ONLY JOKING:

A FRESH LOOK AT ARISTOPHANES' PARABASES

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to read Aristophanes' comedy as comedy, by foregrounding the mental processes involved in processing humour. I draw upon several areas of modern theory: humour theory in its various instantiations, cognitive approaches to reading literature, and empirical studies in media psychology. By pulling together ideas from several areas of contemporary research, I create a toolbox of ideas suited to reading the Aristophanes' parabases in a way which focuses on humour and explores the mediating effect it has on the creation of political meaning.

Next, I put these tools to work on the parabases, passages of Old Comedy which have featured as the cornerstone of arguments surrounding Aristophanic politics. By carrying out a close reading of each parabasis in turn, this dissertation illustrates the myriad ways in which humour can be generated, and it becomes clear that, to an audience of diverse political opinions, every character and demographic represented in the parabases can be understood as a source of humour. There is very little in Aristophanes which can be taken as entirely serious.

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For Digby, who can't read this,

and Jacqui, who already has.

Notes

My Aristophanes text is that of Wilson's (2007) *OCT* except where noted, and scholia are from the Holwerda, Koster and Chantry's Groningen series (1977-94). Text and numbering of comic fragments are from Kassel and Austin's (1983-2001) *Poetae Comici Graeci*. Translations and mistakes are my own unless noted otherwise.

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Introduction

1. What's All This, Then?

Twice a year, a handful of Athenian citizens were each given the opportunity to monopolise the attention of a broad swathe of the *demos* for over an hour, with the production of a play that could be highly political and flout social conventions with regard to appropriate public speech. These citizens, the comic playwrights, were not elected, but could petition an official, the eponymous *archon*, who would grant or refuse them a chorus according to criteria unknown to us, but which were likely a matter of personal discretion.[1] No wonder, then, that the comic playwright's potential to wield disproportionate political influence upon his audience quickly became a source of anxiety.

Comedy, with its imaginative and vituperative power, has often been seen as a threatening political force. This is clear from the numerous attempts by politicians throughout history to check the power of comedy by introducing censorship. To name but a few occasions: Aristophanes himself was supposedly taken to court by the politician Cleon when his comedy revealed uncomfortable truths about Athens' treatment of her allies on the public stage of the City Dionysia;[2] in England it was primarily a sexualising, scatological political farce called *The Golden Rump* satirising King George II and his government which led to the Licensing Act of 1737, giving powers of censorship over all theatre to the Lord Chamberlain for over two centuries;[3] and comics in Berlusconi's Italy faced censorship by the thin-skinned prime minister, in scenes interestingly akin to the

[1] Arist. *Po.* 1449b1-2 says that originally the performers of comedy were volunteers, but when the process was later formalised the *archon* granted choruses to playwrights: καὶ γὰρ χορὸν κωμῳδῶν ὀψέ ποτε ὁ ἄρχων ἔδωκεν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐθελονταὶ ἦϲαν. Cratinus was supposedly denied a chorus at least once: Κρατῖνοϲ ἀπὸ διθυράμβου ἐν Βουκόλοιϲ ἀρξάμενοϲ, ἐπειδὴ χορὸν οὐκ ἔλαβεν παρὰ τοῦ ἄρχοντοϲ. ἔϲτιν οὗ †ἠτήρει (fr. 20).

[2] *Ach.* 377-382; Atkinson (1992). The possibility that comedians' speech was curbed by decree in the 5th century has been long debated: e.g. Sommerstein (1986, 2004a, 2004b), Halliwell (1984, 1991, 2004), Wallace (2005), and Rigsby (2020).

[3] This was a move to renew and legitimise the censorship of theatres on matters related to the government, a role that had previously fallen to the Master of Revels: Wright (1964) 252-4.

Aristophanes-Cleon affair, and in one case even involving a production of Aristophanes' *Frogs*, which was set to include caricatures of the businessman-turned-politician.[4]

Recent studies have suggested that politicians ought not to cower at the power of comedy, since there are only specific, limited circumstances in which comedy can wield power effectively, as will be discussed below.[5] Certainly, however, all this censorship points to a widespread historical belief that comedy is politically potent. Of course we want to identify the political perspective of our comics, since they often in Western culture seem to wield unchecked, unelected influence on political currents.

In the case of Aristophanes, the mission to determine his political perspective is motivated on historical grounds too, since his topical, politically engaged comedies are among the most compelling sources of political discussion in the last decades of the fifth century. Unlike its sibling genre, tragedy, which was generally confined to enactment of mythic or historical material,[6] comedy is frequently set in the here-and-now of classical Athens, with license to comment explicitly and directly upon social and political matters.

Naturally, attempts to discern Aristophanes' own political perspective have been numerous. The question has long been debated, and yet his political bent and influence remains controversial. It would be fair to say that the majority who have tackled this question have found that Aristophanes represents a conservative or elite perspective.[7] Nevertheless, some have placed Aristophanes on the opposite end of the political

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[4] Bannerman (2009), 'Comedian Daniele Luttazzi accuses Silvio Berlusconi of media censorship', *The Times*, 16 May; Grimmond (2002), 'Political toads stir up row over 2,500-year-old drama', *Independent,* 21 May.

[5] Political satire seems sometimes to reinforce the status quo it challenges: Tsakona & Popa (2011).

[6] Historical plays were scarce and, judging by the reception of Phrynichus' *Sack of Miletus*, could cut too close to the bone: Hdt. 6.21.2, Proietti (2019) 86-90. Few tragedies solely featured characters of the poet's invention, and Agathon's *Antheus* is the only known named example: Arist. *Po*. 1451b, Karamanou (2010) 389-90.

[7] E.g. de Ste. Croix (1972) 357-8 saw Aristophanes as a Cimonian conservative, hostile to radical democracy and opposed to continued warfare; Konstan (1995) 25-8 sees Aristophanes as oligarchic in sympathies throughout; Sommerstein (1996, 1993) argues that Aristophanes' plays may have been harnessed by conservative politicians and weaponised against 'the Left'.

spectrum, as a committed democrat.[8] Standing apart from both these contrasting interpretations are those who, like Malcolm Heath, find that the plays were not seriously intended to have any influence on politics at all.[9] While I think it safer to discuss effect than intention, it is this view with which I most sympathise, and this seems to be partially a consequence of the plays' political polyphony; in Aristophanes many political strains are expressed, but in counterpoint with opposing voices, the result of which is that none are presented as authoritative or unfocalized, and the plays carry no one authorised 'correct' political meaning. As Ruffell says, we must 'embrace the multi-stranded nature of the discourse'.[10] This nature renders these plays and their political import a sort of Rorschach ink-blot test for the reader.

Lately, discussions have tended not to hinge around pinpointing the political perspective of the poet but have become more sensitive to the particular complexities of interpreting political comedy.[11] While this may be a welcome change given that these ongoing discussions have long been worn 'threadbare',[12] it is also hard to side-step the issue. Our sense of Aristophanes' political stance inevitably informs our reading of the plays. Additionally, in the parabases of the first five extant comedies, the author is represented as a character, and a loud and opinionated one at that. When faced with such a figure, it is natural to consider the thoughts and opinions that lie behind their words.[13] The audience is encouraged to identify that character with the poet, albeit only partially and superficially, since each audience member must also have been aware that the poetic persona's speeches in the parabases were matters of artifice, sometimes conventional, and

[8] Sidwell (2009); Miller (2019) sees Aristophanes' criticisms as participating in and reinforcing democratic systems; Case (2021) argues that the plays envisage an extremely egalitarian and inclusive democratic world.
[9] E.g. Heath (1987), Gomme (1938).
[10] Ruffell (2006) 75.
[11] E.g. Rosen and Foley (2020).
[12] Gomme (1938) 97.
[13] Indeed, the idea of '**mentalising**' is a useful lens which this dissertation will use; see section 4 below.

not necessarily informative in aim. And so, the question of Aristophanes' political stance and intent confronts the reader or audience member. It is a question both difficult to answer and difficult to avoid.

The present dissertation will aim to approach this debate from a new angle, by reading the text primarily as a piece of comedy, foregrounding the mental processes involved in 'getting' comic texts. Since humorous messages are processed by the brain in different ways than earnest messages, this seems key to interpreting the political satire of Aristophanes, and understanding how his original audience naturally would have interpreted it. I operate on the assumption that the plays were genuinely humorous, as indeed modern readers intuitively recognise them to be. Of course, not every joke in Aristophanes' corpus need have landed. If a particular joke failed to elicit amusement, if the dynamic of humour failed, then it remains to us as a sort of red herring when it comes to understanding the culture that belies it. It is both charitable to the historic playwright, and more productive for us, to assume that Aristophanes' work is generally funny.

I also take as a foundation of my argument the fact that a modern reader or audience member's brain processes humour in much the same way as an ancient Athenian would. While the context of humour is largely culturally specific,[14] the way in which a mind digests the fundamental structure of humour is universal. This can be justified on grounds of 'psychobiology'.[15] Evolution does not work fast enough for our brains to be structurally different than the brains of our 5th century ancestors, and the brain's psychological processes are determined by its physical structure. Therefore modern and ancient thinkers share the same basic underlying cognitive processes. If cognitive processing varied between civilisations as greatly as cultural factors, then other

[14] See note 69.
[15] Fagan (2011) 39.

civilisations would be totally inexplicable to us, whereas in fact anthropologists have found many human universals.[16] Likewise, a modern reader confronted with an ancient text often immediately and intuitively identifies common emotions, thought processes and responses. In Aristophanes, a modern audience often readily recognises the dynamics of humour.

On these grounds, this dissertation undertakes a new reading of the parabases of Aristophanes, drawing on various contemporary fields to understand how the humour functions and shapes the political 'message' of the plays. Reading the plays through the lens of humour is not a new practice. Ruffell's illuminating interpretation sees jokes as the building blocks of the plays.[17] Recent edited volumes have been alive to humour's role in moderating meaning, explaining this phenomenon through aspects of humour theory.[18] One particular contribution to such volumes, by Lowe, explores the processual nature of getting a joke, a chronologically unfurling journey which may comprise one or several comic **beats**, and which involves **script collisions** and **mentalising** at every step.[19] Rosen has drawn interesting comparisons between the practice and politics of modern American satirical comedians and the ancient theatre.[20] Scott has studied ancient jokes, explaining incongruity theory and demonstrating how it can be made to bear upon Aristophanic comedy,[21] while Kanellakis has explored how *para prosdokian* jokes in Aristophanes exemplify incongruity theory and Jendza has discussed how such jokes function as part of comic scenes.[22] All these readings have contributed to my approach for understanding Aristophanes.

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[16] E.g. Brown (1991), Antweiler (2016).
[17] Ruffell (2011) e.g.
[18] E.g. Rosen & Foley (2020), Swallow & Hall (2020).
[19] Lowe (2020). See sections 2.1 and 3.1 below for the concepts in bold.
[20] Rosen (2012).
[21] Scott (2023).
[22] Kanellakis (2020); Jendza (2023) and his article in Swallow and Hall (2020) 39-52.

What is new in this dissertation is the breadth of fields from which I have drawn ideas, and the sustained analysis of Aristophanic passages with this approach. Selecting useful concepts from three key areas, I explore how Aristophanic humour may have been processed by the audience through a sustained study of a humorous, and supposedly politically potent recurring scene: the parabasis. The first area from which I draw is that of humour theory, where I consider modern refinements of the three canonical theories of humour (Incongruity, Relief and Superiority), and explore how other insights from the field may reflect on Aristophanes. Secondly, I introduce concepts from cognitive approaches to analysing literature. These approaches are grounded in neurological data and, when made to work for the comic stage, provide insight into how an audience member processes character-driven narratives. Finally, since Aristophanes' comedy is inescapably political, I discuss empirical studies into political satire, and derive some principles about how the audience is liable to process humorous political messages. With all these selected ideas, this dissertation brings an empirical, cognitively grounded perspective to long-debated questions.

In the rest of this chapter, I introduce the tools in my toolbox. I describe each theory and what it explains, and demonstrate how each can be meaningfully applied to reading Aristophanes. The names of each tool will be in bold throughout this dissertation, to make it clear that I am using particular terms in particular ways and that each piece of jargon is explained in this introduction. After introducing these tools and demonstrating how they can be applied to reading Old Comedy, I will lay out the project at hand, with a brief discussion of the parabasis, the audience, and Aristophanes' place in poetic tradition. To draw this introduction to a close, I will gesture towards what emerges in the following chapters, each a close line-by-line reading of one or two Aristophanic parabases in sequence, with some discussion of historical and cultural context.

2. Aristophanes as Comedy

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to list exhaustively all the ways in which a particular joke is funny, and this 'unlimited semiosis of humour'[23] makes classification and explanation difficult. Plato and Aristotle are our earliest sources hinting at theories of humour,[24] but humour has only been the subject of empirical scientific study for a century.[25] Over time, three canonical theories of humour have emerged – Superiority Theory, Relief Theory and Incongruity Theory – although many other strands of thought abound.[26] Each theory has its own particular 'wheelhouse' which it explains best, but no theory is sufficient in explaining every instance of humour. Nevertheless, each theory highlights an important aspect of humour, and so the following discussion of these theories notes the special insight of each which can be productively applied to interpretation of Aristophanic comedy when used to guide a close reading of the texts.

2.1 Incongruity Theory, Mind Candy and Cold Cognition

Incongruity Theory is the most popular and comprehensive of the three canonical theories to explain humour,[27] which has been applied to Aristophanes several times.[28] This theory posits that humour arises as a result of an **incongruity**, a sudden divergence from set expectations. This idea may be detected in Aristotle,[29] was expressed more fully by Kant

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[23] Osborne (2020) 24.
[24] Pl. *R.* 388a-389a, 605c-607a; *Phlb.* 47e-50b; *Lg.* 816d-817a, 935a-936a; Arist. *EN.* 1127b34-1128b9, *Po.* 1449a32–37, 1453a30-38; *Pol.* 1336b16-19, 1336b33–35. Daly (2021) explores these passages and the philosophers' impact on humour theory.
[25] Provine (2000) 18.
[26] E.g. biological theories, ambivalence theories, play theory, or Bergson's (1911) mechanical theory of humour. For this last, see chapter five on *Wasps* and *Peace*.
[27] Farber (2007) 68 calls it 'clearly the front runner'.
[28] Scott (2023); Swallow (2020) 4-5, 167-81; Lowe (2020); Jendza (2020).
[29] *Rhet.* 1406b5-6 discusses 'inappropriate' (ἀπρεπεῖς) metaphors: 'there are inappropriate metaphors, some because they are ridiculous (for comedy writers also use metaphors)'; see also *Po.* 1453a30-38 and *Rhet.* 1412a19-1412b11 with Daly (2021) 41-2.

inter alios,[30] and was endorsed by Darwin.[31] Its predominance is not surprising, as its breadth allows it to encompass the domains of the other two canonical theories of humour: **Superiority** Theory can be seen as **incongruity** with regard to social status and hierarchy; **incongruities** puncture pretensions and license the temporary relaxation of normal inhibitions which is described by **Relief** Theory. While these other two theories relate to emotional experiences which may predispose an audience to receive a joke favourably, or which the humour may elicit, **incongruity** seems to be a necessary and intrinsic part of generating humour. Our brains have been evolutionarily programmed to enjoy the process of noticing and **resolving** a perceived **incongruity**, and we now have an appetite for this 'endogenous mind candy'.[32]

While **Superiority** and **Relief** theories particularly explain highly emotive humour **Incongruity** Theory fills in the gaps, explaining more harmless humour, like wordplay and puns. It is, therefore, tempting to see **incongruous** humour as primarily a process of 'cold cognition' – that is, a non-emotional process. However, this overlooks the fact that as embodied beings, our thoughts and emotions are interdependent, creating a continual feedback loop, both conscious and unconscious.[33] To 'get' any joke generates an emotional response (pleasure, mirth), and the flipside of this is that failure to **resolve** an **incongruity** could result in anxiety or even paranoia.[34]

Of course, there are some obvious cases in which mere **incongruity** is not funny. A non-sequitur, for example, may baffle rather than amuse, and some **incongruities** could

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[30] Kant (2008 [1790]) 210 'laughter is an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing'. Schopenhauer espouses a more restricted incongruity: '*laughter* arises from nothing other than the sudden perception of an incongruity between a concept and the real objects that are, in some respect, thought through the concept.': (1966a [1844]) 141-2; he fleshes out the theory in (1966b [1844]) 142-9.
[31] Darwin (2009 [1872]).
[32] Hurley, Dennett & Adams, Jr. (2011) xi.
[33] *Ibid.* 67-72.
[34] Granitsas (2020).

generate disgust, anger or fear.[35] **Incongruity** may be a necessary condition for humour, but not a sufficient one.[36] Defining what is meant by **incongruous** in this theory is therefore the greatest and most important challenge faced by its proponents.

A useful definition is provided by Raskin's Semantic Script Theory of Humour, which employs the concept of semantic **scripts**, and can be summarised like this:[37]

1) A semantic **script** is a bundle of concepts and associations. The 'bar **script**' for example contains the associations one typically has with a bar: bartenders, drinks, purchasing, etc.
2) A text can be characterised as a joke if and only if the following conditions are met:
    i) The text is compatible, fully or partially, with two **scripts**.
    ii) The two **scripts** with which the text is compatible are opposed in some important sense.
    iii) The two **scripts** overlap fully or partially in this text.

By this theory, an **incongruity** is a collision of opposed **scripts**. The sense in which two **scripts** can be opposed has been the subject of some debate, but what seems certain is that there must be a sense of difference, and the second **script** should be surprising and more specific than the first.[38] A **script** is a bundle of associated ideas which may be invoked by a text even if they are not explicitly mentioned. These **scripts** are culturally constructed,[39] and thus thinking about how these **scripts** were recognised by the original audience requires one to consider culturally determined ideas and associations.[40] Finally, another

[35] Bain (1859) 282-3 lists some, e.g. 'A decrepit man under a heavy burden', 'an instrument out of tune' or 'a corpse at a feast'.
[36] Morreall (1987) 91, 108; Martin (2007) 64.
[37] Raskin (1985).
[38] Defining this opposition has been somewhat controversial, but to paraphrase Attardo (1997) who draws upon Weiner (1996) and Giora (1991), the opposition is more than mere negation, and the second script will often be more specific and more surprising (this being a layman's way of understanding the cognitive linguistic concepts of 'accessibility' and 'informativeness').
[39] As e.g. Kianbakht (2020) explores.
[40] See note 69.

useful term when considering **incongruity** is that of **set-up**.[41] The **set-up** may be textual or purely contextual, logically precedes the **incongruity**, and may be compatible with two or more **scripts**, without obviously clashing at first. When two **scripts** do collide, by the occurrence of an **incongruity**, the listener engages in problem-solving and works out how the **incongruity** can follow the preceding **set-up** of the joke. This result of this process is **resolution**.[42] The **resolution** is intellectually satisfying, and sometimes in some sense incomplete, since the **incongruity** may persist after the **resolution**, and 'often stresses the playfulness or even the fallacious nature of the resolution.'[43]

Let us consider an example from *Frogs*.

Ἡρακλῆϲ ποῖ γῆϲ ἀπεδήμειϲ;

Διόνυϲοϲ ἐπεβάτευον Κλειϲθένει-

Ἡρακλῆϲ κἀναυμάχηϲαϲ;

Διόνυϲοϲ καὶ κατεδύϲαμέν γε ναῦϲ

τῶν πολεμίων ἢ δώδεκ᾽ ἢ τρεῖϲ καὶ δέκα.

Ἡρακλῆϲ ϲφώ;

Διόνυϲοϲ νὴ τὸν Ἀπόλλω.

Ξανθίαϲ κᾆτ᾽ ἔγωγ᾽ ἐξηγρόμην.

Heracles Where on earth have you been travelling?

Dionysus Aboard Kleisthenes' ship.

Heracles So you fought in the sea battle?

[41] Attardo (1997).

[42] Suls (1972).

[43] Attardo (1997) 405-406. See e.g. my analysis of *Eq.* 573-4 where, even when the audience realise why the chorus mention Cleon's father, the **resolution** is incomplete and the reference nonsensical, calling attention to the irreality of the **world** they conjure to mock Cleon.

Dionysus Oh yes, and we sunk

Twelve or thirteen enemy ships.

Heracles You two?

Dionysus Yes, by Apollo!

Xanthias And then I woke up…

Frogs 48-51

In this exchange, the **set-up** is the discussion between Dionysus and Heracles, which introduces the **script** of naval warfare, with its associations (e.g. rowing, sinking ships, bravery). The **incongruity** comes with Xanthias' aside, which introduces the specific and surprising **script** of waking, and associated ideas of sleep and dreaming. The consumer must then rapidly reprocess what they have heard to reach the **resolution**, realising that what has come before, the sinking of enemy ships, was in fact part of a dream. The lines of text which comprise Dionysus' claims, therefore, constitute a period of overlap between the two **scripts**. Here, part of the humour is that bravery is an subtextual association of the naval warfare **script**, and one at odds with the passivity and lack of bravery associated with the second **script**, of dreaming. The **resolution** is complete in the sense that what Dionysus describes is also fully compatible with the dream **script**, although the audience member is left to decide for themselves whose version of events to believe.

2.2 Tension, Timing and Taboo

Incongruity can go some way in explaining the underlying mechanisms of humour. However, our understanding is supplemented by additional theories which relate more closely to the emotional experience of humour. **Relief** theory, for example, is a psycho-analytic theory which posits that laughter occurs as a result of a pleasurable release of

psychic energy normally invested in maintaining certain socially mandated inhibitions. Laughter arises when someone is suddenly freed from nervous **tension**, and releases this latent quota of energy. This theory was developed and championed by Freud,[44] and is useful for understanding laughter as an emotional response. It can explain, among other things, why transgression of authority can be funny. The theory has found empirical support in a neurological study which demonstrated that humour typically correlates with patterns of emotional arousal.[45]

This theory is also appealing because it explains why **emotionally arousing** topics, like sex and death, are so ripe for comedy. It also explains why jokes sometimes benefit from a long build-up before the punchline: the growing **tension** from anticipation results in a greater release of energy. However, this theory is not comprehensive in explaining how humour functions. It does not, for example, explain puns, or how something can be humorous with little to no build-up. It also seems to rely on our understanding of the human psyche as something like a steam engine with high pressure contents which, once built up, needs to be released to ease it. This metaphor may aid understanding, but it is an unsophisticated image to apply to something as complex as the human brain and sense of humour.[46]

Despite these limitations, **Relief** Theory has some truth to it, and its own purview: topics that occasion high **tension** and **emotional arousal**. Analysis of humour through this lens will therefore seek to identify when the humour deliberately plays upon topics that stimulate **tension** and **emotional arousal**. These are sometimes culturally dictated, and at other times quite universal in scope.

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[44] Freud (2002 [1905]).
[45] Hubert et al. (1993).
[46] Hurley, Dennett & Adams, Jr. (2011) 44 say it ‘seems old-fashioned and naïve’.

Let us consider the entrance of Opora in *Peace* (819-855). Non-speaking female roles like this, along with flute-players, may have been performed by women, presumably *hetairai* in revealing costumes.[47] If this was the case, then part of the allure of such parts was that they were titillating for the spectators. Even if they were performed by men in padded costumes suggesting women's bodies, still sexual attraction is the focus of the exchange, and the spectators accordingly experience **emotional arousal** or **tension** when hearing about such a topic.[48]

The **tension** generated by the presence of the alluring Opora, is not relieved for some time. She enters at 819, but the alleviating sexual innuendo does not occur until 851-55:[49]

Οἰκέτηϲ εἰπέ μοι, δῶ καταφαγεῖν
ταύτῃ τι;
Τρυγαῖοϲ μηδέν· οὐ γὰρ ἐθελήϲει φαγεῖν
οὔτ᾽ ἄρτον οὔτε μᾶζαν, εἰωθυῖ᾽ ἀεὶ
παρὰ τοῖϲ θεοῖϲιν ἀμβροϲίαν λείχειν ἄνω.
Οἰκέτηϲ λείχειν ἄρ᾽ αὐτῇ κἀνθάδε ϲκευαϲτέον.

Slave Tell me, what should I give her
To eat?
Trygaius Nothing. She won't touch
Bread or cake. She's used to licking ambrosia
At the feasts of the gods above.
Slave Well, we'll have to give her something to lick here, too.

[47] Zweig (1992).
[48] Mastromarco (2023) discusses the costuming of such roles.
[49] Passing over the comic **beat** at 848-9, which refers obliquely to Opora's sexuality by suggesting that the gods are acting as pimps, a joke that targets the gods rather than centring straightforward sexual humour.

Both the titillating subject matter and the long build up to the comic climax increase the **tension** ultimately released with this last line.

2.3 Superiority Theory to Disposition Theory

Superiority theory of humour, which chimes with the German concept of *Schadenfreude*, says humour is the result of a sudden pleasurable feeling of superiority derived from a comparison that shows the joker and/or audience in a better light than the denigrated other. Like **incongruity**, this theory has an impressive pedigree. Plato and Aristotle hint at it,[50] but Thomas Hobbes spells it out more clearly in *Leviathan*: 'sudden glory is the passion that maketh those grimaces called laughter; and is caused by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves.'[51] We laugh when others suddenly are revealed to be deficient, and we are pleased by the flattering comparison. When Dionysus is scared of Empusa in the *Frogs*,[52] for example, his deficient courage and self-awareness (he has just boasted of super-Herculean bravery)[53] are gratifying to the audience member who feels temporarily **superior** to him.

The enduring nature of this theory is unsurprising, since it speaks to something widespread in human nature – that humour is used competitively in social contexts.[54] This is clear in the obscene mockery of *iambos*, the antagonistic quips of orators, and of course

[50] Plato *Philebus* 48-50; Aristotle *Poetics* 5.1449a
[51] Hobbes (1996 [1651]) 38.
[52] *Ra.* 285-308. Xanthias may merely pretend that Empusa is present.
[53] *Ra.* 279-284. Humour at the expense of a boaster lacking in self-knowledge, at their ἀλαζονεία, is recognised by ancient and modern thinkers alike: Major (2006). This dynamic is present in parabases frequently, where the poet presents himself as an ἀλαζών.
[54] Gruner (1997) 80: 'humor consists of basically two elements: one is conflict, contest, competition, aggression, hostility, or whatever synonym you wish. The other is "sudden perception" of the result of the contest, a "win" and a "loss".'

in Old Comedy.[55] Ridiculing someone can increase one's own esteem, or the esteem of the listener, at the expense of the ridiculed, and humour that targets a particular person or group can also serve a positive social role, enforcing group values by ridiculing those who transgress these values.[56] This is operative in the ridicule of named *komoidoumenoi* in Aristophanes, as scholars have noted.[57] The chorus leader in *Knights* even comments upon the positive impact of disparaging iniquitous people: 'There is nothing hateful in insulting wicked men. In fact, it's an honour to the good ones'.[58]

Recent developments in humour theory have added nuance and broader scope to **Superiority** Theory, and it can be used to understand dynamics of humour with regard to **in-groups** and **out-groups**. Early developments of this theory hypothesised that a member of a group will see the group as an extension of the self, and accordingly find disparagement humour more amusing if it targets an unaffiliated group.[59] However, further research suggested that it was not actual affiliation with a targeted group which predicted whether or not someone found antagonistic humour funny, but **psychological identification** with the relevant groups.[60] One may **identify** with a group either because one is a member of the group, or merely because one feels positively about said group, and on these grounds one can predict whether someone will find a piece of disparaging humour amusing.[61] This theory was refined into Disposition Theory which treats attitude towards a

[55] In e.g. fr. 12 (West) Hipponax refers to his enemy Bupalus as μητροκοίτης ('motherfucker'); see section 5.3 for Old Comedy's relationship to *iambos*. Harding (1994) argues humour in classical rhetoric may be a result of the influence of comedy.
[56] Bergson (1911) 21 talks of laughter as a 'corrective' to behaviour that seems 'mechanical', that is, overly rigid and therefore anti-social. Things can become less funny when the transgressor is perceived to have suffered too much for their mistake: Deckers & Carr (1986), Wicker et al. (1981).
[57] Stark (2004), Ruffell (2011) 275-84.
[58] *Eq.* 1274-5.
[59] Wolff et al. (1934).
[60] For example, while gentiles found anti-Jewish jokes more amusing than Jews did, Jewish study participants also found anti-Scottish jokes less amusing than gentiles did, suggesting a vicarious identification of Jewish participants with denigrated Scottish people: Wolff et al. (1934); Conversely, one may not **psychologically identify** with a group in which one is numbered: a study showed that lower-class African Americans found anti-African-American jokes less amusing than their white counterparts did, but middle-class African-Americans enjoyed these jokes just as much as white Americans: Middleton (1959).
[61] La Fave (1972), La Fave et al. (1996 [1976]).

disparaged group as a continuous variable instead.[62] The more one **psychologically identifies** with Megarians, for example, the less likely one is to laugh at the *Acharnians* scene with the starving Megarian father.[63]

This last framework is the most sensitive to the minutiae of a relationship which might result in disparagement humour being effective and it finds empirical backing in studies.[64] For my purposes, to identify how group **identities** factored into the overall original reception of Aristophanic humour, it is generic identity groups which will be most relevant, although of course with any particular comic moment an individual audience member's predispositions will be more complicated than simply **psychological affiliation** with one group or another.[65]

Humour which elicits amusement by denigrating a particular target, whether a single person, a group, or even an ideology, is called 'disparagement humour'.[66] When such humour occurs in Old Comedy, it is useful to consider the various demographics in the audience, and their probable **psychological identifications** with different groups, individuals and stances. This is particularly important in, for example, my analysis of misogynistic humour in chapter seven on the parabases of *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae*. For now, I note that this off-shoot of **superiority** theory gives us three main useful concepts to work with. Firstly, at its most basic, humour can be generated by suggesting the **inferiority** of some character or group. Secondly, the perceived humorousness of a joke is inversely proportional to the favourableness with which an audience member regards the target of humour, so jokes targeting **out-groups**,

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[62] Zillmann & Cantor (1996 [1976]) 100-101: 'Humor appreciation varies inversely with the favorableness [sic] of the disposition toward the agent or entity being disparaged, and varies directly with the favorableness of the disposition towards the agent or entity disparaging it.'
[63] *Ach.* 729-835.
[64] Zillmann & Cantor (1972).
[65] Gallois & Callan (1985) suggest that attitudes towards the generic social categories of the target, and specific attitudes to the individual, predict amusement.
[66] E.g. Ferguson & Ford (2008).

with which the majority of audience members are not likely to **identify psychologically**, will likely generate the most amusement. Thirdly, it is not actual affiliation with some **in-group** or other that determines the audience's reaction to a joke, but **psychological identification** with groups.

I illustrate these principles through two jokes from Aristophanes.

Μαθητής τί ἐθαύμαcαc; τῷ cοι δοκοῦcιν εἰκέναι;

cτρεψιάδηc τοῖc ἐκ Πύλου ληφθεῖcι τοῖc Λακωνικοῖc.

Student Why are you surprised? How do they seem to you?

Strepsiades Like the Spartans captured at Pylos!

Clouds 185-186

Here, Strepsiades mocks the appearance of the students of the Thinkery. They are, we gather from dialogue elsewhere, presented as skinny and pale, and Strepsiades' reply that they resemble the emaciated prisoners-of-war captured by Athens at Pylos pleasingly recalls one of the city's recent triumphs in war. The physical **inferiority** of the sophistic students and the captured Spartans are played upon to generate humour, relying on the lack of **psychological identification** between the typical audience member and these two **out-groups**.

Διόνυcοc κατεῖδες οὖν που τοὺc πατραλοίαc αὐτόθι

καὶ τοὺc ἐπιόρκουc, οὓc ἔλεγεν ἡμῖν;

Ξανθίαc cὺ δ᾽ οὔ;

Διόνυcοc νὴ τὸν Ποcειδῶ 'γωγε, καὶ νυνί γ᾽ ὁρῶ.

Dionysus And did you see the father-killers there

And the oath-breakers, like he said?

Xanthias Didn't you?

Dionysus Yes, by Poseidon, and I see them now.

Frogs 274-276

The deictic νυνί suggests that Dionysus is breaking the fourth wall and referring to the audience as patricides and perjurers. This surprising and cheeky digression from expectation demonstrates a curious phenomenon of ancient comedy, which can be explained by reference to the developed forms of **Superiority** Theory outlined above: abuse of the audience. Despite the assertion of the Old Oligarch,[67] the Athenian public is frequently insulted in Old Comedy. At first glance this sort of humour seems to fly in the face of the principles of **Superiority** Theory – why would an audience member laugh at their own group being mocked? However, the joke carries little sting, because each individual audience member need not **psychologically identify** with his fellow audience members.

3. Aristophanes as Cognitive Event

In the 21st century there has been a growth in scholarship taking a cognitive approach to Classics.[68] This involves the foregrounding of processes, capabilities and limits of human cognition. As already discussed, this seems justified on the basis that the structure and therefore processing capabilities of our brains, as studied by contemporary science, is shared by the ancient audience member. While a modern reader or spectator of

[67] Ps.-X. *Ath.* 2.18: κωμῳδεῖν δ᾽ αὖ καὶ κακῶς λέγειν τὸν μὲν δῆμον οὐκ ἐῶσιν.
[68] E.g. Meineck, Short & Devereaux (2019); Budelmann & Sluiter (2023); for an online platform, see https://cognitiveclassics.blogs.sas.ac.uk.

Aristophanes may have to consult a commentary to immerse themselves in the culture-specific references required to understand the jokes,[69] the underlying mechanisms of humour are recognisable and familiar. Hence, the application of cognitive theories, which benefit from and have been developed through empirical scientific studies, can be legitimately applied to our ancient sources.

Cognitive approaches to literature tend to focus on useful concepts such as **mentalising** and Text-World Theory (**TWT**), which will be discussed below. These methods of approach can be applied equally well to all sorts of literature. But as of yet, cognitive theory has only been tentatively applied to ancient comedy, and some have turned to less mainstream models of humour theory instead.[70] One notable recent attempt at applying cognitive theory to ancient comedy was made by Lowe,[71] who stresses the importance of **mentalising** in the pay-off of a joke, and that the process of 'getting' a joke is not a static thing but a process that involves re-analysing what came before. He also stresses the need to consider jokes not as stand-alone items, but as parts of longer speeches where different comic **beats** unfurl slowly and interact over time. I adopt his use of '**beat**' to refer to a climactic moment of humour, since 'punchline' implies a simple one **setup**, one punchline structure, whereas in fact a passage may have multiple comic **beats** of varying strength.

The application of cognitive science and its technical vocabulary to the reading of classical literature may seem abstract or anachronistic at first glance, but there is much continuity with traditional methods of interpretation. Cognitive models are informed by the

[69] Cognitive theorists, e.g. Haugeland (1998) 207-37, talk of 'embedded cognition': that a mind is one part of a broader cognitive system, acting upon and within its own cultural context. Scott (2023) 1-2 explains *Ra.* 1-4, as wordplay 'embedded in the dramatic scenario' for which 'a quite extraordinary amount of literary, linguistic, cultural and dramatic knowledge is required to get this joke.' A cognitive approach to classics must foreground mental processes, while at the same time striving to understand the specific cultural context in which the text was produced and consumed.
[70] E.g. Robson (2006), Ruffell (2011).
[71] Lowe (2020).

way humans process information, which has not changed and can be grasped to a certain extent *a priori*. The approach taken in this dissertation is still essentially one of chronologically working through the text and situating it within ancient culture,[72] and therefore has much in common with a traditional commentary. Where cognitive approaches innovate is in bringing a sense of assurance that the scholar can legitimately make interpretative leaps about characters, their thoughts, and the fictional world of the play, which are not explicitly dictated by the text. This sort of analysis may be speculative, but it is also fundamental to communication, and therefore a natural part of the way a consumer of a text processes information.

3.1 Mentalising

Mentalising, also known as mind-reading, or Theory of Mind, is a particularly influential idea derived from cognitive approaches.[73] To **mentalise** is to attempt to determine the cognitive state of another person. Evaluating their knowledge, beliefs or emotional state typically involves intuiting things which have not been made explicit and taking clues from context. **Mentalising** is frequently extremely important in generating humour, in ways clearly compatible with the aspects of humour theory: differing levels of knowledge between speakers, for example, can easily result in misunderstandings which may generate **incongruity**, and which can put people on an unequal footing, potentially leading to feelings of **superiority** over a figure who lacks some understanding. In fact, **mentalising**

[72] See note 69 above.
[73] Others refer to 'social cognition'. Apperly (2011) 114-7 sees 'social cognition' as something broader, encompassing also e.g. social scripts. Since the process by which an audience member analyses the mind of a character in a play is a one-way street, **mentalising** seems the preferable term because one would expect 'social cognition' to be more 'social', i.e. interactive. However, the characters of Aristophanes' parabases do sometimes act as if they are **mentalising** about the audience in turn: e.g. I argue in chapter eight that the chorus backtrack at *Frogs* 695-6 because they expect the audience will be offended by what they have previously said.

is so fundamental to human interaction that studies suggest we can grasp several orders of intentionality when processing an idea or joke (e.g. 'he thinks that she thinks that…).[74]

How characters in ancient dramas should be understood – as psychologically convincing depictions, as representatives of types such as 'tyrant' or 'wife', or as mere drivers of plot – has been the subject of some debate.[75] If dramatic characters exist only to further the plot, then it may be illegitimate to **mentalise** about them; there is no mental state to theorise about. On the other hand, modern cognitive science suggests that **mentalising** is a natural human instinct, and scholars have created fruitful readings of ancient texts using this lens.[76] Significantly, by **mentalising** we imbue characters with motives, emotions and beliefs that may be expressed in a way that allows us to recognise the gap between what a character says and what they mean. In parabases, typically a straightforward address to the audience, this is particularly notable when the speaker either fails to express themselves as they seem to intend to, or when their attempts to persuade or deceive the audience fail. For example, at *Acharnians* 655, the poetic persona accidentally undermines his own claim to didactic righteousness, and the speakers of the parabases of *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Frogs* try to persuade the audience of their point of view, but their specious logic and deceptive intentions render their attempts to persuade so flimsy that the audience likely felt an enjoyable sense of **superiority** that they were not taken in by it.[77]

An example to illustrate **mentalising**'s role in humour is found at *Frogs* 56-7. Dionysus explains to Heracles that he is consumed by desire (πόθος 53). This desire will

[74] A conversation tends to involve a minimum of three orders of intentionality (speaker *intends* listener to *recognise* that the speaker *intends* the listener to produce some effect: Dennett (1983) 346). Adults struggle to cope with more than five orders of intentionality: Kinderman et al. (1998); Powell et al. (2010); Stiller & Dunbar (2007). At this point jokes generally become too complex to reliably elicit amusement: Dunbar et al. (2016).
[75] Gould (1978); Gill (1986); Thumiger (2007) 20-6.
[76] E.g. Budelmann & Easterling (2010), Scodel (2012), Minchin (2019), Lowe (2020).
[77] Or, some would have. Audience members who already sympathise with e.g. the oligarchic tones of the *Frogs* chorus may process the humour differently. See section 4.1 in this chapter and chapter eight on *Frogs*.

turn out to be a longing for Euripides as a poet, but Heracles assumes that Dionysus' longing is sexual desire, and guesses for whom that desire may be:

Ἡρακλῆϲ γυναικόϲ;
Διόνυϲοϲ οὐ δῆτ᾽.
Ἡρακλῆϲ ἀλλὰ παιδόϲ;
Διόνυϲοϲ οὐδαμῶϲ.
Ἡρακλῆϲ ἀλλ᾽ ἀνδρόϲ;
Διόνυϲοϲ ἀπαπαί.
Ἡρακλῆϲ ξυνεγένου τῷ Κλειϲθένει;

Heracles For a woman?
Dionysus No.
Heracles Then for a boy?
Dionysus Not at all.
Heracles Then for a man?
Dionysus Ugh!
Heracles You had sex with Cleisthenes?

Here, **mentalising** about Heracles is a key source of humour, as we witness his increasing surprise as he moves from appropriate objects of πόθοϲ to inappropriate ones. A little later, Dionysus clarifies that his longing is for Euripides, and Heracles' incredulity is patent from the intensifying καί in his response: καὶ ταῦτα τοῦ τεθνηκότοϲ;[78] Analysis through **mentalising** allows us to speculate that this incredulity is due to the fact that

[78] *Ra.* 67.

Heracles still thinks Dionysus' desire is sexual in nature. Heracles is thus surprised at what he takes initially to be his half-brother's necrophiliac desire towards Euripides.

Mentalising about the chorus in the parabasis is perhaps slightly more complicated, since they are a group, and one that some scholars see as speaking in Greek tragedy with more authority than other figures.[79] This seems not to be the case in the parabases, however, which can by and large be split into autobiographical passages and passages concerning the chorus' intra-narrative identity. In the former type, the chorus speaks as or about the poet in his defence or praise. In the latter, the chorus explains its own world-view from their peculiar perspective (as birds, as clouds, etc), and here the focalisation seems rather to be the point. In neither sort does the chorus display the kind of impartial perspective and unfocalised, authoritative wisdom that might distinguish them from dramatic characters, and so it seems legitimate to analyse them with the same lens. Nor does the plurality of minds of the chorus significantly effect my analysis, but what results from **mentaling** about these groups is the construction of appealing portraits of particular character types or demographics.

3.2 Text Worlds

Text-world theory (**TWT**) posits that when consuming a text we create a mental model of the scenario envisaged. These mental representations are **text-worlds**, constructed by analogy to the real world which informs our experience.[80] These **worlds** are developed in spatial and temporal dimensions, so spatial, temporal and deictic markers are meaningful **world**-building elements. Typically, **text-worlds** rely on the audience's background knowledge to fill in the gaps of what is not explicit in the text.[81] In the sense that both refer

[79] E.g. Mastronarde (1998).
[80] Werth (1999); developed by Gavins (2007).
[81] Werth (1999) 19-20, Gavins (2007) 2.

to mental models conditioned by prior knowledge, **text-worlds** resemble **scripts**, and just as in Semantic Script Theory of Humour the shift from one **script** to another may generate humour, so too shifting **text-worlds** have this potential.[82]

Although Paul Werth, who expounded this theory, saw **TWT** as applicable to all sorts of discourse, his work focused upon realist narratives – a far cry from the fantastical comic dramas of Aristophanes. More work has since been done to adapt **TWT** to reading plays,[83] and to comic narratives.[84] What is important for this dissertation is that the primary **world** of a play is the fictional **world** of the narrative, the world which is inhabited by the characters. Within this, there are embedded **worlds**, which are created in speeches by the characters. Both sorts of **world** are constructed in a cooperative process between creator and viewer: the creator, through the text, provides deictic and referential information, and the viewer contributes their own knowledge to flesh out the **world**. Both sorts of world are thus constructed using external inputs, such as real-world scenarios or other narrative **worlds**, and the way in which this **world** distorts or diverges from this input can be telling, and often humorous.

Cognitive approaches are as applicable to the parabases as to the rest of Old Comedy, and I take a chunk from the parabases of *Thesmophoriazusae* to illustrate the utility of **TWT** since the passage also nicely shows the importance of **mentalising**, and how the two concepts interact. I argue in a chapter below that the audience is primed by the plot of the play, where women plot vengeance upon Euripides for presenting deceptive women as the

[82] Marszalek (2012) 113.
[83] Cruickshank & Lahey (2010) distinguish between the staged **world** and the fictional **world** that a reader of a play envisages – that is, when reading a play the reader juggles, on the one hand, the mental image of the staging, costumes and actors they must conjure up, and, on the other hand, the fictional **world** which the characters inhabit. Since this dissertation considers how an Aristophanic play was received by its original audience, I will not discuss the staged **world**, since the audience would not have had to imagine such, but would have seen the actual staging.
[84] Marszalek (2012) 32-59 sees humorous **worlds** as constructed largely through disrupted elements, a broader sort of **incongruity** than verbal humour; Marszalek (2015) explores how the consumer experiences the humorous **worlds** of a text.

protagonists of his tragedies, to recognise Euripidean plays with outspoken heroines as an input for the fictional **world**. This input also casts doubt on the legitimacy of the embedded imagined world the speaker creates, since Euripidean heroines are often deceptive, as the audience of *Thesmophoriazusae* has already been reminded.

> κἂν ἐξέλθῃ τὸ γύναιόν ποι, κᾆθ᾽ εὕρητ᾽ αὐτὸ θύραϲιν,
> μανίαϲ μαίνεϲθ᾽, οὓϲ χρῆν ϲπένδειν καὶ χαίρειν, εἴπερ ἀληθῶϲ
> ἔνδοθεν ηὕρετε φροῦδον τὸ κακὸν καὶ μὴ κατελαμβάνετ᾽ ἔνδον.
>
> And if a little woman should go out somewhere, and you then find it outside
> You're mad with madness, when you should pour libations and rejoice, if really truly
> You have found your curse clean gone from the house, and won't come upon it at home.
>
> *Thesmophoriazusae* 792-794

Here a spokeswoman defends womankind, arguing that women cannot be the 'curse' men say they are, since they are guarded so closely. Spatial references act as world-building elements which construct a text-**world** of two binary and unnuanced locations: inside and outside (κᾆθ᾽ εὕρητ᾽ αὐτὸ θύραϲιν 792, ἔνδοθεν ηὕρετε φροῦδον… μὴ κατελαμβάνετ᾽ ἔνδον 794). At first, the **world** is intended to be a depiction by the speaker of the real **world**, in which husbands are infuriated by their wives' absence from home. The speaker does not spell out why women leave the house without their husbands' permission, nor why exactly this angers said husbands, but since **text-worlds** are constructed by analogy with the real world, an audience member could flesh out this **world** by inferring why a husband might find his wife's absence alarming. A **mentalising** perspective might suggest

that the woman is trying to diminish the bad behaviour of women, judging by their avoidance to clarify why women sneak out, and by the diminutive form γύναιον. Through **mentalising** one might even recognise the speaker to be feigning naivety with deceptive intent, as I argue more fully in chapter seven.[85] The audience's recognition that the speaker is lying is intellectually rewarding, and creates a mismatch between how the speaker believes they are coming across and how they really are, which may generate humour through **superiority**.

The speaker then moves from one embedded **world** to another, and the second is a hypothetical world in which husbands ought not to rage, but to rejoice, since their 'curse', has disappeared. This humorously **incongruous** deviation from the previously described status quo is ridiculous, and highlights that the behaviour of men is illogical, in that they speak of their wives as an 'evil' (κακόν, used to express the way men see their wives, is repeated again and again in a sort of ironic or caustic quotation), yet they do not act in line with this apparent belief. Thus, the construction of a hypothetical **world** is part of the speaker's argument, although it is hardly an air-tight argument: women could be a pest in the eyes of their husband especially because their absence from the home meant a lack of control over them and over reproduction.

4. Aristophanes as Political Comedy

Media psychology, in the broader discipline of the social sciences, is a growing but ill-defined field.[86] An offshoot from the areas of communication studies and psychology, it shares much with audience theory.[87] Much like cognitive approaches, this field has been developed through theoretical discussion and empirical studies. It differs from cognitive

[85] See chapter seven.
[86] Giles (2003) 1-13.
[87] Livingstone (1997).

approaches in that it takes a broader perspective on how media affects audiences, focusing on the end result of how political messages in media influence viewers' opinions. In recent years there has been rapid growth in this area when it comes to understanding the effects of political satire on audiences, particularly in the USA, where studies on how audience members understand various late night political comedy shows have proliferated. A large amount of these studies focus on single personae, often from late night news shows, such as Jon Stewart or Stephen Colbert,[88] but there are also some studies on the processing of satirical narratives featuring multiple characters.[89]

The field is still finding its feet, and as with many areas in the social sciences, researchers sometimes come up against a problem of replicability.[90] To mitigate the risk of relying on the results of study which later turn out not to be replicable, I have developed ideas only on the basis of results confirmed by multiple studies. Nevertheless, when used cautiously, insights from these results could be very significant, because as with cognitive approaches to literature, the grounding of this area in scientific study allows us to use this area to seek empirically-derived hermeneutic principles.

4.1 Seeing What You Want to See

Strikingly, some studies conclude that audiences are frequently poor at pinpointing the political stance of the author of a piece of satire. A study focusing on viewers' understanding of *The Colbert Report* (Comedy Central, 2005–14) demonstrates this most clearly.[91] In this late-night satirical news segment, the personally Left-leaning Stephen Colbert dons the persona of a right-wing political news pundit and aggressively interviews

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[88] E.g. Warner (2007), Polk et al. (2009), Martin et al. (2018); Levinson's (2020) survey of satire begins with Aristophanes and ends with Colbert.
[89] E.g. LaMarre & Grill (2019).
[90] Baker (2016), Pashler & Wagenmakers (2012).
[91] LaMarre, Landreville & Beam (2009).

left-wing politicians and celebrity guests. The study revealed that viewers from opposite ends of the political spectrum, both liberals and conservatives, found the segment funny at similar levels, but the individual political perspective of the viewers strongly predicted perceptions of Stephen Colbert's own political stance. While left-leaning viewers were laughing at the satirising of a right-wing interviewer stance, and perceived Stephen Colbert himself to be a liberal intentionally mocking conservative institutions like Fox News, the conservative viewers enjoyed the discomfort Stephen Colbert's persona inflicted upon liberal interviewees, and believed that Colbert's persona was a slightly exaggerated representation of the comedian's own opinions. Audience members see what they want to see, selectively interpreting media in such a way as to make it accord with their own beliefs.

Similarly, studies of the sitcom character Alf Garnett (and his American counterpart Archie Bunker) suggest that such selective processing and interpretation on the level of the individual occurs widely throughout media consumption. The racist, chauvinistic father figure in *Till Death Do Us Part* (BBC, 1965–75; the US counterpart was *All in the Family* CBS 1971-9), was created by and played by committed socialists, Johnny Speight and Warren Mitchell, with the explicit intention of using this figure to satirise bigotry among the working class.[92] Despite the writer and actor's intentions with the character – that we should laugh at them and their foolish opinions – audiences found themselves identifying with the character. Indeed, the gruff *pater familias* was broadly approved and widely quoted, as a study of his American counterpart shows.[93]

Since identification with the satirised party was not what the creator intended, these variant interpretations could be seen as misinterpretations. And yet, this would prioritise

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[92] Speight in an interview in *The Sun*, 2 December 1975: 'There is still deep-seated racial prejudice in this country, based on ignorance and fear. But my show brings it out in the open and tries to make people realise how silly it is.' This quoted in Schaffer (2014) 219 n.11.
[93] Vidmar & Rokeach (1974).

the intended reading of a text according to its author over the actual received meaning decoded by a significant portion of the audience. In the case of Aristophanes, there is no non-comic material expressing his real political opinions. No interview clip remains for us in which, for example, Aristophanes laments that Philocleon was received by the public as a loveable rogue, rightly thumbing his nose at aristocratic pretensions, when in fact he wanted the figure to satirise the blind followers of Cleon who worship the mechanisms of democracy. Even if we wished to champion the authorially intended meaning of a text, and judge any politically partisan interpretation of a play as 'wrong' or 'right' insofar as we believe it aligns with Aristophanes' political stance, there is no external source which would justify our judgement of this stance.

Of course, not every text is as open to selective re-interpretation on the part of the individual as the rest. When a political message is clearly expressed, it is harder for selective reinterpretation to occur.[94] A bitter tone, as mentioned in the next section, can also be decisive in making sure a political message is taken to be serious. But since humour tends to succeed only when the perceived political message does not threaten the audience member's own identity,[95] clearer and more partisan messages are therefore the most likely to alienate a great portion of the audience. This does not seem, therefore, to be a promising strategy for an ambitious comic playwright.[96] All the more reason, then, to be agnostic when it comes to the personal politics of the historical poet.

4.2 Limited Political Potency

Another interesting result, closely related to the above, is that the persuasive effects of political satire are surprisingly weak. Humour tends to rob political messages of their sting,

[94] Podlas (2011).
[95] Meyer (2000) 314, and see section 2.3 on **superiority** and disposition theory above.
[96] The size and composition of the audience is important here; for this, see section 5.3 below.

because its presence triggers the cognitive process of ‘message discounting’.[97] That is, the comedian is seen as ‘just joking’. This effect is particularly powerful when the humour is perceived as light-hearted or silly, rather than bitter.[98] Of course, the application of these descriptors is a somewhat subjective matter, and I leave it to each reader to decide to what degree and where they may apply within Old Comedy, but certainly the fantastical plots and the outlandish costumes result in the plays being seen as light-hearted.

Comedy satirising particular figures can even counter-intuitively end up increasing an audience’s affection for and/or agreement with the satirised subject.[99] This result is perhaps most interesting for its historical significance. Aristophanes’ railing against Cleon, for example, not only does not seem to have swayed the public’s perception of the politician, but in fact, this result suggests, it probably could not have. Even in cases where political comedy contains explicit calls to action, it yields only negligible results, at most increasing the salience of its discussed topic in the minds of the audience.[100] Even if, for example, we read the *Frogs* parabasis as containing an earnest call to action to re-enfranchise the ἄτιμοι, it seems unlikely that Aristophanes had any chance of significantly shifting opinion.[101]

4.3 Principles and Application

The three key principles I derive from the field of media psychology are: (1) selective re-interpretation on the part of the individual is liable to occur when the political message of a text is ambiguous; (2) we are unreliable interpreters of the political stance of a text’s author when that text is ambiguous; (3) from a historical perspective, political satire was unlikely to have affected public opinion. Expanding on the first two points, I would argue that

[97] Nabi et al. (2007), Boukes et al. (2015).
[98] LaMarre et al. (2014), Holbert (2014).
[99] Esralew & Young (2012), Boukes et al. (2015), O’Connor (2017), Becker (2021).
[100] Boukes (2019).
[101] *Contra* Arnott (1991). See chapter eight on *Frogs*.

Aristophanes' texts fall squarely into the category of the politically ambiguous, because they are balanced in their presentation of opposing perspectives. Aristophanes loves to put two opposing viewpoints or demographics on stage and make them thrash it out.[102] They both undermine their opponent and themselves, thereby leaving no political position in Aristophanes' plays fully or unproblematically endorsed. This even-handed style creates political ambiguity, and therefore, from (2) we should expect **variant interpretations** of the text to occur on the level of the individual. The political ambiguity also suggests, from (3) that we cannot with certainty pinpoint Aristophanes' own political perspective. It is therefore more useful to focus not on determining authorial intent, but to concentrate on the multiple possible readings that would have occurred on the individual level, and to appreciate their multiplicity.

The use and import of these principles may be illustrated through a concise discussion of the Κρείττων and Ἥττων Λόγοϲ of *Clouds* (889-1114). The former is costumed as an old man (τυφογέρων 908) who represents traditional values (ἀρχαῖοϲ 915) and is construed as out of touch (ἀνάρμοϲτοϲ 908; Κρόνοϲ 929, cf. 1070); the latter represents youth, innovation (896) which was a trend of the time (ταῦτα γὰρ ἀνθεῖ διὰ τουτουcὶ | τοὺϲ ἀνοήτουϲ. 897-898), associated with the subversion of traditional moral values (e.g. denial of Justice's existence at 902; βωμολόχοϲ 910; πατραλοίαϲ 911) and sophistry (ϲοφόϲ 895; ϲοφιϲτῄϲ 1111) that can distort the truth. Emblematic of this last point is the fact that the Ἥττων Λόγοϲ admits to being the worse (ἥττων 893) but asserts that he will win regardless (894-5). The pair are parodic instantiations of opposing societal attitudes and trends. Their *agon* enacts on stage the culture clash occurring in fifth century Athens. Importantly, they are presented in a balanced fashion. Neither group is authoritatively in

[102] Consider the sustained clashes between Philocleon and Bdelycleon in *Wasps*, Euripides and Aeschylus in *Frogs*, or the Better and Worse Arguments in *Clouds*.

the right. The argument of the Κρείττων Λόγος argument is essentially an encomium of traditional education (961-1023), which attacks the sophistry and lack of physical rigour of modern education (1015-1023), but which also effectively undermines itself with its sentimentality and its perverse obsession with the genitals of young men (e.g. 972-978, 981-983). Likewise, the Ἥττων Λόγος confounds his opponent with arguments (1043-1114), but his arguments are specious – such arguments being both emblematic of his character and typical in comedy. He ultimately triumphs only through expediency as the Κρείττων Λόγος realises that, if most Athenians are already wide-arsed (εὐρυπρώκτοι), then it wouldn't hurt to join this group too (1083-1104). Both traditional values and innovative 'sophistic' ideas would have had champions among the Athenian audience,[103] and Aristophanes gives both camps a character to laugh with and laugh at in this even-handed scene.

5. Reading the Parabases

5.1 Recap of Methods

To recap: jokes begin with a **set-up** which textually or contextually introduces at least one mental **script**, i.e. mental bundles of associations. The **set-up** can generate psychic **tension**, particularly when dealing with **emotionally arousing** subjects, and this **tension** may increase the payoff as the joke when it is ultimately resolved into pleasurable entertainment. Jokes hinge around a comic **beat** which is usually an **incongruity** involving an opposing **script**, and which the audience must do some cognitive work to resolve. The **resolution** may engender in the audience member a pleasing sense of intellectual achievement. The **resolution** need not be complete, but sometimes the joke calls attention to the specious or comic logic which the audience member has been forced to apply.

[103] I discuss the composition of the theatre audience in section 5.3 below.

Jokes sometimes target a person or group, and will generally be found more amusing if the audience does not **psychologically identify** with said target. Since audience members are liable to reinterpret humour in line with their own beliefs, as antagonistic towards groups with which they have no **psychological identification**, and favourable towards groups with which they do have **psychological identification**, targeted jokes may produce **variant interpretations** on the level of the individual, which can be concurrently valid. Jokes frequently call upon the audience to construct mental models of the state of mind of characters – **mentalising** – and of fictional **text-worlds**.

Taking one final example to demonstrate all of the above, let us consider the Cyon-Labes canine lawsuit in *Wasps* (891-1007). This prolonged parody of the Athenian courtroom transfers it into the domestic world of Bdely- and Philocleon's home. The **set-up** is the activation of the courtroom **script**, which clashes frequently with the dog and dog-behaviour **scripts** activated throughout the scene. The dogs are clearly to be identified with real political figures, with Cyon ('Dog') a stand-in for the politician *du jour* Cleon, while Labes ('Grabber') represents the general Laches, further complicating this travesty of the courtroom. These politicians represent diametrically opposed political interests, which gives this political comedy broad appeal, as audience members would likely individually **identify** with one of the two figures, and enjoy the humour that targets the other. Bdelycleon here constructs a **text world** within the play that takes as input the real Athenian lawcourts, and the domestic scenery of a Greek household kitchen, and many **incongruities** ensue.

I note just two comic **beats** from this scene. First, the punishment suggested for Labes is a figwood collar (τίμημα κλῳὸϲ cύκινοϲ 897). This punishment is humorously apt, since κλῳόϲ can mean a collar suitable for restraining a disobedient or violent dog,[104] but it can

[104] E.g. X. *HG.* II. 4.41.

also refer to a neck shackle used to restrain a prisoner.[105] Therefore, this choice of punishment fits both the law-court **script** and the dog **script**. Later in the scene, Bdelycleon defends Labes by saying 'If he stole, forgive him: for he does not know how to play the lyre.' (958-9). The suggestion that the dog must be forgiven for his misdeeds because he has missed out on an improving education conjures an absurd mental image. It also suggests that Bdelycleon is willing to make argument geared towards manipulating his listener's emotions, parodying real courtroom practice.[106]

5.2 Parabases and Genre Expectations

Although the collection of ideas assembled above could be fruitfully applied to any humorous text, this dissertation will focus upon a close reading of a particular recurring scene in Old Comedy plays: the parabasis. The name is derived from the action of stepping forward (παραβαίνω) which the chorus undertakes to speak directly to the audience while the other characters are off-stage.[107] These passages tend to be politically loaded, as the chorus advises and criticises the audience. The chorus leader sometimes speaks about the poet,[108] or even in the voice of the poet,[109] before speaking in and about the intra-narrative identity of the chorus. Parabases pretend to be direct expressions of opinion from the poet or his chorus to the audience, promising more direct access to the poet's mind than any other section of Old Comedy. These passages are therefore the 'most seductive form of Aristophanic comedy';[110] they offer a tantalisingly direct insight into the poet's mind on

[105] E.g. X. *HG.* III. 3.11
[106] Similar emotive manipulation is found at 976, where Bdelycleon calls for Labes' puppies to be brought in, ironically echoing his earlier complaint at 568-70 that people at court drag in their children to beg for leniency.
[107] The exception is *Thesmophoriazusae*, where Mnesilochus remains on stage during the parabasis.
[108] *Ach.* 628-58, *Eq.* 507ff., *V.* 1015ff., *Pax* 734-53.
[109] *Ach.* 659-64, *Nu.* 518-62, *V.* 1284-91, *Pax* 754-79. This may be a vestige from an earlier phase in which the poet performed the parabasis himself: Pickard-Cambridge (1968 [1953]) 93. Gilula (1997) 131-43 argues that this endured in the 5th century.
[110] Platter (2007) 94.

topical themes, but this insight is illusory. Parabases are not Aristophanes' diary, the poetic persona that emerges is just that, a persona, and the apparent spontaneity of the parabasis is scripted, a paradox to which these texts sometimes playfully draw attention.[111]

Applying techniques for interpreting comedy as laid out above to the parabases presents the chance to understand the complicated dynamics involved in these passages. They are good candidates for reading in this way, because as simple addresses to the audience without interactions between characters,[112] the dynamic closely resembles that of the late-night talk show hosts' monologues frequently analysed in studies of media psychology. Analysis of the parabases is thus appropriate for the lens I have constructed, and promises rich rewards, since studying these politically charged passages means tackling the long-debated question of the poet's politics from a new angle. I have limited myself to the first parabasis of each play, although five plays include a shorter second parabasis, [113] because of limitations of space, choosing to prioritise coverage across every play with a parabasis.

