυλλάς, ὑπερβῶ  
κρηναῖα νάπη· τὸν ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς  
αἰθέρ' ιδέσθαι σπεύδω, τίν' ἔχει  
στάσιν εὐοδίας.

Let me pass, you shadowy foliage; let me cross the watery dells. I am in haste to see the heaven above my head, what state it has for a good journey. (trans. Collard, Cropp & Lee)

(fr. 308 *TrGF*)

While it is of course possible that these lines come from a messenger-speech, and that the flight was therefore only reported and not staged, further evidence from Julius Pollux (4.128) suggests that Bellerophon was (along with Perseus) one of only two examples of the *mechane*

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26. Cf. Dunn 1996: 29-31; and Rehm 2002: 257-8, 270 on the *mechane* as a device which reinforces the distance and hierarchical distinction between gods and men. While in the *Medea* the *mechane* is utilised for a main character rather than in a true *deus ex machina*, Medea unlike Bellerophon is a demi-god, and this is therefore not directly comparable. For a detailed discussion of the *mechane* and its deployment in tragedy, cf. Mastronarde 1990, esp. 286-7.

27. For these and following translations of the *Bellerophon*, cf. Collard, Cropp & Lee 1995: 98-120). Note that Collard, Cropp & Lee assign fr. 307a as the first line of fr. 308, while here the numbering of *TrGF* has been followed.

being used to depict a mortal character in flight. Furthermore, given that both the flight of Perseus in the *Andromeda* and the flight of *Bellerophon* are featured in Aristophanic parodies,<sup>28</sup> both of which involve the *mechane*, it does seem highly likely that firstly the *mechane* was used to depict these heroes' flight; and that secondly, this usage was unusual or distinctive enough to warrant specific parodic attention.<sup>29</sup>

The use of the *mechane* in the *Bellerophon* is not only unusual because of the depiction of a mortal in flight; unlike the usage in the *Andromeda*, it also demonstrates another element of experimentation, in that the character is depicted flying not downwards, as is usual for a *deus ex machina*, but upwards. A downward flight would be considerably easier to execute, since gravity would be on the side of the crane-operator, and it would therefore require less precision, and produce a smoother line of flight.<sup>30</sup> Since in the *Peace* the parody gives considerable emphasis to the unsteady nature of Trygaeus' flight and the inability of the crane operator to execute it without turbulence (174-5: ὃ μηχανοποιέ, πρόσεχε τὸν νοῦν, ὡς ἐμὲ / ἤδη στροβεῖ τι πνεῦμα περι τὸν ὀμφαλόν), it seems highly likely that the lack of grace of Bellerophon's flight in Euripides' play is one of the main targets of the parody; and the fact that such a take-off seems not to have been attempted again by the tragedian further suggests

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28. Cf. *Thesm.* 1009ff, in which Euripides appears as Perseus, making an entrance via the *mechane* to save the In-Law, who takes to role of Andromeda on the rock.

29. Taplin 1977: 443-6 in his discussion of the use of the *mechane* on stage similarly concludes that the *mechane* was indeed used in the *Bellerophon*, and that along with Perseus, Bellerophon was an rare example of the *mechane* being used to depict a mortal in flight.

30. How exactly an actor portraying a *deus ex machine* would have mounted the *mechane*, and whether this process would have been visible to the audience, is unclear. If the *mechane* was located at the side of the stage (as opposed to being at least partially concealed behind the *skene* building); and if the actor assumed their high position by means of the rope (and not, for example, by means of a ladder), then it is possible that an upward flight, preceding the downward *deus ex machina* flight, was visible to the audience as a matter of course whenever the *mechane* was used. If however Mastronarde (1990: 290-4) is correct in suggesting that the crane was placed behind the stage building, then the actor's upward flight could have been concealed, with the actor emerging into view only once they were firmly in the air. Even if the stage building was not used to conceal the actor's upward movement however,, this action would take place outside the fictional reality, and would therefore be less intrusive (even if wobbly and inelegant) than a poorly executed upwards flight which took place within the dramatic action, as I argue above for the *Bellerophon*.

that the experimental use of the *mechane* may not have been fully successful. The unsteady flight of Trygaeus in the *Peace* only adds to the comic effect, and the quite obviously unconvincing nature of Trygaeus' ascent is not concealed or even overlooked, but rather used as an opportunity to draw attention to the fictional nature of the spectacle, and the obvious visibility of the machinery involved in creating it, through the address to the crane operator in line 174. By contrast, in the context of a tragedy such a lack of grace would be inappropriate, and possibly even funny. Furthermore, if the illusion of flight was not executed successfully, this would consequently highlight the artificiality of the spectacle in a conspicuous manner more suited to comedy than tragedy.<sup>31</sup> Anything but a perfectly smooth ascent would quite possibly have been a distraction from the dramatic action, and the tragic mood, of the play. The flight of the beetle therefore appears to poke fun at tragedy not only through the imposition of a dung beetle into a previously serious poetic context, but also by drawing attention to an experimental failure. While the depiction of a flight to heaven was apparently beyond what could be successfully executed on the tragic stage, comedy can get around the technical limitations of stage technology by simply turning its limitations into a joke; and this ability to turn technical failure or limitation into comic opportunity therefore allows for a greater freedom in what can be depicted on the comic stage.

The mix of the traditionally mythic and the comically scatological which is associated with the beetle in the opening scene of the *Peace* can also be found in the slaves' description of Zeus. As they discuss the provenance of the beetle, who they agree is not the work of Aphrodite or the Graces, the slaves suggest instead that such a foul creature could only come from Zeus:

<Οἱ> τοῦ γάρ ἐστ’;

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31. Note that this would not be the only example in Aristophanes of a parodic focus on the artificiality of tragic stage-machinery. Both the *Acharnians* (408-9) and *Thesmophoriazousae* (265) target the use of the ἐκκύκλημα, and show tragedians being 'wheeled out' in such a way which both draws attention to, and derives a degree of humour from, the high degree of artificiality inherent to the use of this device.

<Οἶβ> οὐκ ἔσθ' ὅπως  
οὐκ ἔστι τὸ τέρας τοῦ Διὸς σκαταιβάτου.

Slave A: Then who's it from?

Slave B: It can only be that this monstrosity comes from Zeus, the Lord of the Thunder-crap.

(*Pax* 41-2)

The epithet *καταιβάτου* ('thundering down'), to which an initial sigma has been added in a rather brilliant scatological pun, is in fact not attested in epic or tragedy, but rather relies on a general characterisation of Zeus as being associated with thunderbolts in particular, and weather phenomena in general.<sup>32</sup> The use of a generalising epithet such as this shows that while the narrative of *Peace* is primarily based around a close engagement with Euripides' *Bellerophon*, the fictional world of the play is characterised by an engagement with mythic material more broadly, and the components are not always filtered through a tragic or other literary usage or intertext; while the addition of a scatological pun makes clear that although the *Peace* situates itself in a mythic mode, the myth will be overtly comic in type.

The treatment of Zeus throughout the opening scene is key to the comic characterisation of *Peace*'s mythic material. Although Trygaeus' mad raging at the gods does appear to be modelled closely on the opening of the *Bellerophon* (see n. 23 above), it differs from its model in one important regard. Although Zeus does figure in the *Bellerophon* myth, since it is he who sends the gadfly which is responsible for Pegasus throwing his rider, in Euripides' play *Bellerophon*'s anger appears to be directed against the gods in general (286.1, 286.10: θεούς, 286.12: θεοῖς); while Trygaeus' hostility is specifically towards Zeus, a fact which is repeatedly emphasised throughout the opening scene. The hero is described as raving abusively at Zeus (57: λοιδορεῖται τῷ Διῖ); his first words, heard from backstage, challenge the god's actions against the Greeks (62: ὦ Ζεῦ, τί δρασεῖεις ποθ' ἡμῶν τὸν λεῶν;); and when

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32. On the association of Zeus with thunderbolts, cf. Cook 1925, Volume 2: 'Zeus God of the Dark Sky (Thunder and Lightning)' *passim*. The epithet *καταιβάτου* is itself attested in Pausanias (5.14.10), as well as in some inscriptional evidence from Athens (in particular IG II<sup>2</sup> 6964-5), dating to the period shortly after the *Peace*, however since all these sources postdate Aristophanes, it cannot be stated with any certainty that the epithet was in usage in this period, and the joke therefore may well be more to do with general characterisations of the god than any specific cultic epithet.

Trygaeus' slaves ask where he is going (102-3) and why (104), he replies that he is going to Zeus in heaven (104: τὸν Δί' εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν), to ask him about his intentions for the Greeks. The tone towards the god is however comically irreverent, undermining the seriousness of the theomachy theme, and thereby emphasising the modulation of the tragic theomachy plot of the *Bellerophon* into a more appropriately comic μῦθος. Trygaeus' words are initially grand and paratragic, but the epic register of his opening line (e.g. 62: λεών) quickly descends into bathos with the agricultural, and possibly even sexually euphemistic,<sup>33</sup> ἐκκοκκίσας (from κόκκος, pomegranate; meaning 'to squeeze the seeds from a pomegranate'). The god is further assimilated into the comic mode by the addition of elements from ordinary political life which are at home in comedy but appear more incongruous in the mythic context into which they are placed. When Trygaeus is asked by his slaves exactly how he plans to take on the king of the gods, he suggests a legal approach, whereby if Zeus does not give him a satisfactory explanation for his behaviour he will indict him (106: γράγομαι, a word with technical, legalistic overtones) for treachery.

The assimilation of Zeus into a comic plot is not entirely unparalleled. Despite Zeus' importance in tragedy, particularly but not exclusively in the plays of Aeschylus,<sup>34</sup> there seems to have been some prohibition on presenting Zeus on the tragic stage, and he is not attested as a *dramatis persona* in any play.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, while Zeus only ever features on the peripheries of Aristophanes' comedies,<sup>36</sup> the god appears to have been a character in at least a small number of comic plays, and is depicted on a number of comic vases.<sup>37</sup> Cratinus'

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33. Cf. Henderson 1991: 134

34. Cf. Lloyd-Jones 1956.

35. The possible exception to this rule is Aeschylus' lost *Psychstasia*; however the evidence for Zeus as a *dramatis persona* in this play is roundly dismissed by Taplin 1977: 431-3. Easterling 1993, in her discussion of staging gods in tragedy similarly concludes (pp. 78-9) that there was a prohibition on the presentation of Zeus on the tragic stage, despite his appearance as a character in comedy.

36. As for example in the *Birds* in which it is implied that Peisetairos triumphs over, and displaces, Zeus, but the god does not himself appear on stage.

37. Cf. Taplin 1993: 60 n. 11 for a list of comic vase paintings of Zeus.

*Nemesis* seems to have portrayed Zeus in pursuit of Nemesis;<sup>38</sup> and several plays of Middle Comedy are likely to have featured Zeus as a character.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to note that all of these comedies feature a cast of exclusively immortal characters, and do not feature any interaction, let alone confrontation, between Zeus and a mortal hero. The relentless and specific focus on Zeus by Trygaeus in the opening scene of the *Peace* however seems at first to be setting up just such a confrontation between our hero and the king of the gods; and the assimilation of the god into the comic mode of the play appears to place his appearance at least within the bounds of possibility. The actual dramatisation of such a staged confrontation between a mortal hero and the king of the gods himself would be unprecedented, and a clear demonstration of comedy's total freedom from the constraints and prohibitions which, apparently, governed tragedy.<sup>40</sup>

However, as Trygaeus sets off on his beetle-mount declaring that he will go to Zeus in heaven, despite the play clearly signalling that a confrontation with the king of the gods is imminent, at the last moment this confrontation is neatly, and knowingly, avoided, suggesting that, despite the play's apparent intimations to the contrary, even comic storytelling does in fact have its limits. When Trygaeus arrives in Olympus he quickly demands an audience with Zeus himself (195: ἴθι νῦν κάλεσόν μοι τὸν Δί'); but he is informed by Hermes (suitably guarding the door, herm-like), that this will not be possible, since the gods have moved house (196-7: ὄτ' οὐδὲ μέλλεις ἐγγὺς εἶναι τῶν θεῶν / φροῦδοι γάρ· ἐχθές εἰσιν ἐξοικισμένοι.). The fact that Zeus has only just yesterday (ἐχθές) gone away, so that Trygaeus has literally

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38. Cf. Bakola 2010: 168-73 for a discussion of this play. Bakola suggests that, in common with the *Peace*, *Nemesis* was heavily paratragic.

39. Zeus must certainly have been a character in Philiscus' Διὸς γοναί; and is likely to have featured in the Ἀθηνᾶς γοναί by Hermippus, as well as the three attested Διονύσου γοναί plays (by Polyzelus, Demetrius I, and Anaxandrides), since the god features fairly prominently in the stories associated with these births. For a full discussion of θεῶν γοναί plays, cf. Nesselrath 1995.

40. The *Birds* similarly almost dramatises a confrontation between its hero and Zeus, before ultimately evading it. Peisetairos is clearly depicted as triumphing over Zeus, but the play avoids any actual dramatisation of this, and the victory of the hero over Zeus is instead enacted symbolically through the figure of Basilea, who represents Zeus' power and dominion, and who is claimed by Peisetairos at the end of the play.

just missed him at home, cleverly side-steps the theomachic confrontation which the play appeared to be preparing, whilst also drawing attention to the evasion. This clever plot twist again has its roots in the comic modulation of the play's tragic model. In the opening of the *Bellerophon*, the hero declares that there are no gods in heaven (fr. 286.1-2; for its attribution see n. 23 above); and here in the *Peace* this statement of theological bleakness and despair becomes instead an irreverent joke: there really *are* no gods in heaven, but only because they got fed up with the Greeks and decided to move away and leave them to their own devices, leaving behind only their pots and pans (202: χυτρίδια καὶ σανίδια κάμφορείδια), and Hermes to keep watch.

The last-minute substitution of Zeus, Trygaeus' intended target when he took flight, for Hermes is also an appropriately comic touch; and this adds further humour to the comic frustration of the initial expectation of Zeus' appearance on stage. Of the four of Aristophanes' extant plays in which divine figures are represented on stage (*Peace*, *Birds*, *Frogs*, and *Wealth*), Hermes makes an appearance in all but *Frogs*.<sup>41</sup> Given the nature of the god Hermes, and particularly his representation in literature, it is perhaps unsurprising that he seems to be disproportionately represented in comparison with other divine figures.<sup>42</sup> As the god of tricksters and trickery, Hermes often appears in poetry which is comic in tone, including Iambos.<sup>43</sup> The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* is in particular notable for its light and

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41. It seems that Hermes also appeared in a play by the middle comic playwright Philiscus, which dealt with the god's birth. However, in the period in which Philiscus was active θεῶν γοναί plays appear to have been common (Philiscus himself producing seven or eight), and mythological/theological themes seem generally to have been more common than in Old Comedy (in which as Given 2009 has noted gods appear with relative infrequency). For the depiction of gods in middle/4th century comedy, cf. Nesselrath 1995, Sidwell 2014: 64-5.

42. The only other god to appear more than once in our extant Aristophanic texts is Heracles (*Birds*, *Frogs*), who seems indeed to have been something of a stock comic figure (cf. *Vesp.* 60 on the 'hungry Heracles' motif).

43. Vergados 2011: 87-98 gives an detailed overview of the depiction of Hermes as comic, both in literature and inscriptions. To his otherwise comprehensive list of comic depictions of Hermes in poetry, I would also add Sophocles' satyr play *Ichneutae* (for which cf. Sutton 1980a: 47-54), which seems to have dramatised some of the events also told in the *Homeric Hymn*.

comic style, in contrast to the grander tone of the hymns to other gods,<sup>44</sup> and even in epic his appearances are often at moments of light relief.<sup>45</sup> The frequent appearance of Hermes in Aristophanes therefore appears to interact with the persona given to the god in wider literature, and even to cement his status as a god particularly associated with comic poetry.<sup>46</sup> The replacement of Zeus by Hermes in the divine confrontation of the *Peace* therefore injects a self-consciously comic element into the play's theomachy myth-pattern, as Bellerophon's appropriately grand tragic nemesis is exchanged for an opponent more in keeping with Trygaeus' nature and his status as a comic hero.<sup>47</sup>

Trygaeus' second heavenly opponent is the god Polemos ('War') who, along with his hapless attendant Kudoimos ('Din of Battle'), has taken up residence on Olympus in the absence of the other gods. The presentation of these two figures is reminiscent of epic tellings of myth, in particular Hesiod's *Theogony*, in which a series of cosmic forces are personified as gods (e.g. Οὐρανὸς, Γαῖα, Χάος, Αἰθήρ, Ὠκεανός, etc.); and the two characters' epic affiliations are emphasised through their overblown mock-epic language (236: ἰὼ βροτοὶ βροτοὶ πολυτλήμονες, 242-3: ἰὼ Πρασιαὶ τρις ἄθλαι καὶ πεντάκις / καὶ πολλοδεκάκις, ὡς ἀπολεῖσθε τήμερον, 280: οἴμοι τάλας, οἴμοι γε κᾶτ' οἴμοι μάλα). However, Polemos is in epic rarely personified (unlike for example Nike, who is often presented as a goddess);<sup>48</sup> while a comic personification of Polemos (albeit not staged) has appeared already in the

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44. Janko 1982: 148-9: "Its lighthearted tone, unepic vocabulary and penchant for unusual compounds are reminiscent of the comic and satyric genres that were beginning their literary development in this period".

45. Vergados 2011 87-8.

46. Dobrov 2001: 3-4 even suggests that Hermes is almost as much a quintessential god of comedy as Dionysus.

47. Vergados 2011: 93 has suggested that the depiction of Hermes in the *Peace* contains a more specific allusion to the *Homeric Hymn*, and that Hermes' susceptibility to Trygaeus' bribe of a piece of meat (192: τὰ κρέα) plays on the depiction of Hermes in the *Hymn* as especially desirous of meat (64, 287: κρειῶν ἐρατίζων). However, it seems more likely that the interaction is with the general association of Hermes with lighthearted, comic poetry, rather than any more specific intertext or allusion.

48. For a discussion of the lack of personification of Polemos as a god in epic, cf. Kostuch 2011, who argues that *polemos* in the *Iliad* in particular is a power at the disposal of various gods, and cannot therefore be presented as a god himself.



*Acharnians* (979-86), in which he is described as a problem drunk (*Ach.* 979: παροινικός) crashing a symposium and destroying his host's home. Here in the *Peace*, the comicalness of the personification of Polemos is emphasised through the scene's slapstick (e.g. 255-6); and by the similarly comic accompanying reification of the pestle metaphor (which appeared first in *Knights* 984, again applied to Cleon), in which Polemos is literally making μπτωτός (cheese hash) of the Greek cities, with each city represented by an ingredient associated with it (Sicilian cheese, Attic honey, etc.).<sup>49</sup> Through this combination of comic-style personification/reification of abstraction and metaphor, with the epic-style presentation of personified entities as gods, the play is able to insert a new god into both the pantheon, and its mythic storyline, and in this regard to surpass its epic-mythic models. This creation of new gods in a comic style is continued with the introduction of Peace's attendants Opora and Theoria. These two characters are in fact an even more typical example of comic personification than Polemos, since they fall into the common category of mute, nude, female representations of abstractions,<sup>50</sup> and again demonstrate the ability of comedy to invent new gods through a combination of established mythic (personifications as gods) and comic (female reified abstractions) norms.

After the episode with Polemos, as the scene on Olympus continues the initial theomachic plot line is largely discarded,<sup>51</sup> along with the intertextual interactions with epic

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49. The phrase 'to make μπτωτός of someone' has much the same force in Greek as the English 'to make mincemeat of someone'; μπτωτός was a dish of cheese, garlic, and honey, made into a paste in a pestle and mortar.

50. Cf. Hall 2000 on the phenomenon of female representations of abstractions in Old Comedy. Zweig 1992 discusses the specific use of silent, nude female characters in Aristophanes. For further discussion of the staging of the female body in Aristophanes, cf. Compton-Engle 2015: 28-37.

51. Ideas of theomachy arguably linger in the remaining plot of the play, since Trygaeus, firstly in rescuing Peace and rearranging the pantheon more to his, and mankind's, benefit; and secondly in his disobedience to the ruling of Zeus which is entailed in this rescue, does continue the theomachic plot to some degree. Furthermore, the *hieros gamos* which ends the play arguably places Trygaeus himself among the gods in a manner similar to the marriage of Peisetairos to Basilea in the *Birds*. However, following the scene with Polemos, the theme of theomachy unarguably fades into the background; and indeed it was never foregrounded to the same degree as in the later *Birds*.

and tragedy (save a final quotation of the *Bellerophon* in line 722), in favour of references to texts more similar in genre and tone to the *Peace* itself, in particular Aeschylus' satyr drama *Diktyoulkoi*.<sup>52</sup> Unlike the play's previous interaction with tragedy, which is overtly competitive and parodic, the *Peace*'s use of satyr drama is more incorporative, demonstrating comedy's ability to absorb and integrate the conventions of other genres by modulating them according to comedy's own norms and practices.<sup>53</sup> As a genre which specialised in the comic retelling of traditional mythic stories, satyr drama is an apposite model for the *Peace*'s own mythic narrative. However, in comparison to comedy, the narrative possibilities of satyr drama are relatively limited; the plays take traditional mythic characters and stories, insert satyrs into the action, and thereby derive both their plot and their humour from the collision of the comic satyrs with the serious mythic context in which they are placed.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, even within this already limited framework, satyr plays appear to have featured a small number of recurrent plot-types, which usually saw the satyrs escaping from bondage or servitude, or otherwise from a monster or ogre.<sup>55</sup>

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52. The other prominent intertext in this scene is Aristophanes' own *Acharnians*, with which *Peace* shares a great deal of thematic material. In this particular scene, material from Dicaeopolis' speech to the chorus (496-556) is reworked, beginning with Trygaeus' own name (revealed in line 190), which hints at Dicaeopolis' coinage 'trygoidia' in the *Acharnians* (500: τὸ γὰρ δίκαιον οἶδε καὶ τρυγῳδία). The scene then proceeds to rework Dicaeopolis' explanation of the origins of the war (which here in *Peace* is put instead in the mouth of Hermes), beginning with the Pericles' hand in the war's origins (*Ach.* 530, *Pax.* 605-7); the Megarian decree (*Ach.* 532-4, *Pax.* 608-9) leading to the destruction of the Attic countryside; and a particular emphasis on the cutting down of vines (*Ach.* 512, *Pax.* 612).

53. For a discussion of Cratinus' integration of satyr drama, cf. Bakola 2010 ch. 2. The relatively seamless incorporation of satyr drama in Cratinus' plays suggests that the clear tendency in Aristophanic comedy to take a less competitive, more assimilative stance when dealing with genres closer in status/register to comedy is not in fact a specific feature of Aristophanic comedy, but is perhaps characteristic of Old Comedy as a whole.

54. Cf. Krumeich, Pechstein & Seidensticker 1999: 19, who suggest that "Die Satyrn sind nur selten ursprünglicher Bestandteil der Geschichte, die das Stück erzählt. Dionysische Stoffe scheinen eher rar gewesen zu sein." Rather, the satyrs are inserted, often as slaves or servants of the protagonist, into mythic contexts in which they do not belong. This aspect is also discussed by Sutton 1980a: 135.

55. Cf. Krumeich, Pechstein & Seidensticker 1999: 25-32 on the formulaic plots of satyr drama, and their common themes and plot-motifs (such as bondage/servitude; escape from ogres and monsters; and the rescue of maidens).

It is to these stereotypical satyric plot motifs that *Peace* turns in its reworking of satyr drama in this scene. The rescue of the goddess Peace from the cave combines two common tropes characteristic of satyr drama, namely *anodos* scenes, and the rescue of a ‘damsel in distress’.<sup>56</sup> In particular, the *Peace* appears to interact closely with Aeschylus’ *Diktyoulokoí*, in which the chorus of satyrs rescue Danaë from the sea. As Trygaeus calls to the chorus to come and rescue the goddess Peace from the cave in which she has been imprisoned (*Pax* 296-300), his words are strikingly similar to fr. 46a. 16-20 from the *Diktyoulokoí*, in which the fisherman Dictys calls to ‘all you farmers and vine-workers’ (17: παντες γεωργοι δευτε καμπελοσκαφοι) for help in raising his rather larger than usual catch. This close intertextual parallel, in combination with the *Peace*’s replication of the stage-action of the *Diktyoulokoí*’s central, and visually distinctive, ‘hauling’ scene makes the interaction with the satyric ‘rescue’ trope clear.<sup>57</sup> In framing an *anodos*, already itself a trope of satyric plots, as simultaneously a stock rescue-scene from satyr drama, the play therefore combines two typical satyric motifs; and by focusing its interaction with the genre on such recurrent elements, the *Peace* thereby draws attention to the extent to which the narratives of satyr play are formulaic. This in turn forms a point of contrast with the *Peace*’s own plot, in which the use of these motifs is considerably more innovative, firstly in the way the play combines the usually separate motifs of *anodos* and rescue; and secondly in its presentation of an *anodos* of the goddess Peace, which unlike the *anodoi* dramatised in satyr play which are always taken from traditional mythic stories, is otherwise unattested and seems to be an invention of the play.<sup>58</sup>

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56. Cf. *ibid* 29 on ‘rescue’ plots, in which the satyrs come to the aid of a young maiden; and 56-7 on *anodos* scenes, which seem to be common in satyr plays at least in the first half of the 5th century, and which are common in visual depictions of satyr drama. The specific staging of *anodos* scenes is further discussed by Sutton 1975.

57. The *Peace*’s interaction with the *Diktyoulokoí* is discussed also by Ruffell 2011: 333-4. The chorus of satyrs in Sophocles’ *Ichneutai* is summoned by a similar appeal to any shepherd or farmer or charcoal-burner nearby (fr. 314 39-40), suggesting that such a call to nearby rustics, followed by the initial entry of the satyr chorus, may have been a common feature of satyr drama. In this case, the *Peace*’s interaction with the genre would be clearer still.

58. Despite the *anodos* of Peace being apparently an invention of the play, the goddess’ return

Additionally, by placing this interaction at the point of the chorus' entry, the *Peace* emphasises the difference between its own chorus and that of satyr play. The chorus of satyr drama is of course the most heavily conventionalised aspect of the genre, and in this respect the genre offers no scope to its poets for innovation.<sup>59</sup> The chorus in comedy, on the other hand, appears to be subject to very few formal, or even practical (staging/costume) limitations; the surviving evidence points to choruses of birds, beasts, centaurs, sirens, griffins, frogs, insects,<sup>60</sup> satyrs,<sup>61</sup> and even personifications of inanimate objects or concepts such as demes and cities,<sup>62</sup> as well as men and women. Although *Peace*'s chorus of farmers is in fact one of the least inventive and outlandish of the Old Comic choruses, it is fitted well to the context of the play's narrative and ethos,<sup>63</sup> and in this respect shows the contrast with satyr play, in which the chorus are not able to be varied according to the demands of the play's narrative. Therefore, despite the lack of any overtly competitive dynamic between the *Peace* and its satyric model, the play's incorporation of formulaic elements of satyr drama does highlight the relative lack of formal restrictions on the comic plot, and the genre's greater mythopoetic freedom.

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does have recognisable characteristics, and in particular seems to be framed in similar terms to the *anodos* of Persephone, in that the goddess and her two companions are expressly characterised as goddesses associated with fertility, both agrarian and otherwise; and *Peace*'s return ushers in the utopian plenty celebrated in the play's second half. *Peace* herself is first addressed by Trygaeus as 'grape-producing' (520: ὃ πότνια βοτρυόδωρε), and described as smelling of sweet late-summer fruits (530: ὀπώρας) and young sheep (535: προβατίων). This Persephone-like characterisation of *Peace* would be particularly striking if Sutton 1975 is correct in suggesting that Sophocles wrote a satyr drama entitled *Iambe*, which may have featured an *anodos* of Persephone; however both the existence of such a play, and its supposed contents and plot, are highly uncertain.

59. On the composition and characteristics of the chorus in satyr drama, cf. Krumeich, Pechstein & Seidensticker 1999: 17-23.

60. For a full discussion of animal choruses in Old Comedy, cf. Rothwell 2007 *passim*; and for a table showing all the animal and mythological creatures known to have been depicted in Old Comic choruses, cf. Sifakis 1971: 76-7.

61. Cf. Bakola 2010 ch. 2 on the satyr chorus in Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros*; and for a list of play containing mythological choruses, including satyrs, cf. Rothwell 2007: 91-2.

62. Cf. Storey 2003: 124-9 on the chorus of Eupolis' *Demes*; and 217-21 on the chorus in *Poleis*.

63. On the Panhellenism of the *Peace*, to which the chorus is key, cf. Moulton 1981: 100

The *Peace*'s mythic narrative is therefore a grand act of reformulation. Elements from a variety of sources, both literary and mythic, are recombined and adapted to the comic context, in order to create a new mythic storyline on the basis of existing narrative elements. Comedy's freedom to innovate within a mythic framework, and to invent new stories, is throughout the opening of the play contrasted with the more limited kinds of narrative innovation practised by other genres, and particularly comedy's two rival dramatic genres, tragedy and satyr play. The play's relationship with tragedy is more overtly competitive than its use of other genres, and particularly of genres closer in register to Comedy itself, such as satyr play; and the metamorphosis of Euripides' elegant Pegasus into a stinking dung beetle, as well as the replacement of Bellerophon's grand destroyer, Zeus, with the comically appropriate Hermes serves to emphasise the parodic stance taken towards 'serious' storytelling in the play. The use of satyr play is in comparison more incorporative, and never veers into outright parody. However, the incorporation is not entirely un-contrastive, and the use of stereotypical and formulaic elements of satyr drama serves to emphasise comedy's relative formal and narrative freedom. Comedy's freedom is, however, not absolute. Not only is its mythic narrative bound in its re-use of other elements by the "culture of re-telling" identified by Lowe (2000: 269); but the 'will-they-won't-they' game played with the audience with regard to the dramatisation of Trygaeus' conflict with Zeus (which despite being set up throughout the opening of the play is eventually sidestepped) shows that Old Comedy does appear, like tragedy, have some restrictions on what it can and cannot show.

### **Tragedy vs. Comedy; Failure vs. Success**

The competitive relationship with tragedy in the *Peace* is not limited to the contrast between tragedy as a genre which retells existing myths, and comedy as a genre free to invent new ones. The play is also interested in the differences between the kinds of stories the two genres tell. In its engagement with the *Bellerophon*, *Peace* repeatedly represents tragic μῦθος as being characterised by failure and misery; while comedy is in comparison presented as a genre of success and celebration.

While Most (2000) has argued that the application of the term 'tragic' to sad, desperate,

or pitiable events is a purely modern phenomenon, Aristotle *Poetics* 1453a would appear to contradict the argument that contemporary Greeks had no idea of ‘tragicness’ pertaining to unhappy events. Aristotle’s discussion of tragedy is not of course fully or straightforwardly representative of either the genre itself, or the ancient idea of what constituted tragedy and tragicness; however, it is likely to reflect elements of contemporary discourse. Furthermore, although Aristotle deals largely in generalisations to which exceptions can inevitably be found, the level of generalisation in Aristotle is similar to that found in comedy’s own inter-generic discourse, which likewise operates on the basis of plausible generalities when dealing with the distinctions between genres. Aristotle suggests that the best tragedies are those which arouse pity or fear in their audience (1453a5-6: ἔλεος μὲν περὶ τὸν ἀνάξιον, φόβος δὲ περὶ τὸν ὅμοιον); and argues that in the plot of a good tragedy, events must not progress from misfortune to fortune, but rather the opposite (1453a13-15: μεταβάλλειν οὐκ εἰς εὐτυχίαν ἐκ δυστυχίας ἀλλὰ τούναντίον ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν). Aristotle further insists that it is preferable that the turn of events from fortune to misfortune should be driven not by the inherent villainy of the character, but rather by some mistake (1453a15-16: μὴ διὰ μοχθηρίαν ἀλλὰ δι’ ἀμαρτίαν μεγάλην), since this is more pitiable; and he lists the stories of Oedipus, Orestes, and Thyestes as good examples of typically tragic progression from good to bad fortune, since these characters either did or suffered terrible things (1453a22: παθεῖν δεινὰ ἢ ποιῆσαι). On these grounds, Aristotle suggests that Euripides, despite his flaws, is the “most tragic” of the poets (1453a28-30: ὁ Εὐριπίδης, εἰ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα μὴ εὖ οἰκονομεῖ, ἀλλὰ τραγικώτατός γε τῶν ποιητῶν φαίνεται). Furthermore, Aristotle suggests that for a traditionally unhappy story to be given instead a happy ending is characteristic not of tragedy, but of comedy:<sup>64</sup>

ἔστιν δὲ οὐχ αὕτη ἀπὸ τραγωδίας ἡδονὴ ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον τῆς κωμωδίας οἰκεία· ἐκεῖ γὰρ οἱ ἂν ἔχθιστοι ὄσιν ἐν τῷ μύθῳ, οἷον Ὀρέστης καὶ Αἴγισθος, φίλοι γενόμενοι ἐπὶ τελευτῆς ἐξέρχονται, καὶ ἀποθνήσκει οὐδεις ὑπ’ οὐδενός.

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64. Aristotle here gives the *Odyssey* as such an example of a happy ending, since the good characters, he suggests, are given good endings, and the bad characters bad ones (1453a32-3: τελευτῶσα ἐξ ἐναντίας τοῖς βελτίοσι καὶ χείροσιν); and he states that such an ending as this is inappropriate in tragedy.

Yet this is not the pleasure to expect from tragedy, but is more appropriate to comedy, where those who are the deadliest of enemies in the plot, such as Orestes and Aegisthus, exit at the end as new friends, and no one dies at anyone's hands. (trans. Halliwell)

(Aristotle *Poetics* 1453a35-9)

Aristotle further suggests that, while a tragedian should make skilful and inventive use of the tradition (1453b25-6: αὐτὸν δὲ εὐρίσκειν δεῖ καὶ τοῖς παραδεδομένοις χρῆσθαι καλῶς), he is not at liberty to disrupt it to the extent that, for example, Clytemnestra is not killed by Orestes.<sup>65</sup> The worst alterations of traditional stories are those that contain no terrible event or suffering, since according to Aristotle such a story is no longer tragic (1435b38-9: τό τε γὰρ μαρὸν ἔχει, καὶ οὐ τραγικόν· ἀπαθὲς γάρ).