There have been two commentaries devoted to the Aristophanic parabases in the past three decades. First Totaro's commentary on the second parabases of selected plays,[114] and then Imperio's commentary on the parabases of *Acharnians, Knights, Wasps* and *Birds*.[115] Imperio's detailed commentary has been a great aid to me. Prior to these works, the last scholar to devote a monograph to the parabases was Hubbard.[116] His work's main goal was to take up the challenge of Bowie,[117] by demonstrating how each parabasis is closely integrated with the rest of the play. When it comes to the autobiographical

[111] See my analysis of *Eq.* 507-9 below.
[112] Except in *Lysistrata*, where two semi-choruses address each other: see chapter 7.
[113] *Eq.* 1264-1315, *Nu.* 1113-30, *V.* 1265-91, *Pax* 1127-90, *Av.* 1058-117; see Totaro (1999).
[114] Totaro (1999).
[115] Imperio (2004).
[116] Hubbard (1991).
[117] Bowie (1982).

parabases of the first five extant plays, he also showed how each parabasis related to the parabases that came before, and the connections between the poet, as he presents himself, and the plays' protagonists. I take it for granted that his work succeeded in demonstrating these ideas, and in that sense his work is foundational for my own. Although my focus is rather different, concentrated as I am on using some modern areas of theory to consider the dynamics of humour in these passages, I start each chapter by laying out my interpretation of the overarching messages and thematic points of the parabases, and in this my goal is aligned with Hubbard's. At times, I concur with his analysis, as in chapter 2 I agree with his assessment of the connections between Dicaeopolis and the poet. At other times, I dissent, as in chapter 4 when I deny the suggestion that in his many trope-disavowals Aristophanes is pointing out the debasement of his original *Clouds* to his more perceptive fans, while concealing his true message from the less perceptive fans. Nevertheless, in every case this work has been extremely valuable for me to consult and to think with.

5.3 Poet, Chorus and Audience

Before reading the parabases, it will be useful to consider briefly some important aspects of context: the poetic tradition into which Aristophanes' plays and persona insert themselves; the chorus leader and chorus, who perform these passages; the historical audience who originally watched the play.

When the poetic persona appears as a character, either speaking as himself or being spoken of by the chorus, he resembles the scurrilous personae of iambic poetry. Indeed, the similarities between the two genres, Old Comedy and *iambos*, are striking: both feature personal abusive mockery, sustained quarrels, obscene language and less than virtuous poet figures.[118] While the former cannot be said to have developed out of the latter in a

[118] Rosen (1988).

straightforward way,[119] their structural similarities constitute a sort of 'generic affiliation'.[120] Aristotle saw *epos* and tragedy as alike in involving *mimesis* of noble actions, while *iambos* and comedy resemble one another in that they imitate the immoral.[121] One could also draw an overarching analogy between the genres: *iambos* is to *epos* as comedy is to tragedy, in that the former is frequently parodic, a travestied image of the latter.[122] To bring this association of comedy as a corruption of tragedy to the fore, Aristophanes sometimes calls his genre *trygedy.* Old Comedy draws attention to its 'alterity',[123] the parasitic relationship it enjoys with tragedy and other genres, by frequent paratragedy and allusion. Against this generic background, the audience would be primed to see the poetic persona as a warped, comic instantiation of a poet, and therefore one not to be taken seriously.[124] For example, in *Acharnians*, the poet draws attention to this relationship between genres while parodying and comically warping the concept of the poet as διδάϲκαλοϲ to the city, a role more seriously ascribed to tragedians.[125]

Aristophanes' persona is particularly akin to an *iambic* poet in his sustained antagonistic νεῖκοϲ with the politician Cleon. The quarrel bears a broad resemblance to the kind of extended quarrel that Archilochus has with Lycambes and his daughters, or Hipponax with Bupalus and his brother.[126] The literary precedent is clear, and so are the benefits: to present oneself as the participant in a quarrel was a lively and memorable

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[119] Bowie (2002).
[120] Rosen (2013).
[121] Arist. *Po.* 1448b24-1449a5.
[122] Bakhtin (1981) speaks of the parodic voice as a consistent foil to more righteous modes of poetry. For Hipponax's parody of *epos*, see e.g. Degani (1984) 187-205, Alexandrou (2016). Kelly (forthcoming) urges caution in identifying intertextuality between Hipponax and specific texts, an approach which privileges the *epos* that survives; nevertheless, Hipponax's poetry may be a low-brow travesty of epic tradition, diction and myths in general.
[123] Rosen (2013) 81.
[124] For discussion of what it means for comedy to be 'serious', see Silk (2000) 301-20. Similarly, Kidd (2014) tackles the question of seriousness and non-seriousness through the idea of 'nonsense', which he shows to be pervasive in Aristophanes. Modern studies which suggest that humour triggers 'message discounting' are discussed in section 4.2 above.
[125] The idea that tragic poets advised or taught the city is presupposed by the plot of *Frogs*.
[126] Rosen (1988) 59-82.

method of autobiography. In this way, Aristophanes forges a recognisable brand identity which is salient to the city's political life. In *Wasps* and *Peace*, I will argue, this antagonistic relationship ultimately generates humour by casting the poet persona as obstinate and out of touch. In these autobiographical passages, the poet constructs an identity, which is meant to be identified with the historical poet, but only partially. Inasmuch as his quarrels resemble iambic rivalries, they are conventional and to be regarded as constructed as a literary artifice. The audience must have been aware that the Aristophanic persona they laugh *at* is not the same person as the author of the script, and that to laugh *at* the poetic persona is actually a win for the poet.

Although frequently autobiographical, the parabases were delivered by the chorus and chorus leader, and Aristophanes sometimes plays around with the distancing effect which this delivery creates.[127] Beyond the autobiographical passages, the parabases focus on the various perspectives of the intra-narrative identity of the chorus (as Acharnians, as knights, etc). The chorus comprised twenty four amateur choreuts,[128] who probably performed the odes of the epirrhematic syzygy (an alternation of metrically equivalent lyric odes with passages of recited trochaic tetrameters), whereas one (semi-)professional coryphaeus (chorus leader) probably delivered the *makron* (a long run of anapaestic tetrameter catalectic, cratineans or eupolideans) which preceded.[129] Our evidence for this allocation of parts is uncertain, but this has been generally assumed in the absence of evidence to the contrary since a single speaker would be more suited to the longer chanted passage, as he would be more easily understood than twenty four speakers chanting in unison.

[127] See *Eq.* 507-9 with my discussion.
[128] Csapo & Slater (1994) 351-2.
[129] Zimmerman (2010) 458.

When the choreuts take on the perspective of a particular group, they sometimes are imbued with a political stance (as the Acharnians are pro-war, the wasps passionate jurymen, the old men in *Lysistrata* die-hard democrats), and thus represent demographics with which audience members may or may not **psychologically identify**. Typically, this group will both mock another opposing group, and undermine their own perspective, generating humour at their own expense. As a result, both audience members who **psychologically identify** with the stance, and those who do not, end up with comic figures, either portrayed or mentioned on stage, with and at whom they can laugh. The layering of different identities (e.g. as wasps as well as aged jurymen) often generates a great deal of creativity and humour and through **incongruities**, as they bring together ideas from totally different spheres or **scripts**.[130]

Finally, since this dissertation strives to consider how the dynamics of humour would have been processed by the plays' original audience, it will be useful to consider the constitution of this group. Estimates of the number of audience members who could be comfortably seated in the Theatre of Dionysus have varied wildly, although archaeological evidence has been taken to suggest a conservative figure of between 4,000 and 7,000 people.[131] Whether women or slaves could attend has been hotly debated, but given that it was a leisure activity outside of the house and cost a fee, it is likely that male citizens were the majority of the audience.[132] Ancient authors tend to identify the theatre-going public with the politically active assembly-goers, who were probably of a similar number.[133] Assuming that the male citizen body numbered 30,000-50,000 when Aristophanes first

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[130] E.g. in *Birds* the amalgamation of avian aspects with traditional theogonic narrative drives much of the humour.
[131] Dawson (1997) suggests 3,700; Olson (2001) 6 suggests a larger figure of around 17,000; Csapo (2007) 97-100 argues for this last figure of 4,000-7,000.
[132] Pickard-Cambridge (1968 [1953]) 265–8.
[133] e.g. Ar. *Nu.* 581-94, *Ra.* 778-9; Pl. *Lg.* 700c-1a, *R.* 492b-c. Assembly attendance was probably around 6,000: Hansen (1991) 130-1, Pritchard (2012) 17. Cf. Ar. *Eq.* 546–50; *Av.* 445–6; *Ec.*. 1141–2; Pl. *Lg.* 659a.

started composing,[134] and 30,000 or less at the end of the fifth century,[135] even the conservative estimate of 4,000 in attendance is a large chunk of the population.

It has been argued that, because attendance was not free, the theatre grew to be monopolised by wealthier and more conservative audience members.[136] The entry fee, of two obols per day, was neither negligible nor exorbitant, but broadly equal to the daily wage of a labourer.[137] Certainly, the theatre audience need not have perfectly reflected and represented the demographics of the citizen body. The location, for example, may have meant that those dwelling in the urban centre were over-represented compared to their hinterland compatriots.

On the other hand, there is good reason to think that citizens from across Attica would have been present in the city for the dramatic festivals. The high number of amateur citizen choreuts who performed in dithyrambs, tragic and comic choruses, would likely have attracted many people to the festival.[138] The decree of Demophantus required that, following the coup of the Four Hundred, every citizen swore an oath to defend the democracy, and this oath was to be sworn publicly before the City Dionysia, suggesting that, at least notionally, every citizen was expected to be present at this festival, or at least that it was the public occasion at which the largest possible swathe of the citizen body was present in the city.[139]

In short, the dramatic competitions were mass entertainment, and attracted so many people that the event must have appealed to people across the political spectrum. While the

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[134] Hansen (1988) 14-28 estimates a population of 60,000 in Pericles' time, while Gomme (1933) 5 estimated 43,000. Shortly before Aristophanes' first productions, many died of plague: Thuc. 3.87.3 says at least 3,300 hoplites and 300 knights died, and an unknown number of the rest: τοῦ δὲ ἄλλου ὄχλου ἀνεξεύρετος ἀριθμός.
[135] The population remained around 30,000 throughout the 4th century: Hansen (1991).
[136] Sommerstein (1997) suggests that the theatre entry fee increased in the fifth century, but there is no direct evidence to support this.
[137] D. 18.28.
[138] Revermann (2006) 111-12 estimates that 1,100 amateur choreuts were required at every City Dionysia.
[139] Shear (2011) 136-7. In chapter eight I discuss the implications of this oath on the interpretation of the *Frogs*' parabasis.

poets were, in a narrow sense, competing to win the competition by impressing that year's judges, these judges were selected randomly by sortition at the start of the festival,[140] and were apparently influenced by the crowd's reception of the play.[141] Clearly it would be self-defeating to alienate any sizeable portion of the audience.[142] The poet is clearly incentivised to make his play appeal to the broadest possible swathe of his audience. No wonder, then, that the political perspectives of Aristophanes' characters – including his persona – are never presented as endorsed or correct in an unchallenged or unfocalized way.

5.4 Caveats and Results

In the above discussion I have identified several meaningful characteristics and dynamics of humour in texts. Since I approach reading the parabases as sustained pieces, moving through them chronologically in order to follow the order in which the information is processed, my results resemble a traditional commentary, but with a different balance of focus. Not all of these characteristics are equally useful or salient to apply to each and every comic **beat.** Jokes can be interpreted as functioning in multiple different ways, and as I have argued, in these texts there is a multiplicity of concurrently valid **variant interpretations**, so my analysis of the parabases in the coming chapters is necessarily not comprehensive, and does not analyse every comic moment from every possible direction. I have had to be selective, and so the commentary below focuses on what I deem to be the most important aspects and interpretations of each particular comic **beat**. At times I dedicate space to some timeworn questions, such as the question of whether Aristophanes' career progression included a period of relative anonymity as he wrote for other poets and

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[140] Pickard-Cambridge (1968 [1953]) 95-9.
[141] Ar. *Av*. 444-47, Pl. *Lg*. 659a-c, Arist. *Po*. 1453a.
[142] Allan & Kelly (2013) 87-8 argue this for tragedy.

produces, or the political meaning of *Birds,* when these debates are pertinent to the parabases as a whole.

My chapter on *Acharnians* will argue that Aristophanes purposefully presents his persona as aiming at, and falling short of, the figure of the poet-*didaskalos*, while this play's epirrhematic syzygy is the first of several to parody the overblown rhetoric of the Marathonomachoi.

In my chapter on *Knights* I argue that the poet's stance of *faux* pity towards his predecessors and Cratinus is balanced by his own excessive hesitation to become a comic producer, and that the eponymous chorus's attempts at self-defence and self-promotion are consistently undermined by suggestions of effeminacy and unflattering comparison to the navy.

Chapter three on *Clouds* considers the poet's anger in defeat as a comic stance, which brings the audience itself into the persona's narrative as a transgressor against the poet, while the persona's self-presentation allows the audience to laugh at the persona, an intellect too stupid to know what side his bread is buttered on. In the syzygy of *Clouds*, the chorus present a whimsical image of divine intervention in Athens' favour while simultaneously marking out certain *komoidoumenoi* for abuse.

The next chapter considers the parabases of *Wasps* and *Peace*, in which the constructed relationship between Aristophanes and Cleon reaches a climax with the death of the politician, and the poet is humorously inflexible in continuing to mock the deceased. The portrait of wasp-Marathonomachoi-heliasts combines multiple **scripts** to poke gentle fun once again at the Greco-Persian war veterans, but in such a way as to avoid mocking the war veterans *qua* war veterans. In *Peace* the syzygy is abridged to just a pair of odes mocking named contemporary poets in riotously creative invective.

The parabasis of *Birds* is constructed from repeated moments of **incongruity**, where bird and human **scripts** collide, and I argue that these sustained collisions constitute an exercise in species-focalised relativism which chimes with the moral relativism of Cloudcuckooland. At the same time, Aristophanes projects human qualities, flaws and appetites onto the birds, to create a comic **world** in which all living beings are as universally self-interested as us.

In a combined chapter on *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae*, I argue that Aristophanes uses but does not rely heavily upon misogynistic humour in these plays, with the first enacting a battle of the sexes that makes the men ridiculous too, and the second acting as a parody of the monologuing Euripidean (anti-)heroine.

In my *Frogs* chapter I argue against the grain that the chorus of Eleusinian initiates' voice parodies the sentiments of a faction of the Athenian populace who were essentially conservative and fearful of changes to the democratic makeup of their polis, and that humour derives from the subtle parody of this viewpoint.

Finally, in my conclusion I bring together some of the results which this research has obtained. When it comes to politics, what becomes clear throughout is that ambiguity is baked into Aristophanic humour in multiple ways, and this surely would have encouraged variant interpretations by different groups within the audience. Beyond politics, my reading demonstrates the immensely generative power of humour.

Making a Mockery of Justice

The Double-Voiced *Didaskalos* in *Acharnians*

In the first extant parabasis, Aristophanes emerges as a figure full of contradictions. His persona urges for further pursuit of war against the Peloponnesians, placing him at odds with the play's protagonist, who had earlier spoken as the poet, and in this way the play can be viewed as 'double-voiced' as it seems both to support and to denounce the ongoing war. The ambivalence this creates is likely to have given the play a broad appeal across political boundaries among the Athenian audience.

Within the parabasis, the ambivalent 'double-voicing' continues on a smaller scale. The poet, through his coryphaeus, spends the autobiographical anapaests delivering a rebarbative *apologia*, which rehashes the public slander and possible impeachment of the poet as a maligner of the city, and lays out his claim to act as a *didaskalos* to the city. However, his words constantly work against him, illustrating his inappropriateness for the role by revealing him as delusional, deceptive and at times even incompetent as a poet. The duality of meaning throughout fundamentally problematises the idea of a comic poet acting as a legitimate teacher at all, and ultimately functions as a comic takedown of the literary-critical tradition of the poet as moral instructor.

Finally, in the epirrhematic syzygy the chorus' identity not as Acharnians but as Marathonomachoi is brought to the fore. The unparalleled achievement of Greco-Persian War veterans makes the demographic both an appealing target for **disparagement humour**, and simultaneously one to be handled with care, and Aristophanes' depiction of them balances a certain *Schadenfreude* at their expense with ridicule of the young.

1. Hero and Poet

At first glance, *Acharnians* is an anti-war play,[1] by an anti-war poet.[2] Dicaeopolis' private peace treaty defines the plot, and the causes of the war are subjected to sustained ridicule.[3] This impression is strengthened by the fact that the protagonist who pursues peace seems to be closely connected to the figure of the poet,[4] and indeed even speaks as the poet at points.[5] The ties between character and creator are so strong that some have even speculated that Aristophanes may have performed Dicaeopolis' role himself.[6]

When the autobiographical parabasis starts, one might expect more of the same. And indeed, the anapaestic speech about Aristophanes has an 'allegorical similarity'[7] to Dicaeopolis' earlier speech dressed as Telephus.[8] Each speech is an *apologia*,[9] responding to the detractors of a 'morally ambiguous' figure.[10] Both characters are connected to justice,[11] and present themselves as the voice of reason, telling unwelcome truths. In each speech, some claim is made about the didactic potential of *trygedy*, a moniker for comedy that suggests it is a debased counterpart of tragedy.[12] However, while the emotional dynamic may be similar, the political opinions of the characters do not overlap. Unlike Dicaeopolis, the Aristophanic persona believes the Athenians can and should continue fighting. Dicaeopolis' general stance is one of political quietism, while the poet persona

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[1] As it is understood by e.g. de Ste. Croix (1972) 363-7, MacDowell (1983) 143-62, Imperio (2004) 109: 'Aristofane esprime il proprio appassionato impegno antibellicista attraverso la figura del protagonista Diceopoli'.
[2] Worthington (1987) 56: 'That Aristophanes was against the Peloponnesian War and desired a general peace is beyond doubt'.
[3] 513-39; Bertelli (2013b) 115: 'The main purpose of *Acharnians* had been to refute the common opinion that the Spartans were responsible for the war.'
[4] Bowie (1982) esp. 29–35; Hubbard (1991) 47–56.
[5] *Ach.* 377-83, 496-508. Ewen Bowie (1988) sees Dicaeopolis as representing Eupolis; Parker (1991) poses persuasive objections to this theory.
[6] Bailey (1936), Ghiron-Bistagne (1976) 148, Sutton (1988), Slater (1989).
[7] Harsh (1934) 188.
[8] *Ach.* 496-556.
[9] Imperio (2004) *ad loc.* compares *Ach.* 632 and Eup. fr. 392.2: εὐθὺ γὰρ πρὸς ὑμᾶς πρῶτον ἀπολογήσομαι.
[10] Fisher (1993) 39.
[11] Dicaeopolis particularly through his name ('Just-city'), and Aristophanes by his claims at 645, 655 and 661.
[12] *Ach.* 500, 628, 656.

vows to continue participating in political life through the corrective force of his poetry. It is hard to square these discontinuities with the reading of *Acharnians* as a peace play. The play eludes a straightforward political interpretation.[13]

In the differing opinions of these figures, who both seem to some degree to be licensed mouthpieces of the poet, the play is politically ambivalent. Hence, it is opaque with regard to the poet's true political stance, and it is unwise to allege that any political gesture is a genuine expression of the poet's thoughts.[14] It may still be tempting to pinpoint Aristophanes' own opinions as aligned with either his poetic persona's, or his protagonist's, as for example Konstantakos does, arguing that *Acharnians* earnestly promotes peace, and includes pro-war sentiment in the parabasis to hedge its bets and avoid aggravating the staunch partisans of war among the audience.[15] However, studies of the effects of political satire suggest that confidence in one's ability to determine the political perspective of a satirist is frequently unfounded.[16] This sort of humour, where no speaker – not even the poetic persona – is authoritatively correct, is ripe for re-interpretation on the part of individuals.

2. Didacticism and *Trygedy*

When we meet Aristophanes, he has a bone to pick with us. This is not unusual in Old Comedy,[17] although it is out of place in his situation: having placed second with his first play, *Banqueters*, and first with his second, *Babylonians*,[18] Aristophanes' career was on the

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[13] As Goldhill (1991) 188-96 and Rosen (2012) 6-17 conclude. Carey (1993) sees the play as having no serious political purpose.
[14] Contra e.g. Nelson (2016) 139 who sees the poet's voice as 'genuinely behind his hero's frustration at the insanity of the city, and… behind the chorus' claim that their poet is devoted to Athens.'
[15] Konstantakos (2021).
[16] See introduction, section 4.1.
[17] *Peace* contains the only parabasis in which the poet does not criticise the audience; see chapter five. Snippets from parabases by other Old Comedy playwrights show the same tendency for criticising the audience: Telecl. fr. 2, Cratin. fr. 360.
[18] Σ *Nub.* 529b says *Banqueters* was judged second; *IG* ii^2 2325 shows Aristophanes named before Eupolis and Cantharus, most likely with *Babylonians*.

ascendant when he composed *Acharnians*. Nevertheless, the poet prefers to focus on a source of contention for him, creating a more emotionally dynamic narrative than a poet at peace.[19] His persona can be seen as an underdog,[20] and one that is comically bitter. In this case, he is bitter because, despite the good service he has rendered the city, he has been slandered.[21] This claim probably refers to a specific run-in with Cleon before the Council, concerning his depiction of Athens in *Babylonians*, produced at the City Dionysia of the previous year. [22]

Whether or not the run-in with Cleon was historical,[23] the Aristophanic persona goes to some lengths to present himself as a wronged, righteous poet, with improving advice that his listeners would do well to take seriously. This stance has poetic precedent, in for example, the works of Hesiod.[24] Poets were often thought of as sources of wisdom and instruction, as shown, for example in *Frogs* when Euripides says that poets are to be admired for 'cleverness and advice, because we make men in the cities better.'[25] It is this vein of thought which Aristophanes taps into in *Acharnians*, where justice is an ever-present theme, enshrined in the very name of its protagonist.[26]

Aristophanes' persona is no simple agent of justice, however, and this is appropriate for the genre. From the start of the parabasis, and even before in the speech of Dicaeopolis, Aristophanes has referred to his genre as *trygedy*, a corruption of its sibling

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[19] Greek poets often indulge in autobiographical 'laments about misfortune or self-defences under attack': Most (1989) 126. This comes out particularly in my chapter on *Clouds.*

[20] For Aristophanes-as-underdog, see e.g. Rosen (2014) 232.

[21] *Ach.* 630-1.

[22] This extra-theatrical dispute is pieced together from references within plays (*Ach.* 377-82, 502-3; *V.* 1284-91), and some scholia, which do not seem to possess any evidence beyond the text of these plays. Σ *Ach.* 378 says *Babylonians* sparked the dispute; see *Ach.* 630-1, 642 and my discussion on these lines below.

[23] In chapter five on *Wasps* and *Peace* I discuss how constructing a poetic persona in relation to an already famous public figure has literary precedent and rhetorical benefits.

[24] Hesiod uses the wrong supposedly done to him by his brother Perses as premise for the morally edifying paraenetic poem *Works and Days*, and was recognised in antiquity as a didactic poet: Heraclitus called Hesiod διδάϲκαλοϲ δὲ πλείϲτων (fr. 22B57 Diels & Kranz).

[25] *Ra.* 1009-10: δεξιότητοϲ καὶ νουθεϲίαϲ, ὅτι βελτίουϲ γε ποιοῦμεν | τοὺϲ ἀνθρώπουϲ ἐν ταῖϲ πόλεϲιν.

[26] On the theme of justice in the *Acharnians*, see Perusino (1987) 17-33.

genre by the incorporation of τρύξ ('new unfermented wine', or 'lees').[27] When Dicaeopolis claims earlier that 'even' (καί) *trygedy* knows justice, the implication is that tragedy is associated with justice, while comedy is not.[28] The line can be taken as an earnest assertion, a serious reinvention, of comedy's capabilities – indeed, the idea of comedy as a corrective force on people's behaviour is a common one – but by calling comedy '*trygedy*', the 'song of wine-lees', Aristophanes reminds us of the general conception of the genre as parasitic, derivative, and of inherently lesser worth. The *trygic* playwright accordingly is lesser than his tragic counterpart, and tries but fails to take on the normative voice of the righteous poet.

While Aristophanes' persona constantly make claims about justice, these claims are undermined in various ways, starting with this positioning of comedy as inherently less valuable than tragedy. The ambivalence already noted concerning the poet's opinions generally is continued in the parabasis on a smaller scale, and the piece can be described as 'double-voiced'. The term 'double-voiced discourse', coined by Bakhtin, describes the idea that literature contains two voices which clash, speak concurrently and in conversation with one another.[29] In particular, he argued that the two voices are 'the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author'.[30]

As Platter notes: 'the *parabasis* is a radically double-voiced discourse that only seems to report the straightforward speech of the author'.[31] The *Acharnians* parabasis is no exception, as the poetic persona tries to assert his identity as moral instructor to the city, but this message is complicated by his repeated, comic missteps. The poet's speech becomes ambiguous particularly when referring to the didactic dimension of his role,

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[27] See on 628 below.
[28] Pucci (2007) 119; Rosen (2015a) 218.
[29] Bakhtin (1981).
[30] *Ibid.* 324
[31] Platter (2007) 94-5.

accidentally undermining his own claim to justice (655), for example, or revealing that he is reading too much into his title of διδάσκαλος (658). The poet becomes thus semantically incontinent particularly when discussing his own role as a teacher. This, alongside his self-representation as a bitter, out of touch, deceptive and delusional *alazon*, makes the poetic persona's claim to speak as a serious adviser ridiculous, and satirises the poetic claim to didactic authority itself.

3. Marathonomachoi

The epirrhematic syzygy of *Acharnians* develops the intra-narrative identity of the chorus. This is typical, and typically too that it takes their character in new, unexpected directions.[32] In *Acharnians* it is not their deme that is the focus, but the chorus' identity as Greco-Persian War veterans, no help to them now as they are litigiously abused by youngsters. It is surprising to see a weaker side of the previously fearsome Acharnian men.

Aristophanes is fond of inter-generational contrasts, and the (once) glorious Marathonomachoi provide a striking, comically productive contrast to the apparently morally dissolute younger generations in the 420s. One reading of this clash would be that the older men are not mocked, but represent a nostalgic patriotism, and former glory in pointed contrast to contemporary iniquity.[33] Alternatively, some believe that the overblown rhetoric surrounding Marathon, probably an all too frequent *topos* of civic discourse,[34] is

[32] As, for example, the knights surprise by conflating cavalry and navy (*Eq.* 595-610), and the clouds show a surprising allegiance to the traditional Greek pantheon (*Nu.* 563-74, 595-606).
[33] This is the interpretation of e.g. Papadodima (2013), Nevin (2022) and Stachniw (1969) 22 who says that Aristophanes 'nowhere mocks the causes of the Persian Wars in which Greece fought for her very existence against a foreign foe nor does he anywhere make the glorious heroes of Marathon the butt of a joke.'
[34] At Th. 1. 73.2 an Athenian envoy tells the Peloponnesian League that they themselves are actually sick of having to invoke the Athenian contribution to the Greek victory in the Persian war, but do so out of necessity: τὰ δὲ Μηδικὰ καὶ ὅσα αὐτοὶ ξύνιστε, εἰ καὶ δι' ὄχλου μᾶλλον ἔσται αἰεὶ προβαλλομένοις, ἀνάγκη λέγειν.

satirised by Aristophanes.[35] The achievements of the Marathon warriors had become a benchmark against which it was impossible to measure up, as seen in a fragment of Eupolis' *Demes*, where the achievements of later generals are likened to an undersized sacrificial animal at a feast, in comparison to Miltiades' contributions.[36] It seems reasonable then to suggest that some among the younger generation may have been sick of Marathon as unassailable *exemplum* of past glory.

For this reason, the Marathonomachoi become an appealing **out-group** to satirise, and yet, since they must have commanded great respect from large swathes of the audience, they can only be mocked carefully.[37] We see this in *Acharnians*. The audience is encouraged to laugh not just at the rhetoric surrounding Marathon, but at the characters themselves. At the same time, the positioning of them in a text **world** of the law courts opposite morally bankrupt youngster *komoidoumenoi*, εὐρύπρωκτος καὶ λάλος figures such as Alcibiades, allows for a certain balance and provides another source of **targeted** humour.

4. The Parabasis

Let's Strip 626-7

ἁνὴρ νικᾷ τοῖϲι λόγοιϲιν, καὶ τὸν δῆμον μεταπείθει 626

περὶ τῶν ϲπονδῶν. ἀλλ' ἀποδύντεϲ τοῖϲ ἀναπαίϲτοιϲ ἐπίωμεν.

The man triumphs with his words, and persuades the people 626

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[35] Gomme (1938) 105 says of the name of Marathon that Aristophanes 'mocks its constant use'; Hardwick (2013) 284 notes in passing that Marathon as an *exemplum* was 'perhaps overdone, hence the satire in Aristophanes'.

[36] Fr. 130: τοιγαροῦν ϲτρατηγὸϲ ἐξ ἐκείνου τοῦ χρόνου οὐδεὶϲ δύναται ὥϲπερ μειαγωγὸϲ ἑϲτιῶν τῆϲ τοῦδε νίκηϲ πλεῖον' ἑλκύϲαι ϲταθμόν. There have been several attempts to render this into metre, but none has won general acceptance.

[37] In chapter 5 on *Wasps* I argue the layering of the 'wasp' identity onto the Marathonomachoi identity is an means of generating humour at the expense of the old men but somewhat indirectly.

About peace. But come, let’s strip and start the anapaests.

The parabases of Aristophanes’ first extant plays are the most uniform in structure. *Acharnians* accordingly contains all seven typical elements,[38] commencing with a short *kommation*, which summarises and closes the action of the preceding scene, then heralds the start of the parabasis. The reference to stripping has provoked debate. There are several interpretations: 1) it was a practical measure to facilitate the vigorous dancing which possibly accompanied the parabasis; 2) it was a practical measure to facilitate the dynamic arm gestures and handwaving that possibly accompanied the parabasis;[39] 3) it signalled the stripping of the chorus’ intra-narrative identity, here i.e. as old Acharnian men; 4) the stripping was a relic from when the parabasis was originally the final scene of the comedy, and signified the dismantling of the dramatic illusion of the play;[40] 5) it is a metaphor taken from athletics, and the stripping is meant non-literally, but rather something like ‘getting down to business’.[41]

This debate is impossible to resolve with any certainty, though interpretations 1) and 2) are not mutually exclusive and seem likely. That the two semi-choruses of *Lysistrata* strip at 615ff. while clearly maintaining their identity as old men and old women counts strongly against 3), the idea of the stripping as a divestment of intra-narrative identity. Suggestion 4) is unproveable and assumes the continuing existence of a vestigial oddity over quite some period of time. Later usages of the verb for stripping may support

[38] 1) *Kommation,* a short recitative that bids farewell to the characters of the preceding scene and signals the start of the parabasis, 2) the *macron* or parabasis proper, usually focusing on the poet, is composed in anapaestic tetrameters and is referred to within the plays as simply ‘the anapaests’, 3) *pnigos*, a short section delivered rapid-fire and without the speaker drawing breath, hence its name – ‘the choker’, followed by an epirrhematic syzygy comprised of 4) lyric ode, 5) *epirrhema* in trochaic tetrameters typically characterising the intra-narrative role of the chorus, 6) antistrophe corresponding metrically to the ode, and 7) *antepirrhema* developing the *epirrhema’s* theme.
[39] Ketterer (1980) argues for 1) and 2).
[40] Zieliński (1885).
[41] Later usages of ἀποδύομαι in the middle attest to this meaning.

5), but in passages like *Lysistrata* 615ff. or *Wasps* 408ff. the call to strip is followed by a verbal and, from the sounds of it, physical confrontation, which suggest that the stripping is not merely metaphorical.

The Poet Defends Himself 628-40

ἐξ οὗ γε χοροῖϲιν ἐφέϲτηκεν τρυγικοῖϲ ὁ διδάϲκαλοϲ ἡμῶν,
οὔπω παρέβη πρὸϲ τὸ θέατρον λέξων ὡϲ δεξιόϲ ἐϲτιν·
διαβαλλόμενοϲ δ’ ὑπὸ τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἐν Ἀθηναίοιϲ ταχυβούλοιϲ, 630
ὡϲ κωμῳδεῖ τὴν πόλιν ἡμῶν καὶ τὸν δῆμον καθυβρίζει,
ἀποκρίναϲθαι δεῖται νυνὶ πρὸϲ Ἀθηναίουϲ μεταβούλουϲ.
φηϲὶν δ’ εἶναι πολλῶν ἀγαθῶν ἄξιοϲ ὑμῖν ὁ ποιητήϲ,
παύϲαϲ ὑμᾶϲ ξενικοῖϲι λόγοιϲ μὴ λίαν ἐξαπατᾶϲθαι,
μηδ’ ἥδεϲθαι θωπευομένουϲ, μηδ’ εἶναι χαυνοπολίταϲ. 635
πρότερον δ’ ὑμᾶϲ ἀπὸ τῶν πόλεων οἱ πρέϲβειϲ ἐξαπατῶντεϲ
πρῶτον μὲν ἰοϲτεφάνουϲ ἐκάλουν· κἀπειδὴ τοῦτό τιϲ εἴποι,
εὐθὺϲ διὰ τοὺϲ ϲτεφάνουϲ ἐπ’ ἄκρων τῶν πυγιδίων ἐκάθηϲθε.
εἰ δέ τιϲ ὑμᾶϲ ὑποθωπεύϲαϲ λιπαρὰϲ καλέϲειεν Ἀθήναϲ,
ηὕρετο πᾶν ἂν διὰ τὰϲ λιπαράϲ, ἀφύων τιμὴν περιάψαϲ. 640

From the time when our teacher was put in charge of *trugic* choruses,
He has not yet stepped forward to tell the audience how clever he is:
But, slandered by his enemies among the Athenians, quick to make up their minds, 630
That he mocks our city and insults the people,
He needs now to respond to the Athenians quick to change their minds.
Our poet says that he is deserving of much good from you,

Having stopped you being excessively deceived by foreign words

And taking pleasure in being fawned over, and being *chaunopolitas*. 635

Before now the ambassadors from the cities would deceive you

By first calling you 'violet-crowned': And when someone would say this

Straightaway because of these crowns you'd sit up on the tips of your little buttocks.

And if someone flattering you would call Athens 'gleaming',

He'd hit the jackpot because of its 'gleaming', decking the city with an honour fit for anchovies 640

The parabasis begins by contextualising the play within the poet's biography. The chronology and various stages of the poet's career, and whether his early works were attributed to Callistratus or Aristophanes, are debated questions.[42] For a more detailed argument about the various stages of Aristophanes' career, see section one of my chapter on *Knights*. It will suffice here to point out that his claim, to have not yet (οὔπω) stepped forward to engage in self-promotion (628-9) implies that Aristophanes was not new to the game, but what is new is this reluctant moment of self-praise. The διδάcκαλοc here (631) should be understood as the same person as was διδάcκαλοc of *Banqueters* and *Babylonians*, and on the basis of the continuity of the persona between *Acharnians* and later plays, I take Aristophanes to be the known δίδαcκαλοc here, rather than Callistratus, who produced the play.

The chorus call the poet ὁ διδάcκαλοc ἡμῶν,[43] and his choruses as τρυγικοί. Perusino has argued compellingly that while διδάcκαλοc and ποιητήc can both be used to refer to the author of a comic play, the former is used to suggest a personal relationship

[42] E.g. Mastromarco (1979) 160-3, Halliwell (1980) 35-6, MacDowell (1982) 24-5, Henderson (1990) 288, Hubbard (1991) 227-230.

[43] As at *Pax* 738.

between the author and his chorus, who he sometimes trained directly.[44] To highlight this relationship, as Aristophanes does through the mouthpiece of his chorus here with ἡμῶν, is to emphasise a destabilising aspect of the autobiographical parabasis. The chorus are a mediating presence between the poet and the audience,[45] and while they appear to speak spontaneously about their instructor from their own personal perspective, simultaneously the audience are aware that their words were written by said instructor. The description of Aristophanes as ὁ διδάσκαλος ἡμῶν, also establishes a central theme: the comic poet as a teacher, and whether he can as legitimately be described a teacher of the city, as of the chorus.

The description of the poet's choruses as τρυγικοί may act as a rather complicated mid-line comic **beat.** This word, and its counterpart τρυγῳδία, are used as synonyms for the more common κωμικός and κωμῳδία,[46] often in moments where a contrast or comparison with tragedy is suggested.[47] τρύξ meaning 'new, unfermented wine' or, more commonly, 'dregs'[48] configures comedy as an inferior, bitterer form of theatre to tragedy, which is by contrast the true wine, the οἶνoc so often associated with at least metaphorical sweetness.[49] Certainly Aristophanes pretends to think that the parabasis will not be so easily palatable to the Athenian audience, since he configures his persona as speaking uncomfortable truths to power. The playful corruption of τραγῳδία is a sort of **incongruity**, the **resolution** of which raises questions about the mental state of the poet: is this reference self-deprecating, acknowledging the lesser status of his genre compared to

[44] Perusino (1982).
[45] Platter (2007) 97 on parabases generally: 'the fact that it is the chorus who speak in the author's name necessarily transforms the dialogic situation by adding an extra layer of separation between the author and the spectators he addresses.'
[46] *Ach.* 886 has τρυγῳδικοῖς; in fr. 149.9 τρυγῳδῶν are contrasted with τραγικῶν χορῶν; τρυγῳδός at *V.* 650, 1537; fr. 333.1 from *Thesmophoriazusae* II aggrandises comedy as τρυγῳδοποιομουσική.
[47] Taplin (1983).
[48] E.g. Archil. fr. 4.8, Sem. fr. 25 (West); Ar. *Pl.* 1085-7.
[49] ἡδύς *Od*. 2.349, 9.204; ἡδύποτος *Od*. 15.507; μελιηδής *Il*. 4.346, al.; μελίφρων *Il*. 6.264. Anacr. fr. 7.2 τρύγα μελίηδεα is likely ironic; that τρύξ are not usually palatable seems to be the point: Harvey (1957).

tragedy, or is it indicative of poetic persona's (mistaken) belief that his artform is on a par with tragedy as a legitimate source of moral instruction?

It is difficult to evaluate the poet's claim 'never yet' to have 'stepped forward to tell the audience how clever he is'. παρέβη is morally loaded, carrying a sense of transgression,[50] and this is not the only parabasis in Old Comedy where self-promotion is undertaken with reluctance.[51] Ancient Greek sources do not typically have a high opinion of self-praise.[52] While Aristophanes claims to stoop to this dubious act for the first time now, without the text of *Banqueters* and *Babylonians*, this is unverifiable. Given the extent to which a) Aristophanes and others use parabases elsewhere as opportunities for self-promotion, and b) Aristophanes is deceptive in his disavowal of certain devices, it is certainly possible that he has engaged in self-promotion previously and is being deceptive here. Whether or not his claim is true, the implication of prior modesty at 629, is undercut by the line itself. That he has 'not yet' had his chorus step forward 'to say that he is clever' suggests he is about to do so now, and that he does indeed consider himself 'clever'. In short, we are confronted immediately with a character who professes himself reticent, yet who here quickly engages in boasting not wholly justified by the grounds he gives. The audience, likely already conditioned to expect the parabasis to be utilised as a vehicle for unabashed or thinly veiled self-aggrandisement, will feel that this section forms a sort of building crescendo and generates a certain amount of **tension**. By feigning (prior) modesty, the comic pay-off of his unrestrained self-promotion later is all the greater, and

[50] Biles (2011) 12-55.
[51] Pl. Com. fr. 96: εἰ μὲν μὴ λίαν <uu_> ὦνδρες, ἠναγκαζόμην | στρέψαι δεῦρ', οὐκ ἂν παρέβην εἰc λέξιν τοιάνδ' | ἐπῶν; *Pax* 734-5.
[52] Spatharas (2019) 159-88. Plutarch 539D-E says that self-praise puts the listener in a difficult position: silence may be taken as a sign of envy, while vocal agreement looks like fawning and thus compromises the listener's honour. Some self-praise can be found in Pindar, but even there it is generally indirect, balanced by moments of relative modesty, and serves to heighten the glory of the *laudandus*: Burgess (1990).

indeed the quality that he claims, δεξιότης, is a virtue much prized by the Athenian *demos* – perhaps even too much.[53]

In 630-1 Aristophanes claims to have been slandered (διαβαλλόμενος) by enemies (ἔχθροι) as someone who mocks the city and insults the people. The verb διαβάλλω frequently occurs in legal contexts,[54] echoes the language of Dicaeopolis earlier,[55] and implies defamation, the casting of aspersions on one's character with ill intent or falsehood.[56] Yet, as we will see, he devotes almost the entire anapaestic section of the parabasis to abuse of the audience, which seems to stand for the Athenians at large.[57] Indeed, even while the poet summarises the accusations against him (630-2) – that he mocks the city and insults the people – he engages in exactly the kind of behaviour alleged, through his choice of epithets to refer to his fellow-citizens. Olson notes that Aristophanes' point is that he does mock the city, but as a sort of bitter medicine, for its betterment.[58] However, this would not mean that Aristophanes has been slandered, since he is indeed mocking the city and insulting its people. Moreover, there must exist within rhetorical space a medium position between the extremes of mocking the city as Aristophanes does and fawning upon the city as the poet claims others do. By insulting the audience, and criticising their judgement, the poet uses the 'rhetoric of anti-rhetoric',[59] itself a sort of rhetoric, and one which actually aligns his persona closer to Cleon.[60]

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[53] E.g. Cleon decries the Athenian love of cleverness and innovation at Th. 3.37-8.
[54] For legal sense of διαβολή see Rizzo & Vox (1978) 307-321.
[55] *Ach.* 380, 502.
[56] *LSJ* A V, VI.
[57] E.g. at 632, where the poet persona, although about to speak to the Lenaean audience, says that it is necessary to respond to 'the Athenians'. See section 5.3 of my introduction where I discuss the makeup of the audience and of the notional audience.
[58] Olson (2002) *ad* 633-58
[59] Hesk (2000) 202-41 for this stance in oratory.
[60] The sentiments here resemble the insulting tones of Cleon in the Mytilenaean debate (Thuc. 3.37-40). Both insult Athenian inconstancy: ταχυβουλους 630, μεταβουλους 632, cf. 3.37.3; and both hint at the harsh reality of the Athenian empire: δείξας ὡς δημοκρατοῦνται 642, cf. 3.37.2 οὐ cκοποῦντες ὅτι τυραννίδα ἔχετε τὴν ἀρχὴν.

At 630 and 632 Aristophanes uses two epithets in tautometry to cajole the Athenians, and it is hard to square his use of these epithets with his rejection of the claim in 631 that he mocks the city and insults the people. With these very epithets – ταχυβούλοις and μεταβούλους – he does both. The obvious **incongruity** between what Aristophanes implicitly claims (i.e. that he does not insult the people), and his language choices to describe them, humorously reveals through **mentalising** that the poetic persona lacks self-awareness. The parallel phrasing draws attention to the shift in meaning from ταχυβούλοις to μεταβούλους, and the poetic persona's attempt to manipulate the audience through this change in language is patent. The Athenians are ταχυβούλοις when they condemn him, μεταβούλους when he thinks he can talk them around.

The sense of κωμῳδεῖ in line 631 is worth noting. The verb's etymological origin suggests a relation to comedy, and suggests a translation such as 'to make a comedy of/about', but since this is a supposedly slanderous accusation made against Aristophanes, the sense must be in some way pejorative. It must mean 'to mock' or 'to make fun of' as well as the more literal etymological meaning of 'to make a comedy of/about'.[61] This negative connotation will have important implications for the interpretation of line 655, as discussed below.

After framing his speech as an *apologia*, a defence against false charges, the poet claims he is in fact deserving of reward for the services he rendered (633), which as Olson notes, constitutes 'a cheeky insistence on being rewarded for his services similar to Socrates' request for free meals in the Prytaneion at the end of Plato's version of his *Apology* (36d-e).'[62] The self-importance this suggests was no doubt at odds with his actual (un)importance.

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[61] Riu (1995) 62 says that the verb is never attested without an attendant sense of mockery: 'il verbo non si trova mai nel senso di "rappresentare in una commedia" senza includere l'idea della beffa'.
[62] Olson (2002) *ad loc.* Olson, however, emends ἄξιος to αἴτιος.

Aristophanes next sets up an opposition between himself and the deceptive ξενικοῖϲι λόγοιϲ of others. In these aspects, the poet aligns himself with Dicaeopolis, his hero, as Bowie and others have pointed out.[63] While foreigners were associated with deception and flattery, the poet associates himself with their opposites, configuring himself as a speaker of harsh truths. Of course, when it comes to radical honesty, there is often a fine line between candour and insult. The fact that what he says is unpalatable is shortly demonstrated, when he describes the behaviours to which he has put a stop, and ends the tricolon which rises in offensiveness (634-5), by calling the audience χαυνοπολίταϲ. This *hapax* seems to mean something like 'loose-minded', and to denote foolish credulity since it suggests open-mouthed gawping.[64] The themes of flattery, deception and foreignness in these lines also bring to mind the opening assembly scene. In that scene the Persian Pseudartabas, calls the Athenians χαυνόπρωκτ' (104), 'gaping-arsed'. This derogatory epithet, coming from a Persian who had previously seemed to speak no Greek, is a complex and effective comic **beat**.[65] The insulting epithet is repeated by Dicaeopolis two lines later, and is therefore likely a very memorable line. Indeed, χαυνοπολίταϲ here may even be a sort of deflationary *para prosdokian*, as the audience expect χαυνο- to end in πρωκτουϲ.

At the least, here the poet's persona, through his coryphaeus, echoes this foreigner in insulting the audience. The theme of being deceived by foreigners and flatterers, particularly during times of danger like the Peloponnesian War, seems likely to be a subject that might generate **tension**, and crude bodily humour such as found in χαυνοπολίταϲ (evoking χαυνοπρώκτουϲ), or later ἐπ' ἄκρων τῶν πυγιδίων may have functioned to **release** this **tension**. ἐπ' ἄκρων τῶν πυγιδίων is a parody of the proverb ἐπ'

[63] Bowie (1982), Biles (2011) 56-96.
[64] Cf. Athens' description as τῇ Κεχηναίων πόλει at *Eq*. 1263.
[65] As explored by Lowe (2020) 18-21.

ἄκρων τῶν ὀνύχων, suggesting the vanity of a person who walks on tiptoe to appear taller.[66] The warped comic version found here suggests the Athenians' rapt attention as they sit up straight in their eagerness to physically embody the impressive stature with which flattery imbued them.

At 636-640 Aristophanes draws an image of Athenian audience behaviour prior to his intervention, and uses this opportunity to mock the language of other speakers. In particular, the flattering epithets ἰοστεφάνους and λιπαράς come from Pindar fr. 76,[67] and they become popular laudatory epithets. ἰοστεφάνος refers to the emblematic flower of the city, and λιπαρός may have some connection to Athens' best-known export: olive oil. Here however, Aristophanes mocks them, and 'λιπαρός enters the Aristophanic lexicon as the emblem of the transparent flattery used by fawning orators to gain the knee-jerk approval of the Athenian assembly.'[68] The mention of ἀφύων is an **incongruity** which the audience must **resolve** by moving from understanding λιπαρός in a metaphorical sense to understanding it in a more literal sense. Of course, using metaphorical laudatory language is not new. λιπαρός is used in literal and metaphorical senses from our earliest literature.[69] While it may be tonally out of place in Old Comedy, it is used – hypocritically or to prove his point – by the poet as part of a composite adjective later in the *Acharnians*.[70] Here his disavowal of such metaphorical language seems also to suggest the poet's own cynicism and hostility to other modes of expression. The poet may have a chip on his shoulder about tragedy, and he is not too keen on Pindar, either.

[66] Imperio (2004) *ad loc.*
[67] Aristophanes employs these epithets again, having his chorus describe the Athenian people as such at the end of *Knights* (1323, 1329).
[68] Platter (2007) 71.
[69] Of a veil at *Il.* 22.406; of a city at *Thgn.* 947; of old age at *Od.* 11.136.
[70] *Ach.* 671, see *ad loc.* below.

International Acclaim 641-54

ταῦτα ποιήϲαϲ πολλῶν ἀγαθῶν αἴτιοϲ ὑμῖν γεγένηται

καὶ τοῖϲ δήμοιϲ ἐν ταῖϲ πόλεϲιν, δείξαϲ ὡϲ δημοκρατοῦνται.

τοιγάρτοι νῦν ἐκ τῶν πόλεων τὸν φόρον ὑμῖν ἀπάγοντεϲ

ἥξουϲιν ἰδεῖν ἐπιθυμοῦντεϲ τὸν ποιητὴν τὸν ἄριϲτον,

ὅϲτιϲ παρεκινδύνευϲ' εἰπεῖν ἐν Ἀθηναίοιϲ τὰ δίκαια. 645

ὄντωϲ δ' αὐτοῦ περὶ τῆϲ τόλμηϲ ἤδη πόρρω κλέοϲ ἥκει,

ὅτε καὶ βαϲιλεὺϲ Λακεδαιμονίων τὴν πρεϲβείαν βαϲανίζων

ἠρώτηϲεν πρῶτα μὲν αὐτοὺϲ πότεροι ταῖϲ ναυϲὶ κρατοῦϲιν,

εἶτα δὲ τοῦτον τὸν ποιητὴν ποτέρουϲ εἴποι κακὰ πολλά·

τούτουϲ γὰρ ἔφη τοὺϲ ἀνθρώπουϲ πολὺ βελτίουϲ γεγενῆϲθαι 650

καὶ τῷ πολέμῳ πολὺ νικήϲειν τοῦτον ξύμβουλον ἔχονταϲ.

διὰ τοῦθ' ὑμᾶϲ Λακεδαιμόνιοι τὴν εἰρήνην προκαλοῦνται

καὶ τὴν Αἴγιναν ἀπαιτοῦϲιν· καὶ τῆϲ νήϲου μὲν ἐκείνηϲ

οὐ φροντίζουϲ', ἀλλ' ἵνα τοῦτον τὸν ποιητὴν ἀφέλωνται.

By doing this he is responsible for many blessings for you,

And for the people in the cities too, because he showed them how they are ruled by a democracy.

In fact that's why they now come to you from the cities bearing tribute –

They come eager to see the best poet,

He who dares to speak what is right among the Athenians. 645

Thus far the renown of his daring has already reached,

That even the King, when he tests out the Spartans' embassy

First asked them which was more powerful in terms of ships,

And then asked which of the two the poet abused a lot.

'For these men' he said 'have become much better for it 650

And they will win the war by much with this man as an adviser.'

That's why the Spartans are summoning you for peace talks,

And they're demanding Aegina: they're not even worried

About that island, they just want to snatch this poet away.

Much as the shift from Ἀθηναίοιϲ ταχυβούλοιϲ to Ἀθηναίοιϲ μεταβούλουϲ was a meaningful one earlier in Aristophanes' rhetoric (630, 632), so too is the shift from πολλῶν ἀγαθῶν ἄξιοϲ in 633 to πολλῶν ἀγαθῶν αἴτιοϲ here at 641. The parallel phrases, also in tautometric position in their respective lines, call attention to the idea of reward and responsibility. While the claim of 641 may be unconvincing, the language shift at least gives a sense of structure to his argument – he is worthy of good things, because he has been the cause of good things.

However, this clear statement of responsibility is immediately undercut by the following line, in which he says that he is responsible for blessings 'for the people in the cities too, because he showed them how they are ruled by a democracy.' This seems to be a reference to *Babylonians*, in which the allied cities may have been depicted as slaves to the cruel hegemon, Athens.[71] The line could refer to the local democracies themselves being corrupt,[72] or it may be an oblique criticism of the imperialist policies of democratic Athens, a popular *topos* of Old Comedy.[73] The suggestion in 643-5 that the citizens of the allied states delight in the poet's words suggests that 642 refers to Athenian mistreatment

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[71] MacDowell (1995) 32, Imperio (2004) 131. Plutarch *Pericles* 26.4 suggests Aristophanes made light of Samians who were tattooed following the Samian War.

[72] MacDowell (1995) 32: 'probably it means that the governments were not as democratic as they professed to be'.

[73] Imperio (2004) *ad loc.*

of the allies rather than to the corruption of their own democracies.[74] This explanation would accord with Dicaeopolis' earlier statement that since the current play is a Lenaean production, Cleon will not 'slander me that I spoke ill of the city in the presence of foreigners.'[75] The irony of claiming to be responsible for blessings for Athens, before immediately reminding them of the harm he has allegedly done to the city's reputation, is patent. δείξας ὡς δημοκρατοῦνται acts as an elusive confirmation that he has done exactly what he was accused of – negatively portraying Athenian power in front of emissaries from her allied (subject) states. In terms of **mentalising**, this could be understood as cheeky faux naiveté, as the poetic persona pretends not to understand what he is accused of doing wrong, and even argues that he has done the city a favour. Aristophanes' doublespeak twists harms into blessings, but the deception is humorously brazen.

Aristophanes' delusions of grandeur find fuller expression at 646-51, as he constructs an obviously fanciful scenario in which the Persian king asks about the poet's invective, and acknowledges that this abuse has a corrective power that will help Athens in the war. Epic language (κλέος) stresses the delusional self-aggrandisement, and the claim that Aristophanes' abuse will help Athens in the war efforts touches upon a topic that would no doubt generate **tension** among the audience – the tactics of Sparta and the possibility of intervention by Persia would be of vital importance in the Peloponnesian War. The inclusion of the King's inquiry about the navy (648) is an extraneous detail, as if the poetic persona is trying to make the scenario envisaged sound more realistic, while the balanced temporal markers πρῶτα and εἶτα in lines 648-9 suggest that the poet's abuse was almost of equal importance to the navy.

[74] Olson (2001) 239.

[75] *Ach* 502-3: οὐ γάρ με νῦν γε διαβαλεῖ Κλέων ὅτι | ξένων παρόντων τὴν πόλιν κακῶς λέγω.

At 652-8, Aristophanes' self-aggrandisement continues at the international scale, as he claims that Sparta's demand for Athens to give up the nearby island of Aegina was made with the intention of depriving Athens of her poet (652-4). Aristophanes was from the deme of Cydathenaeum,[76] so this reference led some to think that the poet or his family may have gotten possession of some extra land on the nearby island during the hostilities between Athens and Aegina.[77] Biles has recently argued that this inference is unnecessary, but rather, in light of the kidnapping narrative which is said to have caused the Peloponnesian War (524-8), these lines may suggest 'the purely contextual understanding of Aegina as a place from which the Spartans might launch an operation to snatch the internationally acclaimed poet.'[78] No matter the specific significance of Aegina, the poet's inflated sense of self-worth is humorously exposed when he alleges himself to be a primary concern to Sparta.

Mocking Justice, Teaching the Best 655-8

ἀλλ' ὑμεῖϲ τοι μή ποτ' ἀφῆϲθ'· ὡϲ κωμῳδήϲει τὰ δίκαια· 655
φηϲὶν δ' ὑμᾶϲ πολλὰ διδάξειν ἀγάθ', ὥϲτ' εὐδαίμοναϲ εἶναι,
οὐ θωπεύων οὐδ' ὑποτείνων μιϲθοὺϲ οὐδ' ἐξαπατύλλων,
οὐδὲ πανουργῶν οὐδὲ κατάρδων, ἀλλὰ τὰ βέλτιϲτα διδάϲκων.

But don't ever let him go; he'll make comedy of what is right. 655
And he says that he will teach you many good lessons, so you'll be prosperous,
Neither fawning on you nor proffering wages nor hoodwinking you,
Nor resorting to anything nor tinkling down, but teaching the best lessons.

[76] *IG* ii^2 1740 21.
[77] Σ *Ach.* 653, 654bI.
[78] Biles (2023) 421.

The coryphaeus' justification for why Athens should hang on to him is particularly interesting: κωμῳδήϲει τὰ δίκαια 655. This is an important comic **beat**, but one that requires careful explanation. In it the poet, through his chorus, tries to continue to embody the stance of the righteous poet, by combining reference to the art of creating comedy plays with some commitment to justice. However, the ambiguous syntax radically alters the meaning, and the poet 'accidentally' expresses almost the complete opposite – that he will ridicule justice itself.

Perusino sees the line as a meaningful corruption of κωμῳδεῖ τὴν πόλιν (631) and εἰπεῖν ἐν Ἀθηναίοιϲ τὰ δίκαια (645), and says the line 'risponde alla funzione che Aristofane assegna alla poesia comica… egli non intende "prendere in giro" la città e le sue istituzioni… ma vuole presentare, sotto le sembianze del comico, situazioni e personaggi e muovere critiche ispirate a un senso di giustizia.'[79] By this reading, the line is a programmatic assertion of the poet's intention to create poetry 'inspired' by his sense of what is right. Indeed, this has been the dominant interpretation of this line.[80] Most English translations read something like 'he will write comedy about what is just',[81] or 'in his comedies he'll say what's right.'[82]

However, this is not the most natural way of processing this line. The verb κωμῳδέω takes a direct object in the accusative.[83] This direct object is usually a person, but it can be more abstract; earlier in this very parabasis the direct object was the city.[84] Not only can this verb take a direct accusative object, but in fact it overwhelmingly does. A

[79] Perusino (1987) 27. Imperio (2004) *ad loc.* concurs.
[80] Olson (2002) *ad loc.* says that τὰ δίκαια is an internal accusative, thus acting as an adverbial modifier of the verb, i.e. 'he will mock justly'. However, it would be unusual to find an internal accusative with definite article.
[81] Hubbard (1991).
[82] Sommerstein (1980); Henderson (1988) follows Sommerstein almost verbatim, but later (1998) renders it: 'he'll keep on making comedy of what's right.
[83] E.g. *Acharnians* 631, *Wasps* 1026, *Peace* 751; Ps-Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 2.18; Pl. *Parm.* 128d1, *Symp*. 193b6, 193d8, *Laws* 935d5, 935e6, *Rep.* 395e8, 452d1; Lys. 24.18.
[84] *Acharnians* 631; *Symp.* 193b6 has Plato's Aristophanes worrying that Eryximachus will respond to him by κωμῳδῶν τὸν λόγον.

survey through *TLG* of the usages of κωμῳδέω in the 5th and early 4th century reveals only one case in which the verb is used intransitively: at *Wealth* 557 Poverty rhetorically orders Chremylus to keep on making fun, and even here it could be argued that the flow of the scene implies that the unspoken object of the verb is Poverty herself.[85] Finally, it is worth pointing out that this verb always carries the connotation of mockery at the expense of the person or object having the verb done to it,[86] as it did earlier at 631. It would certainly be strange, as Riu points out, if the verb was used in its accustomed sense at 631, and then used here at 655 in an unattested and different sense.[87]

Therefore, the audience reasonably would have been expecting to hear a direct accusative object of κωμῳδήcει. When the next words were delivered, τὰ δίκαια, the audience would, I argue, initially have processed this noun as the direct object of the verb of mockery.[88] When the chorus leader says that Aristophanes is going 'to ridicule justice', that claim is wholly at odds with the comic persona's stance as the righteous poet. Why then does he say it? Only Wright recognises that this is the most natural interpretation of the line,[89] and he finds it 'puzzling' that the aims of the poet are described here in a way that contradicts what Dicaeopolis elsewhere claims.[90]

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[85] cκώπτειν πειρᾷ καὶ κωμῳδεῖν τοῦ cπουδάζειν ἀμελήcαc.
[86] As pointed out by Riu (1995) 62. In *Wealth* 557, for example, the verb seems to be being used synonymously to cκώπτειν.
[87] Riu (1995) 62.
[88] Riu (1995) notes this possible meaning, saying that κωμῳδεῖν τὰ δίκαια can mean either 'to ridicule justice' or 'what it is just to ridicule in a comedy', with the latter meaning supplied by context: 'In realtà le expressioni εἰπεῖν τὰ δίκαια o κωμῳδεῖν τὰ δίκαια (oppure τὸ δίκαιον) possono essere interpretate in due sensi a prima vista diversi: "dire" o "ridicolizzare" quello che è giusto in genere, "la giustizia" per così dire, oppure "quello che è giusto dire o ridicolizzare" (in una commedia, come puntualizza sempre il contest, se non il verbo stesso).' However, he goes on to say that the meaning of 'ridiculing justice' is present because justice is important in the play, which in fact can be understood as an 'illustrazione della giustizia comica, una giustizia molto particolare, che esula dalla commune nozione di giustizia', to which it must objected that 'ridiculing justice' and illustrating comic justice are not (necessarily) the same thing, nor would Aristophanes' audience have reached that conclusion from line 655.
[89] Wright (2012) 11: 'the chorus-leader promises that Aristophanes will never stop making fun of what is right.'
[90] Wright, *ibid.*

I believe that we can resolve the 'puzzling' nature of the claim, and the point of the line's semantic ambiguity, by reference to **mentalising** and to the double-voiced nature of the discourse. There are two ways of understanding κωμῳδήϲει τὰ δίκαια. Firstly, it can simply mean 'he will mock what is just' i.e. justice. Secondly, it can be taken as 'he will mock what it is just (to mock)', where the predication of the adjective 'just' to an unspoken action ('to mock'), is merely understood. The first translation is the more natural one, and probably the one which an audience will process first, but the second is the one which accords more with Aristophanes' poetic ends (i.e. of mocking the Athenians, who it is just to mock, and thereby speaking as a just poet) as expressed elsewhere in the parabasis.[91] However, the first, more scurrilous sense of 655 generates an **incongruity** between the words meaning, and the persona of the would-be righteous poet, which causes the audience to reprocess the message and **resolve** it by recognising that the second, less semantically obvious meaning, is what the coryphaeus intends to express. The audience, through **mentalising**, determines what the chorus leader means, but fails to clearly express. Syntactical ambiguity of this kind, where the variant possible interpretations differ wildly in meaning, is a mechanism for generating humour, frequently found, for example, in newspaper headlines.[92]

This is, in a sense, a failure of communication, and a meaningful one. The error is in the words of the coryphaeus, but as the poet's mouthpiece, the fault is still Aristophanes', and it suggests a sort of poetic incompetence, as if the poet were not in control of the play's semiotic power. Nor is it a chance or random loss of control, but rather the mistake completely distorts what would otherwise have been a (*faux*) important

[91] 631: κωμῳδεῖ τὴν πόλιν ἡμῶν καὶ τὸν δῆμον καθυβρίζει; 661-2: μετ᾽ ἐμου… τὸ δἰκαιον | ξὐμμαχον ἔϲται.
[92] Charina (2017) explores lexical and semantic humour as a source for humour; Bucaria (2004) found humorous syntactical ambiguity to be much more common in newspaper headlines than in surveys of humour more generally. Bucaria (2004) 295 provides an example which, like *Ach.* 655, relies on ellipsis: 'Lawmen From Mexico Barbecue Guests', where 'to be' has to be understood between 'Mexico' and 'Barbecue'.

programmatic statement about the nature of his poetry and its lofty didactic purpose. The blunder thereby calls into question the poet's fitness to act as a teacher to the city. Paradoxically, Aristophanes the real, historical poet succeeds in making a sweeping programmatic claim about his poetry, by having his persona try and fail to make such a claim. The persona's grand claims of righteousness, and of a didactic role in the city, are undermined by this verbal incontinence, and the resultant apparently unintended message, that he will mock justice, is in fact a more accurate one.

The poet ends the anapaests with claims about his art. Tautologous positive claims (ὑμᾶϲ πολλὰ διδάξειν ἀγάθ', ὥϲτ' εὐδαίμοναϲ εἶναι… ἀλλὰ τὰ βέλτιϲτα διδάϲκων) sandwich a greater number of claims about what he will not do, and as elsewhere in Old Comedy the list is not without humorous elements. The dismissal of ὑποτείνων μιϲθούϲ may be an oblique reference to Cleon, on whose motion jury pay had been raised from two to three obols at around this time.[93] Public opinion was clearly moving towards the increase of jury pay, and the poet's disavowal of it here, while in line with his anti-flattery stance, may be another attribute by which Aristophanes makes his persona seem out of touch and bitter. The poetic voice drips with contempt with the derogatory ἐξαπατύλλων, which employs the comic diminutive suffix -υλλ- before the ending.[94] Aristophanes also disavows pouring down (κατάρδων), probably a reference to effusive praise like that in the epinician and paeans of Pindar,[95] and so continues the mockery of this poet as already seen at 637-40.

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[93] Σ *V.* 88a says Cleon was general when this motion was carried, dating it to the summer after *Acharnians.* If this is indeed an allusion to the increase of jury pay, then Cleon must have been arguing for the change for some time before it was accepted.

[94] This comic diminutive form is used of both verbs and nouns: e.g. ἐπύλλιον from ἔποϲ at *Ach*. 398, *Pax* 532, *Ra*. 942; καθάρυλλοϲ from καθαρόϲ at Pl. Com. 86; ἡβυλλιάω from ἡβάω at *Ra*. 516, Pherecr. 108.29. This exact comic dimunitive is only otherwise found at *Eq.* 1144.

[95] E.g. Pi. *P.* 8. 57: ῥαίνω δὲ καὶ ὕμνῳ 'I sprinkle with song'; *I.* 6. 21: νᾶϲον ῥαινέμεν εὐλογίαιϲ 'I sprinkle the island with praise'.

There is the possibility of punning in 658. διδάϲκειν with two direct accusative objects means to teach someone something, as at 656 φηϲὶν δ’ ὑμᾶϲ πολλὰ διδάξειν ἀγάθ’ must mean ‘he says that he will teach you many good things’. However, without a direct accusative personal pronoun or object receiving the teaching, the verb could be understood in its dramatic sense of ‘producing’ a play,[96] just as a διδαϲκαλοϲ could designate the play’s producer, and sometimes the instructor the choreuts.[97] As such, 658 could be understood as saying that Aristophanes will be ‘teaching the best things’, or ‘producing the best plays’. This ambivalence once again marks a point where the discourse is double-voiced, drawing attention to the disjunct between what the poetic persona pretends to be his goal (i.e. proper moral instruction of his audience), while at the same time voicing what might reasonably be considered the poet’s true goal (producing the most appealing plays).

Pnigos 659-65

πρὸϲ ταῦτα Κλέων καὶ παλαμάϲθω

καὶ πᾶν ἐπ’ ἐμοὶ τεκταινέϲθω. 660

τὸ γὰρ εὖ μετ’ ἐμοῦ καὶ τὸ δίκαιον

ξύμμαχον ἔϲται, κοὐ μή ποθ’ ἁλῶ

περὶ τὴν πόλιν ὢν ὥϲπερ ἐκεῖνοϲ

δειλὸϲ καὶ λακαταπύγων.

In reply let Cleon scheme

Let him contrive anything against me 660

[96] The verb is used habitually thus in scholia and hypotheses to plays, but also of producing dithyrambs at Hdt. 1.23, and tragedies 6.21.2. At *Ra.* 1026-7, the verb is used in this sense, and then in the sense of moral instruction shortly afterwards: εἶτα διδάξαϲ Πέρϲαϲ μετὰ τοῦτ’ ἐπιθυμεῖν ἐξεδίδαξα | νικᾶν ἀεὶ τοὺϲ ἀντιπάλουϲ… The altering of meaning seems intended to draw attention to the two differing meanings while alleging a connection between them.

[97] Rogers (2013) discussed the connection between these two meanings of διδάϲκειν.

For the good and the just will be

My allies, and I won't ever be convicted

About the city as being, as he is,

A coward and a *lakatapugon.*

The *pnigos* is a parody of Euripides fr. 918 (Bergk), probably from *Telephus*, and so carries on the intertextuality of Dicaeopolis' earlier speech.[98] It deviates at 659 with the inclusion of Cleon, and ultimately ends in bathetic obscenity **incongruous** with the *faux* righteousness of the poetic persona, and with the elevated tone of tragedy. λα- is an intensifying prefix added to the more commonly attested καταπύγων, which is sometimes used as a term of abuse in a broad sense, and at other times distinctly connotes passive homosexuality.[99] Although Cleon's entrance into the song may have been subtly heralded by ὑποτείνων μιcθούς (657), still the attack here comes as a surprise. A recurrent occupation with Cleon pervades this play and the poet's whole corpus, and functions as a sort of Aristophanic signature and a cultural point of reference around which the poet could build his persona and autobiography.

This *pnigos* marks a shift in voice, as the poet is no longer spoken of in the third person, but rather Aristophanes' voice in the first person breaks through. Explanations for this have been proffered: MacDowell suggests that the switch derives from the poet once playing the main role, and that the chorus leader retained by convention the ability to speak as the poet, even when the author was no longer performing the part;[100] Gilula invokes Occam's razor, arguing that comic poets sometimes really did come forward to speak to the audience in the first person.[101] Either response may be correct, but both are

[98] *Ach.* 528-39.
[99] Henderson (1975) 210.
[100] MacDowell (1971) 299.
[101] Gilula (1997).

necessarily speculative. It seems safer to assume that the chorus leader is still the one proclaiming, carrying on from the anapaestic *makron*, and to understand the switch as one that deconstructs the dramatic pretence of the coryphaeus' speaking spontaneously. Perusino describes the poet 'overruling his intermediary' ('scavalca di prepotenza il suo intermediario') at times of high emotion or when discussing sensitive subjects,[102] and this seems a fair intuition: the poet, apparently unable to hold himself back, shatters part of the dramatic illusion, so intent is he upon directly attacking his nemesis, and there is humour to be found through this analysis of the poet's state of mind, as he allows his obsession with the politician to alter the voice and the texture of his play.

Approach, Acharnian Muse 666-75

δεῦρο, Μοῦς', ἐλθὲ φλεγυρά, πυρὸς ἔχουσα μένος, 666
ἔντονος Ἀχαρνική.
οἷον ἐξ ἀνθράκων πρινίνων φέψαλος ἀν-
ήλατ' ἐρεθιζόμενος οὐρίᾳ ῥιπίδι,
ἡνίκ' ἂν ἐπανθρακίδες ὦσι παρακείμεναι, 670
οἱ δὲ Θασίαν ἀνακυκῶσι λιπαράμπυκα,
οἱ δὲ μάττωσιν, οὕτω σοβαρὸν ἐλθὲ μέλος
εὔτονον, ἀγροικότερον,
ὡς ἐμὲ λαβοῦσα τὸν δημότην. 675

Come here, Muse, burning with the strength of fire,
Eager Acharnian Muse.

[102] Perusino (1986) 17: 'Ma quando gli preme discutere argomenti delicati o quando la passione trattenuta rompe gli argini della misura, Aristofane scavalca di prepotenza il suo intermediario e interviene in prima persona per bocca del corifeo.'

Like a spark from oak-wood coal

Leaps up, fanned by favouring bellows,

When needed to fry small-fry, 670

While others mix up Thasian bright-filleted fish pickle,

And others knead dough, so vigorously may you come, and bring,

Rustic, well-strung song,

To me, your demesman. 675

Next begins the epirrhematic syzygy, with lyric strophe and antistrophe in cretic-paeonic metre. As others have noted,[103] it is not unusual for the lyric section of an Aristophanic parabasis to begin with an invocation of the Muse or other divinity, personalised with attributes to suit the intra-narrative identity of the chorus.[104] In this case, the Acharnian Muse's attributes (φλεγυρά, πυρὸϲ ἔχουϲα μένοϲ) correspond to the demesmen's traditional profession as charcoal-producers. Throughout there is an ironic and bathetic application of the lofty language of religious song, the register of lyric, epic and tragic diction, to the more quotidian aspects of life proper to comedy.

Thus, the language used to introduce the Muse contains vocabulary that held a tragic (e.g. μένοϲ, ἔντονοϲ) or epic flavour (e.g. μένοϲ) and is combined with the more mundane with ῥιπίϲ. The word οὔριοϲ ('favourable'), which is typically tragic and usually applied to the wind or a sea-voyage pushed on by the winds,[105] is playfully applied here to the bellows as a tool of the Acharnians' trade. The bellows is thus likened in passing to the

[103] E.g. Sommerstein (1980) Olson (2002) and Imperio (2004) *ad loc.*

[104] Cf. *Eq.* 551-64 which begins by invoking ἵππι' ἄναξ Πόϲειδον; the Clouds show surprising allegiance to the traditional pantheon by calling upon ὑψιμέδοντα μὲν θεῶν | Ζῆνα τύραννον at *Nu.* 563ff.; at *Pax* 775ff. the chorus do not retain a strong intra-narrative identity, and accordingly it is simply the Muse who is invited to join them; the Μοῦϲα λοχμαία is called upon by the avian chorus at *Av.* 737-9; the general Muse is called upon by the Eleusinian initiates at *Ra.* 674.

[105] S. *Aj.* 889, 1083, *Phil.* 355, 780; E. *Hec.* 900, *Tro.* 882-3, *Hel.* 147, 406, 1612, 1663, *IA.* 352, 1596; Thuc. 7.53.4.

elements themselves, suggesting its extreme importance in the Acharnians' eyes, and an attendant sense of their own self-importance. To describe a bellows-wind as 'favourable' is non-sensical, in that the gust it produces is created purposefully by the bellows-user, and therefore could hardly ever be 'unfavourable' in the way that a strong wind from an inconvenient angle may be.

With their elevated tone brought jarringly down by the ῥιπίς, the chorus' picture of the Muse's importance is elaborated further by reference to a favourite topic of comedy: food. Concern for one's stomach is a stock theme in comedy,[106] but the chorus let their stomachs lead them rather far from their original topic. Through **mentalising**, one could surmise that the chorus may be hungry, as they become a little distracted from their purpose, digressing into the world of culinary arts. This is particularly notable, when they go into detail about the Thasia, a brine and oil pickle, which presumably did not require heat to prepare, and can therefore only be of very peripheral importance to the Acharnian Muse.[107] There is wordplay with ἐπανθρακίδες, 'small-fry' which derive their name from the manner in which they are cooked over coals. In this context the etymology of the name is highlighted (ἀνθράκων 668, ἐπανθρακίδες 670), and so their choice of their fish is motivated by their own domain as charcoal-burners, before their turn to the less relevant dipping sauce and accompanying bread (μάττωσιν 672).[108]

Interesting, the chorus describe their sauce as λιπαράμπυξ. Earlier, Aristophanes had described the application of the epithet λιπαρός (gleaming, oiled) to Athens as ridiculous flattery, an inappropriate use of an adjective properly applied to anchovies (639-40). Here, there is a compound adjective formed from λιπαρός and ἄμπυξ, which denotes a

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[106] Hungry Heracles was apparently a common version of this topic: *V.* 60, *Pax* 741, *Av.* 1574-1692, *Ra.* 62-5, Cratin. 346.

[107] Hesych. s.v. Θασία; Ath. 7.329b, citing Ar. fr. 426. Cf. Peisetairus' rather too full description of the way that men prepare birds to eat at *Av.* 531-535.

[108] Some editors follow Hamaker's (1853) 155 emendation of μάττωσιν to βάπτωσιν in line 672, so continuing the description of the preparation of the fish, rather than moving onto another foodstuff.

woman’s headband,[109] and so means ‘with shining headband’. This compound – among other λιπαρ- compounds[110] – is also attested in Pindar, where it is used as an epithet of personified Memory, and of maidens in a fragmentary paean.[111] Therefore λιπαράμπυξ here functions as a continuation of Aristophanes’ mockery of Pindar, as he uses another Pindaric word, perhaps a Pindaric coinage, and applies it to the world of food, which he has earlier said is an appropriate referent for λιπαρός. In one sense, the poet is belabouring his point, driving home the superiority of his language over Pindar’s by illustrating his earlier claim. However, there is also a sense in which the poet is being hypocritical: even if λιπαρός is more literally and therefore appropriately applied to fish than to Athens, ἄμπυξ is surely not thus appropriately applied to a pickle. The usage of λιπαράμπυξ seems liable to the same objections of inappropriate application, just as much as Pindar calling Athens ‘gleaming’. Both Pindar and Aristophanes’ chorus are using non-literal language to achieve their rhetorical purposes. And in the case of *Acharnians*, the poetic diction is used to glorify not a city, but whitebait.

Courtroom Drama 676-91

οἱ γέροντες οἱ παλαιοὶ μεμφόμεσθα τῇ πόλει·
οὐ γὰρ ἀξίως ἐκείνων ὧν ἐναυμαχήσαμεν
γηροβοσκούμεσθ’ ὑφ’ ὑμῶν, ἀλλὰ δεινὰ πάσχομεν,
οἵτινες γέροντας ἄνδρας ἐμβαλόντες εἰς γραφὰς
ὑπὸ νεανίσκων ἐᾶτε καταγελᾶσθαι ῥητόρων, 680
οὐδὲν ὄντας, ἀλλὰ κωφοὺς καὶ παρεξηυλημένους,

[109] *Il*. 22.469, A. *Supp*. 431, E. *Hec*. 465, Theoc. 1.33.
[110] E.g. λιπαροτρόφων Paean 12, fr. 47.6, and λιπαροπλοκάμου Prosodia 78-9.1 (Bowra).
[111] *N*. 7.15: Μναμοσύνας ἕκατι λιπαράμπυκος; fr. D2, *Pa*. II.99 (Rutherford): λιπαρ]άμπ̣υ̣[κε]̣ς ἱστάμ̣ε̣ναι χορόν.

οἷς Ποσειδῶν ἀσφάλειός ἐστιν ἡ βακτηρία·

τονθορύζοντες δὲ γήρᾳ τῷ λίθῳ προσέσταμεν,

οὐχ ὁρῶντες οὐδὲν εἰ μὴ τῆς δίκης τὴν ἠλύγην.

ὁ δὲ νεανίας ἑαυτῷ σπουδάσας ξυνηγορεῖν 685

εἰς τάχος παίει ξυνάπτων στρογγύλοις τοῖς ῥήμασιν·

κᾆτ᾽ ἀνελκύσας ἐρωτᾷ, σκανδάληθρ᾽ ἱστὰς ἐπῶν,

ἄνδρα Τιθωνὸν σπαράττων καὶ ταράττων καὶ κυκῶν.

ὁ δ᾽ ὑπὸ γήρως μασταρύζει, κᾆτ᾽ ὀφλὼν ἀπέρχεται,

εἶτ᾽ ἀλύει καὶ δακρύει καὶ λέγει πρὸς τοὺς φίλους, 690

"οὗ μ᾽ ἐχρῆν σορὸν πρίασθαι, τοῦτ᾽ ὀφλὼν ἀπέρχομαι."

We old men, we aged, find fault with the city.

It doesn't match up to those sea-battles we won

The way you care for us in old age. In fact, we're suffering awfully,

You throw us old men into lawsuits

And let us be jeered at by youngster orators, 680

Useless, mute, absolutely piped out.

For us, unshakeable Poseidon is our walking stick.

And mumbling in old age we stand before the dock

Seeing nothing but justice's shadow.

But the young man, eagerly acting as prosecutor on his own case 685

At once strikes us with dense utterings:

Then he drags us up into the stand and questions us, setting up a trap with his words,

Tearing and troubling and confounding some Tithonus.

And his lower lip trembles due to old age, and he leaves owing a fine,

Then he sobs and cries and says to his friends: 690
'The money I needed to buy a coffin, I owe it as a fine.'

In the catalectic trochaic tetrameters, the querulous old Acharnian men cut particularly feeble figures, quite different from their fearsome first impression in the play.[112] After the introductory ode, their deme is dropped as a theme, and instead we see the men primarily as octogenarians and Greco-Persian war veterans. Much of the humour of this passage is at the expense of their pathetic old age. The language constantly lingers on their old age (οἱ γέροντες οἱ παλαιοὶ… γηροβοσκούμεσθ'… οἵτινες γέροντας ἄνδρας… γήρᾳ) and decrepitude (οὐδὲν ὄντας, ἀλλὰ κωφοὺς καὶ παρεξηυλημένους… τονθορύζοντες… οὐχ ὁρῶντες οὐδὲν), which is thrown into high relief by their adversaries' youth (note the diminutive form of νεανίσκων).

As discussed above, the old men are a ripe target for humour, because of a cultural preoccupation with the glory of the Greco-Persian Wars, but at the same time the mockery cannot be pushed too far, since they were also a group that demanded respect on the public stage. At 677 not Marathon, but sea battles such as that at Salamis, are invoked. Old Comedy tends to be rather imprecise in referring to battles of the Greco-Persian Wars.[113] This may imply that the chorus are becoming rather senile, although the blurring of boundaries between battles also serves their rhetorical purpose, aggrandising their achievements further by taking credit for victories both by land and by sea. Gentle fun is also poked at these old men by their use of archaic epic or lyric flavour -μεσθα endings in the 1st person plural, a linguistic detail that suggests self-aggrandisement, as they talk about themselves like heroes of these other genres.

[112] *Ach.* 204ff.
[113] Cf. *V.* 1078-88, which conflates Marathon, Thermopylae and Salamis.

There are more dynamics of humour at play here, however. The wonderful image of the old men as played-out *auloi* (παρεξηυλημένουϲ), is **incongruous** with the more literal depictions of senility that precede it, yet continues the idea of muteness (κωφούϲ) through the metaphor. Similarly **incongruity resolution** is the prime mechanism of humour in the description of Ποϲειδῶν ἀϲφάλειοϲ as a βακτηρία. In this, the script of divinity and their honorific epithets collides with the mundane imagery of the walking stick, and causes the audience to reprocess the word ἀϲφάλειοϲ and understand it in its literal, etymological meaning of 'unslipping', from the addition of privative ἀ to the verb ϲφάλλομαι. The claim that the old men see nothing but 'justice's shadow' is another playful **incongruity**, subverting the poetic concept of the light of justice,[114] and combining it with a reference to the old men's failing sight,[115] and doing so in such a way as to suggest the legal helplessness of the old men.

At 685-91 the constructed **world** of the courtroom scene reaches a piteous climax. From earlier in the passage of tetrameters, a text-world of a courtroom drama was introduced: ἐμβαλόντεϲ ἐϲ γραφὰϲ 679; τῷ λίθῳ προϲέϲταμεν 683. The text **world** is peopled by two characters representing contrasting demographics: the senile old man and the ruthless young prosecutor. In a fashion typical of Aristophanes, neither side comes out of the collision entirely smelling of roses. If there is much humour derived at the expense of the old Acharnians, so too is there mockery of the zealous and weaponised litigiousness of the youth.[116]

The speed and vigour of the young men is highlighted (ϲπουδάϲαϲ… εἰϲ τάχοϲ), and their industrious zeal expressed through the density of verbs in these lines (ϲπουδάϲαϲ ξυνηγορεῖν… παίει ξυνάπτων… ἀνελκύϲαϲ ἐρωτᾷ… ἱϲτὰϲ ἐπῶν), culminating in the

[114] E.g. A. *Ag.* 773, E. *Supp.* 564; Trag. Adesp. tr. fr. 500 (*TrGF*).
[115] Starkie (1909) *ad loc.* assumes they are 'nearly blind'.
[116] The litigiousness of Athenians is a comic theme: cf. e.g. Telecl. fr. 2 and *Av.* 39-41.

tricolon at line 688: cπαράττων καὶ ταράττων καὶ κυκῶν. The use of metaphorical imagery, pelting, and setting traps as if for animals, are **incongruities** to the courtroom **script**, and express through **incongruity** the inappropriateness of the treatment which the youth doles out to the poor 'Tithonus'. Through **mentalising**, the violent imagery also reveals the extreme fear with which the old chorus regard the young.

With the pitiful image of a man too poor to pay for a coffin, the tetrameters give way to an indignant lyric ode.

Antode 692-702

ταῦτα πῶς εἰκότα, γέροντ' ἀπολέcαι πολιὸν
ἄνδρα περὶ κλεψύδραν,
πολλὰ δὴ ξυμπονήcαντα καὶ θερμὸν ἀπο- 695
μορξάμενον ἀνδρικὸν ἱδρῶτα δὴ καὶ πολύν,
ἄνδρ' ἀγαθὸν ὄντα Μαραθῶνι περὶ τὴν πόλιν;
εἶτα Μαραθῶνι μὲν ὅτ' ἦμεν, ἐδιώκομεν,
νῦν δ' ὑπ' ἀνδρῶν πονηρῶν cφόδρα διωκόμεθα, 700
κᾆτα πρὸc ἁλιcκόμεθα;
πρὸc τάδε τίc ἀντερεῖ Μαρψίαc;

How are these things right, to destroy a white-haired old
Man around the water-clock,
Who has toiled many times and wiped away warm 695
Manly sweat, and indeed a lot of it,
A good man who was at Marathon for the city?
Then at Marathon, when we were there, we pursued,

But now by worthless men we are strenuously *sued*,[117] 700

And then even remand us?

What Marpsias will respond to this?

In this choral ode we find once again that there is a thin line between mockery and sympathy. From a **mentalising** perspective, there may be something funny in the way the old men harp on about the past, with their frequent use of repetition to stress their repeated fighting, their manliness, and their presence at that pre-eminent Athenian victory, Marathon (πολλὰ δὴ… δὴ καὶ πολύν; ἀνδρικὸν… ἄνδρ'; Μαραθῶνι… Μαραθῶνι). ὅτ' ἦμεν is extraneous, lingering on the event with pointed nostalgia. The frequency with which the Greco-Persian Wars, and the battle of Marathon in particular, are mentioned in Old Comedy, over half a century after the fact, suggests that it was probably a time-worn talking point. [118] The chorus' desire to stress their participation at Marathon is a tired trope.

The contrast between their former and current states is emphasised by the move from active ἐδιώκομεν to passive διωκόμεθα, and the audience's realisation that they must pivot from the martial to legal meaning of the verb in order to **resolve** the **incongruity** is intellectually satisfying and neat.

Not What We Once Were 703-18

τῷ γὰρ εἰκὸϲ ἄνδρα κυφόν, ἡλίκον Θουκυδίδην,

ἐξολέϲθαι ϲυμπλακέντα τῇ ϲκυθῶν ἐρημίᾳ,

τῷδε τῷ Κηφιϲοδήμου, τῷ λάλῳ ξυνηγόρῳ; 705

[117] Inspired by Sommerstein's translation (1980) of 'hotly sue and pursue *us*' (emphasis his).
[118] Ar. *Knights* 781, 1334; *Wasps* 711; Eup. fr. 233; Eup. fr. 106 has a character, possibly representing Miltiades, swear by Marathon. Hermipp. fr. 81 says men honour Marathon by adding fennel (μάραθον) to olives. For further discussion see Hunt (forthcoming).

ὥςτ’ ἐγὼ μὲν ἠλέηςα κἀπεμορξάμην ἰδὼν

ἄνδρα πρεςβύτην ὑπ’ ἀνδρὸς τοξότου κυκώμενον·

ὃς μὰ τὴν Δήμητρ’, ἐκεῖνος ἡνίκ’ ἦν Θουκυδίδης,

οὐδ’ ἂν αὐτὴν τὴν Ἀχαιὰν ῥᾳδίως ἠνέςχετ’ ἄν,

ἀλλὰ κατεπάλαιςε μέντἂν πρῶτον Εὐάθλους δέκα, 710

κατεβόηςε δ’ ἂν κεκραγὼς τοξότας τριςχιλίους,

ὑπερετόξευςεν δ’ ἂν αὐτοὺς τοῦ πατρὸς τοὺς ξυγγενεῖς.

ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴ τοὺς γέροντας οὐκ ἐᾶθ’ ὕπνου τυχεῖν,

ψηφίςαςθε χωρὶς εἶναι τὰς γραφάς, ὅπως ἂν ᾖ

τῷ γέροντι μὲν γέρων καὶ νωδὸς ὁ ξυνήγορος, 715

τοῖς νέοιςι δ’ εὐρύπρωκτος καὶ λάλος χὡ Κλεινίου.

κἀξελαύνειν χρὴ τὸ λοιπόν, κἂν φύγῃ τις ζημιοῦν,

τὸν γέροντα τῷ γέροντι, τὸν νέον δὲ τῷ νέῳ.

How is it reasonable that a hunchbacked man, of Thucydides’ age,

Should be destroyed in the grips of the Scythian desert,

Of that son of Cephisodemus, that babbling public advocate? 705

And so I pitied him, and wiped away a tear when I saw him

That old gentleman shaken up by an archer.

Who, by Demeter, when he was that Thucydides we all knew,

Would not easily have put up with even Achaea herself,

But would have wrestled down ten Euathluses first, 710

And shouted down thirty thousand archers with his cry,

And he’d outshoot that man’s father’s relatives.

But since you won’t let old men sleep,

Decree that lawsuits be separate, so that against an old man

The accuser must be old and toothless too, 715

And against the young must be a wide-arsed and a babbler and Clinias' son.

And from now on, if anyone is accused and faces a fine, we must

Fight the old with the old, and the young with the young.

The final run of tetrameters sees the elderly Thucydides pitted against a younger man, Cephisodemus, who is styled as a Scythian archer.

The disjunct between the extreme senility of Thucydides (not to be confused with the historian of the same name), and the treatment he receives, being vigorously grappled (ϲυμπλακέντα) and shaken (κυκώμενον) is highly **incongruous.** This humour may be at the elderly Thucydides' expense, but Cephisodemus is also a comic target, introduced as a 'Scythian desert' and described as babbling (λάλῳ). The former description suggests foreign extraction, and barbarity, and the description of him as an archer a little later on combines with this to depict the son of Cephisodemus as a member of the group of public slave-archers responsible for enforcing the will of the magistrates and maintaining some aspects of civic order in Athens. As such, the insult suggests both barbarity and slavishness, common avenues of attack in ancient invective.[119]

Line 709 presents some difficulty. Manuscripts give αὐτὴν τὴν Ἀχαιάν, an epithet for Demeter derived from her grief (ἄχοϲ) following the abduction of Persephone,[120] but it is not immediately obvious why Aristophanes should say that, in younger days, Thucydides would not have put up with Demeter Achaia. There have been several proposed emendations to solve this difficulty,[121] although it is uncertain whether the text

[119] Apostolakis (2021) 56-8.
[120] Hdt. 5.61.2; *IG* II^2 5117, 5153; Nic. *Th.* 484-5, Σ 485; Plu. *Mor.* 378e; Hsch. α 8806.
[121] Headlam (1898) proposed αὐτὴν τὴν Ἀγραίαν, a cult title of Artemis; Borthwick (1970) proposed αὐτον Ἀρταχαίαν, a Persian follower of Xerxes and one with a voice suitable for shouting others down; Wilson

has been corrupted at all. Worship of Demeter frequently involved *aischrologia*, ritualised abusive mockery,[122] and the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* seems to function as an aetiology for the presence of ritualised mockery in festivals to Demeter.[123] Iambe's humour in that poem is mocking (πολλὰ παρασκώπτουσ᾽203), and aimed at cheering Demeter from her grief. So too ritualised mockery in festival contexts 'thus served as the necessary complement to the lamentations that reenacted the sorrows of Demeter.'[124] Since her grief (ἄχος) was conceptually tied to abuse and mockery, which resembles the treatment that Cephisodemus doles out to Thucydides in the courtroom, then by invoking Demeter as the Grieving One the chorus leader says that the politician in his youth would not put up with being publicly mocked, even if the mocker was the goddess associated with public mockery herself. From a cognitive perspective, the oath μὰ τὴν Δήμητρ' (708) in the previous line prepares the audience to recognise her in the following line, allowing them to access further associated concepts (i.e. *aischrologia*) quickly.

At 713-8, the chorus put forward a solution to their troubles: age categories which keep the young and the old away from each other in court. While earlier the balance of mockery had leaned a little more towards ridiculing the infirmity of the elderly, here the balance shifts slightly the other way, as we see with the triadic description of young accusers in line 715: εὐρύπρωκτος καὶ λάλος χὠ Κλεινίου. Sexually depraved and verbally

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(2007) 30 proposes αὐτὸν τὸν Ἀνάχαρσιν, a Scythian king; Austin (2002) 73-4 argues for an idea put forward by Sir Denys Page in his lectures – that αὐτὴν τὴν Ἀχαίαν is not the direct object of the verb but an oath intensifying the μὰ τὴν Δήμητρ' of the previous line; Petrides (2010) proposes αὐτὴν τὴν Ἀφαίαν, a goddess worshipped on Aegina. Capra (2019) has proposed a significant textual emendation of τὴν Ἀχαιὰν to τὴν Χίμαιραν, on the grounds that the two are visually similar in capitals – even more so if Ἀχαιά was originally spelt with two iotas, as in Herodotus (5.61.11), since iota and rho are often confused in capital form – and since the Chimera is depicted in the *Iliad* as ἀμαιμακέτη (5.161) it makes a fitting adversary for Thucydides to overcome, who accordingly resembles a heroic Bellerophon.

[122] As in the festivals of: the Stenia, *IG* ii[2] 674.6-8, Hsch. S.v. Στήνια and Στηνιῶσαι; Haloa, see Σ Luc. *Dial. Meretr.* 7.4; Thesmophoria, see Apollod. 1.5.1, *Th.* 792, *Ra.* 390; Eleusinian Mysteries, where veiled figures called *gephuristai* hurled insults at initiates crossing the Cephisus river, for which see Hsch. s.v. Γεφυρίς and Γεφυρισταί, Strabo 9.1.24, and for discussion Halliwell (2008) 169-71, *V.* 1361-3.

[123] *HHDem* 198-205. Rosen (2007) 44-9.

[124] McClure (1999) 51.

incontinent, this depiction culminates in a reference to Alcibiades, already famous and later to become a fairly frequent *komoidoumenos*.[125]

The final two lines sum up their suggestion and allude to the proverb that only like can be driven out by like, similar to the English phrase ‘to fight fire with fire’. Indeed, Aristophanes seems to be quite fond of ending a parabasis with a catchphrase, either an idiom or a well-known quotation, which he has radically transformed by putting it in a new context.[126]

5. Conclusions

Aristophanes the character speaks, through his coryphaeus, about the didactic potential of his art form, and styles himself as a subversive speaker of harsh truths. The backlash he apparently faced as a result of his presentation of Athenian imperial power in *Babylonians* put him in the perfect position to do this. On the other hand, the disavowal of flattery, the tough love tactic, is itself a rhetorical move, and throughout the parabasis this ‘anti-rhetorical proclamation is explicitly and comically framed as a deceptive and distorted exaggeration.’[127]

In particular, the frequency with which ambiguity and **incongruity** is present in the poet’s claims to justice and didacticism seem designed to call attention to the poetic persona’s inadequacies. For example, when Aristophanes plays with the dual meanings of διδάσκειν, as ‘teach’ and as ‘produce a play’,[128] this scrutiny invites the viewer to disambiguate the word’s associations. The audience is called upon to decouple didacticism from drama. On the back of a long run of hints and suggestions that this delusional and

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[125] Ar. frr. 205.5-6, 244; *Wasps* 44-5; Eup. *Baptai* test. iii-iv, vi; fr. 171; Pherecr. fr. 164.
[126] Cf. *Frogs*’ use of the idiom από αξιου ξυλου; *Eq.* 609-10 uses a common merism (‘by land or sea’), also found in Timocreon (fr. 8 Bergk).
[127] Hesk (2000) 271.
[128] *Ach.* 658.

deceptive comic persona has no particular claim to justice or wisdom, his role as διδάσκαλος is in fact so fundamentally problematised that the poet seems even to be calling attention to the assumption that a dramatic teacher teaches anything at all.

Flops and Fops

Elder Abuse in *Knights*

In stark contrast to the delusionally big-headed figure in *Acharnians*, the poetic persona of *Knights* is excessively cautious. In particular, here Aristophanes the prodigy harbours a particular anxiety: that the passage of time is not always kind. The anapaests show the persona taking a unique stance towards other poets which is not confrontational, but rather feigns pity. This allows for a particular triangulation between the audience, Aristophanes' predecessors (and rival) and his poetic persona: the audience is blamed, the predecessors pitied and mocked indirectly, and the poetic persona affects prudence while simultaneously showing himself up as overly timid.

In the epirrhematic syzygy, the hippic class attempt indirect self-praise by eulogising their fathers and horses, but manage only an ambivalent *apologia* which highlights their dandyish tendencies. In the epirrhema, the eulogy of their fathers could be taken by some as a straight-forwardly feel-good description of that generation's bravery, while at the same time references to effeminacy and self-indulgent grooming habits may have appealed to a less aristocratic audience member as mockery at the knights' expense.

In the antepirrhema, the collision of cavalry **script** with navy **script** drives much of the humour, and again sustains the ambivalence of the knights' presentation. The implicit comparison between cavalry and navy can be seen as an indirect critique of the knights, who are much less useful to military tactics of the era. Alternatively, it can be seen as glorifying the hippic class by presenting them as a counterpart to the navy and by referring to their one successful battle to date (Solygeia).

1. Aristophanes Takes the Helm

With only *Banqueters*, *Babylonians* and *Acharnians* under his belt so far, Aristophanes is still a relative newcomer to the comic stage at the time of *Knights*, as he is keen to remind his audience. In particular, in this parabasis the poet makes much of this play as his first production where he played the role of producer. He suggests that the delay was born of prudent caution, since a poet must undergo a theatrical *cursus honorum* before taking on the most difficult of jobs (κωμῳδοδιδασκαλία).

This claim is made particularly at 541-4 where the poet describes a comic playwright's steps to becoming a producer as like working one's way up through various ranks on board a ship. The image is central to the debate surrounding the question of Aristophanes' 'apprenticeship'.[1] This debate questions whether the depictions of Aristophanes as a rower in *Knights* and a ventriloquist in *Wasps* refer to a truly anonymous stage in Aristophanes' career, and whether the first two or three plays of Aristophanes were thought of as his work or his producer's. Since this matter is important to understanding the stance of the poetic persona here in the *Knights* anapaests, I briefly consider the questions here and argue that Aristophanes was always publicly known as the author of his plays. The possibility that poets sometimes contributed anonymously to the plays of others cannot be excluded, but the process also cannot be reliably modelled given the elliptic nature of the references to the practice, which seem to constitute a generic trope and which are often couched in metaphorical terms. It is safer and more productive to consider how each autobiographical reference serves a particular purpose of characterisation in each play. In this play, the result is the creation of a purposeful comic stance of timidity, as the poetic persona suggests that he was purposefully hiding his light under a bushel before, in fear of the fickle Athenian *demos*.

[1] See note 42 in the previous chapter.

The 'apprenticeship' debates revolve largely around these parabatic passages:

1) *Acharnians* 628-9: the poet claims that since the time he organised choruses, he has 'not yet' (οὔπω) stepped forward to say he is clever. These lines imply that the poet is not new to the game.
2) *Knights* 541-4: in defending his decision to start producing his own plays only with this play in 424, the poet reasons that in the navy one must first be a rower, then be a ship boy and look out for gales, before captaining a ship.
3) *Clouds* 528-31: the poet claims that he gave up an early play (understood to be *Banqueters*), metaphorically represented as a baby, to be raised by another, because he was a maiden (παρθένος) and it was not allowed for him yet to bear a child (κοὐκ ἐξῆν πώ μοι τεκεῖν).
4) *Wasps* 1018-22: the poet claims that he helped other poets secretly (κρύβδην), in the manner of Eurycles, a sort of ventriloquist, pouring forth comic lines from the mouths of others, before 'harnessing his own Muses' mouths'.

MacDowell proposed and long championed a two-stage account of Aristophanes' career, whereby when *Banqueters, Babylonians* and *Acharnians* were produced by Callistratus, another now-lost play of Aristophanes was possibly produced by Philonides,[2] and it was Callistratus the producer who was widely famed for the creation of the plays, while Aristophanes was little known.[3] This model does not, however, comfortably account for *Knights* 512-13, in which the coryphaeus is made to claim many people (πολλούς 512) have been asking him why he did not ask for a chorus (i.e. produce) 'long ago' (πάλαι 513). This surely suggests he was publicly known as the poet of his previous plays, at least by the time of *Knights*. MacDowell conjectures that the city had come to know of his

[2] Possibly Philonides produced another, now lost play of Aristophanes in the period 427-425: Halliwell (1980) 44-5, Welsh (1983).
[3] MacDowell (1982, 1995, 2004).

authorship before *Knights* because scripts of Aristophanes' plays, complete with by-lines, began to circulate.[4] However, if *Knights* really was the first play to be officially connected to Aristophanes, and which revealed or at least publicly asserted for the first time that *Banqueters, Babylonians* and *Acharnians* were the work not of Callistratus, as previously held, but of Aristophanes, then it does so with surprisingly little fanfare. Rather, the emphasis in *Knights* is on the fact that producing is a new challenge to Aristophanes, but his authorship of earlier plays is merely alluded to in passing at *Knights* 512-3, as a premise for his defensive speech. This presentation surely suggests that his authorship was already ubiquitously known, not a piece of information that had recently and presumably only partially made its way around the city by word of mouth or circulation of scripts.

The most popular explanation of these passages is the three-stage account, as argued by Mastromarco and Halliwell.[5] By this model, in the first phase Aristophanes first contributed anonymously to the plays of others, which corresponds to the secret (κρύβδην) ventriloquism image of *Wasps* 1018, and presumably the rower phase of the ranks as recounted in *Knights* 541-4. In the second phase he wrote his own plays, but had them produced by others, corresponding to the foster baby-*Banqueters* as depicted in *Clouds* 528-31, and the second rung of the naval ladder in *Knights* 543. In the third and final phase of his career, from *Knights* onwards, he produced on his own behalf,[6] corresponding to the captaining of a ship in *Knights* 544 and the harnessing of his own Muses' mouths at *Wasps* 1022. This account explains well the sense of anonymity implied by κρύβδην, and the idea that before composing a whole play one might try one's hand at contributing to the work of another seems sensible.[7] There is no obvious fault in this interpretation, but the early stage

[4] MacDowell (1982) 25-6.
[5] Mastromarco (1979) 160-3, Halliwell (1980) 35-6.
[6] For the most part; *Wasps*, *Amphiaraus* and *Frogs* were apparently directed by Philonides, and *Birds* by Callistratus: *V.* Hyp. I. 30, *Av.* Hyp. IV, *Ra.* Hyp. IC (Dover). *Proagon*, often attributed to Aristophanes, was said to have been put on by Philonides in *V.* Hyp. I. 30-2.
[7] Halliwell (1980) 43: this 'may have been an established way of encouraging new dramatists'.

of anonymous contribution to the word(s) of another cannot be certain, since references to an early stage of inter-authorial collaboration are generally couched in metaphorical terms: as rowing, as ventriloquism or gifting.[8] Moreover, the passages in *Knights* and *Wasps* are trying to emphasise the length of the service Aristophanes has paid to the city, and the thanklessness and lack of recognition of the early stages. This overt rhetorical motive alerts a reader or audience member to the fact that his comedic CV as narrated over the course of the parabases is no dispassionate report. Mastromarco and Halliwell's three-stage model is appealing, but not fully certain.

Another noteworthy interpretation is that of Brockmann.[9] Brockmann takes *Wasps* 1018, where Aristophanes talks about secretly assisting other poets, to refer to the period in which Aristophanes wrote *Banqueters, Babylonians* and *Acharnians*, but had them produced by another man. By his account, the ventriloquist image in *Wasps* is an 'ironisches Understatement';[10] that is, Aristophanes was already known as the poet, but understates the recognition he held at that point. MacDowell responds that ironic understatement is not at home in the speech of the poetic persona of the parabasis.[11] That may be broadly true, but in fact, if Brockmann is correct and Aristophanes was from the start well-known as the poet of the plays, the ventriloquist image understates his public recognition, not his talent. The metaphor suggests control of the words of the plays, no small matter. To exaggerate the lack of public recognition which Aristophanes experienced before producing is, if anything, a criticism of those around him, and emphasises the poetic ability that allowed him to rise from such an undervalued position. This in itself could be considered a comic stance, as the persona manipulates the narrative to make himself seem

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[8] *Eq.* 542; *V.* 1018; Eupolis' claim in fr. 89 to have written *Knights* and given it 'to Baldie' (i.e. Aristophanes) could well refer to collaboration in the early stages of Eupolis' career.
[9] Brockmann (2003) 202-77.
[10] Brockmann (2003) 251.
[11] MacDowell (2004) 449.

undervalued. If this was, as Brockmann suspects, at odds with his actual reception by the city, then the persona is being obviously disingenuous.[12] Finally, it is worth noting that the ventriloquist image can be read, not as understatement, but as straightforward and typically parabatic boasting: Eurycles' ability was clearly something of a wonder.[13]

Scholars try to get a two- or three-stage account to adhere to the words of these parabases because they are hesitant to say that Aristophanes could be misrepresenting something which was public knowledge.[14] But in fact, the way in which a character-constructed **world** diverges from the real **world** can in fact be a source of humour. That is, the audience of *Wasps* may well have remembered that Aristophanes, the supposedly anonymous ventriloquist, had in fact been well known as the author of *Banqueters*, *Babylonians* and *Acharnians* at the time. The audience (or early reader) of the revised *Clouds* may well have been aware that *Banqueters* was also publicly known as Aristophanes' work, at odds with the story of abandonment and adoption found in the parabasis. They would, therefore, recognise the disparity between the **world** the persona conjures up (in which he toiled unrecognised) and the real **world** (in which the poet was well known). They might judge through **mentalising** that this disparity indicates that the poetic persona is purposefully distorting the narrative to make himself pitiable and commendable, or that he has such a persecution complex that he has genuinely forgotten his past fame. Either way, it is possible that Aristophanes' CV as presented in the parabases purposefully and significantly diverges from the known truth of the matter for comic ends.

The safest ground, therefore, is to consider what each individual passage recounting the poet's past career is trying to achieve within the context of its individual

[12] For my take on disingenuousness as a driver of humour, see page 21.
[13] Pl. *Sph.* 252c calls Eurycles ἄτοπος; at *V.* 1019 Eurycles' abilities are described positively as μαντείαν καὶ διάνοιαν 'the prophetic skill and faculty'.
[14] Halliwell (1980) 33 'I both work with and hope to justify the principle that Aristophanic disingenuousness does not normally operate where hard facts of chronology, law and theatrical conditions are concerned.'

play; to do otherwise 'risks selling short the poet's creative license, while underestimating the audience's ability to interpret passages and scenarios'.[15] In *Wasps*, the ventriloquism passage stresses that the poet has toiled for the city for some time, initially without recognition, and therefore contributes to the analogy drawn explicitly later, between Aristophanes and Heracles, who both toil for the good of another.[16] In *Clouds*, the image of the 'maiden' poet stresses his youth and modesty. What, then, is the effect of the autobiography constructed in *Knights*?

2. An Abundance of Caution

In *Acharnians*, I argued, poetic incompetence was an important theme of the parabasis, as the poet's words backfired against him to such an extent as to call into question the legitimacy of calling poets διδάσκαλοι. Between that parabasis and the one in *Knights* there is both continuity and variation in this regard. Poetic incompetence continues to be suggested, but the figure of the poet changes from one with supreme confidence in their didactic ability and wisdom, to one suddenly cautious, aware of his vulnerability at the hands of the fickle public. This is a marked divergence from the bravado and egotism of *Acharnians.* The change in the characterisation of the poetic persona is not as jarring as it could be, since it fits into an overarching story with its own logic. The author of *Acharnians* had a short but strong track record as a poet; a rising star with justified confidence. With *Knights*, the poet is displaying a new skill (production) for public scrutiny, and he is no longer ascendant, but ascended. There is now nowhere to go but down, and an understandable anxiety about the ephemerality of success and status creeps in.

[15] Biles (2023) 422.
[16] See pages 179, 183.

Of course, this narrative is constructed by the poet. It may or may not reflect how the historical Aristophanes felt, but it is the poet's choice to tell this overarching story across parabases, and this choice must have been taken with some thematic and tonal purposes in mind.[17] There is more, therefore, to be said. For one thing, the poet may have purposefully varied the mood of his parabatic persona, while keeping the character consistent, for the sake of keeping things fresh. This continuity of characterisation and simultaneous variation of tone is well illustrated in *Wasps* and *Peace*, too. The parabases of these plays contain a section repeated almost verbatim, yet vary wildly in tone: the poetic persona of *Wasps* is vituperative and indignant, the poet of *Peace* jubilant.[18]

As well as a desire for variation in tone to keep things fresh, the theme of age and decline is apt to be brought into the parabasis because it is of key importance to the play as a whole. The senility of the character Demus allows Aristophanes to criticise the Athenian populace, represented by this figure, as easily led and lacking proper judgement. At the same time, the flaws this image suggests turn out ultimately to be inessential and reversible. Just as Demus is rejuvenated when he starts to favour Agoracritus over his previous slave-advisers, so too, the underlying logic suggests, the Athenian democracy can return to good judgement if it stops heeding the politicians it currently favours. Agoracritus' fresh blood and youth are instrumental in this,[19] and the poet is presented in parallel as relatively young and new on the scene. Connections between the protagonist and parabatic persona are common in Aristophanes,[20] and here the connections between the two solidify the sense that both are young and ascendant, represent a positive change

[17] Biles (2023) 419: 'the objective of disentangling hard facts often appears at odds with the targeted literary effect, which seems rather to be a sort of rhetorical impressionism that coerces sympathy, admiration, and faith, undergirded always by expansive humor, in the patently self-serving poetic biography that typically lies at the heart of an Aristophanic parabasis.'
[18] See chapter five below.
[19] His return on stage is heralded at 611 with an address to him as νεανικώτατε.
[20] See page 45 for the connection between Dicaeopolis and poet, and 199-200 for Trygaeus. Bowie (1982) sounded the call to explore meaningfully the interrelation of parabasis and play at large, largely on the basis of the connections between the poet and his protagonists.

for the city, stand against the current abuse of the elderly and infirm, and have a difficult task ahead of them.

While the poetic persona and protagonist share these attributes, they differ in their relationship to the Athenian populace. Agoracritus will ultimately help and rejuvenate the elderly Demus, who symbolises the people. Meanwhile, the Aristophanic persona has an antagonistic attitude towards the theatre audience, criticising them for their fickleness towards different elderly figures: that of older comic playwrights. This positioning allows Aristophanes to mock the audience for their inconstancy,[21] and the *faux* pity he shows for other poets occasions targeted mockery at their expense. As for the figure cut by the poetic persona himself, his suggestion that a new poet ought to go through stages of apprenticeship is designed to stress the poet's relative youth and his shrewd caution. For the **mentalising** audience member there also lurks underneath the surface the suggestion that the poet has acted not cautiously but timidly, as his self-justification shades into defensiveness.

3. Well-Kept Horsemen

The hippic class too can be seen as defending themselves in the epirrhematic syzygy. In particular, it seems that in the preceding years, Cleon had clashed with the knights,[22] and the parabatic speeches here can be seen as a rebuttal to the kind of accusations that he may have brought against the knights: that the cavalry was ineffective, economically burdensome, cowardly, and engaged in luxurious, dissolute living.

[21] See on 518-9 below.
[22] Σ *Eq.* 225 claims that the knights were hostile to Cleon because when he was a member of that corps he treated them badly. Cleon may have been responsible for or simply associated with newly levied εἰσφοραί which fell most heavily upon the rich, and so were likely to upset the aristocratic knights: Bugh (1988) 108-9. Cleon apparently lost five ill-gotten talents because of the knights: *Ach.* 6-8 with scholia and Carawan (1990).

Although an aristocratic class bracket called *hippeis* existed from Solon's time, their role in war prior to the Peloponnesian War is uncertain. It is possible that, until some point after the Greco-Persian Wars, *hippeis* did not fight from atop their horses, but rode to battle before dismounting and fighting as regular hoplites.[23] However, most scholars currently believe that Athens did have a cavalry, as in a force that fought from horseback, from the Archaic period and throughout the fifth century.[24] It is noteworthy, then, that the cavalry seemingly played no decisive part in any battle until that of Solygeia in 425.[25] In this battle, alluded to in *Knights*' parabasis at 604-10, the Athenian cavalry were apparently highly effective only because the opposing forces had no cavalry at all.[26]

A cost-benefit analysis of the cavalry may have been taking place in Athenian politics at the time. This branch of the army had no great achievements to point towards before Solygeia, and was financially supported by the state, in the form of an establishment loan (κατάϲταϲιϲ) of up to 1200 drachmae for each *hippeus* to pay for his horse.[27] Although the upkeep of a horse, slave groom and a horse for this slave would have greatly exceeded the pay provided to each *hippeus* by the state,[28] and each was required to pay back their establishment loan on retirement,[29] nevertheless this portion of the army may have been perceived as an economic burden, as indeed may be suggested by a fragment of Theopompus.

A scholium on *Knights*, citing Theopompus, says that Cleon ἐπετέθη τῇ πολιτείᾳ ('attacked the constitution') in anger at the cavalry. [30] Fornara has argued that this was a faulty paraphrase by the scholiast of Theopompus' ἐπετέθη τῇ καταϲτάϲει, with καταϲτάϲιϲ

[23] Helbig (1902); Hdt. 6.112.2 tells us no cavalry fought at the Battle of Marathon.
[24] Bugh (1988) 4-13, Spence (1993) 9-10, Van Wees (2013) 74.
[25] Th. 4.42-4.
[26] Th. 4.44.
[27] Lys. 16.6-7, Eup. fr. 293, Pl. Com. fr. 181.
[28] Probably one drachma wage and a higher than average grain allowance of four obols: Mihajlov (2022) 53. Their wage was reduced to four obols in around 403: Lysias *Against Theozotides*, frr. 128-150 (Carey).
[29] Pritchard (2018) 8.
[30] *FGrH* 115 F 93 = Σ *Eq.* 226a.

intended to carry the specific meaning of the equipment loan money to which the knights had been entitled,[31] but taken by the scholiast in its more common meaning of 'constitution', and subsequently glossed with a synonym of this latter sense. If indeed Cleon was attempting to decrease their equipment money and diminish their public status at this time, then the coryphaeus-knight's speeches in the syzygy can be understood as a response to this, and to any insults or arguments that may have been used in support of this decrease in κατάcταcιc.

The same scholia tells us that Cleon accused the knights of desertion (κατηγόρηcε γὰρ αὐτῶν ὡc λειποcτρατούντων), hoping to stoke hostility towards the cavalry by painting them in an ignoble light.[32] This may have played upon a widespread perception of knights as cowards: given their elevated position and the fact that cavalry often functioned more as a deterrent than an active force in battle, the role likely was far more secure, and resentment towards them a natural result. Indeed, in a speech of Lysias, the speaker claims that everyone thinks that knights are safe, while hoplites are in danger, and that some men even tried to join the cavalry without passing through the necessary checks for this very reason.[33] Of course, this is not to say that everyone thought of knights as cowards; those among or sympathetic to the hippic class no doubt saw them very differently.[34] Nevertheless, outside of these people, less flattering associations with the cavalry existed.

Finally, the criticism of knights as pampered and effeminate, was common. Young men from this group were often noted for their long hair, and this visual symbol acquired various connotations.[35] For the wearer, it probably denoted freedom and luxury,[36] but

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[31] Fornara (1973).
[32] Carawan (1990) 143.
[33] Lys. 16.13.
[34] A funerary stele in the Ceramicus, for example, proudly depicts one Dexileus in his role as a cavalryman: *CAT* 2.209 (Clairmont).
[35] MacDowell (1971) 197, Gad (1993) 76-103.
[36] Short hair was associated with slavery: Σ *Th.* 838c. Phidippides' long hair goes hand in hand with his expensive equestrian habit: *Nu.* 14-16. It is interesting that Semonides' description of the woman like a mare

which the less wealthy associated with effeminacy, passive homosexuality,[37] and even pro-Spartan sentiment.[38] Because long hair could be seen as signalling high status, sometimes deceptively, growing hair could be seen as indicative of aspirations exceeding your social status, and to say that someone grew their hair long could signal haughtiness or lofty aspirations.[39] It is particularly these connotations of arrogance and effeminacy against which the coryphaeus pushes back at the end of the epirrhema: 'Do not begrudge it if we grow our hair long and wear tiaras' (580).

So dissolute luxury, cowardice, economic burden and military ineffectuality are, we can surmise, charges against which the coryphaeus is defending his demographic in the epirrhematic syzygy. It is tempting to read these speeches in *Knights* as straightforward eulogy, especially given that the knights seem aligned with the poet against his arch-enemy, Cleon.[40] But in fact, like other demographics represented in Aristophanic parabases, these speakers are as much to be laughed at as laughed with. Some sections of the speech seem to vindicate the cavalry, while other elements are damning. In particular, Lech reads the playfully absurd depiction of horses as members of the navy in the antepirrhema as unintentionally undermining, since it draws attention to the ideological divide between these two military branches, and draws a comparison that can hardly be flattering for the horsemen, whose one victory in battle is vastly outnumbered by the achievements of Athens' navy. In the preceding epirrhema, the coryphaeus at times seems to confirm the perception of knights as effeminate, and indeed, even the wrestling

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shares the knights' preference for long haired and concern for grooming oneself (Semon. 7.57-70). In these aspects the knights seem to present themselves as sharing traits with their horses.

[37] *V.* 1067-70, 1101; Com. Adesp. 12, 13, 14; Platter (1996).

[38] Hdt. 1.82.7-8; *Nu.* 685-91 and *V.* 464-76 portray Amynias as cowardly, effeminate, and pro-Sparta.

[39] *V.* 545, 1317; Hdt. 5.71.

[40] Hubbard (1991) 83 'we see their martial courage defended… in this syzygy'; Sommerstein (1981) 4: 'The Knights can claim, too, that they and their fathers have performed services to Athens, some of them very recent, that are at least as meritorious as those of Cleon even supposing the latter were genuine (565-580, 595-610). For much of the play the chorus constitute our only ground for hope that there is anything healthy in the Athenian body politic.'

metaphor at 571-3 can be read as undermining, as it exemplifies their athleticism while also suggesting to the **mentalising** audience member an offhand attitude to warfare as a sort of game which only a relatively safe fighter could hold. This attitude could be called, appropriately, cavalier.

4. Parabasis

Go, Rejoicing 498-506

ἀλλ' ἴθι χαίρων, καὶ πράξειας
κατὰ νοῦν τὸν ἐμόν, καί cε φυλάττοι
Ζεὺc ἀγοραῖοc· καὶ νικήcαc 500
αὖθιc ἐκεῖθεν πάλιν ὡc ἡμᾶc
ἔλθοιc cτεφάνοιc κατάπαcτοc.
ὑμεῖc δ' ἡμῖν προcέχετε τὸν νοῦν
τοῖc ἀναπαίcτοιc,
ὦ παντοίαc ἤδη Μούcηc 505
πειραθέντεc καθ' ἑαυτούc.

Then go and farewell, and may you manage
As I intend you to, and may Zeus of the marketplace
Defend you: and once you've won 500
May you come back here to us
Again, sprinkled with garlands.
But you lot, pay attention to
Our anapaests,
Oh you who've tried out the varied 505

Muse in your own right.

The parabasis of *Knights* follows the full seven-part structure found in the first four extant plays, beginning with a *kommation* which heralds the start of the anapaests and bids farewell to the departing characters. The invocation of Zeus of the marketplace is suited to the protagonist in his profession as a vendor. The chorus hope that the Sausage-Seller will be victorious over Paphlagon/Cleon, and that he will return 'sprinkled' (κατάπαστος) with garlands. This word is usually used of liquids, and so suggests an abundant stream of garlands. It is perhaps meant to evoke the image of effusive praise much as κατάρδων at *Ach.* 658 does.[41]

The address to the audience as παντοίας ἤδη Μούσης | πειραθέντες καθ' ἑαυτούς (505-6) contrasts the inveterate, experienced audience, with the poet as a relative newcomer; καθ' ἑαυτούς is echoed in the description of the poet at 513, where it is wondered why he has not yet demanded a chorus of his own.

Reticent Poet 507-19

εἰ μέν τις ἀνὴρ τῶν ἀρχαίων κωμῳδοδιδάσκαλος ἡμᾶς
ἠνάγκαζεν λέξοντας ἔπη πρὸς τὸ θέατρον παραβῆναι,
οὐκ ἂν φαύλως ἔτυχεν τούτου· νῦν δ' ἄξιός ἐσθ' ὁ ποητής,
ὅτι τοὺς αὐτοὺς ἡμῖν μισεῖ τολμᾷ τε λέγειν τὰ δίκαια, 510
καὶ γενναίως πρὸς τὸν Τυφῶ χωρεῖ καὶ τὴν ἐριώλην.
ἃ δὲ θαυμάζειν ὑμῶν φησιν πολλοὺς αὐτῷ προσιόντας
καὶ βασανίζειν, ὡς οὐχὶ πάλαι χορὸν αἰτοίη καθ' ἑαυτόν,
ἡμᾶς ὑμῖν ἐκέλευε φράσαι περὶ τούτου. φησὶ γὰρ ἀνὴρ

[41] See page 67 for this image as parody of Pindaric praise.

οὐχ ὑπ’ ἀνοίας τοῦτο πεπονθὼς διατρίβειν, ἀλλὰ νομίζων 515

κωμῳδοδιδασκαλίαν εἶναι χαλεπώτατον ἔργον ἁπάντων·

πολλῶν γὰρ δὴ πειρασάντων αὐτὴν ὀλίγοις χαρίσασθαι·

ὑμᾶς τε πάλαι διαγιγνώσκων ἐπετείους τὴν φύσιν ὄντας

καὶ τοὺς προτέρους τῶν ποιητῶν ἅμα τῷ γήρᾳ προδιδόντας·

If any comedy creator of the previous generations 507

Forced us to step forward towards the theatre to speak lines,

He would not have had an easy job of it: but now the poet is a worthy one,

Because he hates the same people as us, and dares to speak what is right, 510

And goes nobly against Typhon and the whirlwind.

As for the thing which he says, many of you approach him, amazed about it,

And grill him about, the fact that he did not demand a chorus of his own ages ago,

He bid us to tell you about this. For the man says

That he didn’t let the time slip by out of folly, but because he considers 515

Creating comedy plays to be the most difficult of all tasks:

Many indeed make a pass at her, but she grants favours to just a few.