*Peace*'s fundamental alteration of its narrative model is precisely that which Aristotle suggests is unsuitable for tragedy, in that instead of being thrown to his death like Bellerophon, Trygaeus succeeds in scaling Olympus and challenging the gods; and a traditional ending of suffering and misfortune is thereby replaced with success and happiness. Such an ability to write a theomachy-style myth in which the mortal hero, instead of being punished for his hybris, actually manages not only to reach the gods, but even to rearrange affairs on Olympus more to his (and mankind's) advantage, is definitively comic. While it is clear that tragedy might (and Euripides certainly did) alter myths from their traditional forms, a tragedian does not have the same freedom to change the ending of a myth from total failure to total success for the hero. Throughout the opening of *Peace*, Euripides' *Bellerophon* is characterised as primarily a story of failure; and Trygaeus' status as a specifically comic hero

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65. This passage is discussed by Sommerstein 2005: 167-8. Sommerstein notes that such an innovation as abolishing the death of Clytemnestra at the hands of her son is in fact a possibility in tragedy; but suggests that despite this there is still some fundamental truth in Aristotle's statement that tragic innovation was bound by at least the framework of traditional stories. While Aristotle's observations about tragedy are of course not always strictly true, they do suggest that contemporary thinkers perceived there to be a fundamental difference between tragic and comic stories, particularly with regards to happy vs. sad endings; and that therefore the contrast between tragic failure and comic success in *Peace* is built on contemporary ideas about what was generally true of the two genres, even if in practice there are inevitably examples which contradict such generalisations.

in a specifically comic myth is presented as the key to his ability to succeed where his tragic model failed.

Trygaeus' initial appearance on the back of the beetle provokes great alarm among his household and in particular his daughter, whose warning to her father that he may fall and become lame, thereby providing Euripides with a new idea for a tragedy, relies on the stock characterisation (discussed above) of Euripides in Aristophanes as a creator of lame characters. The particular emphasis of the joke however differs here from its incarnation in the *Acharnians* (426-7), in which the accusation is that Euripides has a preference for presenting the stories of traditionally wretched characters such as Bellerophon and Telephus in his plays; here instead, the joke is that Trygaeus, should he fail to achieve his goal and fall to earth, would himself become a tragedy fit for Euripides:

ἐκεῖνο τήρει, μὴ σφαλῆς καταρρυῆς  
ἐντεῦθεν, εἴτα χολὸς ὢν Εὐριπίδη  
λόγον παράσχῃς καὶ τραγωδία γένη.

Watch out for one thing, that you don't slip off and drop from up there, and then be lamed and provide Euripides with a plot and get turned into a tragedy.

(*Pax*. 146-8)

In this way, narratives of failure and misfortune (such as a hero attempting a great deed, but failing and becoming crippled in the process) are characterised as inherently tragic; and tragedy itself is presented as a hobbled (χολὸς) genre. This is particularly emphasised by the fact that, unlike in the previous lines where the adjectival form τραγικώτερος is used (*Pax* 36), here the suggestion is not that Trygaeus would become tragic-like, but would actually turn into a tragedy itself (τραγωδία γένη) were he to fail in his mission.

This characterisation of tragedy as a genre of failure is accompanied by the suggestion that it is Trygaeus' specifically comic attributes which allow him to transform a narrative of failure into one of success. In response to his daughter's fears that he might, like Bellerophon, fall from the skies as he attempts to fly to heaven, Trygaeus responds in typically comic fashion:



ἐπίτηδες εἶχον πηδάλιον, ᾧ χρήσομαι·  
τὸ δὲ πλοῖον ἔσται Ναξιουργῆς κἀνθαρος.

I brought for that very purpose an oar, which I will use; and my vessel will be a beetle-boat, made in Naxos.

(*Pax* 142-3)

The word πηδάλιον (‘oar’) is described by Henderson (1991: 123) as having “a phallic meaning as early as Theognis”, and indeed an oar appears in a similar, if more direct, euphemism in Plato Comicus,<sup>66</sup> and rowing as a sexual euphemism in the *Ecclesiazusae*.<sup>67</sup> We can therefore assume with reasonable certainty that in this context the πηδάλιον which Trygaeus indicates is his comic phallus; and that it is therefore precisely this generic marker of comedy which will enable Trygaeus to avoid the fate of a tragic hero. Similarly, when further pressed by his daughter about how he might avoid death by drowning, Trygaeus replies that his beetle (κἀνθαρος) can become a Naxian light-boat (κἀνθαρος; the pun is clarified by the description Ναξιουργῆς), therefore providing him with a boat (πλοῖον) from which to use his oar. Comedy’s ability to use wordplay, through which one object can be instantly transformed into another by a pun, thereby provides the hero with an additional escape-route should he need it.

Although the characterisation of tragedy as a genre of failure and wretchedness in comparison to comedy’s celebration of success and happiness is most overt in the reformulation of Bellerophon’s flight, an antagonistic attitude towards tragedy and tragicness is also more broadly embedded in the play. Given the climate of optimism which must have prevailed in 421, Aristophanes’ choice of parodic targets is significant. In addition to the extensive parody of the *Bellerophon*, *Peace* quotes directly from the *Stheneboea* and *Aeolus*. The *Bellerophon* and *Stheneboea* in particular (which appear to be of a piece not only in their

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66. fr. 3.4 PCG: ἡ μὲν ἐλαυνομένη λαθρίοις ἐρετμοῖς, ὁ δ’ ἐλαύνων

67. ὁ γὰρ ἀνήρ ᾧ φιλάτη, / Σαλαμίνιος γὰρ ἐστὶν ᾧ ζύνειμ’ ἐγώ, / τὴν νύχθ’ ὄλην ἤλαυνέ μ’ ἐν τοῖς στρώμασιν, / ὥστ’ ἄρτι τουτὶ θοῖμάτιον αὐτοῦ λαβόν. (*Ec.* 37-40) The verb ἐλαύνω is often used in a nautical context, most commonly with the meaning ‘sailing’. However given the Salaminian reputation for oarsmanship, ‘rowing’ can be preferred as the translation here (as in the fragment of Plato n. 64 above), which also seems a more appropriately vigorous image in the context.

mythic material, which is drawn from the same cycle of stories, but also in their philosophical stance) are notably (albeit not uniquely) bleak in their outlook. The prologues (in each case spoken by Bellerophon)<sup>68</sup> both reject the idea that any man, whether rich or poor, can be truly fortunate, but argue that all are wretched in their own way:

οὐκ ἔστιν ὅστις πάντ' ἀνὴρ εὐδαιμονεῖ·  
ἢ γὰρ πεφυκῶς ἐσθλὸς οὐκ ἔχει βίον,  
ἢ δυσγενῆς ὧν πλουσίαν ἀροῖ πλάκα.

There is no man who is completely fortunate: either he is well-born but lacks a living, or he is of low birth but ploughs rich acres. (trans. Collard, Cropp & Lee)

(E. *Sth.* fr. 661 *TrGF*: 1-4)<sup>69</sup>

ἐγὼ τὸ μὲν δὴ πανταχοῦ θρυλούμενον  
κράτιστον εἶναι φημί μὴ φῦναι βροτῶ·  
τρισεῶν δὲ μοιρῶν ἐγκρινῶ νικᾶν μίαν,  
πλούτου τε χῶτῳ σπέρμα γενναῖον προσῆ  
πενίας τ'· ἀριθμὸν γὰρ τοσόνδε προουθέμην.  
ὁ μὲν ζάπλουτος, εἰς γένος δ' οὐκ εὐτυχῆς,  
ἀλγεῖ μὲν ἀλγεῖ, παγκάλως δ' ἀλγύνεται  
ὄλβου διοίγων θάλαμον ἥδιστον χερί.  
ἔξω δὲ βαίνων τοῦδε τὸν πάρος χρόνον  
πλουτῶν ὑπ' ἄτης ζεῦγλαν ἀσχάλλει πεσών.  
ὅστις δὲ γαῦρον σπέρμα γενναῖόν τ' ἔχων  
βίου σπανίζει, τῶ γένει μὲν εὐτυχεῖ,  
πενία δ' ἐλάσσων ἐστίν, ἐν δ' ἀλγύνεται  
φρονῶν, ὑπ' αἰδοῦς δ' ἔργ' ἀπωθεῖται χερῶν.

I myself say —in fact it's a common refrain everywhere— that it's best for a man not to have been born. He has three estates, of which I shall be judging one superior; and they are wealth, noble blood, and poverty: that's the complete count I put forward. The very wealthy man, but without the fortune of birth, is miserable, yes, miserable — but it is a splendid misery when his hand opens up his treasure-house for his delight; yet when he goes outside it, despite his wealth during the time before, he falls under folly's yoke and suffers hard. Then, the man

68. Although the attribution of fr. 661 is less secure; cf. Collard, Cropp, & Lee 1995: 86 for a brief discussion of the evidence. Fr. 661 is however attributed to Bellerophon by Kannicht in *TrGF*. Fr. 268 is universally attributed to Bellerophon, with the exception of Dixon (whose reconstruction diverges from the scholarly consensus in almost every respect. See n. 23 for a full discussion of Dixon's suggestions).

69. cf. *Ran.* 1216-19. The prologue was presumably well known, and is quoted without being named.

with proud and noble blood who lacks a living, has the fortune of his birth but poverty makes him inferior, his thoughts inside are misery, and shame makes him reject manual work. (trans. Collard, Cropp & Lee)

(E. *Bell.* fr. 285 *TrGF*: 1-14)

The prologue of the *Bellerophon* goes even further, as the hero suggests that not only are the lives of both rich and poor men blighted with misery, but that it is in fact better never to have experienced good things at all (18: οὕτως ἄριστον μὴ πεπειρᾶσθαι καλῶν), since this only makes inevitable suffering and misery more difficult to bear.

*Bellerophon's* striking rejection of good things (καλά) stands in stark contrast to the ethos of comedy, whose celebration and pursuit of the good things in life is a defining aspect of the genre, and one which dominates the second half of *Peace*. Plays celebrating agricultural and festive abundance were common, with the characters returning to a state of utopian, golden age plenty in which food, wine, and sex are available automatically and without limit.<sup>70</sup> While the element of automatism often found in utopian comedies does not feature strongly in *Peace*,<sup>71</sup> the play celebrates the advent of the good things/blessings (ἀγαθά) which are enjoyed by the hero and his community as a result of the peace. Throughout the play, Trygaeus and the chorus declare the arrival and enjoyment of ἀγαθά. They pray for ἀγαθά before they rescue the goddess Peace (453: ἡμῖν δ' ἀγαθὰ γένοιτ'. ἡ παιῶν, ἡ); the community is offered a share in the benefits of ἀγαθά (888: σκέψασθ' ὅσ' ὑμῖν ἀγαθὰ παραδώσω φέρων); the chorus praise god for changing things in favour of ἀγαθά (945-6: νῦν γὰρ δαίμων φανερῶς / εἰς ἀγαθὰ μεταβιβάξει); other characters praise Trygaeus for bringing the ἀγαθά of peace (1198-9: ὦ φίλτατ', ὦ Τρυγαῖ', ὅσ' ἡμᾶς τὰγαθὰ / δέδρακας εἰρήνην

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70. On utopian abundance and the pursuit of ἀγαθά in comedy, cf. Wilkins 2000 ch. 3; The political aspects of comic utopianism are additionally discussed by Ruffell 2014.

71. Cf. Ruffell 2000 for a discussion of automatism as an important category of Old Comic utopias. Wilkins 2000: 129 argues that the theme of automation does feature in *Peace* to some degree, since in lines 1313-14 flat cakes are described as wandering about (πλανωμένοις); however, this is significantly less emphatic than the suggestion of automation found in *Acharnians* (976: αὐτόματα πάντ' ἀγαθὰ τῶδέ γε πορίζεται), in which the theme is still less prominent than in other utopia plays such as Cratinus' *Ploutoi*, Telekleides' *Amphictuones*, and Crates' *Theria*. However, the *hieros gamos* between Opora ('Harvest Time') and Trygaeus ('Wine-lees') which concludes the *Peace* strongly suggests the beginning of a new agrarian Golden Age.

ποιήσας); the play ends with a final celebration of ἀγαθά as Trygaeus prays that the community may get back the good things they had previously lost (1326-7: τὰγαθὰ πάνθ' ὅσ' ἀπωλέσαμεν /συλλέξασθαι πάλιν ἐξ ἀρχῆς); and the play closes with a final hymn to the ἀγαθά now enjoyed by the hero (1334-5: ὦ τρις μάκαρ ὡς δικαί- /ὡς τὰγαθὰ νῦν ἔχεις).

The *Peace's* celebration of the good life is not (unlike in *Acharnians*) confined to the hero, but is also the theme of the chorus, who state that Trygaeus' actions are good not only for him, but for everyone (911: ἅπασιν),<sup>72</sup> and the second parabasis contains an extended hymn to the pleasures of the countryside and of rural life (1127-1171). Attica is described as verdant and flourishing; rain falls gently on the recently sown fields (1140-1); grapes and wild figs ripen on the vine (1161-5); the farmers enjoy all the abundant offerings of the countryside: roast chickpeas (1136: κὰνθρακίζων τούρεβίνθου), beans (1144: φασήλων) thrushes and finches (1149: τὴν κίχλην καὶ τὸ σπίνω), beestings (1150: πύος), hare (1150: λαγῶα), myrtle-berries (1154: μυρρίνας), and thyme (1169: θύμου), and they grow fat on the offerings of the summer (1170-1: κᾶτα γίγνομαι παχὺς / τηνικαῦτα τοῦ θερούς). As Moulton (1981: 95-8) has observed, the chorus' description of country life appears to take in all the seasons, from the autumnal pleasures of roasting acorns over the fire, through to springtime with rain and the first milk of birthing animals, and the chirruping cicadas of the summer, thereby building a picture of year-round, limitless plenty.

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72. This communality is not exclusive to *Peace*; in *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae* (and to a lesser extent also in *Wealth*), for example, the protagonists achieve benefits not only for themselves, but for the city as a whole. However, this aspect of communality is at its most emphatic in *Peace*, whose hero is considerably more altruistic than the vast majority of Aristophanes' protagonists, who are often highly individualistic and very little concerned with their community as a whole (Cf. Whitman 1964: ch. 3, Sutton 1980b: ch. 2). In particular, the *Acharnians*, with like *Peace* celebrates the advent of ἀγαθά (as discussed below), is considerably less communal in its outlook, since the ἀγαθά of the play are granted to the hero Dicaeopolis alone (976: αὐτόματα πάντ' ἀγαθὰ τῷδὲ γε πορίζεται), and he refuses throughout the play to share his good fortune with members of the wider community. The characterisation of comedy as a genre of communal celebration and shared plenty is therefore to a degree specious, since this aspect is in fact unusually emphatic in *Peace*, which in this regard is not characteristic of the genre as a whole.

The description in the *Peace* of the landscape outside of the city as a place of joyful abundance stands in stark contrast to the non-urban space hinted at in the Bellerophon myth. In the *Iliad* Bellerophon is described wandering (6.201: ἀλᾶτο) in the wilderness of the Aelian plain, shunning the path of other men (6.202: πάτον ἀνθρώπων ἀλειίνων), and this episode appears to directly precede the flight to heaven which is the climax of Euripides' play. Unless Euripides departed significantly from the established myth,<sup>73</sup> the *Bellerophon* must therefore have depicted the hero in the Aelian plain either before or after (or possibly even both before and after) his fall from Pegasus.<sup>74</sup> The depiction of non-urban space as wild, eremitic or hostile is a common theme in tragedy, and of extant plays features most prominently in (pseudo) Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, and *Ajax* (as well as to some extent *Antigone*), and Euripides' *Trojan Women* and *Bacchae*. Rush Rehm's 2002 book *The Play of Space* discusses in detail the importance of eremitic space in tragedy, in particular four plays (*Antigone*, *Philoctetes*, *Ajax*, and *Prometheus Bound*) which use eremitic space as their dramatic setting either in part or in whole, and argues that spaces described as ἔρημος are characterised as wild, desolate, and frightening; and D. M. Carter has argued in a 2006 chapter entitled 'At Home, Round Here, Out There: The City and Tragic Space' that space outside the city is frequently in tragedy a place of trouble, and that the presentation of city space as a place of safety in contrast to a wild and frightening 'out there' space is "a characteristic structure" (161) of Greek tragedy.

Given firstly the tendency of tragedy to characterise non-urban space in this way; and secondly the centrality of eremitic, wild space to the portion of the Bellerophon myth told in Euripides' play, it seems highly probable that the *Bellerophon* was at least in part set in an eremitic space akin to those found in other plays with non-urban settings. Indeed, when

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73. This has been suggested by Dixon 2014, in opposition to the majority of scholarship which is largely in agreement that the play depicted Bellerophon's wandering, flight, and fall. Dixon suggests instead that the play featured Stheneboea, and took place in Lycia at the palace of king Iobates.

74. Di Gregorio (1983) argues that the play began with Bellerophon wandering on the Aelian plain; and Dobrov (2001: 95) similarly suggests that the entirety of the play was set on the Aelian plain, and that it opened with Bellerophon's wanderings; Collard, Cropp, & Lee (1995: 99-100) however suggest that the wandering could have taken place either before or after the fall from Pegasus. However all three are in agreement that Bellerophon's wandering in the wilderness was featured in the play.

Trygaeus first sets out on his beetle, the slave warns that such desertion may be the result of his venture, when he tells the children that in flying to heaven their father will leave them ἐρήμους (112-3: ὦ παιδί', ὁ πατήρ ἀπολιπὼν ἀπέρχεται / ὑμᾶς ἐρήμους εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν λάθρα). However, as we have seen, far from leaving his children ἐρήμους, quite the opposite state of affairs results from Trygaeus' flight, which ushers in a state of verdant plenty for his family and community. If the *Bellerophon* was indeed, as seems likely, a play whose setting emphasised eremitic space, *Peace*'s depiction of non-urban space as idyllic, verdant, and a refuge from the troubles of the city is potentially another way in which the play sets up a contrast between the ethos of tragedy, characterised by failure, and that of comedy, characterised by success and celebration. Not only the heroes Bellerophon and Trygaeus, one a success and the other a failure, one who spurns life's pleasures and the other who celebrates the advent of ἀγαθά; but even the landscape in which their stories are enacted, one bleak and the other joyful, one empty and the other bursting with life, become part of the distinction between the tragic and comic worlds.

The celebration of ἀγαθά and of pastoral plenty found in the *Peace* replicates the earlier, albeit less extended, use of this comic theme in the *Acharnians*, in which the re-opening of trade allows Dicaeopolis to access the good things available in peacetime (873: ὅσ' ἐστὶν ἀγαθὰ Βοιωτοῖς ἀπλῶς), and the chorus describe good things coming of their own accord to the hero (976: αὐτόματα πάντ' ἀγαθὰ τῷδέ γε πορίζεται). The fact that the theme in *Peace* recalls its appearance *Acharnians* serves to reinforce the idea that good things and the good life are the stuff of comedy, and that comedy's ethos stands in stark contrast to that of *Peace*'s most prominent tragic models, *Bellerophon* and *Stheneboea*, which both emphasise the idea that good things are at best fleeting, and that life is fundamentally bleak and full of suffering. The repetition of the theme of ἀγαθά from the *Acharnians* however also highlights the very different stances towards tragedy in the two plays. The climax of the earlier play's paratragic sequence, in which Dicaeopolis addresses the chorus disguised as Euripides' Telephus, begins as follows:

μή μοι φθονήσητ', ἄνδρες οἱ θεώμενοι,  
εἰ πτωχὸς ὢν ἔπειτ' ἐν Ἀθηναίοις λέγειν

μέλλω περὶ τῆς πόλεως, τρυγωδίαν ποιῶν.  
τὸ γὰρ δίκαιον οἶδε καὶ τρυγωδία.

Do not be indignant with me, members of the audience, if, though a beggar, I speak before the Athenians about public affairs in a comedy. Even comedy is acquainted with justice.

(*Ach.* 496-500)

In this passage (which directly proceeds the passage reworked in Hermes' explanation of the war, for which see n. 51 above; this specific passage of the *Acharnians* is therefore a prominently foregrounded intertext in the play), Dicaeopolis attempts to elide the differences between tragedy and comedy, and to suggest that comedy should take its place alongside tragedy as a genre central to the political life of the city. In *Peace* however, it is not the similarities but the differences between tragedy and comedy which are emphasised, as tragedy is presented as a genre characterised by the failure of its characters to achieve their aims; and this is in turn linked to tragedy's more limited ability to innovate in its use of mythic material, in contrast to comedy's freedom, as in *Peace*, to turn tragic/mythic models of failure and suffering into stories of success and the advent of ἀγαθά.

It is not only Bellerophon's rejection of good things in the prologue which is in turn rejected in *Peace*'s celebration of ἀγαθά; the bleak, atheistic sentiments of the *Bellerophon*'s opening are also given a comic twist in *Peace*. The so-called atheistic fragment is attributed by almost all commentators to Bellerophon, and appears to come from an early part of the play, most probably the prologue;<sup>75</sup> and it contains a strong denial of the existence of the gods:

φησὶν τις εἶναι δῆτ' ἐν οὐρανῷ θεούς;  
οὐκ εἰσὶν, οὐκ εἶσ', εἴ τις ἀνθρώπων θέλει  
μὴ τῷ παλαιῷ μῶρος ὦν χρῆσθαι λόγῳ.

Does someone say there are indeed gods in heaven? There are not, there are not, if a man is willing not to rely foolishly on the antiquated reasoning. (trans. Collard, Cropp & Lee)

(*E. Bell.* 286 *TrGF*: 1-3)

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75. Again, only Dixon differs from other commentators here; see n. 23 above for a discussion of Dixon's unusual reconstruction of the play.

In a typically literalistic comic move (i.e. the transformation of the idea “there are no gods in heaven” from meaning that there are no gods in existence, to meaning that they have simply gone on holiday), the *Peace* turns Bellerophon’s atheistic melancholy into a joke; and instead of being thwarted by an angry Zeus, Trygaeus finds heaven is unoccupied. While of course in Euripides, Bellerophon’s belief that the gods, and therefore any form of divine justice, are absent from the universe is a cause of despair, for a comic hero the gods’ absence is nothing but an opportunity. That this theme of divine absence in *Peace*, taken from its tragic model, is so central to the comic hero’s success, again shows the importance of rewriting myth both to comedy, and to the success of *Peace*’s hero. Indeed it is the absence of (most of) the gods which creates the power vacuum which allows Trygaeus to rescue Peace and thereby rearrange the world more to his advantage behind the Olympians’ backs; and therefore what was in tragedy a cause of misery and failure for the hero becomes in comedy, through a reformulation of the mythic model, the very cause of Trygaeus’ success.

### **Conclusions**

*Peace*’s anti-tragic stance is not limited to its overtly parodic reformulation of Pegasus-as-beetle; but rather the refutation of tragedy and the tragic is built deep into the structure of the plot. The play’s relationship with tragedy is primarily characterised through the transformation of a model of tragic failure into a story of comic success; and the ability of comedy, and its heroes, to succeed is thereby linked to its very ability to transform and reformulate its mythic models, and to its relative narrative freedom in comparison with tragedy. That Euripides was of all the tragedians arguably the most innovative in his use of myth makes the use of specifically Euripidean tragedy in the *Peace*’s contrast of tragic and comic myth significant, since it is precisely in the period when tragedy most appears to be taking on the narrative freedom of comedy that it becomes necessary to reclaim mythic innovation as the property of comedy alone. By choosing tragic models whose heroes are so strikingly bleak in their outlook, the transformation of these models into a comic story of celebration becomes not only a transformation of tragic narrative, but also a refutation of the tragic ethos. As emphatically as Trygaeus’ model, Bellerophon, rejected life’s pleasures, Trygaeus and the *Peace* celebrates them. In the immediate aftermath of the peace in 421,



*Peace* therefore presents comedy as a fitting genre in which to celebrate the ἀγαθά which must now come to Athens, as surely as they come to Trygaeus.

### ***Birds***

The *Birds*' interest in myth-making and the invention of new narratives is, if anything, even more overt than that of the *Peace*. Like the earlier play, *Birds* uses the end of an existing tragic/mythic story as the launch-pad for a new flight of fancy. The hero Peisetairos<sup>76</sup> ability to erect new mythic narratives on the scaffolding of old is key to his success as he re-writes the origins of the universe to place the birds at its centre; and the plot as a whole encompasses a series of mythic traditions, as ideas of theogony, theomachy, and city-founding are combined with the more specific (though by no means fixed) narrative of the Tereus-myth, in order to create a new story which is at once entirely new, and strangely familiar. Moreover, Peisetairos' modulation of myth is even more successful than his predecessor's in the *Peace*. While Trygaeus succeeds in ascending the heavens where his tragic model failed, and is able to rearrange affairs on Olympus more to his, and mankind's, benefit, any real conflict with Zeus himself is deftly avoided. Peisetairos by contrast embarks on a holy war in which he finally displaces the (still un-staged) king of the gods at the head of the Olympian hierarchy. This chapter will investigate how the play's new myths are first invented; before examining how, in contrast to the *Peace*, which steadfastly rejects the negative elements of its tragic model, *Birds* incorporates the more disturbing aspects of the myths it draws on into its own fictional world, which is resultantly considerably darker and less celebratory than the *Peace*. The final section will consider the *Birds*' creation of the fictional bird-city on stage, and suggest that the play interrogates the gap between what can be imagined, and what can feasibly be represented, in comedy.

### **Myth-Making in the *Birds***

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76. I follow Dunbar's spelling 'Peisetairos' throughout. There is some confusion in the manuscript tradition about the exact form of the hero's name (for which cf. Dunbar 1995: 128-9). However, it is clear that it is some combination of the verb πείθω and the noun ἑταῖρος.

The plot of the *Birds* is in some ways the most ambitious (and indeed, at over 1700 lines, it is certainly the longest) of all of Aristophanes' plays. The hero Peisetairos escapes upwards from Athens towards the heavens, and his transformation from disaffected citizen to tyrant, and finally to god is a feat of *hybris* unsurpassed by any other Aristophanic hero. Additionally, the play is the most eclectically intertextual of all of Aristophanes' extant works, drawing on a variety of literary and non-literary sources to create a mythic patchwork which is at once new, when taken in its entirety, but also completely derivative, since no individual element in the patchwork is fully without precedent or source. Like the *Peace*, the plot is formed through the modulation and transformation of traditional myth, which is in turn combined with comedy's own generic conventions. The first of these conventions of comic plotting occurs at the very start of the play, as the play takes its initial impetus from a grand act of literalisation (similar to the *Peace*'s literalisation of 'there are no gods in heaven', discussed above). The phase 'going to the crows' (ἐς κόρακας) appears frequently in Aristophanes,<sup>77</sup> and is roughly equivalent to the English 'going to hell' which can similarly be used either as an exhortation to others, or as a description of a less-than-ideal state of affairs; and the opening of *Birds* finds the hero and his companion going literally ἐς κόρακας, following a raven and a crow who seem to be leading them into the wilderness and towards the birds.

Once this literalistic comic turn has set the plot in motion, Peisetairos' grand plan begins to take shape, structured on the basis of two overlapping mythic models, firstly the Tereus-myth, which provides Peisetairos with his initial idea (46-8), and to which this chapter will return in its second section; and secondly a pseudo-Hesiodic cosmology in which traditional narrative patterns of theogony and theomachy are used as the basis of Peisetairos' re-invention of the traditional mythic history of the world, as well as his grand plan to take on

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77. 477, 601 PCG, *Ach.* 864, 892, *Eq.* 1314, *Nub.* 123, 133, 646, 789, 871, *Vesp.* 51, 458, 835, 852, 982, *Pax* 19, 117, 500, 1221, *Av.* 28, 889, 990, *Ran.* 187, 189, 607, *Plut.* 394, 604, 782. It is interesting to note such a high concentration of the phase in *Clouds* and *Peace*, both plays which explore the theme of flight in one way or another. The similarly high frequency of use in *Wasps* is probably explained by the prevalence of animal-imagery in that play, as discussed in ch. 1.

the gods with the birds as his allies. This strategy of plot creation, whereby new myths are created on the scaffolding of existing ones, both engages with the comic discourse of novelty and the genre's unique power to compose new mythic structures (what Lowe 2000: 161-2 has called 'unretold stories', and Dobrov 1997: 99 a *hapax dromenon*), whilst simultaneously failing to fully disengage from the 'culture of retelling' identified by Lowe (2000: 269) as fundamental to storytelling both comic and otherwise in this period.

The primary intertextual model for the *Birds* is, perhaps inevitably in a play which takes the creation of creation-myths as a central theme, Hesiod's *Theogony*. The primarily Hesiodic foundation of Peisetairos' new creation-myth is introduced early in the hero's interaction with the chorus, when the hero inserts the birds at the head of the accepted Hesiodic genealogy in which Earth and Heaven bear the Titans and Chronos, father of Zeus (*Theog.* 116-175):

<Πε>	οὕτως ὑμῶν ὑπεραλγῶ,
	οἵτινες ὄντες πρότερον βασιλῆς—
<Χο>	ἡμεῖς βασιλῆς; τίνας;
<Πε>	ὕμεις
	πάντων ὅπος' ἔστιν, ἐμοῦ πρώτον, τουδί, καὶ τοῦ Διὸς αὐτοῦ,
	ἀρχαιότεροι πρότεροι τε Κρόνου καὶ Τιτάνων ἐγένεσθε,
	καὶ Γῆς.

Pei: So grieved am I for your sake, who once upon a time were kings –

Ch: Us kings? What of?

Pei: Yes, you, kings over everything that exists, over me here to begin with, and over Zeus himself; you who are senior in birth and antiquity to Chronos and the Titans and to Earth!

(*Av.* 466-70)

Despite the clear basis of this genealogy in the *Theogony*, Peisetairos' myth-telling is innovative in two ways. Firstly, and most obviously, the hero has inserted the birds at the very beginning (ἀρχαιότεροι) of this genealogy, before Zeus and Chronos and even the Earth came into being, so that they become the first inhabitants of the void which preceded creation. This is a complete act of fiction, unprecedented in the Hesiodic source material, or indeed any other existing Greek cosmology; however, other than this insertion, the content of the Hesiodic material is left largely intact, and is therefore easily recognisable. In addition to this newly fictional addition, the perspective from which this pseudo-Hesiodic genealogy is told

is altered: while the *Theogony* progresses chronologically from Chaos, forwards through Earth and the Titans, to the ‘present day’ Olympian gods, Peisetairos works backwards from the current king of heaven to the beginnings of the world with Earth, mentioning first Zeus (τοῦ Διὸς), then Chronos and the Titans, and Ge only last (τε Κρόνου καὶ Τιτάνων ἐγένεσθε, / καὶ Γῆς). By inverting the Hesiodic narrative order, but maintaining (with the exception of the addition of the birds) the order of succession found in the *Theogony*, Peisetairos is able to put his own spin on existing material, which is accordingly viewed from the perspective of his own present, rather than beginning in the distant past. This use of Hesiod, through which innovation interacts with intertextuality, allows the play to create new myths which still preserve their source material intact enough to be recognisable to the audience, and thereby places the play’s fictional inventions within an existing mythic framework.

No sooner has Peisetairos located his myth-making in the Hesiodic tradition, he begins to introduce Aesopic elements into the story. When the birds express surprise at their newfound place at the head of the traditional Hesiodic genealogy, Peisetairos says that they would have known this if only they had studied their Aesop (471: ἀμαθῆς γὰρ ἔφυς κοῦ πολυπράγμων, οὐδ’ Αἴσωπον πεπάτηκας). As Chapter One discussed, the use of Aesopic material is a recurrent feature in Aristophanes’ plays (e.g. *Wasps*, *Peace*); and as in *Peace* it is here juxtaposed with more ostensibly ‘serious’ epic/mythic material, thereby inserting an explicitly ‘low’ element into the play’s mythic structure. However, unlike previous usages of Aesop in Aristophanes, which have always utilised fables attested in other sources and which were therefore presumably traditional and widely known, the Aesopic story here appears to be entirely the invention of the increasingly unscrupulous hero:

ὃς ἔφασκε λέγων κορυδὸν πάντων πρώτην ὄρνιθα γενέσθαι,  
 προτέραν τῆς γῆς, κάπειτα νόσῳ τὸν πατέρ’ αὐτῆς ἀποθνήσκειν·  
 γῆν δ’ οὐκ εἶναι, τὸν δὲ προκεῖσθαι πεμπαῖον· τὴν δ’ ἀποροῦσαν  
 ὑπ’ ἀμηχανίας τὸν πατέρ’ αὐτῆς ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ κατορύξει.

He said in his tale that the Lark was born first of all the birds, before the Earth came to be. Then her father fell sick and died; there was no earth, he’d been lying unburied for four days, she had no idea what to do, and finally in desperation she buried her father in her own head.

(Av. 472-5)

This story of the lark is not attested elsewhere, either as Aesopic or otherwise, nor is it identified in the scholia as Aesopic in origin. Rather, the element of animal fable seems to be at best Aesopic in type, in that it mimics the conventional features of the genre's animal stories,<sup>78</sup> with the name of Aesop itself added to give the story a sense of authority, and of traditionally accepted wisdom, despite being a complete act of invention. The specific content of the story seems to owe something to Hesiod, and particularly to *Theogony* 924-6, which relates the story of the birth of Athena in which she is born from the head of her father Zeus. Here however, the narrative pattern is inverted, and instead of being born from the head of her father, the lark buries her father in her own head. To these pseudo-Hesiodic and pseudo-Aesopic elements a typically comic, and Aristophanic, pun is added, since the story seems to play on the similarity between the Greek word for the crested lark (κορυδός) and head or top (κορυς or κορυφή), which is indeed used by Hesiod to describe the head of Zeus from which Athena is born (fr. 343 MW 11-12: τὴν μὲν ἔτικτε πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε / παρ κορυφῆν). This combination of Hesiodic myth with an animal fable in the style of Aesop via the medium of a comic pun to create a new story which suits the purposes of the storyteller shows in microcosm the mythopoetic strategy of the *Birds* as a whole.

Along with this use of the traditionally didactic Aesopic tradition, Peisetairos also taps into the language of the newly emerging genre of historiography, in order to lend his ludicrous re-writing of history greater authority. Elements of ethnographic discourse have been detected by Rusten (2013) in the bird chorus' later songs (Av. 1470-81, 1482-93, 1553-64, 1694-1705) in which Athens is described as if it were a strange and distant land. Rusten argues that the bird chorus' description of their flight engages with the poetic tradition of "fabulous ethnography" (307), and in particular stories about the Hyperboreans, who could supposedly be reached only by means of flight. Half-mythic stories surrounding the Hyperboreans are well established in the poetic tradition (appearing in, for example, Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women* fr. 150 MW, Pindar *Pythian* 10.29-30, and later in Horace *Carm.*

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78. The connection between Aesop and animal stories was discussed at length in chapter 1, which argues that while not all Aesopic material contains animals, there was a strong association between fable and animals.