And he realised long ago your nature changes by the year

And that you betray previous poets along with their old age. 519

In these lines, there is great continuity with the autobiographical section of the *Acharnians* parabasis: the chorus show a distaste for stepping forward to praise poets in general (508-

9, cf. *Ach.* 628-32),[42] the poet is described as ἄξιος (509, cf. *Ach.* 633) and shown to be a brave speaker of harsh truths (510, cf. *Ach.* 645).

What is new to the constructed autobiography of the anapaests here is that the intra-narrative identity of the chorus seems to be retained.[43] The chorus-leader says the poet 'hates the same people as us' (510), which in context suggests Cleon, Aristophanes' nemesis, and the antagonist of the play at large. The knights enter the play calling for Cleon to be beaten (247), and this striking first impression renders their hostility a dominant aspect of their characterisation. This aspect of their character also probably dramatizes a historical political antagonism between the cavalry and Cleon, as discussed in section three above.

The claim that an ἀρχαῖος poet would not so easily have compelled the knights to speak calls for the audience to engage in **mentalising** in a way that is multi-levelled and playful. Within the dramatic illusion of the play, the coryphaeus is a knight, speaking apparently of his own volition on behalf of the poet, as implied by his commendation at 509-511. At the same time, this very speech is a creation of the poet, the knight a puppet to a poet ventriloquist. There is a certain wry irony and self-interest in the way Aristophanes ventriloquises the knights to have them claim personal interest in defending the poet.

Their final reason for supporting Aristophanes, that he 'goes nobly against Typhon and the whirlwind', picks up their earlier description of Cleon as Charybdis (248) during their first introduction.[44] As well as presenting Cleon as an inhuman destructive force, this configures Aristophanes' resistance to him as a heroic act.[45] In fact, he implies his

[42] As already noted, this reluctance gestures towards the offensive nature of unchecked self-praise: Spatharas (2011). παραβαίνω carries a sense of moral transgression as well as its spatial sense: Biles (2011) 12-55.
[43] For discussion of the retention or abandonment of intra-narrative choral identity in the parabases, see section 6 of my chapter on *Frogs*.
[44] The same identification of Cleon with Typhon is found in later plays: *V.* 1033 = *Pax* 756; Telò (2014).
[45] Typhon was a chthonic monster (Hes. *Th.* 820-69), whose revolt was quashed by Zeus (A. *Pr.* 353-74), and who was confined to Tartarus (Hes. *Th.* 868) or beneath Aetna (A. *Pr.* 365-7; Pi. *P.* 1. 15-28).

achievements are on a par with Zeus', a comparison that a more righteous poet surely would avoid.[46]

Aristophanes goes on to relate, through his mouthpiece the knight-coryphaeus, an apparently common occurrence: many approach him to question why he has not yet produced his own plays. As with so many events narrated in Aristophanic parabases, the historicity is unverifiable, and the inclusion of it a conscious poetic decision. Therefore, we should focus on it as a literary construction which serves the characterisation of the poetic persona. This is not to say that the text bears no relation to historical fact; it seems likely that when the comic playwrights bent the truth, it would have been small changes, or, if they were glaring, they likely served some comic purpose recognisable to the audience. When it comes to the question here of how Aristophanes constructs the narrative of his own career, his description serves several artistic ends: the poetic persona characterises himself as sagely cautious, the audience as fickle and uncaring, his predecessors as pathetic and played-out. The text, however, also generates humour through suggestions of the persona's underlying timidity and incompetence and with the backfiring of the insults that target the audience.

The poetic persona claims he is approached by multiple people, who marvel (θαυμάζειν 512) at his never before having produced, and demand an explanation. The hypothetical situation the poet constructs here is obviously flattering, as he is apparently approached by many (πολλοὺς 512) fans with an interest in his taking up the helm. Implied by the anecdote is the idea that greater fame or rewards await those who compose and also produce their own plays, and the run of the passage suggests even that a poet who does not produce his plays is unknown, and not subject to the abuse and abandonment that

[46] Pi. *I.* 5.14: μὴ μάτευε Ζεὺς γενέσθαι; Callimachus denies that anyone can even sing of Zeus' deeds (*Jov.* 92-3): τεὰ δ' ἔργματα τίς κεν ἀείδοι;οὐ γένετ', οὐκ ἔσται·

Magnes, Cratinus and Crates suffer. As I have argued, the consistent characterisation of the poetic persona across his first plays weighs heavily against this idea. Aristophanes' reticence must therefore to some extent be a poetic stance, and in this case the striking impression is of a poet who is fearful, out of touch and perhaps even lazy.

The persona excuses his reticence by saying that he did not waste time out of folly but because he considered comedy production to be the hardest task of all (515-6). On a superficial level, this is a fine justification. However, the fact that διατρίβειν is the only non-participle verb in this justification makes it the only action, and hence the οὐχ seems to govern only ὑπ' ἀνοίας, otherwise the participle νομίζων has no main verb to modify. In short, a closer look at the language suggests that Aristophanes does not deny wasting time. The verb διατρίβειν (515) can simply mean to spend one's time, but frequently seems to carry the sense of unnecessary prevarication or hindrance.[47] Moreover, the difficulty of κωμῳδοδιδασκαλία is the persona's perception of it (νομίζων 515): although 515-16 is intended by the persona as a reflection on the essential nature of the task, it could also be taken as an indication of the poet's own (lack of) aptitude.

His estimation of the audience as ἐπετείους τὴν φύσιν ὄντας is also a comic beat where the words can be understood on two levels. Intended as an insult to the inconstant audience – and insults directed at the audience are frequent parabatic occurrences – the particular choice of ἐπετείους is humorously apt, since in fact 'liable to change by the year' is an accurate description of how the verdict of the annual dramatic festival competitions is intended to be, and so suggests the poetic persona's dismay is a result of the dramatic competitions functioning optimally. This joke, that one is affronted by the inconstancy of the audience, is not unique to Aristophanes,[48] and a **mentalising** audience

[47] *LSJ* A. II.2, 2b, 3, III. E.g. οὐ μὴ διατρίψεις; *Ra.* 462.
[48] Cratinus fr. 25: ἐτήσιοι γὰρ πρόσιτ' ἀεὶ πρὸς τὴν τέχνην.

member would recognise the comic playwright as out of touch with the mechanisms of his own profession. His stark accusation that the audience betray their poets when the poets reach old age uses strong language to sharpen this sense of the persona's indignation.

All Out Magnes 520-25

τοῦτο μὲν εἰδὼϲ ἅπαθε Μάγνηϲ ἅμα ταῖϲ πολιαῖϲ κατιούϲαιϲ, 520
ὃϲ πλεῖϲτα χορῶν τῶν ἀντιπάλων νίκηϲ ἔϲτηϲε τροπαῖα·
πάϲαϲ δ' ὑμῖν φωνὰϲ ἱεὶϲ καὶ ψάλλων καὶ πτερυγίζων
καὶ λυδίζων καὶ ψηνίζων καὶ βαπτόμενοϲ βατραχείοιϲ
οὐκ ἐξήρκεϲεν, ἀλλὰ τελευτῶν ἐπὶ γήρωϲ οὐ γὰρ ἐφ' ἥβηϲ,
ἐξεβλήθη πρεϲβύτηϲ ὤν, ὅτι τοῦ ϲκώπτειν ἀπελείφθη· 525

For he knows what Magnes went through when his grey hairs came out, 520
He who stood the most trophies of victory of his chorus over his rivals.
He sent out for you his full voice, and plucking and growing wings
And becoming Lydian and becoming a wasp and being dyed frog-green
He was not enough, but growing old, for he was not in his youth,
While an old man he was thrown aside, because he lost his mockery. 525

As Spelman points out, the narrative Aristophanes presents of his notable predecessors, while overtly aimed at illustrating the fickleness of the Athenian public, and at their awful treatment of previous poets, also creates a periodisation of Old Comedy which makes Aristophanes the heir to their better impulses, and simultaneously an improvement upon them.[49]

[49] Spelman (2021).

The description of Magnes is difficult to check against historical fact, since so little remains of his work. A scholium on the passage links each verb with a particular play of his, but these could easily be fabrications to explain the lines at hand;[50] only *Lydians* is externally corroborated. The epigraphic evidence seems to record at least two wins for Magnes,[51] although one would think the description of him as standing many more triumphs than his opponents would imply further victories no longer known to us.

A great emphasis is placed on Magnes' age, and the more particular aesthetic problem with Magnes' work is perhaps a lack of pointed personal attack, if that is the sense of cκώπτειν to be taken here.[52] The overall picture, then, of Magnes is of a protean poet, with a fondness for animal choruses, willing to go to all lengths to impress his audience, but toothless in his mockery.

τοῦ cκώπτειν ἀπελείφθη ('he lost his mockery') coming off the back of not one but three successive references to Magnes' advancing years, is probably meant to be a surprising modification of a more standard phrase denoting the loss of some abstract quality. The audience could expect to hear that he had lost his youth, for example, or his wits, and both these sentiments are expressed elsewhere using ἀπολείπω.[53] What Magnes has actually lost is more unusual, more specific, and more ironic for a comic playwright to lose, and so presents a fitting **incongruity.** There may also be some humour in the

[50] Σ *Knights* 522a: ψάλλων· τοὺc Βαρβιτιcτὰc ἂν λέγοι· δρᾶμα δέ ἐcτι τοῦ Μάγνητοc. ἡ δὲ βάρβιτοc εἶδοc ὀργάνου μουcικοῦ. πτερυγίζων δὲ ὁτι καὶ Ὄρνιθαc ἐποίηcε δρᾶμα· ἔγραψε δὲ καὶ Λύδουc καὶ Ψῆναc καὶ Βατράχουc. ἔcτι δὲ χρώματοc εἶδοc τὸ βατράχειον· ἀπὸ τούτου καὶ βατραχὶc ἱμάτιον. ἐχρίοντο δὲ τῷ βατραχείῳ τὰ πρόcωπα, πρὶν ἐπινοηθῆναι τὰ προcωπεῖα. το ψηνίζων δὲ εἶπεν ὡc πρὸc τοὺc Ψῆναc ἀναφέρων.

[51] *IG* ii^2 2325.44, *IG* ii^2 2318.7, *IG* ii^2 2318.17; *Suda* μ 20 also attests to his achieving two victories.

[52] Storey (2011) 339 in his introduction to the testimonia of Magnes ponders: 'In this regard, the verb *skōptein* at Knights 525, in which quality Magnes was lacking, usually means "personal jokes." Is it here that Magnes was seen as especially falling short given the personal and topical comedy that Cratinus and Hermippus were creating in the 430s?'; Neil (1901) *ad loc.*

[53] For the analogy of losing one's youth, X. *Smp*. 8.14: τὸ μὲν τῆc ὥραc ἄνθοc ταχὺ δήπου παρακμάζει, ἀπολείποντοc δὲ τούτου…; for wits, E. *Or.* 216: τῶν πρὶν ἀπολειφθεὶc φρενῶν.

redundant use of multiple expressions to highlight Magnes' decrepitude, which the younger poet seems to relish.

Cratinus 526-36

εἶτα Κρατίνου μεμνημένος, ὃς πολλῷ ῥεύσας ποτ' ἐπαίνῳ
διὰ τῶν ἀφελῶν πεδίων ἔρρει, καὶ τῆς στάσεως παρασύρων
ἐφόρει τὰς δρῦς καὶ τὰς πλατάνους καὶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς προθελύμνους·
ᾆσαι δ' οὐκ ἦν ἐν συμποσίῳ πλὴν "Δωροῖ συκοπέδιλε,"
καὶ "τέκτονες εὐπαλάμων ὕμνων·" οὕτως ἤνθησεν ἐκεῖνος. 530
νυνὶ δ' ὑμεῖς αὐτὸν ὁρῶντες παραληροῦντ' οὐκ ἐλεεῖτε,
ἐκπιπτουσῶν τῶν ἠλέκτρων καὶ τοῦ τόνου οὐκέτ' ἐνόντος
τῶν θ' ἁρμονιῶν διαχασκουσῶν· ἀλλὰ γέρων ὢν περιέρρει,
ὥσπερ Κοννᾶς, "στέφανον μὲν ἔχων αὖον, δίψῃ δ' ἀπολωλώς",
ὃν χρῆν διὰ τὰς προτέρας νίκας πίνειν ἐν τῷ πρυτανείῳ, 535
καὶ μὴ ληρεῖν, ἀλλὰ θεᾶσθαι λιπαρὸν παρὰ τῷ Διονύσῳ.

Then he remembered Cratinus, who let flow great praise
And streamed through the vacant plains, and sweeping them from their places
Carried off oak trees and plane trees and his enemies roots and all.
And there were no songs in the symposium except 'fig-sandaled Bribery',
And 'builders of skilful hymns'. So did that man flourish. 530
But now you, seeing him babbling, do not take pity,
With his pegs falling out and his tuning no longer right
And his harmonies falling apart: But as an old man he wanders around
Just like Connas, 'wearing a dried-up wreath and dying of thirst,'

Who ought, thanks to his earlier victories, to drink in the prytaneum, 535

And not to babble, but to spectate, gleaming next to Dionysus.

In this section, Cratinus comes under attack. The persona's claim that retirement would be a kindness for this poet stands in pointed contrast to the actual fact of Cratinus' flourishing. The following year, Cratinus would defeat his rivals with his play Πυτίνη,[54] 'The Wineflask', a play in which the poetic persona starred as the protagonist, an alcoholic who mistreats his wife, the personification of Comedy.[55]

In this description of Cratinus, three separate **worlds** are imagined. The first, heralded by μεμνημένος (526), narrated in past tense verbs the period, now over, of Cratinus' poetic success. The second, beginning with νυνί (531) describes the Cratinus in his current apparently decrepit state. And the last **world** is hypothetical, as at 535-6 the coryphaeus explains how Cratinus ought to be treated. It is the contrast between these three **worlds** which builds the speaker's argument: Cratinus was such a wonderful poet – a force of nature, even – that he ought now, in his dotage, to be put out to pasture for his own good, at state expense, rather than allowed to continue his drivel publicly. The comic force of these lines, however, lies in the disjunct between the second **world**, the coryphaeus' depiction of the present, and the actual state of things. The image exaggerates Cratinus' old age to denigrate him and generate humour through **superiority**, but at the same time the obvious mismatch between conjured **world** and reality also calls attention to the mind of the poet who creates such a deceptive representation of Cratinus. Indeed, the depiction of Cratinus as debilitated by old age to the point of babbling reads like the fantasy of the poetic persona.

[54] Hyp. V *Nu.*
[55] Σ *Eq.* 400a. Biles (2002), building on Rosen (1988) 37-58, argues that Aristophanes' depiction of Cratinus as a drunk, as at e.g. *Eq.* 400 is a comic distortion of Cratinus' own poetic debt to Archilochus: Cratin. fr. 203 cf. Archil. fr. 120 (West). With Πυτίνη, Cratinus responds to his poetic reputation in a sustained manner.

The wish for Cratinus to spectate 'gleaming next to Dionysus' refers either to a statue of the god, or the priest of the god, present in the front of the theatre.[56] The word λιπαρός ('gleaming', 'rich'), when appended to old age, denotes the sort of abundance that makes old age bearable.[57] However, it is also a significant intertext with the parabasis of the previous play, where Aristophanes mocks its usage in the lexis of praise, and says that it is more appropriately applied to anchovies.[58] Since it is used here to flatter his older rival, an audience member who remembers the poet persona's dislike of this word brings a sarcastic edge to his apparently benevolent wish here.

Crates 537-40

οἵας δὲ Κράτης ὀργὰς ὑμῶν ἠνέςχετο καὶ ςτυφελιγμούς,
ὃς ἀπὸ ςμικρᾶς δαπάνης ὑμᾶς ἀριςτίζων ἀπέπεμπεν,
ἀπὸ κραμβοτάτου ςτόματος μάττων ἀςτειοτάτας ἐπινοίας·
χοὖτος μέντοι μόλις ἀντήρκει, τοτὲ μὲν πίπτων, τοτὲ δ' οὐχί. 540

And what tempers of yours Crates endured, and what abuse,
He who at little expense provided lunch for you and sent you home,
From the driest mouth kneading the wittiest ideas.
And he persisted with difficulty, sometimes falling, sometimes not.

Crates is the last of three older poets to be pitied in this parabasis.[59] He receives little attention, but his inclusion here functions to sandwich the still-active Cratinus between

[56] Pickard-Cambridge (1968 [1953]) 60; *Ra.* 297.
[57] E.g. *Od.* 11.136, Pi. *N.* 7.99, Cratin. fr. 14; Imperio (2004) *ad loc.*
[58] *Ach.* 640, and see my commentary in the chapter above.
[59] For a recent appraisal of this poet, see Perrone (2020).

poetic predecessors who were genuinely retired.[60] Nevertheless, mockery creeps in. While his ideas are described as ἀστειοτάται, 'wittiest' or 'very urbane', the mouth which emits them is κραμβοτάτος, 'very dry',[61] which may echo the dried up wreath of Cratinus' section (στέφανον μὲν ἔχων αὖον, δίψῃ δ' ἀπολωλώς 534).[62] His mixed record is noted in 540. Although by μάττων… ἐπινοίας in 539 it seems that Aristophanes is using a food metaphor to describe the dramatic output of Crates, line 538 damns with faint praise by implying, particularly through the juxtaposition of ἀριστίζων and ἀπέπεμπεν, that all he provides his audience with is a snack. Bribing the audience with food is elsewhere deemed a cheap trick of inferior poets,[63] and the same implication can no doubt be detected here as well. That food was really an important aspect of Crates' script is suggested, for example by a fragment from his *Samians*, later mocked in Aristophanes' lost second *Thesmophoriazusae*.[64]

Raise an Oar 541-50

ταῦτ' ὀρρωδῶν διέτριβεν ἀεί, καὶ πρὸς τούτοισιν ἔφασκεν

ἐρέτην χρῆναι πρῶτα γενέσθαι πρὶν πηδαλίοις ἐπιχειρεῖν,

κᾆτ' ἐντεῦθεν πρῳρατεῦσαι καὶ τοὺς ἀνέμους διαθρῆσαι,

κᾆτα κυβερνᾶν αὐτὸν ἑαυτῷ. τούτων οὖν οὕνεκα πάντων,

ὅτι σωφρονικῶς οὐκ ἀνοήτως εἰσπηδήσας ἐφλυάρει, 545

αἴρεσθ' αὐτῷ πολὺ τὸ ῥόθιον, παραπέμψατ' ἐφ' ἕνδεκα κώπαις,

[60] Ruffell (2002) 143. Biles (2011) 120 suggests the particular allure of discussing Crates here was that he was retired and his career began after Cratinus, thus allowing the parabasis to go through poets in the chronological order that their careers began, while still implying that Cratinus is long past it.
[61] The translation of κράμβος is uncertain, but a scholiast *ad loc.* suggests it means 'sweetest' (ἡδυτάτου) or 'driest' (ξηροτάτου), and indicates that the **script** invoked comes from the world of vegetables, and the jokes imply Crates' light hand in composition: ἔπαιξε δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ λαχάνου ἐπινοίας. αὐτοσχέδιος γὰρ ἦν περὶ τὰ δράματα.
[62] Neil (1901) *ad loc.*
[63] *V.* 58-9, *Pl.* 797-9. Aristophanes instantiates this trope at *Pax* 960-2.
[64] Crates Com. fr. 32; Ar. fr. 347.

θόρυβον χρηστὸν Ληναΐτην,

ἵν’ ὁ ποιητὴς ἀπίῃ χαίρων

κατὰ νοῦν πράξας,

φαιδρὸς λάμποντι μετώπῳ. 550

Always fearing this sort of treatment, he wasted time, and moreover he said

That one ought to be a rower first before trying to steer,

And then to be the ship boy and look out for gales,

And then to captain the ship for oneself. So, for all these reasons,

Because he sensibly did not foolishly leap in and talk nonsense, 545

Raise a great crash, and on eleven oars send him

A good Lenaean uproar,

So the poet can leave rejoicing

Having achieved his goal,

Beaming with shining forehead. 550

I have discussed the significance of the different ranks of the ship as an analogy for the poet’s career in sections one and two of this chapter. It is significant here that the coryphaeus is reporting a claim by the poet when he discusses the phases of ranks on board a ship: ‘he [i.e. the poet] said that one ought…’ (ἔφασκεν … χρῆναι 541-2). The implication is that this was not a formalised, institutionalised and compulsory course of development for a comic playwright, but rather this is the poetic persona’s own opinion as to how a wannabe playwright ought best to approach the artform. Why would the poet bother saying that he thinks it is necessary for a budding potential playwright to go through such a sequence if that was in fact the usual or compulsory route into the career?

The image stresses the caution and care which the poet has chosen to put into his own admittedly rather slow professional development, and the implication is that he ought to be commended for being so slow. This may strike some audience members as the earnest description of a laudable course of action, but to another audience member, engaging in **mentalising** and noticing the frequency with which the persona explains and valorises his own reticence, the lines may come across as humorously defensive.

At 543 it is possible that the ἄνεμοι are to be identified as referring to Cleon outside of the metaphor, since earlier Cleon was implicitly likened not just to Typhon but also to a whirlwind (τὸν Τυφῶ… καὶ τὴν ἐριώλην 511), and earlier still he was identified with another danger at sea: Charybdis (248).

Why the chorus leader calls for the audience to send the poet on 'with eleven oars' is obscure.[65] Lech suggests that the eleven oars may allude to the eleven ships with which Phormio, the Athenian general mentioned in the coming ode (562), triumphed in a sea battle at Naupactus in 429 despite being hugely outnumbered.[66]

The hope that the poet will 'leave rejoicing, having accomplished his intention' (548-9) echoes the farewell to the protagonist in the *kommation* (498-9), implicitly likening poet and character. While Agoracritus is to return 'sprinkled with garlands' (502), the poet will leave 'bright with shining forehead'. The 'forehead' is a comic **beat** which ends the line with a *para prosdokian* where the audience might expect something else. φαιδρός meaning 'gleaming', 'bright' or 'glad', is regularly applied to many nouns, including one's face or head, and can be used on its own or with φρήν to describe mood.[67] Likewise many things are said to 'shine' (λάμπω): armour, warriors, the sun, the moon, torches or a helmet.[68]

[65] Neil (1901) 82 and Hubbard (1990) have suggested that the choreuts may have represented pairs of horses and knights, with the knights all holding up an oar at this point (except for one, presumably the speaking coryphaeus), but Lech (2009) 19-20 raises cogent objections.
[66] Th. 2.90.5-90
[67] E.g. πρόσωπον at S. *El.* 1297, X. *HG.* 3.4.11.7; κάρα at S. *El.* 1310; φρήν at A. *Ch.* 565.
[68] E.g. στρατοί at *Il.* 18.509-10; torches: *Il.* 18.492, *Od.* 19.48; Helmet: *Il.* 16.70-1, Eumel. fr. 21.3 (West).

Both φαιδρός and λάμπω can be used of eyes, and this is perhaps what an audience would expect at the end of 550.[69] Instead, they are met with a reference to Aristophanes' premature baldness, perhaps even a bald head gleaming with perspiration drawn through his creative exertion. Such an image generates humour both by the **incongruous** rupture of expectations and by suggesting the poet's **inferiority** with respect to appearance, and the difficulty he finds in his poetic toil.[70]

Hymning the Horse-Lord 551-64

ἵππι' ἄναξ Πόσειδον, ᾧ
χαλκοκρότων ἵππων κτύπος
καὶ χρεμετισμὸς ἁνδάνει
καὶ κυανέμβολοι θοαὶ
μισθοφόροι τριήρεις, 555
μειρακίων θ' ἅμιλλα λαμ-
πρυνομένων ἐν ἅρμασιν
καὶ βαρυδαιμονούντων,
δεῦρ' ἔλθ' εἰς χορόν, ὦ χρυσοτρίαν', ὦ
δελφίνων μεδέων Σουνιάρατε, 560
ὦ Γεραίστιε παῖ Κρόνου,
Φορμίωνί τε φίλτατ' ἐκ
τῶν ἄλλων τε θεῶν Ἀθη-
ναίοις πρὸς τὸ παρεστός.

[69] E.g. ὄμματα at A. *Ag.* 520; ὄμμα at E. *Med.* 1043; Ismene is φαιδρά from her eyes ἀπ' ὀμμάτων at S. *OC* 319; eyes 'shine' with λάμπειν at e.g. *Il.* 13.474, 15.607-8.
[70] Eurymachus compares Odysseus' bald head to a torch: *Od.* 18.533-5. Dawe (1991).

Lord of Horses, Poseidon, whom

The din of bronze-hoofed horses

And whinnying pleases,

And blue-prowed swift

Wage-bearing triremes,

And a contest of youths winning

Glory in chariots,

And the ones who grievously fail,

Come here to the dance, oh God of the Golden Trident,

Oh Sunium-Worshipped ruler of dolphins

Oh Gerestian son of Cronus,

Most dear to Phormio, and out of

The other gods, to the Athenians,

In the present circumstances.

An ode hymning a divinity significant to the narrative identity of the chorus is typical of the parabasis as it segues from the autobiographical *makron* into the epirrhematic syzygy in which the intra-narrative identity of the chorus is the main focus. Poseidon is a fitting god, as the god of horses and the sea, transitioning the focus from naval imagery in the anapaests onto horsemen in the epirrhema. Fraenkel notes that the hymns of this syzygy, to Poseidon and Athena, allude to ritual chants, and that hymns to these gods must have been common in Athens,[71] and Fiorentini has explored this ode's relationship to tragic hymns and wider lyric from which it borrows language.[72]

[71] Fraenkel (1962) 194-5.
[72] Fiorentini (2022).

The Good Old Days 565-73

εὐλογῆσαι βουλόμεσθα τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν, ὅτι 565

ἄνδρες ἦσαν τῆσδε τῆς γῆς ἄξιοι καὶ τοῦ πέπλου,

οἵτινες πεζαῖς μάχαισιν ἔν τε ναυφάρκτῳ στρατῷ

πανταχοῦ νικῶντες ἀεὶ τήνδ' ἐκόσμησαν πόλιν·

οὐ γὰρ οὐδεὶς πώποτ' αὐτῶν τοὺς ἐναντίους ἰδὼν

ἠρίθμησεν, ἀλλ' ὁ θυμὸς εὐθὺς ἦν ἀμυνίας· 570

εἰ δέ που πέσοιεν εἰς τὸν ὦμον ἐν μάχῃ τινί,

τοῦτ' ἀπεψήσαντ' ἄν, εἶτ' ἠρνοῦντο μὴ πεπτωκέναι,

ἀλλὰ διεπάλαιον αὖθις.

We wish to eulogise our fathers, because 565

They were men worthy of this land and of the dress,

Who, in land battles and in the naval army,

Fighting everywhere, they always decorated this city.

For none of them ever, when they saw their enemies

Counted them, but their spirit was at once *Amynias*. 570

And if someone were ever to fall on their shoulder in any battle,

He'd dust himself off, then deny that he had fallen,

But went on wrestling again.

In the epirrhema of the *Knights* parabasis, the chorus eulogise their fathers, whose glory reflects back upon themselves. Although the antepirrhema, with its playful depiction of horses as oarsmen, has been recognised as essentially comic, the humour of the epirrhema

has been largely ignored.[73] A closer look, however, reveals that humour is in fact generated throughout this epirrhema at the expense of the knights themselves, as their speech's overt purpose of praise is undermined in various ways. Lech argues that the way in which the knights, a traditionally elite segment of Athenian society, adopt the imagery and language of the city's democratic institutions, and later of the navy, is purposefully **incongruous**.[74] The knights may wish to eulogise their fathers and their horses, and thereby themselves (εὐλογῆcαι βουλόμεcθα 565), but they undermine themselves at every turn.

The chorus describe their fathers as τῆcδε τῆc γῆc ἄξιοι καὶ τοῦ πέπλου (566). The meaning of the first part of this is understandable and uncontroversial, but τοῦ πέπλου requires further thought. Scholars, guided by the scholia,[75] identify the πέπλοc as referring to the Panathenaic robe ritually woven and placed upon the cult statue of Athena.[76] The knights played a prominent role in the parade, as did the πέπλοc. The πέπλοc is a metonym for the festival, itself an embodiment of Athenian prosperity and power, in which the knights claim they deserve their place.[77] Because the πέπλοc was woven with depictions of the Gigantomachy and/or Titanomachy,[78] achievements of the Olympian gods, Imperio even suggests that 'to be worthy of the dress' means to achieve heroic feats comparable to that of the gods.[79]

[73] Hubbard (1991) 81: 'the antepirrheme stands as a comic inversion of the serious themes treated in the epirrheme'.
[74] Lech (2019). He even notes that the syzygy involves the confluence of 'incongruous aspects', *ibid.* 116.
[75] Σ *Eq*. 566aI, 566c.
[76] Translators supplement the text to specify this meaning, e.g. Sommerstein's (1981) 'worthy of … the Panathenaic robe' and Hubbard's (1991) 'worthy of… Athena's robe'.
[77] Lech (2019) 107 sees a jarring clash between the elite identity of the knights, and the fundamentally democratic essence of the festival context they invoke.
[78] E. *Hec*. 470–4, *IT* 222–4; Σ E. *Hec.* 468, 472 and 467, with Stratt. 73; Σ Pl. *R*. 327a; Σ. *Eq*. 566aII; Σ Aristid. *Panath*. 197.8; Σ Procl. *in Prm*. 643, 687, *in Ti*. 85; Verg. *Cir*. 29–34. On the confusion, see Stamatopoulou (2012).
[79] Imperio (2004) *ad loc.*

However, while πέπλοϲ frequently refers to the votive offering of a robe to the goddess Athena,[80] more generally it refers to standard attire for Greek women,[81] 'never worn by men'.[82] If the knights are trying to dispel their reputation for effeminacy, they have chosen a poor way of wording it. The definite article specifies a particular dress, and so suggests that they do in fact mean this most famous dress of the Panathenaea, and **mentalising** about their intentions leads to the conclusion that they intend to glorify their fathers in this way. On the other hand, the ambiguity of the actual phrase, 'the dress' unqualified, will still trigger an audience member to associate the knights' fathers with this feminine garb – hardly a good defence from accusations of effeminacy – and humour through **superiority** may result from the audience member's recognition that the chorus leader is failing to present his demographic as he intends.

Praise of a previous generation's military service is a typical feature of the annual funeral oration,[83] as indeed are many other *topoi* present at 567-73. What is striking is that the battles in which they fought are referred to as πεζαῖϲ μάχαιϲιν ἔν τε ναυφάρκτῳ ϲτρατῷ (567). That their fathers did not fight on horseback may well have been true, as noted in section three, but the language calls particular attention to this fact, and that cavalry as a fighting force played no part in Athens' greatest historic victories, Marathon and Salamis. Thus the praise of their fathers by implicit comparison subtly highlights the knights' own relative unimportance as a fighting force in the present. Their doing so seems entirely opposed to their avowed goal of eulogy, but through **mentalising** to surmise the chorus' intention the audience would recognise this self-undermining as unintentional.

[80] As it does, for example, later in the play at 1180, though then the audience are primed to understand it as a the sacred *peplos* of Athena because the characters are already talking about that goddess.
[81] Lee (2005).
[82] Davies & Llewellyn-Jones (2017) 88.
[83] E.g. Th. 2.36.1; Lys. 2.6, 17, 20, 23, 26, 32, 62, 69; Dem. 60.4–7, 12.

The chorus goes on to say that when confronted with an enemy, their fathers did not count them, but 'at once they had the courage of Amynias.' ἀμυνία can be understood as an abstract noun derived from ἀμύνω, meaning something like 'defence', but this line seems also to be a reference to Amynias, a figure often satirised elsewhere in Old Comedy as a coward,[84] and known for sporting the κρωβύλος, a hairstyle long out of fashion, and which would necessitate long hair. Amynias seems to be associated with the elite class of the cavalrymen and with avoiding military service,[85] so the effect of the reference to him here seems to be, as Lech argues, to create an obvious clash between the meaning of his name, and the substance of his character.[86] More than that, the knights' reference to him, much like their reference to the πέπλος above, is dramatic misfire. The pun reverses their meaning, and far from declaring that their father's 'spirit instantly breathed fierce resistance' (Sommerstein's translation), they accidentally liken his courage to that of a famously cowardly member of their set.

Next the knights explain that if any of their father's lot should fall on his shoulder in some battle (ἐν μάχῃ τινί), that he would brush the sand off, deny that he had fallen and get back to wrestling (διεπάλαιον αὖθις). The way the conjured **world** segues from the battlefield to the palaestra constitutes a humorous **incongruity**. Athletic prowess was widely admired in classical Athens, by more than just the traditional elite,[87] and athletics and warfare were considered to have 'required the same virtues'.[88] To an audience member who **psychologically identified** with the *hippeis,* this metaphor could read as flattering.

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[84] *V.* 466, 1267-70; *Nu.* 690-2; Cratin. fr. 212.
[85] *Nu.* 31, 689-92
[86] Lech (2019) 109.
[87] The democracy introduced and maintained athletic competitions and awarded civic honours to victors: Pritchard (2013) 84-103.
[88] Pritchard (2013) 123.

On the other hand, taking into account the perception of cavalry as cowardly, and their manner of warfare an ‘unmanly and relatively secure way of fighting’,[89] an audience member who did not **psychologically identify** with the knights could interpret even this metaphor from athletics as gently mocking the cavalry’s elite perspective. Athletics were the preserve of the rich, and wrestling as a pastime is used in Aristophanes to characterise the traditional athletic upbringing of the well-to-do.[90] The conflation of battlefield and wrestling ring could be taken to suggest that the only real battle the knights’ fathers found themselves in were the orderly athletic ‘battles’ of the palaestra, and that this is where the bulk of this elite group’s energy was really spent, undercutting their claims of bravery.[91] Moreover, to equate warfare with an athletic pastime, suggests a blasé attitude to war which may only have been tenable for those fighters who were privileged to be in relatively little danger, such as the knights were.

Personal Grooming 573-80

καὶ στρατηγὸς οὐδ’ ἂν εἷϲ
τῶν πρὸ τοῦ ϲίτηϲιν ᾔτηϲ’ ἐρόμενοϲ Κλεαίνετον·
νῦν δ’ ἐὰν μὴ προεδρίαν φέρωϲι καὶ τὰ ϲιτία, 575
οὐ μαχεῖϲθαί φαϲιν. ἡμεῖϲ δ’ ἀξιοῦμεν τῇ πόλει
προῖκα γενναίωϲ ἀμύνειν καὶ θεοῖϲ ἐγχωρίοιϲ.
καὶ πρὸϲ οὐκ αἰτοῦμεν οὐδὲν πλὴν τοϲουτονὶ μόνον·
ἤν ποτ’ εἰρήνη γένηται καὶ πόνων παυϲώμεθα,
μὴ φθονεῖθ’ ἡμῖν κομῶϲι μηδ’ ἀνεϲτλεγγιϲμένοιϲ. 580

[89] Lech (2019) 104.
[90] E.g. *Ra.* 689, 729.
[91] Cf. Quint. 10.1.79, which says Isocrates’ oratory is better suited to the palaestra than the battlefield.

And not even one general

Of those former ones would beg, asking Cleaenetus for state-maintenance.

But now if they don't get special seating and free food, 575

They say they won't fight. But we think it right to defend the city

Free of charge and nobly, and the native gods.

And we ask for nothing more, except this one little thing:

If there is ever peace, and we cease from our toils,

Do not begrudge it if we grow our hair long and wear tiaras. 580

The chorus go on to declare that their fathers would not have begged Cleaenetus to feed them at state expense, while men now refuse to fight if they are not granted this and front row seats (573-76). The first claim is rather confusing, because Cleaenetus, the father of Cleon, was known to be wealthy, but nothing suggests he was politically active. [92] The implication is surely, as Sommerstein notes, that the knights' fathers would not bow and scrape to a *nouveau riche* political nobody such as Cleon's father.[93] But the dynamic of humour is more complicated than that. The coryphaeus is constructing a **world** which is temporally removed from the audience's time, jumping into the past and up one generation to their father's time. This **world** is built in analogy to present time, however, and so the coryphaeus, wishing to make the point that current generals pander to Cleon to be granted the reward of state-maintenance, substitutes Cleon for his father Cleanetus in this imagined past **world** of their fathers. If Cleanetus was a political non-entity, so much the funnier: the counter-factualism of the substitution draws attention to itself, a glaring **incongruity** that persists even after the audience reach **resolution** by deducing the line of thought that went

[92] *IG* ii^2 2318 shows he performed a liturgy at the 460/459 Dionysia.

[93] Sommerstein (1981) *ad loc.*

into the building of this imaginary **world**, drawing attention to the inventiveness with which the chorus denigrate Cleon.

They go on to point out that they 'think it right to defend the city | Free of charge and nobly, and the native gods' (576-77), contrasting themselves with an indefinite mass of modern, more mercenary citizens. This suggestion about their fellow citizens is obviously specious, and their claim that they defend their city προῖκα ('freely', 'as a gift') does not align with the facts: the cavalry were paid wages and granted allowances for the provision of equipment by the state, and this may have recently come under scrutiny from Cleon, as discussed in section three. This clash between what the audience knew of the historical knights and their self-presentation here generates humour at the expense of the knights, who, through **mentalising**, must be understood as bending the truth for their own rhetorical purposes.

The chorus end their encomium of their fathers with one single (μόνον 578) request, which the manuscripts transmit as μὴ φθονεῖθ' ἡμῖν κομῶϲι μηδ' ἀπεϲτλεγγιϲμένοιϲ (580). The reading of this final word has been contended. It is a participle formed from a preposition and the noun ϲτλεγγίϲ, which can mean either a 'strigil' or sort of 'headband' or 'tiara'. The manuscripts' ἀπεϲτλεγγιϲμένοιϲ, 'scraping oneself off with strigils' is from a verb attested elsewhere,[94] but van Leeuwen emended this to ἀνεϲτλεγγιϲμένοιϲ, reconstructing an unattested verb, ἀναϲτλεγγίζω.[95] This verb, constructed by analogy to verbs like ἀναδῆϲαι or ἀναϲτεφανῶϲαι, would mean something like 'deck with a headband'. The emendation is commonly preferred because the flow of the passage necessitates that the chorus' demand at line 580 be for an unusual or showy concession, and the idea of adorning one's hair goes hand in hand with the reference in the

[94] X. *Oec.* 11.18.4; Arist. *Pr.* 867b4.
[95] Van Leeuwen (1901).

first part of the line, to growing out one's hair. To signify a request that the Athenians indulge an ostentatious habit, only ἀνεcτλεγγιcμένοιc works; scraping with one's sweat off with a strigil was common practice, but wearing a headband 'would be blatant ostentatiousness'.[96] Imperio, on the other hand, finds the emendation unnecessary, since ἀπεcτλεγγιcμένοιc as a post-athletic grooming practice suggests the lament, found elsewhere in Aristophanes, for the decline in athletic spirit among the Athenians.[97] This would follow on nicely from the idea of the athleticism of their fathers, highlighted at 572-73. Since both readings make sense, Imperio's conservative approach is valid and probably methodologically preferable.

The emendation does, however, have a hitherto unappreciated benefit. ἀναcτλεγγίζω may well be understood as 'deck with a headband', where the prefix ἀνα- is taken to signify 'up',[98] in the sense of 'on one's head', and so ἀνεcτλεγγιcμένοιc may mean 'wearing headbands'. But ἀνα- can also be an intensifier or signify repetition,[99] and so plausibly this verb could mean 'use a strigil carefully' or 'use a strigil repeatedly'. Particularly if this was an Aristophanic neologism – certainly it is attested nowhere else – the word may be purposefully ambiguous. As already shown, a **mentalising** audience member may perceive that throughout the epirrhema the knights undermine their own arguments accidentally. The same mechanism may be at work here, in that the coryphaeus may mean ἀναcτλεγγίζω as in 'use a strigil carefully/repeatedly', while simultaneously calling to the audience's mind the sense of 'wear a headband', thus accidentally alluding to the sort of extravagant and effeminate ostentation with which the hippic class was associated.

[96] Sommerstein (1981) *ad loc.* Wilson (2007a and b) follows this emendation, as does Lech (2019) 103.
[97] Imperio (2001) 243.
[98] *LSJ* F. I.
[99] *LSJ* F. II, III.

Bring Us Victory 581-94

Ὦ πολιοῦχε Παλλάς, ὦ

τῆς ἱερωτάτης ἁπα-

σῶν πολέμῳ τε καὶ ποιη-

ταῖς δυνάμει θ’ ὑπερφερού-

σης μεδέουσα χώρας, 585

δεῦρ’ ἀφικοῦ λαβοῦσα τὴν

ἐν στρατιαῖς τε καὶ μάχαις

ἡμετέραν ξυνεργὸν

Νίκην, ἣ Χαρίτων ἐστὶν ἑταίρα

τοῖς τ’ ἐχθροῖσι μεθ’ ἡμῶν στασιάζει. 590

νῦν οὖν δεῦρο φάνηθι· δεῖ

γὰρ τοῖς ἀνδράσι τοῖσδε πά-

σῃ τέχνῃ πορίσαι σε νί-

κην, εἴπερ ποτέ, καὶ νῦν.

Oh Earth-Holding Pallas, who

Rules over the most sacred of

All lands, a land which surpasses

In war and in poets

And in power, 585

Arrive here, having brought your

Workmate in campaigns

And battles,

Victory, who is a companion of the Graces

And sides with us against our enemies. 590

So, appear here now; for you must

Provide these men here,

Through all your skill, with

Victory, if ever, then now.

This antode hymns Athena in a largely traditional way, although the comparison of war and poetry is apt for the competitive context.[100] In this way, Aristophanes takes the opportunity to affirm the importance of Athenian poetry. The claim that Athena ought (δεῖ 591) to provide men with victory 'if ever, then now' (εἴπερ ποτέ, καὶ νῦν 594), especially after the demonstrative τοῖcδε (592) seems to be a call for victory not in, for example, the ongoing way against the allied Peloponnesian forces, but in the here-and-now of the dramatic competition. Hence, it reveals humorously warped priorities.

Noble Steeds, Noble Deeds 595-610

ἃ ξύνιcμεν τοῖcιν ἵπποις, βουλόμεcθ' ἐπαινέcαι. 595

ἄξιοι δ' εἴc' εὐλογεῖcθαι· πολλὰ γὰρ δὴ πράγματα

ξυνδιήνεγκαν μεθ' ἡμῶν, εἰcβολάς τε καὶ μάχας.

ἀλλὰ τἀν τῇ γῇ μὲν αὐτῶν οὐκ ἄγαν θαυμάζομεν,

ὡc ⟨δ'⟩ ὅτ' εἰc τὰc ἱππαγωγοὺc εἰcεπήδων ἀνδρικῶc,

πριάμενοι κώθωνας, οἱ δὲ καὶ cκόροδα καὶ κρόμμυα, 600

εἶτα τὰc κώπας λαβόντες ὥcπερ ἡμεῖc οἱ βροτοὶ

ἐμβαλόντες ἂν ἐφρυάξανθ', "ἱππαπαῖ, τίc ἐμβαλεῖ;

ληπτέον μᾶλλον, τί δρῶμεν; οὐκ ἐλᾷc, ὦ cαμφόρα;"

[100] See my section on the ode above, and Fiorentini (2022).

ἐξεπήδων τ’ εἰς Κόρινθον· εἶτα δ’ οἱ νεώτατοι
ταῖς ὁπλαῖς ὤρυττον εὐνὰς καὶ μετῇσαν βρώματα· 605
ᾔσθιον δὲ τοὺς παγούρους ἀντὶ ποίας Μηδικῆς,
εἴ τις ἐξέρποι θύραζε, κἀκ βυθοῦ θηρώμενοι·
ὥστ’ ἔφη Θέωρος εἰπεῖν καρκίνον Κορίνθιον,
“δεινά, γ’, ὦ Πόσειδον, εἰ μηδ’ ἐν βυθῷ δυνήσομαι
μήτε γῇ μήτ’ ἐν θαλάττῃ διαφυγεῖν τοὺς ἱππέας.” 610

What we can testify about our horses, we wish to praise. 595
They are worthy of being eulogised. For indeed they endured
A lot with us, both invasions and battles.
But we do not admire excessively their deeds on land,
As when they leapt into the cavalry ships in a manly fashion,
Buying canteens, and some bought garlic and onions, 600
And then they grabbed their oar-handles, and just like us men
They rowed hard and they’d neigh: ‘Hippapai, who’ll row?
Pull harder! What are we doing? Won’t you push, branded one?’
And they leapt out at Corinth. Then the youngest ones
Dug resting spots with their iron and sought fodder: 605
And they ate crabs instead of Persian pasture,
If any should creep outside, and hunting them from the deep,
So Theorus quoted a Corinthian crab,
‘How awful, oh Poseidon, if I cannot in the depths,
Nor on land nor by sea, escape the knights!’ 610

The antepirrhema is more obviously comic than the epirrhema. After beginning their speech of praise in a straightforward way (595-97), the chorus embark on an extended flight of fancy (598-610), in which they envisage their horses as rowers in the Athenian navy. Humour is derived throughout from the transposition of horses into the role of members of the Athenian navy, and the obvious occasions for **incongruities** which arise from this absurdist premise. Members of the audience who did not **psychologically identify** with the hippic class may perceive this humour as being at the cavalry's expense. The **incongruous** image, the hybrid **world** envisaged invites the audience to compare these two distinct and complementary sections of the Athenian army. As already mentioned, this could be seen as likening the two in a way that glorifies both, or alternatively as a comparison that is unflattering for the knights, given their relative unimportance within Athens' military.[101]

The opening of epirrhema and antepirrhema closely parallel each other, stating their eulogistic purpose (595; cf. 565), and indeed what follows acts as an equine-centric counterpart to the self-undermining praise of their forefathers.

The depiction of the horses as members of the Athenian military begins with a vague description: 'they endured | A lot with us, both invasions and battles' (596-7). Sommerstein identifies these ἐcβολάc as the invasions of Attica by the Peloponnesians during the Archidamian war,[102] but Imperio takes ξυνδιήνεγκαν to refer to an offensive campaign, making ἐcβολαὶ τε καὶ μάχαι a hendiadys referring to the Athenian campaign against Corinth, with which this antepirrhema does indeed end. Alternatively, Lech argues that the vagueness of the references to hippic military engagements is purposeful, as the cavalry attempt to exaggerate the impact of their horses in Athenian military history in an

[101] Lech (2019).
[102] Th. 2.19, 2.22, 3.1.

obviously dishonest fashion, alluding to many battles and invasions when really Solygeia 'was *de facto* the only major success of the Athenian cavalry to date.'[103]

ἱππαγωγούϲ in line 599 refers to the Athenian's adoption of horse-transportation vessels. This invention was originally a sort of boat peculiar to the Persians and their forces, the Athenians took up this invention in 430. The horses leap into the boat ἀνδρικῶϲ ('bravely') at 599, a description which puns on that word's etymology, as ἀνδρικῶϲ is derived from ἀνήρ ('man').[104] The horses then engage in trade, buying garlic and onions (600), traditional sailor fare judging by *Acharnians* 550. All of this can be understood as a humorously fantastical collision of human and horse **scripts**.

Equine punning occurs at 602, when the traditional cry of the sailors, ῥυππαπαῖ,[105] is transformed into ἱππαπαῖ, and twice in line 605, where the youngest horses dig out beds with their ὁπλαῖϲ ('hooves', but close to ὅπλοιϲ, 'weapons' or 'tools') and fetch what is either ϲτρώματα ('bed-sheets') or, according to R βρώματα ('fodder').[106] Most readers favour the βρώματα of R,[107] seeing ϲτρώματα as a corruption of βρώματα, brought about by the proximity of the word εὐνάϲ ('beds'). βρώματα certainly makes more sense as something that the horses might have to go to seek (μετῇϲαν), as opposed to ϲτρώματα which one would assume a soldier-horse would bring with them. Whether ϲτρώματα or βρώματα, the dynamic of humour is the same, since it lies in recognising that both of these words fit perfectly into the two conjured **scripts**: soldier and horse. ϲτρῶμα refers to anything spread, and is regularly used to mean bedding, but can also refer to a horse's blanket.[108] βρῶμα frequently denotes the food of animals, as in Aesop's fables, but

[103] Lech (2019) 115.
[104] The same pun occurs at *V.* 1077 and 1090 where it is used to describe the wasp-Marathonomachoi.
[105] *V.* 909, *Ra.* 1073.
[106] This translation of βρῶμα suggested by Sommerstein (1981).
[107] E.g. Imperio (2004), Sommerstein (1981), Lech (2019) and Wilson (2007).
[108] X. *Cyr.* 8.8.19, Antiph. 109.

Thucydides uses βρῶμα in military lexis, where it refers to any sort of sustenance sought out by soldiers.[109]

The last few lines of the antepirrhema reference the horsemen's victory at Solygeia. This was the knights' first military success to speak of, and was enabled by Athens' new horse transportation vessels. The Corinthian crab represents one of Athens' enemies in war, so its lament that the knights cannot be evaded by land or by sea cashes in on the audience members' hostility to Corinthians as **out-group**. Simultaneously, the image of the crustacean in lamentation whimsically continues the anthropomorphic **incongruities** of the piece. The merism of earth and sea may be a commonplace, but the exact wording of μήτε γῇ μήτ' ἐν θαλάττῃ echoes from a Timocreon fragment, in which the speaker wishes that wealth was present 'neither on land nor in the sea', since it brings evils to men.[110] Here humour is generated by the transposition of a recognisable phrase into a new and **incongruous** context (the mouth of a crab), and the attendant sense of satisfaction when we notice that the phrase applies particularly well to the newly sea-borne cavalry.

5. Conclusions

In both *Acharnians* and *Knights* the autobiography of the anapaests responds to external cues. For *Acharnians*, the uproar and even apparent prosecution at the hands of Cleon that ensued from Aristophanes' portrayal of Athenian power in *Babylonians* set the stage for him to present himself as a subversive figure who spoke truth to power and whose words were of international import. In *Knights*, his first foray as a producer inspired the fashioning of a more cautious poetic persona. What is common between the two is that the

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[109] Imperio (2004) *ad loc.* Th. 4.26.5, 39.2.

[110] fr. 8 Bergk = Σ *Ach.* 532. An audience member who knows the original context of the phrase may see the phrase as apt, since in Timocreon it describes wealth as an abstract force bringing evils, while here it describes some of the wealthiest Athenian soldiers bringing evils to Corinth.

poet is incompetent: in *Acharnians* he is confident to the point of delusions of grandeur, while in *Knights* this manifests as caution bordering on timidity, and a perception of the audience as fickle that rests on a misunderstanding of the poetic competition in which he is taking part.

In a play so dedicated to the mockery of Cleon, one might expect that the Athenian cavalry, Cleon's enemy on and beyond the comic stage, would be presented favourably. But in fact, the poet's treatment of them is ambivalent, and many comic **beats** show up the knights as effete and raise the question of their military effectiveness. With *Knights* Aristophanes does not pay lip service to that eponymous aristocratic class.

Clouds II

This Time it’s Personal

Aristophanes’ disgruntled stance in *Clouds*, as a wronged and vituperative poet, is a cultural inheritance which can be traced back to our earliest Greek poetry. Old Comedy innovates: the parabasis’ tendency to break the fourth-wall allows the poet persona to contemplate explicitly their own career over the span of many years, and the competitive context allows the audience to enter the resultant sustained meta-narrative as its own character. The poet can be wronged by the audience itself.

In *Clouds*, Aristophanes’ persona makes just this claim, and by exhibiting also an overt tendency towards *alazoneia* (boastfulness), he is presented as out of touch. The character harbours pretensions with regard to his artform, which he sees as a matter of objective value, determined by a play’s ‘cleverness’. These pretensions only alienate the audience. More than that, the poetic persona apparently misunderstands the nature of the dramatic competitions, because he does not deign to try to win over his audience, instead focusing upon composing poetry that is good according to his own intellectualist and esoteric standards. Thus, the theme of comic incompetence is continued from previous parabases and the audience are gifted a gratifying sense of **superiority** over the poet, an intellect too rarefied for his own good.

Following the bitter, ‘personal’ eupolideans, the syzygy delivered by the clouds marks a shift in the dynamics of humour. There is no satiric bite to mocking personified meteorology, and so instead a pleasingly whimsical **world** is constructed in which nature itself is depicted as being on Athens’ side, and the clouds’ viewpoint also functions as a springboard for light-hearted humour targeting named politicians.

1. Initial Failure and Revision

As old, decrepit, dried-up and played-out as Cratinus was in the *Knights*' parabasis,[1] he nevertheless defeated Aristophanes the following year. His *Wine Flask* triumphed over the original *Clouds* at the City Dionysia of 423, where Aristophanes' play did not even take second place.[2] Why did *Clouds* I lose?[3] While attractive to contemplate, a serious answer can hardly be sought. Objective assessment of the first *Clouds*' aesthetic value is not possible, and even if it were, we cannot account for any number of other possibilities influencing the contemporary judging citizens' opinions, which may have been idiosyncratic,[4] or influenced by some incidental flaw in the performance now unknown to us. Perhaps the weather was ironically poor, or the actors did not perform their best. Most likely, Cratinus and Ameipsias' plays simply appealed more. *Clouds* I's loss certainly need not reflect that the audience's aesthetic sensibilities were insufficiently elevated to appreciate the poet's novel genius, but this is how the poetic persona of the revised edition's parabasis frames the loss,[5] and his assessment has not been without its backers.[6]

It is *Clouds* II, the revision, which survives, as is made clear by internal evidence from the parabasis, and a hypothesis.[7] Clearly the play was revised in several parts, and the parabasis is cited as an example of a passage that was revised: αὐτίκα ἡ παράβαcιc τοῦ

[1] See my analysis of *Eq.*526-36.
[2] Hyp. II: αἱ πρῶται Νεφέλαι ἐδιδάχθηcαν ἐν ἄcτει ἐπὶ ἄρχοντοc Ἰcάρχου, ὅτε Κρατῖνοc μὲν ἐνίκα Πυτίνῃ, Ἀμειψίαc δὲ Κόννῳ. Ameipsias' play likely also starred Socrates and featured other intellectuals as a chorus (D. L. 2.27-8; Ath. 218c).
[3] Many answers have been given. Biles (2011) 58 cites the selfish goal of the protagonist, which is 'hard to embrace'; Storey (2011) 68 speculates that the overlap between *Clouds* and Ameipsias' play, Κόννοc (fr. 7-11), which also features Socrates, may have been a factor. See n. 6 below.
[4] Aelian records an anecdote wherein the judges ignored the loud clamour of the crowd, which demanded that Aristophanes be placed first: *VH.* 2.13.
[5] Cf. *V.* 1043-5.
[6] Ehrenberg (1943) 51: 'the play was probably above their heads'; Havelock (1972) 18: 'We must conclude, however, that the applause of the wits in 423 B.C. was not loud enough to drown the groans or compensate for the silence of those who found that a comedy of manneristic idiom with very little politics and a minimum of slap-stick was too much for them – or not enough.'
[7] Hyp I.

χοροῦ ἤμειπται (‘For example, the parabasis of the chorus has been changed’). Naturally, there has been some discussion about the date of the revision of *Clouds*,[8] and analytic debate over exactly which sections of the play have undergone revision,[9] a debate complicated by the suggestion that this revision was incomplete.[10] At least the eupolidean *makron* preceding the epirrhematic syzygy was composed afresh for the revision. This brand new parabasis proper constitutes the most sustained speech in the first person voice of the poetic persona: a lengthy 45-line stretch compared to concise 6-8-line appearances in other parabases.[11] The prolonged starring turn, the personal self-defence of his art and his play, suggests *prima facie* actual offence taken by the poet, as perhaps befits the circumstances.[12] Now we encounter an Aristophanes with a more legitimate grievance against the Athenian audience than ever before – not that lack of legitimate cause had ever prevented his complaints previously.[13]

Another hypothesis suggests the poet was surprised by *Clouds*’ initial failure, which motivated him to revise the play, saying that ‘having been unexpectedly cast aside, he thought it necessary to write the second *Clouds* again to blame the audience.’[14] But, as sometimes happens in ancient scholarship on Greek poetry, this seems likely to be

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[8] E.g. Kopff (1990), Storey (1993). A date around 418 seems preferable.

[9] E.g. Casanova (2014). Recchia (2017) discusses a fragment from the first *Clouds*.

[10] Dover (1968) xcviii: ‘unperformable and incompletely revised’; Henderson (2007) 295 n. 101: ‘retains passages from the 423 production that would have been wholly inappropriate in the period of the play’s revision.’ Whitman (1964) sees the resulting play as inconsistent to the point that he questions the validity of interpreting an end-product ‘which may not, as it was left, represent the poet’s wishes in any very clear way’, 121, 119-166; Storey (1993) 73-4. Frr. 392-401 are from the original *Clouds*, but do not give much of a sense of the extent to which it differs from the revised edition.

[11] *Ach.* 659-64, *V.* 1284-91, *Pax* 754-79

[12] Biles (2011) 177-8 argues that the sustained first person speech suggests personal competitive engagement.

[13] Prior to this play the poet had come second with *Banqueters* (427), then won with *Babylonians* (426), *Acharnians* (425) and *Knights* (424) and even apparently the lost *Merchant Ships.* In between *Clouds’* initial performance and its revision – even assuming an early *terminus ante quem* for the revision, such as Storey (1993) suggests – Aristophanes has performed middlingly, placing second in the 422 Lenaea and 421 Dionysia with *Wasps* and *Peace* respectively, although *Proagon,* which won against *Wasps*, may have been composed by Aristophanes although Philonides produced in: *V.* Hyp. I. 30-2. *Merchant Ships* and *Farmers* may also have fallen in this interval and their placing in the competitions is unclear.

[14] Hyp. II: ἀπορριφθεὶϲ παραλόγωϲ ᾠήθη δεῖν ἀναδιδάξαϲ τὰϲ Νεφέλαϲ τὰϲ δευτέραϲ καταμέμφεϲθαι τὸ θέατρον.

speculation, inference based on the parabasis, rather than derived from an independent source.

The first-person voice and the vituperation of the audience certainly create a sense that the eupolidean section of the parabasis is a personal, emotionally charged outburst from the poet, but we must be careful not to read the parabasis as a diary.

Indignation is a poetic stance which can be traced back to the earliest extant Greek poetry.[15] Hesiod quarrels with his brother, Archilochus with Lycambes, Hipponax with Boupalus – from the earliest first-person voices in Greek literature, we find our poets responding bitterly to wrongs done them. What is new with Old Comedy is that the annual rehiring of comic poets to compose for the Lenaea and Dionysia festivals across years in succession, along with the genre's conventional breaking of the fourth wall, allows the poet to speak about his career explicitly over the course of multiple years. Through the parabasis the poet creates a sustained 'meta-narrative'.[16] Moreover, the competitive context means that the public actively participate in the poet's career, allowing the poet to write them into this meta-narrative as a character. With Old Comedy, the audience gain the ability to star in the wronged-poet narrative, as the ones who have crossed him.

Aristophanes makes precisely this claim in the parabasis of *Clouds*, alleging that he has been betrayed by (most of) his public. Unlike some wronged poets, however, Aristophanes also undermines the poet's grievances by depicting his persona as out of touch, pretentious, and, once again, in a certain sense incompetent as a poet.

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[15] See section 5.3 of my introduction.
[16] Platter (2007) 71.

2. Aristophanes: ἀλαζών and Sophist

Major has identified ἀλαζονεία, 'boastfulness', as the key characteristic of the poet's persona, and accordingly the key mechanism for generating humour in the parabases of *Clouds* and other plays.[17] Major sees the humour of *Clouds*' parabasis as generated by the recognition that a character lacks self-awareness, usually in relation to wealth, physical characteristics and virtue, and he supports this argument by reference to ancient accounts of comedy in Plato, Xenophon and Aristotle,[18] as well as pointing to various other ἀλαζών characters in Old Comedy.[19] In the *makron* it is the poet himself who is an ἀλαζών, and as elsewhere this is intended to provoke laughter.

This dynamic is surely prevalent, and can be understood in the terms I have discussed in my introduction. The lack of self-awareness essential to ἀλαζονεία is recognised through **mentalising**, as the audience look beyond the surface value of the poet's words to understand the inner workings of the persona. His delusionality could quite naturally evoke a pleasing sense of **superiority** in audience members, and he constructs a **world** in which he is unfairly overlooked, his innovation and wit ignored. Through **mentalising**, we can go further than Major's ἀλαζονεία and flesh out a character with related traits which go beyond a lack of self-awareness, a character who is by turns bitter, manipulative and a pseudo-sophist.

Now, given that *Clouds* was at one point 'almost universally accepted as a manifesto of Aristophanes' educational beliefs, his hatred of sophistic teaching, and his belief in the old conservative way',[20] his sophistic traits in the parabasis may surprise. And yet, loaded

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[17] Major (2006).
[18] Pl. *Phlb.* 48c-49c, X. *Cyr.* 2.2.11-13, Arist. *EN.* 4.7.
[19] Major (2006) 133-136.
[20] Whitman (1964) 119. Whitman does not settle on any particular interpretation of the play, which he sees as an unfinished revision and consequently lacking a coherent message. Adams (2014) sees *Clouds* as contributing to an atmosphere of hostility against Socrates.

terms like σοφίζομαι (547) seem designed to call attention to similarities between the poetic persona's speech and the rhetorical practices of the group targeted for ridicule in the rest of the play. Indeed, in terms of argumentative structure and rhetorical devices, there are numerous similarities between the eupolidean speech and a sophistic oration.[21] Several scholars have noted that Aristophanes is like a sophist here, and comment upon the sense of ambivalence that this creates.[22]

The dynamic of humour in this sophistic oration is complex. For one thing, it marks the poetic persona as a member of an **out-group**, the sophists, at whom the audience are encouraged to laugh. The alienation of the persona by aligning him with this **out-group** heightens the humour generated at his expense,[23] as he is not only ridiculous in his own right, but also tarred by the same brush as the high-minded sophists. To the extent that the persona acts as a sophist, the passage is a playful exercise in embodying and comically warping this demographic, and bears comparison to the comic impersonation of recognisable demographics in other parabases. In *Frogs*, I argue, we get a comic portrait of Athenian crypto-oligarchs, while in *Thesmophoriazusae* the parabasis is a comic take on the long dramatic speeches of Euripidean villainesses.

By making his persona a delusional ἀλαζών, and a sophist to boot, the poet alienates this figure, makes him ridiculous, and gives the audience the gratifying opportunity to laugh in **superiority** over his persona, and sophists generally – to laugh at those who consider themselves of superior intellect. This dynamic also interacts with the theme, demonstrated already in *Acharnians* and *Knights*, of poetic incompetence. In particular, the Aristophanic persona pretends not to understand the name of the game, which is not in fact

[21] Rivers (1985).
[22] E.g. *ibid.*, O'Regan (1992), Bowie (1993).
[23] See my introduction, section 3.1.

to write poetry that is deemed good by his own standards, but to win over the audience. Line 560 functions as a particularly telling comic **beat**, drawing attention to the persona's pretentious misapprehensions about his genre.

3. Cloudy with a Chance of Divine Intervention

Anger at the audience, addressing their listeners as σοφός, and reward and flattery contingent on the Athenians changing their ways (back) are just some of the continuities between the eupolideans spoken by the coryphaeus, and the epirrhematic syzygy performed by the clouds. However, the passages diverge sharply in terms of the dynamics of humour.

While we certainly might have expected, from the clouds' introduction by a reverent Socrates, that these meteorological beings would reflect the natures of the sophists who worship them, they do not.[24] Impersonating sophists has already been done by the poetic persona in the eupolidean parabasis proper, and the clouds leave it to him. In fact, in the parabasis we have a confirmation of what has already been suggested in the parodos: the clouds embody a more traditional worldview than the sophists at the Thinkery espouse.[25]

Aside from this traditionalism, however, the clouds are not exactly full of personality. In the eupolideans, and other parabases, much of the humour is at the expense of the speakers themselves, as they undermine themselves repeatedly. Here, on the other hand, with the cloud chorus, and similarly in the parabasis of *Peace*, where the chorus

[24] The deceptive nature and imitative ability of the clouds is a key part of their character and their strategy of educational reform: Köhnken (1980).

[25] It is characteristic of parabases to develop the character of their chorus, pushing them in slightly unexpected ways. Bertelli (2013a) argues that Aristophanes' depiction of gods ultimately conforms to tradition.

represent Greek farmers in general, humour is not at the expense of the speakers. Elsewhere, the appeal of the self-undermining chorus is that they impersonate, exaggerate and warp a recognisable group which the audience has dealings with outside the theatre, about which they have previously formed opinions, and have external knowledge against which to judge their Aristophanic instantiations. But the Panhellenic chorus of *Peace* is too broad, since all they share is Hellenism itself, which does not obviously lend itself to humorous impersonation. Nor does Aristophanes choose to layer a more specific political identity or viewpoint onto this chorus. Similarly, here mocking the personifications of a meteorological phenomenon holds little reward.

Instead, the mechanisms of humour are of two main types in the epirrhematic syzygy. Firstly, there is the mockery of particular named politicians. Secondly, there is a rather gentle absurdist sort of humour at play, as the clouds attribute divine will to actual meteorological and astronomical occurrences. This second sort of humour can perhaps be understood best as a sort of fanciful **text world**, which takes as its main input the real **world** with which the audience has experience. This **text world** diverges from reality when the depiction of these events (i.e. eclipses, storms, the gust of wind robbing Hyperbolus of his wreath) are imbued with the fanciful detail of divine intentionality. The embroidering of the historical events with this new thread – divine favour – is part of the expression of the rather soothing idea, expressed explicitly at lines 587-9, that despite poor strategy Athens could not fail, so favoured was she by the gods.

4. The Parabasis

I Thought You Were Clever 518-526

ὦ θεώμενοι, κατερῶ πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐλευθέρως

τἀληθῆ, νὴ τὸν Διόνυςον τὸν ἐκθρέψαντά με.

οὕτω νικήςαιμί τʼ ἐγὼ καὶ νομιζοίμην ςοφός, 520

ὡς ὑμᾶς ἡγούμενος εἶναι θεατὰς δεξιοὺς

καὶ ταύτην ςοφώτατʼ ἔχειν τῶν ἐμῶν κωμῳδιῶν,

†πρώτους ἠξίωςʼ ἀναγεῦςʼ ὑμᾶς†, ἣ παρέςχε μοι

ἔργον πλεῖςτον· εἶτʼ ἀνεχώρουν ὑπʼ ἀνδρῶν φορτικῶν

ἡττηθεὶς οὐκ ἄξιος ὤν· ταῦτʼ οὖν ὑμῖν μέμφομαι 525

τοῖς ςοφοῖς, ὧν οὕνεκʼ ἐγὼ ταῦτʼ ἐπραγματευόμην.

Oh spectators, I will freely declare to you the

Truth, I swear by Dionysus who raised me.

So may I be victorious, and be considered wise, 520

I thought you to be a clever audience,

And this to be the smartest of my comedies,

And so I deemed you worthy to taste it first, a play which gave me

The most toil: then I retreated, beaten by base men

Unworthily. For this I blame you 525

Wise men, on whose account I went to all this trouble.

The parabasis commences with a pledge to speak the truth in the first person voice of the poet. Although we do find the coryphaeus dropping his dramatic identity and speaking as the poet elsewhere in the parabases,[26] this is, as noted, the longest section of text in which this occurs. It is more common for the coryphaeus to praise the poet in the third person.[27] Here one dramatic identity is dropped, and another assumed. The chorus leader may have put on a mask bearing resemblance to Aristophanes himself,[28] a prop which would visually provide the punchline to the riffing on the poet's baldness (540, 545). Alternatively, the first person singular speeches of the parabases may have been spoken by the comedian himself.[29] If so, this would mark out the parabasis even further as an exceptional scene, and would make it function in an even more directly comparable way to the self-promotion of the epideictic speeches tragedians made for their plays in the *proagon*,[30] or to the shameless first person poetry of the invective poets.[31] Unfortunately, the argument largely rests on the shifts between the use of plural first person verbs and the singular, and therefore need not be particularly decisive if one sees choral voice and identity in lyric poetry as flexible.

Sommerstein notes that the claim to have been raised by Dionysus is meaningfully autobiographical: 'Ar. had become a dramatist when barely out of boyhood, and may well have been preparing himself for this profession much earlier still.'[32] Whether this is true or not, the oath is humorously conceited,[33] and jarringly juxtaposed with a claim to speak the truth. From the very outset of the *Clouds* parabasis, Aristophanes is transgressively

[26] *Ach.* 659-64, *V.* 1284-91, *Pax* 754-79.
[27] *Ach.* 628-58, *Eq.* 507ff., *V.* 1015ff., *Pax* 734-53.
[28] Rivers (1985) 172.
[29] Gilula (1997) 131-43.
[30] This comparison suggested by Biles (2011) 40-45.
[31] See section 5.3 in my introduction.
[32] Sommerstein (1982) n. *ad loc*.
[33] The Aristophanic Aeschylus invokes Demeter with similar conceitedness (*Ra.* 886): Δήμητερ ἡ θρέψασα τὴν ἐμὴν φρένα. To be διοτρεφής is normally attributed to Homeric heroes, not current or recent historical figures.

boastful and disingenuous. The audience will have been conditioned so greatly by previous parabases that they 'can come to consider boasts so much the standard for parabatic utterances that any other statement appears incongruous.'[34] From the very start, an audience member alert to generic conventions or acquainted with Aristophanes' poetic persona from previous parabases, would judge his words on this basis, and, through **mentalising**, recognise they are reflective of an arrogant character with manipulative intent. His claim to have been raised by a god, if taken as τἀληθῆ, can only be so metaphorically; at once it is clear that Aristophanes' 'truth' is not always of a literal kind. This is also an interesting play on the oath as a typical oratorical opening technique. As Rivers notes, it was common for orators to begin with an oath to a god to establish credibility.[35] Yet here, the very wording of the oath calls into question the manner in which the poetic persona intends to follow it. The persona is not entirely lying, but there is some hint to the audience that what follows will be in a comic mode, a distortion of the truth by a deluded and disingenuous speaker.

The persona then explains that he has made a mistake. He thought that this play, his cleverest yet, when put before an audience he falsely believed to be intelligent, would surely win the competition. The language of intelligence pervades this parabasis (ϲοφόϲ 520, δεξιούϲ 521, ϲοφώτατ' 522, ϲοφοῖϲ 526, δεξιούϲ 526, ϲοφοῖϲ 535, ϲοφίζομαι 547, δεξιάϲ 548, εὖ φρονεῖν 562)[36] as the poet continually asserts his intellectual superiority over others, while dangling the compliment over the audience and/or reader.[37] The perceived intelligence of the audience has been revealed to be illusory, and the rhetoric

[34] Major (2006) 139.
[35] Rivers (1985) 173-4: Arist. *Rh.* 1375a22-77b12, *Rh.Al.* 1432a33-b4.
[36] Cavallero (2006) uses a quantitative analysis of such repeated terms to explore how certain semantic fields are used to construct a clash between opposing sides in this play.
[37] Rivers (1985) argues that the flattery opening the speech in this section is textbook oratorical technique: 174, *Rhet. to Alex.* 1436b16–37, 1442a14–15. However, the conditional flattery here can hardly be considered fawning.

makes the flattery of the audience conditional on their (hypothetical, counterfactual) backing of Aristophanes. The praise is dangled before the audience, out of reach, and the audience is met with a poet who feels, or pretends to feel, cheated by the results of the dramatic competition.

Later on, Aristophanes will go on to offer audience members a chance at redemption, enacting a rhetorical stratification of the audience into two levels – on one, the clever ones, who get it (ὑμῶν …τοὺϲ δεξιούϲ 527); on the other the base ones, who prefer the low-brow work of ἀνδρῶν φορτικῶν – and making entrance into the privileged stratum conditional on their future support of the playwright (561-2). The Athenians were particularly keen on ϲοφία, a key trait of their patron goddess, and indeed it became a significant part of their self-image, as the Thucydidean Cleon laments in the Mytilenaean debate.[38] Clearly the poetic persona has chosen a peculiarly tantalising carrot of a compliment to dangle before his audience, and the leveraging of this prized characteristic may generate **tension**, ultimately to be **released** in laughter at the pretensions of the poetic persona.

On top of this manipulative framing, the language of ϲοφία from the mouth of the poet creates a sense of the persona as an intellectual, even a sophist. The Athenians may generally have prided themselves on their intelligence, but the context of this play, where intellectuals and sophists are consistently sent up and targeted for humour as an **out-group**, makes the choice to model his persona on the sophists an unusual one. The idea of 'Aristophanes'-as-sophist may be expressed also by the sophist-endorsed rhetorical structure of the eupolideans (*prooimium* 518- 523, *diegesis* 524-536, *pisteis* 537-559, *epilogus* 560-562), and by the use of rhetorical devices favoured by the sophists.[39] To the

[38] Th. 3.37.4, 38.5-7. See e.g. Hutchinson (2016) 38-40.
[39] Rivers (1985) 173: 'The result is at once a pastiche and a masterpiece of the Greek art of persuasion.'

extent that these techniques were recognisably sophistic, the piece constitutes humorous imitation of the intellectual type. As elsewhere in Aristophanic parabases, the point lies in how the poetic persona fails to achieve his desired effect: his speech does not persuade, and his framing as a pseudo-sophist sets him up for failure. The very obviousness of his attempts at persuasion reveal to the audience, engaging in **mentalising** when watching this figure's monologue, a great disjunct between the persona's intention, how he wants to come across, and how they are actually understood by an engaged spectator; this is a lack of self-awareness, Major's ἀλαζονεία.

The claim to have deemed the Athenians worthy to taste his comedy first is a curious one. Unlike tragedy,[40] we have no references to Old Comedy plays being performed outside of Athens. As such, the persona seems to be disingenuously casting his only option – and actually a great honour to the playwright – as a favour with which he was gracing the Dionysia audience, a move that affirms the audience's assessment of his character manipulative and conceited.

When the poetic persona describes his defeat as undeserved (οὐκ ἄξιοϲ ὤν 525), it is possible that the observant and frequent theatre-goer was meant to hear an echo in ἄξιοϲ,[41] which the poet has explicitly claimed to be in every extant previous parabasis, besides *Wasps*.[42] In these earlier plays, the poet is positively staking out the claim to deserve rewards, while in *Clouds*, after the play's initial failure, we find the inverse: the poet is not deserving of this failure. This claim can be seen as the continuation of the

[40] Aeschylus' *Persians* and *Women of Etna* were probably performed in Sicily: Herington (1967).
[41] Just as Lucretius' spectacle-addict, haunted by images of shows at 4.971ff., past dramas, their ideas and images, could have had a certain longevity in the minds of theatre-lovers.
[42] *Ach.* 633: φηϲὶν δ᾽ εἶναι πολλῶν ἀγαθῶν ἄξιοϲ ὑμῖν ὁ ποιητήϲ; *Knights* 509: νῦν δ᾽ ἄξιόϲ ἐϲθ᾽ ὁ ποιητήϲ; *Pax* 738: ἄξιοϲ εἶναί φηϲ᾽ εὐλογίαϲ μεγάληϲ ὁ διδάϲκαλοϲ ἡμῶν; cf. *V.* 1017: ἀδικεῖϲθαι γάρ φηϲιν πρότεροϲ πόλλ᾽ αὐτοὺϲ εὖ πεποιηκώϲ 1017.

poet's brand, the stubborn self-assurance of the poetic persona, just translated into a new context – that of failure.

I Will Not Betray the Clever Ones 527-33

ἀλλ᾽ οὐδ᾽ ὣϲ ὑμῶν ποθ᾽ ἑκὼν προδώϲω τοὺϲ δεξιούϲ.

ἐξ ὅτου γὰρ ἐνθάδ᾽ ὑπ᾽ ἀνδρῶν, οἷϲ ἡδὺ καὶ ψέγειν,

ὁ ϲώφρων τε χὠ καταπύγων ἄριϲτ᾽ ἠκουϲάτην,

κἀγώ, παρθένοϲ γὰρ ἔτ᾽ ἦν, κοὐκ ἐξῆν πώ μοι τεκεῖν, 530

ἐξέθηκα, παῖϲ δ᾽ ἑτέρα τιϲ λαβοῦϲ᾽ ἀνείλετο,

ὑμεῖϲ δ᾽ ἐξεθρέψατε γενναίωϲ κἀπαιδεύϲατε·

ἐκ τούτου μοι πιϲτὰ παρ᾽ ὑμῶν γνώμηϲ ἔϲθ᾽ ὅρκια.

But I will never willingly betray the clever ones among you.

For from the time when here, by men whom it is a delight even to mention,

My virtuous boy and my buggered boy were well spoken of,

And I, for I was still unwed, and it was not yet allowed for me to give birth, 530

I exposed the child, and another certain girl picked it up and took it in,

And you raised it nobly and educated it:

From then I have held sworn pledges of your good opinion.

The move from ὑμῖν… τοῖϲ ϲοφοῖϲ (525-26) whom the poetic persona blames, and on whose account he went to all the trouble, to ὑμῶν… τοὺϲ δεξιούϲ (527) whom he will not willingly betray, at first seems jarring and contradictory. In fact, the first group's moniker ϲοφόϲ is probably sarcastic, and the partitive genitive construction in the latter suggests that Aristophanes is singling out a subset of Athenians, probably to be identified with those 'men whom it is a delight even to mention', who spoke well of *Banqueters* (528-9).[43] The narrowing scope and continued allegiance to those who are truly wise is noted by Hubbard as a rhetorical technique: 'Every spectator is flattered by being invited to consider himself part of an elite.'[44]

In these lines the poetic persona depicts himself as an unwed woman, a playful and perhaps even embarrassing image, and puts the audience into a quasi-parental role, as they raise and educate the abandoned *Banqueters*-child. The choice of the verb ἐξεθρέψατε echoes Aristophanes' own rearing by the god in line 519 (ἐκθρέψαντα), which creates a sense of continuity through the beginning of the poet's career,[45] but it also falsely suggests a more personal relationship between the poet's output and his audience. In the following line, the purposeful misunderstanding of their relationship goes further, as the persona pretends to believe that the audience's favouring of *Banqueters* amounts to a binding oath of support, as if the relationship between comic poet and audience were the same as that of members of a *hetaireia*. By affecting to have had a personal relationship with his audience, he can therefore pretend to have been betrayed by the viewers who failed to place *Clouds* I first. The **text world** constructed here clearly diverges from its real world input, in that in the annual dramatic competitions the machinery of judgement was surely intended to

[43] Halliwell (1980) 41-2 sees this as a reference to a form of patronage. It is subtle, if so.
[44] Hubbard (1991) 94.
[45] Biles (2011) 178-9.

produce yearly decisions based solely on the artistic merit of the staged plays at hand.[46] That the persona takes, or pretends to take, each win as a lasting commitment from the audience members may be read, through **mentalising** as a sign of self-delusion or manipulative deceit.

Electra-*Clouds* 534-44

νῦν οὖν Ἠλέκτραν κατ᾽ ἐκείνην ἥδ᾽ ἡ κωμῳδία

ζητοῦϲ᾽ ἦλθ᾽, ἤν που 'πιτύχῃ θεαταῖϲ οὕτω ϲοφοῖϲ· 535

γνώϲεται γάρ, ἤνπερ ἴδῃ, τἀδελφοῦ τὸν βόϲτρυχον.

ὡϲ δὲ ϲώφρων ἐϲτὶ φύϲει ϲκέψαϲθ᾽· ἥτιϲ πρῶτα μὲν

οὐδὲν ἦλθε ῥαψαμένη ϲκύτινον καθειμένον

ἐρυθρὸν ἐξ ἄκρου, παχύ, τοῖϲ παιδίοιϲ ἵν᾽ ᾖ γέλωϲ·

οὐδ᾽ ἔϲκωψεν τοὺϲ φαλακρούϲ, οὐδὲ κόρδαχ᾽ εἵλκυϲεν, 540

οὐδὲ πρεϲβύτηϲ ὁ λέγων τἄπη τῇ βακτηρίᾳ

τύπτει τὸν παρόντ᾽, ἀφανίζων πονηρὰ ϲκώμματα,

οὐδ᾽ εἰϲῇξε δᾷδαϲ ἔχουϲ᾽ οὐδ᾽ "ἰοὺ ἰοὺ" βοᾷ,

ἀλλ᾽ αὑτῇ καὶ τοῖϲ ἔπεϲιν πιϲτεύουϲ᾽ ἐλήλυθεν.

[46] Cf. *Eq.* 518 where the audience is denigrated as ἐπετείουϲ τὴν φύϲιν ὄνταϲ 518. A sign that the democratic mechanism of competition is functioning correctly is thus maligned as a sign of fickleness.

And so now like that Electra this comedy

Has come forth seeking, if somehow there happens to be such wise spectators: 535

For she will recognise, if she sees it, the lock of her brother's hair.

And look how modest she is in nature: for first

She came with no stitched dangling leather piece

Red at the end and thick, to make the children laugh;

Nor did she mock bald men, nor dragged out the can-can, 540

Nor does an old man giving a speech use a stick

To bash passers-by, concealing poor quality jokes,

Nor did anyone dash in carrying torches, nor shout 'Ioo, ioo'

But she came trusting in herself and her script.

The Electra image here is confusing, since if taken to its logical extremes it casts the audience as an avenging Orestes.[47] It may however, be a comic version of a typical rhetorical move: defendants sometimes displayed their children in the law court to play on the heliasts' sympathies.[48]

As many have pointed out, the coarse tricks disavowed in these lines are all (probably) instantiated within this very play,[49] and elsewhere in the poet's oeuvre,

[47] Olson (2021) *ad loc.*
[48] Rivers (1985) 176; Pl. *Apology* 34c, and cf. *V.* 976-8.
[49] A leather phallus was likely part of Strepsiades' costume, gestured to or with at moments with sexual charge, e.g. 196-7, 734; baldness is mocked at 545, and the character-mask of Socrates may also have been bald, since he was so depicted in busts, and later used as a positive *exemplum* in Synesius of Cyrene's *Encomium of Baldness* (1196.5); beating with a stick occurs at 56-59 and 1297-1300; characters rush on stage with torches at 1490-94; cries of ἰοὺ ἰοὺ at 1, 1321 and 1493.

prompting the question, 'has Aristophanes never seen an Aristophanes play?'[50] Hubbard argues the 'modesty' of the Electra-*Clouds* actually refers to the first version of the play, hypothesising that the first did not contain all the base and hackneyed comic tricks described here.[51] In his reading, the verbs in the aorist tense (ἦλθε 538; ἔϲκωψεν, εἵλκυϲεν 540; εἰϲῆξε 543) refer to the first *Clouds* only, while ἐϲτί (537) and ἐλήλυθεν (544) are general assertions about the play's enduring character, πρῶτα μὲν (537) is temporal rather than structuring an argument, and the poet rebukes the audience for only being responsive to the base comic tricks enumerated in lines 537-544, but incorporates them in his revised edition anyway. This is 'not merely the usual programmatic irony of pretending not to do things he often does',[52] as at *Wasps* 58-63, *Peace* 739-51 and *Frogs* 1-20, but rather the poet adapted the play to include coarser humour to increase its appeal to the masses, and in these lines he subtly admits that he has debased his play thus. He does not make an explicit delineation between comments about *Clouds* I and *Clouds* II clear, Hubbard thinks, because to do so would be to tell the masses directly that they were foolish for now enjoying *Clouds* I and that *Clouds* II panders to their poor taste. 'On the other hand', Hubbard notes, 'the poet could not maintain self-respect among his more perceptive fans without apologizing in some way for what he has done.'[53]

While this argument is an intriguing explanation of why the poetic persona disavows the many cheap tricks that the play actually contains, Olson argues compellingly that the poet in these lines refers to both versions of *Clouds* as if one entity, and that this reading is supported by the mix of tenses in the passage.[54] Additionally, it does not seem that the poetic persona is trying to mask his message in order to spare the feelings of the

[50] Case (2021) 26.
[51] Hubbard (1986) and (1991). O'Regan (1992) follows this reading. In Hubbard's favour perhaps is the suggestion of Σ *Nu.* 543a which suggests that the original *Clouds* does not end in arson.
[52] Hubbard (1991) 100.
[53] *Ibid.* 102.
[54] Olson (1994).

hoi polloi, since this very parabasis explicitly rebukes the audience for their decision in placing *Clouds* third. Moreover, splitting the audience into two groups, the mass of the audience and the more perceptive members, in the way that Hubbard does, is extremely simplistic. Doubtless, it is sometimes the case that some members of the audience will comprehend a joke, while others will not. Doubtless too, different audience members will have different tastes in joke material, with some preferring more highbrow humour, others less so. But these are inconsistent and matters of degree rather than monolithic groupings, nor can we identify those who prefer highbrow humour with '[Aristophanes'] more perceptive fans',[55] and those who prefer coarse humour with his less perceptive fans. But Hubbard's analysis, whereby the poet points out the debasement of *Clouds* II to his more perceptive fans as a sort of apology, and a criticism of the masses' taste in lowbrow tropes, assumes these identifications, as if indeed the audience can be simply divided into ϲοφοί (who liked *Clouds* I, who Aristophanes is loyal to and simultaneously who grasp that this parabasis is pointing out the debasement of the revised edition) and non-ϲοφοί (who did not like *Clouds* I, enjoy coarse jokes, and who as well have no chance of understanding the veiled criticism of this parabasis).

Stratification of the audience into the clever ones and the not-so-clever ones is of course exactly what Aristophanes has been doing in the eupolideans so far, but as argued above this is a rhetorical move so patently manipulative as to be humorous in and of itself, revealing as it does the insufficient self-awareness of the speaker. In reality, an audience would not fall so neatly into these two groupings, making this kind of *sotto voce* criticism of one faction of the audience to the other impractical.

[55] Hubbard (1991) 102.

I concur with Olson that these lines are best read as 'humorously self-promoting hypocrisy of a typically Aristophanic sort.'[56] This hypocrisy is clear in the case of many of the enumerated tropes, as discussed above, while the reference to long red phalluses and to the *kordax* are less certain since they rest on visual aspects of performance. Assuming, as seems likely, that Aristophanes intended to enact each and every one of the disavowed comic tropes, this could be taken as evidence that the revised *Clouds* was intended for performance.[57] The reference to the *kordax* may be a swipe at Eupolis, who later is said to have 'put a drunk old woman on stage for the sake of a *kordax*' (προcθεὶc αὐτῷ γραῦν μεθύcην τοῦ κόρδακοc οὕνεχ' 555). Meanwhile, the aural similarity of φαλακρόc to a portmanteau of φαλλόc and ἄκροc, occurring in 540 directly after a rather over-described visual image of a stage phallus, which even features the word ἄκροc (ῥαψαμένη cκύτινον καθειμένον | ἐρυθρὸν ἐξ ἄκρου, παχύ 538-9), may actually immediately undermine the claim in 540. Φαλακρόc is used as a euphemism for the glans penis in satyr comedy on a few occasions,[58] and after this drawn-out description of a stage phallus, the audience were primed to hear the scurrilous meaning, so the overt meaning of the statement οὐδ' ἔcκωψεν τοὺc φαλακρούc ('[the play] did not mock bald men' 540) is undermined immediately by the aural assimilation of 'bald men' to this body part.

[56] Olson (1994) 33.

[57] Marshall (2012) argues that the revised *Clouds* was reperformed, perhaps repeatedly. Rosen (1997) discusses how the play's comment on the textual process of revision reveals the poet's concern that the play be disseminated as a text to be read. Aristophanes may have had both readership and reperformance in mind: *Frogs* composed some thirteen odd years later has Dionysus refer casually to reading Euripides' *Andromeda* (52-3), taking for granted the possibility of reading dramatic manuscripts; on the other hand, the visual nature of the tropes here (presumably ironically) foresworn is suggestive of the intention of reperformance.

[58] A. *Dict*. 787-88, S. *Ichn.* fr. 314.368 (*TrGF*), E. *Cyc.* fr.227, and perhaps S. fr. 171.3 (*TrGF*); cf. Henderson (1975) 244-5.

What Aristophanes Does Not Do 545-50

κἀγὼ μὲν τοιοῦτος ἀνὴρ ὢν ποιητὴς οὐ κομῶ, 545

οὐδ᾽ ὑμᾶς ζητῶ 'ξαπατᾶν δὶς καὶ τρὶς ταὔτ᾽ εἰςάγων,

ἀλλ᾽ αἰεὶ καινὰς ἰδέας εἰςφέρων σοφίζομαι,

οὐδὲν ἀλλήλαισιν ὁμοίας καὶ πάσας δεξιάς·

ὃς μέγιστον ὄντα Κλέων᾽ ἔπαις᾽ ἐς τὴν γαστέρα

κοὐκ ἐτόλμης᾽ αὖθις ἐπεμπηδῆς᾽ αὐτῷ κειμένῳ. 550

And I am such a man who does not give himself *hairs* as a poet.[59] 545

Nor do I try to deceive you by leading out something several times,

But I am always innovating, bringing in new ideas,

Never the same as one another, and all clever.

I who, when he was famous, struck Cleon in the gut,

But did not dare to leap on him again when he was down. 550

The second item on the checklist (540) is decisively ticked off: Aristophanes was himself bald,[60] and κομάω can mean to ‘give oneself airs’, but it is also a pun compatible with two **scripts**, because it can also mean to wear one’s hair long, which the poet was famously unable to do. In a carnivalesque crescendo at the end of the play the last three items of this

[59] This translation of κομάω suggested by Sommerstein (1982).
[60] E.g. *Pax* 767-73.

list of cheap comic tricks occur in quick succession, in roughly the order given here. Therefore, we might wonder if, in the performed play, all of these apparent comedic faux pas would have occurred in the exact order given here. In that case, the first item (the appearance of a red, uncircumcised stage phallus or phalluses) would have already happened. This cannot be ruled out, and indeed it could even have been the case that the coryphaeus delivering the eupolideans wore such an item of costuming, perhaps revealing it as a comic **beat** during the parabasis itself.

And so, Aristophanes' baldness undermines the literal sense of the claim at 545. The metaphorical sense, that Aristophanes lacks pretensions, is also humorously false, exposed by his proud claims in 547: αἰεὶ καινὰϲ ἰδέαϲ εἰϲφέρων ϲοφίζομαι, and indeed by his arrogance throughout this and past parabases. The stress laid on innovation (καινάϲ 547, οὐδέν ἀλλήλαιϲιν ὁμοίαϲ 548) and cleverness (ϲοφίζομαι 547, πάϲαϲ δεξιάϲ 548) continues to characterise Aristophanes as a pseudo-sophist, as part of an **out-group** frequently the target of mockery elsewhere in the play, thereby compounding the dynamic of humour at the expense of the poet.

The poetic persona's claim to have struck Cleon when he was flourishing, but not to have leapt on him when he was down, is categorically untrue. The retention from *Clouds* I of insults directed at Cleon at 581-94 are thus made highly ironic. Lines 549-550 presumably refer to his plays' mockery of the politician, but they present Aristophanes as actually physically enacting violence on Cleon. This is narratological metalepsis, collapsing the diegetic levels between the world of the poet and the events of his plays.[61] To present the author physically interacting with figures within their plays centres the poet's dynamic power and agency, while simultaneously calling attention to the artifice of

[61] This metalepsis recalls literal violence to Paphlagon-Cleon at *Eq.* 273, 453-4: Kuhn-Treichel (2023).

the narrative world. It also highlights the persona's deluded sense of self-worth, as he treats his intra-narrative accomplishments as real events.

Those Other Hacks 551-9

οὗτοι δ', ὡς ἅπαξ παρέδωκεν λαβὴν Ὑπέρβολος,

τοῦτον δείλαιον κολετρῶς' ἀεὶ καὶ τὴν μητέρα.

Εὔπολις μὲν τὸν Μαρικᾶν πρώτιστον παρείλκυσεν

ἐκστρέψας τοὺς ἡμετέρους Ἱππέας κακὸς κακῶς,

προσθεὶς αὐτῷ γραῦν μεθύσην τοῦ κόρδακος οὕνεχ', ἣν 555

Φρύνιχος πάλαι πεποίηχ', ἣν τὸ κῆτος ἤσθιεν.

εἶθ' Ἕρμιππος αὖθις ἐποίησεν εἰς Ὑπέρβολον,

ἄλλοι τ' ἤδη πάντες ἐρείδουσιν εἰς Ὑπέρβολον,

τὰς εἰκοὺς τῶν ἐγχέλεων τὰς ἐμὰς μιμούμενοι.

But these other poets, at once when Hyperbolus let them grab hold of him,

Beat the wretch continually, and his mother too.

Eupolis first of all dragged out his *Marikas*

Twisting our *Knights* terribly,

Adding to it an old woman drunk just for a can-can, whom 555

Phrynichus produced long ago, whom the sea monster ate.

Then Hermippus made another play against Hyperbolus,

And already all the rest are laying into Hyperbolus,

And the similes about eels I wrote they're plagiarising.

The poet contrasts his own judicious battering of Cleon with the constant thrashing Hyperbolus received from other comic playwrights, and accuses Eupolis of plagiarism. The accusation that Eupolis 'twisted our *Knights* terribly' (554) needs further consideration. The juxtaposition of κακός and κακῶς echoes the Sausage-Seller in *Knights*, as he says that he is literate, but only just: ἀλλ' ὦγάθ' οὐδὲ μουσικὴν ἐπίσταμαι | πλὴν γραμμάτων, καὶ ταῦτα μέντοι κακὰ κακῶς (188-9). Sommerstein and Anderson-Dix note that the pairing of adjective and adverb is emphatic. The latter ventures that this technique is 'colloquial',[62] while Sommerstein renders the phrase as 'I'm proper bad at that', suggesting that he too sees this as clumsy phrasing, intended to illustrate the Sausage-Seller's lack of education.

On the other hand, polyptoton of κακός with its adverb occurs several times in Greek tragedy.[63] Rivers identifies this phrasing as 'slant homoeoteleuton… alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia' and says that 'Gorgias himself, the king of rhetorical repetition, could not have said it better.'[64] It is hard, therefore, to determine the tone of κακὸς κακῶς, whether it sounds clumsy, and hence characterises Eupolis' mishandling of the *Knights*, or is an elegant phrase intended to continue the persona's impersonation of a sophist.

[62] Sommerstein (1982), Anderson and Dix (2020) *ad loc*.
[63] A. Th. 1049, S. *Aj.* 1177, 1391, *OT* 248; E. *Med.* 805, 1386, *HF* 728, *Tr.* 446, 1055-6.
[64] Rivers (1985) 179.

Line 559 seems to refer to just one simile, *Knights* 864-7, in which Paphlagon-Cleon is likened to an eel-fisher who catches eels by stirring them up. Sommerstein refers to the plural here as a 'plural of aggrievement', suggesting that Aristophanes has pluralised the eel in anger, exaggerating the size of the theft. Perhaps Aristophanes composed other eel-similes now lost to us, but this interpretation, which relies on **mentalising**, is very appealing and suggests a poetic persona that is petulant and liable to over-estimate his own impact.

Circling Back to the Point 560-2

ὅϲτιϲ οὖν τούτοιϲι γελᾷ, τοῖϲ ἐμοῖϲ μὴ χαιρέτω· 560

ἢν δ᾽ ἐμοὶ καὶ τοῖϲιν ἐμοῖϲ εὐφραίνηϲθ᾽ εὑρήμαϲιν,

ἐϲ τὰϲ ὥραϲ τὰϲ ἑτέραϲ εὖ φρονεῖν δοκήϲετε.

So whoever laughs along with these jokes, let him take no pleasure in mine! 560

But if you enjoy me and my inventions,

Into other seasons you will seem wise.

Line 560 provides a clear comic **beat**. It continues the rhetorical stratification of the audience into those with worse taste, who laugh at poor jokes and the plagiarising plays of inferior playwrights, and those with better taste, who laugh at the innovative jokes of the superior Aristophanes. Nevertheless, there is something clearly inauspicious and humorous in a comic playwright explicitly wishing that a portion of his audience or readership not

enjoy his work. It recalls a famous joke by Bob Monkhouse: 'When I said I was going to become a comedian, they all laughed. Well, they're not laughing now, are they?' In both, humour is generated because the bitterness of the poet causes him to celebrate people not finding them funny – an event which they should clearly be striving for. In Aristophanes, he actually orders part of the audience not to enjoy his work. To celebrate the alienation of part of one's audience, when the public democratic nature of the competitive environment incentivises playwrights to appeal to the broadest possible section of society, reaffirms the poetic persona's stance as one humorously out of touch, with too high an opinion of himself to perform his own job well. Paradoxically, the humour that this pseudo-intellectual conceited persona generates at their own expense is a testament to the actual poet's skill as a comic playwright.[65]

The final two lines of the eupolideans appeal to posterity, as the poetic persona once again dangles the possibility of appearing wise in front of his audience.[66] Rivers notes the playful aural echo between action and consequence in εὐφραίνηcθ' εὑρήμαcιν… εὖ φρονεῖν, and identifies these lines as possessing a Gorgianic jingle.[67] ἐc τὰc ὥραc τὰc ἑτέραc could mean 'into other seasons' or 'into other years', and similarly to line 533 expresses the poetic persona's desire for guaranteed and enduring public support. On the other hand, given how pretentious the cοφόc poet (520) has come across over the course of the parabasis, one wonders how much association with him would appeal, and how great of a reward 'εὖ φρονεῖν δοκήcετε' represents, when proffered by him.

[65] Cf. my analysis of *Ach.* 655.
[66] Cf. *Frogs* 705, 736-7.
[67] Rivers (1985) 180.

Hymning Zeus, Poseidon, Aether and Helios 563-74

ὑψιμέδοντα μὲν θεῶν

Ζῆνα τύραννον ἐς χορὸν

πρῶτα μέγαν κικλήσκω· 565

τόν τε μεγασθενῆ τριαί-

νης ταμίαν,

γῆς τε καὶ ἁλμυρᾶς θαλάς-

σης ἄγριον μοχλευτήν·

καὶ μεγαλώνυμον ἡμέτερον πατέρ',

Αἰθέρα σεμνότατον βιοθρέμμονα πάντων· 570

τόν θ' ἱππονώμαν, ὃς ὑπερ-

λάμπροις ἀκτῖσιν κατέχει

γῆς πέδον, μέγας ἐν θεοῖς

ἐν θνητοῖσί τε δαίμων.

High-ruling lord

Of the gods, great Zeus,

I first call to the chorus, 565

And the great and mighty

Keeper of the trident,

The savage upheaver

Of earth and briny sea,

And our great-named father,

Aether, the most reverend, who nourishes all life, 570

And the charioteer, who spreads

His shining rays over

The plain of the earth, a great

Deity among gods and mortals.

The choice of gods in the ode and antode have been commented upon by many. Firstly, their use of traditional deities seems at odds with their introduction as new gods.[68] Their traditional piety comes as a surprise, therefore, but one that anticipates the revelation of their real mission, not as champions of new sophistic ideas but as reformers of πονηρὰ πράγματα (1455), who teach fear of the traditional gods (1458-61). Secondly, Scodel has noted that the gods invoked in the ode are gods of nature, while the gods in the antode are called upon in terms that stress their connection to particular locations of worship, and even refer to Athena as ἡμετέρα θεός in 601: 'the chorus of the ode sees the gods from a perspective appropriate to clouds, as cosmic forces, whereas that of the antode sees them from the point of view of human worshippers.'[69] It is not necessary to see the chorus' identity as shifting in a definitive way between the ode and antode, however, as the clouds

[68] Blyth (1994) sees the references to the traditional pantheon as prefiguring their moral message at 1458-61.
[69] Scodel (1987) 335. Anderson (2008) 2 sees the choral identity in the ode as ambiguous.

have shown themselves in the intervening tetrameters as having an invested interest in aiding the Athenians, and so the reference to Athena as ἡμετέρα θεός could be appropriate for them, not as the real Athenian choreut performers, but as Athenian, or simply pro-Athenian, clouds.

Blaming the Audience 575-9

ὦ ϲοφώτατοι θεαταί, δεῦρο τὸν νοῦν προϲέχετε. 575

ἠδικημέναι γὰρ ὑμῖν μεμφόμεϲθ᾽ ἐναντίον·

πλεῖϲτα γὰρ θεῶν ἁπάντων ὠφελούϲαιϲ τὴν πόλιν,

δαιμόνων ἡμῖν μόναιϲ οὐ θύετ᾽ οὐδὲ ϲπένδετε,

αἵτινεϲ τηροῦμεν ὑμᾶϲ.

Oh wisest audience, pay attention now. 575

Because we've been wronged and openly blame you.

For although we help the city more than all the gods,

To us, uniquely of deities, you don't sacrifice or pour libations,

Us who watch over you.

In the tetrameters of *Clouds* we find a different dynamic of humour at play from that in *Knights* and other plays. The chorus personify an inhuman meteorological phenomenon,

and Aristophanes does not turn them into an imitation of any particular Athenian demographic. While a great deal of the humour in *Knights* lies in the imitation and distortion of the hippic class as a targeted **out-group**, here in *Clouds* there is no such imitation or denigration of a group. The clouds do not even represent, as we would be forgiven for having expected, the sophists or their fans. Instead, the humour is generated through fanciful personification of celestial forces, the clever co-opting of real astronomical and meteorological events as the result of divine displeasure, and the mockery of the audience and named political figures – Cleon and Hyperbolus.

The poetic persona and the clouds are alike in claiming to be benefactors of the Athenians, in complaining of maltreatment by the Athenians,[70] and by engaging with the theme of cleverness. The clouds' address to the audience at 575 as σοφώτατοι θεαταί could even be taken as sarcastic, given how loaded the word σοφός has become in the play.

Election Day Storms 579-94

ἣν γὰρ ᾖ τις ἔξοδος

μηδενὶ ξὺν νῷ, τότ᾽ ἢ βροντῶμεν ἢ ψακάζομεν. 580

εἶτα τὸν θεοῖςιν ἐχθρὸν βυρςοδέψην Παφλαγόνα

ἡνίχ᾽ ᾑρεῖςθε ςτρατηγόν, τὰς ὀφρῦς ξυνήγομεν

κἀποιοῦμεν δεινά, βροντὴ δ᾽ ἐρράγη δι᾽ ἀςτραπῆς.

ἡ ςελήνη δ᾽ ἐξέλειπε τὰς ὁδούς, ὁ δ᾽ ἥλιος

[70] These two continuities noted by Bowie (1993) 128-9.

τὴν θρυαλλίδ᾽ εἰϲ ἑαυτὸν εὐθέωϲ ξυνελκύϲαϲ 585

οὐ φανεῖν ἔφαϲκεν ὑμῖν, εἰ ϲτρατηγήϲοι Κλέων.

ἀλλ᾽ ὅμωϲ εἵλεϲθε τοῦτον. φαϲὶ γὰρ δυϲβουλίαν

τῇδε τῇ πόλει προϲεῖναι, ταῦτα μέντοι τοὺϲ θεούϲ,

ἅττ᾽ ἂν ὑμεῖϲ ἐξαμάρτητ᾽, ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιον τρέπειν.

ὡϲ δὲ καὶ τοῦτο ξυνοίϲει ῥᾳδίωϲ διδάξομεν· 590

ἢν Κλέωνα τὸν λάρον δώρων ἑλόντεϲ καὶ κλοπῆϲ

εἶτα φιμώϲητε τούτου τῷ ξύλῳ τὸν αὐχένα,

αὖθιϲ ἐϲ τἀρχαῖον ὑμῖν, εἴ τι κἀξημάρτετε,

ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιον τὸ πρᾶγμα τῇ πόλει ξυνοίϲεται.

If there is to be an expedition

Which is foolish, then we thunder or drizzle. 580

Then that god-hated tanner Paphlagon,

When you chose him as general, we drew our brows together

And were angry, and thunder broke through the lightning.

The moon left her paths, and the sun

Retracted his wick at once, 585

And said he would not shine, if Cleon should be general.

But still you chose him. For they say ill-counsel

Is at hand in the city, but that the gods,

Whenever you make a mistake, turn it for the better.

And how this will benefit you, we will easily teach you: 590

If you convict Cleon the gull of taking bribes and embezzling

And you fasten his neck in the stocks,

Returning to your old ways, then even if you do something wrong,

The matter will turn out for the better for the city.

Here the clouds suggest that storms and eclipses were intended as signals from them, the sun and moon, warning the Athenians not to elect Cleon as general. One sort of humour in these lines can perhaps best be understood through **text world theory**, since it is a sustained narrative which constructs a **text world**, with general knowledge of the real world as its key input. The clouds construct an alternate Athens, based on real political, meteorological and astronomical events, but in which these events are explained by the privileged support Athens receives from their divine guardian angels.[71]

As well as the pleasing image of Athens' protection by divine forces, and the intellectually satisfying explanatory force of this constructed **world**, mockery of Cleon is intended to generate humour. The retention of jokes about Cleon, in the revised edition of *Clouds* which certainly postdates the politician's death, gives the lie to the poet's claim not to kick Cleon when he was down (550). There are two routes one can take in the

[71] Olson (2021) notes that the idea that Athens was charmed, unable to meet with disaster due to luck rather than her citizen's shrewdness, was a local saying: Σ *Nu.* 587, Eup. fr. 219.3: ὡc εὐτυχὴc εἶ μᾶλλον ἢ καλῶc φρονεῖc. It even seems to have survived the Peloponnesian War: *Ec.* 473-5: λόγοc γέ τοί τιc ἔcτι τῶν γεραιτέρων, | ὅc' ἂν ἀνόητ' ἢ μῶρα βουλευcώμεθα, | ἅπαντ' ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιον ἡμῖν ξυμφέρειν.

interpretation of this passage. Firstly, the retention of this passage, surely composed prior to Cleon's death for the first *Clouds*, could be 'an ill-adjusted mingling of earlier and later passages… [which] lends no humour, but only confusion, to [the] text',[72] and a sign that the revision of the *Clouds* is incomplete. Secondly, the preservation of this passage in the revised *Clouds* could be understood as 'every bit as deliberate as the decision to write something new.'[73]

The fact that the existent *Clouds* is a revised version is no secret. The references to defeat in the eupolideans make this fact part of the discourse and the texture of the play itself. Had the revised *Clouds* ever been performed, perhaps at a smaller deme theatre rather than the civic stage of the theatre of Dionysus, the audience would have been aware of the archaeology of the text, which comprises two distinct strata from different eras of composition. Given this knowledge, why should the audience be unduly confused by the shift in temporal perspective between eupolideans and the epirrhema? The lack of topicality is not necessarily a sign that Aristophanes did not get around to revising this section; Old Comedy is so highly topical in its references that the reperformance of any comic play would surely have the same problem. But we know that at least one other play was reperformed.[74] Therefore, it is preferable to interpret the text as it has come down to us, without second-guessing the extent to which Aristophanes 'completed' his revision of the play.

Interpreting the text at hand on its own terms also provides interesting results. Karatzoglou has found in Cleon's reincarnation a subtle joke relying on an Iliadic intertext, arguing that this is an allusion to the Paphlagonian character Pylaemenes, who dies in

[72] Whitman (1964) 121.
[73] Hubbard (1986) 195 n. 47.
[74] *Ra.* Hyp. I^{C} tells us *Frogs* was reperformed.

combat before returning to the battlefield several books later.[75] The coincidence of Paphlagonian heritage, the notoriety of the Pylaemenes inconsistency in ancient scholarship, and the *Iliad*'s fame and centrality to classical education all combine to make this interpretation attractive.

On the other hand, it would take a particularly well-versed and observant audience member to recognise the reference here, which is not markedly signposted, and the potential Homeric allusion is not necessary to explain the preservation of jokes at Cleon's expense here in *Clouds* II. For one thing, the inclusion of this joke sometime after Cleon's death would increase the hypocrisy of Aristophanes' persona, as it contradicts the (already untrue) claim made at 549-550. The reference to Cleon also functions to further cement the persona of Aristophanes as bitter, unable to let Cleon go.[76]

Hymning Apollo, Artemis, Athena and Dionysus 595-606

ἀμφί μοι αὖτε, Φοῖβ᾽ ἄναξ 595

Δήλιε, Κυνθίαν ἔχων

ὑψικέρατα πέτραν·

ἥ τ᾽ Ἐφέσου μάκαιρα πάγ-

χρυσον ἔχεις οἶκον, ἐν ᾧ κόραι cε Λυ-

δῶν μεγάλως cέβουcιν, 600

ἥ τ᾽ ἐπιχώριος ἡμετέρα θεὸc

[75] *Il.*5. 576-9, 13. 643–59: Karatzoglou (2019).

[76] See section 1 of the following chapter.

αἰγίδος ἡνίοχος, πολιοῦχος Ἀθάνα,

Παρναccίαν θ᾽ ὃc κατέχων

πέτραν cὺν πεύκαις cελαγεῖ

Βάκχαις Δελφίcιν ἐμπρέπων, 605

κωμαcτὴc Διόνυcοc.

Be around me again, Lord Phoebus, 595

Delian one, who holds the

High-horned Cynthian rock.

And the blessed one, you who have

The all-golden house of Ephesus, in which girls

Of Lydia revere you greatly, 600

And our native god,

Driver of the aegis, protector of the city, Athena,

And he who, inhabiting the Parnassian

Rock, shines with pine-torches,

Conspicuous among Delphic bacchants, 605

The reveller Dionysus.

In this antode the clouds calls upon four further deities, in two complementary pairs: Apollo and Artemis, Athena and Dionysus. The phrase ἀμφί μοι... ἄναξ should be translated as something like 'be with us…!', and stands in for the missing active verb of the passage.[77] According to the scholia, it comes from the early poet Terpander, and was used by the dithyrambic poets.[78] Terpander, considered by some to be a descendant of Hesiod or Homer,[79] was credited with various musical innovations, particularly ones to do with lyric melody as an accompaniment to the *cithara* or other stringed instrument.[80] Aside from Pindar's assertion that Terpander invented *scolia*,[81] the overwhelming impression one gets of Terpander's musical oeuvre is one of archaic, traditional, uncontroversial lyric. If this is indeed the sort of tone Aristophanes is borrowing here, it strengthens our impression of the cloud chorus as surprising champions of the traditional Greek pantheon.

Lunacy 607-19

ἡνίχ᾽ ἡμεῖϲ δεῦρ᾽ ἀφορμᾶϲθαι παρεϲκευάϲμεθα,

ἡ ϲελήνη ξυντυχοῦϲ᾽ ἡμῖν ἐπέϲτειλεν φράϲαι,

πρῶτα μὲν χαίρειν Ἀθηναίοιϲι καὶ τοῖϲ ξυμμάχοιϲ·

εἶτα θυμαίνειν ἔφαϲκε· δεινὰ γὰρ πεπονθέναι 610

ὠφελοῦϲ᾽ ὑμᾶϲ ἅπανταϲ οὐ λόγοιϲ ἀλλ᾽ ἐμφανῶϲ·

πρῶτα μὲν τοῦ μηνὸϲ ἐϲ δᾶδ᾽ οὐκ ἔλαττον ἢ δραχμήν,

[77] Olson (2021) *ad loc.*
[78] Σ *Nu.* 595c.α.
[79] *Sud*. T 354 (iv 527 Adler).
[80] E.g. *Marm. Par.* Ep. 34., *Sud.* T 354 (iv 527 Adler), Plut. *Mus*. 4.1132e, Ath. 14.635de.
[81] Pi. fr. 129 (Turyn).

ὥστε καὶ λέγειν ἅπαντας ἐξιόντας ἑσπέρας,

“μὴ πρίῃ, παῖ, δᾷδ᾽, ἐπειδὴ φῶς σεληναίης καλόν.”

ἄλλα τ᾽ εὖ δρᾶν φησιν, ὑμᾶς δ᾽ οὐκ ἄγειν τὰς ἡμέρας 615

οὐδὲν ὀρθῶς, ἀλλ᾽ ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω κυδοιδοπᾶν·

ὥστ᾽ ἀπειλεῖν φησιν αὐτῇ τοὺς θεοὺς ἑκάστοτε,

ἡνίκ᾽ ἂν ψευσθῶσι δείπνου κἀπίωσιν οἴκαδε

τῆς ἑορτῆς μὴ τυχόντες κατὰ λόγον τῶν ἡμερῶν.

When we had prepared to set out on our way here,

The moon met us and bid us to say,

First, hello to the Athenians and the allies,

Then she said she was angry, because she’s suffered terribly 610

While helping you, not just with words but visibly:

First, in a month, no less than a drachma towards torches,

So that in fact everyone says as they go out in the evenings,

“Don’t buy a torch, boy, since the light of the moon is so fine.”

And she says she does you other benefits, but you don’t conduct your days 615

At all rightly, but you make a topsy-turvy commotion of them.

And as a result, she says, each of the gods threatens her,

When they’re cheated of their dinner and go off home

Without having met with the feast calculated for the date.

As well as the fanciful image of the moon chatting to some clouds, this passage derives humour by mocking the audience for their stinginess, much as Aristophanes will go on to mock the chorus-leader in *Wasps* at 250-3 by having him reproach his son for using too much oil. Once more in this passage we find that the humour is largely based on real astronomical events, as at 615-9 the chorus seem to be referring to a discrepancy between the years as they counted them and the lunar calendars, and then imbuing this historical fact with divine significance.

Festal Day Slacking 620-6

κᾆθ᾽ ὅταν θύειν δέῃ, στρεβλοῦτε καὶ δικάζετε· 620

πολλάκις δ᾽ ἡμῶν ἀγόντων τῶν θεῶν ἀπαστίαν,

ἡνίκ᾽ ἂν πενθῶμεν ἢ τὸν Μέμνον᾽ ἢ Σαρπηδόνα,

σπένδεθ᾽ ὑμεῖς καὶ γελᾶτ᾽· ἀνθ᾽ ὧν λαχὼν Ὑπέρβολος

τῆτες ἱερομνημονεῖν, κἄπειθ᾽ ὑφ᾽ ἡμῶν τῶν θεῶν

τὸν στέφανον ἀφῃρέθη· μᾶλλον γὰρ οὕτως εἴσεται 625

κατὰ σελήνην ὡς ἄγειν χρὴ τοῦ βίου τὰς ἡμέρας.

And when you should sacrifice, you're torturing or litigating; 620

And often when us gods are fasting,

When we mourn Memnon or Sarpedon,

You are pouring libations and laughing. Because of this, when Hyperbolus

Obtained by lot the role of *hieromnemon* this year, he was then by us gods

Robbed of his wreath, so he will know better

That he ought to lead the days of his life according to the moon.

The chorus go on to impute the Athenians' typical litigiousness, which comes at the expense of disregarding traditional religious festivals. They go on to explain how Hyperbolus lost his wreath after being made *hieromnemon*: presumably this wreath was blown from his head during a ceremony, and in the **text world** constructed in the parabasis, where every change of weather or astronomical event is imbued with divine significance, this real event is made to be a purposeful slight to the politician. The humour of this section relies to a certain degree on the recalling of an event that was no doubt rather embarrassing to Hyperbolus, and therefore already somewhat humorous to his detractors and others. Ostracised around 416, this attack on Hyperbolus is obviously in humorous intertext to the eupolideans section of the parabasis (551-8), where attacks on this politician are suggested to be old-hat and derivative.

5. Conclusions

In the *Clouds* parabasis, the Aristophanic persona is perhaps at his most alienated, and this is partially a result of the guise which he adopts as a quasi-sophist, a misunderstood intellect. As with *Acharnians*, the disjunct between what the protagonist seems to represent (Dicaeopolis as anti-war, Strepsiades as anti-intellectual) and the representation of the

poetic persona (Aristophanes as eager war adviser, Aristophanes as rarefied wit) creates a broad structural ambivalence that does not allow for one dominant interpretation of the poet's attitudes to be reached.[82] As with *Acharnians*, this has led scholars to confusion, in the belief that the play lacks a coherent political message.

It would be more accurate, I submit, to see the play as calling upon the audience to laugh at Strepsiades' foolish knavery just as much as it encourages us to find humour in the depiction of the poetic persona as a sophist with highbrow pretensions. Aristophanes caters to the multiplicity of opinions that must have existed in the theatre audience, and is sensitive to their differing perspectives, just as his persona pointedly refuses to be.

[82] This is exemplified by the debate regarding the play's ending with the burning of the Thinkery: Kopff (1977) finds it disturbing while Davies (1990) sees it as 'popular justice'; Segal (1969) recognises the arson as both an act of liberation and destruction; Pirrotta (2016) 48: 'Strepsiades's revenge is nothing but a sign of absolute desperation'.

Bugging Out

The Cleon Obsession in *Wasps* and *Peace*

Oversized insects dominate the plot and imagery of Aristophanes' next two plays, but *Wasps* and *Peace* share more than that. There are many continuities in Aristophanes' brand identity between the two plays, and a striking similarity is the almost verbatim repetition of a passage in which Aristophanes-as-hero slays Cleon-as-monster. The doubling down on his hatred of Cleon, especially after the death in war of this prominent politician, functions to sustain his poetic brand, and his stubbornness can also be seen as a humorous stance explained particularly well by Bergson's mechanical theory of humour.

In *Wasps* Aristophanes once again chooses a chorus of Greco-Persian Wars veterans, and in satirising this group he must tread carefully to avoid causing offence. In this parabasis, the confluence of three rather different aspects of the chorus identity – as veterans, as jurists, and as wasps – means that humour is mainly derived from **incongruities** when these different **scripts** collide, although humour is also found in the excessive nostalgia of the veterans with their well-worn aggrandising rhetoric.

In *Peace*, Aristophanes triumphantly reprises his abuse of Cleon, luxuriating in the politician's death in such a way as to disingenuously take credit both for Cleon's downfall, and for the subsequent enactment of peace. After the autobiographical section, Aristophanes chooses not to layer any more specific identity – political or otherwise – over his rather bland chorus of Panhellenic farmers. While often the audience of an Old Comedy is treated in the parabasis to a comic representation of some particular demographic or species, in this play the intra-narrative identity of the chorus is neglected. Instead, the parabasis is dedicated to the mockery of particular named poet *komoidoumenoi*. It is as if, since peace has been achieved to general approbation, there is time to focus upon the aesthetic inferiorities of other poets, which alone blight the idyllic **world** envisaged by this play.

1. Speaking Ill of the Dead

The parabases of *Wasps* and *Peace* have a lot in common besides familiar generic features, such as the claim not to have levied his poetic success to procure sexual favours.[1] Continuity between parabases is to be expected, as it is crucial to maintaining a coherent brand identity for the poet and sustaining a dynamic narrative about his persona.[2] Notebly, *Peace* also quotes *Wasps* almost verbatim, regurgitating a six and a half line section wholesale. Furthermore, the repetition of this section – in which the central narrative is that of Aristophanes-as-hero slaying Cleon-as-monster – chronologically straddles this politician's death in war.

The repetition of the passage in *Peace*, with its depiction of the recently dead general as an infernal monster, seems to contradict the generally respected concept of *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*. Diogenes Laertius attributes the phrase, presumably proverbial, τὸν τεθνηκότα μὴ κακολογεῖν to Chilon of Sparta, while Plutarch attributes the sentiment to Solon.[3] Both thus give the thought archaic origins, and even if we doubt these later attributions, the basic idea is echoed in Pericles' funeral oration: τὸν γὰρ οὐκ ὄντα ἅπας εἴωθεν ἐπαινεῖν (Th. 2.45). Even if we accept that this precept is not always respected in Old Comedy – as *Frogs*, or the fragments of Eupolis' *Demoi*, for example, suggest we should[4] – nevertheless, the triumphant mockery of a recently dead general, previously a venerated hero of the *polis*, certainly risked striking an uncomfortable note.[5]

And yet, this may be exactly what the poet intended. As discussed in my introduction, humour involving **emotionally arousing** subject matter, such as death and taboo topics, may generate a greater payoff of humour because these topics create **tension**. The greater the tension, the more energy the audience will release as laughter when given permission to stop vigilantly maintaining their inhibitions, specifically here a sense of respect when discussing the recently deceased. To

[1] *V.* 1025-8, *Pax* 762-3.
[2] See e.g. 37, 47 and 69.
[3] D.L. 1.3.70, Plu. *Sol.* 21.
[4] Mockery of the long-dead Aeschylus and the still relatively warm Euripides dominates the second half of *Frogs*. The four dead Athenian leaders central to *Demoi*'s plot must have been the subject of some mockery, e.g. in fr. 110 Pericles is mocked for having bastard sons with an unsavoury woman.
[5] Attempts at humour are 'dualistic' in that they typically risk a potential negative outcome (generating a negative emotion such as embarrassment, outrage, or anxiety), while aiming for a positive outcome (amusement and laughter): Granitsas (2020) 627.

Cleon's most loyal supporters, this humour may well have fallen flat,[6] but for the rest of the audience, this irreverent humour is heightened by its potentially touchy subject matter. The poetic persona not only refuses to avoid such topics, but joyously reprises his imagined confrontation with Cleon. He even shifts the encounter from the third to the first person as if to assert maximum ownership over the deed.

The inflammatory nature of the repeated section, which publicly exults in imagined victory over a recently deceased public figure, also serves an overarching function relating to self-characterisation: it influences the mental model which the audience, engaging in **mentalising**, would construct of the poetic persona. His antagonism towards the politician is envisaged by the persona as heroic encounters. In *Wasps* he becomes a new Heraclean cleanser of the land.[7] In *Peace* he usurps the role of Bellerophon from the protagonist and refers to his own attacks upon Cleon as fighting in defence of Athens and her allies,[8] and his innovations to theatre and its tropes as ending wars,[9] which other comic playwrights wage.[10] In the latter play, the cumulative effect of these references to warfare and securing peace is that the persona seems to bask in stolen glory, by equating his poetic achievements to both the waging of war and the brokering of peace. By restating his hostility to Cleon, an influential pro-war politician, whose posthumous absence from city politics facilitated the brokering of the peace of Nicias,[11] the poet's persona seems to claim by association to have been fighting for peace, staking triumphant claim to the historical peace that was achieved. This co-opting of the brokering of peace is expressed also in the very name of the play; about Aristophanes, it could be said that he ποιῆcαι/ποιήcαcθαι εἰρήνην, in the sense 'composed *Peace*', but the same phrase could also mean that he 'made peace', as in brokered an end to war.[12]

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[6] See section 2.3 in my introduction.
[7] τῆc χώραc τῆcδε καθαρτήν 1043.
[8] *Pax* 759-60.
[9] τοὺc ἀντιπάλουc… κατέπαυcεν… πολεμοῦνταc *Pax* 739-40.
[10] I.e. the war on slaves' ribs: μῶν ὑcτριχὶc εἰcέβαλέν coι | εἰc τὰc πλευρὰc πολλῇ cτρατιᾷ κἀδενδροτόμηcε τὸ νῶτον; 746-7.
[11] Th. 5.16.1.
[12] Cf. Th. 1.40.2: εἰ cωφρονοῦcι, πόλεμον ἀντ᾽ εἰρήνηc ποιήcει.