2.20.16); but they are conversely rejected by Herodotus (4.36), who relates how when he looked into (ὀρέων) all the many things written (γράψαντας) on the subject, he discovered them to be nonsense (οὐδένα νοον ἔχοντας).

While the later choral songs therefore appear to engage primarily with a poetic tradition of fabulous, semi-mythic ethnography, Peisetairos' argument here, in both its language and content, is more suggestive of the more historiographical strand of ethnography which (along with other new modes of intellectual inquiry, such as medicine and natural history) was emergent in the fifth century, and which crystallised in Herodotus' ethnographic work. Building on Lloyd's earlier work on the development of intellectual and scientific inquiry in the fifth century,<sup>79</sup> Rosalind Thomas (2000) has convincingly argued that, far from being primarily a 'storyteller', Herodotus was closely engaged with contemporary intellectual language and methods more often associated with Sophists such as Protagoras and Gorgias. Thomas in particular argues that Herodotus' use of the language of proof (τεκμήρια) and demonstration (ἀποδείκνυμι, ἐπίδειξις and cognates) mirrors contemporary sophistic discourse in both rhetorical and scientific writing. In lines 481-506, Peisetairos insists that the cock was the first king of the Persians, before Darius and Megabazus, the cuckoo king over Egypt and Phoenicia (504-6), and even the kite over the Greeks themselves (499-500); and this particular emphasis on non-Greek, eastern peoples is strongly reminiscent of the type of historiographic ethnography practised by Herodotus (in particular in books one and two of the *Histories*, which deal with Persia and Egypt). Furthermore, Peisetairos' engagement with ethnographic ideas is, as in Herodotus,<sup>80</sup> accompanied by a rationalising, scientific tone, in which his examples are presented as 'proof' (482: τεκμήρια) which can be 'demonstrated' (483: ἐπιδείξω, 500: ἀτέδειξέν). However, the sheer bizarreness of the stories related by Peisetairos in this authoritative, pseudo-historiographical tone only draws attention

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79. Cf. Lloyd 1966.

80. Note that the word τεκμήρια is in fact used with greatest frequency by Herodotus in book 2, which is strongly ethnographic in character (Cf. 2.13.1, 2.22.6, 2.43.7, 2.58.3, 2.104.2). Thomas 2000: 199-200 suggests that Herodotus employs this word when his arguments are in fact at their most obscure, difficult, or tenuous, and that Herodotus' tone in such passages has "a distinctly ostentatious, argumentative edge" (200). Such an argumentative tone is similarly characteristic of Peisetairos, in this passage and elsewhere.

to the gap between his act of invention, and the historical authority which he is claiming for it, so that the effect is only to reinforce the total newness and fictionality of the stories, rather than to root them in a sense of intellectually cutting-edge historicism.

Peisetairos' cosmological origins-myth is set within the context of theomachy, a theme which appears in the lines both preceding and following the hero's invention of a new creation myth for the birds. By locating his bird-myths within the Hesiodic mythic tradition, Peisetairos further suggests that the successions which characterise the *Theogony*, in which one ruler is violently displaced by the next, will also shape the plot of the *Birds*; and Peisetairos' insistence that the birds must declare a 'holy war' (556: ἱερὸν πόλεμον) against the gods confirms that his plan is broadly theomachic in character. Again, mythic elements are combined with typical comic features, in this case the reference to contemporary political ideas and events which are out of place within this mythic context,<sup>81</sup> to create a new, peculiarly comic, myth. Peisetairos' initial suggestion of placing the gods under an embargo would appear to be inspired by the Athenian siege of Melos a year and a half previously,<sup>82</sup> in which the Melians had been starved into submission and the city razed:

ὥστ' ἄρξετ' ἀνθρώπων μὲν ὥσπερ παρνόπων,  
τοὺς δ' αὖ θεοὺς ἀπολεῖτε λιμῶ Μηλίων.

The result will be that you'll rule over men as if they were locusts, and as for the gods, you'll crush them by starvation like the Melians.

(Av. 185-6)

To this, a further reference to the recent events of the Peloponnesian War is added, as Peisetairos likens his heavenly embargo on κνῖσα (193) to the transit limitations put in place

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81. Sutton 1980a: 10 suggests that unlike in Old Comedy, satyr drama did not insert contemporary political and cultural elements into their mythic storylines. On the interplay of mythic and political narrative elements in Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros*, cf. Bakola 2010: 208-220; and in Old Comedy in general, Bowie 2000: 324-7. The juxtaposition of these anachronistically contemporary elements with otherwise mythic narratives appears therefore to be a typically Old Comic way of handling such mythic storylines, and one which is not shared with other genres, even those such as satyr play which also tell comic versions of myths.

82. For the siege of Melos, cf. Thuc. 5.114-6.

by the Boiotians, under which the Athenians wishing to pass through to Delphi had to obtain a pass (δίοδος) from the authorities.<sup>83</sup>

To this combination of Hesiodic theomachy and contemporary siege techniques and economic blockades, Peisetairos adds stories taken from myth more generally, concerning the affairs of Zeus with mortal women, which are not drawn from any particular text, but rather reference the broader mythic tradition surrounding Zeus:

καὶ τοῖσι θεοῖσιν ἀπειπεῖν  
διὰ τῆς χώρας τῆς ὑμετέρας ἐστυκόσι μὴ διαφοιτᾶν,  
ὥσπερ πρότερον μοιχεύσοντες τὰς Ἀλκμήνας κατέβαινον  
καὶ τὰς Ἀλόπας καὶ τὰς Σεμέλας·

And [you] prohibit the gods from passing to and fro through your territory with their cocks up, in the way they used to come down previously and debauch their Alcmenas and their Alopes and their Semeles.

(*Av.* 556-9)

The use of these names in the plural (Ἀλκμήνας, Ἀλόπας, Σεμέλας) is at once rather dismissive in tone, whilst also giving the impression of a generalised mythic pattern, more extensive than the examples of these three women alone, in which the gods swoop down to earth and commit adultery with mortal women; and the use of the verb μοιχεύω for these illicit sexual relations, a technical term taken from the Athenian legal system whose prosaic register seems out of place in this mythic context, but which, in keeping with Peisetairos' general tone in this passage, serves to bring the gods down towards the level of humans by suggesting that they too are not above being made subject to mortal laws and justice.<sup>84</sup>

As Peisetairos re-writes the history of the universe to better suit his ends, the play places its emphasis on how exactly comic myths can be invented (almost) from scratch, as elements from myth are rewritten and recombined with the elements contemporary political and cultural discourse which are so strongly characteristic of comedy, thereby showing the

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83. A full discussion of the arrangements between Athens and Boiotia regarding Athenian access to Delphi can be found in Dunbar 1995: 196-7.

84. Cf. *Pax* 106: γράψομαι, discussed above, where legalistic language is similarly used in relation to Zeus.



process of comic plot invention in action. This patchwork approach to mythopoiesis in the *Birds* continues into the parabasis, in which the bird chorus expand on Peisetairos' earlier bird-theogony narrative (*Av.* 466ff.). The most overt model for the parabasis continues to be Hesiod, but a variety of additional sources both mythic and contemporary are drawn upon as part of the bird's myth of their own creation.

Following a brief sung strophe, the parabasis begins with an invocation to the audience to listen to the chorus so that they might learn everything correctly about the universe (690: ἴν' ἀκούσαντες πάντα παρ' ἡμῶν ὀρθῶς περὶ τῶν μετεώρων), with the word ὀρθῶς immediately indicating their intention of overwriting and correcting previous versions of mythic history which were, it is implied, incorrect. In this way the passage plays into the poetic tradition of mythic correction and revision (in which poets present innovations not as invention, but as a refinement or amendment of existing stories) which Griffiths (1990: 193) has argued is a particular characteristic of archaic poetry, and one which is driven by the highly agonistic context of poetic performance. As with Peisetairos' earlier invented ethnography, the chorus' invention is couched in the terms of contemporary intellectual discourse. The term ὀρθός seems to have been something of a buzzword amongst the Sophists, particularly Protogoras;<sup>85</sup> and, as Thomas argues, “‘correctness’ is part of the language of certainty, of philosophical proof, of theories of language, in the milieu which seems to have included the Hippocratic essays, the later prose writers of the fifth century (all from East Greece), certain sophists for rhetorical or display purposes (Gorgias), as well as for more obviously philosophical discussions (Prodicus, Protagoras)” (2000: 234-5).<sup>86</sup> The sophistic, intellectualising tone (confirmed through a mention of Prodicus himself in line 692) therefore adds a contemporary slant to the established tradition of presenting contradictory or ‘corrected’ versions of mythic stories. However, even the combination of this tradition of mythic correction with a contemporary sophistic tone is not unprecedented, but is anticipated by for example Pindar's *Olympian* 1, which similarly uses the contemporary language of ‘correction’ (*Ol.* 7.20: 

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85. Cf. Pl. *Phdr.* 267c; Protagoras' particular use of the term is also discussed by Schiappa 1991: 162-4.

86. Note that the term also appears in the *Clouds* (*Nub.* 250-1), where it is used by Socrates. On the comic tradition of lampooning the Sophists, cf. Carey 2000.

διορθῶσαι λόγον) in its revision of the myth of Pelops.<sup>87</sup> Despite the radical departure from traditional cosmology, the bird chorus' revisions are therefore simultaneously well grounded in not only the in the contemporary discourse of intellectual inquiry, but in existing poetic treatments of mythic innovation.

The chorus' modish, sophisticated language is juxtaposed with material taken from more traditional sources for myth. The chorus begins with an address to the audience as 'dwelling in darkness' (685: ἀμαυρόβιοι), 'like to the race of leaves' (685: φύλλων γενεᾷ προσόμοιοι), and 'formed from the mud' (686: πλάσματα πηλοῦ). The register is distinctly epic, with the highly conventional φύλλων γενεᾷ recalling amongst others Homer (*Iliad* 6.146: οἷη περ φύλλων γενεῆ τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν, 21.463-4: βροτῶν... οἷ φύλλοισιν ἐοικότες); and πλάσματα πηλοῦ reminiscent of both the *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, in which the first woman is made from clay (*Theog.* 571, *WD:* 61).<sup>88</sup> Both formulations traditionally emphasise the insignificance of mortal men in comparison to the gods, and their employment here suggests a similar level of distance between the bird chorus and their human audience as they begin their own claim to godlike status and knowledge. This stance of privileged immortal status and knowledge is signalled again through a close intertextual parallel with the final section of the invocation to the Muses in *Theogony* 104-115, and the programmatic passage which directly follows it. The request to the Muses in the *Theogony* to tell how the first gods and the rivers and the ocean came to be (*Theog.* 108-9: εἶπατε δ', ὡς τὰ πρῶτα θεοὶ καὶ γαῖα γένοντο / καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ πόντος) is echoed in *Birds* 691-2 (φύσιν οἰωνῶν γένεσιν τε θεῶν ποταμῶν τ' Ἑρέβους τε Χάους τε / εἰδότες), with the rather grand term οἰωνῶν (specifically a bird of religious omen) prefixing the more typically Hesiodic gods and rivers. By evoking

87. Pindar's engagement with the tradition of mythic correction in this poem is discussed by Howie 1983, who argues that the poet adopts a tone of "historical enquiry" (277) in order to lend authority to his reinvention of the myth, as well as Griffiths 1990 (above). Mythic innovation in Pindar is also discussed by Rutherford 2011.

88. This story of mankind being made from earth cannot be unique to Hesiod (and indeed a similar story occurs in Plato *Protagoras* 320d, in which men are made by the gods from earth and fire); however it is not conventional in the way of the description of mankind as leaves (characterised by Kirk 1990: 176 as "a poetical commonplace"), and would therefore despite any broader associations with the mythic tradition in general most probably be associated primarily with these two Hesiodic texts.

this Hesiodic passage, not only do these lines emphasise the displacement of the gods and other natural phenomena by the birds; the allusion to the invocation of the Muses to share their divine knowledge also draws attention to the fact that here no such divine intercession is needed, with the birds themselves instead assuming this position of poetic authority ordinarily occupied by the Muses. By usurping the Muses, the comic chorus assert their freedom from poetic and mythic tradition, and their ability to invent new stories where other poets, including Hesiod, must rely on those already handed down to them by the goddesses.

This apparent imaginative freedom to write the story of creation entirely anew is however undermined by the fact that very little of the parabolic material that follows is in fact new, but is instead cobbled together from a variety of religious and literary sources, albeit in an inventive way. The birds' cosmology at first continues in familiar Hesiodic terrain, and line 963 (Χάος ἦν καὶ Νύξ Ἐρεβός τε μέλαν πρῶτον καὶ Τάρταρος εὐρύς) is in fact almost directly lifted from the beginning of this passage (*Theog.* 123: ἐκ Χάεος δ' Ἐρεβός τε μέλαινά τε Νύξ ἐγένοντο). However, after this point the chorus' new cosmology begins to diverge from its initial intertext, and instead to incorporate elements of Orphic cosmology. The most notable of these is the inclusion of the Cosmic Egg laid by Night and from which Eros springs, which appears in line 695 and is a key element of the Orphic theogony-myth.<sup>89</sup> The inclusion of the Egg in a creation-myth which places the birds at the top of the divine hierarchy is a light comic touch typical of Aristophanes. As with the use of Hesiodic genealogy both here and in lines 466-70, the basic shape of the source myth is maintained,

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89. This appearance of the Egg in *Birds* is in fact the earliest extant example of the Cosmic Egg in relation to Orphic cosmology. It has however been argued that the Egg is one of the many elements of Orphic cosmology drawn from the Vedic tradition (for which cf. Luján 2011), and that it must therefore have existed in the Orphic tradition from an early stage (as has been argued by Bernabé 2008). For a fuller discussion of the Orphic aspects of this passage, cf. Bernabé 1995. For an overview of the Orphic Theogony, cf. Guthrie 1952: 78ff. The identification of Eros with the Orphic Phanes in these lines was made by Guthrie 1952: 95-6. Another aspect of the Orphic creation myths potentially appears earlier in the *Birds*, in the form of the σκῆπτρον which first appears in line 480 (and again at 510, 635), which comes to represent in the play the rulership of the world and which Peisetairos demands be handed over by Zeus (1535, 1600). The image of a Cosmic Sceptre is prominent in Orphic cosmologies, for which cf. West 1983: 71ff.

with the birds simply interposed into the existing narrative order, thereby creating a new myth out of old.

However even this apparent innovation of combining Hesiodic and Orphic material to create a new comic cosmology is not as innovative as it might first appear. Cratinus fr. 258 PCG, from his play *Cheirones* (which most likely dates to the 430s, and must certainly have been performed before Pericles' death at the end of that decade), deploys this exact same technique of combining Hesiodic and Orphic elements to create a new satirical cosmology. The fragment parodies Pericles, who here becomes a Zeus-figure, with the god's usual epithet νεφεληγερέτα changed instead to κεφαληγερέταν, a pun which probably recalls the (apparently notorious) strange shape of Pericles' head:<sup>90</sup>

Στάσις δὲ καὶ πρεσβυγενῆς  
Χρόνος ἀλλήλοισι μιγέντε  
μέγιστον τίκτετον τύραννον,  
ὄν δὴ κεφαληγερέταν  
θεοὶ καλέουσιν.

Political Strife and ancient-born Time came together and produced the greatest ruler, whom the gods in fact call “the Head-Gatherer.”

(Cratinus fr. 258 PCG, trans. Storey)

As well as the general tone and content, the reference to the epithet νεφεληγερέτα clearly locates this fragment within an epic cosmological tradition (it is used three times in the *Theogony*, at lines 558, 730, and 944). However the substitution of Χρόνος for Κρόνος, who would in the Hesiodic cosmological tradition be the father of Zeus, recalls the Orphic tradition, in which Chronos is named as the first primordial god.<sup>91</sup> If indeed this Cratinus fragment does encompass elements of Orphism, then the *Birds*' great mythic innovation lies to some degree in the expansion of an already extant idea, rather than in originality in the truest sense.

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90. For a discussion of Pericles' ‘onion-head’ in the comic tradition, and particularly Cratinus, cf. Revermann 1997.

91. For a discussion of Chronos in the Orphic cosmological tradition, cf. West 1983: 103-5, Betegh 2004: 140-3. According to this tradition it is Chronos who places the Cosmic Egg, from which Phanes/Eros is born and which features at *Av.* 695-9, in Aither. The Orphic overtones of Cratinus fr. 258 are discussed briefly by Bowie 2000: 326.

Aristophanes' cosmology in the *Birds* is of course on one level 'new' exactly as it claims, overwriting previous traditions with one which is ὀρθός and which places the birds at the centre of the creation-myth in a remarkable act of fiction which displays the boundless imaginative possibilities of comedy. However for all its apparent fictional innovation, the parabasis is firmly rooted in not only the epic tradition, through its use of material from both Hesiod and Homer, and the broader religious, and particularly Orphic, cosmological tradition. Despite this, through the sheer expansiveness and ambition of its intertextuality, the *Birds* recasts comedy's inherent 'secondariness'<sup>92</sup> as not a constriction, but a freedom, as the play draws on a seemingly limitless variety of genres and modes (including stories taken from everything from epic poetry and tragedy to historiography, ethnography, and religious traditions) to create its own mythopoetic texture. Furthermore, this re-use is additionally an act of self-reinvention, as the definition of the comic expands apparently without limit through the play's embrace of such a wide variety of literary genres and cultural modes.

### **Tragedy, Myth, and the Darker Side of the *Birds*' Fictional World**

While the myth-making strategy of the *Birds* is in many ways similar to that of the *Peace*, in that both plays combine material drawn from a variety of mythic, tragic, and epic sources, and remodulate it according to the conventions of comic storytelling, in its stance towards tragedy and tragic myth the *Birds* diverges significantly from its predecessor. The *Peace* is overtly parodic in its use of tragedy, and interacts closely with the particular telling and staging of Euripides' *Bellerophon*. In contrast, *Birds*' relationship with its tragic model, Sophocles' *Tereus*, is considerably looser. Unlike *Peace*, the play does not revisit the events dramatised in Sophocles' play, but rather picks up the story after this point; and other than one brief mention of the tragedian in a joke at lines 100-1 which appears to lampoon the ridiculousness of Tereus' appearance in Sophocles' play as a hoopoe,<sup>93</sup> the *Birds*' interest

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92. Cf. Leigh 2012: 90 (discussed above, in the introduction to this chapter).

93. The particular way in which Tereus' appearance is introduced in the *Birds* seems to suggest that the transformation into a hoopoe is at least particularly associated with Sophocles, if not completely unique to his version (as discussed below). When Tereus emerges from his thicket (92), Peisetairos and Euelpides burst out laughing, commenting in

seems to be primarily in the content of the myth utilised by the *Tereus*, and not in the particular dramatic or narrative qualities of Sophocles' specific telling of it. Furthermore, while *Peace* actively set itself against tragedy, characterising the genre as one of failure and misery, and therefore one which starkly contrasts with the play's own celebratory atmosphere, the *Birds*' use of tragedy is considerably more incorporative, not only in its relative lack of overt parody, but also in the way that the darker elements of its tragic and mythic models are subsumed into the fictional world of the play, which is subsequently of a very different character to that found in the *Peace*. This section will examine how the *Birds*' engagement with Sophocles' *Tereus*, and the Tereus-myth more broadly, is combined with its interaction with Hesiodic material, and particularly the theme of violent succession which is prominent throughout the *Theogony*, in a way which integrates rather than refutes (as per the *Peace*) the darker, and in many ways decidedly un-comic, aspects of these mythic narratives into the play's own structure.

The use of Sophocles' *Tereus* in the *Birds* is distinctive not only because it lacks the overly parodic stance which usually accompanies interactions with tragedy in Aristophanes, but also because it is highly unusual for Aristophanic interactions with tragedy to focus on Sophocles at all. While a number of plays use Euripidean paratragedy as scaffolding for the comic plot (e.g. *Acharnians*, *Peace*), or even ridicule Euripides more directly as a character on stage (e.g. *Acharnians*, *Thesmophoriazousae*), Sophocles rarely features more than in passing in Aristophanes, for example in *Peace* 694-9 where he is personally made a target of

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particular on his plumage (94: πτέρωσις) and crest (94: τριλοφίας), and Tereus replies that these are the indignities which Sophocles inflicts on him in his tragedies (100-1: τοιαῦτα μέντοι Σοφοκλέης λυμáίνεται / ἐν ταῖς τραγωδίασιν ἐμὲ τὸν Τηρέα.) Since the hoopoe, with its large patterned crest, is a considerably more outlandish-looking bird than the hawk it would seem that the ridiculous appearance of the hoopoe, and its association with the Sophoclean version of the story, is the object of the joke here. For an overview of the hoopoe in ancient Greek sources, cf. Thompson 1936: 95-100. However, the emphasis here on Sophocles' staging does not return after these lines. It is worth noting that it is unclear whether or not the hoopoe-Tereus was actually seen on stage in Sophocles' play; fr. 581 suggests that the metamorphosis was reported in some kind of messenger speech. However, for the view that the Tereus-metamorphosis may have been depicted, with Tereus shown at the end of the play in his hoopoe-guise cf. Slater 2002: 134-5, Dobrov 2001: 115-6.

ridicule, with his poetry itself escaping largely unscathed. Even in the *Frogs*, Sophocles' poetry somehow seems beyond the reach of parody, and he appears only at the end once the contest between Euripides and Aeschylus has been concluded. The absence of an established comic/Aristophanic caricature of either the tragedian or his tragedy therefore perhaps makes it easier for *Birds* to use the narrative and mythic structure of a Sophoclean play as the starting point for comedy, without the individual characteristics of the poet and his works obscuring a broader interaction with myth and tragedy as categories more generally, thereby allowing for a relationship between *Birds* and its tragic model which is contrastive without being so overtly competitive as that found in *Peace* and other plays.

Unfortunately, the exact content of the Tereus myth, and of Sophocles' play on the same subject, is contentious; and this is in part due to the impact of the version of the myth related by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* (6.412ff.), which as the only fully extant telling of the story must necessarily form part of the basis for reconstructing earlier mythic and literary versions, despite the obvious pitfalls involved in using a source which dates to a period so far removed, both temporally and otherwise, from Sophocles' own. With regard to the myth itself, it would seem that there were originally two parallel traditions, possibly but not definitely originating from the same source.<sup>94</sup> A version in which the nightingale sings in lament because she killed her son (here named Itylus, rather than Itys as in other sources) is attested at *Od.* 19.518-23, and a scholion on this passage suggests that this allusion is to a version in which the murder

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94. The argument for there being two alternative traditions is made in full by Fitzpatrick 2001, who suggests that the existence of two alternative names for the nightingale's son (Itys, as in Sophocles (cf. also *Av.* 212); and Itylus, as in Hom. *Od.* 19.518-23) may be evidence for two parallel traditions. This article contains an extended and persuasive discussion of both the pre-Sophoclean myth, and the content of Sophocles' play. Cf. also Sommerstein, Fitzpatrick, and Talbot 2006: 141-95; and a good overview of the evidence for the myth and its presentation in Sophocles *Tereus*; and Coe 2013, which also provides a good discussion of exactly how the plot of *Tereus* might be reconstructed. Much of the uncertainty about the play's plot surrounds whether Philomela was brought into her sister's household as a concubine, either in disguise or not, or whether, as in Ovid's version, she was abandoned by Tereus on the journey home, as well as whether Procne prior to discovering the truth believed her sister to be dead. However, whichever of these versions is correct, this aspect of the story makes no appearance in *Birds*.

was a mistake committed when she was attempting to kill not her own son, but her brother-in-law's son.<sup>95</sup> In Hesiod fr. 312 MW, the nightingale is associated with the swallow, who it seems in another version of the myth (the one seemingly used by Sophocles) aided the nightingale in murdering Itys/Itylus; and a temple painting dated to the seventh century BC on the metope of the Temple of Apollo at Thermon also seems to refer to a version in which the swallow participated in the murder.<sup>96</sup> The inclusion of Tereus as a hawk is attested in Aeschylus' *Supplices* 62, and it would seem that in earlier versions of the myth Tereus was turned into a hawk and not a hoopoe as in Sophocles (fr. 581); and Hesiod *WD.202-12* would also appear to associate the nightingale with the hawk in a way which may suggest some versions of the myth in which Tereus became a hawk.

While intrafamilial violence of some description is clearly present in even the earliest versions of the myth, the element of cannibalism is less well attested in pre-Sophoclean sources; however, it is probably alluded to in the *Agamemnon* (Aesch. *Ag.* 1140-5), where it is included in a passage which references a number of myths known to contain elements of cannibalism (including the story of Thyestes, 1090-7, in which similarly children are eaten by their own father).<sup>97</sup> There is no evidence for either the rape or the tongue removal prior to Sophocles; and indeed the evidence for these aspects in Sophocles' play is also not entirely conclusive, although fr. 595 (κερκίδος φωνή) strongly suggests that Philomela, as in Ovid, used weaving to reveal Tereus' crimes against her; and both the rape and mutilation, as well as the delivery of the message from Philomela to her sister Procne through weaving, are securely attested in a hypothesis of the play; and therefore (albeit that hypotheses are not always entirely accurate), it can be stated with reasonable certainty that these elements of rape and mutilation also featured in Sophocles' version of the myth.<sup>98</sup>

95. Cf. Sommerstein, Fitzpatrick & Talbot 2006: 143 n. 5.

96. Fitzpatrick 2001: 90.

97. The argument for the reference to Itys in *Ag.* 1140 being evidence for the myth at this point already ending in cannibalism is made more convincing if one accepts Denniston and Page's emendation of the final word of line 1145 from βίον to μόρον.

98. Fitzpatrick 2001: 91 n. 9 suggests also that there is 'implicit evidence' for the tongue-removal being a feature of the pre-Sophoclean myth, since "[t]he twittering of swallows was a traditional metaphor for people, particularly non-Greeks, who spoke inarticulately or



Given these features, both the Tereus-myth itself, and Sophocles' play, seem unusual choices for integration into a comic narrative of any kind. Although rape and other forms of sexual violence are common enough in Greek myth, the almost certain presence of both mutilation and intra-familial cannibalism in at least Sophocles' dramatisation (if not also earlier versions) of the Tereus story would seem to make it ill-suited to comic treatment, and the sheer unpleasantness of the myth seems at odds with the comic genre. However, unlike in the *Peace* in which the tragic ethos of the *Bellerophon* is actively refuted, the *Birds* does not attempt such an overt neutralisation of its model; and as the Tereus narrative is integrated into the comic drama, these darker elements lurk in the background of Aristophanes' play. When Tereus the Hoopoe is first introduced, Peisetairos quickly begins to over-write the Thracian king's tragic backstory of rape and mutilation with a narrative more appropriate to an appearance in comic drama. Asked why they have come in search of the Hoopoe, Peisetairos replies:

ὅτι πρῶτα μὲν ἦσθ' ἄνθρωπος ὥσπερ νῶ ποτε,  
 κἀργύριον ὠφείλησας ὥσπερ νῶ ποτε,  
 κοῦκ ἀποδιδούς ἔχαιρες ὥσπερ νῶ ποτε·  
 εἶτ' αὔθις ὀρνίθων μεταλλάξας φύσιν  
 καὶ γῆν ἐπέπτου καὶ θάλατταν ἐν κύκλῳ,  
 καὶ πάνθ' ὅσαπερ ἄνθρωπος ὅσα τ' ὄρνις φρονεῖς·

It's because you were originally a man, once upon a time, like us; and you owed people money, once upon a time, like us; and you liked to avoid paying them, once upon a time, like us. Then later you changed to the shape of a bird, and you've flown over land and sea in every direction; and you have all the knowledge that a man and a bird has.

(*Av.* 114-9)

The repetition of ὥσπερ νῶ ποτέ (and particularly the repeated use of the dual pronoun: 'just like us two') clearly attempts to elide the differences between the comic characters and the

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unintelligibly: ... As Philomela is transformed into a swallow in the myth, it is possible that the removal of her tongue explains the twittering song of the swallow." The absence of this aspect of the story in any of the pre-Sophoclean evidence does raise at least the possibility that these were innovations made by the tragedian; however given the gaps in the earlier evidence this is not a secure speculation by any means, and Fitzpatrick may well be correct in suggesting that the tongue removal was integral to the story even prior to Sophocles' play.

tragic interloper, and to integrate Tereus into a characteristically comic narrative of the financially-pressed hero seeking an escape from debt and poverty.<sup>99</sup> Tereus' metamorphosis into a bird is ascribed to vague money troubles (κάργυριον ὀφείλησας... κοῦκ ἀποδιδούς ἔχαιρες), with the εἴτ' at the beginning of line 117, a word which may denote not only temporal sequence but also consequence, suggesting that his transformation was spurred on by a desire to escape debt, rather than coming at the end of Tereus' traditional mythic narrative of familial strife, murder, and cannibalism. However the insertion of this stock comic scenario in fact only serves to highlight the gap between this version of Tereus' history and what the audience in fact knows about his gruesome past, and the 'real' mythic history is therefore made to overshadow the new comic narrative through its rather startling absence.

While the *Birds* presents an apparently perfect comic happy ending to the Tereus myth in which, as Aristotle (*Poet.* 1453a35-9, discussed above) suggests is appropriate for the genre, sworn enemies have been reconciled, and murder swept under the carpet, the myth's traditional, tragic ending at points intrudes. Tereus' post-tragic 'happy families' act, which in *Birds* sees him living contentedly with his wife the nightingale, is briefly interrupted in lines 209-14, when the traditional mythic history of the characters is referenced in Tereus' song, as he calls on his wife to deploy her bird-song lament, which in even the earliest versions of the myth is associated with her grief at her son's death,<sup>100</sup> to summon the other birds to assemble:

ἄγε, σύννομέ μοι, παῦσαι μὲν ὕπνου,  
 λῦσον δὲ νόμους ἱερῶν ὕμνων,  
 οὓς διὰ θείου στόματος θρηγεῖς  
 τὸν ἐμὸν καὶ σὸν πολύδακρυν Ἴτυν,  
 ἐλελιζομένη διεροῖς μέλεσιν  
 γένυος ξουθῆς.

Come, my consort, leave your sleep  
 and let forth the melodies of sacred song

99. For the theme of comic characters escaping their debts, see for example the opening monologue of *Clouds*. Old Comedy's clear interest in matters of money can be seen from the proliferation of titles which reference this theme, for example Cratinus' *Ploutoi*, Pherekrates' *Metalles*, and of course Aristophanes' own *Ploutos*.

100. Cf. Hom. *Od.* 19.518-23, where the nightingale is described singing in lament of her son.

with which from your divine lips you lament  
your child and mine, the much-bewailed Itys,  
quavering with the liquid notes  
of your vibrant throat.

(Av. 209-14)

Given the mythic narrative of sexual violence and the silencing of female voices which is recalled, albeit fleetingly, here in the mention of the traditional story associated with Tereus and Procne, the presentation of Procne when she finally appears on stage in lines 659ff. as one of the mute, nude female figures who often appear in comic dramas as silent recipients of aggressive male sexual desire seems significant.<sup>101</sup> The nightingale in *Birds* is not quite silent in the manner of for example Opora and Theoria in *Peace*, or Diallage in *Lysistrata*, since although like these characters she is not given speech as such, her song is represented through the aulos, which she is shown playing.<sup>102</sup> Since flute-girls were (almost) indistinguishable from prostitutes,<sup>103</sup> however, the representation of Procne's voice in this way only serves to further disempower her; in common with other such figures in Aristophanes, the speaking male characters direct sexual comments at Procne (e.g. (669: ἐγὼ διαμηρίζοιμ' ἄν αὐτήν ἠδέως, 673-4: ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ᾠδὸν νῆ Δί' ἀπολέψαντα χρῆ / ἀπὸ τῆς κεφαλῆς τὸ λέμμα),<sup>104</sup> and in the context of this treatment, and the associations of her presentation as an *auletris*, her flute-song, despite breaking her silence, only further reinforces her speechlessness and disempowerment, as the play replicates the treatment of female characters in Procne's original mythic tradition.<sup>105</sup>

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101. For a discussion of these figures in Aristophanes, and how they may have been staged, cf. Zweig 1992, Compton-Engle 2015 28-37.

102. On the staging of Procne, cf. Dunbar 1995: 421-2, who suggests that while it is unlikely that the pipe player himself was costumed as Procne, since a bird-mask (indicated in lines 672-4) would make it difficult for him to play, line 672 suggests that Procne did have a pipe at her lips, and therefore it seems that the actor must have mimed pipe-playing while the music was played off-stage.

103. On the *auletris* and other female entertainment at symposia, cf. McClure 2014: 21-2. Such flute-girls also appear in Aristophanes' *Wasps* (1368) and *Thesmophoriazousae* (1186), and both also fall into Zweig's category (n. 98 above) of mute, nude female figures.

104. It is also possible that χρυσόν in line 670 is an obscene innuendo, as is suggested by Henderson 1991: 131 and Dunbar 1995: 422-3.

105. For a discussion of the way in which the rape and tongue cutting are collapsed into one another in the Ovidian version of the story, cf. Klindienst 1984, and Marder 1992. Whether or

However, the presentation of Procne, although it recalls her more unpleasant mythic associations with sexual violence, murder, and the violent silencing of women, also contains elements which are considerably more comic in tone. While Peisetairos and Euelpides are clear about their sexual attraction to Procne, her non-human features are also emphasised (672: ῥύγχος ὀβελίσκοιν ἔχει), and attention is drawn to her hybrid form as a naked woman (669: διαμηρίζοιμ', 670: ὥσπερ παρθένος) with a bird's head. Since Peisetairos and Euelpides are at this point in the play still untransformed, this passage raises the rather peculiar idea of inter-species sexual intercourse, and the presentation of the half-human-half-bird Procne appears in this context comically grotesque, an aspect of the scene which is only intensified when Euelpides threatens to peel her like a boiled egg (673-4) in one of the more bizarre examples of metaphorical language in an already bizarre play. In addition to the stock element of the nude, silent, female figure, the grotesquery of this scene allows this otherwise disturbing mythic material to be reformulated into something which is at least recognisably comic.