The repeated section is also striking as a missed opportunity for creativity. Given the opportunity to present fresh material on the civic stage, repetition seems a counter-intuitive choice on the face of it. Why not showcase the creative vision which the poet's persona repeatedly claims to possess?[13] Two answers spring to mind. Firstly, the dogged pursuit of Cleon, even after the politician's demise, is important for the poet's brand. Criticism of Cleon had been a key characteristic of the poetic persona in every earlier extant play,[14] and is attested in lost comedies as well.[15] The connection of poet and politician allowed Aristophanes to make his poet persona memorable, giving it notional relevance to the city's political life and defining himself in relation to the most successful politician of the era. This would function much like when Chevy Chase invented a relationship between himself and Gerald Ford as a long-standing joke on *Saturday Night Live* during Ford's presidency.[16] On this side of the pond, an invented encounter between Stewart Lee and David Cameron serves as a parallel, when the comedian claimed that he was forced by the future prime minister and the rest of the Bullingdon Club to drink vomit from a champagne bucket at a May Ball in Oxford.[17] Such fictionalised connections have great comedic potential, allowing for the comic to create a personal narrative involving an already famous figure. The benefits are clear. So is the literary precedent, for the desirability of entering a νεῖκος with a well-known figure can be observed in the conflict between Archilochus and Lycambes, or Hipponax and Bupalus.[18]

Secondly, the obstinacy of the poetic persona showcased in his gloating reprisal of the lines in question is itself a driver of humour. A **mentalising** audience member recognises the poet as obsessed to the extent that he risks being offensive, effectively dancing upon the grave of the recently deceased general. Obsessiveness as a generator of humour can be understood particularly well by reference to the humour theory of Bergson. According to his 'mechanical' theory of humour, laughter is caused when someone is perceived as demonstrating behaviour that is too

[13] E.g. *Nu.* 547-8, *V.* 1044, 1053-4.; Innovation is surely also implied by his disavowal of hackneyed comic tropes at *Nu.* 538-43, *Pax* 739-48.
[14] *Ach.* 659-64, *Eq.* 510-11, *Nu.* 549-50.
[15] For *Babylonians* (427), see Σ *Ach.* 378, Σ *Ach.* 503, *Proleg. de com.* XXVIII Kost. 19-21; for *Farmers* (424-422) see Σ *Eq.* 963aIII; for *Merchant Ships* (424-421) see Hyp. *Pax* A3.
[16] For discussion of this, see Rosen (2010) 235.
[17] Hanning (2014).
[18] Rosen (1988, 2013). See also section 5.3 in my introduction.

mechanically rigid, rather than appropriately adapting to the circumstances in which they find themselves. This can be quite literal and physical, as when someone fails to adjust their gait and trips upon an obstacle, or it can refer to inappropriate social behaviour. In this latter case, laughter acts as a sort of 'corrective' to behaviour that is too rigid, and therefore inappropriate.[19] This theory, though semi-influential, has generally been deemed too narrow to constitute a universal explanation of humour. Nevertheless, it is particularly apt in this case, where the poetic persona continues inflexibly to wage his personal vendetta, even when Cleon-bashing is not socially appropriate. This mechanism for humour may be an atavistic reflex which encourages adaptation of behaviours, and increases social cohesion through the policing of others' anti-social behaviour, but in this context the laughter of the crowd at Aristophanes' persona will hardly embarrass the poet to 'correct' his behaviour. Laughter at the persona's expense is his goal.

With Cleon's death, the poet loses the potential for fresh material on the topic. *Peace* is the last extant and full autobiographical parabasis, but it is not the case that, without Cleon, without the politician around whom Aristophanes had built his own comic persona, the poet abandons the autobiographical parabasis altogether. Later parabatic fragments show the poet discussing plagiarism and the comic craft, through his chorus or in the first person.[20] So Aristophanes' autobiography soldiers on without Cleon, and manages by and large to let the politician go: the poet only mentions him twice, briefly, in later plays.[21] *Peace*'s parabasis is the last (sustained) hurrah for Cleon-bashing. For Aristophanes, the recapitulation of victory over Cleon clearly held such appeal that the poet was willing to forego the chance to display innovation or creativity. And,

[19] Bergson (1911) 21.
[20] In Ar. fr. 30 (*Amphiaraus*, probably 414 – see Hyp. *Av.* A5 29-30) the poet acknowledges in anapaests that he is doing something archaic (ἀρχαῖόν τι); fr. 58 (*Anagyrus*, probably after 417) alludes to Eupolis plagiarising his work (ἐκ δὲ τῆϲ ἐμῆϲ χλανίδοϲ τρεῖϲ ἀπληγίδαϲ ποιῶν); frr. 264-5 (*Danaids*, date uncertain) are parabatic and discuss the practices of early comic performers: Spelman (2021); fr. 347 (the lost second *Thesmophoriazusae* c. 415-406) discusses the poetic style of Crates, as at *Eq.* 537-40, and refers to the play's director explicitly (ὥϲ φηϲιν ὁ διδάϲκαλοϲ… fr. 348).
[21] *Nu.* 549-50, 581-6, 591-2, which in its revised form dates to c. 419; Cleon is glimpsed up to his old litigious tricks in the Underworld at *Ra.* 569-78. Cleon may potentially be referred to in fr. 303 (*Dramas*, date unknown).

in another sense, the choice to repeat the section was itself a daringly creative one, and new meaning is breathed into the passage in *Peace* by the very changed circumstances that surround it.

2. Comic Stingers

The *Wasps*' autobiographical section of the parabasis, the anapaests, is tonally similar to that of the *Clouds*. The poet's apparent irritation at the original *Clouds*' third place ranking is certainly present, but just as for the revised *Clouds'* parabasis, it is more profitable to treat this indignation as a poetic and comic stance, rather than a genuine reflection of emotion.[22] The antagonistic stance taken towards the audience facilitates humour primarily at the expense of the delusional, embittered poet. His delusions mean that he inhabits a different **world** than his audience, and the way in which his diverges from theirs can be a source of great humour. In particular, the persona enacts a reversal in the natural relationship between poet and audience, by blaming them and their skill as judges for *Clouds* coming third. Of course, this is not to say that the poet persona is entirely alienated from the audience, and Cleon also finds himself the subject of targeted disparagement humour.

In the epirrhematic syzygy, the rhetoric of blame continues. It concerns the identity of the wasp-heliasts, who happen also to be veterans of the Persian Wars. Hence, the syzygy becomes a character portrait of a particular known and recognisable demographic of Athens, comically transformed into a vespine hybrid. Much of the humour of this section derives from **incongruities**, as the Marathonomachoi **script** collides with that of the insect world. The advanced years of the speakers occasion humour in the same way as was found with the Acharnian Persian Wars veterans in *Acharnians*: a sort of pathetic *Schadenfreude* at the expense of their senility, and on the other hand a striking contrast between them and the dissolute behaviour of the younger generations.[23] The Marathonomachoi were probably an appealing **target** for disparaging humour, because praise of their unparalleled, unparallel-able glory must have been an ever-present strain in Athenian

[22] See pages 129-30 from my *Clouds* chapter above.
[23] See section 3 of my chapter on *Acharnians*.

discourse.[24] No wonder, then, that Aristophanes is fond of mentioning the battles himself, in this and other plays.[25]

In *Wasps*' epirrhematic syzygy the old men dance in comical costumes, and thus light fun is poked at the Marathonomachoi, who are apparently unable to move on mentally from their military pursuits and overwhelmed and exploited by the systems that dominated contemporary life. In this last aspect they particularly resemble the old men of the *Acharnians* parabasis.[26] Some among the younger generation must have enjoyed this humour **targeting** the veterans, given that they were raised in an atmosphere where the virtue of their elders has reached an enviable, almost legendary status which they felt they could never attain. On the other hand, the Marathon veterans must have been earnestly revered by some, and so mockery cannot go too far without offending a portion of the audience. *Acharnians* mitigates this risk by balancing mockery of the old with that of the young, while here in *Wasps*, the humour revolves around the collision of vespine and veteran traits. By layering the identities 'wasp', 'heliast' and 'Greco-Persian Wars veteran' one on top of the other in the form of the choreuts, Aristophanes occasions a multitude of humorous **incongruities**. While the audience are encouraged to laugh at the Marathonomachoi in a basic sense, and the poet therefore harnesses the emotional power of, for example, a young audience member's sublimated hostility to these doddering darlings, and uses it to reinforce the impact of his humour, there are only fleeting moments when he seems to encourage us to laugh at the veterans *qua* veterans.

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[24] At *Eq.* 781-2 the Sausage-Seller addressed Demos as cὲ γάρ, ὃc Μήδοιcι διεξιφίcω περὶ τῆc χώραc Μαραθῶνι, | καὶ νικήcαc ἡμῖν μεγάλωc ἐγγλωττοτυπεῖν παρέδωκαc. Clearly, politicians applied themselves to the creative and competitive eulogization of the Greco-Persian Wars with industry.
[25] E.g. *Eq.* 178-85, *Nu.* 985-6. Carey (2013) 124 notes too that the memory of Old Comedy, broadly in line with Thomas' (1989) 283 observations on the nature of family and *polis* history, spans roughly three generations, and also seems to undergo the 'hourglass' effect whereby the present and more distant past are emphasised, the intervening years largely ignored.
[26] *Ach.* 676-702.

3. *Wasps*

Uncountable Masses, Pay Attention 1009-14

ἀλλ’ ἴτε χαίροντες ὅποι βούλεϲθ’.

ὑμεῖϲ δὲ τέωϲ, 1010

ὦ μυριάδεϲ ἀναρίθμητοι,

νῦν τὰ μέλλοντ’ εὖ λέγεϲθαι

μὴ πέϲῃ φαύλωϲ χαμᾶζ’

εὐλαβεῖϲθε.

τοῦτο γὰρ ϲκαιῶν θεατῶν

ἐϲτι πάϲχειν, κοὐ πρὸϲ ὑμῶν.

Now go, rejoicing, wherever you want!

But meanwhile you, 1010

Oh countless thousands,

Be careful that what is now

About to be spoken well

Does not fall lightly to the ground.

Because this sort of thing happens to

Foolish spectators, not to you.

This *kommation* is typical in form, and typical also in that it describes the departing characters as χαίροντες.[27] Here, the description is rather out of place, as the chorus' enthusiasm 'stands in ironic contrast to Philocleon's feelings in particular.'[28]

The *kommation* sets the tone for the coming parabasis well, by stressing, rather patronisingly, the need for the audience to pay close attention. The description of the audience as ὦ μυριάδες ἀναρίθμητοι (1010-11) is poetic. It cannot be attributed to any poet in particular, but is quoted also by Plato.[29] The exaggerated size of the audience combines with the poetic tone of the phrase to conjure a tone of grandeur, as does the primarily epic resonances of χαμᾶζ' (1013). The desire not to have one's words fall φαύλως χαμᾶζ' (1013) draws on either an image of ignored and uneaten fruit, or from the image of martial archery.[30]

The call for the audience to pay attention νῦν may be read as patronising, bordering on insulting, and 'the fact that he feels the need to issue the warning in 1011-12 may already suggest sarcasm.'[31] Certainly there is something jarring about the combination of, on one hand, the chorus deeming it necessary to remind the audience to pay attention and the abuse of the audience by the poet which will shortly follow (1015 ff.), and on the other hand, the description of the audience as not σκαιός (1013-14). Further, although Starkie says that πάσχειν is 'almost = ποιεῖν',[32] the choice of πάσχειν surely suggests passivity, as if should the audience fail to listen carefully this time, that would not be precisely their fault either. The combination of flattery and insults directed at the audience is of course characteristic of the parabasis, and the slight antagonistic hostility fostered encourages the audience to find fault with the poet's speech to come.

The phrase κοὐ πρὸς ὑμῶν is delayed to the end as a sort of comic **beat**, a surprise twist towards flattery. At the same time, the flattery is contingent on their paying proper attention to this

[27] *Eq.* 498, *Nu.* 510, *Pax* 729.
[28] Biles & Olson (2015) *ad loc.*
[29] *Tht.* 175A, *Lg.* 804e; *Smp.* 175e exaggerates when it says the theatre audience exceeded 30,000.
[30] E.g. P. *O.* 9.11-12, *P.* 6.37, 8.93, *N.* 4.40-1. Pindar will continue to be a point of comparison throughout the anapaests, as later this possible archery imagery will be replaced with chariot racing (1022, 1050), another image familiar to us from Pindaric epinician.
[31] Biles & Olson (2015) *ad loc.*
[32] Starkie (1897) *ad loc.*

parabasis, and not letting it fall fruitless to the ground. This rhetorical manoeuvre enacts the same kind of stratification of the audience into the clever ones, who get Aristophanes' work, and the foolish ones, who do not, as was encountered already in *Clouds,*[33] and will recur at 1048-50. Abuse of the audience on the grounds that they judge wrongly was not exclusive to Aristophanes.[34]

Aristophanes' CV 1015-29

νῦν αὖτε, λεῴ, προσέχετε τὸν νοῦν, εἴπερ καθαρόν τι φιλεῖτε. 1015

μέμψασθαι γὰρ τοῖσι θεαταῖς ὁ ποιητὴς νῦν ἐπιθυμεῖ.

ἀδικεῖσθαι γάρ φησιν πρότερος πόλλ' αὐτοὺς εὖ πεποιηκώς·

τὰ μὲν οὐ φανερῶς ἀλλ' ἐπικουρῶν κρύβδην ἑτέροισι ποιηταῖς,

μιμησάμενος τὴν Εὐρυκλέους μαντείαν καὶ διάνοιαν,

εἰς ἀλλοτρίας γαστέρας ἐνδὺς κωμῳδικὰ πολλὰ χέασθαι· 1020

μετὰ τοῦτο δὲ καὶ φανερῶς ἤδη κινδυνεύων καθ' ἑαυτόν,

οὐκ ἀλλοτρίων ἀλλ' οἰκείων Μουσῶν στόμαθ' ἡνιοχήσας.

ἀρθεὶς δὲ μέγας καὶ τιμηθεὶς ὡς οὐδεὶς πώποτ' ἐν ὑμῖν,

οὐκ ἐκχαλάσαι φησὶν ἐπαρθεὶς οὐδ' ὀγκῶσαι τὸ φρόνημα,

οὐδὲ παλαίστρας περικωμάζειν πειρῶν· οὐδ' εἴ τις ἐραστὴς 1025

κωμῳδεῖσθαι παιδίχ' ἑαυτοῦ μισῶν ἔσπευσε πρὸς αὐτόν,

οὐδενὶ πώποτέ φησι πιθέσθαι, γνώμην τιν' ἔχων ἐπιεικῆ,

ἵνα τὰς Μούσας αἷσιν χρῆται μὴ προαγωγοὺς ἀποφήνῃ.

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[33] *Nu.* 521-7, 561-2; see pages 137-46.

[34] Cratin. fr. 360.1-2: χαῖρ', ὦ μέγ' ἀχρειόγελως ὅμιλε ταῖς ἐπίβδαις, | τῆς ἡμετέρας σοφίας κριτὴς ἄριστε πάντων; the fickleness of the audience is also reproached in Cratin. fr. 25: ἐτήσιοι γὰρ πρόσιτ' ἀεὶ πρὸς τὴν τέχνην.

οὐδ’ ὅτε πρῶτόν γ’ ἦρξε διδάσκειν, ἀνθρώποις φήσ’ ἐπιθέσθαι,

Now again, people, pay attention, if you really do love what is pure, 1015
Because the poet now wants to blame his viewers. Since he says
That he has been wronged, despite having done you much good before;
Some things not publicly, but providing help to other poets secretly,
When he mimicked the prophetic skill and faculty of Eurycles.
Slipping into the stomachs of others and pouring forth many comic lines. 1020
After this, he risked it openly on his own account,
Not using that of another, but harnessing his own Muses’ mouths.
And raised up as one of the greats, honoured like none among you ever was before,
He says he did not slack off nor swell up with pride,
Nor did he revel around the wrestling gym making passes at anyone, nor if 1025
Some lover urged him to satirise his boy-lover when he was mad at them,
He says he never did obey, but he was always reasonable in his opinions,
To avoid turning the Muses with whom he consorts into bawds.
Nor when he first began to produce, did he go after men,

Unusually, the typical call to attention of the *kommation* is renewed strenuously at the start of these anapaests. The νῦν, repeated so soon after 1012, the emphatic iterative sense of αὖτε, and the

typically parabatic command προcέχετε τὸν νοῦν,[35] combine to suggest the coryphaeus' insistence, to the point where it becomes antagonistic towards the audience.

Since καθαρόν can denote not just purity but also clarity and thus simplicity, 'the mocking implication that anything too complicated or allusive may baffle the generally none-too-bright spectators' may be detected.[36] On the other hand, it may be better to understand the ancillary περ of εἴπερ as denoting scepticism ('if *really* you love what is καθαρόν'), and καθαρόν as 'pure', 'frank' or 'honest'. This makes the protasis a jab at the audience, since the sceptical tone suggests that the coryphaeus is questioning the audience's professed tastes. For this reading, καθαρόν τι φιλεῖν must be a desirable trait to have, and therefore, a more positive meaning of καθαρόν than 'simple'/'easy to understand' is needed. This alternate reading makes the chorus-leader subtly insulting, and much like 1013-14 acts as a sort of challenge to the audience to prove themselves as spectators.

Once again, we find Aristophanes distorting what should be the natural dynamic of the competition – that the playwright proves himself by impressing the audience with his creative capacity and virtue – into its inverse – that the audience should prove themselves to the playwright by impressing the playwright with their interpretative capacity and virtue (by voting for his play). This interpretation appeals for two further reasons. Firstly, this reversal of dynamic, whereby the public has disappointed their poet, rather than the poet disappointing his public, continues in lines 1016-17, and is also obviously consonant with the tone struck in the revised *Clouds*' parabasis. Secondly, understanding καθαρόν as connoting purity creates a greater sense of continuity throughout the parabasis, since the playwright will go on to style himself as a Heraclean purifier of the land.

And so, at 1016-17 the poet makes explicit the idea that the audience has let him down, and not the other way around. His claim to have done the people much good previously likewise finds comic point from the disparity between the **world** envisaged by the poet and the real **world** which it takes as an input: for in fact, the relationship must generally have been categorised the

[35] Cf. *Eq.* 503, *Nu.* 757, *Av.* 688.
[36] Biles & Olson (2015) *ad loc.*

other way around – the comic playwright obviously stands to benefit from the favour of the audience. Such a slant, however, has precedent for this poet.[37] To a **mentalising** audience member, this framing may be identified as humorously delusional thinking.

In lines 1018-20 we hear of an anonymous period in Aristophanes' career, illustrated through the image of the ventriloquist, Eurycles. This passage has, alongside *Knights* 541-44 and *Clouds* 530-32, generated much discussion about the poet's career progression, and the perception of his earlier plays as being the works of another.[38] I have argued above that even in the case of his earliest plays, *Banqueters* and *Babylonians*, which were produced by Callistratus, it is likely that Aristophanes was publicly known as the *de facto* author, and that the suggestion that a particularly new or young poet had to go through a period of anonymous apprenticeship is probably a comic fiction designed to stress the poet's modesty, level of training and ability, and relative youth.[39] The use of a producer may have simply been convenient, allowing the poet to focus on composition, and the tasks anyway seem to require different talents.[40]

Describing his eventual, reluctant foray into the combined writer-producer role, he employs the metaphor of the Muse's chariot, but surprisingly transforms the Muses from the possessors or occupants of the chariot, into the horses that pull it. The image, co-opted from lyric,[41] is warped to degrade the importance of the divine Muses, placing them in theriomorphic subjugation to the poet.[42] A subtle difference, but one that contributes to our sense of the poet's arrogance. Their mouths are driven (Μουϲῶν ϲτόματα ἡνιοχήϲαϲ) by the poet, suggesting his control of their mouths, and thus, poetry, but the image also fails: for reins, an audience member would plausibly expect, are attached to a bit, and bits curb speech.[43] The poet's persona seems unaware that his imagery is paradoxical or flawed in this way, and this must therefore, as well as

[37] E.g. *Ach.* 633.
[38] See section 1 of my chapter on *Knights.*
[39] See pages 53, 86-90.
[40] Pickard-Cambridge (1968 [1953]) 85.
[41] P. *O.* 6.22-4, 9.80-1; *I.* 2.2, 8.61-3; *B.* 5.176-8
[42] The image resembles Atossa's dream at A. *Pers.* 189-98, where Xerxes yokes two women, representing Asia and Greece. The Aristophanic persona's actions here may be similarly hubristic.
[43] Iphigenia's gag at A. *Ag.* 235-8 which prevents her speaking to call down a curse upon her family.

being a humorously inventive and warped image in its own right, constitute a case of the poet persona mis-performing his role and showing up his imperfect control of his own speech.[44] This is particularly ironic since the image was intended to illustrate the opposite.

Aristophanes' claim in line 1023, that he was 'honoured like none among you ever was before' has been taken as referring to successive competitive victories,[45] and perhaps even an unparalleled achievement, either of having won both Lenaea and Dionysia of the same year,[46] or of winning the Dionysia of one year followed by the Lenaea of the next.[47] Of course, it is not certain whether a) Aristophanes achieved either such thing, or b) he was the first to do so. On the other hand, if we take 1023 as a generalised assertion of unparalleled honour, we find the poetic persona engaging in the braggartry familiar to us and proper to the parabasis, giving the lie to his claim to modesty in the following line.

1025-8 has been taken as a swipe at Eupolis, or indeed as a response to an accusation levied against him by Eupolis, but the exact manner of the inter-poetic trading of insults is unclear.[48] What is clear is that Aristophanes' claim not to make his Muses into bawds is somewhat undermined. For, as Biles and Olson points out, χρῆται has many meanings, and while the primary intended meaning must be 'use' or 'have dealings with', 'a sexual—and thus comically undermining-sense may also be felt'.[49] To turn his Muses into bawds is apparently beneath the Aristophanic persona, but to have erotic dealings with them himself, or, indeed, to turn them into horses (1022), is not.

Aristophanes the Hero 1030-50

ἀλλ' Ἡρακλέους ὀργήν τιν' ἔχων τοῖcι μεγίcτοιc ἐπεχείρει, 1030

[44] Cf. *Ach.* 655 with my discussion above.
[45] Mastromarco (1979) 178; Halliwell (1980) 38.
[46] As Neri (1994) argues, in 424 with *Knights* and *Farmers.*
[47] I.e. he won in 426 with *Babylonians* and 425 with *Acharnians*: see Sommerstein (1983) xxix-xxx.
[48] See Harvey & Wilkins (2000) 377, Storey (2003) 288–90.
[49] Biles & Olson (2015) *ad loc.*

θραϲέωϲ ξυϲτὰϲ εὐθὺϲ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆϲ αὐτῷ τῷ καρχαρόδοντι,

οὗ δεινόταται μὲν ἀπ’ ὀφθαλμῶν Κύννηϲ ἀκτῖνεϲ ἔλαμπον,

ἑκατὸν δὲ κύκλῳ κεφαλαὶ κολάκων οἰμωξομένων ἐλιχμῶντο

περὶ τὴν κεφαλήν, φωνὴν δ’ εἶχεν χαράδραϲ ὄλεθρον τετοκυίαϲ,

φώκηϲ δ’ ὀϲμήν, Λαμίαϲ δ’ ὄρχειϲ ἀπλύτουϲ, πρωκτὸν δὲ καμήλου. 1035

τοιοῦτον ἰδὼν τέραϲ οὔ φηϲιν δείϲαϲ καταδωροδοκῆϲαι,

ἀλλ’ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἔτι καὶ νυνὶ πολεμεῖ· φηϲίν τε μετ’ αὐτὸν

τοῖϲ ἠπιάλοιϲ ἐπιχειρῆϲαι πέρυϲιν καὶ τοῖϲ πυρετοῖϲιν,

οἳ τοὺϲ πατέραϲ τ’ ἦγχον νύκτωρ καὶ τοὺϲ πάππουϲ ἀπέπνιγον

κατακλινομένουϲ ἐν ταῖϲ κοίταιϲ, ἐπὶ τοῖϲί τ’ ἀπράγμοϲιν ὑμῶν 1040

ἀντωμοϲίαϲ καὶ προϲκλήϲειϲ καὶ μαρτυρίαϲ ϲυνεκόλλων,

ὥϲτ’ ἀναπηδᾶν δειμαίνονταϲ πολλοὺϲ ὡϲ τὸν πολέμαρχον.

τοιόνδ’ εὑρόντεϲ ἀλεξίκακον τῆϲ χώραϲ τῆϲδε καθαρτήν,

πέρυϲιν καταπροὔδοτε καινοτάταϲ ϲπείραντ’ αὐτὸν διανοίαϲ,

ἃϲ ὑπὸ τοῦ μὴ γνῶναι καθαρῶϲ ὑμεῖϲ ἐποιήϲατ’ ἀναλδεῖϲ· 1045

καίτοι ϲπένδων πόλλ’ ἐπὶ πολλοῖϲ ὄμνυϲιν τὸν Διόνυϲον

μὴ πώποτ’ ἀμείνον’ ἔπη τούτων κωμῳδικὰ μηδέν’ ἀκοῦϲαι.

τοῦτο μὲν οὖν ἐϲθ’ ὑμῖν αἰϲχρὸν τοῖϲ μὴ γνοῦϲιν παραχρῆμα,

ὁ δὲ ποιητὴϲ οὐδὲν χείρων παρὰ τοῖϲι ϲοφοῖϲ νενόμιϲται,

εἰ παρελαύνων τοὺϲ ἀντιπάλουϲ τὴν ἐπίνοιαν ξυνέτριψεν. 1050

But with the spirit of Heracles he attempted upon the greatest, 1030

Bravely right from the beginning standing up to the jagged-toothed one itself,

From the eyes of which the most awful rays of Cynna shone out,

And around whose head a hundred cursed heads of flatterers licked in a circle,

While the hound itself had the voice of a death-bearing mountain torrent,

The smell of a seal, the unwashed balls of Lamia, the asshole of a camel. 1035

Seeing such a monster, he says that he did not take bribes in fear,

But still even now makes war on your behalf. And he says that after him,

Last year, he laid his hand upon the chills and fevers,

Who throttled their fathers at night and choked their grandfathers,

As they were lying in their beds, and against the easy-going ones among you 1040

They glued together counter-oaths, summonses, and depositions

So that many in fear leapt up to the polemarch.

Finding such a guardian and purifier of this land,

You betrayed him last year, after he sowed the newest ideas,

Which you made fruitless by not judging clearly. 1045

And yet, making many and many libations, he swears by Dionysus

That you have never heard better comic verse than this.

This is on the spot shameful to you who don’t understand,

But the poet has been thought nothing worse by the wise,

If in passing his opponents he crashed his purpose. 1050

Lines 1030-7 are repeated in the parabasis of *Peace* at the City Dionysia of the following year, with a few emendations as discussed below. In this passage the poetic persona imagines his productions as the deeds of Heracles, cleanser of the land,[50] and his enemy Cleon as a sort of Cerberus. In this fantastical **world** dreamed up by the persona, Cleon becomes at times a Cerberus (1031-2, 1034), at others Typhon with flatterers as snake-crown (1033),[51] and then as a distorted chimaera (1035). The identification of the poet with Heracles may be born out of comments made by his rivals that Aristophanes was 'born on the fourth day', a proverb used of those fated to labour on another's behalf, used probably to poke fun at Aristophanes' habit of staging his plays through producer.[52] Possibly the direction of influence is the other way around, and his rivals adopted the identification of Aristophanes with Heracles in order to stress not the heroic aspect but the idea that his work benefitted another.[53]

There are various dynamics of humour at work here. Firstly, the combination of several **scripts**, that of mythical monsters, combined with that of the contemporary politics, and also with that of non-mythical animals, provide several moments of **incongruity**. κολάκων in line 1033, for example, is incongruous in this context of a hydra-like monster, deflating the intimidating picture, and a similar effect is achieved by the chimera pictured in line 1035, where the choices of body parts and of animals call attention to the monster's stink and its genitals.[54] In addition, the picture drawn by the character confirms our impression of the poetic persona as an ἀλάζων who is so hopelessly deluded that he views himself as an equal to the Greek hero *par excellence.* This self-undermining is an important aspect of the comedy, since it makes it politically ambivalent: while audience members strongly disposed against Cleon and his cronies would no doubt appreciate the absurd distorted picture of them, the sense that the persona is delusional would make the humour palatable to Cleon's backers, as well. Cleon must have been popular among a sizeable portion of

[50] S. *Tr.* 1012: Heracles describe himself as καθαίρων many things by land and in the woods.
[51] Cf. Hes. *Th.* 824-6.
[52] Amips. fr. 27; Aristonym. fr. 3; Sannyr. fr. 5. Welsh (1983). This is perhaps set up at 1018-20 by the references to the poet 'providing help to other poets secretly', like the ventriloquist Eurycles.
[53] Mastromarco (1989).
[54] Cf. Hom. *Il.* 6. 160-83; Hes. *Th.* 319-24.

the audience.[55] This faction of the comic audience would be more likely to pick up on, focus on and appreciate the ways in which the poetic persona makes himself ridiculous, since this would delegitimise his portrayal of Cleon, robbing it of its sting and going some way towards neutralising what would otherwise be felt as an uncomplicated and earnest assault on their political beliefs and identity.[56]

Aristophanes then goes on to heroize his production of the previous year, probably Ὁλκάδες,[57] in which clearly unscrupulous and litigious politicians were targeted (1040-41). Mastromarco has shown that these lines (1038-42) continue the image of Aristophanes as Heracles – for this hero has a connection to healing and medicine,[58] and ἠπίαλος ('fever') is also the name (with slight variations, Ἠπιάλης and Ἐφιάλτης) of a giant whom Heracles slays in some mythic traditions.[59] Clearly, the political invective that last year's play involved is to be imagined as an efficacious cleansing of the city – although modern studies of targeted political comedy give us reason to doubt that such satire could have such a strong impact on politics.[60] Nevertheless, the Aristophanic persona goes on to blame the audience, who despite finding him an ἀλεξίκακον... καθαρτήν, betrayed him after he sowed the newest ideas, rendering them useless by their unclear judging (μὴ γνῶμαι καθαρῶς). The sense is clear: the audience were to match the poet in being καθαρός, and their failure to do so, and to appreciate his innovations, was a betrayal. The reference is to the failure of *Clouds* I, perpetuating the persona's pretence to misunderstand the fundamental relationship between audience and poet.

Before the transitional *pnigos*, the poetic persona hits several familiar notes – his arrogant belief that he produces the best comic verses (1047), the rhetorical stratification of the audience

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[55] Cleon is described as τῷ τε δήμῳ παρὰ πολὺ ἐν τῷ τότε πιθανώτατος by Thucydides during the Mytilenean Debate (3. 36.6), and the historical debate occurred in 427. His success at Pylos/Sphacteria can only have strengthened his political sway, and this very text suggests that even just his politically/legally active followers constitute a great number: ἑκατὸν… κεφαλαὶ κολάκων (1033). See my introduction section 5.3 for an analysis of the festival audience makeup.
[56] See my introduction, section 4.1.
[57] This on the basis of Hyp. *Pax* A3 30.
[58] He was frequently called ἀλεξίκακος, and see Salowey (2002) for evidence of Heraclean healing cult.
[59] Mastromarco (1989) 421-2; for the battle of Heracles and Ephialtes depicted on pottery, see Brommer (1984) 79.
[60] See my introduction, section 4.2.

into those who get it and those who do not (1048-9), and the return to the image of the chariot, which the persona turns out to have crashed (1050). In this last moment, an **incongruity**, as this concept of ingenuity (ἐπίνοιαν) appears suddenly amongst the chariot-racing **script**. Moreover, the choice of the chariot crash caused by a risky overtaking manoeuvre tells us even more about the persona's state of mind: although an admission of *Clouds* I's failure, the manner in which he failed was heroic, born out of bravery and zeal rather than simply lacking power.

The Potpourri of Cleverness 1051-9

ἀλλὰ τὸ λοιπὸν τῶν ποιητῶν,

ὦ δαιμόνιοι, τοὺϲ ζητοῦνταϲ

καινόν τι λέγειν κἀξευρίϲκειν

ϲτέργετε μᾶλλον καὶ θεραπεύετε,

καὶ τὰ νοήματα ϲῴζεϲθ' αὐτῶν, 1055

εἰϲβάλλετέ τ' εἰϲ τὰϲ κιβωτοὺϲ

μετὰ τῶν μήλων. κἂν ταῦτα ποιῆθ',

ὑμῖν δι' ἔτουϲ τῶν ἱματίων

ὀζήϲει δεξιότητοϲ.

But in the future, good men,

Love and cherish more

Those poets trying

To say and invent something new.

Preserve those poets' thoughts 1055

And throw them into chests

With citrons. And if you do this,

Then the whole year through your cloaks

Will smell of cleverness.

Capping the autobiographical segment of the parabasis, this whimsical *pnigos* centres around an **incongruity**: the **script collision** between wisdom and its metaphorical preservation, and the domestic preservation of household treasures alongside citrons (μῆλα) to infuse their clothes with scent. These fruits, an import from India via Persia,[61] are inedible but bright and pleasantly scented. Intriguingly for the context in *Wasps*, citrons function much like lavender or cedar as natural insect repellents,[62] although this benefit of μῆλα is not explicitly referred to here. The image pleasingly suggests that after preserving the poet's thoughts, the audience member will passively be imbued with his cleverness (or the perception of it). The **resolution** of the **incongruity** is incomplete and evolving since the points of comparison shift: the poet's νοήματα are first conceptualised as something to be preserved alongside fragrant bug-repellent, but come by the end to take on the role of the μῆλα instead, imparting a pleasing scent.

ἄλκιμοι, ἄλκιμοι, ἀλκιμώτατοι 1060-70

ὦ πάλαι ποτ' ὄντεϲ ἡμεῖϲ ἄλκιμοι μὲν ἐν χοροῖϲ, 1060

ἄλκιμοι δ' ἐν μάχαιϲ,

καὶ κατ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο μόνον

[61] Zohary, Hopf & Weiss (2012) 146.
[62] Plin. *HN*. 12.15.

ἄνδρες ἀλκιμώτατοι.

πρίν ποτ’ ἦν, πρὶν ταῦτα· νῦν δ’

οἴχεται, κύκνου τε πολι-

ώτεραι δὴ αἵδ’ ἐπανθοῦϲιν τρίχεϲ. 1065

ἀλλὰ κἀκ τῶν λειψάνων δεῖ τῶνδε ῥώμην

νεανικὴν ϲχεῖν· ὡϲ ἐγὼ τοὐμὸν νομίζω

γῆραϲ εἶναι κρεῖττον ἢ πολλῶν κικίννουϲ

νεανιῶν καὶ ϲχῆμα κεὐρυπρωκτίαν. 1070

We were once long ago valiant in the chorus, 1060

And valiant in battles,

And in this thing alone

The most valiant men.

Once that was it, once it was. But now

It’s gone, and whiter than a swan

Do these hairs bloom. 1065

But even from these remains we must

Hold onto youthful strength. For I think that

My old age is stronger than the curls

And wide-assed posturing of many young men. 1070

The strophic pair punctuating the epirrhema of the syzygy are mainly trochaic, a metre felt to reflect movement as the chorus no doubt danced or processed around the *orchestra*, presumably somehow imitating the manner of a wasp.

While the *Acharnians* parabases reveals the old men, who were introduced as fearsome figures, to be deceptively vulnerable, the *Wasps* parabasis moves in the opposite direction. The old jurors seemed vulnerable as they were led in by their sons at the start of the play (230ff.), but in the parabasis we glimpse them (except in lines 1063-4) in their former glory. This former glory is introduced as a theme initially with wistful nostalgia, expressed in the introductory lament of ὦ, the climactic tricolon ἄλκιμοι… ἄλκιμοι… ἀλκιμώτατοι, and the unnecessary repetition of πρίν – a repetition typically confined to epic, and therefore adding a note of archaic heroism. At 1060, ὢ πάλαι ποτ' ὄντες ἡμεῖς ἄλκιμοι loosely quotes a proverb, πάλαι ποτ' ἦσαν ἄλκιμοι Μιλήσιοι,[63] denoting lost prior strength. At 1063-4, with πρίν ποτ' ἦν, πρὶν ταῦτα· νῦν δ' | οἴχεται, the repetition of πρίν and the contrast with νῦν is wistful, and an echo of it (intentional or not) can be heard in Demosthenes' *Third Philippic* when the speaker wonders about the patriotism that allowed the Greeks to win the Greco-Persian Wars: 'Once there was something, there was… which now there is not.'ἦν τι τότ', ἦν… ὃ νῦν οὐκ ἔστιν'.[64] Throughout this syzygy, the density of poetic quotations and adaptations reflects the proliferation of literature and song commemorating the Persian Wars. Additionally, a **mentalising** audience member may see the chorus as rather self-congratulatory in the way that they have so thoroughly internalised the praise they have received.

κατ' αὐτὸ δὴ τοῦτο μόνον presumably refers to their stinger which was part of their costume, as Xanthias points out at 420 (κέντρ' ἔχουσιν. οὐχ ὁρᾷς ὦ δέσποτα;). Some have seen this instead as accompanied by a gesture towards their stage phalluses,[65] on the grounds that the wasps' stings are very much still in use at this stage of their lives.[66] However, it might also be wondered how practical and effective in iconographic terms a costume featuring both stinger and stage

[63] *Pl.* 1002, 1075.
[64] D. *Phil.* 3.36.
[65] MacDowell (1971) *ad loc.*, Sommerstein (1983) note *ad loc.*
[66] E.g. 223-7, 403-55, 1113.

phallus would be. Depending on the placement of the stinger, one could easily imagine that the performers using gestures to make the stinger a stand-in for the *phallus*, in which case the idea of declining sexual virility may still have been felt.[67]

Indeed, the physicality and movement performed alongside the words of this ode seem likely to have carried significant meaning, although of course discussion of it must remain speculative. When they talk of the σχῆμα (1070) of the youth, for example, they are no doubt ridiculing their appearance in terms of dress or deportment,[68] and a physical picture of their bodily features is certainly built up by κικίννους and εὐρυπρωκτίαν. On the other hand, σχῆμα is a technical term in ancient dance, and is most frequently mimetic.[69] It therefore seems likely that the word would have been accompanied by a derogatory mimetic gesture or pose from the choreuts themselves, mocking the dissolute young through imitation. This could be imagined much like the description at 688 of Chaereas' son earlier in the play as a μειράκιον... κατάπυγον… | ὡδὶ διαβάς, διακινηθεὶς τῷ σώματι καὶ τρυφερανθείς ('With his legs spread like this, wiggling his body about effeminately' 687-8). Similarly, σχεῖν in 1065 may have been accompanied by some manner of more energetic dancing, in imitation of the youthful vigour they aspire to maintain.

The abuse of young men for effeminacy and engaging in passive homosexuality is widespread in Old Comedy,[70] and here the targeted hostile humour is balanced by the *Schadenfreude* evoked by the old men's frailty. The verb ἐπανθέω ('bloom'), for example, clashes paradoxically with the white hair it takes as object, while the idea of the swan (κύκνου 1064) turns the ode itself into a piteous swan-song.[71]

[67] Reckford (1977) 306-7 sees a connection between sting and virility, concluding that 'the stings in it evidently stand not just for anger, but for anger as a sexual surrogate.'
[68] Biles & Olson (2015) *ad loc*. 'the nauseatingly fastidious, stylish attire of the city's 'youngsters' or the disgusting manner in which they pose, primp, and sashay about (1170, 1210; cf. 688 n.).'
[69] Bocksberger (2021).
[70] E.g. *V.* 466.
[71] Cf. A. *Ag*. 1444, Pl. *Phd*. 84e–5a.

The Attic Wasp 1071-90

εἴ τις ὑμῶν, ὦ θεαταί, τὴν ἐμὴν ἰδὼν φύσιν

εἶτα θαυμάζει μ’ ὁρῶν μέσον διεσφηκωμένον,

ἥτις ἡμῶν ἐστιν ἡ ’πίνοια τῆς ἐγκεντρίδος,

ῥᾳδίως ἐγὼ διδάξω, “κἂν ἄμουσος ᾖ τὸ πρίν”.

ἐσμὲν ἡμεῖς, οἷς πρόσεστι τοῦτο τοὐρροπύγιον, 1075

Ἀττικοὶ μόνοι δικαίως ἐγγενεῖς αὐτόχθονες,

ἀνδρικώτατον γένος καὶ πλεῖστα τήνδε τὴν πόλιν

ὠφελῆσαν ἐν μάχαισιν, ἡνίκ’ ἦλθ’ ὁ βάρβαρος,

τῷ καπνῷ τύφων ἅπασαν τὴν πόλιν καὶ πυρπολῶν,

ἐξελεῖν ἡμῶν μενοινῶν πρὸς βίαν τἀνθρήνια. 1080

εὐθέως γὰρ ἐκδραμόντες “ξὺν δορὶ ξὺν ἀςπίδι”

ἐμαχόμεςθ’ αὐτοῖςι, θυμὸν ὀξίνην πεπωκότες,

ςτὰς ἀνὴρ παρ’ ἄνδρ’, ὑπ’ ὀργῆς τὴν χελύνην ἐςθίων·

ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν τοξευμάτων οὐκ ἦν ἰδεῖν τὸν οὐρανόν.

ἀλλ’ ὅμως ἐωςάμεςθα ξὺν θεοῖς πρὸς ἑςπέραν. 1085

γλαῦξ γὰρ ἡμῶν πρὶν μάχεςθαι τὸν στρατὸν διέπτατο.

εἶτα δ’ εἱπόμεςθα θυννάζοντες εἰς τοὺς θυλάκους,

οἱ δ’ ἔφευγον τὰς γνάθους καὶ τὰς ὀφρῦς κεντούμενοι·

ὥςτε παρὰ τοῖς βαρβάροιςι πανταχοῦ καὶ νῦν ἔτι

μηδὲν Ἀττικοῦ καλεῖςθαι ςφηκὸς ἀνδρικώτερον. 1090

If one of you, oh spectators, looking at my nature

Then marvels upon seeing me wasped-through at the middle,

What the point of our sting is,

I shall easily teach him, “even if he be museless before.”

We, who have this rump attached, 1075

Are the only truly native earth-born Attic men,

A most manly race and which helped this city most

In battle, when the barbarian came,

Filling the whole city with smoke and setting it ablaze,

Wishing by force to drive us out of our hives. 1080

Immediately running out “with spear and shield”

We did battle with them, having taken a swig of acrid spirit(s),

Standing man to man, biting our lip in anger.

One couldn’t see the sky for all the arrows.

But all the same, with the gods, we pushed forward till evening, 1085

For an owl flew through our host before doing battle.

And then we pursued them, harpooning them in the trousers,

And they fled, stung in their jaws and brows,

So that everywhere among the barbarians, even now,

Nothing is called more manly than an Attic wasp. 1090

The symbolic significance of the vespine qualities foisted on the Marathonomachoi is explicitly discussed, point by point, and it is precisely the clash between the Greco-Persian Wars **script** with the **script** of wasps which is the comic point of the piece. The voice of the wasps as elders, with poetic pretensions, is developed throughout as well. The overblown and oft-repeated rhetoric surrounding Athenian achievements in the Greco-Persian Wars is mocked in Aristophanes elsewhere.[72] Here the same effect is achieved through the density of poetic quotations in their speech, which stresses the status of their achievement in war as worthy of being immortalised in song. It also suggests their own poetic mastery.

ἡνίκ’ ἦλθ’ ὁ βάρβαρος at 1078 adapts a fragment of Xenophanes referring to the Persian conquest of Ionia in the mid-sixth century, in which the poet asked ‘What age were you when the Mede came?’[73] Similarly, at 1081 ξὺν δορὶ ξὺν ἀσπίδι is lifted from a description of Ares in a tragic fragment.[74] Biting one’s lip as an expression of determination is found at 1083, but also in Tyrtaeus and in Homer.[75] The idea of the Persians being harpooned like fish (θυννάζοντες 1087), finds precedent in Aeschylus,[76] although the scurrilous specification that it was in the θυλάκους (‘sacks’, slang for ‘trousers’) is Euripidean.[77] They claim didactic and poetic mastery in a patronising tone at 1074, quoting another line of Euripides: ῥᾳδίως ἐγὼ διδάξω, “κἂν ἄμουσος ᾖ τὸ πρίν”[78], and they frequently use the poetic -μεσθα ending for 1st person singular verbs (ἐμαχόμεσθ’ 1082, ἐωσάμεσθα 1085, εἰπόμεσθα 1087). These densely packed quotations, and their own personal pretensions, suggest to the **mentalising** audience member that the chorus leader feels as if, by virtue of their

[72] See chapter two on *Acharnians* above, particularly footnotes 34 and 35.
[73] Xenoph. 21 B 22. 5 (Diels and Kranz) πηλίκος ἦσθ', ὅθ' ὁ Μῆδος ἀφίκετο;
[74] Achae. *Momus* Ἄρης ὁ λῃστὴς ξὺν δορὶ ξὺν ἀσπίδι *TrGF* 20 F 29. Cf. A. *Ag.* 111 where the Greek expediton is sent to Troy ξὺν δορὶ καὶ χερὶ πράκτορι, and is mockingly trotted out as typically Aeschylean at *Ra.* 1289.
[75] Tyrt. fr. 10.32 (West), Hom. *Od.* 1.381, 18.410, 20.268.
[76] A. *Pers.* 424-6.
[77] E. *Cyc.* 182.
[78] A scholion identifies this line as being from Euripides’ *Stheneboea* (fr. 663), quoted elsewhere in Plato (*Smp.* 196e) and Plutarch’s *Moralia* (405e, 622c, 762b). The context of this play’s narrative arc, and the clause which precedes the quoted clause (ποιητὴν δ’ ἄρα | Ἔρως διδάσκει,), do not add obvious point to this choice of quote. Presumably the phrase was in popular circulation, and perhaps there is a sense of patronising contempt in the idea of being called ἄμουσος.

frequent poetic memorialisation, they have become poets themselves. So often have they been eulogised in verse that they have taken on the very language of poetry to describe themselves. This speech functions both to memorialise their exploits, just like the quoted texts embedded within it, albeit with a comic twist, and at the same time to parody this very endeavour, and the arrogance that it has produced in the memorialised subjects.

The chorus also displays pride in explicitly laying sole claim to the prized Athenian value of autochthony (Ἀττικοὶ μόνοι δικαίως ἐγγενεῖς αὐτόχθονες 1076). The self-description as ἀλκιμώτατοι from the preceding ode (1062) finds development in the idea of them as an ἀνδρικώτατον γένος (1077), which they return to at the end of this epirrhema (μηδὲν Ἀττικοῦ καλεῖσθαι σφηκὸς ἀνδρικώτερον 1090). The description of the wasps as ἀνδρικώτατον γένος at 1077, and the assertion at 1090 that nothing is ἀνδρικώτερον than a wasp is clever wordplay. While on one level ἀνδρικός is simply a colloquial Attic alternative to the more elevated ἀνδρεῖος, on another level the derivation of the word from ἀνήρ, combined with its use of creatures whose wasp-like nature is the subject of discussion, makes it a humorous **incongruity**. On the other hand, this self-description also expresses the self-importance of the wasps, and their pride no doubt found humorous contrast with their less decorous comic costume.

As already mentioned, the Marathonomachoi made a fruitful but risky subject of mockery. The impact of the success of the combined Greek forces on the political landscape of the fifth-century should not be understated, and they were memorialised like heroes.[79] On the other hand, their unsurpassed, unsurpassable achievement and its omnipresent eulogy may have started to grate upon the younger members of the *polis.* By mapping other levels of meaning onto these old men – their hybrid vespine nature and their identity as entrenched heliasts – Aristophanes grants his audience the license to laugh at these men, without the laughter being directed at them as veterans of the Greco-Persian Wars, *per se*, and thus mitigating risk of offence. The light-heartedness of the absurd blending of **scripts** also allows the poet to invoke a highly **emotionally arousing** topic to his advantage. The wasp imagery is embroidered onto a well-worn (threadbare perhaps, or merely

[79] Braun (2023) describes the phases of memorialisation of the Battle of Marathon.

well-loved), tapestry of scenes from the wars. The alterations produce humorous **incongruities**, softening with its absurdity the wars' horrors, like the razing of Athens, which is turned into a scene of pest fumigation (1078-9, cf. 459-60), and piggybacking on the emotional exhilaration of their victories in battle (1081-8). There is also a sense that the veteran wasps may be losing their memory, which is now somewhat imprecise, as they seem to blur several battles into one. [80]

Martial Rowing, Courtroom Rows 1091-1101

ἆρα δεινὸϲ ἦ τόθ', ὥϲτε ταῦτα μὴ δεδοικέναι,

καὶ κατεϲτρεψάμην

τοὺϲ ἐναντίουϲ, πλέων ἐ-

κεῖϲε ταῖϲ τριήρεϲιν;

οὐ γὰρ ἦν ἡμῖν ὅπωϲ

ῥῆϲιν εὖ λέξειν ἐμέλλο- 1095

μεν τότ' οὐδὲ ϲυκοφαντήϲειν τινὰ

φροντίϲ, ἀλλ' ὅϲτιϲ ἐρέτηϲ ἔϲοιτ' ἄριϲτοϲ.

τοιγαροῦν πολλὰϲ πόλειϲ Μήδων ἑλόντεϲ

αἰτιώτατοι φέρεϲθαι τὸν φόρον δεῦρ' 1100

ἐϲμέν, ὃν κλέπτουϲιν οἱ νεώτεροι.

I was terrible then, so I did not fear this,

[80] 1078-9 refers to the Persian destruction of Athens in 480-79; the battle described at 1081-8 most resembles the battle of Marathon in 490, particularly in the description of fleeing Persians (Hdt. vi. 102–14; cf. 1087–8); the idea of the Persians' arrows being so numerous as to block out the sky (1084) is normally related in connection with Dieneces' witty response to the warning before the battle of Thermopylae in 480 that they would fight in shade (Hdt. vii. 226. 1–2); and the detail of the owl flying through the Athenian forces (1086) seems to be from the sea battle of Salamis (Plu. *Them.* 12. 1).

And I threw down

The enemy, sailing there

in the triremes.

We did not then have any thought

Of how we should deliver a good speech 1095

Or denounce someone,

But of who would be the best oarsman.

Thus, having taken many cities of the Medes,

We are most responsible for the receipt of the tribute, 1100

Which the younger men steal.

The manuscripts preserve 1091 as ἆρα δεινὸς ἦ τόθ', ὥστε πάντα μὴ δεδοικέναι, ('Then I was fierce, so I did not fear everything'), but this seems likely to be a corruption. I adopt Wilson's emendation of just πάντα to ταῦτα, ([so that] 'I did not fear this') but the original, in that it undermines the speakers through understatement of their bravery, also has its appeal.

In this antode, the theme of the Greco-Persian Wars continues unabated, the wasp aspect of their identity recedes, and the theme of shifting values across generations becomes prominent. The wasps still seem somewhat imprecise in their statements about the war: as Biles and Olson point out, the idea of competing to be the best oarsman 'transfers the traditional competitive drive for heroic honour and reputation… perhaps still appropriate to hoplite-fighting, to a sphere in which it has no place, since rowers must work as a team, with each man matching his movements precisely to those of everyone else.'[81]

[81] Biles & Olson (2015) *ad loc.*

Judicial Drones 1102-1121

πολλαχῇ cκοποῦντεc ἡμᾶc εἰc ἅπανθ' εὑρήcετε

τοὺc τρόπουc καὶ τὴν δίαιταν cφηξὶν ἐμφερεcτάτουc.

πρῶτα μὲν γὰρ οὐδὲν ἡμῶν ζῷον ἠρεθιcμένον

μᾶλλον ὀξύθυμόν ἐcτιν οὐδὲ δυcκολώτερον· 1105

εἶτα τἄλλ' ὅμοια πάντα cφηξὶ μηχανώμεθα.

ξυλλεγέντεc γὰρ καθ' ἑcμοὺc ὥcπερ εἰc ἀνθρήνια,

οἱ μὲν ἡμῶν οὗπερ ἄρχων, οἱ δὲ παρὰ τοὺc ἕνδεκα,

οἱ δ' ἐν ᾠδείῳ δικάζουc', ὧδε πρὸc τοῖc τειχίοιc 1110

ξυμβεβυcμένοι πυκνόν, νεύοντεc εἰc τὴν γῆν, μόλιc

ὥcπερ οἱ cκώληκεc ἐν τοῖc κυττάροιc κινούμενοι.

εἴc τε τὴν ἄλλην δίαιτάν ἐcμεν εὐπορώτατοι.

πάντα γὰρ κεντοῦμεν ἄνδρα κἀκπορίζομεν βίον.

ἀλλὰ γὰρ κηφῆνεc ἡμῖν εἰcιν ἐγκαθήμενοι

οὐκ ἔχοντεc κέντρον, οἳ μένοντεc ἡμῶν τοῦ φόρου 1115

τὸν γόνον κατεcθίουcιν οὐ ταλαιπωρούμενοι.

τοῦτο δ' ἔcτ' ἄλγιcτον ἡμῖν, ἤν τιc ἀcτράτευτοc ὢν

ἐκροφῇ τὸν μιcθὸν ἡμῶν, τῆcδε τῆc χώραc ὕπερ

μήτε κώπην μήτε λόγχην μήτε φλύκταιναν λαβών.

ἀλλά μοι δοκεῖ τὸ λοιπὸν τῶν πολιτῶν ἔμβραχυ 1120

ὅϲτιϲ ἂν μὴ ’χῃ τὸ κέντρον μὴ φέρειν τριώβολον.

Examining us from many places and in every way, you will find us

Most like wasps in our habit and life.

First, no animal, when angered, is more

Sharp-tempered or difficult than us. 1105

And then, we devise all other things most like wasps.

For gathering together in swarms just as into hives,

Some of us judge where the archon is, others in the court of the Eleven,

And some in the Odeon, so thickly packed against the walls,

Bending to the ground, hardly moving, 1110

Just like grub-worms in their cells.

In the rest of our life we are most inventive,

For we sting every man and provide a livelihood.

But there are drones sitting among us

Not having a sting, who wait for the offspring of our tribute 1115

And eat it up, not going through any of the toil.

This is most painful to us, if someone who was never a soldier

Slurps down our pay, never in service of this country

Taking ahold of an oar, a spear, or a blister.

But in short, it seems to me that from now, those of the citizens 1120

Who don't have a sting shouldn't take three obols.

While the epirrhema splices wasps with warriors and manages to gently mock the elderly veterans while playfully evoking the glory of their achievements, here the **scripts** that collide are primarily of wasps and the Athenian legal system, at least until the motif of martial valour recurs towards the end of the antepirrhema (1118-21). When mapping wasp traits onto the old men as heliasts, the picture becomes less flattering. Nothing is more ὀξύθυμόν ('sharp-tempered') nor δυσκολώτερον ('more difficult' 1105) than them. The **out-group** receiving mockery at 1102-1116, that of the passionate and professional juryman, was no doubt important for the democratic machinery of the *polis*, but received less public reverence than the Greco-Persian Wars veterans. This seems clear from the criticism which is levied against the lawcourts – and in particular, the way that politicians sought to harness them for personal gain – throughout this play and elsewhere.

The passage continues with frequent **incongruities** resulting from the collisions of law-court, wasp, and military **scripts**, and much like the epirrhema these **incongruities** are explained one by one by the chorus leader. The old men are bad-tempered (1104-5), like aggressive wasps; they plans things together by swarming as in hives (1106-7); the court and the Odeon are packed so thickly with them that they resemble grub-worms in cells (1108-1111); they sting people (judicially) to make a living (1113).

The antepirrhema ends with more targeted humour, this time against an even more iniquitous **out-group**, those who have never served their *polis* in war and lack a sting as they serve on juries. Although this group attracted the attention and ire of comic playwrights,[82] this demographic was probably quite small, and individual audience members were unlikely to **psychologically identify** with them, making this a safe **out-group** against which to level invective. These men are mocked as stingless drones (1114-5), an animal already symbolic of idle parasites in

[82] Eupolis wrote a 'Draft-Dodgers' (Ἀστράτευτοι) frr. 35-46; the Sausage-Seller accuses Paphlagon of shirking military duty in an exchange of insults meant to parody that of political rivals: *Eq.* 442-4; Cleonymus is singled out as seeking to avoid acting as a hoplite at *Eq.* 1369-72; Amynias is called feminine for his draft-dodging at *Nu*. 685–93. For discussion generally, see Christ (2006) 45-87.

Hesiod,[83] who drink down public pay (1118), and the antepirrhema ends with the emphatic assertion: no sting, no public pay (1121). Here the idea of having a stinger comes to signify the carrying out of military duty, whereas being a stingless drone is identified with draft-dodging. Thus the last lines of the wasps' speech is a resounding and witty assertion of widely shared civic values.

4. *Peace*

With the deaths of pro-war leaders Cleon and Brasidas at Amphipolis, tides were turning among the Greek states.[84] Athens made peace with Sparta on favourable terms,[85] and won respite from war. It is in this moment of immense change that Aristophanes produced *Peace*, which is accordingly concerned with preserving the continuity of the poet's brand and persona. It does so most notably, with its remarkable act of prolonged self-quotation (752,754-9). It seems unlikely that this sustained repetition would have gone unnoticed, since these plays were performed a little over a year apart. This section, which has been altered sparingly, with one line added (751) and with the shift from third to first person narration, has in a sense lost its dramatic point with the death of the targeted Cleon. In another sense, however, the changed context following the peace of Nicias that ended the Archidamian phase of the Peloponnesian War, has given it fresh meaning, and the passage acts as a sort of vindication for the poet. Hubbard notes that 'By this act of self-quotation, Aristophanes reminds us that he was always against Cleon, and that the course of history has now vindicated him.'[86] Of course, the politician's death in war was not a vindication of Aristophanes' opinion of him. And yet, the poet acts as if the public have digested his criticism, recognised the true nature of the corrupt politician and removed him from power accordingly. This simplistic equation of Cleon's death with Aristophanes' victory is encouraged by the poet.

In the anapaests, the poet uses clever phrasing to contrive to turn his (alleged) aesthetic innovations on the comic stage into a form of martial victory and peace-brokering, and in this pro-

[83] Hes. *Th*. 594–9; *Op*. 304–6.
[84] Th. 5.16.1; *Pax* 261-86.
[85] Andrewes (2008) 433.
[86] Hubbard (1991) 150.

peace stance, he has much in common with his protagonist, Trygaeus. This character, whose initiative brings peace to the Greeks, is closely connected to the comic playwright himself. His name, derived from τρυγάω ('reap', 'gather'), characterises him as a farmer, but also suggests τρύξ, the 'dregs' or 'unfermented wine' which forms half of the portmanteau τρυγῳδία, a name used by Aristophanes to characterise his own artform as a bastardised version of tragedy.[87] The protagonist is therefore connected both to the poet via reference to the genre itself, and also to its sibling genre.[88] Just as *Acharnians* features much paratragedy, so too *Peace* has extended paratragic action, as the protagonist plays the role of Bellerophon, but with a flying beetle replacing a flying horse. Returning to the parabasis, we see the poet reflecting the protagonist with respect to this same hero of myth, as the chimaera-like monster of 758 (= *V.* 1035) puts the poet persona in a Bellerophontic role as well. Thus, the poet adds new meaning to the repeated parabatic section. Protagonist and poet reflect one another in their portrayals as paratragic heroes, peace-bringers and the same could be said of their stance as enemies of the hated Cleon, since Trygaeus too does not mince words when it comes to his dislike of the politician.[89] Most interestingly, at 647ff., Trygaeus commits a sort of comic praeteritio:

Ἑρμῆς ταῦτα δ' ἦν ὁ δρῶν

βυρcοπώληc.

Τρυγαῖοc παῦε παῦ', ὦ δέcποθ' Ἑρμῆ, μὴ λέγε,

ἀλλ' ἔα τὸν ἄνδρ' ἐκεῖνον οὗπερ ἔcτ' εἶναι κάτω·

οὐ γὰρ ἡμέτεροc ἔτ' ἔcτ' ἐκεῖνοc ἀνὴρ ἀλλὰ cόc. 650

ἅττ' ἂν οὖν λέγῃc ἐκεῖνον,

κεἰ πανοῦργοc ἦν, ὅτ' ἔζη,

[87] See pages 54-5, and Taplin (1983).

[88] Dicaeopolis speaks explicitly of the genre he inhabits as τρυγῳδία at *Ach.* 500, and is also closely aligned with the poet.

[89] At 268-72 Trygaeus is glad that Athens has lost its pestle which churned up Greece; at 313-5 only Cleon can be meant by the Cerberus who, though dead, might as a guard prevent the *anabasis* of Peace.

καὶ λάλος καὶ συκοφάντης

καὶ κύκηθρον καὶ τάρακτρον,

ταῦθ’ ἁπαξάπαντα νυνὶ 655

τοὺς σεαυτοῦ λοιδορεῖς.

Hermes It was the tanner

Who did this

Trygaeus Stop, stop, Lord Hermes, say no more!

Just let that man stay right where he is, down below.

That man’s no longer ours, he’s yours. 650

So whatever you say about him

– Even if he was a scoundrel while he lived,

And a bigmouth and a frame-up artist

And an agitator and a troublemaker –

All these names you’ll now 655

Be calling one of your own.

Trygaeus says we should let sleeping dogs (or dead Cerberi) lie, but cannot help himself from rattling off a list of five insults to cap Hermes’ accusation in a climactic *pnigos*,[90] nor can the poet restrain himself from direct and sustained attack on the dead politician in the parabasis itself (753-60). Here, the poet overtly signals an end to insults against the politician,[91] but the inevitable

[90] Usually a *pnigos* occurs in the parabasis and is spoken in the voice of the poet, so it is significant that Trygaeus is given a *pnigos*, suggesting the close alignment of protagonist and poetic persona.
[91] Cf. *Nu.* 550, 584-94.

resumption of this theme in the parabasis characterises the poet-persona as obsessed to a humorous degree.

Once the Cleon-hatred is temporarily out of his system, the anapaests give way to a strophic pair. This parabasis is heavily abridged, lacking epirrhema and antepirrhema in the syzygy. Those missing passages are routinely devoted in other plays to the characterisation of the chorus in their intra-narrative identity, and the humour is derived from this group's mockery of others and from their inadvertent self-undermining. Here, the Panhellenic chorus of farmers, by virtue of the universality of their character, lack the sorts of quirks and foibles which recommend other groups (the hippic class in *Knights*; heliasts in *Wasps*) for this sort of mockery, nor does the poet choose to graft on a secondary demographic identity (as the *Wasps*' heliasts are also Marathonomachoi; as the female semi-chorus in *Lysistrata* can be seen to represent oligarchy and the male semi-chorus radical democracy). Bereft of epirrhema and antepirrhema, the syzygy that follows is comprised solely of an ode and corresponding antode, composed of dactylo-epitrites and iambic metres. Both songs begin as adaptations of Stesichorus, using these lyric songs as a jumping-off point from which to achieve a further comic end: the playful and creative mockery of supposedly inferior contemporary poets.

Kommation 729-33

ἀλλ' ἴθι χαίρων· ἡμεῖϲ δὲ τέωϲ τάδε τὰ cκεύη παραδόντεc

τοῖc ἀκολούθοιc δῶμεν cῴζειν, ὡc εἰώθαcι μάλιcτα 730

περὶ τὰc cκηνὰc πλεῖcτοι κλέπται κυπτάζειν καὶ κακοποιεῖν.

ἀλλὰ φυλάττετε ταῦτ' ἀνδρείωc· ἡμεῖc δ' αὖ τοῖcι θεαταῖc

ἣν ἔχομεν ὁδὸν λόγων εἴπωμεν ὅcα τε νοῦc ἔχει.

But go, rejoicing, and we meanwhile will put down our gear

Giving it to the attendants to look after, since there are always 730

So many thieves lurking around the stage, up to no good.

But guard these things bravely: and we in turn will say to the spectators

The path of speech we have, and what we think.

In this conventional *kommation*, the chorus say they will dispose of τάδε τὰ σκεύη, i.e. the shovels, crowbars and ropes with which they assembled at 299-301. Without these tools, there is, as far as we can tell based on the text, no visible tokens of their identity left on stage. Combined with the lack of epirrhema and antepirrhema – elsewhere the place to showcase and develop the chorus' intra-narrative identity – here one can least objectionably assert that the chorus speak not as a group of Panhellenic farmers, but as comic chorus *qua* comic chorus.

The stripping of gear is also followed by lines which give us some interesting evidence regarding the historical theatre practices – that there were stage attendants to aid in the chorus' disrobing – and then pivots from this act of undressing to an insult – that the comic stage was a site of frequent thefts. These thefts may be intended as a meta-theatrical reference to the supposed tendency of other poets to steal the work of others. In fact, this accusation is fairly typical of the intertextual game of capping and ribbing in which the poets of Old Comedy were engaged.[92] On the other hand, it may simply be that the spaces around the theatre where actors and choreuts frequently changed clothes were hotspots for thievery comparable to the frequent thefts at other such public changing spaces. Aristotle mentions thefts in bath-houses,[93] the palaestra, market and any public place, and Roman authors frequently decry bath-house thefts.[94] Both interpretations of the thefts may well have been noticed by the audience.

[92] E.g. *Nu.* 553-9; Σ *Nu.* 554a = Eup. fr. 89.
[93] Arist. *Pr.* 952a.18-19.
[94] E.g. Plaut. *Rud.* ii.3.51, Sen. *Ep.*56.1-3.

Beat those who Self-Praise 734-51

χρῆν μὲν τύπτειν τοὺϲ ῥαβδούχουϲ, εἴ τιϲ κωμῳδοποιητὴϲ

αὑτὸν ἐπῄνει πρὸϲ τὸ θέατρον παραβὰϲ ἐν τοῖϲ ἀναπαίϲτοιϲ· 735

εἰ δ’ οὖν εἰκόϲ τινα τιμῆϲαι, θύγατερ Διόϲ, ὅϲτιϲ ἄριϲτοϲ

κωμῳδοδιδάϲκαλοϲ ἀνθρώπων καὶ κλεινότατοϲ γεγένηται,

ἄξιοϲ εἶναί φηϲ’ εὐλογίαϲ μεγάληϲ ὁ διδάϲκαλοϲ ἡμῶν.

πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ τοὺϲ ἀντιπάλουϲ μόνοϲ ἀνθρώπων κατέπαυϲεν

εἰϲ τὰ ῥάκια ϲκώπτονταϲ ἀεὶ καὶ τοῖϲ φθειρϲὶν πολεμοῦνταϲ, 740

τούϲ θ’ Ἡρακλέαϲ τοὺϲ μάττονταϲ κἀεὶ πεινῶνταϲ ἐκείνουϲ

ἐξήλαϲ’ ἀτιμώϲαϲ πρῶτοϲ, καὶ τοὺϲ δούλουϲ παρέλυϲεν 743

τοὺϲ φεύγονταϲ κἀξαπατῶνταϲ καὶ τυπτομένουϲ, ἐπίτηδεϲ 742

{οὓϲ ἐξῆγον κλάονταϲ ἀεί, καὶ τούτουϲ οὕνεκα τουδί}

ἵν’ ὁ ϲύνδουλοϲ ϲκώψαϲ αὐτοῦ τὰϲ πληγὰϲ εἶτ’ ἀνέροιτο· 745

"ὦ κακόδαιμον, τί τὸ δέρμ’ ἔπαθεϲ; μῶν ὑϲτριχὶϲ εἰϲέβαλέν ϲοι

εἰϲ τὰϲ πλευρὰϲ πολλῇ ϲτρατιᾷ κἀδενδροτόμηϲε τὸ νῶτον;"

τοιαῦτ’ ἀφελὼν κακὰ καὶ φόρτον καὶ βωμολοχεύματ’ ἀγεννῆ

ἐποίηϲε τέχνην μεγάλην ὑμῖν κἀπύργωϲ’ οἰκοδομήϲαϲ

ἔπεϲιν μεγάλοιϲ καὶ διανοίαιϲ καὶ ϲκώμμαϲιν οὐκ ἀγοραίοιϲ, 750

οὐκ ἰδιώταϲ ἀνθρωπίϲκουϲ κωμῳδῶν οὐδὲ γυναῖκαϲ,

He ought of course to be beaten by the referees, if some comedy-poet

Praises himself to the theatre having stepped forward in the anapaests: 735

But really, if it is fitting to honour, oh daughter of Zeus, anyone

Who should become the best and most renowned comedy-producer

He says he is worthy of a great eulogy, our producer does.

For first off, he alone out of everyone stopped his rivals

From constantly making fun of rags and war on lice, 740

And those Heracleses kneading dough and going hungry, he drove them

Out, dishonoured them, the first to do it, and got rid of the slaves

Running away, and deceiving and being beaten purposefully

{Which they always led out on stage crying, and for this very reason}

So their fellow-slave can mock him and ask about the strokes 745

'Oh wretch, what's happened to your skin? Has a whip made war

On your ribs with a great army and laid waste to your back?'

He removed such bad jokes, and lowbrow and ignoble scurrilous things

And made our artform great, building it up with high towers

Of lofty words and intentions and unvulgar jokes, 750

Mocking neither private individualings nor women,

From one sort of official festival attendant to another, we move from stage attendants (730) to rod-bearers, the minor officials responsible for whipping those who broke rules at the Olympic

games.[95] ‘Ραβδοῦχοι (‘*The Rod-Bearers*’) was also the title of a play by Plato Comicus. This play was probably later,[96] although the evidence for this is not entirely certain, and Hartwig constructs another interpretation of this evidence which would make ‘Ραβδοῦχοι earlier, and perhaps even performed at the same City Dionysia as *Peace*.[97] If Hartwig's argument is correct, then lines 734-35 could be taken as a reference to this play, with which *Peace* was possibly in direct competition. Given the ubiquity of self-praise in parabases, this would be a ‘clever attack on Plato instructing his chorus… to remove him (or rather themselves) from the stage for promoting his own cause.’[98] Such an intertextual exchange would not be out of place in Old Comedy, and a pause after 735 could have encouraged the audience to dwell upon this comment and make note of its intertextual implications.

Beyond this possible meta-theatrical intertextual joke, Aristophanes uses ὕcτερον-πρότερον syntax with this conditional, and suppressed an αὐτόν, to promote the idea of punishment, and to delay, as a surprise, the ill behaviour said to merit such punishment. Here the humour involves a certain amount of **set-up**, to which norms of syntactical order are made subservient. As often in jokes, form is privileged.[99] The **set-up**, generating **tension** by delaying payoff and through its content – social norms and their violent enforcement – delays the revelation of who the coryphaeus thinks ought to be punished. This makes it a surprise, and it is a humorous one since we find that the behaviour to be punished with a beating is behaviour in which Aristophanes has engaged in every extant parabasis prior to *Peace*. The hypothetical nature of the indefinite ‘εἴ τις κωμῳδοποιητής’ seems to deny that this is what Aristophanes has habitually done,

[95] See e.g. Adeimantus' threat to Themistocles for speaking out of line in an assembly before the battle of Salamis: ἐν τοῖcι ἀγῶcι οἱ προεξανιcτάμενοι ῥαπίζονται (Hdt. 8.59).
[96] *POxy.* 2737 fr. 1, col. ii 10-17: ‘Eratosthenes says about Plato that for as long as he gave (ἐδίδου) his comedies to others, he was held in high regard, but when he produced (διδάξας) *The Rod-Bearers* on his own for the first time through himself, he came fourth and was pushed back into the Lenaean festivals.’ This supposedly dates the play to the Peace of Nicias, since it was thought that the number of comic playwrights competing in the Dionysia was reduced from five to three during the Peloponnesian War, and restored during this peace.
[97] Hartwig (2010). The argument rests heavily upon specific interpretations of comic statements regarding the role of poet and producer, what it means to give (δίδωμι) a play to others, and what it means to teach (διδάcκω) one. But these statements may be intended in a much less precise or accurate sense than Hartwig or others take them: e.g. Halliwell (1989); Gilula (1990); Hubbard (1991) 227-30.
[98] Hartwig (2010) 29.
[99] Scott (2023) 2-3 argues that the championing of form over content is a commonality of jokes and poetry.

implicitly getting the comic playwright off the hook. Placed at the start of the parabasis, this line works to generate humour by falsely implying that Aristophanes would not act in this way, and calls attention to the transgressive nature of parabatic self-praise.[100] These lines suggest that in this play such behaviour will be avoided, and yet this behaviour is ubiquitous in parabases and perhaps the most central dynamic. Any pause between 735 and what follows will have the audience asking themselves: 'What is Aristophanes going to say, if he is not going to praise himself?'

The audience does not need to wait long to have their question answered: Aristophanes is going to go ahead and praise himself regardless. He is a hypocrite, invoking what seems to be a behavioural standard only to immediately break it.[101] Note that εἴ τιϲ κωμῳδοποιητήϲ earlier was not subject to any qualifications: not even the ἄριϲτοϲ… καὶ κλεινότατοϲ comic playwright should, according to the earlier standard, conduct parabatic self-praise with impunity. Yet self-praise is exactly what follows, particularly from 754ff. when the parabases shifts from speaking about the poet in the third person, to speaking as him in the first person. Even initially, speaking through the mouthpiece of the chorus leader, the description identifying Aristophanes as ἄριϲτοϲ | κωμῳδοδιδάϲκαλοϲ ἀνθρώπων καὶ κλεινότατοϲ and ἄξιοϲ… εὐλογίαϲ μεγάληϲ constitutes prolonged and elaborate self-praise,[102] for the audience would have laboured under no false illusions as to whose script the coryphaeus was reciting.

At 739-40 Aristophanes starts to present himself as a peacemaker, in line with his protagonist, but the peace he makes is on the comic stage and fought against cheap comic tricks. He stops his fellow comic playwrights from 'mocking rags and making war on lice', and lists two other hackneyed tropes used by other playwrights – hungry Heracleses,[103] and beaten, fleeing slaves. Of course, Aristophanes himself makes jokes about poverty and rags.[104] Heracles has not been brought on stage by Aristophanes yet – except in so far as Aristophanes represented his own persona as Heracles in *Wasps* – but the trope of the running slave, which will survive into New

[100] For Greek discomfort with self-praise, see note 52 in my chapter on *Acharnians*.
[101] For more hypocrisy, see *Nu.* 537-46, *V.* 56-63, *Ra.* 1-20.
[102] ἄξιοϲ is an Aristophanic buzzword of the parabases: *Ach*. 633, *Eq.* 509, *Nu.* 525.
[103] Cf. Cratin. fr. 336; *V.* 60, *Ra.* 62-5.
[104] *Ach.* 855-9; *Eq.* 1267-74; *V.* 249-57, 291-315; *Th.* 948-52; *Ra.* 411-16; *Pl.* 602.

Comedy and thence into Latin Comedy, is instantiated in *Knights* 1-39. Clearly the poetic persona is here committing the hypocrisy typical of an ἀλαζών poet, and the **mentalising** audience member will notice this, recognise the figure lacks self-awareness and may enjoy an attendant sense of **superiority**, experienced as humour.

Once finished with discussing the tropes and tendencies he has banished from the artform, Aristophanes turns to what he has actively done to improve it. The language he uses is that of defence and fortification, reminiscent of Aeschylus' claims in the *Frogs* (1004). Like Aeschylus there, the claim is pompous, and even more incongruous when used of comedy, while in the *Frogs* it was a claim made of tragedy. The language is also a continuation of the poet's attempt to connect his artform to current events: the fortification of a city is a defensive manoeuvre, and one done with the intent of prolonging peace by deterring attack. Once again, the poetic persona co-opts the language of war and peace, themes of vital importance to the city, to elevate himself and his artform in a way that is inappropriate to the status of his genre.

The Aristophanic persona next claims to have done away with σκώμματα, which seems specifically to refer to scurrilous jokes.[105] In a fragment of Eupolis from his Κόλακες (fr. 172), a σκῶμμα is mentioned and said to be so ἀσελγές that the composer is implied to have been executed. In another fragment of his, from Προσπάλτιοι (fr. 261) he mentions another σκῶμμα… ἀσελγές which is called Megarian (Μεγαρικόν). A Megarian joke was typically regarded by the Athenians as crude.[106] At *Clouds* 542 the Aristophanic persona has already complained of other poets using slapstick to cover up πονηρὰ σκώμματα. Once again, the claim is hypocritical: Old Comedy was full of σκώμματα and Aristophanes is no exception.

Before (re)launching his attack of Cleon, Aristophanes disavows another comic trend: he does not make fun of private individuals or women. This last claim may be a dig at Eupolis, whose Μαρικᾶς mocked Hyperbolus' mother.[107] Whether or not the poetic persona's claim about his own

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[105] *LSJ* A.
[106] Ecphantid. fr. 3; *V.* 57.
[107] Σ *Nu.* 555.

restrained behaviour is true depends on whether γυναῖκας is taken to refer to women generally, in which case the mockery of female characters previously would undermine his claim, or specifically to the mocking of real, named women. Although the Aristophanic plays which revolve around women are still to come, women have been mocked in previous plays. Strepsiades mocks his spendthrift wife in *Clouds*, Philocleon mocks Myrtia in *Wasps* and Trygaeus mocks his own daughters in this very play.[108] If Aristophanes means that he does not mock *real* named women, the claim retains more credibility. As for his claim not to mock ἰδιώτας ἀνθρωπίσκους, the statement is self-defeating. The diminutive is itself mocking in tone.

Aristophanes the Hero (Reprise) 752-64

ἀλλ’ Ἡρακλέους ὀργήν τιν’ ἔχων τοῖσι μεγίστοις ἐπεχείρει,

διαβὰς βυρσῶν ὀσμὰς δεινὰς κἀπειλὰς βορβοροθύμους.

καὶ πρῶτον μὲν μάχομαι πάντων αὐτῷ τῷ καρχαρόδοντι,

οὗ δεινόταται μὲν ἀπ’ ὀφθαλμῶν Κύννης ἀκτῖνες ἔλαμπον, 755

ἑκατὸν δὲ κύκλῳ κεφαλαὶ κολάκων οἰμωξομένων ἐλιχμῶντο

περὶ τὴν κεφαλήν, φωνὴν δ’ εἶχεν χαράδρας ὄλεθρον τετοκυίας,

φώκης δ’ ὀσμήν, Λαμίας δ’ ὄρχεις ἀπλύτους, πρωκτὸν δὲ καμήλου.

τοιοῦτον ἰδὼν τέρας οὐ κατέδεισ’, ἀλλ’ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν πολεμίζων

ἀντεῖχον ἀεὶ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων νήσων. ὧν οὕνεκα νυνὶ 760

ἀποδοῦναί μοι τὴν χάριν ὑμᾶς εἰκὸς καὶ μνήμονας εἶναι.

καὶ γὰρ πρότερον πράξας κατὰ νοῦν οὐχὶ παλαίστρας περινοστῶν

παῖδας ἐπείρων, ἀλλ’ ἀράμενος τὴν σκευὴν εὐθὺς ἐχώρουν,

[108] *Nu.* 41-70, *V.* 1388-412, *Pax* 110-45.

παῦρ’ ἀνιάϲαϲ, πόλλ’ εὐφράναϲ, πάντα παραϲχὼν τὰ δέοντα.

But having the spirit of Heracles, he attacked the greatest,

Ignoring the stench of hides and the mud-hearted threats,

And first of all, I fight against the jagged-toothed one,

From whose eyes shone the most terrible rays of Kynna, 755

And a hundred heads of wailing flatterers licked around in a circle

Around its head, and it had the baneful voice of a rushing torrent,

The smell of a seal, the unwashed balls of a Lamia, and the arsehole of a camel.

Having seen such a monster, I did not shrink back in fear, but I held out

Always fighting on behalf of you and the islands, too. For these reasons now 760

It is right that you give me your favour and remember: for even though

I’ve done this already by design, I have not started stalking around

The wrestling grounds making passes at boys, but I got my gear and left at once,

Causing them little grief but much happiness, providing all that’s necessary.

Amid the section repeated from *Wasps (*752, 754-9), line 753 (διαβὰϲ βυρϲῶν ὀϲμὰϲ δεινὰϲ κἀπειλὰϲ βορβοροθύμουϲ) is added, which does an effective job of evoking the politician, as βυρϲῶν recalls βυρϲοπώληϲ, Hermes’ descriptor of Cleon at 648, and βορβοροθύμουϲ is appropriate to Cleon after his death, since mud is a feature of the Underworld.[109] The very act of prolonged self-quotation is unparalleled in extant Old Comedy, and so probably in and of itself

[109] E.g. *Ra.* 116, 268.

constituted an audacious choice. The shift from third-person to first-person (μάχομαι 754) creates a sense of gloating reprisal of the role, as the poetic persona takes total ownership of this fictive achievement, whether or not this was an altogether comfortable topic for humour.

The repeated section is capped by a confusing claim: that the poet 'held out | Always fighting on behalf of you and the islands, too' (760). *Peace* was a Dionysia play, and therefore likely watched by foreign embassies from Athens' allies, which perhaps motivates the inclusion of this line which has no parallel in *Wasps*. However, since Aristophanes was probably criticised for depicting the Athenian empire as unjustly governing the allied island states, and fact that he alludes to in *Acharnians*,[110] the claim here to fight on the behalf of both would have struck an odd note to Athenian audience members.

At 762-4, the claim not to have used his poetic success to win the favour of young boys at the gym resembles the claim of *Wasps* 1023-5. In both cases the scholia tell us this is an oblique criticism of Eupolis, although it is uncertain whether the scholiasts are basing this on reliable external evidence or extrapolating on the basis that Aristophanes and Eupolis traded insults elsewhere. One scholiast on *Wasps* tells us that this line is a description of Eupolis' behaviour, but gives no evidence, simply paraphrasing the allegation simply regurgitates the line itself as evidence, [111] as does another scholiast on *Peace*,[112] while another on *Wasps* says that in fact Eupolis accuses Aristophanes of this sort of behaviour in his *Autolycus*.[113] If this last scholiast had a secure text of *Autolycus*, then the most likely reading seems to be that here in *Wasps* and later in *Peace* Aristophanes is not hinting at Eupolis' poor behaviour but denying Eupolis' allegations concerning his own conduct.

[110] See my analysis of *Ach.* 642-3.
[111] Σ *V.* 1025c.
[112] Σ *Pax* 763c.
[113] Σ *V.* 1025b.

Give Things to Baldie 765-73

πρὸς ταῦτα χρεὼν εἶναι μετ' ἐμοῦ 765

καὶ τοὺς ἄνδρας καὶ τοὺς παῖδας·

καὶ τοῖς φαλακροῖσι παραινοῦμεν

ξυσπουδάζειν περὶ τῆς νίκης.

πᾶς γάρ τις ἐρεῖ νικῶντος ἐμοῦ

κἀπὶ τραπέζῃ καὶ ξυμποσίοις, 770

“φέρε τῷ φαλακρῷ, δὸς τῷ φαλακρῷ

τῶν τρωγαλίων, καὶ μἀφαίρει

γενναιοτάτου τῶν ποιητῶν

ἀνδρὸς τὸ μέτωπον ἔχοντος.”

And so, it's necessary for men and

Children alike to be on my side

And I encourage bald men

To hurry me on to victory.

For if I win every man will say

At the dining tables and drinking parties

“Take this to the bald man, give baldie

Some edible treats, and don't begrudge anything

To the noblest of poets

The man with the (whopping big) forehead."

The poetic persona seeks support from men and children, without mentioning women. Depending on whether or not women were permitted to attend the dramatic festivals,[114] this may have constituted a merism referring to the entire audience. Bald men are sought particularly as partisans, a natural alliance given the poet's own precocious alopecia (767).[115] As well as conjuring up a charming but fanciful **world** in which solidarity between bald men results in their mutual benefit, this *pnigos* continues our picture of Aristophanes in triumph, even if here the picture is hypothetical, hinging upon the imagined success of this play.

The repetitive imagined cry "φέρε τῷ φαλακρῷ, δὸϲ τῷ φαλακρῷ" curiously anticipates a much-cited Eupolis fragment, a scholium on *Clouds* which reports that he says in his Βάπται: † κἀκεῖνοϲ † τοὺϲ Ἱππέαϲ | ϲυνεποίηϲα τῷ φαλακρῷ ⟨ – ᴗ ⟩ κἀδωρηϲάμην ('I cowrote the *Knights* and gifted it to Baldie' fr. 89).[116] While Βάπται probably dates to 416, the accusation itself could date to any time following *Knights*' production, in which case it is possible that the audience would understand this as a call to be permissive of the bald poet's poetic borrowings. Alternatively, the claim in the Βάπται may be an occasion on which Eupolis is adopting and playing upon Aristophanes' self-presentation. Aristophanes says 'Give good things to Baldie,' and Eupolis replies 'I gave him *Knights*!'

The *pnigos* ends with a description of the poet as 'noblest' and 'having a forehead' (773-4). This last descriptor functions as **incongruity**. For while certainly a conspicuous forehead could be an identifying feature of the poet, coming after the description of the poet as 'noblest', further

[114] The inclusion or exclusion of women from dramatic audiences has received long discussion: e.g. Dover (1972) 17, Henderson (1991), Roselli (2011) 158-94, Goldhill (1994) 347–370, and see note 6 in my chapter on *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae.* In general, it seems fair to conclude that men at least constituted the primary intended audience, and this line seems to weigh in favour of their exclusion.
[115] Cf. *Eq.* 550, *Nu.* 540, 545, and page 146 for a discussion of φαλακρόϲ as an innuendo.
[116] Σ *Nu.* 554a.

praise might be expected. As such μέτωπον is a surprise where something like νόον might have been expected.[117]

Muse, Come Dance 774-95

Μοῦϲα, ϲὺ μὲν πολέμουϲ ἀπωϲαμένη μετ’ ἐμοῦ

τοῦ φίλου χόρευϲον, 775

κλείουϲα θεῶν τε γάμουϲ

ἀνδρῶν τε δαῖταϲ καὶ θαλίαϲ μακάρων·

ϲοὶ γὰρ τάδ’ ἐξ ἀρχῆϲ μέλει. 780

ἢν δέ ϲε Καρκίνοϲ ἐλθὼν

ἀντιβολῇ μετὰ τῶν παίδων χορεῦϲαι,

μήθ’ ὑπάκουε μήτ’ ἔλ- 785

θῃϲ ϲυνέριθοϲ αὐτοῖϲ,

ἀλλὰ νόμιζε πάνταϲ

ὄρτυγαϲ οἰκογενεῖϲ, γυλιαύχεναϲ ὀρχηϲτὰϲ

νανοφυεῖϲ, ϲφυράδων ἀποκνίϲματα, μηχανοδίφαϲ. 790

καὶ γὰρ ἔφαϲχ’ ὁ πατὴρ ὃ παρ’ ἐλπίδαϲ

εἶχε τὸ δρᾶμα γαλῆν τῆϲ ἑϲπέραϲ ἀπάγξαι. 795

Muse, once you’ve driven wars away, come dance

[117] E.g. Isoc. 12.34.

With me, your friend, 775

Celebrating the marriages of the gods

And the feasts of men and banquets of the blest:

For this has always been your concern. 780

If Carcinus should come and

Beg you to perform in a chorus with his children

Don't listen to him, and don't 785

Go be any assistance to them either,

But consider them all

Homebred quails, long-necked dancers

Manlets, scrapings of dung-balls, artifice-contrivers. 790

For even the father admitted that the drama he most unexpectedly

Finished was dragged away by its neck last night by a weasel. 795

Here, as in the metrically corresponding antistrophe, the metre is feverishly dactylic. Both sections are replete with neologisms, notably portmanteaus compounding different nouns to suggest the manifold mutant deformities of the κωμῳδούμενοι. In the latter passage, these compound insults will revolve primarily around animals, but here the net is cast wider. The effect of these sections, which heap nouns upon nouns upon nouns, in combination with the ebulliently dactylic metre, is to impress upon the listener Aristophanes' potent poetic talent when it comes to the fertile ground of insults. The poet's fecund imagination churns out inventive neologisms, and his productive ability is implicitly contrasted with Carcinus' lack thereof.

The opening line of the ode says that the Muse has driven away war. To what does this refer? As discussed below, this much of the following odes may be from Stesichorus, but when transplanted into this context, following directly on from the autobiographical section of the parabasis, it takes on new meaning. Prior to this, the poet has acted as if he personally has some claim to have created peace, and so the implication here is that it is Aristophanes' Muse who has played a role in ending the Peloponnesian War, through the advice of his poetry. With these two words (πολέμους ἀπωσαμένη), the poet bids *adieu* to the theme of war, allowing what follows to focus upon perfecting the poetic landscape of the city at peace. At the same time, he subtly renews his claim to have brought about the brokering of peace with his productivity, and his poetry is suggested to be so politically potent that is has altered the course of events on an international scale.

Line 775-9 may adapt Stesichorus,[118] and although borrowed from lyric the invocation of the Muse in dactylic metre is also evocative of *epos*. The Stesichorus here adapted may be from his *Oresteia*, if it hails from the same place as the quotation which begins the antistrophe.[119] Without this poem, however, it is impossible to say whether the context of the quotation had some precise bearing on Aristophanes' adaptation, although one might expect there to be a meaningful **script collision** or incongruity between Aristophanes and the parodied text. On the other hand, the effect of the quotation here seems likely to be one of *bathos*. By taking on the voice of Stesichorus, the poetry temporarily assumes a more elegant,[120] righteous and melodious tone. Such a tone is not exactly proper to Old Comedy, and may have prompted the audience to wonder why the usually scurrilous poet has adopted such a lofty tone. The **tension** increases until we return to more familiar comic ground, rivalry against another poet (781-7), and is thoroughly dispelled by the rollocking and colourful invective directed against Carcinus and his children.

Carcinus and his sons featured in the absurdist finale of *Wasps*, as the figures who come on stage to take up Philocleon's gauntlet and dance in a dance-battle against him (1500-11), and as

[118] Σ *Pax* 775f, Stesich. fr. 172 (Davies & Finglass).
[119] Σ *Pax* 797c, see below.
[120] The scholium (Σ *Pax* 775f) says this is γλαφυρὸν εἴρηται: 'spoken eloquently'.

such they act as another point of continuity between the two plays.[121] After imploring the Muse not to aid them (781-6), the poetry goes on to heap insult upon insult on the theatrical family (789-90). While before the dactyls were epic-through-lyric in flavour, here they are nothing short of feverish. The neologisms and compound nouns in breathless asyndeton have a double-edged effect. On the one hand, the sons of Carcinus are maligned, implied by the image to be, by turns, diminutive, docile, perhaps servile, long-necked or, conversely, lacking any neck at all, disfigured, malodorous, and artificial,[122] and the impossibility of bringing all these aspects together to form a coherent image of the brothers adds to the sense of their monstrosity. On the other hand, this fever-dream of an insult demonstrates Aristophanes' own exceptionally generative poetic skill, in striking contrast to Carcinus'.

Weasels were associated with catching mice. Indeed, they were probably proverbially the enemies of mice, judging by a Hellenistic papyrus recounting a Galeomyomachy.[123] No doubt they also were the enemies of mice in that they were rival scavengers benefitting from the leavings of the humans. A scholium claims that Carcinus lost a play called *Mice*,[124] but since Carcinus is noted by other scholia as a tragedian, and *Mice* can only have been a comedy, it seems more likely that the scholiast extrapolated this idea in order to explain Aristophanes' joke here. Such an explanation is hardly needed. To say that one's play was dragged off by a weasel is the comically implausible ancient equivalent of the classic schoolchild excuse: 'Sorry sir; the dog ate my homework.' Carcinus seemingly has not produced a play when expected to, and Aristophanes here mocks the tragedian by imagining that he can only have a feeble excuse for this creative lull. The verb

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[121] Carcinus and his sons are also mocked at *Nu.*1260-1, and later at *Pax* 864.

[122] ὄρτυγας, νανοφυεῖϲ and ἀποκνίϲματα all suggest shortness, since quails are rather small birds; ὄρτυγας οἰκογενεῖϲ and domesticated quails, sometimes thought to be docile, cf. Eup. fr. 226; when not describing birds, οἰκογενήϲ is used in the classical era of slaves born in the household: e.g. Pl. *Men.* 82b5; γυλιαύχενας is likely derived from γυλιόϲ, a soldier's pack, although this, and indeed the shape of such a pack, is not clear; νανοφυεῖϲ refers not simply to shortness, but to dwarfism; ϲφυράδων ἀποκνίϲματα is likely meant to impute smell as well as size; μηχανοδίφας in this context of invective seems to suggest an over-eagerness for artifice, perhaps suggesting their innovations, whether in dance or dramaturgical technology (Pl. Com. fr. 143), are contrived.

[123] P. Mich. Inv. 6946, cf. Schibli (1983).

[124] Σ *Pax* 795.

ἀπάγξαι theriomorphises Carcinus' work into the sort of small animal upon which a weasel might prey.

Such Song-Subjects of the Lovely-Haired Graces 796-816

τοιάδε χρὴ Χαρίτων δαμώματα καλλικόμων

τὸν σοφὸν ποιητὴν

ὑμνεῖν, ὅταν ἠρινὰ μὲν

φωνῇ χελιδὼν ἡδομένη κελαδῇ, 800

χορὸν δὲ μὴ 'χῃ Μόρσιμος

μηδὲ Μελάνθιος, οὗ δὴ

πικροτάτην ὄπα γηρύσαντος ἤκους', 805

ἡνίκα τῶν τραγῳδῶν

τὸν χορὸν εἶχον ἀδελ-

φός τε καὶ αὐτός, ἄμφω

Γοργόνες ὀψοφάγοι, βατιδοσκόποι Ἅρπυιαι, 810

γραοσόβαι μιαροί, τραγομάσχαλοι ἰχθυολῦμαι·

ὧν καταχρεμψαμένη μέγα καὶ πλατύ, 815

Μοῦσα θεά, μετ' ἐμοῦ ξύμπαιζε τὴν ἑορτήν.

Such subjects of songs on the lovely-haired Graces

Ought a wise poet

To hymn, whenever in Spring you sound sitting

With the voice of swallows,

And Morsimus has no chorus

Nor Melanthius, whose

Bitterest voice I heard singing

When he had a chorus

Of tragedy, his brother

And him, both

Flesh-eating Gorgons, skate-seeking Harpies,

Old women-shooing scoundrels, goat-armpitted fish-gobblers:

Once you've spat upon them hard and far,

Goddess, Muse, play with me in the festival.

This antistrophe, too, begins with an adaptation of Stesichorus,[125] and the dynamic of bathetic humour is the same, whereby the righteous voice and pleasant subject matter of the lyric poet is temporarily adopted, only to be thrown off when the comic poet cannot help but fall back into a more scurrilous tone, heaping invective on inferior poets. As in the strophe above, this climaxes in an asyndetic concatenation of innovative abuse. This time it is Melanthius and his brother, possibly Morsimus, who receive colourful treatment, and are suggested to be monstrous, gluttonous, minded to mistreat others and foul-smelling.[126]

[125] Σ *Pax* 797c, Stesich. fr. 173 (Davies & Finglass).

[126] Γοργόνες, and Ἅρπυιαι suggest monstrosity; ὀψοφάγοι, βατιδοσκόποι Ἅρπυιαι and ἰχθυολῦμαι suggest their appetites, particularly for fish; γραοσόβαι μιαροί refers to the ill-treatment of others, and in the surrounding context the old women of γραοσόβαι may refer to them behaving aggressively in the marketplace – see Olson (1998) *ad loc.*; τραγομάσχαλοι suggests odour.

The poet encourages his Muse to sink to his level and spit on the brothers, allegedly deserving of such treatment. This action would have twin effects: obviously, spitting on the brothers suggests a lack of respect, but the action would also clear the throat of the Muse, since χρέμπτομαι is used specifically of clearing one's throat before giving a speech,[127] and so this assault would have the added benefit of readying the Muses' voices when they play with Aristophanes in a festival. This last command, 'Goddess, Muse, play with me in the festival', creates ring composition with the start of the ode (774-5), and a resumption of the earlier more highbrow tone, which once again resembles lyric. The audience may get whiplash from the speed at which the poet resumes the normative artistic and righteous voice of a lyric poet, so soon after heaping comic abuse on the brothers and asking the Muse to spit on them.

5. Conclusions

The self-quotation in *Peace* is an act of both repetition and reinvention. Transplanted from a parabasis in which the poetic persona is bitter and overlooked, into one where he is triumphant, the repeated section enacts a victory over Cleon which gains greater point from his intervening death and the establishment of peace. While previously, by enacting a feud with Cleon on-stage Aristophanes could make his persona memorable by tying him through narrative to the most influential politician of the day, at this politician's death the poet sought to capitalise by turning a tragic event into his own personal glory and achievement. Through some comic sleight-of-hand with regard to logic and narrative, Aristophanes turns the demagogue's death into an 'I told you so' moment.

In *Wasps* the poet also innovates upon an already familiar subject of comedy: the Greco-Persian Wars veterans. Although the poetic tone of these figures may constitute parody of well-worn aggrandising rhetoric about their military success, the combination of this identity with two other aspects of their characterisation, as passionate heliasts and as wasps, distracts from this

[127] Ar. *Th.* 381; Gal. *Protr*. 8.

parodic humour, with its potential to offend, and demonstrates the remarkable generative power of comedy. **Incongruous** humour demands the unexpected combination, or **clash**, of significantly different **scripts**, and when the poet accordingly draws together two essentially unconnected ideas for a sustained time, the resultant **world** is something brand new, even when one of the **scripts** is a topic as played out as Greek military success against the Persians.

Aristophanes continues to demonstrate his exceptional ability for creativity in the truncated epirrhematic syzygy. The odes are replete with concatenated insults directed at supposedly inferior poets. This is a deft demonstration of Aristophanes' skill, and extremely entertaining in its own right, but the way these joyously grotesque verses are bookended by lines taken from Stesichorus creates another level of meaning. By adopting, discarding, then ultimately re-adopting Stesichorus' noble tone, Aristophanes seems to call attention to the arbitrariness of the righteous tone typically used by lyric poets. Their register is clearly not indicative of a noble mind, since the scurrilous Aristophanes can so lightly borrow and discard it, and the tone comes across as bland when placed in jarring contrast with the imaginative havoc conjured in his abuse of other poets.

Doing Things with *Birds*

Avian Cosmogonic Revisionism

The parabasis of *Birds* is a new sort of parabasis for a new sort of comedy. While previous plays teamed with direct topical references to politicians, and parabases strove to situate their poet in the context of the city and its affairs with autobiographical passages, *Birds* is somewhat removed from Athenian politics. The events of the play take place specifically outside the city, engagement with politics is more indirect and allegorical, and in the parabases the poet is nowhere to be found.

In the absence of his persona, Aristophanes' longest surviving parabasis is devoted entirely to the chorus in their avian identity. While they still find the time to mock some aberrant politicians and behaviours in the epirrhematic syzygy, the greater part of the parabasis and its humour focuses upon the birds' attempt to reconfigure all aspects of life around them. Their revisionist take on the cosmogony sees them warp human traditions and beliefs in order to give themselves the starring role. The constant clashes between bird and human **scripts** are a key driver of this humour, the **incongruities** of giving birds human roles, which also suggest a perspective of species-focalised relativism which goes hand in hand with the moral relativism they boast of as the norm in Cloudcuckooland.

In *Birds*, Aristophanes plays with the idea of relativism, though not in a formal or particularly overt way. When he projects human characteristics onto animals, and later gods, these are not any old human characteristics, but rather they are primarily appetites, flaws and vices. As a result, the overwhelming impression is not necessarily that of a critique of relativist philosophy, but rather the comforting, appropriately comic image of a world in which all living creatures are universally hungry, greedy and selfish like us.

1. Politics

It is commonplace to note that *Birds* contains little topical reference to contemporary politics,[1] although it had hardly been a slow news year. It was produced at the City Dionysia of 414, and the Sicilian Expedition was underway. After an initial success at the First Battle of Syracuse, Athens had sustained some losses, including the death of the general Lamachus, leaving just one of the three initially elected generals. On top of that, a religious scandal, the mutilation of the herms and allegations that citizens had profaned the Sacred Mysteries of Eleusis, had recently rocked the city.

In the context of all this intrigue and ambition, *Birds*' lack of direct political references appears a politically charged vacuum.[2] On the other hand, a text is not apolitical just because it contains few topical references – one would hardly call Plato's *Republic* apolitical – and there are those who nevertheless consider the play pointed political allegory. The disagreement lies in what exactly is allegorised, and what moral can be drawn from the play. Are Peisthetairus and Euelpides representative of Athenian cleruchs, from the displaced populations of the Attic hinterlands?[3] Are they representative of manipulative politicians?[4] Are they unscrupulous individuals who evade legal hinderances and become profiteers in Thrace?[5] Does the play overall satirise Athenian (over-)ambition of the sort that led to the Sicilian Expedition?[6] Does the play act out various sorts of utopianism reflective of the contradictions inherent in Athenian political thought?[7] Even binary

[1] Whitman (1964) 169 called this play 'strangely free of political concerns'.
[2] Some see this silence as confirming the assertion of a scholium which said that a decree proposed by Syracosius was enacted which curtailed the power of comic playwrights to mock certain people: Σ *Av.* 1297a. Sommerstein (1986) drawing on an observation by Droysen (1835) sees the measure as a sort of *damnatio memoriae* of those implicated in the scandals of the mutilation of the herms and the profanation of the Mysteries. Atkinson (1992) thinks the measure was meant to protect this group following their exoneration. In contrast Trevett (2009) thinks there was no such restriction placed on comic *parrhesia,* but the scholiast misunderstood joke, whereby a citizen named Syracosius ('Syracusan') was accused of taking away those whom comic playwrights wished to mock, in the sense that the youth of the city were all away on the Sicilian Expedition. No firm conclusion can be reached.
[3] Arrowsmith (1973) 119-126.
[4] E.g. Süvern (1827) saw Peisthetairus as an avatar of Alcibiades, as does Vickers (1995).
[5] Hall (2020).
[6] Süvern (1827) attributes striking foresight to Aristophanes; Arrowsmith (1973) sees the humans as representing the national Athenian tendency to πλεονεξία.
[7] Konstan (1990).

questions such as ‘is *Nephelococcygia* a utopia or a cautionary tale?’ have provoked wildly differing responses.[8]

Allegorical interpretations abound, and all have merit because the play nods to many different political ideas. There is no single overarching political allegorical narrative to the exclusion of other interpretations. This is due to the inherent instability of political messaging in a polyphonic medium, and to the particular nature of the *Birds,* which does not settle for depicting just one political situation, but develops, Protean. Since its coinage in *Birds,* the word ‘nephelococcygia’ has come to mean ‘the act of identifying shapes in clouds’. Interpreters of this play engage in a similar act, because its multifaceted and changing nature suggests many different overall shapes and ideas. The same was no doubt true of its first audience. One theatre-goer may have seen the play as a warning to Athens about the manipulativeness of her politicians as embodied by Peisthetairus, while another, carried along with Peisthetairus’ triumph, may have seen the Cloudcuckooland at the end of the play as an enviable paradise.

2. Comedy

Others have created fruitful interpretations of *Birds* by focusing upon the non-political aspects of the play.[9] By focusing on the humour in this play’s parabasis, we can reach some stable non-political conclusions, the first of which is this: birds are not funny, people are. That is, birds on their own are not funny,[10] but rather the generation of humour always centres on humans, or results from the **incongruous** collision of avian and human **scripts**. Sustained humour involving birds inevitably anthropomorphises them and relates to them on human terms. Mocking birds can only take you so far, but mocking men is a career. The three major dynamics of humour generation

[8] E.g. Süvern (1827) and Köchly (1857).
[9] Pozzi (1985), Perkell (1993),
[10] Even, for example, jokes about the appearance and names of birds in the chorus (268-304) are not solely about birds, but about collisions between bird **scripts** and other **scripts**, as with the Mede bird (277-8) which Euelpides is surprised has flown here without a camel.

present in this parabasis can be neatly explained by the three canonical overarching theories of humour:

1. In the anapaests, epirrhema and antepirrhema, named *komoidoumenoi* are targeted for disparaging humour. The poor behaviour of these figures (cloak-stealing, sedition(?), incontinence, alcoholism or making money from mercantilism) is mocked in a manner best explored by **superiority theory**.
2. In the epirrhema and antepirrhema, the birds offer humans the benefits of living free from the constraints of human *nomoi*.[11] *Patraloia* and adultery, for example, are licensed by lawlessness or the acquisition of wings, and the audience is allowed to indulge in fantasy ideas that are normally taboo and generate **tension**. The flagrant imagined breaking of such taboos generates humour through **relief**.
3. Finally, throughout every section of the parabasis we find the collision of human and avian **scripts**, resulting in **incongruities** which the audience must **resolve**. In the *kommation*, ode and antode, for example, the **script** of bird song is made to collide with human music **scripts**, hymnic and instrumental.

This last near-ubiquitous dynamic of humour results in the charmingly absurd picture of a world hatched from a wind-egg and of theatre-goers flying off from their seats. To Whitman, the parabasis of this play is 'the triumphant lyrical image of nothingness'.[12] Actually, the picture is not as unstructured as this would suggest: the parabasis is ridiculous but follows a definite pattern. The birds construct a cosmic **world** which takes as its inputs both human traditions and ideas, and certain aspects of avian life. Human logic, human patterns of world-building, are transposed onto the class *aves*. Particularly in the sustained parody of theogonic texts at 693-703, this structure is clear. As already mentioned, this can be understood as generating humour through **incongruity**, and it also speaks to a fundamental truth of comedy: humans are the best species to satirise.

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[11] Konstan (1990) 197-8 identifies these sections as explorations of Cloudcuckooland as an anomian or antinomian place.
[12] Whitman (1964) 182.

3. Philosophy

The sustained avian cosmogony also leads to another observation: Aristophanes is carrying out a comic exercise in species-focalised relativism. A fragment of Xenophanes (B15, Diels & Kranz) may be useful to consider here:

> εἰ ⟨δέ⟩ τοι ⟨ἵπποι⟩ ἔχον χέρας ἢ βόες ἠὲ λέοντες
>
> ἢ γράψαι χείρεσσι καὶ ἔργα τελεῖν ἅπερ ἄνδρες,
>
> ἵπποι μέν θ' ἵπποισι, βόες δέ τε βουσὶν ὁμοίας
>
> καί ⟨κε⟩ θεῶν ἰδέας ἔγραφον καὶ σώματ' ἐποίουν
>
> τοιαῦθ' οἷόνπερ καὐτοὶ δέμας εἶχον ἕκαστοι.

> But if horses or cattle or lions had hands,
>
> And could draw with their hands and perform the deeds men do,
>
> Horses would draw their gods as horse-like in form, and
>
> Cattle cattle-like, and they would make their bodies
>
> In form just like they each themselves had.

His point is that the anthropomorphised gods of the Greek pantheon are a result of human perspective, as men project their own properties onto non-human forces. The example of the horses is a sort of *reductio ad absurdum* of this sort of thinking, and Xenophanes implies that men anthropomorphising deities is as ridiculous as horses imagining equine deities.[13] Aristophanes' birds act strikingly like Xenophanes' horses,[14] projecting their avian nature onto the gods and the primordial forces that produced the cosmos. Now, Xenophanes did not accept relativism about the

[13] Xenoph. B23 (Diels & Kranz) shows that he argued for non-anthropomorphic gods.
[14] I will not argue for a direct relationship between this Xenophanes fragment and Aristophanes plays, although e.g. Mourelatos (2020) 141-2 has argued that Aristophanes was familiar with and influenced by the pre-Socratic in *Clouds.*

nature of gods as legitimate, but rather he drew the conclusion from this picture of cultural (or rather, special) relativism that theology which anthropomorphises the gods is misguided. However, in *Birds* Aristophanes plays with the idea of relativism in a sustained manner, as Whitman and Hubbard explore. Whitman talks about how the invincible power of the word, harnessed in the *Birds* as a tool of *poneria*, operates against a background awareness of the concept of relativism.[15] Cultural relativism makes Cloudcuckooland a paradise for those who among men would be deemed nefarious,[16] while a more sweeping relativism, which makes speech prior to reality, enables the machinery of the absurd plot. If objective truth is unknowable, reality becomes subjective, an object malleable through *peitho* and *apato*, both of which Peisthetairus employs to rewrite the history of the world and its hierarchies.

For Hubbard, *Birds* explores the causes and consequences of the sort of impiety that led to these scandals, and he connects this impiety with the teachings of sophistic thinkers,[17] many of whom were seen as atheistic and are mentioned within the play.[18] I am less sure that a member of the original audience would so easily have connected Peisthetairus' sophism and the theme of relativism to the Hermocopids scandal and its perpetrators. Furthermore, I do not think that the *Birds* can be taken as a coherent condemnation of sophistry as the cause of Athens' contemporary problems,[19] because I do not think comedy is an effective vehicle for such a message. For Xenophanes the philosopher, a *reductio ad absurdum* serves his argument. For Aristophanes the comic playwright, *absurdum* is an end goal in and of itself. Whether the comic playwright had a further goal, a political or philosophical message to impart, is impossible to say, because of the inherent ambiguity of satire of this kind. How can one stable message be extracted to the exclusion of others when readers are divided even on whether Cloudcuckooland is a dystopian state ruled by tyranny or a paradise?

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[15] Whitman (1964) 173-174 discusses the relativism of Gorgias, Protagoras and Democritus.
[16] E.g. the birds' drastically different attitudes to *patraloia* in the epirrhema (757-9).
[17] Hubbard (1991) 163.
[18] E.g. Prodicus (692), Diagoras of Melos (1073), Socrates (τῶν μετεώρων 690 recalls Socrates in *Clouds* 227-9), Chaerephon (1564), Philip the orator (1701), Meton the astronomer (992-7) and Cinesias the dithyrambist (1372-1409): see Hubbard (1991) 161-2.
[19] 'Hubbard (1991) 182.

Finally, the comparison to Xenophanes is also apt in another way. While the birds act like Xenophanes' horses, projecting their own attributes onto gods, so too Aristophanes projects humanity onto the birds. Aristophanes is guilty of exactly the sort of anthropomorphism which Xenophanes questions, as he brings on stage anthropomorphic Greek gods: Iris, Poseidon, Heracles and Triballus. Moreover, it is not simply humanity that is projected onto animals and gods alike, but comic humanity, with its exaggerated fallibility, fractiousness and greed.[20] The gods squabble, they hunger, they serve only their own best interests. The birds crave power – at least after Peisthetairus instils in them the belief that it is owed to them[21] – as men do. The birds have a strong sense of self-preservation, a distrust of outsiders, and are wary of being betrayed, like men.[22] This is no neutral portrait which Aristophanes projects in anthropomorphising the birds, but the sort of base figure typical of comedy.[23] Flawed and selfish figures are easy comic fodder, certainly, but bad behaviour is so ubiquitous in Old Comedy that it shapes the entire *ethos* of the comic world. By painting birds and gods with the same brush, Aristophanes draws attention to this ubiquity as a defining feature of the genre. In *Birds*, the playwright makes hierarchies of power arbitrary, the history of the world malleable, but the primacy of every living being's self-interest remains stable.

4. The Parabasis

***Kommation* 676-684**

ὦ φίλη, ὦ ξουθή,

ὦ φίλτατον ὀρνέων

πάντων, ξύννομε τῶν ἐμῶν

---

[20] Perkell (1993) 11: 'Far from omnipotent and serene, the gods are, rather, revealed as beset by serious social and political problems. They are hamstrung by a democracy which is ruled by mediocrity and appoints an embassy incapable of protecting their interests.'
[21] His argument at 466ff. conjures a world in which the birds once ruled, but rule no more. As Konstan (1990) 196 notes, to arouse their interest 'he must first implant a sense of lack, a nostalgia for an originary plenitude which, until he tells them otherwise, they have never missed.'
[22] *Av.* 322, 327ff.
[23] Arist. *Po.* 1448a16-18.

ὕμνων, ξύντροφ᾽ ἀηδοῖ,

ἦλθες, ἦλθες, ὤφθης, 680

ἡδὺν φθόγγον ἐμοὶ φέρουσ᾽·

ἀλλ᾽, ὦ καλλιβόαν κρέκουσ᾽

αὐλὸν φθέγμασιν ἠρινοῖς,

ἄρχου τῶν ἀναπαίστων.

Oh dear one, oh trilling one,

Oh dearest bird

Of all, partner in my

Songs, fellow-fostered nightingale,

You have come, you have come, you've been spotted, 680

Bearing a sweet sound to me.

But, oh you who play the fine-sounding flute

With songs of spring-time,

Begin the anapaests.

A conventional *kommation* begins the parabasis. The focus is not on the departing characters, but on the nightingale, intra-narratively the transformed Procne who was possibly played by a female *aulos*-player.[24] The **incongruity** here is closely related to the play's dramatic pretence: the **script** of

[24] See e.g. Zweig (1992). Even if played by a man in padded costume, Procne's appearance is clearly meant to be titillating, and her costume revealing.

birds and bird-song collides with that of musical instruments and human musical practice. Perhaps because this collision of **scripts** was introduced much earlier in the play, and therefore lacks the element of surprise, the **incongruity-resolution** here is hardly laugh-out-loud funny. Nevertheless, the audience member is engaged in a sort of pleasing cognitive game with the author, as they recognise and appreciate the wit of the constructed correspondences in style between the aural effects of the lyrics and the bird song which it is meant to aurally evoke and imitate: the repetitiveness of ὦ φίλη, ὦ ξουθή, | ὦ φίλτατον ὀρνέων or ἦλθες, ἦλθες, ὤφθης,[25] the anaphora or ξύννομε… ξύντροφ’ or the assonance of φέρουϲ’… κρέκουϲ’. These correspondences were probably drawn out by the melody of the song and the *aulos*’ tune, and accompanying dance may have taken on a mimetic quality. Only in the last two lines is the idyllic music interrupted by references that break the dramatic illusion, with the explicit mention of the *aulos* and the anapaests.

Listen Up, Puny Men 685-736

ἄγε δή, φύϲιν ἄνδρεϲ ἀμαυρόβιοι, φύλλων γενεᾷ προϲόμοιοι, 685

ὀλιγοδρανέεϲ, πλάϲματα πηλοῦ, ϲκιοειδέα φῦλ’ ἀμενηνά,

ἀπτῆνεϲ ἐφημέριοι, ταλαοὶ βροτοί, ἀνέρεϲ εἰκελόνειροι,

πρόϲχετε[26] τὸν νοῦν τοῖϲ ἀθανάτοιϲ ἡμῖν, τοῖϲ αἰὲν ἐοῦϲιν,

τοῖϲ αἰθερίοιϲ, τοῖϲιν ἀγήρῳϲ, τοῖϲ ἄφθιτα μηδομένοιϲιν,

ἵν’ ἀκούϲαντεϲ πάντα παρ’ ἡμῶν ὀρθῶϲ περὶ τῶν μετεώρων, 690

φύϲιν οἰωνῶν γένεϲίν τε θεῶν ποταμῶν τ’ Ἐρέβουϲ τε Χάουϲ τε

εἰδότεϲ ὀρθῶϲ, Προδίκῳ παρ’ ἐμοῦ κλάειν εἴπητε τὸ λοιπόν.

---

[25] The repetition of ἦλθεϲ may be allude to a tradition song announcing the arrival of the swallow, *PMG* 848.1: ἦλθ’, ἦλθε χελιδών.

[26] I emend προϲέχετε to πρόϲχετε on the suggestion of Prof. Gregory Hutchinson, on the grounds that the aorist fixes the metrical irregularity; cf. Pherecr. 84.

Come now, men dim-living in nature, similar to the generations of leaves, 685

Little-accomplishing, mouldings of clay, weak race of shadow-visions,

Wingless ephemerals, wretched mortals, men resembling dreams,

Pay attention to us, the immortal ones, forever in existence,

To us ethereal ones, ageless ones, whose counsels are unchanging,

So that you can hear from us everything rightly about the things above. 690

When you know about the birth of birds and the origin of the gods and rivers and Erebus and Chaos

Accurately, you can tell Prodicus in future from me to piss off.

The birds have quickly internalised the primacy and importance which Peisthetairus has attributed to them, and here reveal themselves as delusional ἀλαζόνες. The eight successive addresses to the audience stressing man's ephemerality create a sense of antagonism that encourages the audience to laugh at the expense of the birds, at their delusions. The Athenians probably did not think of birds as particularly long-lived, and birds were commonly caught with lime and cooked or kept as pets.[27] The insults backfire particularly because they seem to evoke how men traditionally think of birds, not the other way around. To a man, a bird is 'little-accomplishing' and 'weak'. To a man, a bird is short-lived. Aristophanes creates a temporary sense of the carnivalesque inversion of hierarchy, but their self-confidence here is foolish. The address to men as φύλλων γενεᾶ

[27] Aristotle notes that a peafowl lives about twenty-five years (*HA* 564a25), while a ring-dove can live up to forty years, and partridges over sixteen (*HA* 563a2-4). The catching and cooking of birds is described by Peisthetairus at 525-38.

προcόμοιοι recalls the simile used to describe man's transience in the *Iliad*,[28] but it is even more apt for birds, closer to leaves in lifespan, weight and typical location.

Their delusion finds further expression in the accumulation of self-descriptors. Although this second list reaches only five items, the parallel phrasing adds to the sense of alternation, of swapped places between men and birds. Like most Aristophanic lists, some items are fairly straightforward, and others have comic flair; τοῖc ἄφθιτα μηδομένοιcιν is a particularly ironic epithet, given their recent change of heart, revealing their lack of self-awareness.

The birds proclaim that listening men may learn about τὰ μετέωρα, the creation of birds, gods, rivers, Erebus and Chaos, and knowing that, can tell Prodicus, on the birds' behalf, to piss off.[29] Once again, we see Aristophanes exploring 'sophistic' ideas that were in circulation in the city, by having the birds target Prodicus, who believed that the gods were personifications of natural forces. The named *komoidoumenos* provides an easy target for **disparagement** humour, although even an ardent fan of Prodicus may not have been offended by an insult from such a clearly absurd source.

The Cosmic Wind-Egg 693-702

Χάοc ἦν καὶ Νὺξ Ἔρεβόc τε μέλαν πρῶτον καὶ Τάρταροc εὐρύc,

γῆ δ' οὐδ' ἀὴρ οὐδ' οὐρανὸc ἦν· Ἐρέβουc δ' ἐν ἀπείροcι κόλποιc

τίκτει πρώτιcτον ὑπηνέμιον Νὺξ ἡ μελανόπτεροc ᾠόν, 695

ἐξ οὗ περιτελλομέναιc ὥραιc ἔβλαcτεν Ἔρωc ὁ ποθεινόc,

cτίλβων νῶτον πτερύγοιν χρυcαῖν, εἰκὼc ἀνεμώκεcι δίναιc.

οὗτοc δὲ Χάει πτερόεντι μιγεὶc νυχίῳ κατὰ Τάρταρον εὐρὺν

ἐνεόττευcεν γένοc ἡμέτερον, καὶ πρῶτον ἀνήγαγεν εἰc φῶc.

[28] *Il.* 6.146.
[29] More literally: 'tell Prodicus from us to wail during the future.'

πρότερον δ’ οὐκ ἦν γένος ἀθανάτων, πρὶν Ἔρως ξυνέμειξεν ἅπαντα· 700

ξυμμειγνυμένων δ’ ἑτέρων ἑτέροις γένετ’ Οὐρανὸς Ὠκεανός τε

καὶ Γῆ πάντων τε θεῶν μακάρων γένος ἄφθιτον.

There was Chaos and Night, Black Erebus too and broad Tartarus at first,

But no earth nor air or heaven. And in the endless folds of Erebus

First of all black-winged Night bore an egg that was full of wind. 695

From which, once the seasons passed around, sprang Love, the desired one,

His back sparkling with golden wings, swift like a whirlwind.

This one mated with winged Chaos by night in broad Tartarus

He nested our race and first led it into the light.

Previously there was no race of immortal gods, not before Eros mingled everything together: 700

But as one thing mingled with another the heaven and ocean came to be

And the earth and the blessed undying race of gods.

After a swipe at Prodicus, the birds take on the righteous voice of the theogonic poet, endowed with a wisdom conveniently sprung fully-formed into their heads. The sudden change in tone, a sort of reverse *bathos*, marks out their solemnity as a façade: we see them putting on this mask, and know what lies behind it. Throughout these lines, their lofty intent is undermined by the frivolity of the **incongruities** that the merging of theogony and bird **scripts** produces. Their seriousness generates **tension**, but also encourages the **mentalising** audience member to recognise and laugh at self-aggrandising nature of their beliefs, which put them at the centre of the universe.

As part of his vision of projecting human characteristics and narrative patterns onto avian subjects, Aristophanes ends up using the birds as a perspective from which to parody traditional theogonies. Hesiod's is perhaps the best known of such texts, but these sorts of traditions are found across many ancient civilisations. From Greek states alone there were competing accounts attributed to Orpheus, Musaeus, Aristeas and Epimenides,[30] and Aristophanes assembles his story from several sources.[31] While one can certainly take an analytical approach to Aristophanes' avian cosmogony, and identify the literary models element by element, the result is necessarily imprecise and unsatisfactory. Aristophanes certainly drew upon Hesiod,[32] but other theogonic stories are known to us primarily through later sources, and tend to have overlapping elements. The wind-egg, for example, absent from Hesiod, may be indebted to Epimenides, to Orphic traditions,[33] or to the story of the Dioscuri,[34] and these are the full range of options only if we restrict ourselves to Greek texts, and ignore Semitic, Persian, Phoenician and Vedic accounts.[35] The audience are unlikely to have engaged in such a pernickety analytical process, but rather would have recognised that Aristophanes is creating a comic instantiation of a certain *topos* of poetry, and centring aspects that are apt for the birds, who in turn are seen to pick and choose elements most convenient for them. The idea of a wind-egg, 'the unfertilized source of fertility itself',[36] is appropriate for birds, and an apt image to convey the idea of parthenogenesis. Similarly, the description of Night as a winged being (μελανόπτερος) is not unparalleled.[37] Although it may not be Aristophanes' own invention, its placement here in a new and comic context gives it piquant purpose.