However, despite these comic elements, the connection between the rape and silencing of women lurks in the background of the *Birds*' presentation of the Tereus myth, and this theme is then further foregrounded later in the play in Peisetairos' interaction with Iris. The goddess is the last of the intruders over whom the hero asserts his increasing power. Her exit is directly followed by the crowning of Peisetairos (1274-5), and the interaction between the two shows Peisetairos for the first time exerting his dominance directly over a divine figure, thereby beginning his ascent from tyrant and ruler of Nephelokokkugia to the god-like figure who finally displaces Zeus at the close of the play. Growing tired with Iris' protestations that he has no claim to the territory of the sky, nor to any kind of divinity to rival hers, Peisetairos orders the goddess to be silent (1243-4: ἄκουσον, αὐτή· παῦε τῶν παφλασμάτων· / ἔχ'

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not Sophocles emphasised this aspect of the myth, it must certainly have been present in the tragedy, in which the mutilation of Philomela was almost definitely included as part of Tereus' attack on her. It is even possible that the tongue removal was in fact a Sophoclean innovation, but this can only ever be speculative given the lack of evidence, for which see n. 93 above.

ἀτρέμα). By first ordering the goddess to listen to him (ἄκουσον), and then to stop spluttering (παφλασμάτων), an onomatopoeic word which mimics the sound of a pot boiling over and therefore reduces her speech to meaningless noise, Peisetairos clearly asserts that the power of speech is his alone. The hero then enforces this silence upon Iris by threatening her with rape:

σὺ δ' εἴ με λυπήσεις τι, τῆς διακόνου  
πρώτης ἀνατείνας τὼ σκέλει διαμηριῶ  
τὴν Ἴριν αὐτήν, ὅστε θαυμάζειν ὅπως  
οὔτω γέρων ὦν στύομαι τριέμβολον.

And if you annoy me at all, then I'll take on the servant first – raise up her legs and screw her, yes Iris herself, so as to amaze her how at my age I'm still hard enough to stand three rammings!

(Av. 1253-6)

This threat, with which Peisetairos finally succeeds in expelling the goddess from the stage, mimics almost exactly the language the hero directed against Procne earlier in the play (669: διαμηρίζοιμ', 1253: διαμηριῶ). Through this dual threat of silencing and rape, Peisetairos' dominance is therefore enacted in the Iris scene in terms which directly mirror the patterns of male dominance present in both the pre-existing Tereus narrative, and its use in the *Birds* with regards to the figure of Procne, who is presented as both speechless and subject to the sexual desires of the male figures around her.

This disempowerment of female figures by male characters in the *Birds* mimics not only the gendered power structures found in the Tereus myth, but also, as Romer (1997 *passim*) has argued, the play's other major intertext, Hesiod's *Theogony*, whose implicit gender structures and hierarchies are shaped by the narratives of male patriarchal and patrilineal violence which are such a strong thematic thread in the Hesiodic narrative of divine succession. As Romer states: 'The behaviours of [Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus in the *Theogony*] bespeak a pattern of male violence typified not only by violence against fathers but by violence from fathers against females and children as well.' (1997: 56). By inserting Peisetairos into a pseudo-Hesiodic line of succession, Romer argues that the hero is also placed into this tradition of patriarchal violence through which successions and usurpations

are enacted. The essentially patriarchal nature of Peisetairos' ascent to power is confirmed by the presence in the play of a second mute, nude figure, the princess Basileia. Prometheus in lines 1534-45 tells Peisetairos that gaining possession and control of Basilea is the key to ruling over the universe. In this exchange Basilea is treated as a symbolic object along with, and analogous to, the sceptre of Zeus (1534-6: ἐὰν μὴ παραδιδῶ / τὸ σκῆπτρον ὁ Ζεὺς τοῖσιν ὄρνισιν πάλιν, / καὶ τὴν Βασίλειάν σοι γυναικ' ἔχειν διδῶ). As Basilea is simply the key to the absolute power which Peisetairos desires, (1543: ἦν γ' ἦν σὺ παρ' ἐκείνου παραλάβης, πάντ' ἔχεις), possession of her is made to stand synecdochically for Peisetairos' acquisition of power, which is therefore in turn denoted in gendered terms as power over a mute female figure, albeit that the *hieros gamos* which ends the play tempers the preceding suggestions of violence with celebration.

Peisetairos' rise to power is further construed in Hesiodic terms of patrilineal violence through the pseudo-cannibalistic meal at which he is found in lines 1579-85. Since following line 801 Peisetairos seems to have acquired wings and have become a sort of bird-man hybrid (and would presumably retain his wings throughout the rest of the play, as a visual reminder to the audience of his new status), the image of this winged figure at a banquet of roast birds must have had a rather gruesome symbolism about it. Furthermore, since the feast is construed by Peisetairos in political terms as a way of punishing political dissenters from among the bird-populace (1583-5: ὄρνιθές τινες / ἐπανιστάμενοι τοῖς δημοτικοῖσιν ὀρνέοις / ἔδοξαν ἀδικεῖν), his pseudo-cannibalism becomes an assertion of his power as godlike tyrant over the birds. As well as looking back to the cannibalism of the Tereus myth (as Romer 1997: 60 has also suggested), by presenting it as an instrument used by Peisetairos to preserve his power and prevent any rivals from overthrowing him, the feast seems also to mirror the cannibalism of Kronos in the *Theogony* (453ff.) which the god uses to stave off his dethronement.

The *Birds*' simultaneous use of both the Tereus myth, and Hesiodic succession narratives as scaffolding throughout the play serves to emphasise the considerable thematic correspondence of these two mythic models, each of which is characterised by cannibalism,

and murderous intrafamilial strife; and this in turn affects the characterisation of the *Birds*' own mythic world, and in particular Peisetairos rise to power from man, to tyrant, to god. Unlike the earlier *Peace*, which despite its use of a prominent tragic/mythic model characterised by despair and failure does not integrate these elements into its own fictional world, but rather emphasises celebration and festivity as definitive characteristics of the comic universe, the *Birds*' use of its models is considerably more incorporative. Not only does the *Birds* not take a particularly antagonistic stance towards its tragic model Tereus, but throughout the play elements of the plot's tragic and mythic models which sit uneasily within the comic genre, such as cannibalism, mutilation, and internecine murder, are in fact emphasised, and even, in the case of cannibalism, almost replicated by the hero. In this regard, the play pushes at the boundaries of what can be successfully, and perhaps acceptably, incorporated from non-comic stories and genres within a comic plot.

However, despite the darker possibilities opened up by the use of these mythic intertexts in the *Birds*, such possibilities are never allowed to intrude fully on the comic action, but are contained clearly within the boundaries of the genre. Although the play hints at the more unpleasant aspects of the Tereus myth, these elements are overwritten in the *Birds* by a more suitably comic narrative about the reasons for the Hoopoe's transformation; Procne's presentation, despite hinting at some of the darker elements of her mythic backstory, is comically grotesque, and in other ways in keeping with the use of mute, nude figures in Aristophanic comedy; and the violence committed against the goddess Isis never strays beyond comic slapstick. Even Peisetairos' pseudo-cannibalism never becomes actual cannibalism, since despite his acquisition of wings he is throughout the play presented as primarily human and not avian; and the celebratory mood of the *hieros gamos* which ends the play appears to suggest that none of these darker elements should be allowed to trump the festal aspects integral to the genre. Although Peisetairos' success far exceeds any other of Aristophanes' comic heroes, there is nothing to suggest that we are not encouraged to celebrate his rise to power as we do the success of other comic 'everymen' who triumph over the powerful. The *Birds*' act of mythic incorporation therefore at once allows the darker aspects of its mythic models to be integrated into its own fictional world, whilst also

modulating the myths themselves into more suitably comic stories, thereby making the comic tragic, but also the tragic comic. In targeting such conspicuously un-comic material as the Tereus myth, the *Birds* demonstrates the ability of comedy to expand fully into tragedy's territory, and therefore to encompass within its generic boundaries all that the dramatic stage has to offer from horror and pathos to slapstick and crude jokes. The play's relationship with tragedy is accordingly more ambivalent than its predecessor *Peace*, as it blurs rather than reinforces generic distinctions. In integrating the very aspects of the tragic world which *Peace* so comprehensively rejected, the *Birds*' more ambitious project insists that comedy's relationship with tragedy is not limited to the bringing low of its rival's bombast and grandeur, but that even those elements of tragedy which least lend themselves to parody and mockery can still be co-opted into the comic world, and the comic genre.

### **Staging the City: Space, Dramaturgy, and the Limits of Representation in the *Birds***

The *Birds*' mythic stories are, of course, not only told, but staged. The play's central act of mythic creation, the foundation of Nephelokokkugia, is performed in front of the audience, as the hero marks out the city's boundaries in the stage-space; and the second part of the play takes place within the new borders of Peisetairos' city-in-the-sky. However, despite the play's fictional act of creation, the city-space is never actually represented on stage. Comedy's possibilities for physical dramatic representation were comparatively limited; while comedy made use of a wide variety of props and costume effects,<sup>106</sup> beyond the *skene* building, there was little by way of set or scenery,<sup>107</sup> and there was certainly no possibility of operating any large-scale change of scenery mid-action, as in a modern theatre. Therefore, while it is possible that at the opening of the *Birds* the setting was represented visually on stage (and the

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106. On the importance of props on the Greek stage, cf. Revermann 2013.

107. The evidence for any painted scenery in this period is limited. Pickard-Cambridge 1946: 65 suggests that some rudimentary *skenographia* may have been used in combination with the *skene* to depict the rocky landscape and thicket (λόχμη), or that "possibly the greater part of the background may have been provided by screens or canvas so painted as to represent wild country". For a more up to date discussion of *skenographia*, Cf. Small 2013. Craik 1990 offers a discussion of the possible ways in which the opening of *Birds* may have been staged; however, Revermann 2006: 113 suggests that, whatever the nature of scenery used on the Greek stage the "fundamentally environmental nature" of the Greek theatre would lessen the visual impact of any scenography used as part of a play.



nature of this representation will be discussed below), it is impossible that the creation of the walled city of Nephelokokkugia was reflected in any change in the stage-scenery; as with for example the depiction of Mount Olympus in the *Peace*, or the underworld lake in the later *Frogs*, Nephelokokkugia had to be summoned up on stage through a combination of costume, and language, and the imaginative use of space.<sup>108</sup> This section will argue that the *Birds* repeatedly draws attention to the extent to which its fictional creation takes place within imaginative, as opposed to representational, space; and that in this way, the play implicitly recognises the relative limitation of what can be staged, as opposed to imagined, in the comic theatre.

The fictional space of the *Birds* progresses from an indefinite location, in which the two characters are found wandering at the play's opening, to the fixed location of the bird city in which Peisetairos has settled the birds, who previously, like the heroes in the opening scene of the play, seem to have existed in a peripatetic state of continual migration (*Av.* 164-70). The play's opening therefore takes place in a somewhat unusual space.<sup>109</sup> Neither set in the fictionalised Athens of plays such as *Knights* and *Wasps*, nor concerned particularly with the idealised Attic countryside which is celebrated in the *Acharnians* and *Peace*,<sup>110</sup> the play's initial setting is characterised by spacial indeterminacy. The landscape is mostly bare, with a few landmarks, clearly indicated in the text, including a lone tree (1: τὸ δένδρον φαίνεται)

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108. On the importance of props, costume, and language for scene-setting in Aristophanic comedy, cf. Ley 2007: 273-4. The relationship between space and place on the Aristophanic stage is discussed at greater length by Lowe 2006. Note that while the examples in *Peace* and *Frogs* concern a change to a location which is newly *introduced* to the play's landscape and plot as part of the hero's journey (as opposed to newly *created*, as in the *Birds*), the method of staging is much the same.

109. Of extant plays, the closest parallel is perhaps Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, which similarly opens in a wild, non-urban landscape. The similarities between the staging of the *Birds* and *Philoctetes* are discussed by Craik 1990; the relative prominence of eremitic space in tragedy as opposed to comedy was discussed above in relation to *Peace*. Arguably, the *Birds* opening location is another way in which the play incorporates tragic norms.

110. On the relationship between the city and the countryside, and the importance of rural landscapes, in Aristophanes, cf. Rosen 2006; and for this aspect of Athenian drama in general, cf. Roy 1996. The celebration of country life in *Peace* is also discussed in Moulton 1981: 82ff.

and some rocks (20: τῶν πετρῶν). The characters have travelled a long way into the wilderness (6: στάδια... χίλια), far from any roads (20-1: οὐ γάρ ἐστ' ἐνταῦθά τις / ὁδός).<sup>111</sup> The two men appear to be wandering aimlessly (3: τί... πλανύτομεν;), and have no idea where they are (9: ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὅπου γῆς ἐσμὲν οἶδ' ἔγωγ' ἔτι). The confusion and indeterminacy is increased by the profusion of spatial terms which point in different directions (1: ὀρθῆν, 2: πάλιν, 3: ἄνω κάτω) and seem to lead nowhere in particular. This location characterised by an absence of any identifying features has been described by Slater (2002: 132, following the discussion of Konstan 1997) as an *outopia*, an absence of place; and in this regard the setting is reminiscent of the eremitic tragic spaces with which the opening of *Peace* appeared to engage, as discussed in the earlier part of this chapter. Although it is common for the space in the opening scenes of Aristophanes' plays to be fluid,<sup>112</sup> the placeless nowhere in which the *Birds* opens takes this fluidity of space to a greater degree than is usual, and the play's grand act of mythopoiesis is to a degree dependent on this initial absence and emptiness, since this void allows Peisetairos the freedom to create something entirely new from nothing.

However, despite the imaginative openness implied by the *outopic* space in this first scene, the use of the stage space is surprisingly static, and is not characterised by the continual re-purposing of space often seen in the opening of Aristophanes' plays. For example the later *Frogs*, often used as an example of fluid space in Aristophanes, the stage space is used to represent first the house of Heracles, then the river Styx complete with boatman, then the muddy entrance to underworld, and then an underworld tavern all in close succession; and indeed *Peace* similarly repurposes the *skene* building repeatedly in the opening scenes, as it is used to represent first the beetle's stable, then Trygaeus' house, and then the house of the gods on Olympus within the space of the first two hundred lines. By

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111. For a discussion of how exactly this opening might have been staged, Cf. Craik 1990, who suggests that the roof of the *skene* may have been used to create a craggy landscape on stage.

112. Lowe 2006 argues that although space in Aristophanes is less anarchic than has been previously suggested, the scenes prior to the parabasis have a tendency towards spatial fluidity, after which point space becomes more settled. This pattern is certainly applicable to *Birds* to some degree.

contrast, the prologue of the *Birds* remains fixed in one location, and in all likelihood clearly tied to the scene represented on stage through scenery: a rocky outland, with a few shrubs, behind which can be found the door to the Hoopoe's nest/house.<sup>113</sup> The freedom of movement, fluidity of the placeless location, and openness of imaginative possibility which characterise the fictional space which predates Peisetairos' designation and binding down of space, through which he settles the free-flying birds in a single location, therefore stands in opposition to the actual use of dramatic space, which is static, and bound to the visual identifiers of scenery which most probably exist for the audience to see on stage.

As Peisetairos begins to shape the formless, *outopic* fictional space into a single and defined bird-city, he relies on the interaction between space and language, through which dramatic space can be altered and reimagined. When the Hoopoe asks where on earth the birds should found a city, Peisetairos suggests that the clouds and the sky, which might be called the *πόλος* (celestial sphere), could become a bird-city, a *πόλις*:<sup>114</sup>

ὥσπερ ἂν εἴποι τις τόπος.  
 ὅτι δὲ πολεῖται τοῦτο καὶ διέρχεται  
 ἅπαντα διὰ τούτου, καλεῖται νῦν πόλος.  
 ἦν δ' οἰκίσγητε τοῦτο καὶ φάρξθηθ' ἅπαξ,  
 ἐκ τοῦ πόλου τούτου κεκλήσεται πόλις.

A place for them, as one might say; but because it's the scene of activity, and everything passes through it, it is at present called a stage. But if at once you settle and fortify it, then instead of being called your stage it will be called your State.

(Av. 180-4)

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113. Reconstructions of the opening staging in the *Birds* are offered by Pickard-Cambridge 1946: 65, Russo 1962 (1994): 153-4, and Craik 1990, who are all in agreement that the *skene* building was used to represent the hoopoe's nest, and that at least some rudimentary representation of the rocky, wooded landscape described in the text must have been present on stage. Craik additionally suggests that the roof of the *skene* may have formed part of the rocky landscape, and could have been utilised in particular for the appearance of the hoopoe or other birds. On the possible use of *skenographia* in this scene cf. n. 104 above.

114. Note that the pun between the Greek *πόλος* and *πόλις* is replaced by Sommerstein with 'stage' and 'state' in his translation below.

Through a simple pun or trick of language the similarity between the two words *πόλος* and *πόλις* is exploited, so that by changing just a single letter sound, the one is re-designated as the other. This act of re-designation is of course exactly how the relationship between fictional and dramatic space functions on stage. The scenery of rocks and shrubbery is not altered, nor does the stage building change its appearance. Space on stage is simply re-defined and re-purposed, so that without any change in its physical properties, the *skene* can be said to represent first the Hoopoe's house, and then Peisetairos' headquarters, and the stage-space to represent first an *outopic*/celestial space (*πόλος*), and then a defined and enclosed bird-city (*πόλις*).<sup>115</sup>

The intruder scenes in the second half of the play serve to further reinforce the boundaries of the city, and to mark out these boundaries in the physical reality of the stage. Russo (1962 (1994): 154-5) in his analysis of the entrances and exits of the play suggests that the use of the word *προσέρχεσθαι* (*Av.* 1341, 1414) to describe the entries of the parricide and sycophant suggests that characters from Athens arrived via the corridor, while the gods entered from above, via either the *mechane*<sup>116</sup> or the top of the stage building.<sup>117</sup> By placing the bird city both on a vertical and a horizontal axis, through these entrances and exits the city-space is marked out in three dimensions on stage, and established within the physical reality of the performance venue, with not only the theatre itself but even the sky above it co-opted into the spatial and performative world of the play. The city space is therefore situated along two axes, with boundaries both horizontal and vertical, and the actors inhabiting the space in-between accordingly act out the city's presence on stage.

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115. For a discussion of the importance of these acts of re-designation or re-purposing to the relationship between fictional and dramatic space in Greek theatre, cf. Ley 2007.

116. On the use of the *mechane* for the entrance of Iris, cf. Dunbar 1995: 612, who argues that the repeated use of words related to flying suggests that Iris must have entered on the *mechane*.

117. If Slater 2002: 134 is correct in his suggestion that the *ἄνω* and *κάτω* referred to throughout the opening scene correspond to 'upstage' and 'downstage', as well as denoting 'up in the air' and 'down on the ground', then this use of the *skene*, located upstage, for entrances from Olympus, and the downstage corridors for entrances from earth, would also fit within the scheme.

However, despite the play’s movement from *outopic* space to the more concrete and defined imaginative space of the bird city, whose existence is marked out within the space of the stage and the theatre, the actual stage space remains unchanged. The physical markers of the city, and in particular the bird-wall which encircles it, are rather referred to as existing in off-stage space, and are not present within the stage space. The city’s physical presence therefore exists in the audience’s collective imagination, rather than in the representational space of the stage. This act of collective imagination is termed by Revermann (2013: 87) the ‘theatre of mind’. In his discussion of those props of the Greek theatre which, like for example the rope with which Jocasta hangs herself in the *Oedipus Rex*, are not present on stage, but which are critical within the imaginative and fictional world of the play, Revermann suggests that such un-represented props “are not imaginary in the sense that they do not exist, or exist as something ephemeral, perfunctory or evanescent. Quite the contrary: by appealing to the audience’s imagination — by forcing, even, the spectator to re-create them, individually, in their own ‘theatre of mind’ — these imaginary stage objects have a presence that arguably engages the spectator *even more* than a prop that is visible on stage.”

The extent to which the *Birds*’ grand act of fictional creation is imaginative, rather than representative or mimetic, is repeatedly emphasised in the play, in particular in relation to the bird-wall, as first Peisetairos and then Iris draw the audience’s attention to the play’s failure to actually stage the imaginative world which it brings into being. The idea of the bird-wall as the boundary demarcating the city limits, and accordingly summoning Nephelokokkugia into existence, appears early on in the play. According to Peisetairos it is the act of encircling the new city which will transform the birds’ celestial space into a city (183-4: ἦν δ’ οἰκίσητε τοῦτο καὶ φάρξῃθ’ ἄπαξ, / ἐκ τοῦ πόλου τούτου κεκλήσεται πόλις.) Similarly, when Peisetairos instructs the bird-chorus as to his plan, this act of fencing in the space is integral to the location of the birds in a single city:

καὶ δὴ τοίνυν πρῶτα διδάσκω μίαν ὀρνίθων πόλιν εἶναι,  
 κᾶπειτα τὸν ἄερα πάντα κύκλῳ καὶ πᾶν τουτὶ τὸ μεταξὺ  
 περιτειχίζειν μεγάλας πλίνθοις ὀπταῖς ὥσπερ Βαβυλῶνα.

Very well then, I instruct you first of all that there should be a single City of the Birds; and then you should completely encircle the whole of the air, and all this space between heaven and earth, with a wall of great baked bricks, like Babylon.

(Av. 550-2)

According to Peisetairos' instructions, this wall in the air is to be made from solid bricks (πλίνθοις), giving the structure a simultaneous feeling of substance and of impossibility, since the practicalities of locating a brick wall on thin air are, at the very least, somewhat challenging.

The construction of the bird-wall is not acted out on stage, but is rather reported in one of the few extant messenger speeches in Aristophanes.<sup>118</sup> Although the wall appears at first to take on a more concrete existence, as it is given measurements (1131: ἑκατοντορόγιον), and features such as gates (1158: πεπύλωται πύλαις) and towers (1162: πύργοις), as the messenger's account continues it becomes increasingly impossible. The messenger gives the length as one hundred fathoms (1130-1: τὸ δὲ μῆκος ἐστὶ... ἑκατοντορόγιον), which is either, if it refers to the actual length, impossibly short for a city wall, or, if it refers to the height, impossibly tall. Faced with the sheer impossibility of the bird-wall, Peisetairos replies that it might almost seem to be a lie (1167: ἴσα γὰρ ἀληθῶς φαίνεται μοι ψεύδεσιν). Both the impossibility of the wall's dimensions, and Peisetairos' response, draw explicit metatheatrical attention to the fact that the bird-wall, and indeed the whole bird-city is, in Slater's

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118. The messenger speech is a device more usually associated with tragedy, for which cf. de Jong 1991, and Barrett 2002, and particularly ch. 2 which discusses the relationship between the tragic messenger speech and messengers in other genres. Conversely, this device is rarely used in Aristophanes, appearing only here in the *Birds*, and in *Ploutos* 627-770, where the uninterrupted length of the narrative increases the similarity to tragic messenger speeches. A shorter messenger-type speech can also be found at *Vesp.* 1292ff. However whereas in *Birds* and *Wealth* the events of the messenger speech are told only through this speech and are not acted out on stage at all, Philocleon's drunkenness is both related in a speech by Xanthias, before the character himself enters, with his actions on stage picking up the story where Xanthias left off. This use of narrative speech therefore diverges from the model of the tragic messenger speech considerably, and should probably therefore not be included as a tragic-style messenger speech alongside those in *Birds* and *Wealth*.

formulation (2002: 143), “built of words”, and is not represented in physical space, but rather exists only within the collective imagination of the audience and actors.

This metatheatrical focus on the wall’s imaginative qualities is also a feature of the scene with Iris. No sooner has the completion of the bird-wall been announced, a second messenger enters to warn Peisetairos that one of the gods has managed to fly through the gates (1173: διὰ τῶν πυλῶν) and has breached the fortifications of Nephelokokkugia, immediately bringing into question its effectiveness as a physical barrier. When Iris is herself interrogated about why the wall did not prevent her from entering the city, she appears not to know what Peisetairos is talking about, replying that she has no idea which gate she entered by (1210: οὐκ οἶδα μὰ Δί’ ἔγωγε κατὰ ποίας πύλας), nor did she seem to notice any of the sentries or guards which Peisetairos thinks should have held her up (1213-5). When Peisetairos threatens to have the goddess arrested, she replies that “this business seems very out of place” (1208: ἄτοπὸν γε τουτὶ πρᾶγμα). The use of the adjective ἄτοπος to describe something extraordinary or unusual is not uncommon, and is attested elsewhere in Aristophanes (Cf. fr. 565 PCG, *Av.* 276, *Eccl.* 956); however, in the context it seems to be particularly pointed, and to add to the sense that the bird-city is not located in space, but rather in the imagination.

Throughout the *Birds*, the movement towards rootedness and stability, as the birds abandon nomadic flight to occupy a single location which exists within set boundaries, pulls against the more fluid relationship between fictional and dramatic space which is necessitated as the grand scale of the imaginary world grows beyond that which can easily be represented within the limits of the comic stage. Despite repeatedly rooting the boundaries of the city in the physical dramatic space in which it is enacted, in the end Nephelokokkugia turns out to be built no less on thin air dramatically as it is conceptually. Although within a theatrical context, the imaginative is not necessarily any less ‘real’ than the directly staged or represented, the play’s metatheatrical focus on Nephelokokkugia’s non-representation (similar to the pointed non-representation of Zeus in the *Peace*), and its characterisation of the city’s off-stage landmarks as ‘almost a lie’ (1167: ἴσα γὰρ ἀληθῶς φαίνεται μοι ψεύδεσιν) seems to create an opposition between its unlimited powers of imaginative creation, and the

limits of theatrical representation. The pointedness of the non-staging of the bird-wall and the other physical markers of the bird-city, and the repeated recognition of the fact that these markers exist only in the collective imagination of actors and audience, demonstrate that while at times the plots of comedy seem to be limited only by what the poet can imagine, there are ultimately practical restrictions on what comedy can actually present on stage. Again however, this limitation is presented not as a constraint, but an act of ambition in storytelling. In recognising the gap between the imagined and the staged world, which although it always exists in drama is present to an unusual degree in *Birds* due to the scale of its imagined world, and is explicitly foregrounded by the play, the *Birds* also foregrounds the sheer ambition of its fictional creation, which like the bird-city itself breaks free of the physical limits of representation, and exists primarily as an extraordinary act of imagination.

### **Conclusions**

*Peace* and *Birds* are certainly the most fantastical of Aristophanes extant plays. In each, ostensibly ordinary Athenian men take flight from their city to challenge Olympus and the gods, in plots which while being on one level reliant on existing narrative models also create new mythic archetypes which are as rooted in the conventions of comic storytelling as they are in traditional myth. The two plays differ markedly in their tone, with the *Peace* at once more celebratory and more combative than its successor. Taken together, the plays demonstrate that comedy's intergeneric relationships, even in the case of tragedy, vary considerably along a spectrum which runs from the overtly parodic to the contrastive and even incorporative. Both plays push at the boundaries of comic possibility, firstly with regard to the extent of their narrative and fictional invention; and secondly in the way they play with the limits of what can and cannot be represented on the comic stage. While the plays' characterisation of tragedy as fundamentally limited, both dramatically and narratively, in a way that comedy is not is ultimately specious, *Peace* and *Birds* do establish comedy's relative mythopoetic freedom as a defining, and definitive, aspect of the genre.





### Chapter Three: ‘Women On Top’ in the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Ecclesiazusae*

Aristophanes’ interest in tragedy is evident from his earliest plays onwards, with even his first fully extant comedy, the *Acharnians*, featuring tragedy, and the poet Euripides, prominently. However, plays which make tragedy their primary subject only seem to emerge in the latter part of the poet’s career, most famously with the *Frogs*, but also in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, which similarly brings two tragedians on stage as characters. While the central interest of the *Frogs* is tragic poetry, with the tragedians’ prologues, word usage, and meter all coming under scrutiny, the *Thesmophoriazusae* exploits the fuller potential of tragedy as a means of exploring not only different kinds of poetics, but alternative theatrical modes. Staging and costume have of course been present as a concern in Aristophanes’ plays for as long as tragedy, and previous chapters have touched upon the ways in which *Wasps*, *Peace*, and *Birds* reflect upon comic theatrical practice; however, the *Thesmophoriazusae*’s engagement with the topic of tragic and comic illusion, costume, and staging is more sustained than anything seen in the earlier plays.

The establishment of the tragic competition in Athens pre-dated the comic by some two decades, and the genre’s relative seniority and longer period of civic institutionalisation therefore afforded it a greater degree of embeddedness in the public and political life of the city.<sup>1</sup> Further to this, tragedy’s overt seriousness in itself affords the genre a prestige which the baser comedy finds more elusive. While in the *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis famously claims that ‘comedy too knows what is right’ (*Ach.* 500: τὸ γὰρ δίκαιον οἶδε καὶ τρυγῶδία), and has an equal ability to advise the city in its political affairs, later plays distance themselves from, rather than assimilate themselves to, tragedy. While *Peace* and *Birds*, as the previous chapter has argued, carve out a distinct space for comic storytelling, and bring into focus the genre’s

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1. The origins of comedy and its institution at the festival of Dionysus are discussed in more detail in the introduction to ch. 1. For an overview of the origins of the tragic competition, cf. Scullion 2005. A more detailed discussion of the origins of tragedy and its early history can be found in Lesky 1983 ch. 1-3, and a collection of sources regarding the early Greek theatre in Csapo & Slater 1994 ch. 2-3.

powers of mythic invention, this chapter will suggest that in both the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Ecclesiazusae*, Aristophanes makes a case for a distinct comic theatrical practice, entirely different from the precedent set by tragedy. The chapter will argue that in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, this marginalisation of tragic theatrics is achieved by associating the genre and its theatrical practices with femininity, as tragedy's lack of overt metatheatricality, and its (perceived, if not actual) tendency towards illusionism is construed as a kind of feminine deception, akin to the use of cosmetics and the veil; and that this is contrasted with comedy's overt masculinity, most evident in the use of the comic phallus. The second part of this chapter will go on to consider the consequences of this conception of comedy as inherently masculine for a play such as *Ecclesiazusae*, in which the comic hero is replaced by a heroine, and women take centre stage.

In her 2015 monograph, *Costume in the Comedies of Aristophanes*, Gwendolyn Compton-Engle has examined in detail the central place of the grotesque comic body in defining the genre of Old Comedy. As Compton-Engle argues (ch. 1), comedy does not only revel in bodily functions and corporeality, but its image of bodily excess is reified through the padded *somation*, whose importance to the overall aesthetic of comedy is confirmed by its representation on numerous vases which depict scenes from the comic theatre. Comedy's revelation of grotesque nakedness is most obvious in the comic phallus, attached to the *somation*, and which dangled below the tunic worn by the actors,<sup>2</sup> and it is the phallus which most clearly represents comedy's theatrical practice and its difference from tragedy. However, it is important to note that, as Compton-Engle persuasively argues, the *somation* is as much an act of concealment as revelation, covering as it does the actor's real body almost completely, so that only the hands and feet are left exposed. While on the one hand, the comic body is an act of grotesque and obscene exposure, whereby the body is presented to the audience's view, the *somation* is also obviously artificial, and therefore mediates the obscenity and outrages against the body which are a feature of the comic theatre, so that the

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2. The visual evidence for the comic phallus is discussed in detail by Compton-Engle 2015: 24-5, who suggests that it was usually presented flaccid, and that it was visible at all times, even when the actor was fully dressed.

result is ridiculous rather than actually pornographic. Therefore while comedy is certainly defined by its theatrics of revelation, and by the exposure of the comic phallus in particular, its exposure is, ultimately, false, since it is the artificial *somation*, and not the actor's real body, which is presented for the audience's view.

Given the importance of the comic phallus for defining the genre's theatrical practice against that of tragedy, it is therefore not entirely surprising that the *Thesmophoriazusae*, arguably the most relentlessly metatheatrical of all Aristophanes' extant plays, is also concerned with gender, which itself seems to have been a particular interest of Aristophanes' at this time (as the premiere of both *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae* in close succession in 411 B.C. suggests). Up until this point, the feminine, domestic world showcased, albeit in very different ways, in these two plays has been noticeably absent from Aristophanes' plots. Even those plays such as *Knights* and *Wasps* which have taken the οἶκος as their setting do not feature the women of the household, and indeed their concern is primarily with the οἶκος as a metaphor for the πόλις, rather than as an end in itself. Indeed, until 411 B.C., almost all of the female characters in Aristophanes' plays have been mute, nude figures, often representing an abstract concept (e.g. the Peace-Treaties in *Knights*; Opora and Theoria in the *Peace*; Basilea in the *Birds*), or playing the role of a hetaira (as with the flute girl abducted by Philocleon towards the end of the *Wasps*).<sup>3</sup> Goddesses (Peace in the *Peace*, and Iris in the *Birds*) and daughters (as in *Acharnians* and *Peace*) have sometimes featured briefly, but never wives.<sup>4</sup>

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3.Cf. Hall 2000 on female abstractions in Old Comedy, and Zweig 1992 on mute, nude female figures in Aristophanes' plays.

4. It is important to note that the rarity of female characters in Aristophanes' plays before 411 is not necessarily representative of Old Comedy as a whole. A comprehensive survey of attested female characters in the other comic poets is given in Henderson 2000. Henderson states that while no wives are securely attested on the comic stage before 411 (with the exception of Comoidia in Cratinus' *Pytine*, who is an example of a female personification rather than a wife-proper), there was a subset of 'domestic' (as opposed to 'political', as Henderson describes Aristophanes) comedies, most notably by Pherekrates, who Henderson suggests may have been a pioneer of this style. However, the majority of female characters as catalogued by Henderson still fall under the category of mythical figures (as is familiar from Aristophanes), with a significant minority also in the category of hetairai. Therefore, while it

Female characters, including wives, were however a prominent feature of tragedy from early on in the genre's history; several titles which imply a female chorus are attributed to Phrynichus, and the first fully extant tragedy, Aeschylus' *Persians*, has the Persian queen Atossa as a central character.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, since many of these early plays were overtly political or historical in their content, it seems relatively secure that the combination of the domestic, female world with the political was characteristic of tragedy from its beginnings. Of the later tragedians, Euripides in particular is, in Aristophanes at least, associated with female themes and characters, and in both the *Thesmophoriazusae*, and in the *Frogs* (1043-56) he is characterised as a playwright particularly associated with writing (often shamelessly lurid) female characters. Given the importance of female characters for tragedy, and in particular within the plays of Aristophanes' favourite target Euripides, it therefore seems remarkable that female characters were so little used by Aristophanes prior to 411; and to a degree, the poet's sudden foregrounding of female characters, and of the domestic sphere, can itself be seen as a move into territory more usually associated with tragedy, particularly when, as in all three of Aristophanes' 'women' plays, the domestic is aligned with the political, as is (broadly) characteristic of tragedy.

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is clear that Aristophanes may well not have been exactly a pioneer of female characters on the comic stage, his presentation of Athenian wives in a domestic setting is still likely to have been an innovation. Further, as Henderson notes, previous plays which feature (non-mythological, non-personified-abstraction) female characters were of a domestic rather than political character, and therefore in writing political 'women' plays, Aristophanes again is likely to have been innovating to some degree. The potentially new use of women within 'political' plays is perhaps significant firstly given the degree to which gender, and particularly femininity, is itself politicised in the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Ecclesiazusae*, as this chapter will argue; and secondly because, since the combination of female and political themes is arguably a hallmark of tragedy, it would be highly significant if Aristophanes, given his interest in tragedy, was indeed the first of the Old Comedians to use women in 'political' plays.

5. The relative prominence of women on the Attic stage, in comparison to their apparent marginalisation from public life, has been much commented upon by scholars. Foley 1981 sets out a detailed comparison between women's financial, legal, legislative, and political situation, and particularly their status as permanent minors, and the frequency of their appearance in both dramatic and non-dramatic genres of Greek literature. This comparison between women's political and literary status is also made by Zeitlin 1985. Cohen 1991 similarly emphasises the gap between the legal and ideological status of women and the reality of their day-to-day place in society.

As Lauren Taaffe has argued, throughout Aristophanes' three 'women' plays the presentation of women as deceptive is a central theme, and women are presented in particular as masters of costume and mimetic trickery.<sup>6</sup> There is little to add to Taaffe's otherwise comprehensive study of female mimesis and trickery in Aristophanes, except that, in addition to being a component of the presentation of women with regard to costume and staging, this conception of comic women as deceptive is also essential to the overall plot structure of the three 'women' plays: The *Thesmophoriazusae*, *Lysistrata*, and *Ecclesiazusae* are notable for their inclusion of scenes in which women meet secretly to scheme *en masse* against their menfolk, in contrast to the male paradigm of the comic hero who, in Aristophanes, operates both openly and alone without any hint of this clandestine underhandedness. Unlike for example in the *Acharnians*, in which the assembly scene makes clear that mass action is no way for a hero to accomplish anything useful, Aristophanes' heroines always set their plots in motion with a secret all-female gathering.

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6. Taaffe 1993: 24 states that in Aristophanes, "[f]emales tend to manipulate language and costume". The Aristophanic presentation of female deception is a central theme of Taaffe's *passim*. The straightforward correlation between manipulation of costume and femininity suggested by Taaffe has been somewhat problematised by Compton-Engle, who suggests that "[a]n examination of comic vase paintings forces us to dispense (at least for comedy) with any simple equation in which nudity is male and heroic, while concealment and artificiality are female and suspect" (2015: 27). Compton-Engle ch.4 in particular argues that in the *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis' successful manipulation of disguise is presented as a masculine characteristic; and that it is not always disguise *per se*, but rather the failure to successfully manipulate costume, and especially forcible control of a character's costume and body by another, which marks emasculation in Aristophanes. However, while Compton-Engle is surely correct in arguing that it is not universally true that disguise and artificiality are construed as feminine in Aristophanes, particularly in plays such as *Acharnians* in which there is no thematic focus on gender, I would suggest that Taaffe is correct in arguing that artificiality is associated with the feminine in the *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae*. It is important to recognise that the relationship between gender and costume is not uniform, and may differ between plays. That is to say, while Compton-Engle is correct in identifying control of costume as a masculine feature in the *Acharnians*, this does not preclude its presentation as effeminate in the later 'women' plays.

The concept of women as deceptive and masters of mimetic trickery is of course not exclusive to Aristophanic comedy, but features in tragedy,<sup>7</sup> as well as other genres such as epic, rhetoric, and philosophy; and in both Aristophanes, and in other authors, it is often the paraphernalia of femininity, such as cosmetics and the veil, which attract suspicion. However, in this next section, I hope to show that Aristophanes subtly alters the common model of the bad and deceptive women, whose vanity and trickery is contrasted with the modest and virtuous woman, to suggest instead that it is not bad women, but femininity itself, which is defined by mimesis and deception.

The model of feminine deception, in which female sexuality, and beauty practices such as the use of cosmetics, depilation, and other forms of adornment, are construed as acts of trickery, appears at least as early as the 7th century B.C.: Semonides' notorious diatribe against womankind, whom he claims the gods made fundamentally different from men (fr. 7 W 1: χωρίς γυναικὸς θεὸς ἐποίησεν νόον), contains an attack on the 'mare-woman' who takes excessive care of her appearance, and, while she delights other men, is a bane to her own husband:

λοῦται δὲ πάσης ἡμέρης ἄπο ρύπον  
 δίς, ἄλλοτε τρίς, καὶ μύροις ἀλείφεται,  
 αἰεὶ δὲ χαίτην ἐκτενισμένην φορεῖ  
 βαθεῖαν, ἀνθέμοισιν ἐσκιασμένην.  
 κᾶλὸν μὲν ὄν θέημα τοιαύτη γυνή  
 ἄλλοισι, τῷ δ' ἔχοντι γίνεται κακόν,  
 ἢν μή τις ἢ τύραννος ἢ σκηπτοῦχος ἦ,  
 ὅστις τοιούτοις θυμὸν ἀγλαΐζεται.

Twice every day, sometimes three times, she washes the dirt off her and anoints herself with scents, and she always wears her hair combed out and long, shaded with flowers. Such a woman is a beautiful sight to others, but for the man who has her as a wife she is a plague, unless he is some tyrant or sceptre bearer whose heart delights in such things. (trans. Gerber)

(fr. 7 W 63-70)

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7. The representation of women in tragedy is an enormous topic, and one which is largely beyond the scope of the present thesis; even a comprehensive bibliography would run to some length, but cf. e.g. Foley 1981, Zeitlin 1985, McClure 1999, Foley 2009.

This idea of cosmetics as inappropriate for a good and modest wife appears also in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, in which the speaker Ischomachus scolds his young bride for wearing heavy make-up and high heels, which he considers to be a form of deceit akin to forging money:

Ἐγὼ τοίνυν, ἔφη, ἰδὼν ποτε αὐτήν, ὃ Σώκρατες, ἐντετριμμένην πολλῶ μὲν ψιμυθίῳ, ὅπως λευκοτέρα ἔτι δοκοίη εἶναι ἢ ἦν, πολλῇ δ' ἐγγούση, ὅπως ἐρυθροτέρα φαίνοιτο τῆς ἀληθείας, ὑποδήματα δ' ἔχουσαν ὑψηλά, ὅπως μείζων δοκοίη εἶναι ἢ ἐπεφύκει, Εἰπέ μοι, ἔφην, ὃ γύναι, ποτέρως ἄν με κρίναις ἀξιοφίλητον μᾶλλον εἶναι χρημάτων κοινωνόν, εἴ σοι αὐτὰ τὰ ὄντα ἀποδεικνύοιμι, καὶ μήτε κομπάζοιμι ὡς πλείω τῶν ὄντων ἔστι μοι, μήτε ἀποκρυπτοίμην τι τῶν ὄντων μηδέν, ἢ εἰ πειρώμην σε ἐξαπατᾶν λέγων τε ὡς πλείω ἔστι μοι τῶν ὄντων, ἐπιδεικνύς τε ἀργύριον κίβδηλον δηλοίην σε καὶ ὄρμους ὑποξύλους καὶ πορφυρίδας ἐξιτήλους φαίην ἀληθινὰς εἶναι;

“Well, one day, Socrates, I noticed that her face was made up: she had rubbed in a lot of white lead in order to look whiter than she is, and alkanet juice to make her cheeks rosier than they truly were; and she was wearing boots with thick soles to appear taller than she naturally was. So I said to her, “Tell me, wife, how should I appear more worthy of your love as a partner in our goods, by disclosing to you our belongings just as they are, without boasting of imaginary possessions or concealing any part of what we have, or by trying to trick you with an exaggerated account, showing you counterfeit money and wooden necklaces painted gold and describing clothes dyed purple that would fade? (trans. Marchant)

(Xen. *Oec.* 10.2-3)

Likewise in Euripides' *Electra* 1069-75, Electra berates her mother for admiring herself in the mirror, saying that any woman who works on her beauty (1073: ἐς κάλλος ἀσκεῖ) in such a way can only be up to no good; and Socrates in his conversation with Theodote in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* 3.11.7-10 compares the courtesan's ensnarement of 'friends' to a hunter contriving to trap hares with nets. This connection between deception and femininity seems to have been surprisingly tenacious, and appears even as late as Quintillian, who compares excessive oratorical devices to the use of depilation, curling-irons, and make-up:

nam sermo rectus et secundum naturam enuntiatus nihil habere ex ingenio videtur; illa vero, quae utcumque deflexa sunt, tanquam exquisitoria miramur; non aliter quam distortis et quocumque modo prodigiosis corporibus apud quosdam maius est pretium quam iis, quae nihil ex communi habitu boni perdidit. atque etiam qui specie capiuntur, vulsis levatisque et inustas comas acu comentibus et non suo colore nitidis plus esse formae putant, quam possit tribuere incorrupta natura, ut pulchritudo corporis venire videatur ex malismorum.



For straightforward, natural speech is judged to owe nothing to talent; we admire things which are in some way distorted as being more sophisticated— just as some people set a higher value on human bodies which are crippled or somehow deformed than on those which have lost none of the blessings of normality, while others again, who are captivated by appearances, fancy that there is more beauty in those who have their hair plucked and skin smoothed, who singe their hair and keep it in order with pins, and whose complexion is anything but their own, than in anything uncorrupted nature can confer, thus beauty of the body seems to come from depravity of character. (trans. Russell)

(Quin. *Inst. Or.* 2.5.11-12)

This anxiety surrounding the nature of feminine deception was not limited to cosmetic procedures, but also included female clothing. Recent scholarship on the topic of Greek women's dress has emphasised the connection between concealment and sexual allure. The *peplos*, a garment which can be considered to represent traditional female virtue, is also designed so that it "envelops and conceals" the true immoderate sexuality of the female body and removes it from the male gaze;<sup>8</sup> and Llewellyn-Jones, in his study of the veil, which he describes as the "female garment *par excellence*" (2003:17), argues that Greek veiling practices were designed as much to entice as to modestly conceal. Far from being desexualising, the veil was an erotic object whose power lay in its ability to make the veiled object mysterious, as well as to deceptively hide flaws (much like cosmetics): "The veil can have the effect of making the facial features alluringly vague; sometimes it enhances the impression of attractiveness. Veils can draw attention away from physical defects, like wrinkles and lines... Most sociologists and dress historians now accept the idea that the deliberate concealing of certain parts of the body does not necessarily discourage sexual interest but often activates sexual stimulation." (2003:284). It is worth noting that, despite the negativity with which male authors discuss the use of cosmetics and other forms of adornment, visual and archaeological evidence suggests that their use was widespread, if not universal.<sup>9</sup>

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8 . Lee 2005: 61-2. Lee's study encompasses the depiction of the *peplos* in a variety of visual and literary sources, considering both its use and its ideological status in Athens.

9. Cf. Pomeroy 1994: 304-5, who in her discussion of *Oeconomicus* 10.2-3 (above) gives a brief survey of the visual and archeological evidence surrounding cosmetic use. McClure

Outside of comedy, in both dramatic and non-dramatic genres, the deceptive femininity constructed using the false powers of cosmetics and clothes is contrasted with the honest and chaste woman.<sup>10</sup> Electra contrasts Clytemnestra's contrived beauty with the modesty she could have displayed had she wished to (Eur. *Elec.* 1080: καίτοι καλῶς γε σωφρονεῖν παρεῖχέ σοι); the young wife in the *Oeconomicus* soon learns, at Ischomachus' instruction, how to make herself more attractive to her husband not through deceitful cosmetics but honest housework, which will keep her fit and bring colour to her cheeks (Xen. *Oec.* 10.9-13). However, as Taaffe has argued in her deconstruction of the opening scene of *Lysistrata* in particular, in Aristophanes the ideal chaste wife is as much an act of mimesis as the lascivious schemer: "Women, endowed by nature with a multiplicity of appearances, can be both" (1993: 55).

According to Taaffe's analysis, the women in *Lysistrata* (and indeed elsewhere in Aristophanes) are accompanied by a consistent focus on metatheatricality. As Lysistrata advises her followers in how to best 'act out' their femininity, she lays out for the audience how costume and demeanour can be utilised to summon up 'women' on stage. As in the later play *Ecclesiazusae*, *Lysistrata* begins with the heroine instructing her companions in the act of role playing; however unlike in *Ecclesiazusae*, the women are being asked to put their props to use in playing not the opposite gender, but their own. Early in the play it is established that the women's only talents lie in playing with the props of femininity. When Lysistrata suggests to Calonice that she has a plan to stop the war, her friend objects:

τί δ' ἄν γυναῖκες φρόνιμον ἐργασαίαιτο  
ἢ λαμπρόν; αἶ καθήμεθ' ἐξηνθισμένοι,

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2015 also discusses the visual evidence for the use of cosmetics and other beauty procedures by wives in Athens, arguing that the women in *Lysistrata* are not, as has been previously suggested by a number of scholars (cf. Stroup 2004), characterised as hetairai, since cosmetics and adornment were associated with marriage, and not only with prostitution.

10. However note that, as Llewellyn-Jones points out, the two are not necessarily discrete, since concealment which is motivated by true modesty can be as seductive as that which is designed purposefully to be coquettish: "working alongside this idea of an *active* veiled sexuality is one wherein a woman's *passive* veiled modesty and chastity, a naivety towards her own sexuality, becomes an erotic turn-on in itself." (2003: 287)

κροκωτοφοροῦσαι καὶ κεκαλλωπισμέναι  
καὶ Κιμβερικ' ὀρθοστάδια καὶ περιβαρίδας;

But what can women achieve that is clever or glorious— we who sit at home all dolled up, wearing saffron gowns and cosmetics and Cimberic straight-liners and riverboat slippers?

(*Lys.* 42-5)

However, we soon discover that it is precisely these skills which the women are to employ for the benefit of their city. Just as Praxagora and her companions will style their body hair and clothes to play the role of men, Lysistrata suggests that the women do the same in order to better embody the role of women:

εἰ γὰρ καθήμεθ' ἔνδον ἐντετριμμέναι,  
κάν τοῖς χιτωνίοισι τοῖς Ἀμοργίνοις  
γυμναὶ παρίοιμεν δέλτα παρατετιλμένα,  
στύοιντο δ' ἄνδρες κάπιθυμοῖεν σπλεκοῦν,  
ἡμεῖς δὲ μὴ προσειόμεθ', ἀλλ' ἀπεχοίμεθα,  
σπονδὰς ποιήσαιντ' ἂν ταχέως, εὖ οἶδ' ὅτι.

If we sat there at home in our make-up, and came into their rooms wearing our lawn shifts and nothing else and plucked down below delta-style, and our husbands got all horny and eager for the old spleck-spleck, but we kept away and didn't come to them— they'd make peace fast enough, I know for sure.

(*Lys.* 149-154)

The women swear an oath that they will use their saffron gowns, (219: κροκωτοφοροῦσα), Persian slippers (229: Περσικά), and heavy make-up (149: ἐντετριμμέναι, 219: κεκαλλωπισμένη), in addition with their other acts of feminine maintenance (151: δέλτα παρατετιλμένα) to construct a hypersexualised femininity and frustrate their husbands. The only difference between this acting out of femaleness and the day-to-day performance described by Calonice in lines 42-5 is that the women will, after seducing their men, withhold the sex that their performance appears to promise.

According to the women, therefore, femininity is nothing more than an elaborate guise put together with the appropriate props and accoutrements, acted out as a spectacle to deceive men. It is yet another of the schemes at which women, Lysistrata says, excel (11-12 ὅτι παρὰ μὲν τοῖς ἀνδράσιν νενομίσμεθα / εἶναι πανοῦργοι). Of course, the real joke is that, since the actors are men, the femininity on stage really is no more than an illusion, 'a creation of

make-up, costume, and our imaginative gaze.’ (Taaffe 1993: 57). The juxtaposition of what might be called the fictional reality, that these are women acting out their femaleness, with the dramatic reality that these women are in fact men, causes the construction of femininity by real women and by actors to be collapsed in on one another, thereby suggesting that neither performance has much by way of reality underneath it. “Aristophanes carefully constructs his idea of ‘woman’, suggesting that ‘woman’ is a fiction, a creation of costumes and artifice staged for the male gaze.” (Taaffe 1993: 20). This portrayal of the femininity of even good wives (since in both *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*, even the women’s deceptions are acted out only with the best interests of the city in mind) as deceptive is revisited in the opening of the *Ecclesiazusae*. Praxagora in her monologue again connects female sexuality, cosmetic procedures, and deception as she prays to her lamp (which alongside knowing all her secrets is privy to both to the depilation which women undertake in order to attract and ensnare men, as well as the sexual activity which results from such ensnarement) to help her in her latest plot:

σοὶ γὰρ μόνῳ δηλοῦμεν· εἰκότως, ἐπεὶ  
κὰν τοῖσι δωματίοισιν Ἀφροδίτης τρόπων  
πειρωμέναισι πλησίος παραστατεῖς,  
λορδουμένων τε σωμάτων ἐπιστάτην  
ὄφθαλμὸν οὐδεὶς τὸν σὸν ἐξείργει δόμων,  
μόνος δὲ μηρῶν εἰς ἀπορρήτους μυχοὺς  
λάμπεις, ἀφεύων τὴν ἐπανθοῦσαν τρίχα·

To thee alone our secret we'll reveal;  
And rightly, for within our bedrooms too,  
When we try out our new sexual variations,  
Close by thou standest, and thine eye o'ersees  
Our arching bodies, yet none ever shuts it  
Out of the chamber; thou alone dost shine  
Into the secret corners of our thighs  
When singeing off the hairs that sprout from them.

(*Eccl.* 7-13)

This chapter will argue that this model of intentionally obscure, deceptive femininity is crucial to the *Thesmophoriazusae*'s depiction of tragedy, which is the play's central theme. It

will be suggested that through the figure of Agathon, tragedy is cast as inherently, and deceptively, feminine; and that throughout the play this is connected to tragedy's lack of overt metatheatricality. Conversely, the figure of In-Law, who it will be argued is in the play associated with comic modes of performance and speech, is used to characterise comedy as a primarily phallic genre, whose metatheatrical exposure of its own workings is akin to the bodily revelation which is characteristic of the genre. While the *Ecclesiazusae* situates itself in the same landscape as its predecessor, the play shifts the focus from the deceptive illusionism of tragedy to the illusory performances of political life, at which the women of the play apparently excel. It will be argued that this play presents the most radical of all Aristophanes' female characters, in the form of Praxagora; and suggested that the complete reversal of masculine and feminine roles in the play leads to the unravelling of a series of comic conventions, such as the assertion of male fertility and dominance which often ends Aristophanes' plays, which are inherently tied to comedy's status as a phallic genre.

### ***Thesmophoriazusae***

The opening scene of the *Thesmophoriazusae* clearly signals that this is to be a play about both gender and genre; and the presence of the two tragedians, Euripides and Agathon, who are both in different ways connected with femininity and the female (Agathon through his notorious reputation for effeminacy;<sup>11</sup> and Euripides through the repeated Aristophanic accusation that his works are too interested in the affairs of women),<sup>12</sup> at once links these two apparently distant themes. The themes of theatrical performance and gender are further aligned through the enactment of the cross-dressing scene, in which In-Law is disguised as a woman by the two tragedians, and instructed in how to conduct himself at the council of women. The connection between tragedians and femininity of course offers ample opportunity for the kind of insults which are aimed at politicians, tragedians, and other public

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11. For a discussion of the historical figure of Agathon, and his presentation in a variety of authors, cf. Duncan 2006 ch. 1, and Sissa 2012, which compares the presentation of Agathon by Aristophanes and Plato.

12. The accusations against Euripides in the *Frogs* (*Ran.* 1043-56) were discussed above. The association between Euripides and women in the *Thesmophoriazusae* is established early in the scene, in lines 76-85, where the idea that Euripides' predilection for wicked female characters has incited the rage of the real women of Athens is first introduced.

figures who are repeatedly slurred in Old Comedy as effeminate. However, in this section it will be argued that it is not only the tragedians Agathon and Euripides who are connected with femininity, but that the performance practices of tragedy themselves are implicated. The scene will first be examined to show how Agathon's performance of effeminacy is characterised as deceptive and intentionally obscure; and it will then be argued that the structure of the scene, which includes references not only to plays by Agathon and Euripides, both representatives of the modern tragic style, but also Aeschylus and Phrynichus, suggests that it is the genre of tragedy as a whole which is under attack; and that tragic poetics are characterised as displaying the same deceptive effeminacy as Agathon.

The first scene of the *Thesmophoriazusae* presents the audience with two distinct examples of cross-dressing, acted out by Agathon and In-Law respectively. In-Law's transformation takes place before the audience's eyes, and the process of his conversion from male to female is acted out step by step as his beard is shaved off (215-31), his pubic hair depilated (234-45), and he is dressed in a saffron gown (253), breastband (255), hairnet (257), and women's shoes (262). In-Law's portrayal of femininity is therefore quite straightforwardly metatheatrical, as the play allows us to view the means by which his theatrical representation of femininity is created, and the line between his 'real' and 'performed' gender is therefore unambiguous.

The falseness and ultimate futility of In-Law's later attempts to mimic femininity is further implied through the repeated focus on his phallus throughout this scene. He makes aggressive sexual threats against Agathon's servant (*Thesm.* 59-62), and uses a demonstrative pronoun (62: *τουτὶ τὸ πέος*) which suggests that he gestures towards or otherwise brandishes his comic phallus; and later makes a similar threat to Agathon, suggesting that he might help the tragedian compose his satyr dramas by taking the part of the satyr (*Thesm.* 157-8), a suggestion which is also presumably accompanied by a phallic gesture. The prominence of In-Law's phallus seems to pose something of a problem for his feminine disguise. When Euripides dresses In-Law in a saffron gown, the text suggests that there might be some comic play surrounding the difficulty of arranging it in such a way that covers the phallus, as In-

Law asks Euripides to come and arrange his costume around the legs (256: ἴθι νῦν, κατάστειλόν με τὰ περὶ τὸ σκέλει). The command ἴθι νῦν strongly suggests that this line was accompanied by some action by Euripides, and the opportunity of some comic play around the difficulty of concealing In-Law's phallus which dangles 'round his legs' (τὰ περὶ τὸ σκέλει) would surely be almost irresistible for the actors.

Agathon's representation of femininity is quite different to this. As he takes the stage to recite his new tragedy-in-progress, In-Law finds his performance all too convincing, and reacts with a combination of confusion and sexual desire (130-3). In-Law is at first unable to separate Agathon's 'real' and 'performed' gender from one another, since he is unable to distinguish which parts of Agathon's contradictory appearance are props and costume in the tragedian's performance, and which belong to the actor, Agathon, underneath:

ποδαπὸς ὁ γύννις; τίς πάτρα; τίς ἡ στολή;  
τίς ἡ τάραξις τοῦ βίου; τί βάρβιτος  
λαλεῖ κροκωτῶ; τί δὲ λύρα κεκρυφάλῳ;  
τί λήκυθος καὶ στρόφιον; ὡς οὐ ζύμφορον.  
τίς δαὶ κατρόπτου καὶ ξίφους κοινωνία;  
σύ τ' αὐτός, ὦ παῖ, πότερον ὡς ἀνὴρ τρέφει;  
καὶ ποῦ πέος; ποῦ χλαῖνα; ποῦ Λακωνικαί;  
ἀλλ' ὡς γυνὴ δῆτ'; εἶτα ποῦ τὰ τιθία;

“Whence comes this epicene? What is its country, what its garb?” What confusion of life-styles is this? What has a bass to say to a saffron gown? or a lyre to a hair-net? What's an oil-flask doing with a breast-band? How incongruous! And what partnership can there be between a mirror and a sword? And what about yourself, young 'un? Have you been reared as a man? Then where's your prick? Where's your cloak? Where are your Laconian shoes? Or as a woman, was it? Then where are your tits?

(*Thesm.* 136-143)

Unlike In-Law's body (or rather, *somation*) which clearly and visibly manifests his gender identity in his prominent comic phallus, Agathon's body is indeterminate, lacking any proper marker of sex, whether male (he apparently has no phallus, 142: ποῦ πέος, something which is surely highly unusual for an ostensibly male character on the comic stage) or female (143: ποῦ τὰ τιθία).

Agathon's explanations fail to leave In-Law, or the audience any less confused about the exact nature of his cross-dressing effeminacy.<sup>13</sup> First, Agathon explains that he must, as a male tragedian, make himself more female in order to write women's parts:

χρὴ γὰρ ποιητὴν ἄνδρα πρὸς τὰ δρᾶματα  
 ἂ δεῖ ποιεῖν, πρὸς ταῦτα τοὺς τρόπους ἔχειν.  
 αὐτίκα γυναικεῖ' ἦν ποιῆ τις δρᾶματα,  
 μετουσίαν δεῖ τῶν τρόπων τὸ σῶμ' ἔχειν.

A man who is a poet must adopt habits that match the plays he's committed to composing. For example, if one is writing plays about women, one's body must participate in their habits.

(*Thesm.* 149-152)

But almost immediately, Agathon contradicts himself, saying that tragedy reflects the nature of the tragedian who writes it (167: ὅμοια γὰρ ποιεῖν ἀνάγκη τῆ φύσει), and that it is in recognition of this fact that he has cultivated this feminine appearance (171-2: ἅπασ' ἀνάγκη· ταῦτα γὰρ τοι γνοῦς ἐγὼ / ἐμαυτὸν ἐθεράπευσα). Ugly Philocles writes ugly poetry, bad Xenocles writes badly, and frigid Theognis frigidly, and so for a poet not to look beautiful is not only in poor taste, but a regrettable artistic decision (159: ἄμουσόν). If this were not all confusing enough, Agathon seems to suggest that his feminine persona is not limited to his compositional activity, since he wears at least some of his props at night, implying that his cross-dressing is also at least in part some kind of sexual preference:

<Eu> κεκρυφάλου δεῖ καὶ μίτρας.  
 <Ag> ἠδὲ μὲν οὖν ἡδὲ μὲν οὖν  
 κεφαλὴ περίθετος, ἦν ἐγὼ νύκτωρ φορῶ.

Eu: We need a hair-net and a bandeau.

Ag: No, no, here's a put-on headpiece, which I wear at night.

(*Thesm.* 257-8)

This confusion as to the nature of Agathon's gender, and the lack of clarity about the extent to which it is performative (does he only put on this feminine act to write, or all the time? Can we tell the difference between when he is and is not 'putting it on?') is a clear contrast with

13. Both Mueke 1982 and Robson 2005 have explored Agathon's contradictory statements about his feminine dress from the point of view of the engagement with contemporary essentialist vs. constructionist philosophical debates.



In-Law's cross-dressing, in which his 'real' masculine identity is first established through the repeated focus on the character's phallus, before a separate feminine identity is imposed on top of this through the use of a second costume, which is placed on In-Law item by item. The tragedian's femininity is rooted in indeterminacy, which he encourages through his contradictory explanations, and an uncertainty about what is 'real' and what only performed; and Agathon's feminine persona is in this way similar to the deceptive femininity practised by the women in *Lysistrata*, whose feminine wiles are similarly illusory.

### **The Comic Frame: Implicating tragedy**

Although Agathon's flamboyant public image must have made him an almost irresistible target for a comic playwright, the portrayal of Agathon's deceptive effeminacy in the *Thesmophoriazusae* is more than just a matter of personal satire. The structure of the opening scene sets up a comic frame,<sup>14</sup> whereby Agathon's performance of tragedy is focalised through the viewpoint of the comic In-Law; and the scene repeatedly draws the focus away from Agathon's own plays, and towards other tragedians (including of course Euripides), and tragedy more broadly. The opening lines of the *Thesmophoriazusae* clearly signal the fact that some kind of spectacle is about to be viewed by In-Law, at the instigation of Euripides. Characters in the openings of Aristophanes' plays quite often ask for the plot of the play to be explained to them, or to the audience,<sup>15</sup> and true to form, In-Law quickly tries to ascertain what sort of thing he is about to perceive (4: *παρὰ σοῦ πυθέσθαι ποῖ μ' ἄγεις ὤριπίδη;*). Euripides at first refuses to explain, saying simply that he will soon see for himself (5-6: *ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀκούειν δεῖ σε πάνθ' ὅσ' αὐτίκα / ὄψει παρεστώς*), placing the In-Law in the role of the spectator, who need not have the plot explained to him since he will be present to witness it being played out. The fact that the apparent orchestrator of this spectacle is to be the

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14. The use of a framing device in the play is discussed also by Taaffe 1993: 79-82 and Slater 2002: 153.

15. The opening of *Knights* (36: *βούλει τὸ πρᾶγμα τοῖς θεαταῖσιν φράσω;*) *Wasps* (54: *φέρε νυν κατείπω τοῖς θεαταῖς τὸν λόγον*) and *Peace* (44: *τὸ δὲ πρᾶγμα τί;*) contain suggestions that the plot be explained to the audience.

playwright Euripides, who is named unusually early in line 4,<sup>16</sup> suggests that we should see this spectacle as a kind of dramatic performance. That this spectacle will have a particularly Euripidean character is emphasised again with the suggestion that one thing that In-Law might learn from Euripides is how to become lame:

<Εὐ> πόλλ' ἂν μάθοις τοιαῦτα παρ' ἐμοῦ.  
 <Κη> πῶς ἂν οὖν  
 πρὸς τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς τούτοισιν ἐξεύροιμ' ὅπως  
 ἔτι προσμάθοιμι χολὸς εἶναι τῷ σκέλει;

Eu: Oh, you could learn a lot more things like that from me.

In: Then is there any chance, to add to these blessings, that you could discover a way for me to learn how to— be lame in both legs?

(*Thesm.* 22-4)

The lameness of Euripidean heroes has already been the subject of jokes in *Acharnians* (410-11: ἀναβάδην ποιεῖς, / ἐξὸν καταβάδην. οὐκ ἐτὸς χολοὺς ποιεῖς.) and *Peace* (147-8: εἴτα χολὸς ὢν Εὐριπίδῃ / λόγον παράσχῃς καὶ τραγωδία γένη), and, along with the wearing of ragged clothes, is apparently a stock characterisation of the tragedians' plays within Aristophanes. In learning lameness from Euripides, In-Law is therefore cast as a Euripidean hero; and the initial frame as a whole casts the tragic performance which follows as not only representative of Agathon, but also of Euripides.

That what we are about to witness should be viewed as in some way a version of Euripidean tragedy is again indicated when In-Law finally learns what plan Euripides is proposing and replies:

τὸ πρᾶγμα κομψὸν καὶ σφόδρ' ἐκ τοῦ σοῦ τρόπου·

An elegant idea, that, and very much in your style!

(*Thesm.* 93)

The word πρᾶγμα is often used in Aristophanes to refer to the plot of the play, frequently in an explicitly metatheatrical mode (*Eq.* 36: βούλει τὸ πρᾶγμα τοῖς θεαταῖσιν φράσω; *Lys.* 22-3: ἐφ' ὃ τι ποθ' ἡμᾶς τὰς γυναῖκας ξυγκαλεῖς; τί τὸ πρᾶγμα; *Eccl.* 124-5: δεῦρ', ὦ

16. On naming conventions, and the frequent postponement of the revelation of the hero's name, in Aristophanes, Cf. Olson 1992.

γλυκυτάτη Πραξαγόρα, σκέψαι, τάλαν, / ὡς καὶ καταγέλαστον τὸ πρᾶγμα φαίνεται, 310: τί τὸ πρᾶγμα; ποῖ ποθ' ἡ γυνὴ φρούδη 'στί μοι;). By describing the πρᾶγμα as being 'very much in a Euripidean way' In-Law frames the performance by Agathon as being not only representative of his own style but also as somehow Euripidean; and Aristophanes is therefore able to suggest that what is true of Agathon is true of at least one other of the tragedians, and may therefore be a matter of generic rather than individual practice. This point is pressed again when Euripides chides In-Law for mocking Agathon's performative effeminacy, which he feels is perfectly normal for a young tragedian learning his art, and was his own practice in his youth (173-4: παῦσαι βαῦζων· καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ τοιοῦτος ἦν / ὦν τηλικοῦτος, ἡνίκ' ἤρχόμεν ποιεῖν).

However, the identification of Agathon's poetics with the practices of other tragedians is not limited to Euripides, but also encompasses other of the tragedians not usually associated with Agathon and the contemporary style of tragedy. Euripides' plays do receive a number of quotations during the opening scene (*Alcestis* 691 at *Thesm.* 194: χαίρεις ὀρῶν φῶς, πατέρα δ' οὐ χαίρειν δοκεῖς; and *Hippolytus* 612, at *Thesm.* 275-6: μέμνησο τοίνυν ταῦθ', ὅτι ἡ φρήν ὄμοσεν, / ἡ γλῶττα δ' οὐκ ὁμόμοκ', οὐδ' ὄρκωσ' ἐγώ). However, there are also clear references made to tragedians from the earlier history of the genre, who would not normally be associated with the effeminate, modern style.<sup>17</sup> When Agathon first takes the stage, In-Law's confusion about the tragedian's appearance is immediately expressed in suitably paratragic terms:

καί σ', ὦ νεανίσχ', ἤτις εἶ, κατ' Αἰσχύλον  
ἐκ τῆς Λυκουργείας ἐρέσθαι βούλομαι.

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17. It is worth noting at this point that, in this regard, the stance towards tragedy taken in the *Thesmophoriazusae* differs substantially from that in the *Frogs*. In the later play, the emphasis is firmly on the difference between tragedians, as Euripides' tragedy is characterised as domestic and concerned with women, and Aeschylus' older style as warlike and heroic (*Ran.* 936-1088). The *Thesmophoriazusae* by contrast elides the differences between tragedians, since its interest is in comedy vs. tragedy, rather than in investigating different tragic styles and poets. The presentation of Aeschylus here as implicated in tragic effeminacy forms a particular point of departure from the *Frogs*, in which his warlike manliness is contrasted with Euripides' effeminacy and interest in female characters (e.g. *Ran.* 1013-51).

ποδαπὸς ὁ γύννις; τίς πάτρα; τίς ἡ στολή;

And now, young sir, I want to ask you in the style of Aeschylus, in words from the *Lycurgus* plays, what manner of woman are you? “Whence comes this epicene? What is its country, what its garb?”

(*Thesm.* 134-6)

Unlike the quotations of Euripides above, which are not introduced explicitly as such (though they are quite probably well-known and recognisable lines; the quote from *Hippolytus* in particular is also referenced at *Ran.* 102 by Heracles), the use of Aeschylus’ *Lycurgeia* is expressly labelled. A scholion on this line identifies it as coming from the *Edonians*, and suggests that it is spoken by king Lycurgus to the god Dionysus himself, whom he addresses as γύννις. By directing this quotation at Agathon, the play thereby characterises the tragedian as a Dionysiac figure, and represents his effeminate performance of tragedy (which directly precedes these lines) as an engagement with Dionysiac motifs. The effeminate form of the god Dionysus appears not only in cult,<sup>18</sup> but is of course used extensively in tragedy, not only by Aeschylus in the *Lycurgeia*, in which it is a central theme, but also in Euripides’ *Bacchae*, which was in all likelihood influenced by Aeschylus’ earlier trilogy. This feminine manifestation of the god is argued by Zeitlin (1985) to be of particular significance to tragic drama. However, it is not only Agathon whose engagement with the Dionysiac is presented here as effeminate; in using a line of Aeschylus, and an Aeschylean portrayal of the effeminate Dionysus (which even contains the word γύννις, ‘effeminate man’), the older tragedian is also implicated in tragedy’s feminisation, and in particular in the genre’s interest in the effeminate manifestation of the god of the theatre.

As the scene continues, it is not only Aeschylus who is connected with the effeminate tragedy practised by Agathon, but also Phrynichus, who similarly belongs, unlike Agathon and Euripides, to the older, more traditional generation of tragedians. When Agathon is defending his effeminate appearance to In-Law on the grounds that a beautiful outward appearance will aid him in the composition of beautiful poetry, he claims that Phrynichus was similarly concerned with outward beauty, and that this was the cause of his greatness:

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18. For an overview of the various representations of Dionysus in cult, cf. Guettel Cole 2007.

καὶ Φρύνιχος—τοῦτον γὰρ οὖν ἀκήκοας—  
αὐτός τε καλὸς ἦν καὶ καλῶς ἠμπίσχετο·  
διὰ τοῦτ' ἄρ' αὐτοῦ καὶ κάλ' ἦν τὰ δράματα.

And Phrynichus — you must have actually heard him sing — he was an attractive man and he also wore attractive clothes, and *that's* why his plays were attractive too.

(*Thesm.* 164-6)

By including references to not only the new generation of tragedians, but even to Aeschylus and Phrynichus, representatives of the early tragic style not usually associated, unlike the more modern tragedians, with effeminacy, the play encourages us to see the opening scene as a discussion not only of Agathon's poetics but of tragedy as a whole. Effeminacy is throughout the scene cast as an inherent characteristic of tragedy and the tragedians, thereby suggesting that the Agathon's effeminacy is neither recent nor unique, but merely an exaggeration of a characteristic present in the genre since its beginnings.

In contrast to the effeminate manifestation of Dionysus which the *Thesmophoriazousae* associates with tragedy and the tragedians, when Dionysus appears in comedy, his phallic, masculine properties are emphasised. The opening of the *Frogs* sees an extended joke about the god's active sexual appetites, directed in this case at the effeminate politician Cleisthenes (*Ran.* 52-7); and in Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* the god appears with a chorus of satyrs, lustfully abducting Helen in Paris' place.<sup>19</sup> In-Law's engagement with Dionysiac motifs is therefore, unlike Agathon's, very much in keeping with the god's comic, masculine form. Throughout the scene he continually draws attention to his status as a phallic figure operating in a mode which is simultaneously comic and Bacchic. Unlike the apparently phallusless Agathon (142: καὶ ποῦ πέος;),<sup>20</sup> In-Law's phallus is continually made a focus of the scene, as

19. Cf. Bakola 2010 ch. 2.

20. Agathon's possession of a phallus is acknowledged at 254: νῆ τὴν Ἀφροδίτην ἠδὲ γ' ὄζει ποσθίου. However even here it is not straightforwardly masculine, mentioned as it is in combination with a saffron robe. Nor can a πόσθιον possibly be classified as a comic phallus, since it is here in the diminutive, which the comic phallus most certainly is not. Additionally, the phallus is mentioned only as a lingering smell, suggesting that Agathon does not in fact have a visible phallus on stage, and therefore making the contrast between his appearance and that of In-Law consistent with their respectively feminine and masculine characterisation in

he is put in a state of sexual arousal by Agathon's display (133: ὑπὸ τὴν ἔδραν αὐτὴν ὑπῆλθε γάργαλος;), which would presumably be signposted visually by the actor drawing his phallus into the erect position; and In-Law reacts to Agathon's performance with aggressive sexual threats against the tragedian (51: μῶν βινεῖσθαι; 57: καὶ λαικάζει). These threats culminate in In-Law's suggestion that he could 'help' Agathon put on a Satyr Play by buggering him:

ὅταν σατύρους τοίνυν ποιῆς, καλεῖν ἐμέ,  
ἵνα συμποιῶ σοῦπισθεν ἐστυκῶς ἐγώ.

Ask me over, then, when you're writing a satyr-play, so that I can collaborate with you, long and hard, from the rear.

(*Thesm.* 157-8)

It seems appropriate, firstly, that the hyper-phallic In-Law should characterise satyr drama primarily through its similar association with phallic, aggressive masculinity;<sup>21</sup> and secondly, that satyr drama might provide the meeting-point between the overtly comic In-Law and the tragic Agathon, and consequently between these two aspects of Dionysus, the tragic effeminate and the hyper-sexualised, hyper-masculine phallic figure of Old Comedy, with comedy naturally taking the dominant position.

In addition to aiding in the play's characterisation of Agathon's poetics as representative of tragedy, and the tragedians, as a whole, the opening comic frame also makes it clear to the audience that Agathon's performance of tragedy is being viewed through a specifically comic perspective. At line 36, Euripides and In-Law retreat (for no particular reason, as Slater 2002: 153 points out, other than to help in establishing a theatrical frame with them as the audience; there is nothing in the plot itself to motivate this), and the audience subsequently experience Agathon's tragedy through the filter of In-Law's vocal, and comic, reactions from the sidelines of the stage. The performance begins first with the prayers of Agathon's slave, who

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these scenes.

21. Cf. Hedreen 1992 ch. 6 on the topic of visual representations of satyrs, and the relationship between satyr drama and vase painting. Hedreen states (p. 158) that "[the] very frequent state of sexual arousal of the silens is one of the most enduring visual characteristics of these creatures in art." Despite this association between satyrs, and satyr plays, and the phallic, the plays were in reality somewhat broader in their topics (cf. Sutton 1980a). Satyr drama was discussed in more detail in the preceding chapter.

is sent out to make the appropriate intercessions before his master can begin composing. The slave speaks in overtly, and ridiculously, paratragic language which resembles the language which will be used by Agathon in his composition.<sup>22</sup> That even the slave who introduces Agathon's performance of tragic composition speaks in a tragic style suggests that tragedy and tragicness have a tendency to spill out into the ordinary speech of those even peripherally associated with it, thereby making it difficult to draw a clear line where the real ends and the performative begins.<sup>23</sup>

In-Law's mocking interruptions from the sidelines as the slave performs his tragicomic introduction further reinforce the idea that we are viewing tragedy through a comic frame, and focus the audience on In-Law's obviously comic reception of tragic speech, as he first ridicules the slave with nonsense words (46: βομβάξ, 49: βομβαλοβομβάξ), and then with obscenity (51: μῶν βινεῖσθαι, 57: καὶ λαικάζει), and finally, in a manner reminiscent of Philocleon's escape attempts in the opening scene of *Wasps* (*Vesp.* 144: καπνὸς ἔγωγ' ἐξέρχομαι), absurdity (51: νήνεμος αἰθήρ). In-Law's spectatorship and his subsequent interruptions draw the attention of the audience to his reception of the tragic performance, and by focalising the tragic performance from the perspective of In-Law and his exaggeratedly comic interjections, it is made clear that we are viewing Agathon only through the comic frame; and this further suggests that even this 'behind-the-scenes' glimpse of tragic poiesis is only permitted because of the filter of comedy's metatheatrical conventions; tragedy alone does not provide its audience with such a view of its working methods, due to its lack of overt metatheatricity. Poetry and playwrights may be the theme and subject of a comic play, but not a tragic one.

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22. For example *Thesm.* 39: λαός, a word associated usually with epic, and occasionally with tragedy, is high in register; 41: θίασος is, according to Austin and Olson (2004: 66-7) used routinely in Euripidean lyric; 41: μελάθρων is conspicuously tragic in register; this high style of diction is continued throughout the slave's opening prayer.

23. The idea that tragicness and tragic style is not limited to the performance of tragedy itself, but infects the speech of those who come into contact with it, is also a feature of the scene with Euripides in the *Acharnians* (395-497), in which not only the tragedian, but also his slave, and even Dicaeopolis, speak (to varying degrees) in a tragic style.

Once Agathon takes the stage, the same things which make his gender seem mysterious and false also characterise his poetics. Agathon's contradictory comments on his own femininity (136-143 and 149-152, discussed above) seem designed not only to conceal and confuse his real gender, but also his poetic methods, as he first claims that a poet must change his outward appearance in order to imitate different kinds of poetry (148-156), and then states instead that poetry is a reflection of the poet's true self (159-172). Unlike the comic In-Law, whom we will see dressed and made into an actor figure before our very eyes; and unlike the play's comic frame, which overtly announces its status as a dramatic performance (6: ὄψει παρεστῶ, 96: τὸ πρᾶγμα), Agathon lacks this honest metatheatricity, and it seems that he wishes to conceal the truth about his theatrical methods from his audience(s) through obfuscation and contradiction. Just as we are not able to view Agathon's 'real' gender, or to distinguish it from his 'performed' one, the tragedian does not allow the audience to view his transformation to being 'in character', and we are similarly unable to discern exactly where his 'real' self ends and his tragic persona begins. Just as there seems to be nothing 'real' behind Aristophanic femininity, so Agathon's tragedy seems to slip between reality and performance in such a way as to suggest that the two are much the same. If, as Llewellyn-Jones argues, the deceptive veil is the essential garment of femaleness, it would seem that Agathon's hair-covering (κεκρύφαλος),<sup>24</sup> which he both uses to perform his tragic poesis and wears to bed, becomes emblematic of the deceptive way in which the tragedian blurs the distinction between the real and the performative, forever refusing to break the surface and step out into a straightforward declaration of fictionality.

On one level, the *Thesmophoriazusae*'s attack on the effeminacy of tragedy and the tragedians in this scene is simply an expression of comedy's competitive impulse to deride both direct and indirect rivals in whatever terms seem most offensive, with Agathon's well-

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24. Although it is often translated as 'hair-net', Llewellyn-Jones (2003: 30-31) categorises the κεκρύφαλος as a type of veil. The word appears in *Il.* 22.468-72, where it is listed as one of the items which make up Andromache's head covering, along with the ἄμπυξ, πλεκτή ἀναδέσμη, and κρήδεμνον. Llewellyn-Jones suggests that the meaning of κεκρύφαλος was unchanged in the Classical period, and that it may similarly have been used in the later period as only one component of a veiled head-covering, as it seems to be in Homer.



established reputation for effeminacy, as well as the Aristophanic characterisation of Euripidean drama as overly concerned with feminine, domestic matters, providing the starting point. Further to this, the characterisation of the new generation, whether of politicians, tragedians, or men in general, as lacking the manliness of their predecessors is a common trope in Aristophanic abuse.<sup>25</sup> However, by implicating not only the modern generation of tragedians, but also the traditional styles of Aeschylus and Phrynichus, the opening scene of the *Thesmophoriazusae* suggests that, far from being a modern affectation, effeminacy was a quality inherent to tragedy from its beginnings, linked to the genre's affiliation with and interest in the effeminate manifestation of the god of the theatre, Dionysus, who conversely appears in comedy in his phallic, masculine form. Moreover, Agathon's effeminacy is linked throughout the scene to tragedy's lack of overt metatheatricality, whereby performativity is not clearly marked, nor the entry into a state of performance overtly delineated, as it is in the comic frame which opens the scene. The *Thesmophoriazusae* therefore sets up an opposition between the open metatheatricality of comedy, which allows the audience to view the construction of dramatic mimesis, and the deceptive mimetic practice of tragedy which, like a woman who only seems beautiful because she is concealed behind heavy make-up or a veil, strives never to break its own illusion.<sup>26</sup> Throughout the opening scene, the theme of gender is therefore used as a means to an end, carving out a space in which comedy's theatrical methods and techniques can be clearly differentiated from those of tragedy, whilst also calling into question the rival genre's prestigious status.

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25. Cf. for example the arguments of Dikaios Logos in the *Clouds* (961-1023); and the complaints of the wasp-chorus about the younger generation in the *Wasps* (1114-9)

26. On the inappropriateness of thinking of tragic theatrical practice as illusionistic, cf. Taplin 1986, who considers the term unhelpful when applied to such non-naturalistic theatre. Aristophanes' characterisation of tragedy is, of course, a matter of comic exaggeration, especially since tragedy is not, in fact, completely devoid of metatheatrical discourse. However, the lack of what Dobrov 2001 terms 'surface play' in tragedy provides enough of a distinction between tragic and comic theatrics from which to build a generalised comic comparison.

### **The Council of ‘Women’**

Although the focus shifts away from direct literary critical discussions, the opposition set up in these opening scenes between dissembling, feminine tragedy and comedy’s straightforward phallic masculinity continue to colour the rest of the play. By the time In-Law arrives at the council of women, he has been established as figure who operates in an overtly comic mode, and is to a large extent defined as a manifestation of comedy’s status as a phallic genre. The prominence of In-Law’s phallus (and Euripides’ possible difficulty in concealing it earlier in the play) suggests that In-Law’s disguise is somewhat thin, and that he has little hope of passing among the women, as indeed proves to be the case. In this section, it will be argued firstly that In-Law’s status as a comic, phallic figure makes it impossible for him to pass as female, and that his comic speech, which aligns him with the conventions of the genre, and particularly with comic obscenity and revelation, simultaneously marks him out as unmistakably male. Secondly, the women’s association with Euripides, and Euripidean tragedy, will be examined, and it will be suggested that the women’s speech, and their desire to hide their deceptive practices, is characterised as tragic; and conversely, that Euripides’ interest in the deceptive practices of women characterises his poetry as having feminine qualities which contrast with In-Law’s comic impulse towards revelation both bodily and metatheatrical.

While in the opening scene, Euripides simply states that the women are angry at him for slandering them in his plays (85: *ὅτι τραγωδῶ καὶ κακῶς αὐτὰς λέγω*, 181-2: *μέλλουσί μ’ αἰ γυναῖκες ἀπολεῖν τήμερον / τοῖς Θεσμοφορίοις, ὅτι κακῶς αὐτὰς λέγω*), it soon emerges at the council that the women’s complaint is more specific. Namely, they are angry with Euripides not because his bad words about them are untrue, but rather because they are far too true; and accordingly their customary deceptions have been laid bare for all, including their husbands, to see. The council begins with Critylla offering a customary appeal for *εὐφημία*, and praying for the safekeeping of the city and its women. However, what begins as a rather bland prayer for the safety of priests and priestesses, and an incantation against anyone who might negotiate with the Medes (or with Euripides, who is conveniently bracketed alongside them!) or aspire to be a tyrant of the city, quickly descends into

something more outrageous, as Critylla prays for the undoing of anyone who might inform on a woman's misdeeds, such as passing off another's baby as her own (339-40: ἡ παιδίον / ὑποβαλλομένης κατεῖπεν), or cheating on her husband (340-1: ἡ δούλη τινὸς / προαγωγὸς οὔσ' ἐνετρύλλισεν τῷ δεσπότη). The second woman to speak at the assembly (named later in line 760 as Mica), confirms that Euripides is one such man who has revealed the deceptions and misdeeds of women to their husbands, by writing about them in his plays. She claims that since Euripides began to stage his collection of wicked women, the husbands of Athens are permanently suspicious, so that the women can no longer go about their usual deceitful business:

δρᾶσαι δ' ἔθ' ἡμῖν οὐδὲν ὥσπερ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ  
 ἔξεστι· τοιαῦθ' οὗτος ἐδίδαξεν κακὰ  
 τοὺς ἄνδρας ἡμῶν·

We're not able to do *anything* now the way we used to before, what with the kind of bad habits that man has taught our husbands.

(*Thesm.* 398-400)

Like Agathon's performance earlier, it seems that Euripides' poetry is also full of feminine wiles, the only difference being that, while Agathon uses feminine wiles to compose his poetry, Euripides makes them his subject; and despite tragedy's alleged reluctance to reveal its own deceptive methods, Euripides' plays therefore, according to the women at least, have far too keen an interest in the deceptive practices of others.

Not only are the subjects of tragic plots characterised in this scene as feminine, and concerned with female deception, a link is also made between tragic and female speech. When Mica has finished her indictments, the chorus react by praising her cleverness and insight, and stating that even the tragedian Xenocles, son of Carcinus, could not speak so well:

ὥστ' ἂν εἰ λέγοι παρ' αὐτὴν  
 Ξενοκλέης ὁ Καρκίνου, δοκεῖν ἂν αὐτόν,  
 ὡς ἐγῶμαι, πᾶσιν ὑμῖν  
 ἄντικρυς μηδὲν λέγειν.

In comparison with her, if

Xenocles son of Carcinus were to make a speech,  
all of you, I fancy, would agree  
he was talking absolute rubbish!

(*Thesm.* 440-42)

Not only is the female speech at the assembly compared to the (albeit substandard, cf. *Thesm.* 169) tragic poet Xenocles, but the chorus go on to characterise the next speaker in words reminiscent of In-Law's description of Euripides. At line 93, In-Law refers to Euripides' plan as being characteristically κομψός (93: τὸ πρᾶγμα κομψὸν καὶ σφόδρ' ἐκ τοῦ σοῦ τρόπου), a description which is also attributed to Euripidean poetics elsewhere in Aristophanes (e.g. *Eq.* 18: κομψευρικῶς, and *Ran.* 965-7, where Euripides claims the attribute as characteristic of his disciples); and this is precisely the description given to the words of the second speaker, the Garland Seller, who is described as being even cleverer than Mica (460: κομψότερον).

Conversely, when In-Law begins to speak, his register is overtly, and outrageously comic. Furthermore, the speech is misjudged in a number of ways, and at once raises the women's suspicions that this "woman" is not all she seems. Zeitlin has suggested that it is primarily In-Law's total inability to empathise with the female perspective which gives him away to the assembled women, arguing that his "anecdotes of adultery and suppositious babies" (1981: 174) are characteristic of male discourse, in that they present women as scheming adulterers and out of control drinkers. However, the stories of adultery and illegitimacy are no different from those suggested by the earlier female speakers Mica and Critylla (*Thesm.* 339-41, 407-15), and it therefore seems unlikely that it is this content which gives In-Law away. In-Law's speech does however differ from those made by the female speakers in important aspects, both thematic and linguistic. Firstly, unlike the women who were deeply concerned that Euripides should be revealing their deceptive tricks for all to see, In-Law's attitude to revelation is decidedly nonchalant. He begins by arguing that the women should not be overly concerned if Euripides has revealed a few of their methods of deception, since they have many more:

τί ταῦτ' ἔχουσαι ἄκείνον αἰτιώμεθα  
βαρέως τε φέρομεν, εἰ δὲ ἡμῶν ἢ τρία  
κακὰ ξυνειδῶς εἶπε δρώσας μυρία;

Why do we keep blaming it all on him? Why do we feel aggrieved if he's spoken about two or three crimes of ours, when he's well aware that we're guilty of countless thousands of them?

(*Thesm.* 473-5)

In contrast to the women before him who spoke only in generalities (e.g. 400-1: τις... γυνή), In-Law continues his speech with a personal revelation, shamelessly confessing in lurid detail to the most terrible (478: δεινότατον) crime, and one which it appears even Euripides would not reveal:

ἐγὼ γὰρ αὐτὴ πρῶτον, ἵνα μᾶλλον λέγω,  
ξύνοιδ' ἐμαυτῆ πολλὰ <δειν'·> ἐκεῖνο δ' οὖν  
δεινότατον, ὅτε νύμφη μὲν ἦν τρεῖς ἡμέρας,  
ὁ δ' ἀνὴρ παρ' ἐμοὶ καθηῦθεν. ἦν δέ μοι φίλος,  
ὅσπερ με διεκόρευσεν οὔσαν ἐπτέτιν.  
οὗτος πόθω μου ἔκνυεν ἐλθὼν τὴν θύραν·  
κἀγὼ εὐθύς ἔγνων· εἶτα καταβαίνω λάθρα.  
ὁ δ' ἀνὴρ ἐρωτᾷ· “ποῖ σὺ καταβαίνεις;” “ὅποι;  
στρόφος μ' ἔχει τὴν γαστέρ', ὄνερ, κώδύνη·  
εἰς τὸν κοπρῶν' οὖν ἔρχομαι.” “βάδιζέ νυν.”  
κᾷθ' ὁ μὲν ἔτριβε κεδρίδας, ἄννηθον, σφάκον·  
ἐγὼ δὲ καταχέασα τοῦ στροφέως ὕδωρ  
ἐξῆλθον ὡς τὸν μοιχόν· εἶτ' ἠρειδόμην  
παρὰ τὸν Ἀγυιᾶ κύβδ', ἐχομένη τῆς δάφνης.  
ταῦτ' οὐδεπώποτ' εἶφ'—ὄρατ';—Εὐριπίδης·

I myself to begin with, never mind anyone else, have plenty of wicked deeds on my own conscience. The wickedest of all, though, was when I was a bride of three days, and my husband was sleeping beside me. Now I had this friend, who had devirginated me when I was seven years old. He was longing for me, and he came and started scratching on the door. Then I realized at once who it was, and then I start quietly going downstairs. My husband asks “Where are you off downstairs to?” “Where to?” I say. “I've got a griping and pain in my tummy, husband, so I'm going to the bog.” “Go on, then.” And then there he was, pounding up juniper berries and dill and sage; and I poured water over the door-socket, and went out to my lover, and there there I was, bonking away, bent over next to the altar of Apollo, clinging to the laurel bush. Euripides has never mentioned all that, do you see?

(*Thesm.* 476-90)

It is not only his relaxed attitude to the revelation of deceptive tricks which at once begins to signal that In-Law does not fit into the thematic space inhabited by both women and

tragedians within the discourse of the play, but also the tone with which In-Law discloses these crimes. That even Euripides would balk at a story such as this is unsurprising, since it belongs quite obviously within a comic, and not tragic register. Although tragedy may take sex as its subject, the level of detail given here (including sex position, 489: κῶβδ', ἐχομένη τῆς δάφνης, 'bent over and clinging to a laurel bush') is unmistakably comic; and the juxtaposition of sex with scatology, as the 'bride' uses a bad stomach as an excuse to sneak down and meet her lover (483-6), again locates In-Law's speech within a distinctly comic mode.

With the women's suspicions roused about the stranger in their midst, and In-Law's discovery set in motion, he continues to anger the assembly with his failure to control his comic impulse to reveal all (555: μὰ Δί' οὐδέπω τὴν μυριοστὴν μοῖραν ὧν ποιοῦμεν), including an additional scatological outburst at line 570 (τὸν σησαμοῦνθ' ὄν κατέφαγες, τοῦτον χεσεῖν ποιήσω). Just as In-Law's scatological register reveals him as an overtly comic character, it also arguably reveals him as a man. As McClure has observed, while female characters in Old Comedy frequently use sexual obscenity, scatology is almost entirely absent from the speech of women, and instead, "words pertaining to defecation, including allusions to constipation, feces, public befouling, and urination have an exclusively masculine reference in Old Comedy" (McClure 1999: 214). My own data finds that, of the eighty-seven examples of scatological obscenity in Aristophanes, only four are spoken by a female character; and that the word κόπρος (used here by In-Law, *Thesm.* 485), and compounds derived from it, appears ten times in the plays, each of which is spoken by a male character.<sup>27</sup> In-Law's use of graphic scatological vocabulary therefore characterises his speech both as comic, and as male; and the revelation of In-Law's masculinity is therefore tied inextricably to genre, as his scatological language simultaneously reveals his true, insuppressible, identity, and affiliates him with comic modes of speech.

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27. For uses of κόπρος (and compounds derived from it), cf. *Eq.* 295, 899, *Vesp.* 1184, 1431, *Pax* 9, 99, *Lys.* 1174, *Eccl.* 317, 360. For further discussion of the differences between male and female speech in Aristophanes, cf. Sommerstein 1995, and Willi 2003.

In-Law's final revelation finds a similar combination of gender and scatology, with the additional focus on the actor's phallus pressing the connection between comedy and this manifestation of maleness. At line 611, to stave off his now inevitable discovery, In-Law attempts to stall for time, saying that he needs to urinate:

<Κλ> αὐτή σὺ ποῖ στρέφει; μὲν' αὐτοῦ. τί τὸ κακόν;

<Κη> ἔασον οὐρῆσαι μ'. ἀναίσχυντός τις εἶ.

<Κρ> ἀνάμενε δῆτα καὶ σκόπει γ' αὐτὴν σφόδρα·  
μόνην γὰρ αὐτὴν ὄνερ οὐ γιγνώσκομεν.

<Κλ> πολὺν γε χρόνον οὐρεῖς σύ.

<Κη> νῆ Δί' ὦ μέλε,  
στραγγουριῶ γάρ· ἐχθὲς ἔφαγον κάρδαμα.

<Κλ> τί καρδαμίζεις; οὐ βαδιεῖ δεῦρ' ὡς ἐμέ;

Cl: Hey, you, where are you trying to go? Stay right here! What's wrong with you!

In: Allow me to have a piss, will you — you shameless creature!

Cl: All right, you do that. I'll wait for you here.

Cr: Yes, you wait for her, and keep a close eye on here, she's the only one, sir, that we don't know.

Cl: You're certainly taking a long time pissing there.

In: Because I am suffering, my good man, from difficulty in passing water. I ate some cress yesterday.

Kl: What's this cress nonsense? Come over here to me, will you?

(*Thesm.* 610-17)

Given In-Law's predicament, urinating is most certainly not a good idea, since it is likely to only further speed his revelation as a man. Scenes of on-stage urination appear elsewhere in Aristophanes;<sup>28</sup> and *Wasps* 935-40 in particular shares similarities with this scene of the *Thesmophoriazusae*, as Philocleon's extended on-stage urination into a chamber-pot (*Vesp.* 935: ἀμίδα μοι δότω) is likewise met with impatience and irritation (*Vesp.* 940: ἀλλ' ἔτι σὺ γ' οὐρεῖς καὶ καθίζεις οὐδέπω;). Both these scenes appear to derive comic value from the sight of one character struggling to urinate while another hurries them along; however, while Philocleon's slowness is a symptom of his advanced age, In-Law's is perhaps most likely due to his difficulty in attempting to urinate like a woman, squatting down, in order to better convince the onlookers of his female identity. Given the size of the comic phallus worn by

28. The more extended on-stage defecation scene in the *Ecclesiazusae* is discussed in greater detail below.

the character, it would be likely to come into view as soon as the actor assumed a squatting position, and perhaps some additional comic play would have been made with In-Law's difficulty in concealing it beneath his skirts. The scatological act on stage, and the similarly scatological vocabulary (forms of οὐρέω appear eight times in Aristophanes, each time spoken by a man),<sup>29</sup> therefore firstly identifies In-Law as masculine, and as comic, as well as potentially revealing his phallus, which carries the same dual status as male and comic. Finally, in lines 636 and following, In-Law is stripped by the women, and, despite his repeated attempts to conceal it by shuttling it back and forth between his legs (643-8), his phallus is uncovered, marking him unmistakably as a comic man.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the focus on comic masculinity, in this scene the plot of the *Thesmophoriazusae* takes a more obviously political turn, both implicitly in the women's mock assembly, and explicitly with the entry of the politician Cleisthenes. Often the butt of Aristophanes' jokes for his effeminacy and passive homosexuality, he now appears dressed as a woman and expressing his affinities with them, much as Agathon had done earlier in the play. Like the hairless Agathon, whom Euripides says always carries a razor (215: ξυροφορεῖς), Cleisthenes is beardless and smooth-skinned like a woman (574-5: φίλαι γυναῖκες ξυγγενεῖς τοῦμοῦ τρόπου· / ὅτι μὲν φίλος εἶμ' ὑμῖν, ἐπίδηλος ταῖς γνάθοις, 583: τὰς γνάθους ψιλὰς ἔχης); and like Agathon, whose cross-dressing allows him to better understand women (148-152), Cleisthenes is woman-mad and acts as their public ambassador among the men (576: γυναικομανῶ γὰρ προξενῶ θ' ὑμῶν ἀεὶ). This is hardly the first time that tragedians and politicians have been bracketed together in this way by Aristophanes; for example in the *Clouds*, tragedians, advocates, and orators are all described as εὐρύπρωκτοι in

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29. In addition to the two uses here, cf. *Vesp.* 395, 807, *Pax* 1266, *Lys.* 402, *Ran.* 95, *Eccl.* 832.

30. It is interesting to note that the Würzburg Telephus vase (Würzburg H5697), which appears to show In-Law taking the wine-skin baby hostage (*Thesm.* 689ff.), shows the actor's dress hitched up, revealing the leggings of his *somation* below. Although the actor's comic phallus is not visible, the effort the artist has made to show the character in this midway point between clothed and exposed may suggest some recognition of the importance of the act of exposure and undressing in the scene. For a detailed discussion of this vase and its relationship to the *Thesmophoriazusae*, cf. Taplin 1993 ch. 4, 8, Csapo 2010: 52-8.



the final punchline of the *agon* between Better and Worse Argument (*Nub.* 1083-1104). The emphasis in the *Thesmophoriazusae* is of course primarily on the effeminate characterisation of tragedians, with the inclusion of Cleisthenes playing only a minor part in the plot in comparison (perhaps due to the difficulty of producing more extended political satire amidst the growing instability of 411).<sup>31</sup> However, this is not to say that the addition of the politician, and his inclusion within the same thematic landscape as Agathon and the tragedians, is incidental; rather, Cleisthenes characterisation as a kind of second Agathon adds a political dimension to the by now well-established satire of tragedy in the play.

Slater has argued convincingly that Aristophanes' interest in metatheatricality is neither apolitical, nor entirely aesthetic or literary, but is linked to his claims, often made in his parabases, of being a διδάσκαλος to the city, arguing that "Aristophanes believes that teaching his audience to be aware of, and to think critically about, performance, both in the theatre and elsewhere in the life of the city, is a matter of vital importance to the Athenians. His ambition for comedy to rival tragedy as a teacher of the people is intimately related to precisely this self-consciousness about acting and stage technique in which his comedy is so rich." (2002: 5). In attacking tragedy as effeminate for its preference for illusionism over metatheatricality, the *Thesmophoriazusae* therefore does more than just attack the genre's status and prestige, but even brings into question tragedy's importance as a civic and political institution; and this link between the poetic and political is made explicit in the presentation of the politician Cleisthenes as a second Agathon. Tragedy may pretend to teach the city, but its refusal to allow the audience to see how its performance is constructed makes it no better than the lying politicians who pretend that their dealings with the city are 'real' and honest,

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31. The relative lack of overt political engagement in the *Thesmophoriazusae* has often been linked to the difficult political circumstances which coincided with the play's premiere; and the play has been described by Austin and Olson 2004: xlv as most likely "deliberately reticent about the political situation". The exact series of events leading up to the oligarchic coup of 412/11 are uncertain, in part because of the unfinished nature of the major source, Thucydides book viii. However, since the coup took place some time around June, it seems likely that by the time of the Dionysia (at which the play probably premiered; cf. Austin & Olson 2004: xxxiii-xlv) the political situation would have been quite obviously unstable, and that this may explain the relative lack of emphasis given to Cleisthenes in the plot.

when they are nothing but a performative illusion designed to take the viewer, and the city, in. Indeed, in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, the only kind of ‘teaching’ associated with Euripides and tragedy is not moral, but rather amoral, bordering on the prurient, as he is described as having ‘taught’ women’s bad deeds to their husbands (399-400: τοιαῦθ’ οὗτος ἐδίδασκεν κακὰ / τοὺς ἄνδρας ἡμῶν), leading to a breakdown in the relations between the men and women of the city. The claim that tragedy’s political dealings with its audience, and the city, are not straightforward perhaps additionally has some basis in the way in which tragic political engagement is (usually) enacted at one remove, in the guise of myth; its performative dishonesty is therefore compounded by a refusal to tackle contemporary politics head-on as Aristophanes does, instead hiding behind illusion and allegory.

### **Euripides on Stage**

Despite the revelation of his obvious comic status through the uncovering of his phallus, in the final section of the play In-Law makes a series of attempts at embodying tragic characters. In-Law’s tragic performances first take the form of an extended parody of the *Telephus*, in which he takes hostage a ‘child’ (which turns out to be a wineskin);<sup>32</sup> and then on the *Palamedes*, as In-Law attempts to send a message to Euripides in the manner of the hero of that play. Finally, at line 850, In-Law again turns to female mimicry as he takes on the part of Helen to Euripides’ Menelaus. The idea first occurs to In-Law that he may have better luck as a tragic woman than he did as a tragic man due to his already having the costume to hand:

τῷ δῆτ’ ἂν αὐτὸν προσαγαγοίμην δράματι;  
 ἐγὼ δα· τὴν καινὴν Ἑλένην μιμήσομαι.  
 πάντως δ’ ὑπάρχει μοι γυναικεία στολή.

What play *can* I use to entice him here? I know; I’ll act his new Helen. I’ve got the women’s costume already, anyway.

(*Thesm.* 849-51)

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32. For an extended discussion of the *Telephus* parody in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, cf. Platter 2007 ch. 5. Platter argues for seeing In-Law’s performance of the *Telephus* through the filter of Aristophanes’ earlier parody of this play in the *Acharnians*, and suggests that the scene makes use not only of the *Telephus*, but builds a series of paratragic (mostly, but not exclusively, Euripidean) performances one on top of the other.

However, after being stripped by the women in lines 636 and following, In-Law's costume must be in disarray, so that both the audience and the other characters can see behind it to his 'real' costume underneath. The transparency of In-Law's impersonation is very much in keeping with other acts of disguise in comedy. The tragic rags borrowed from Euripides in the *Acharnians* allow not only for a dig at Euripides' tendency to present his heroes as beggars,<sup>33</sup> but for a clear double-layering where Dicaeopolis' own comic costume is visible beneath their tatters; and similarly, Dionysus in the opening scene of the *Frogs* appears with his saffron gown clearly visible under his Heracleian lion-skin.<sup>34</sup> Throughout the *Thesmophoriazusae*, tragedy has been characterised as a genre dependent on illusionism, and in which the line between performed and real identity is always blurred. Now that the illusion of In-Law's disguise has been so comprehensively broken, and his two separate layers of costume have become obvious in a gesture which visibly enacts his dual identity, any such illusionism has become impossible, and it is therefore no wonder that In-Law's attempts to stage a tragedy are entirely unsuccessful. Accordingly, In-Law's internal audiences refuse to believe in the reality of his performances (e.g. 892: τί ὦ κακόδαιμον ἐξαπατᾶς αὖ τὸν ξένον, 1111-1112: οὐ παρτέν' ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ἀμαρτωλὴ γέρων / καὶ κλέπτο καὶ πανοῦργο); and In-Law's failure to pass as a woman, and to pass as a character in tragedy, are consequently aligned.

For all this mimetic failure, there is still one final cross-dressing success to come at the end of the play, although it will not be performed by In-Law, who clearly cannot convince any of the other characters that he is either a tragic character, or a woman. When their series of attempts at staging tragedies fails to persuade the Scythian to set In-Law free, Euripides and In-Law finally have some success in staging of comic κῶμος (Taaffe 1993: 99). At line 1160, Euripides makes his final appearance on stage, dressed as an old woman (1194: γῤῥᾶδιον), accompanied by a dancing girl and a flute player, in order to stage a revel. As the

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33. Cf. also *Ran.* 1063-4.

34. It is likely that this sort of double costume also featured in Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros*, in which the god Dionysus passes himself off as Paris. For a discussion of the use of costume in this play cf. Bakola 2010: 253-61, who argues that Dionysus' disguise in this play probably "consisted of a few items of shepherd's attire flung over his Dionysiac dress" (258).

director of this comic trick, Euripides instructs his players in what to do with a series of imperative verbs (1174: δίδεθε κἀνακάλασον, 1175: ἐπαναφύσα, 1181: φέρε θοϊμάτιον, 1186: αὖλει, 1189: λαβὲ θοϊμάτιον, 1191: φίλησον) as they put on their show for the Scythian. Euripides' successful cross-dressing is a logical conclusion to a play which argues for tragedy's effeminacy: both Agathon and Euripides are able to pass as women, while the comic figure of In-Law finds that his masculinity is impossible to conceal. However, in contrast to the first act of cross-dressing in *Thesmophoriazusae*, where Agathon's tragic femininity appeared youthful and seductive to the In-Law, Euripides is dressed as a comically grotesque old woman, of the type seen also in the *Lysistrata*, and later in the *Ecclesiazusae*, and *Wealth*. Furthermore, while Agathon in the opening placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of getting mimesis right, and indeed claimed initially that his cross-dressing was intended to make sure that his plays' portrayals of women were done convincingly (148-56), Euripides' female act instead appeals to its audience in other ways, namely with the naked flute girl, whom the Scythian archer instantly desires. Comedy's base but honest appeal to the senses at once trumps tragedy's false illusions, and allows Euripides to finally win over his adversary.

The close of the *Thesmophoriazusae* therefore leaves us in familiar comic territory, with tragedy trumped by comedy, and the plan to save Euripides from the women at last successful. However, in one regard, the close of the *Thesmophoriazusae* is entirely unprecedented. As we reach the end of the play, the main character, In-Law, has still not been named. While postponing the revelation of names is common in Aristophanes,<sup>35</sup> in the extant corpus In-Law is the only prominent character to remain unnamed to the end of the play. Throughout the play, In-Law has been presented as an archetypal figure of the comic stage, an old man (63: ὃ γέρον, 146: ὃ πρέσβυ πρέσβυ); a rustic (58: ἀγροιώτας); and, most importantly, a character defined primarily through his status as a phallic figure. In remaining unnamed, In-Law's status as a comic archetype is confirmed.

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35. Cf. Olson 1992. The most extreme examples of this postponement are the *Birds*, where Peisetairos does not reveal his name until 644-5; and *Knights*, where the Sausage-Seller is not named as Agoracritus until 1257.

However, In-Law does have one distinguishing characteristic: he is the long-suffering relative of the tragedian Euripides. Despite the way in which the *Thesmophoriazusae* makes a play for tragedy's status, characterising the rival genre as effeminate, deceptive, and ill-suited to its institutionalised, political role, in defining its own archetypal figure of the comic stage as only the relative of a tragedian, it would seem that the *Thesmophoriazusae*'s final joke is somewhat self-deprecating. This ultimate recognition of comedy's tendency to define itself in relation to tragedy, and of comedy's secondary position, reminds us that for all the *Thesmophoriazusae*'s complex deconstruction of tragic and comic theatrical codes and methods, we ought never to take Aristophanes' stance towards his rival entirely seriously.

### *Ecclesiazusae*

The *Ecclesiazusae* shares many features, both formal and thematic, with the *Thesmophoriazusae*, produced some twenty years earlier in 411. In both plays the 'women on top' theme is foregrounded through the metatheatrical filter of cross-dressing scenes that enact the performativity of gender; and both plays emphasise a connection between deceptive femininity and mimetic performance. The *Ecclesiazusae*'s opening monologue in particular situates itself in similar territory to the *Thesmophoriazusae*, bringing together themes of sex, deception, and tragedy; and the opening line of the play (ὦ λαμπρὸν ὄμμα τοῦ τροχηλάτου λύχνου) is conspicuously tragic in tone.<sup>36</sup> It is not unusual for Aristophanes' plays to open in a tragic register,<sup>37</sup> and the prologue of the *Acharnians* contains a more extended paratragic sequence, quoting from Euripides *Telephus* in its eighth line (διὰ τοῦτο τοῦργον· ἄξιον γὰρ Ἑλλάδι, cf. Eur. *Tel.* fr. 720 κακῶς ὄλοιτ' ἄν· ἄξιον γὰρ Ἑλλάδι). However, in what would seem to be a unique example in Aristophanes' extant plays, the scholia suggest that the first words of the play are a direct tragic quotation of either Agathon or Dicaeogenes.<sup>38</sup> If the line

36. ὄμμα in particular recalls tragic entreaties to the Sun-God in plays such as *Phoenissae* (1-6) and *Antigone* (100-7).

37. For example the first lines of the *Knights* (ιατταταιᾶξ τῶν κακῶν, ιατταταῖ) and *Clouds* (ιοὺν ἰοῦ) imitate tragic utterances of despair.

38. The scholion on this line is as follows: ὑποπτεύεται ὁ ἴαμβος ἢ τοῦ Ἀγάθωνος ἢ τοῦ Δικαιογένους. Snell lists this fragment as Agathon fr. 32.

could be securely attributed to Agathon, this would suggest a clear parallel between this play and the earlier *Thesmophoriazusae* is signalled from the start; however, unfortunately, the attribution is uncertain.

As Praxagora's speech continues we discover more concrete points of thematic contact with the *Thesmophoriazusae*. Praxagora's prayer to her lamp connects feminine deception with female cosmetic practices, as she asks the flame, which is privy to women's secrets and their aid in depilation, to help her in her latest scheme:

σοὶ γὰρ μόνῳ δηλοῦμεν· εἰκότως, ἐπεὶ  
κάν τοῖσι δωματίοισιν Ἄφροδίτης τρόπων  
πειρωμέναισι πλησίος παραστατεῖς,  
λορδουμένων τε σωμάτων ἐπιστάτην  
ὄφθαλμὸν οὐδεὶς τὸν σὸν ἐξείργει δόμων,  
μόνος δὲ μηρῶν εἰς ἀπορρήτους μυχοὺς  
λάμπεις, ἀφεύων τὴν ἐπανθοῦσαν τρίχα·  
στοὰς δὲ καρποῦ Βακχίου τε νάματος  
πλήρεις ὑποιγνύσαισι συμπαραστατεῖς·  
καὶ ταῦτα συνδρῶν οὐ λαλεῖς τοῖς πλησίον.  
ἀνθ' ὧν συνείσει καὶ τὰ νῦν βουλευμάτα...

To thee alone our secret we'll reveal;  
And rightly, for within our bedrooms too,  
When we try out our new sexual variations,  
Close by thou standest, and thine eye o'ersees  
Our arching bodies, yet none ever shuts it  
Out of the chamber; thou alone dost shine  
Into the secret corners of our thighs  
When singeing off the hairs that sprout from them.  
By us thou standest when illicitly  
We open up the brimming granaries  
And stores of Bacchic juice— yet, true accomplice,  
You never blab a word to other folk!  
And therefore shalt thou know our present scheme...

(*Eccl.* 7-17)

The idea of depilation as one of the central cosmetic practices needed to produce the appearance of femininity is also a theme of the cross-dressing scene in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, in which In-Law is depilated, despite the fact that his upper thighs and

genitals are concealed as apart of his disguise, making the procedure somewhat redundant from a practical perspective. The link between sex, seduction, and deception is also revisited, as the lamp is described as the sole (7: μόνῳ) and trusty (16: οὐ λαλεῖς) confidant of women, witness to both their cosmetic preparations for sex, and to the sex act itself (8: Ἀφροδίτης τρόπων); and this is suggested to qualify the lamp to aid the women in their current plot (17: τὰ νῦν βουλευμάτα). Similarly, the ability to steal from the common household supplies which Praxagora describes here (14-15) is also an act of female deception described by the women in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, who complain in lines 418 and following that thanks to Euripides their husbands now keep the keys to the stores themselves.

The *Ecclesiazusae*'s cross-dressing scene also situates the play in a similar landscape to the *Thesmophoriazusae*, and additionally contains some similarities with the opening scene of the *Lysistrata*, which also focuses on costume and cosmetics. Praxagora's first concern in directing her companions to carry out the comic plot is indeed to ensure that they have made the necessary adjustments of costume: the women are to don false beards (24: ἔχουσι τοὺς πώγωνας), put on their husbands' cloaks (26: θαϊμάτια τάνδρεϊα), and accessorise these outfits with men's shoes and walking-sticks (74: Λακωνικὰς γὰρ ἔχετε καὶ βακτηρίας). In contrast to the women in *Lysistrata*, who in the opening scene carefully costume themselves as women to perform their femininity, Praxagora and her friends have simply substituted the physical signifiers of masculinity for those of femininity, and are therefore able to perform the opposite gender. The women have even used their cosmetic skills, usually employed to make themselves more feminine through skin-care and depilation, to transform their bodies from feminine to masculine ones. Instead of depilating, the women have thrown away their razors, and grown out their body hair (60-1: πρῶτον μὲν γ' ἔχω τὰς μασχάλας / λόχμης δασυτέρας, καθάπερ ἦν ξυγκείμενον, 65-7: τὸ ξυρὸν δέ γ' ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας / ἔρριπα πρῶτον, ἵνα δασυνθείην ὅλη / καὶ μηδὲν εἶην ἔτι γυναικί προσφερέης); and instead of painting themselves with white makeup as is usual for women (cf. *Lys.* 149: ἐντετριμμένα, 219: κεκαλλωπισμένη, *Xen. Oec.* 10.2 ἐντετριμμένην πολλῶ μὲν ψιμυθίῳ), they have developed tans (64-5: ἀλειψαμένη τὸ σῶμ' ὅλον δι' ἡμέρας / ἐχραινόμεν ἑστῶσα πρὸς τὸν ἥλιον).

As in the *Thesmophoriazousae*, the cross-dressing of the *Ecclesiazusae* is seen through the filter of costume and performance, albeit to a lesser degree. Both Taaffe and Slater have argued that the opening of the *Ecclesiazusae* can be seen as a theatrical rehearsal, with the women as actors preparing their costume, and practising their roles before their ‘performance’ in the ἐκκλησία, with Praxagora as their director.<sup>39</sup> Praxagora insists that her troop will not begin their performance before their acting is perfect:

παῦε τοίνυν, ὡς ἐγὼ  
ἐκκλησιάσουσ’ οὐκ ἂν προβαίην τὸν πόδα  
τὸν ἕτερον, εἰ μὴ ταῦτ’ ἀκριβωθήσεται.

So stop; because I’m not going to put one foot in front of the other to go to the Assembly, unless these things are exactly right.

(*Eccl.* 160-2)

Under her direction, the women learn to swear their oaths in the correct manner like men:

<Γυ<sup>β</sup>> ἔμοι μὲν οὐ δοκεῖ μὰ τῶ θεῶ.  
<Πρ> μὰ τῶ θεῶ; τάλαινα ποῦ τὸν νοῦν ἔχεις;  
<Γυ<sup>β</sup>> τί δ’ ἔστιν; οὐ γὰρ δὴ πιεῖν γ’ ἤτησά σε.  
<Πρ> μὰ Δί’ ἄλλ’ ἀνὴρ ὢν τῶ θεῶ κατώμοσας,  
καίτοι τά γ’ ἄλλ’ εἰποῦσα δεξιότατα.  
<Γυ<sup>β</sup>> ὦ νῆ τὸν Ἀπόλλω.

Wo<sup>a</sup>: I think it’s wrong, by the Two Goddesses!

Pr: By the Two Goddesses, you fool? Where have you put your brain?

Wo<sup>a</sup>: What’s wrong? I certainly didn’t ask you for a drink!

Pr: No, but you swore by the Two Goddesses, when you were being a *man*  
— although *otherwise* you spoke very skilfully indeed.

Wo<sup>b</sup>: Oh, yes, by Apollo!

(*Eccl.* 155-60)

She corrects them when they address each other and their audience incorrectly:

<Γυ<sup>β</sup>> ἔμοι γὰρ ὦ γυναῖκες αἰ καθήμεναι—  
<Πρ> γυναῖκας αὖ δύστηνε τοὺς ἄνδρας λέγεις;  
<Γυ<sup>β</sup>> δι’ Ἐπίγονόν γ’ ἐκεῖνον· ἐπιβλέψασα γὰρ  
ἐκεῖσε πρὸς γυναῖκας ὀφόμεν λέγειν.

39. Slater 2002 in particular argues that the chorus’ unusual silent entry, and their departure at the end of the opening scene marks the end of the rehearsal: “Choruses usually do not leave during the course of the play. These entered silently but depart singing, giving the audience a curious ‘backstage’ feeling: we have in effect witnessed the final dress rehearsal for their performance in the assembly.” (216)



Wo<sup>b</sup>: In my opinion, ladies of the Assembly—

Pr: Again, you wretch? You're calling them "ladies"!

Wo<sup>b</sup>: That was because of Epigonus over there. I looked that way, and it made me think I was speaking to women.

(*Eccl.* 165-8)

Finally, the women learn to use the correct grammatical endings for their disguise, even learning to correct themselves without Praxagora's intervention, thus showing that their lesson is complete:

ὅπως δὲ τὸ σύμβολον  
λαβόντες ἔπειτα πλη-  
σίοι καθεδούμεθ', ὡς  
ἂν χειροτονῶμεν  
ἅπανθ' ὅπως ἂν δέη  
τὰς ἡμετέρας φίλας—  
καίτοι τί λέγω; φίλους  
γὰρ χρῆν μ' ὀνομάζειν.

And when we've got our tickets,  
then we must make sure  
we sit close together,  
so that we can approve  
all of the measures  
our sisters may need —  
only, what am I saying? I should  
have called them our *brethren*.

(*Eccl.* 296-9)

In this way, the play similarly presents the act of swapping genders as a theatrical performance, and we view the women's cross-dressing and preparations for their roles, just as we did In-Law's in the *Thesmophoriazusae*. Further, just as the earlier play made links between Agathon and Cleisthenes, and therefore between performance, gender and politics, by presenting the women's preparations for the ἐκκλησία as a theatrical rehearsal of actors, the *Ecclesiazusae* characterises the political performance as a kind of theatre.

This presentation of political performance as theatre is emblematic of the way in which in the *Ecclesiazusae* feminine deception is to be characterised as primarily political rather

than tragic. The idea that the politicians running the city are effeminate if anything receives a greater focus than in the *Thesmophoriazusae*. The play suggests that the women’s deceptive and performative nature makes them perfectly suited not only to carry out their cross-dressing trick, but also to the (perhaps not entirely unrelated) business of politics itself. That, far from being a hindrance, it is the women’s very femaleness which equips them for the political arena is first suggested by Praxagora herself. When one of the women raises a concern that as women, they will have difficulty making political speeches, Praxagora replies that their femininity will in fact help them:

<Γυ<sup>a</sup>> καὶ πῶς γυναικῶν θηλύφρων ζυνουσία  
δημηγορήσει;  
<Πρ> πολὺ μὲν οὖν ἄριστά που.  
λέγουσι γὰρ καὶ τῶν νεανίσκων ὅσοι  
πλεῖστα σποδοῦνται, δεινοτάτους εἶναι λέγειν·  
ἡμῖν δ’ ὑπάρχει τοῦτο κατὰ τύχην τινά.

Wo<sup>a</sup>: But how will a “feminine minded company of women” be able to make public speeches?

Pr: Why, very well indeed, I fancy! They say, don’t they, that the young men who get shagged the most turn out to be the smartest speakers? Well, by a stroke of luck, we’ll have that advantage!

(*Eccl.* 110-14)

The implication is therefore that, since the best politicians are those who take the role of women, women should have no difficulty in taking the role of politicians. This characterisation of femininity as a qualification for politics is continued in Praxagora’s rehearsal of her assembly speech, in which she claims that women are better suited than men to run the city. She suggests firstly, that since women are entrusted as keepers of the household, there should be no problem in entrusting them as keepers of the city (210-12: ταῖς γὰρ γυναιξὶ φημὶ χρῆναι τὴν πόλιν / ἡμᾶς παραδοῦναι. καὶ γὰρ ἐν ταῖς οἰκίαις / ταύταις ἐπιτρόποις καὶ ταμίαισι χρώμεθα); secondly (and perhaps most fallaciously, given the radical nature of the female revolution to come), that women’s habit of sticking to the old traditions (216 κατὰ τὸν ἀρχαῖον νόμον) make them more useful as political leaders than the men who are always pursuing novel ideas; thirdly, that there is no one better to look after the interests of the city’s soliders than their mothers (233-5); and finally, that women are financially adept

(236: χρήματα πορίζειν εὐπορώτατον γυνή), and that, as consummate deceivers themselves, they will not easily be fooled (237-8: ἄρχουσά τ' οὐκ ἂν ἐξαπατηθεῖ ποτέ / αὐταὶ γάρ εἰσιν ἐξαπατᾶν εἰθισμένα). Rothwell 1990, in his study of *peitho* and the *Ecclesiazusae*, has convincingly argued that the play's presentation of women as naturally suited to politics engages with a long tradition in Greek thought of portraying *peitho* as a kind of seduction.<sup>40</sup> Rothwell suggests that in the opening scene of the *Ecclesiazusae*, Praxagora is portrayed as a figure of *peitho* (who indeed often appeared embodied in female form as a goddess),<sup>41</sup> and that the play conflates erotic and political language as part of a broad satire of both women, and the perverse femininity of contemporary politicians and politics.

The *Thesmophoriazusae*'s portrayal of comedy as inherently masculine is of course not replicated in the rest of the Aristophanic, or comic, corpus;<sup>42</sup> however, this representation is grounded in features which are found throughout the genre, in both its Aristophanic and non-Aristophanic manifestations, in particular the use of the phallus, as well as the convention of ending plays with a celebration of male fertility and sexual power in scenes which see usually the hero (but sometimes another male character) gifted with an often naked women, whether in marriage (as in the *Peace*, *Birds*, and to an extent also *Lysistrata*), or otherwise (as in *Acharnians*, *Knights*, *Wasps*, and *Thesmophoriazusae*). It is important to note that neither of

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40. In addition to Rothwell, an overview of the history of *peitho* in Greek literature and thought can be found in Buxton 1982. Buxton suggests that the characterisation of seductive *peitho* as a particularly female quality begins as early as Homer, with the *Odyssey*'s series of tricky women, from Helen to Penelope, Calypso, and even the Sirens, providing particularly good examples. The suspicion of political *peitho* as a kind of seduction appears to have reached particular heights in late 5th century Athens with the rise of the Sophists, and particularly the rhetorician Gorgias who arrived in Athens in the year 427.

41. On embodiments of *peitho* in art and cult, cf. Hamdorf 1964. *Peitho* is often associated with negative female figures in mythology. Hesiod for example implicates her in the Pandora myth, and both in visual art and literature *Peitho* is often involved, with *Aphrodite*, in the seduction of Helen by Paris: a Skyphos in Boston (Boston MFA T 483 a; cf. Caskey & Beazley 1963: 32-9) shows the abduction of Helen with both *Peitho* and *Aphrodite* in attendance, for example, and *Peitho* is blamed again for Helen's absconsion by the chorus in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (385).

42. Note particularly Cratinus' portrayal of comedy as a woman in the *Pytine*, an image which is more at home with the usual embodiment of poetry as female in the form of the Muse, as well as with comedy's own tradition of presenting abstractions in female form.

these characteristics of the genre is incidental, but both are tied to the ritual context of the comic festival, which celebrated a particularly male manifestation of fertility cult, and began with a procession of φαλλοφόροι, with every Athenian colony sending a phallus for the procession.<sup>43</sup> Guettel Cole (1993) in particular has argued that the phallic procession had an aggressive edge, and that it added to the atmosphere of competitive masculinity at the city Dionysia of which the comic competition was one part.

In the context of a genre in which the manifestation, and celebration, of aggressive phallic masculinity is a conventional feature, the replacement of the hero with a heroine, and of male power and agency with female, is highly disruptive. This is of course true of all three of the ‘women on top’ plays. However, while the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Lysistrata* find an accommodation between the ‘women on top’ theme and the elements of the genre with which this might conflict, the *Ecclesiazusae* uses its fuller and more radical experiment with the women on top theme to actively subvert these comic conventions. This chapter will argue that firstly, only in the *Ecclesiazusae* do women fully enact a female revolution; that secondly, that unlike in the *Lysistrata*, Praxagora’s feminine characteristics are emphasised, instead of underplayed; and that finally, Praxagora’s comic idea, in which she pursues both sexual and economic commonality in the city, exaggerates the characteristics of the earlier ‘women’ plays, in which female characters are more orientated towards their community, and less individualistic in their concerns. It will be suggested that not only does the *Ecclesiazusae*’s radical realisation of the ‘women on top’ theme lead to structural changes to the play’s plot, but that the subversion of comedy’s conventional celebration of male power and fertility is actively thematised, most notably through the funereal language which appears repeatedly in the play.

### **‘Women on Top’ in the *Ecclesiazusae***

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43. On the nature of the procession at the Dionysia, cf. Sourvinou-Inwood (ed. Parker) 2011; Guettel Cole 1993; and Csapo and Slater 1995: 103-21. On the importance of the festival for the understanding of Greek drama, cf. Goldhill 1987, and Bowie 1996.

It is important to observe that in both the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Lysistrata* the women assert their power only temporarily, before coming to some accommodation with the men of the city, agreeing in the *Thesmophoriazusae* to make peace with Euripides (1160-70); and in *Lysistrata* to end their sex strike and to each return home to their husband (1186-7). Indeed, in both plays, the women's initial complaint is that the normal state of affairs has been disrupted and that the relationships between men and women have been damaged, in the *Thesmophoriazusae* by Euripides and the suspicions he has raised among the men of Athens; and in *Lysistrata* by the war which has deprived the women of their husbands, and disrupted the normal functioning of both οἶκος and πόλις. In both the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Lysistrata* therefore, although the women are temporarily disruptive, their aim is only to restore the status quo. Conversely, not only does the *Ecclesiazusae* not conclude with the women handing back control of the city to their husbands, but the women's new regime completely overturns the norms of both οἶκος and πόλις, as they institute economic and sexual equality, and demand that all goods should be held in common, and that sexual partners should be shared. The *Ecclesiazusae* is therefore a play about revolution, while its predecessors only utilise temporary revolution in order to reassert the conventional place of women within the household and the city.

Furthermore, while Praxagora is not Aristophanes' first comic heroine, she is in some ways a more radical vision of a woman in the role of comic protagonist. It has often been noted by scholars that *Lysistrata* in many ways does not fit the stereotype of the comic woman. She is "disappointingly chaste" in comparison to Praxagora (Rothwell 1990: 90). She appears to have no domestic life (other than a brief mention of a husband in lines 507-528). It is in fact never quite clear whether *Lysistrata* is speaking from her own experience or about the experiences of the women in general with their husbands. She speaks mostly in the first person plural, except briefly in lines 515 and again at 519). She is impatient with the other women when they are delayed by their household duties in the opening scene, and another woman has to explain to her why this might be (16-19: χαλεπή τοι γυναικῶν ἔξοδος / ἢ μὲν γὰρ ἡμῶν περὶ τὸν ἄνδρ' ἐκύπτασεν, / ἢ δ' οἰκέτην ἤγειρεν, ἢ δὲ παιδίον / κατέκλινεν, ἢ δ' ἔλουσεν, ἢ δ' ἐψώμισεν). Her concerns, unlike Praxagora who

seems to be mostly interested in re-arranging the sexual procedures of the city, are not limited by the οἶκος but look outwards to foreign policy. Lysistrata's relative androgyny is further suggested by her apparent connection with the goddess Athena, and her cult and priestess;<sup>44</sup> and Taaffe has described Lysistrata's speech, as well as her general characterisation, as "bearing many of the standard identifiers of masculinity", and as neither distinctively male nor female (1993: 62). Praxagora by contrast is, as Slater argues, "different in degree, not kind" from the other women (Slater 2002: 212). She not only has a husband, but is seen at home with him in a scene which serves to emphasise her ordinary domesticity; unlike Lysistrata, she appears not to be the sole originator of the plot;<sup>45</sup> and she is as bawdy and sex-obsessed as her fellow women.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, while Praxagora is not Aristophanes' first heroine, she is the first whose (comic) femininity has not been tempered or underplayed.

In the *Lysistrata*, any potential conflict between the play's enactment of female power and agency, and the comic conventions surrounding phallic masculinity are actively avoided. Despite the women's sex strike, male characters are presented as ithyphallic figures (e.g. Cinesias in lines 847ff; 1072-96, 1136, where the Athenian and Spartan men complain about the condition of permanent erection which the sex-strike has induced in them), and the play accordingly places a great deal of visual emphasis on the phallocentric vision of sex and masculinity which is conventional for comedy. The opening of the play does also emphasise the strength of female sexual desire (which is in fact the initial impetus for the women to take

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44. Anderson 1995 argues that Lysistrata's androgyny is connected to her link with the priestess of Athena in 411, Lysimache, and that Lysistrata accordingly embodies both the masculine and feminine qualities of the goddess, and that this accounts for her androgynous quality.

45. Cf. for example *Eccl.* 17-18, where Praxagora describes the plan as the one which seemed a good idea to 'my friends' (τὰ νῦν βουλευματα / ὅσα Σκίροις ἔδοξε ταῖς ἐμαῖς φίλαις); and line 61, where the female speaker describes having made the preparations 'as we agreed' (καθάπερ ἦν συγκείμενον).

46. Lysistrata in fact uses more sexually obscene vocabulary than Praxagora (cf. McClure 1999: 210). However her usage is mostly confined to her description of the sex-strike to the other women, and the oath which she makes them swear, and she does not (unlike the other women) discuss her own sexual experiences or desires. In comparison, Praxagora's obscene language is used in a more lighthearted manner, as she uses double entendres (266-7) and makes jokes to set her companions at ease (111-14).

action; their opposition to the war is in large part due to it depriving them of their normal sex-lives), as the women at first balk at Lysistrata's idea for a strike (133-4: ἄλλ' ἄλλ' ὄ τι βούλει· κἄν με χρῆ διὰ τοῦ πυρὸς / ἐθέλω βαδίζειν· τοῦτο μᾶλλον τοῦ πέους), and have some difficulty in implementing it (728-61). However, the success of the plot is dependent on the idea that the women can hold out longer than the men, and that the male sexual impulse is therefore stronger than the female. Additionally, while scholars have often emphasised the play's celebration of normative, marital fertility,<sup>47</sup> it is important to note that although the plot concludes with the wives returning home, thereby ending the men's painful ithyphallic condition, this is preceded by a scene in which the naked figure of Diallage is paraded before the line-up of ithyphallic ambassadors, who react to her with aggressive sexual language. Taaffe (1993: 71) in particular in her discussion of this scene suggests that its inclusion shifts the focus of the finale away from femininity, and towards masculine desire; and that this, along with the use of the stock comic figure of a naked, silent woman subject to aggressive male sexual desire, colours the final presentation of normative marital unions as the husbands and wives reunite at the end of the play.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, before the *Ecclesiazusae*, all but two of Aristophanes' plays have contained some kind of triumph of male sexuality, in which a male character is awarded with a woman or women, in their final (or in the case of *Lysistrata*, penultimate) scenes.<sup>49</sup> While the scene with Diallage does not entirely overshadow or contradict the assertion of female power and agency which dominates the plot of *Lysistrata* as

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47. Cf. Dillon 1987, who argues that the play's presentation of marital fertility is a modulation of the agrarian fertility themes found in Aristophanes' earlier plays, such as the *Acharnians*; and Bierl 2011, whose discussion of the play's final hymns suggests that they should be seen as marriage hymns in the style of Alcman's *partheneia*.

48. The *Thesmophoriazusae* also notably includes a mute female figure in its finale, as the Scythian archer is distracted with a naked dancing girl by Euripides, in order that he might free In-Law. Again, this final reassertion of male sexuality and desire tempers the 'women on top' theme of the play.

49. The exceptions are the finale of *Clouds*, whose violence is highly uncharacteristic of comic endings; and *Frogs*, which reformulates the triumph of male fertility as a triumph over death, and ends with a dead tragedian being brought back to life from the underworld. Otherwise, in the *Acharnians* Dicaeopolis finishes the play with two girls on his arm; in the *Knights*, Demos is awarded the two 'peace treaties'; in *Wasps*, Philocleon absconds from the symposium with the flute-girl; in *Peace* and *Birds*, the heroes end the play in marriage; *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae*'s use of naked female figures are discussed above.

a whole, it does temper this element sufficiently to bring the plot more in line with comic norms.

By contrast, even this small element of counterbalance is absent from the *Ecclesiazusae*. Praxagora's plans for the city emphasise equality of sexual pleasure. In addition to promising her husband that a man will be able to freely have any young woman he desires, Praxagora declares that women too will have sexual rights to men:

<Βλ> ἦν μείρακ' ἰδὼν ἐπιθυμήσῃ καὶ βούληται σκαλαθῦραι,  
ἔξει τούτων ἀφελῶν δοῦναι, τῶν ἐκ κοινοῦ δὲ μεθέξει  
ζυγκαταδαρθῶν.

<Πρ> ἄλλ' ἐξέσται προῖκ' αὐτῷ ζυγκαταδαρθεῖν.  
καὶ ταύτας γὰρ κοινὰς ποιῶ τοῖς ἀνδράσι συγκατακεῖσθαι  
καὶ παιδοποιεῖν τῷ βουλομένῳ.

<Βλ> πῶς οὖν οὐ πάντες ἴασιν  
ἐπὶ τὴν ὠραιότατην αὐτῶν καὶ ζητήσουσιν ἐρεΐδειν;

<Πρ> αἱ φαυλότεραι καὶ σιμότεραι παρὰ τὰς σεμνάς καθεδοῦνται·  
κᾶτ' ἦν ταύτης ἐπιθυμήσῃ, τὴν αἰσχρὰν πρῶθ' ὑποκρούσει.

Bl: If he sees a girl he fancies and wants to poke her about a bit, he'll be able to take some of his money and give it to her, and then have his share of communing — with her, in bed!

Pr: But he'll be able to sleep with her for free! Women also, I'm making common property, for any man who wishes, to have sex and produce children.

Bl: Then surely everyone will go for the most attractive of them and try to shag her!

Pr: The plainer women, the ones with the snubbier noses, will sit beside the fine lookers; and then if he fancies *her*, he'll have to give the ugly ones a knock first!

(*Eccl.* 611-18)

Not only men, but also women, even old women, are to be able to choose the partners they want (615: τῷ βουλομένῳ); and men will have to submit to satisfying the ugly and the old (616-17), rather than simply being able to pursue only the beautiful women whom they actually desire. It is significant that, almost as soon as the women's appropriation of political power has been declared, Blepyrus states that if the women are to have political control of the city, they will also have sexual control over the men, presenting female sexual dominance as the natural consequence of female political dominance:



<Βλ> ἐκεῖνο δεινὸν τοῖσιν ἡλίκοισι νῶν,  
 μὴ παραλαβοῦσαι τῆς πόλεως τὰς ἡνίας  
 ἔπειτ' ἀναγκάζωσι πρὸς βίαν—  
 <Χρ> τί δρᾶν;  
 <Βλ> κινεῖν ἑαυτάς. ἦν δὲ μὴ δυνώμεθα  
 ἄριστον οὐ δώσουσι.

Bl: That's the one thing folk our age have to fear: that when the women take  
 over the reigns of the City, then they may compel us by force to—

Ch: To do what?

Bl: To screw them; and if we're not able to, they won't give us our lunch.

(*Eccl.* 465-9)

In its relegation of the importance of male desire in favour of equal recognition of female desire, Praxagora's plan for the city completely overturns comic norms in which male sexual desire is prioritised and celebrated, and women often relegated to mute objects such as Diallage at the end of the *Lysistrata*; and the promotion of female desire and sexual dominance, and the subsequent denial of male sexual power and autonomy, is presented as an inevitable consequence of the women's political coup.

Praxagora's communistic plans are notable not only for the equal weight given to female and male desires, but also for their promotion of the common good over and above the desires of the individual. This commonality has been a feature of Aristophanes' previous 'women' plays; in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, the women band together for the benefit of all the women of Athens; and in *Lysistrata*, although there is a clear ringleader, Lysistrata's plan is designed with the benefit of the whole of Greece in mind, and does not gain any personal reward (and indeed, since she appears not to have a husband to go home to, does not even have the resumption of normal marital activities to look forward to, unlike her companions). Even Trygaeus, perhaps the most altruistic of Aristophanes' heroes, who sets out to save all of Greece, is rewarded with a goddess for a wife. Whitman's 1964 study of the comic hero identified self-assertion and the relentless pursuit of his own advantage as two of the most definitive characteristics of Aristophanes' protagonists, and while this model has since been refined (most notably by Sutton 1980), Whitman continues to provide a valuable framework for considering the conventional characteristics of protagonists in comedy. According to

Whitman, comic heroism is “individualistic, and tends towards excess, or at least extremes. It asserts its *self* primarily, and formulates its action and experience in isolation from society as such, and in relation only to the universe at large” (1964: 24-5, emphasis Whitman’s). Praxagora’s promotion of complete economic and sexual commonality is therefore simply an exaggeration of the higher levels of altruism and concern for the city as a whole which is associated with female characters elsewhere in Aristophanes; and the comic plot of the *Ecclesiazusae* is therefore, to an extent at least, an embodiment of the typical female approach to community in Aristophanes. Praxagora’s exaggerated anti-individualism is further increased by the fact that, uniquely among Aristophanic protagonists (at least in the extant plays), she is present only for the first half of the play. Praxagora’s disappearance from the second section of the *Ecclesiazusae* leads to a less defined focus on the protagonist as individual, and the play moves in its second half towards an examination of the various ways in which the community at large react to her economic and social plans. The *Ecclesiazusae*’s plot is therefore fundamentally different in its structure to any other of Aristophanes’ extant plays.

### **The *Ecclesiazusae* and the Subversion of Masculinity**

While the plots of the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Lysistrata* mediated any potential conflict between the conventional celebration of male sexuality in comedy and their ‘women on top’ plots, the *Ecclesiazusae* therefore amplifies these contradictions, in a plot which emphasises commonality over individuality, and a protagonist who both in her characterisation and her aims presents an exaggerated version of comic femininity. The play’s active subversion of normative comic masculinity is further suggested by two scenes; firstly, Blepyrus’ introduction into the play; and secondly, the finale in which old women fight over a young lover. Both scenes emphasise the loss of masculine power which is associated with the women’s coup; and this is accompanied by a thematic focus on death and the absence of fertility. The play therefore fully inverts the comic norm of male fertile sexuality, not only by asserting the power of women, but also by presenting the audience with scenes of male powerlessness and infertility.

At the point of the women's initial coup, the assertion of female power is twice connected to the subversion of masculinity by effeminate men. As has been discussed above, when Praxagora is instructing her followers in how to behave at the assembly, she asserts that since effeminate men make the best speakers, women will surely be able to convince the assembly too (112-13: λέγουσι γὰρ καὶ τῶν νεανίσκων ὅσοι / πλεῖστα σποδοῦνται, δεινοτάτους εἶναι λέγειν). Praxagora's particular emphasis on the men's passive sexual role as a qualification for political life introduces the women's political power grab as purely an extension of an existing political failure in Athens, as if their revolution is simply the logical conclusion of a situation in which the dominance of masculinity has already been compromised.

This analogy between female power and the dominance of effeminate men in the city is revisited in the scene between Blepyrus and his friend Chremes. Arriving home from town, Chremes explains that the assembly was packed out with a great crowd of what seemed to be shoemakers (whom we of course know to be the women in disguise):

καὶ δῆτα πάντα σκυτοτόμοις ἠκάζομεν  
 ὀρῶντες αὐτούς· οὐ γὰρ ἀλλ' ὑπερφυῶς  
 ὡς λευκοπληθῆς ἦν ἰδεῖν ἠκκλησία·

And actually, seeing them, we thought they all looked like shoemakers; it really was extraordinary how full of white faces the Assembly was to look at.

(*Eccl.* 385-7)

While the women have evidently managed to pass as male, these lines make clear that they did not succeed in blending into the crowd, but stood out because of their white skin (despite their apparent attempts to tan, cf. *Eccl.* 64-5) which gave them an unusual appearance, and one associated with effeminacy; and one of the 'men' is compared by Chremes in lines 427-9 to the apparently similarly white and effeminate politician Nicias. Chremes' statement that, because of their white faces, the group were thought to be shoemakers seems to play into an existing elite discourse which ascribed effeminate characteristics to craftsmen, and even questioned their suitability for democratic and political participation. In the *Oeconomicus*, Xenophon's Socrates speaks of the effeminacy of 'banausic' occupations, which waste the body due to their necessity for indoor work:

καὶ γὰρ αἶ γε βαναυσικαὶ καλούμεναι καὶ ἐπίρρητοὶ εἰσι καὶ εἰκότως μέντοι πάνυ ἀδοξοῦνται πρὸς τῶν πόλεων. καταλυμαίνονται γὰρ τὰ σώματα τῶν τε ἐργαζομένων καὶ τῶν ἐπιμελομένων, ἀναγκάζουσαι καθῆσθαι καὶ σκιατραφεῖσθαι, ἔνιαι δὲ καὶ πρὸς πῦρ ἡμερεύειν. τῶν δὲ σωμάτων θηλυνομένων καὶ αἱ ψυχαὶ πολὺ ἄρρωστώτεραι γίνονται.

For to be sure, the so-called banausic occupations are scorned and, naturally enough, held in very low regard in our states, For they spoil the bodies of the workmen and foremen, forcing them to sit still and stay indoors, and in some cases to spend the whole day by the fire. As their bodies become womanish their souls lose strength too. (trans. Marchant)

(*Oec.* 4.2)

Similarly, in Aristotle *Pol.* 1278a8, craftsmen are declared unfit to be citizens, as was, he suggests, the case in Sparta.<sup>50</sup> In the *Oeconomicus*, these kinds of technical occupations are contrasted with that of the farmer which, along with soldiering, is to be considered among the noblest (*Oec.* IV.4: ἐν τοῖς καλλίστοις) of occupations. This valorisation of agricultural work is similarly present in Aristophanes (and Old Comedy in general), whose celebration of masculine sexuality is often accompanied by a similar celebration of agrarian fertility;<sup>51</sup> and Wilkins (2000: 142-51) has in particular argued that male sexual domination over female figures, such as Opora in the *Peace*, should be seen as an integral part of the genre's celebration of agrarian fertility. In comparing the women both to effeminate contemporary politicians, and to craftsmen, this passage therefore thematises the women's ascent to political power as the ascent of non-agricultural workers; and accordingly ties together the theme of female power with the absence of the agrarian fertility usually characteristic of Old Comedy.

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50. On the idea that craftsmen in Sparta were not citizens, cf. *Oec.* IV.3 (which is presumably a reference to Sparta), Plut. *Comp. Lyc.*, and *Numa* 2.3. The reliability of these sources, and of Aristotle, for ascertaining the true status of craftsmen in Sparta is however unclear.

51. On the celebration of agrarian fertility in Old Comedy, cf. Wilkins 2000 ch. 3, and Ruffell 2000. Agricultural language in Aristophanes' *Peace* in particular is explored in Moulton 1981 ch. 3. The heroes of the *Acharnians* and *Peace* are both farmers, and some degree of rusticity is also attributed to other of Aristophanes' protagonists such as In-Law (cf. *Thesm.* 58), and Strepsiades (cf. *Nub.* 39-55).

This theme of the subversion and inversion of masculinity and fertility is in particular central to the extended scatological scene which marks the entrance of Blepyrus, Praxagora's husband and the first male character on stage in the play. This scene brings together three of the central themes in the play, namely gender role reversal, the failure and obstruction of male desire, and the inversion of the motif of fertility and reproduction which is usually a theme of Old Comedy. It is also one of the most heavily scatological scenes in all of Aristophanes, with Blepyrus' concentrated use of scatological vocabulary in this scene giving him the highest frequency of scatological utterances of any character in Aristophanes.<sup>52</sup> However, the use of scatological language in this scene is highly non-typical. Along with sex and food, Old Comedy's focus on corporeality, and the functions and pleasures of the body, is manifested in its characters' scatological language and actions; and the ability to indulge in scatological release is often presented alongside sexual pleasure as a central, and desirable, freedom of Old Comedy.<sup>53</sup> This is evident, for example, in the parabasis of the *Birds*, in which the chorus describe to the audience the benefits of having wings, explaining that if the theatre audience were so endowed, they would have the freedom to eat whenever they want (*Av.* 787-9 εἶτα πεινῶν... ἐλθὼν οἴκαδε, / κᾶτ' ἂν ἐμπλησθεῖς); to fart whenever they want (*Av.* 792: κάποπαρδῶν); and to have sex whenever, and with whomever, they want (*Av.* 796: βινήσας). This particular focus on scatological release is similarly characteristic of Old Comedy's sister-genre, Iambos, and in particular of the poetry of Hipponax (one of the most scatological of the iambographers; forms of the verb τιλάω appears no less than five times in his fragments),<sup>54</sup> whose works contain an extended poem on the subject of severe diarrhoea. It is therefore significant that, although Blepyrus' association with scatology is in keeping with male status in Aristophanes (as demonstrated by McClure 1999 ch. 6, as well as my own statistical analysis, discussed above), the scene focuses not on his freedom, but rather his

52. Blepyrus in the *Ecclesiazusae* used ten scatological terms, at 317: κοπρεαῖος, 320: χέσας, 322: χέζοντά, 345: χεζητιῶν, 347: ἠγγέσαιμ', 360: κόπρος, 368: χεζητιῶν, 371: σκωραμῖς, and 640: κάπιχεσοῦνται. Only Strepsiades in the *Clouds* comes close to this frequency, using a total of eight scatological obscenities in the play.

53. Henderson 1991: 187 describes scatological language and routines as “the purest kind of obscene comedy”, even more so than the sexual obscenity which is also characteristic of Old Comedy.

54. Cf. fr. 73 W, 79 W, 86 W, 102 W, 114a W.

inability, to defecate; and this scatological failure is presented in parallel with the feminisation and reversal of gender roles which is also a focus of the scene.<sup>55</sup>

Blepyrus' entry to the stage, dressed in his wife's saffron gown and slippers, presents a clear visualisation of the male-female role reversal which is the theme of the play, as Praxagora's appropriation of her husband's male clothing has resulted in Blepyrus being forced to adopt her clothing in turn.<sup>56</sup> Blepyrus' forced feminisation is therefore represented symbolically through costume, and is a visual presence throughout the scene. Despite the conventional association between scatology and male characters, the scene quickly makes an unusual link between scatology and Blepyrus' assumed femininity, and in particular his female costume. When the neighbour catches sight of Blepyrus squatting outside his house dressed in his wife's clothing, he describes the yellow of the saffron gown in scatological terms:

εἰπέ μοι,  
τί τοῦτό σοι τὸ πυρρόν ἐστίν; οὔτι που  
Κινησίας σου κατατετίληκεν;

Tell me, what's that yellow you've got on? Cinesias hasn't by any chance been shitting over you, has he?

(*Eccl.* 328-30)

The unusual feminine characterisation of scatology continues later in the scene, where Blepyrus in his desperation prays to Hileithya, the goddess of childbirth and midwifery, to relieve him:

ὦ πότνι Ἰλείθια, μή με περιίδης

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55. A connection between sexual prowess and scatology is potentially also a theme in Hipponax's diarrhoea poem (a work which shares a number of thematic similarities with Aristophanes, most notably in its use of the image of the dung-beetle; cf. Hipponax fr. 92 W, Ar. *Vesp.* 1446-9, *Pax* 1ff.). West 1974: 144 suggests (on the basis of a parallel with Petronius *Satyrical* 138) that in fr. 92, the speaker is undergoing a treatment for impotence, and that it is this treatment which seems to result in the severe diarrhoea which follows. On the basis of this reconstruction, the poem's apparent link between the curing of impotence and diarrhoea would therefore form a mirror image to the *Ecclesiazusae*'s link between constipation and impotence/infertility.

56. The power dynamics of costume in this scene are discussed at length by Compton-Engle 2015: 74-82.

διαρραγέντα μηδὲ βεβαλανωμένον,  
ἵνα μὴ γένωμαι σκωραμὶς κωμωδική.

O Lady Hileithya, don't stand by and let me burst or stay blocked up like this;  
I don't want to become a comic shitpot!

(*Eccl.* 369-71)

Blepyrus' failure to defecate is therefore characterised in female terms as the failed delivery of a baby; and Blepyrus' simultaneous feminisation and frustrated scatological desire is presented as a failure of fertility and reproduction. The connection between the reversal of gender roles and the reversal of the usual comic motif of fertility is further thematised in this scene by the presence of funereal imagery, in which Praxagora's appropriation of her husband's clothing is represented as leaving him in a corpse-like state.

εἴτ' οὐ τὸ σαυτῆς ἰμάτιον ἐχρῆν σ' ἔχειν;  
ἀλλ' ἔμ' ἀποδύσασ' ἐπιβαλοῦσα τοῦγκυκλον  
ῶχου καταλιποῦσ' ὡσπερὶ προκείμενον,  
μόνον οὐ στεφανώσασ' οὐδ' ἐπιθεῖσα λήκυθον.

Well, shouldn't you have worn your *own* cloak? Instead, you stripped me, threw your mantle over me, and went off leaving me like a laid-out corpse! I'm surprised that you didn't put an oil jar beside me and a wreath on my head!

(*Eccl.* 535-8)

Throughout this scene therefore, Blepyrus' feminisation is presented as inducing a state of sterility and lifelessness, and the play's inversion of gender roles is linked to an inversion of the comic theme of fertility and fruitfulness, as he is first characterised as unable to deliver a baby, and then presented as not only sterile, but dead.<sup>57</sup>

Blepyrus' feminisation in this scene is therefore accompanied by a simultaneous scatological disempowerment, and his failure to defecate, and so fulfil a central comic freedom of the body, is described in feminine terms. The frustration of Blepyrus' scatological desire (emphasised through his repeated use of the desiderative form *χεζητιῶν*, lines 345,

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57. Rothwell 1990: 56 notes that Praxagora and Blepyrus have no children, and suggests that Blepyrus' fears in lines 465-70 about his ability to perform sexually under duress raises the possibility that Blepyrus suffers from impotence, which would again add to the presentation of Blepyrus as both feminised, and incapable of the fertility usually associated with comedy.

368) additionally offers a parallel to the theme of the frustration of male sexual desire which is also introduced in this scene, as Blepyrus and Chremes worry about whether the women's revolution will lead to the sexual subjugation of men (465-9, discussed above). By characterising Blepyrus' constipation as the failed delivery of a baby, the play further links this frustration of male corporeal desire to a theme of sterility, in which the reversal of gender roles is characterised as leading to a kind of anti-fertility, which is itself a clear inversion of comic norms. This presentation of frustrated male desire as inducing a state of sterility is increasingly a focus of the play, as in the penultimate scene the endorsement of female sexual desire and power, and the subsequent sexual disempowerment of men, is accompanied by imagery of funerals and death.

The penultimate scene of the *Ecclesiazusae*, in which three old women fight for possession over a young man, is in every way a direct inversion of the norms of Aristophanic comic endings. This is true most obviously in the gender-reversal of the comic trope whereby a man wins possession of a young girl; and the emphasis on the fact that instead of being passive, silent sexual objects (as the women claimed by male characters in the finales of the *Acharnians*, *Knights*, *Wasps*, *Peace*, *Birds*, *Lysistrata*, and *Thesmophoriazusae*) the women, both young and old, are actively in pursuit of sex. However, the scene also contravenes the comic convention of rejuvenation and renewal. A significant number of Aristophanes' extant plays feature elderly protagonists, and in each case the play ends with the old man rejuvenated, and enjoying a new lease of life. This is a particularly prominent theme in the *Wasps*, but features also in the *Acharnians*, *Knights*, and *Clouds*,<sup>58</sup> and is arguably another manifestation of Old Comedy's interest in fertility and (festal, agrarian) renewal. It is therefore notable that, unlike the old men of Aristophanes' plays, the old women in the *Ecclesiazusae* are not only not rejuvenated in any way, but are repeatedly presented as being close to, or even as good as, dead; and for the *Ecclesiazusae* to so pointedly avoid, and invert, the theme of rejuvenation seems significant. Instead of male sexual assertion accompanied by the possibility of fertility (since unlike old women even old men may be fertile, and rejuvenated old men presumably more so), we find in this scene of the *Ecclesiazusae*

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58. On the topic of old men and rejuvenation in Old Comedy, cf. Hubbard 1989.



aggressive female sexuality dominating male, and infertile sex triumphing over procreative sex. Accordingly, as in the scene with Blepyrus, the assertion of female power over male inverts the festal conventions of Old Comedy, and the subsequent suppression of male power and fertility is at odds with the norms of the genre.

The penultimate scene opens with a conflict between an old woman and a young girl, who are each trying to take advantage of the new sexual freedoms offered by Praxagora's regime. The scene is therefore set up as a conflict between youth and age, and the eventual triumph of the older women over the girl accordingly emphasises the way in which Praxagora's regime serves to actively disrupt the norms of procreative sex. The disruption of sexual norms, and the sexual subjugation of the young man by the old women, is in the scene explicitly linked to the man's loss of political rights. The women repeatedly refer to their sexual rights as established by law (e.g. 1049: παραβᾶσα τὸν νόμον, 1055: ὁ νόμος ἔλκει, 1077: κατὰ τὸν νόμον); and when he tries to negotiate some kind of exemption to the law, the young man is told that as a man he no longer has the authority (κύριος) to negotiate any contract over the value of a single μεδίμνος (*Eccl.* 1024-5: ἀλλ' οὐ κύριος / ὑπὲρ μεδίμνόν ἐστ' ἀνὴρ οὐδεὶς ἔτι), thereby placing him in the legal position previously assigned to women.<sup>59</sup>

Throughout the scene, death imagery, similar to that earlier associated with Blepyrus, abounds. In her altercation with the first old women, the girl repeatedly characterises her rival as deathly, calling her 'rotten' (884, 926: ὧ σαπρά), and the sweetheart of Death (995: τῷ Θανάτῳ μέλημα); and this opposition between the procreative sex offered by the young girl, and the sterility and deathliness of the old women, is increased when the young man wishes he were dead rather than exchange his young lover for the old woman (977: ἀποθάνοιμ' ἄρα). The funereal imagery increases throughout the young man's interaction with the old women. He firstly claims to be worried about incurring the jealousy of the first woman's boyfriend, who he claims is a famous painter of funeral jars:

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59. Cf. Isaeus 10.10, in which the speaker claims that women, like minors, are not able to negotiate a contract over the value of a single μεδίμνος.

<Av> ἀλλ', ὦ μέλ', ὀρρωδῶ τὸν ἐραστήν σου.  
 <Γρ<sup>α</sup>> τίνα;  
 <Av> τὸν τῶν γραφῶν ἄριστον.  
 <Γρ<sup>α</sup>> οὗτος δ' ἐστὶ τίς;  
 <Av> ὃς τοῖς νεκροῖσι ζωγραφεῖ τὰς ληκύθους.

Man: But lady, I'm worried about your boyfriend!  
 Wo: Who's he?  
 Man: The one who paints jars for funerals.

(*Eccl.* 994-6)

The image of the ληκύθος here ties this scene to the earlier appearance of the funeral theme in the play, where Blepyrus was similarly imagined as a corpse lying with a garland and ληκύθος in line 538; and Praxagora's usurpation of her husband's power and masculinity is therefore associated with the sexual subjugation of the young man in this scene. As the interaction continues, it is not only the old woman, but the young man's sexual encounter with her, which is construed as funereal. Finally submitting to the first old woman, the man instructs her to prepare her bed with herbs, ληκύθοι, and other props associated with the preparation of corpses:

ὑποστόρεσαί νυν πρῶτα τῆς ὀριγάνου  
 καὶ κλήμαθ' ὑπόθου συγκλάσασα τέτταρα,  
 καὶ ταινίωσαι καὶ παράθου τὰς ληκύθους,  
 ὕδατός τε κατάθου τοῦστρακὸν πρὸ τῆς θύρας.

Then strew your bed with marjoram, break off four vine branches and lay them underneath, put on ribbons, place the flasks beside the bed, and put down a pot of water in front of your door.

(*Eccl.* 1030-3)

The sexual encounter between the young man and the old woman is therefore explicitly presented as the opposite of procreative, with the fertile body of a young woman replaced with the corpse-like and barren body of the old, and fertile procreation replaced with the language of death and funerals.

The women's dominance over the young man's body is not only sexual, but, in common with the earlier presentation of Blepyrus, his scatological functions are also obstructed. In

lines 1059 and following, the young man in his desperation to escape attempts to stall for time by saying that he needs to go to the toilet (1059: ἴθι νῦν ἔασον εἰς ἄφοδον), since otherwise he will soil himself. However, the old woman refuses to let him go, telling him that he will have to wait, and that he can shit inside the house (1061: θάρρει, βάδιζ' ἔνδον χεσεῖ). The young man's disempowerment may be further enacted by a visible loss of erection. When he first appeared in the scene he was described as 'carrying a torch' (978: τοῦ δαί δεόμενος δᾶδ' ἔχων ἐλήλυθας;). It has been suggested by Vetta (1989: 251-2) that, since a torch would itself not be cause for much remark given the night-time setting,<sup>60</sup> the 'torch' here indicates the young man's phallus, and that he is therefore an ithyphallic figure.<sup>61</sup> However, at line 1058, the second old woman addresses the man as 'softy' (μαλακίων), which, while a common endearment, additionally suggests that by this point his comic phallus may no longer be erect. If this interpretation is correct, given the importance of the phallus as a symbol of the comic genre, the overturning of comic norms which is a theme throughout this scene would receive some additional visual emphasis.

As in the scene with Blepyrus, the disempowerment of men and the obstruction of their pursuit of typical, comic corporeal pleasures are presented as overturning not only gender norms, but also the norms of the comic genre, as scatological indulgence, and male sexual pleasure and fertility, are replaced instead with funereal imagery which is at odds with Old Comedy's usual celebration of male sexual and corporeal power, and of fertility and procreation both human and agrarian. Although it is impossible to ascertain exactly how the young man was costumed with regards to the comic phallus, it is possible that his loss of

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60. Cf. *Eccl.* 834-52, in which a herald calls the men to dinner. Since it is already clear that this post-dinner scene is taking place at night, there is no need to reinforce this at this point, and it therefore seems unlikely such temporal scene-setting is the function of the comment.

61. Vetta's interpretation of this line is further bolstered by the fact that fire imagery is commonly used as a sexual euphemism not only in Greek (Cf. Henderson 1991: 47-8, 177-8) but in other languages (on universal metaphors, including SEXUAL DESIRE IS FIRE, cf. Kovecses 2010 ch. 13). Furthermore, a torch metaphor is the subject of an extended joke at *Vesp.* 1372-7, although the torch here is used to denote female, rather than male, sexual anatomy. It therefore seems highly plausible that the torch here indicates the young man's phallus, since this would fit within this common pattern of euphemism, as well as making sense within the context, as Vetta argues.

male power could additionally have been signified visually, if the young man's sexual disempowerment, enacted upon him by the old women, was accompanied by a loss of his ithyphallic status by the end of the scene. Throughout the play therefore, the removal of male political power is shown to result in the frustration of male corporeal desire both sexual and scatological; and these are in turn presented as a kind of sterility, thereby simultaneously inverting not only the comic norms of male agency and corporeal indulgence, but also the symbolism of fertility which is equally characteristic of the genre.

### **Conclusions**

Both the *Thesmophoriazusae* and the *Ecclesiazusae* present a similar triangulation between the themes of gender, genre, and politics, and use comic women as a prism through which to explore the conventions of comic fictionality, and the comic plot. The *Thesmophoriazusae*'s overt discussion of genre and theatricality is not repeated in the *Ecclesiazusae*; however, the plot of the later play, and in particular its inversion of a series of comic tropes and motifs, offers an oblique examination of the conventions of comic plotting, as well as drawing attention to the extent to which the typical narrative arcs of comedy may potentially be in conflict with the execution of the 'women on top' theme in its fullest and more extreme manifestation.

The *Thesmophoriazusae*'s presentation of Old Comedy as possessing inherently masculine characteristics is not replicated elsewhere in the Aristophanic corpus; furthermore, the play's attribution of male characteristics to poetry and art is in fact entirely at odds with the Greek tradition of embodying poetry in female form. In both religion and myth, and literature from Homer onwards, poetry and art has been embodied as female in the form of the Muses; and indeed in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, the Muses are repeatedly invoked by the two tragedians, with Euripides' own Muse appearing on stage at lines 1306-7. The female embodiment of poetry is part of a broader tradition in Greek literature and culture in which personifications tend to be presented as female (most probably due, at least in part, to the fact that abstract nouns in Greek are feminine in form); and the tradition of female personifications is if anything a stronger presence in Old Comedy than in other literary

genres.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the convention of female personification is repeatedly applied to metapoetic figures in Aristophanes' plays; in addition to the Euripidean Muse in *Frogs*, Aristophanes' *Gerytades* most probably featured a female figure personifying Poetry;<sup>63</sup> in the parabasis of the *Knights* (*Eq.* 516-17), Comedy is described as a female figure granting 'favours' to the playwrights; and in the *Clouds*, the parabasis contains an extended passage personifying the play itself as a modest young girl (*Nub.* 534-44). A female personification of comic poetry is also a central feature of Cratinus' *Pytine*, in which Comedy appeared on stage as the poet's wife, seeking to win her husband back from the clutches of his mistress Drunkenness. The characterisation of comedy as male in the *Thesmophoriazusae* is therefore contrary to the conventions both of Old Comedy, and of Greek literature at large, and is in this regard entirely anomalous, and highly unusual. However despite this unprecedented step, the *Thesmophoriazusae*'s presentation of Old Comedy as masculine is embedded in a broader understanding of the genre's conventional features. This is most obviously apparent in comedy's use of the phallus, arguably the visual signifier of the genre, and certainly the convention which sets it most clearly apart from its fellow dramatic genre, tragedy. Comedy's conventional celebration of a version of festal fertility which is strongly focused on the fulfilment of male desire, and in particular the genre's trope of ending plays with a man, often the hero, taking possession of a nude, mute female figure, also lends itself towards a presentation of the genre as masculine.

This festal aspect, in which Old Comedy celebrates Dionysiac fertility rites in an explicitly masculine manifestation, is central for understanding the *Ecclesiazusae* in particular, in which the ascent of women is characterised as undermining and disrupting this conventional motif of the genre. The conflict between Old Comedy as a genre which celebrates masculine fertility and the 'women on top' plot is explicitly emphasised throughout the *Ecclesiazusae*, as the women's revolution is presented as overturning a series of comic

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62. On female personifications of abstract concepts in Old Comedy, cf. Hall 2000, who examines the evidence for female abstractions in non-Aristophanic comedy, with a particular focus on figures of metapoetry; and Kidd 2014: 77-83, who discusses the comic potential of sex with abstract personifications.

63. Cf. Hall 2000: 413-14

tropes, and in particular as obstructing the male corporeal fulfilment, both scatological and sexual, which is a defining aspect of Old Comedy. Such a conflict between masculine and feminine versions of fertility rites and festivities, with only the former truly being at home within the comic genre, would be an easy theme within the *Thesmophoriazusae*, whose plot actually centres around a specifically female fertility rite, the Thesmophoria; however, in this play the agrarian aspects of this specifically female fertility festival are almost entirely overlooked in favour of a focus on the comic potentials of all-female gatherings; and any tension between male, Dionysiac, comic fertility motifs and the play's festal setting is therefore underplayed. By contrast, the *Ecclesiazusae*'s repeated thematic focus on death and sterility makes explicit the link between the women's revolution, and the disruption of the conventional comic celebration of masculine, Dionysiac, fertility; and this culminates in the final scene, in which procreative sex is overcome by non-procreative, and the comic celebration of fertility is replaced with the language of funerals and death.

The focus of these two plays is therefore quite different, with the former using the idea of comic masculinity to examine the conventions of tragedy, with comic masculinity defined primarily in opposition to the femininity of the rival genre; and the latter shifting its gaze towards the conventions of the comic plot, which, unusually for an Aristophanes play, are not compared to, or contrasted with, the conventions of another genre, rival or otherwise. Though the *Ecclesiazusae* lacks the explicit play with poetic form which we find in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, it is in its way no less interested in its own generic status and practice.

## Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to argue that comic self-reflexivity extends beyond an (already well established) interest in the authorial persona, and the festal and performative context of the plays, to encompass the conventions of comic storytelling. I have suggested that Aristophanes' plays negotiate the boundaries of their own generic identity in relation to other genres, including fable, epic, and of course tragedy, and that these negotiations are deeply embedded in the story-structure of the plays. Through an investigation of three different sub-genres of comic plots, namely animal comedy, mythic comedy, and 'women on top' plays, I have argued that Aristophanic comedy displays a keen interest in the possibilities of comic storytelling, and in how the characteristics of the specifically comic plot might be used to mark out a distinct generic territory. Furthermore, I have suggested that Aristophanes' interest in generic self-definition is not limited to an agonistic relationship with tragedy, but is considerably more varied, both in terms of the diversity of the genres with which the plays interact, and the modes through which they do so.

Chapter One argued that the plot of the *Wasps* features a sustained engagement with Aesopic animal fable, and that this engagement is used in turn to reflect on the place of animals, animal plots, and animal choruses within comedy's own generic history. Throughout the play, the didactic quality of Aesopic fable is emphasised; and comedy's more eclectic, chaotic, and absurd use of animal imagery is contrasted with the semiotic stability of animal symbolism in fable. The visual potential of animals in comedy is particularly exploited by the play, as the stage is populated by an increasingly bizarre cast of animal characters, including a donkey, talking dogs, dancing crabs, and of course the eponymous chorus of wasps. The chapter argued that in its own use of animal imagery, the *Wasps* shifts the focus away from the relationship between symbol and meaning, and instead focuses primarily on the comic potential of the symbols themselves; and that this is characteristic of comedy's inclination towards disrupting the relationship between signifier and signified. The chapter focused particularly on the unusual nature of the animal chorus in the play, who unlike traditional

animal choruses inhabit a dual human-animal identity; and argued that the chorus' enactment of their theriomorphic role thematises the idea of animal performance which is central to the play.

Chapter Two examined mythological storytelling in the *Peace* and *Birds*. The chapter argued that the plays situate themselves in opposition to tragic myth, and assert a claim to mythopoiesis as a defining characteristic of the comic plot. Using tragedy as a starting point, both plays create a mythic patchwork by drawing on a variety of sources, including epic, satyr drama, ethnography, and the orphic tradition, in order to write stories which are at once new inventions, and grounded in existing mythic and literary models. The chapter argued that while *Peace* asserts its difference from tragic myth, confining sad endings and failure to the rival genre and presenting its own storyline as successful and celebratory, the *Birds* incorporates the darker elements of its tragic model *Tereus* into its own fictional world. In addition to characterising tragedy as firmly bound by conventions of retelling and lacking comedy's freedom of invention, the chapter suggested that both *Peace* and *Birds* display a marked interest in the possibilities of representation on the comic stage. In *Peace* this takes the form of a parodic interaction with the *Bellerophon*'s set piece, which I suggested may have involved an experimental (and quite likely at least partially unsuccessful) deployment of the *mechane* to represent Bellerophon and Pegasus in flight. In *Birds*, this interest in the limits of stage representation resurfaces, as the play repeatedly draws attention to its failure to locate Nephelokokkugia in actual stage space, and interrogates the gap between the boundless possibility of comic imagination, and the constraints of stage practice.

The final chapter turned to the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Ecclesiazusae*, and the increasing prominence of female characters on the Aristophanic stage. The first section of the chapter argued that in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, the figure of Agathon is used to characterise tragedy as inherently feminine, against comedy's phallic masculinity, and that this is in turn linked to tragedy's lack of overt, revelatory metatheatricality. I suggested that the play's characterisation of tragedy's apparent illusionism as effeminate interacts with a broader cultural conception of femininity as deceptive. The play's presentation of In-Law was also



examined, and the chapter argued that his status as an overtly comic figure, characterised by the phallus, is linked in the play to his failure to pass as a woman at the Thesmophoria. I argued that his revelation as a comic man is strongly tied to his scatological language, and that this may have culminated in an on-stage urination scene in which his comicalness and maleness were simultaneously exposed. The second part of the chapter focused on the *Ecclesiazusae*, and argued that the play explores the ramifications of its fuller manifestation of the 'women on top' theme in light of comedy's conventional celebration of male fertility and power. I argued that the play inverts a series of generic norms, as procreative sex is replaced with infertility and the language of death. I suggested the possibility that the absence of comic fertility might have been signalled visually on stage, through the young man's loss of his ithyphallic status in the penultimate scene of the play. The chapter argued that the play also linked the obstruction of male sexual desire and fertility with the obstruction of the scatological impulse which is equally characteristic of comedy, as well as related genres such as Iambus.

It might be noted at this point that in a thesis entitled 'defining the comic plot', no such definition has been forthcoming. While I have attempted to show that Aristophanes' interest in the comic plot and its potential for generic self-definition was sustained throughout his career, I have not suggested a linear model whereby the plays gradually move towards an increasingly well articulated idea of what defines comic storytelling. The absence of any sense of linear progression may be in part due to the paucity of our evidence; from a writing career spanning nearly four decades, only eleven plays survive in full. However, it seems more likely that, although different ideas come into focus in different periods, the comic plot, much like comic jokes, is episodic rather than linear in its development, with each idea being exploited to its fullest potential, and then unceremoniously dropped as the playwright moves on to the next. In place of a linear model, we find instead that the plays' conception and construction of their own genre shifts depending on what they are defining themselves in relation to; a play which engages in an interaction with Aesop is likely to come to a different understanding of where the boundaries of the comic lie than one which engages primarily with tragedy or epic. Furthermore, this process of the continual renegotiation of generic

boundaries itself causes a series of shifts in what constitutes the comic; the plays do not only define themselves agonistically against external genres, but by incorporating their external cultural and literary models they expand their own generic reach into territory not previously their own. As time goes on, the self-reflexivity of Aristophanic comedy begins also to be self-referential; the *Ecclesiazusae* in particular does not engage in a process of defining itself against external generic norms, but rather against the previous conventions of Aristophanic comedy itself.

This ever-expanding conception of the comic plot, in which the conventions of the genre are always open to re-negotiation, and the genre itself undergoes a process of perpetual re-definition, is perhaps inevitable in a genre as varied and eclectic as Old Comedy. In the diverse intellectual milieu of fifth-century Athens, comedy is something of a cultural lightning-rod, encompassing not only a diverse range of literary and performative modes, but also issues of politics, class, gender, religion, philosophy, economics, and other topics far too extensive to be listed here. Whatever there is to be found of Aristophanes' Athens, can be found in Aristophanes. In such a context, it is clear that no one reading can ever be exhaustive, even with regard to the limited topic of the plot. In the process of writing this thesis, certain possible avenues have suggested themselves; in particular, I have not addressed the topic of comic metaphor, and its importance for comic storytelling. No comprehensive study of metaphor in comedy has been attempted since Newiger's 1957 publication, *Metapher und Allegorie: Studien zu Aristophanes*, and subsequent developments in both comic scholarship and metaphor theory make a return to this topic long overdue. Despite the fragmentary nature of the evidence, an investigation of the relationship between metaphor and plot might also be more conducive to the inclusion of non-Aristophanic comedy.

The obvious limitations of this Aristophanocentric study notwithstanding, I hope to have demonstrated Old Comedy's remarkable flexibility as a genre, with regards to the modes in which it operates, the models with which it interacts, and the stance it takes towards its own self-constructed identity; even while ultimately concluding that comedy's perpetual

reinvention of itself requires that a true definition of its generic identity be placed forever just out of reach.

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