At 698 I print the transmitted νυχίῳ, although others have tended to accept West's conjecture of μύχιος.[38] The transmitted νυχίῳ is appealing, because the effect of describing Love

[30] Dunbar (1995) *ad loc.*
[31] Meisner (2018) 89: 'Like most Greek poets, Aristophanes himself is a bricoleur'.
[32] This impression strengthened by the parallels later between lines 709-15, and the markers of the seasons as recorded in the 'Farmer's Almanac' section of Hesiod's *Works and Days*.
[33] West (1983) 198-203.
[34] Σ *Av.* 695.
[35] West (1983) 103-4, 201.
[36] Meisner (2018) 90. Arist. *HA* 559b 22-24: 'Some say that wind-eggs are the remains of eggs previously fertilised, but they are wrong, because it has been observed sufficiently often already that chicken hens and geese who have not been fertilised produce wind-eggs.'
[37] E. *Or.* 178.
[38] West (1977) 74-5.

and winged Chaos – not elsewhere winged[39] – as mingling 'by night' calls attention to the sort of metaphysical confusion that is attendant upon cosmogonic accounts. While Night had previously been a character in events, it is now suddenly a period of time or state. Moreover, νυχίῳ seems humorously redundant, since light or day has not yet been mentioned. Calling attention to the inherently abstract and confusing nature of cosmogonies is the sort of imitation plus exaggeration that is to be expected of a parodic text.

Through mingling by night, Eros ἐνεόττευcεν the race of birds. Elsewhere, such as throughout Aristotle's *Historia Animalium*, νεοττεύειν means 'to build a nest', and does not take a direct object, yet here it seems closer in meaning to the compound ἐκνεοττεύειν, 'to produce chicks'. Aristophanes crowbars a word that can only relate to birds into a context where it does not syntactically fit. He uses this verb where other options, e.g. τίκτειν, γεννᾶν or φυτεύειν, would have been more appropriate, calling attention to the absurdity of the narrative, and to the very nature of its fabrication, as the poet sews together two opposing **scripts** with rather clumsy stitching, in the process underscoring the novelty of the birds' version of events.

Lovebirds 702-712

ὧδε μέν ἐcμεν

πολὺ πρεcβύτατοι πάντων μακάρων ἡμεῖc. ὡc δ' ἐcμὲν Ἔρωτοc

πολλοῖc δῆλον· πετόμεcθά τε γὰρ καὶ τοῖcιν ἐρῶcι cύνεcμεν·

πολλοὺc δὲ καλοὺc ἀπομωμοκόταc παῖδαc πρὸc τέρμαcιν ὥραc 705

διὰ τὴν ἰcχὺν τὴν ἡμετέραν διεμήριcαν ἄνδρεc ἐραcταί,

ὁ μὲν ὄρτυγα δούc, ὁ δὲ πορφυρίων', ὁ δὲ χῆν', ὁ δὲ Περcικὸν ὄρνιν.

[39] See Dunbar (1995) *ad loc.* Night is winged in Euripides (E. *Or.* 178), and Eros is often depicted with wings, as in 697, although Arrowsmith (1973) 136-7 argues that 'winged Eros' may also be intended to evoke the imagery of a winged phallus, a common apotropaic symbol in antiquity.

πάντα δὲ θνητοῖϲ ἐϲτιν ἀφ’ ἡμῶν τῶν ὀρνίθων τὰ μέγιϲτα.

πρῶτα μὲν ὥραϲ φαίνομεν ἡμεῖϲ ἦροϲ, χειμῶνοϲ, ὀπώραϲ·

ϲπείρειν μέν, ὅταν γέρανοϲ κρώζουϲ’ εἰϲ τὴν Λιβύην μεταχωρῇ— 710

καὶ πηδάλιον τότε ναυκλήρῳ φράζει κρεμάϲαντι καθεύδειν—

εἶτα δ’ Ὀρέϲτῃ χλαῖναν ὑφαίνειν, ἵνα μὴ ῥιγῶν ἀποδύῃ.

And thus we are

The oldest of all the blessed ones. And that we are the children of Eros

Is clear in many ways: for we fly and go among those in love:

And many beautiful boys who swore off it, as they near the end of their bloom 705

Whom, because of our power, their grown lovers screwed,

Having given the boy a quail or a porphyrion or a goose or a Persian bird.

All the greatest things come to mortals from us birds.

First off, we show them the seasons of Spring, Winter, Autumn:

The season to sow, when the crane calls on its migration to Africa. 710

And signals to the helmsman to hang up his rudder and sleep,

Then to weave a warm cloak for Orestes, so he doesn’t get cold and steal one.

In the style of a deictic speech, the coryphaeus gives evidence for their divine ancestry from Eros, and the tricolon ends with a reference to some less than righteous human behaviour: reluctant ex-*eromenoi* bribed to a concession with the gift of a bird. Paederasty as a practice may have increasingly come to be seen as problematic over the course of the fifth century. Depiction of it on

vases stops after the 470s.[40] Regardless, there were certainly ways to go about seducing an *eromenos* that were considered wrong, such as trying to pick boys up at the palaestra.[41] In this case, the reluctance of the *eromenos* marks out the assignation as sordid, and particularly so because the youth has sworn off it (705). Moreover, the youth is approaching the time in life at which being an *eromenos* became a dishonour (705). Thus, the gift of a bird occasions human bad behaviour.

In this section on the birds as love-tokens, and again in the coming lines about their marking the seasons, there is a defined comic rhythm, with a few lines of non-humorous build-up (702-4, 708-11) before lapses into discussion of scurrilous behaviour (705-7, 712). The more serious lines, in the context of a comic performance, generate expectant **tension** to be **released**, and once again it is the poor behaviour of humans that punctures the temporarily solemn façade. In the second half of this passage, there is a quasi-Hesiodic account of the birds as heralds of the seasons,[42] culminating in a reference to a man called Orestes with an apparent propensity for stealing cloaks.[43] Orestes is mentioned in *Acharnians* (1164-8), as a raving drunk liable to assault you by night, and again later in *Birds*, where he is said to strip men of their clothes if encountered by night.[44] It is tempting to think that Orestes is a generic nickname for someone mad or acting in an outrageous way, as the mythical Orestes can be seen as doing. This is certainly the case for a later 'Orestes', Diocles of Phlya.[45] However, Σ *Av.* 1484b supplies a patronymic for the clothes-snatching Orestes, and Eupolis fr. 166 lists an Orestes as a hanger-on of Callias. A contemporary Orestes, known for stealing cloaks, therefore seems likely.[46]

Aristophanes may, however, be playing with the different figures called Orestes. For until the final word of 712, the chorus could plausibly be referring to the hero Orestes. In Aeschylus'

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[40] Hubbard (1998) argues that paederasty was thought of as an elite practice, losing public approval as Athens' democracy became more inclusive; Lear (2015).
[41] Cf. *Wasps* 1025-7, *Peace* 762-3; Henderson (1975) 216.
[42] Cf. *W&Ds* 448-50, 486, 568-70.
[43] See Dunbar (1995) *ad loc.*
[44] *Av.* 1482-93 humorously combines a reference to the cloak-snatching Orestes with the popular belief that to meet a hero was dangerous for ordinary men, and could result in paralysis down one side: Men. fr. 348, Ath. 11.461c.
[45] Is. 8.
[46] See Dunbar (1995) *ad loc.* and Higham (1932).

Libation-Bearers the cloak that Electra has woven for Orestes is a recognition token.[47] This motif clearly lingered in the minds of the Athenian audience for some time, since Euripides pointedly has his Electra dismiss the idea, on the grounds that a grown man would hardly be wearing an item of clothing woven for an infant.[48] A cloak was part of the mythical Orestes' story, then, and even in the Euripidean version, it is implied that the garment was vital in saving the infant's life: ἐν ᾧ ποτ' αὐτὸν ἐξέκλεψα μὴ θανεῖν; 540. At the start of line 712, playing on the Hesiodic recommendation to wrap up warm at *W&Ds* 536-7, Orestes the hero may be the more salient figure, and therefore the mention of stealing that ends the line is a climactic surprise, and the audience are forced to **resolve** this **incongruity** by realising that the ignominious cloak-thief is meant.

Calendars and Oracles 713-22

ἰκτῖνος ⟨δ'⟩ αὖ μετὰ ταῦτα φανεὶς ἑτέραν ὥραν ἀποφαίνει,

ἡνίκα πεκτεῖν ὥρα προβάτων πόκον ἠρινόν· εἶτα χελιδών,

ὅτε χρὴ χλαῖναν πωλεῖν ἤδη καὶ ληδάριόν τι πρίαϲθαι. 715

ἐϲμὲν δ' ὑμῖν Ἄμμων, Δελφοί, Δωδώνη, Φοῖβοϲ Ἀπόλλων.

ἐλθόντεϲ γὰρ πρῶτον ἐπ' ὄρνιϲ οὕτω πρὸϲ ἅπαντα τρέπεϲθε,

πρόϲ τ' ἐμπορίαν, καὶ πρὸϲ βιότου κτῆϲιν, καὶ πρὸϲ γάμον ἀνδρόϲ.

ὄρνιν τε νομίζετε πάνθ' ὅϲαπερ περὶ μαντείαϲ διακρίνει·

φήμη γ' ὑμῖν ὄρνιϲ ἐϲτί, πταρμόν τ' ὄρνιθα καλεῖτε, 720

ξύμβολον ὄρνιν, φωνὴν ὄρνιν, θεράποντ' ὄρνιν, ὄνον ὄρνιν.

ἆρ' οὐ φανερῶϲ ἡμεῖϲ ὑμῖν ἐϲμεν μαντεῖοϲ Ἀπόλλων;

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[47] A. *Ch.* 231-2.
[48] E. *El.* 538-46.

The kite again after this appears to herald another season

The season to shear sheep of their spring wool: then the swallow,

When one ought to sell the warm cloak already and buy a thin one. 715

And we are, to you lot, Ammon, Delphi, Dodona, Phoebus Apollo.

For first you go to the birds before you turn yourself to anything,

To trade, or acquiring livelihood, or marriage.

You consider everything that concerns prophecy to be a bird:

A prophetic saying, to you, is a bird. A sneeze, you call a bird. 720

A chance meeting is a bird, a voice is a bird, a servant is a bird, a donkey is a bird.

So aren't we quite obviously your prophetic Apollo?

The chorus leader continues to list the birds' calendar functions, this time heralding the return of warmer weather, and the advice of line 715 is 'surely comic fantasy, for few would need or wish to sell their heavy winter cloak to buy a summer-weight one.'[49] For Hesiod, the swallow's call marks pruning season, and the deviation from parodied model to parody is a meaningful one:[50] substituting an important agricultural task for a bit of shopping undermines the birds' attempt to emphasise their year-round importance.

The bird-coryphaeus then parrots Peisthetairus' ideas about their prophetic role,[51] noting the frequency with which men defer to bird omens to guide their actions at key life events. The sentiment recalls Hesiodic advice once again, in particular his advice to consult birds of omen

[49] Dunbar (1995) *ad loc.*
[50] *W&Ds* 568-70.
[51] *Av.* 592-626.

before marriage,[52] and the resounding wisdom with which the *Works and Days* ends: 'In them, happy and blessed is he who knows all these things, acts blamelessly towards the gods, judges by the omens of birds, and avoids transgression.'[53] Of course, the bird has singled out the ὄρνιθας κρίνων bit, and dropped the rest.

The speaker's argument at 720-2 is an obviously specious one. In much the same way as the speaker of the parabasis of *Thesmophoriazusae* argues on the basis of names such as Ναυσιμάχη that women are better than men, here a human convention of naming is used to prove falsely a point about the thing which is not implied by the convention of speech. Ὄνον ὄρνιν, is clearly a humorous climax to the argument. Donkeys and their braying may have been subjects of Greek superstitions,[54] but this juxtaposition of similar-sounding disyllabic animal names also returns us to our theme of relativism and the interchangeability of living beings. Here, gentle fun is poked at human superstition, confirming the centrality of human folly to Aristophanic humour.

Blessings and Bird's Milk 723-36

ἢν οὖν ἡμᾶς νομίσητε θεούς,

ἕξετε χρῆσθαι μάντεσι Μούσαις

πάσαις ὥραις, χειμῶνι, θέρει 725

μετρίῳ, πνίγει· κοὐκ ἀποδράντες

καθεδούμεθ' ἄνω σεμνυνόμενοι

παρὰ ταῖς νεφέλαις ὥσπερ χὠ Ζεύς·

ἀλλὰ παρόντες δώσομεν ὑμῖν

αὐτοῖς, παισίν, παίδων παισίν, 730

[52] *Av.* 718, cf. *W&Ds* 800-1.
[53] *W&Ds* 826-8.
[54] Dunbar (1995) *ad loc*, John Chrysostom *Homily XII on St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* Migne, Pat. Gr. lxii, col. 92.

πλουθυγίειαν, βίον, εἰρήνην,

νεότητα, γέλωτα, χορούς, θαλίας,

γάλα τ' ὀρνίθων. ὥςτε παρέσται

κοπιᾶν ὑμῖν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀγαθῶν· 735

οὕτω πλουτήςετε πάντες.

So if you consider us gods,

You will have prophetic Muses to consult

Outside in the seasons, in winter, in the moderate

Summer, and the stifling: And we won't run away

And sleep up there all haughty

Among the clouds like Zeus.

But we'll be present and give to you

To your children, to your children's children, 730

Health-wealth, life, peace,

Nestlings, laughter, choruses, feasts,

And bird's milk. So you'll be able 735

To grow weary of blessings

So wealthy you all will be.

The anapaests end with a *pnigos* urging the audience to view them as gods and proselytising the benefits they can offer. 723-6 recap the last claims of the anapaests proper, but in reverse order. Interestingly, this precis ends with an apparent oxymoron: μετρίῳ πνίγει. A summer can hardly be both μέτριος (‘measured’, ‘mild’) and πνίγος (‘choking’, ‘stifling’). One solution is to place punctuation between the two, as printed above, to signal that these are two different sorts of summer, listed asyndetically, in which the birds may prophesy. This is certainly possible, but it is also striking to place μέτριος, so closely etymologically related to μέτρον (‘measure’ but also ‘metrical foot’), next to πνίγει, which could just as easily be taken as the noun πνῖγος, the name for this sort of metrical run. Although scholia are our earliest evidence for this meaning of πνῖγος,[55] it is not implausible for it to have been known as such to Aristophanes’ first audience, too. After all, they were used to hearing the anapaests explicitly announced,[56] and it is entirely possible that the πνῖγος may have been explicitly named in some Old Comedy play(s) now lost. If this were the case, and if in μέτριος something like μετρικός or μετροειδής was heard, then this phrase could be perceived both as describing two contrasting states of θέρει, and at the same time denoting the ‘metrical *pnigos*’, referring in a moment of metapoetry to the song itself, a clever **resolution** to a playful **incongruity**.

The enumeration of the blessings birds would provide for men is, as often in Aristophanes, a mixed list of straight and humorous entries. Starting strong, the portmanteau πλουθυγίειαν ‘wealth-health’ makes it clear that the birds are promising nothing short of the epitome of good fortune itself. Such exaggeration is to be expected in a parabasis. Life, peace, youth, laughter, choruses and feasts follow, jam-packed enthusiastically into an asyndetic catalogue of indisputably appealing items, and the last four of these have interesting resonances. νεότητα means ‘youth’, but it can also denote ‘folly’ and the initial aural similarity to words like νεοττεία (‘nest-building’) and νεοττιά (‘nest/brood of young birds’) constitutes a sort of wordplay that once again works by

[55] E.g. Σ *Ach.* 659a.
[56] *Ach.* 627: τοῖς ἀναπαίστοις ἐπίωμεν; *Eq.* 503-4: προσέχετε τὸν νοῦν τοῖς ἀναπαίστοις; *Pax* 735: παραβὰς ἐν τοῖς ἀναπαίστοις; *Av.* 684: ἄρχου τῶν ἀναπαίστων; Pherecr. fr. 84: ἄνδρες, πρόσχετε τὸν νοῦν | ἐξευρήματι καινῷ, | συμπτύκτοις ἀναπαίστοις.

blurring the boundaries of species. Χορούϲ and θαλίαϲ suggests religious festivities to be held in honour of the birds as gods, but following on from γέλωτα would also suggest, metapoetically, the ongoing comic performance itself, its religious context and attendant festivities. The bird coryphaeus is intra-narratively trying to win over man to the worship of birds, while on another level he directs the audience to recognise the aesthetic merit of the play itself, ultimately making a bid for their favour and votes. The last item on the list is birds' milk, which was a proverbial delicacy.[57] It was also, as the Greeks were well aware, an impossibility.[58] If the blessings on offer seemed exaggerated to begin with, this culmination confirms that when an offer seems too good to be true, it usually is. Here the birds are eager to win their audience over, but they rather over-egg it.

Mountain Melodies 737-52

Μοῦϲα λοχμαία,

τιοτιοτιοτιοτίγξ,

ποικίλη, μεθ' ἧϲ ἐγὼ νά-

παιϲί ⟨τε καὶ⟩ κορυφαῖϲ ἐν ὀρείαιϲ, 740

τιοτιοτιοτιοτίγξ,

ἱζόμενοϲ μελίαϲ ἔπι φυλλοκόμου,

τιοτιοτιοτιοτίγξ,

δι' ἐμῆϲ γένυοϲ ξουθῆϲ μελέων

Πανὶ νόμουϲ ἱεροὺϲ ἀναφαίνω 745

ϲεμνά τε Μητρὶ χορεύματ' ὀρείᾳ,

[57] *V.* 508, *Av.* 1673; Mnesim. Fr. 9.

[58] Arist. *HA* 521b26-7: 'Those animals which are born externally, or produce eggs, have neither breasts nor milk, such as a fish and birds.'

τοτοτοτοτοτοτοτοτοτίγξ,

ἔνθεν ὡσπερεὶ μέλιττα

Φρύνιχος ἀμβροσίων μελέων ἀπεβόσκετο καρπὸν ἀεὶ

φέρων γλυκεῖαν ᾠδάν, 750

τιοτιοτιοτίγξ.

Muse of the thickets,

Tiotiotiotiotinx,

Dappled one, with whom I

In the glens and mountain peaks, 740

Tiotiotiotiotinx,

Sitting upon a thick-leaved ash

Tiotiotiotiotinx

Through my tawny cheeks the holy

Melodies of songs for Pan I reveal 745

And solemn dances for Mother Mountain,

Totototototototototinx,

From where, just like a bee,

Phrynichus feeds upon the fruit of ambrosial song continually

Carrying off sweet odes, 750

Tiotiotiotinx

Silk was unimpressed by the offering of the lyric odes of *Birds*,[59] but others have made more of them. Perkell sees the beauty of these odes as expressive of an aesthetic sensibility at odds with the greed that characterises the humans of the play,[60] and Pozzi locates them as a key part of the play's pastoral theme. Certainly, what we find here is respite from the usual dynamics of boasting and persuasion, with a moment of pastoral and religious song.

There is more going on, however. For one thing, the non-verbal refrain of τιοτιοτιοτιοτιγξ is yet another aspect in which human and bird collide.[61] Not merely imitations of bird calls, the wordless refrain bears comparison to the non-verbal vocalisations that are characteristic of certain Greek song forms. As laments could be punctuated by an ὀτοτοτοτοτοτοῖ with a variable number of 'το's,[62] wedding songs broken up by ὑμήναον,[63] and paeans by ἰὲ Παιάν or ἰὴ ἰὲ Παιάν,[64] so too the birds' song is interrupted by chirruping. The sense that these interludes are an unnecessary interruption is stressed by the extent to which the first three trills cause the main verb to be delayed, creating expectancy and **tension**. Again, we find the birds engaging in behaviour that parallels human behaviour, and one could even take this incessant interruption as a sort of comment on man's musical fondness for refrains relatively devoid of semantic purpose.[65]

The imitative mockery is more specific than that, however, as the reference to Phrynichus suggests that the poetry may be an imitation of the odes of this tragedian. Kakridis saw these lines as extensively quoting a *hyporchema* of Phrynichus,[66] and although there is not enough evidence to conjecture the existence of a specific song of such a type, it seems likely that the odes are meant to

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[59] Silk (1980) 102 describes *Av.* 209-22 as 'a piece of hyper-conventional high-lyrical pastiche, written in a very relaxed style devoid of any pressure or pointedness. Its simple theme – the nightingale is to sing and Apollo and the gods in general will answer – is distended to fill up fourteen verses without wit or invention, let alone intellectual point.' Although referring to an earlier ode, one imagines the same argument could be made about these parabatic odes.
[60] Perkell (1993), Pozzi (1985).
[61] Lewis (2023) sees the trilling τιοτιοτιοτιγξ as an element that imitates and exaggerates New Music, with its emphasis on musical virtuosity, lyrical emptiness and propensity for onomatopoeia.
[62] E.g. A. *Pers.* 268, *Cho.* 159, S. *El.* 1245.
[63] Sapph. fr. 111.
[64] Aristonous, *Paean to Apollo* 1-4; Philodamus *Paean to Dionysus* 5 (Käppel).
[65] See note 61.
[66] Kakridis (1970)

sound Phrynichean in a more generalised way, and Lewis has recently suggested that both ode and antode represent a mash-up of music in the style of Phrynichus' dramatic odes, and the growing style of New Music.[67] Imitation of Phrynichus would certainly make sense. For this pastoral ode, with its vocalising bird-cries, clearly intends not just to report on but to mimic the woodland bird-song which it describes, and since such woodland bird-song is said to be the sustenance of Phrynichus, then the music of the *Birds* ode itself must resemble the sort of musical pollen Phrynichus gathers, his musical inspiration. The metre is frequently dactylic, and so may loosely resemble dactylo-epitrites found in the poetry of Phrynichus.[68] His identification with a bee and the sweetness of song referenced suggest the sweetness which was perceived as characteristic of his work.[69] While to some the image of Phrynichus here seems to be a matter of respectful homage,[70] this depiction is probably flattering of the bygone poet only insofar as the listener enjoys the aesthetics of this ode.

The Upside-Down Ethics of Cloudcuckooland 753-68

εἰ μετ' ὀρνίθων τις ὑμῶν, ὦ θεαταί, βούλεται

διαπλέκειν ζῶν ἡδέως τὸ λοιπόν, ὡς ἡμᾶς ἴτω.

ὅσα γὰρ ἐνθάδ' ἐστὶν αἰσχρὰ καὶ νόμῳ κρατούμενα, 755

ταῦτα πάντ' ἐστὶν παρ' ἡμῖν τοῖσιν ὄρνισιν καλά.

εἰ γὰρ ἐνθάδ' ἐστὶν αἰσχρὸν τὸν πατέρα τύπτειν νόμῳ,

τοῦτ' ἐκεῖ καλὸν παρ' ἡμῖν ἐστιν, ἤν τις τῷ πατρὶ

[67] Lewis (2023).
[68] E.g. Phryn. Trag. frr. 9, 13 (*TrGF*).
[69] *V.* 220 describes a song as ἀρχαιομελισιδωνοφρυνιχήρατα where -μελι- suggests honeyed song, and -φρυνιχ- identifies Phrynichus as the sort of poet to compose it.
[70] E.g. Pozzi (1985) 125: 'Aristophanes refers here to his own art, not in the customary parabatic plea for victory or in an ironic disclaimer, but programmatically, by naming a playwright he respects'; Prato & Del Corno (2001) 189: 'ricordato da Aristofane con rispetto e ammirazione.'

προσδραμὼν εἴπῃ πατάξας "αἶρε πλῆκτρον, εἰ μαχεῖ."

εἰ δὲ τυγχάνει τις ὑμῶν δραπέτης ἐστιγμένος, 760

ἀτταγᾶς οὗτος παρ’ ἡμῖν ποικίλος κεκλήσεται.

εἰ δὲ τυγχάνει τις ὢν Φρὺξ μηδὲν ἧττον Σπινθάρου,

φρυγίλος ὄρνις οὗτος ἔσται, τοῦ Φιλήμονος γένους.

εἰ δὲ δοῦλός ἐστι καὶ Κὰρ ὥσπερ Ἐξηκεστίδης,

φυσάτω πάππους παρ’ ἡμῖν, καὶ φανοῦνται φράτερες. 765

εἰ δ’ ὁ Πεισίου προδοῦναι τοῖς ἀτίμοις τὰς πύλας

βούλεται, πέρδιξ γενέσθω, τοῦ πατρὸς νεόττιον·

ὡς παρ’ ἡμῖν οὐδὲν αἰσχρόν ἐστιν ἐκπερδικίσαι.

If anyone among you, oh audience, wants

To spend their life playing sweetly with the birds, let him come to us.

For all the things which are here considered by law to be shameful, 755

All these things are, among us birds, just swell.

If here it’s shameful to beat your father, by law,

This there is praiseworthy among us, if someone

Running at their father and hitting them should say, ‘Put your spurs up, if you’re fighting!’

If one of you happens to bear the tattooed-stigma of desertion, 760

This man will just be called a speckled hen among us.

If one of you happens to be a Phrygian like Spintharos,

Well he's a *pigeon* here, of Philemon's family.

And if a slave is a Carian like Execestides,

Let him grow grandfeathers among us and join his flock. 765

And if some son of Peisias wants to betray the gates to the disenfranchised

Let him become a partridge, a chick off the old cock:[71]

Since among us there's nothing shameful in being a sly old bird.

In this epirrhema, the birds appeal to the base, even criminal impulses of the audience. This is what Konstan's analysis identifies as an antinomian strand of Cloudcuckooland's utopian attributes,[72] as typically frowned-upon attributes receive not opprobrium but praise (758) in the birds' new domain. As discussed above, this appeal to the worst in humanity has latent potential for humour because it invokes taboo topics, topics which normally generate **tension** as the audience member expends mental energy maintaining usually socially desirable **inhibitions**, and puncturing this tension by making light of such emblematically wrong things as father-beating comes as a **relief**.

However, Aristophanes does not rely too heavily on this dynamic of humour. The epirrhema is replete with bird puns, and some disparagement of named *komoidoumenoi* for good measure. The **incongruity-resolution** needed to process the bird puns works nicely alongside the taboo and touchy topics invoked, by punctuating the **tension** and providing much needed levity. The reference to *patroloia*, for example, obviously invokes a cultural norm that it would be taboo to break, but the section on it ends with a rather harmless joke brought about by the **incongruity** of πλῆκτρον where one might expect a word for fists or weapons.[73] Similarly at 760-1, the topic of the runaway slave is a rather touchy one. The desertion of slaves was a problem for Athens particularly around this period, since slaves could sometimes expect a warm reception from her hostile

[71] This phrase taken from Barrett's Penguin translation.
[72] Konstan (1990) 197-8.
[73] Hubbard (1991) 169 sees the *patroloia* verses as an echo of *Nu.* 1321-1446.

neighbours.[74] The picture of them as speckled francolins (see figure 1) wittily reconfigures their shameful branding into an avian attribute, and in doing so robs this group of threat or menace.

Foreign extraction, slavehood, and perfidy are the traits which the birds next mitigate with their wordplay. Their attribution of these traits to named individuals allows for a quick comic swipe,[75] but the final comic **beat** in each run revolves around wordplay.

The Heavens Resound 769-84

τοιάδε κύκνοι,

τιοτιοτιοτιοτίγξ, 770

cυμμιγῆ βοὴν ὁμοῦ πτε-

ροῖcι κρέκοντεc ἴαχον Ἀπόλλω,

τιοτιοτιοτιοτίγξ,

ὄχθῳ ἐφεζόμενοι παρ’ Ἕβρον ποταμόν,

τιοτιοτιοτιοτίγξ, 775

διὰ δ’ αἰθέριον νέφοc ἦλθε βοά·

πτῆξε δὲ ποικίλα φῦλα τὰ θηρῶν,

κύματά τ’ ἔcβεcε νήνεμοc αἴθρη,

τοτοτοτοτοτοτοτοτοτίγξ·

πᾶc δ’ ἐπεκτύπηc’ Ὄλυμποc· 780

[74] Th. 1.139.2. The problem would soon intensify when the Spartans captured Deceleia in the Attic countryside and 20,000 slaves took the opportunity to desert: Th. 7.27.5.
[75] The identity of ὁ Πειcίου and the nature of his betrayal has naturally generated some speculation, but certainty is impossible, since as a scholiast admits: οὐδὲν cαφὲc ἔχομεν, οὔτε τίc ὁ Πιcίου οὔτε περὶ τῆc προδοcίαc (Σ *Av.* 766a). It is possible that the ἄτιμοι are those who were accused as part of the Hermocopid scandal, which factors into discussions of the possible decree of Syracosius; see note 2 above.

εἷλε δὲ θάμβος ἄνακτας· Ὀλυμπιάδες δὲ μέλος Χάριτες

Μοῦϲαί τ' ἐπωλόλυξαν,

τιοτιοτιοτίγξ.

With such things did swans,

Tiotiotiotiotinx 770

With mingled cry together with the strumming

Of wings hymn Apollo,

Tiotiotiotiotinx,

Perched atop the bank of the river Hebrus,

Tiotiotiotiotinx, 775

Through the clouds above went the cry,

And made cower the varied tribes of beasts,

And windless clear sky quenched the waves,

Totototototototototinx,

All Olympus echoed, 780

And wonder took its lords. The Olympian Graces

And Muses cry back in joy,

Tiotiotiotinx!

In this corresponding antode, the same threads are found as in the preceding ode. The non-verbal vocalising τιοτιοτιοτιοτίγξ is reprised, and this time birdsong does not only hymn gods and attract

an apian poet, but the ode narrates how it effects the animals, the seas, heavens and the gods themselves. This is the triumphant culmination of the lyric sections of the parabasis, as the Muses themselves take on the vocalising refrain.

The Benefits of Wings 785-800

οὐδέν ἐςτ' ἄμεινον οὐδ' ἥδιον ἢ φῦςαι πτερά. 785

αὐτίχ' ὑμῶν τῶν θεατῶν εἴ τις ἦν ὑπόπτερος,

εἶτα πεινῶν τοῖς χοροῖςι τῶν τραγῳδῶν ἤχθετο,

ἐκπτόμενος ἂν οὗτος ἠρίςτηςεν ἐλθὼν οἴκαδε,

κᾆτ' ἂν ἐμπληςθεὶς ἐφ' ἡμᾶς αὖθις αὖ κατέπτατο.

Εἴ τε Πατροκλείδης τις ὑμῶν τυγχάνει χεζητιῶν, 790

οὐκ ἂν ἐξίδιςεν εἰς θοἰμάτιον, ἀλλ' ἀνέπτατο,

κἀποπαρδὼν κἀναπνεύςας αὖθις αὖ καθέζετο.

Εἴ τε μοιχεύων τις ὑμῶν ἐςτιν ὅςτις τυγχάνει,

κᾆθ' ὁρᾷ τὸν ἄνδρα τῆς γυναικὸς ἐν βουλευτικῷ,

οὗτος ἂν πάλιν παρ' ὑμῶν πτερυγίςας ἀνέπτατο, 795

εἶτα βινήςας ἐκεῖθεν αὖθις αὖ κατέπτατο.

ἆρ' ὑπόπτερον γενέςθαι παντός ἐςτιν ἄξιον;

ὡς Διειτρέφης γε πυτιναῖα μόνον ἔχων πτερὰ

ᾑρέθη φύλαρχος, εἶθ' ἵππαρχος, ὥςτ' ἐξ οὐδενὸς

μεγάλα πράττει κἀςτὶ νυνὶ ξουθὸς ἱππαλεκτρυών. 800

Nothing is better nor sweeter than to grow wings. 785

For example, if one of you audience members were winged

Then when he grows hungry and gets tired of the tragedians' choruses,

He could fly away, go home and have lunch,

Then once he's full he could fly back again for our show.

And if some Patroclides among you happens to need a shit, 790

He would not have to *exude* into his coat, but fly up,

And having let it all out and caught his breath fly back down again:

And if one of you happened to be an adulterer,

And then he sees the woman's husband in the Council's reserved seats,

He could grow wings and fly up away from you, 795

Then having fucked her fly down back again from there.

So isn't becoming winged the most valuable gift?

So Dieitrephes who has just wicker wine-flask wings

Was elected phylarch, then hipparch, then rising from obscurity

He achieves great things and is now a tawny horse-cock. 800

In the antepirrhema the birds proselyte about the benefits of wings, thematically paving the way for the imminent return of Peisthetairus and Euelpides, now winged. The wings as described here allow the user to indulge in bodily pleasures which would otherwise meet with some social friction. The tricolon of bodily urges – hunger, the need to defecate, sexual desire for adultery – ends in one that would be illegal to satisfy. Adultery was a crime terrible enough that if the

offended husband caught the perpetrators *in fragrante* in his home, he was allowed to kill the adulterous intruder.[76] The mention of it here chimes with **relief** theory of humour, since by mentioning a topic as titillating and taboo as adultery, the audience may feel **tension** which they are ultimately allowed to expel in laughter that is publicly licensed by the occasion and by the crime's status as purely hypothetical, rather than as a reference to any real persons.[77] The reference to adultery also confirms the picture of base, pleasure-driven mankind, of the type which I argue above is the assumed state of being in comedy, and which Aristophanes applies indiscriminately to birdkind and godkind, too. The adulteress' identity as wife of a Council member makes the image even more risqué: a reward for his service to the city, a seat near the front of the theatre, is used against this unwitting sap, whose subsequent visibility in the theatre ensures the adulterer gets away with his misdeed.

These lines have been taken as evidence for tragedy and comedy being produced back-to-back in the space of one day, rather than on different days in the City Dionysia festival,[78] although this argument rests heavily on ἐφ' ἡμᾶς referring specifically to those present at a comic performance, not merely a dramatic one, and also presupposes that time in a comic narrative has to pass at a sensible pace.[79] What is clearly true is that these imagined winged excursions for the purpose of indulging bodily desires are the more vivid for being set in the here and now of the theatre of Dionysus. By taking the audience's present surroundings as one input to the fantastic **world** they are constructing, spectators are encouraged to visualise the world and to laugh directly at the Council members in the front rows.

[76] Lys. 1.30.
[77] Adultery is joked about in abstract terms in Old Comedy: *Nu.* 1079-84, *Pax* 979-85, *Lys.* 107, *Th.* 343-6 and 478-501. Named figures are never accused of it, except perhaps an Orsilochus at *Lys.* 725, who could just as easily be a brothel-keeper, and Aristophanes jokes at *Ach.* 848-50 that Cratinus has an adulterer's haircut. For attitudes to adultery generally, see Robson (2013) 90-102, and for discussion of Orsilochus, see Janse & Praet (2012), Sommerstein (1990) *ad loc.* and Henderson (1987) n. *ad loc.*
[78] Pickard-Cambridge (1968) 83, Storey (2002). The arrangement would have reduced the number of days of the competition, with one tragedian's tetralogy and one comedian's comedy performed back-to-back daily for three days, and would have meant that there were only three comic playwrights, rather than five.
[79] Luppe (1972) argues that it was always the case that five comic playwrights were in competition at the City Dionysia, but that only the top three were consistently considered as having placed, and their identities recorded; likewise Hartwig (2012).

Two *komoidoumenoi* are targeted for humour in this passage: Patroclides and Dieitrephes. A scholion provides us with Patroclides' nickname, Χεcᾶc ('Shitter'), and explains it as the result of habitual nocturnal faecal incontinence,[80] although Dunbar speculates that the nickname is more likely to derive from a one-off public attack of diarrhoea.[81] If the scholiast is right, this joke finds parallel in a joke about the aged Cratinus' incontinent bladder.[82] If Dunbar is correct, one might compare the similarly singular and public embarrassments of e.g. Hyperbolus losing his religious garland to the winds during a public ceremony, or the actor Hegelochus who mispronounced γαλήν' ὁρῶ ('I see calm') as γαλῆν ὁρῶ ('I see a weasel') in performing Euripides' *Orestes.* [83]

Finally, there is the mockery of Dieitrephes. It is unclear whether the 'wicker wine-flask wings' are appropriate for him because he was a drunk, or because he or his family was involved in the production or trade of these objects, but the focus of these last lines is more on the culmination of Dieitrephes' advancement, from phylarch, to hipparch, to ξουθὸc ἱππαλεκτρυών. His progression through the ranks is shown by the alteration of one element of the compound titles in turn phylarch – hipparch – *hippalectryon*, where the final element is a surprise for e.g. epihipparch, which was a role a rung above hipparch. Instead of the expected alteration, the **incongruous** inclusion of an avian element. The 'tawny horsecock' is taken from Aeschylus' *Myrmidons*,[84] and apparently refers to an emblem painted on the front of ships, as Aristophanes has his Aeschylus explain to Dionysus in *Frogs*.[85] Euripides then goes on to mock Aeschylus for this word, which was clearly both extremely obscure and even exotic – Euripides associates the emblem with Persian tapestries. As such, the *hippalectryon* fits perfectly the criteria for an **incongruity**, as it is highly specific and surprising.

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[80] Σ *Av.* 790a α: καταcχημονῶν τῶν cτρωμάτων.
[81] Dunbar (1995) *ad loc.*
[82] *Eq.* 400.
[83] For Hyperbolus' garland loss, see *Nub.* 623-5 and Starkie (1911) *ad loc.*; Hegelochus' slip of the tongue clearly occasioned much mirth, given the number of comic references to him: Ar. *Ra.* 302-4; Sannyr. fr. 8, Stratt. fr. 1. The actor is otherwise unknown, except for Plato Comicus commenting that he had an unpleasant voice: fr. 235.
[84] Fr. 134 (*TrGF*).
[85] *Ra.* 931-8.

5. Conclusions

The birds in this parabasis attempt to rewrite history, religion and the rule book. Although animal choruses and **incongruous** anthropomorphism may have been the bread and butter of early comic plays,[86] this parabasis is remarkable in its enormous scope, and the lengths to which it goes to impose birds onto the entire history of the world, starting from its genesis and ending, in the antepirrhema, with the here and now of the festival performance.

Aristophanes' poetic persona may be absent, but the parabasis here continues to build the poet's brand. By playing with the idea of relativism, a provocative idea associated with the sophists in classical Athens, Aristophanes may be seen as perpetuating his self-fashioned reputation as a sophisticated thinker, unafraid of new ideas. While the poet is not mentioned, his characters do more than enough to conjure his presence before the audience.

[86] Sifakis (1971), Rothwell (2007).

The Curse You Want to Keep

Misogynistic Humour in *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae*

In 411 Aristophanes composed two successive plays centred around women, and in doing so mined what must have a rich seam of comic material. Women as a group were a ripe target for disparaging humour, since misogyny was prevalent in classical Athens. What is perhaps most striking about these two plays, however, is that Aristophanes does not rely on this dynamic for generating humour particularly heavily.

In *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes adds an extra political dimension to the gendered squabble, by having the male group represent die-hard democrats, while the women's speeches sometimes carries oligarchic connotations. I believe this layering of identities allows the poet to produce a play about a touchy topic – the possibility of political power being wrested from the city's democracy – while simultaneously diffusing the threat with sexual humour.

Later, in *Thesmophoriazusae*, women provide a distraction from politics altogether, but the humour is more sophisticated than mere misogyny. Aristophanes takes as **input** the Euripidean trope of the powerful monologuing (anti)heroine, and creates a **world** in which the female chorus leader unwittingly takes on the role of the formidable and deceptive Euripidean woman. The speaker uses obviously specious reasoning and feigns naivety, and humour may be found in the very patency of her attempt to manipulate, as well as in the swipes at the poor behaviour of *komoidoumenoi* (male and female) and through innuendo.

1. Disparagement Humour and Misogyny

In the *Thesmophoriazusae*, the women of Athens bewail the bad reputation for women that Euripides has fostered in Athens: τί γὰρ οὗτος ἡμᾶς οὐκ ἐπισμῇ τῶν κακῶν; ('What sort of abuse has he not smeared us with?' (389). However, recent studies of the effects of misogynistic humour suggest that the women of Athens would have been wise to be concerned about Aristophanes instead.

Studies of misogynistic humour indicate some perhaps intuitive results; that it is (a) more palatable to men, (b) more palatable when communicated by a woman, (c) more palatable when perceived as socially acceptable, (d) more likely to be found inoffensive by those who hold negative opinions of women, (e) more likely to be positively enjoyed by those who hold such opinions, and relatedly, (f) more likely to be enjoyed by those who do not **psychologically identify** with women as a group.[1] Another study even suggests that misogynistic humour may be more palatable to those who perceive their own masculinity as threatened, since it then serves as a way of re-affirming their masculinity.[2] Enjoyment of sexist humour positively correlates with measures of sexual aggression, and exposure to such humour has been shown to promote sexist behaviour and to nurture environments in which harmful behaviour towards women is taken less seriously.[3]

If we define sexist humour as that which 'demeans, insults, stereotypes, victimizes, and/or objectifies'[4] a person or group on the basis of their gender, then *Lysistrata* and

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[1] For (a)-(d), Parrott & Hopp (2020). Conclusion (e) is supported by numerous studies: e.g. Butland & Ivy (1990); Ford (2000); Henkin & Fish (1986); LaFrance & Woodzicka (1998); Moore et al. (1987). For (f), Kochersberger et al. (2014).

[2] O' Connor et al (2017). Other research suggests that disparagement of a disliked target is sufficient to elicit amusement, without entailing the obvious enhancement of another target which is esteemed by the viewer, or with whom they **psychologically identify**: Zillmann & Cantor (1972; 1996). In the historical context of an implicit gender binary, it is possible that the disparagement of one gender carried a sort of sub-conscious positive esteem for the other.

[3] Ryan & Kanjorski (1998); Ford et al. (2007) Romero-Sánchez et al. (2017), Ford (2000), Ford & Ferguson (2004).

[4] Kochersberger et al. (2014). Sexist humour can be understood as a subset of disparagement humour, a sort of humour which tends both to diminish and to reinterpret its target: Fine (1983), Greenwood & Isbell (2002); Wyer & Collins (1992). The non-serious manner of delivering a denigrating message through

Thesmophoriazusae sometimes fit the bill, as they frequently deal in stereotypes and objectify their female characters.[5] Aristophanes' audience consisted of men at least in part, although some scholars believe the audience was entirely male, while others believe that women were present in the physical audience but excluded from judging and from the notional audience which the poet contemplated while composing, so conclusion (a) above seems applicable.[6] As for point (b), a good deal of the sexist tropes of the plays are peddled by female characters, albeit played by male actors.[7] With regard to point (c), the context of the civic festival occasion, which typically acted as a public showcase for all sorts of comic bad behaviour, would surely generate the impression that such humour was socially acceptable. So far, so palatable.

Whether points (d) to (f) apply to our Athenian audience may need more sustained consideration. The position of women in Athens as legal minors dependent upon their male next of kin, and without political rights, has been much discussed.[8] This alone need not imply that the men of Athens were seething with misogynistic vitriol. Women participated in the religious life of the city,[9] were respected for their management of quotidian domestic

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disparagement humour allows it often to go unchallenged and uncriticised: Bill & Naus (1992), Ford & Ferguson (2004); Johnson (1990).

[5] Women are stereotyped in the plays as sexually voracious and adulterous: e.g. *Lys.* 23, 107-10, 137, 212-3, 404-19, *Th.* 345-6, 491-2; as bibulous: e.g. *Lys.* 1-3, 195-208, 426-7, 465-6, *Th.* 420, 689-755; as liable to steal from their husbands: e.g. *Th.* 418-28. For objectification, see e.g. *Lys.* 83, 87-8, 91-2, 1136, 1148, 1157-8.

[6] Arguments revolve around: Pl. *Lg.* 817c and 658a-d, which describe the audience of dramas as including women; *Pax* 962-67 and Alex. *Gynaecocratia* fr. 41 which suggest that women were present but sat in the furthest away seats; *Av.* 793-6 which suggests women were assumed to be physically absent; *Thesmophoriazusae,* e.g. 395-7, which seems to presuppose that wives remained at home. Tsakmakis (2019) notes that Critylla's total ignorance of Euripides' dramatic performances and their conventions (850-944) makes better sense if women were precluded from viewing them. For an overview of relevant sources, see Podlecki (1990). Goldhill (1994) sees women as excluded from theatre audiences; Henderson (1991) argues that women were present physically but not treated as the notional audience of the plays; Roselli (2011) argues that women were present in the physical and notional audiences. See also Csapo and Slater (1995) 286-7, 420.

[7] Particularly in the *Thesmophoriazusae* parabasis; see below. Some see the use of male actors to play female roles as complicating or fundamentally altering the gender dynamics of the plays: e.g. Taaffe (1993) 4-10, chs. 2 and 4.

[8] E.g. Blundell (1998), Kaltsas and Shapiro (2008), Eidinow (2015).

[9] Notably drawn out in the *Lysistrata* at 641-7 (see below). The Priestesses of Athena Nike and Athena Polias were the most prominent religious roles for women, and are represented in the play by the characters Lysistrata and Myrrhine respectively.

duties, and citizen woman had a comparatively privileged status compared to metics and slaves. All this is compatible with a sort of paternalistic complementarian outlook, whereby women were respected in their (separate, circumscribed) spheres.

What is perhaps more telling is the sort of ideas about women which were in circulation. Famously, in Pericles' funeral oration, a woman's greatest glory was to be no worse than her nature, and never to be spoken of between men.[10] The multitude of references to female adultery in archaic and classical Greek literature, attest to this as a common anxiety in the male Greek psyche.[11] That these references sometimes go hand in hand with references to illegitimate children suggests that the underlying cause of these anxieties is the legitimacy of offspring.[12] Women were sometimes thought to have large libidos, as is suggested by the above references to adultery, and to the use of dildos, as depicted on pottery.[13] Women were also thought to pilfer household goods, as seems to be depicted in a 5th century Attic *skyphos* which shows a woman, drinking deeply from a similarly shaped *skyphos*, while stood up in a storage room, accompanied (or interrupted) by one slave.[14] A reference in Hesiod to women stealing food, or flirting to persuade men to give them food, prompted West's aside that 'Women stole food because they were kept half-starved by their husbands, who resented their habit of eating.'[15] A fragment of Plato Comicus endorses physical assault as a means of keeping one's otherwise unruly wife in check: 'A wife, if you always punish her, is the best possession of all, but if you let go, she is an arrogant, uncontrolled thing.'[16]

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[10] Th. 2. 45.
[11] E.g. Archil. fr. 196a.33-34: ὅ]πωϲ ἐγὼ γυναῖκα τ[ο]ιαύτην ἔχων [γεί]τοϲι χάρμ' ἔϲομαι, cf. Hes. *Op.* 373-75, 701; Semon. fr. 7.110-11; Lys. 1; Ar. *Pax* 979-85, fr. 191.
[12] Hesiod says that the wives of just men produce children like their parents, implying that such children are a blessing because there is no doubt as to their parentage: τίκτουϲιν δὲ γυναῖκεϲ ἐοικότα τέκνα γονεῦϲιν: *Op.* 235. Gardner (1989) 55-61.
[13] Keuls (1985) plates 72–80. Though later, cf. Herod. 6 & 7.
[14] J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection, 86.AE.265.
[15] West (1978) *ad Op.* 373-4.
[16] Fr. 105.

Negative stereotypes about women were clearly in circulation in 5th century Athens. On the other hand, in the fifth century some authors seem to deeply empathise with the position of women. Medea's famous speech about woman's lot may be complicated by her role as witch and familicide, and the speech's implicit purpose of persuading the women of Corinth,[17] but sympathy for the difficult position of women is expressed also by Procne in Sophocles' *Tereus*.[18] The idea that women have a bad reputation because of the actions of a few of them is explicitly contemplated in, for example, fragments from Euripides' *Melanippe Desmotis*.[19] A dramatic conversation about the lot of women was being staged in the 5th century, and Aristophanes capitalises on this with *Thesmophoriazusae*.

Clearly, there were some sympathetic observers of women's position in Athens. It could not be argued, however, that these plays truly represented a challenge to the contemporary patriarchal viewpoint inherent in Athenian society, nor do these sympathetic portrayals nullify the fact that negative stereotypes about women were very much in circulation, as already discussed. On the whole, it seems safe to conclude that Aristophanes' audience would have been largely receptive to misogynistic humour. The extent to which the humour was palatable would, as with all targeted disparagement humour, vary from individual to individual.[20] It is this underlying mechanism of 'hot cognition', harnessing pre-existing gendered **in-group** and **out-group** sentiments, which Aristophanes relies upon when he uses humour that disparages women in *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae.*

[17] E. *M.* 230-51. For discussion, see Pelling (1999) 198-203, who considers how the monologue may have been variously received by individual audience members.
[18] Fr. 583 (*TrGF*). See e.g. Libatique (2018).
[19] Frr. 493, 494 (*TrGF*). See Collard et al. (2009).
[20] Based on their level of **psychological identification** with the targeted in-group, as in (f) above. For a similar point, see Pelling (1999) 198-203.

At first glance, this may in itself seem sufficient to explain Aristophanes' sudden creative interest in women; *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae* were probably produced back-to-back, and perhaps even written in tandem.[21] But on closer inspection, the parabases of these plays rely on this straightforward dynamic only rather rarely. In *Lysistrata*, women are mocked at times, but more commonly the presence of the women and their sex-strike plan occasion sexual humour.[22] Aside from that, it is the layering of political dimensions onto gender identity which is the spark for entertaining confrontations between the two semi-choruses. In *Thesmophoriazusae,* the speaker embodies the stereotype of the cunning woman, but the framing of the monologue suggests that it is a parody of an outspoken Euripidean heroine, and so the gendered disparagement humour is matched by a literary parodic strain. The mechanism for humour through targeted mockery of women as laid out above is certainly an undercurrent, a common strain in these plays, but what is more striking is the fact that Aristophanes does not rely heavily upon it.

2. The Plays and their Context

411 was a perilous time for the city. The Sicilian expedition had ended so catastrophically that Athens' citizens were reluctant to believe it.[23] The Spartans had fortified Decelea in 413, disrupting Athenian access to the silver mines of Laurium, and facilitating the escape of thousands of Attic slaves. Military disasters precipitated constitutional reform and political unrest: a board of ten elderly *probouloi* was instituted to consider new policies

[21] Hyp. I confirms that *Lysistrata* was performed in 411. Andrewes (1981a) 184-93 is influential. See also Hubbard (1991) 243-5 and Avery (1999). Tsakmakis (2011) argues for a 410 Lenaean production of *Thesmophoriazusae*.
[22] Which, as discussed in section 2.2 of my introduction, is a great generator of humour of the type best explained by **relief theory**.
[23] Th. 8.1.

and prevent further disaster,[24] while in Samos among the Athenian forces, an oligarchic coup was fomenting, which would have short-lived success in Athens.[25] Ionian states were in revolt, including Chios – crucially one of the two allies required to provide ships rather than pay tribute.

It is against this backdrop that Aristophanes chose to compose plays that centred upon women, and indeed *Lysistrata* is the first known Old Comedy to feature a female protagonist. The basic appeal of gendered humour has been outlined above, but there is more to be said about the timing of this focus on the feminine. Athens had undergone a demographic shift, with about one third of the male citizen population killed over the course of the Peloponnesian War by 411,[26] particularly after the recent losses of the Sicilian Expedition, and this probably resulted in an impression 'that there was a surplus of women in the city.'[27] This alone may have made *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae* feel rather topical. Both plays, like *Birds* before it, contain strikingly few references to named politicians,[28] and the focus on women, the unmartial sex, could thus function to provide a distraction from the dire circumstances in which Athens found herself. *Thesmophoriazusae* at least is 'on the surface one of Aristophanes' least political plays',[29] and focuses on the world of tragedy with prolonged paratragedy and intertextual allusions.[30] This retreat from political engagement may reflect the city's mood. In between the two productions, Pisander's programme of oligarchic political reforms had been published in Athens,[31] and jokes about politics may no longer have been so amusing.

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[24] Thuc. 8.1.3-4; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 29.
[25] Thuc. 8.63.3-71.
[26] Kagan (1987) 110.
[27] Taaffe (1993) 72.
[28] The few political references they do contain have been used to pinpoint the date of these plays' productions: Sommerstein (1977), Hubbard (1991) 243-5. The chorus of *Lysistrata* say that they do not want to speak ill of any citizens, since the city has enough troubles already: *Lys.* 1043-9.
[29] Sommerstein (1977) 116.
[30] Zuckerberg (2016) 220: 'Aristophanes and Euripides engaged deeply with each other's texts in a dialogue that inspired and enriched the work of both playwrights.'
[31] Andrewes (1992) 471-2; for more debate on the timeline of events in 411, see e.g. Avery (1999).

Nevertheless, *Lysistrata,* produced just a few months prior, was 'fully engaged politically'.[32] Far from shying away from the city's perilous position, war is the backdrop and premise, and its casualties even poignantly referenced.[33] The occupation of the Acropolis by the women in this play has been taken by some as inspired by the city's brewing flirtation with oligarchy.[34] *Lysistrata* directly addressed the crises of the day, and, inasmuch as these crises (military and political) were chiefly male ones, it could be argued that women act not as a distraction but as a symbol of difference, of an alternative to the current fraught situation.[35] The women represent, and contrive to bring about, an alternative to war. They act like oligarchic agitators and thus also represent an alternative to democracy.

How does Aristophanes get away with staging (dramaturgically) an oligarchic coup, in the public and democratic space of the theatre, mere months before an oligarchic coup was staged (politically) in a moment of political terror and violence? The play is an 'abstract, sanitised version'[36] of the sort of oligarchic intervention which was increasingly on the public's mind, but the identification of would-be oligarchs with a non-threatening demographic, women, serves to rob the depiction of its menace. In particular, the sexual jokes that pervade the play creates a branch of strain which counter-balances the inherent political challenge posed by the women.

In short, *Lysistrata* explores contemporary questions, capitalising on the audience's natural investment in these matters, but layering gendered and sexual humour over political identities as a means of distracting from the disquieting themes. Gender balances

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[32] Henderson (2020) 47.
[33] *Lys.* 588-90.
[34] Olson (2012) 76: 'Aristophanes must have expected the ugly political fantasy upon which it depends, of a good and just conspiracy led by loyal citizens compelled by patriotism to strike out against a failed because deliberately deaf and domineering pseudo-democratic order, to resonate with his contemporaries.'
[35] Case (2021) 96: 'Amidst the crises of (masculine) political power in the late fifth and early fourth centuries, especially with the two oligarchic revolutions of 411 and 404, it is surely no coincidence that Aristophanes starts writing plays that empower women in 411 and thereafter.'
[36] Olson (2012) 78.

politics. Later, *Thesmophoriazusae* foregoes political relevance and concerns itself with the more stable and non-threatening world of the theatre. Gender distracts from politics.

3. *Lysistrata*

The parabasis of *Lysistrata* is a departure formally from prior instantiations of the oeuvre. There is no opening section of anapaests, nor do the chorus speak directly to the audience. What is parabatic is that all characters other than the chorus leave the stage, the alternation of song and recited lines which forms the double epirrhematic syzygy. The two semi-choruses remove their outer garments, possibly also a typical feature.[37] Here, it has an additional point: the two semi-choruses are also stripping to fight (615, 635-6, 656-7). The parabatic exchange was presumably accompanied by aggressive choreography, and may have visually resembled a violent dance-off.

There were no hard and fast 'rules' for the parabasis: even in the restricted oeuvre of extant Old Comedy we find variation in form. Nevertheless, when the other characters leave the stage, the audience was probably expecting a more conventional parabasis than this. Aristophanes plays with this expectation: the antagonism between the male and female semi-choruses does not bow down to generic convention, but persists, emblematic of the conflict at the heart of the plot.[38] The stripping of the chorus is both part of this conflict, as their verbal skirmish is likened to an athletic fight, and at the same time furthers the men's discomfort at their enforced sexual abstinence. Throughout, the men seem to struggle to keep their minds strictly on the matter at hand.

A further effect of the bisection of this chorus is that each semi-chorus vent their spleens at one another, and therefore fail to address, harangue or abuse the audience in the

[37] *Lys.* 615, 637; see pages 51-2 for discussion of stripping at *Ach.* 627 and generally.
[38] Markantonatos (2020) 177: 'the unrelenting trading of blow for blow in this choral interplay of arguments invites the spectators to appreciate the complexity of political and social problems'.

typical parabatic fashion. The fourth wall remains unbroken, and any advice gleaned from the play is indirect. Markantonatos describes this section as a 'masterfully camouflaged parabasis', offering the sort of didactic 'extra-dramatic advisory speechmaking' which parabases were known for, but doing so covertly and indirectly.[39] However, one might wonder why, if Aristophanes were earnestly advising the Athenian people here, he chose to do so in such a 'masterfully camouflaged' way.

The parabasis cannot easily be seen as a vehicle for political advice in the *Lysistrata*, but rather the exchange between the two semi-choruses seems aimed primarily at the generation of humour through the conflict between two opposing demographics, both of whom, although attempting to justify themselves and attack their opponents, end up eliciting humour at their own expense just as frequently. This is typical of Aristophanes' style, as I have shown elsewhere. The balance between competing voices representing differing demographics and political perspectives disrupts simple **in-group** or **out-group** dynamics. There is a to-and-fro rhythm by which the two groups mock each other successively while simultaneously making themselves look ridiculous, providing everyone by turns someone to laugh at and someone to laugh with.

A Whiff of Tyranny 614-35

Χορὸϲ γερόντων

οὐκέτ' ἔργον ἐγκαθεύδειν ὅϲτιϲ ἔϲτ' ἐλεύθεροϲ.

ἀλλ' ἐπαποδυώμεθ', ἄνδρεϲ, τουτῳὶ τῷ πράγματι. 615

ἤδη γὰρ ὄζειν ταδὶ πλειόνων

καὶ μειζόνων πραγμάτων μοι δοκεῖ,

καὶ μάλιϲτ' ὀϲφραίνομαι τῆϲ Ἱππίου τυραννίδοϲ·

[39] *Ibid.* 183, 176.

καὶ πάνυ δέδοικα μὴ τῶν Λακώνων τινὲς 620

δεῦρο ϲυνεληλυθότεϲ ἄνδρεϲ εἰϲ Κλειϲθένουϲ

τὰϲ θεοῖϲ ἐχθρὰϲ γυναῖκαϲ ἐξεπαίρουϲιν δόλῳ

καταλαβεῖν τὰ χρήμαθ’ ἡμῶν τόν τε μιϲθόν,

ἔνθεν ἔζων ἐγώ. 625

δεινὰ γάρ τοι τάϲδε γ’ ἤδη τοὺϲ πολίταϲ νουθετεῖν,

καὶ λαλεῖν γυναῖκαϲ οὔϲαϲ ἀϲπίδοϲ χαλκῆϲ πέρι,

καὶ διαλλάττειν πρὸϲ ἡμᾶϲ ἀνδράϲιν Λακωνικοῖϲ,

οἷϲι πιϲτὸν οὐδὲν εἰ μή περ λύκῳ κεχηνότι.

ἀλλὰ ταῦθ’ ὕφηναν ἡμῖν, ἄνδρεϲ, ἐπὶ τυραννίδι. 630

ἀλλ’ ἐμοῦ μὲν οὐ τυραννεύϲουϲ’, ἐπεὶ φυλάξομαι

καὶ φορήϲω τὸ ξίφοϲ τὸ λοιπὸν ἐν μύρτου κλαδί,

ἀγοράϲω τ’ ἐν τοῖϲ ὅπλοιϲ ἑξῆϲ Ἀριϲτογείτονι,

ὧδέ θ’ ἑϲτήξω παρ’ αὐτόν· αὐτὸ γάρ μοι γίγνεται

τῆϲ θεοῖϲ ἐχθρᾶϲ πατάξαι τῆϲδε γραὸϲ τὴν γνάθον. 635

No longer is it the job of any free man to sleep,

But let’s strip off, men, for this action. 615

For already this seems to me to whiff of more

And larger things,

And in particular I catch an odour of Hippias’ tyranny.

And I’m dead scared that some men of the Laconians 620

Might gather here together at Cleisthenes’ house,

And urge on these god-forsaken women with trickery

To seize our money and the wage

That I live on. 625

For it’s terrible indeed that that these women are already advising the citizens

And babble on, being women, about bronze shields,

And try to reconcile us with the Laconic men,

Who are about as trustworthy as an open-mouthed wolf.

No, they weave against us, men, a plan that aims at tyranny. 630

But I’m not going to be tyrannised, since I will be alert

And I will carry a sword with me in future, hidden in myrtle,

And I will shop in armour next to Aristogeiton.

And I’ll stand beside him like this. That’s how I’ll be able to

Strike that god-hated old woman on the jaw. 635

The quasi-parabatic exchange between the semi-choruses begins with the men stripping to allow them to dance more freely. This is typical of a parabasis, but here ‘the dancing is bellicose (the dancers strip as for a fight)’.[40] The antagonism between the two choruses is nicely reflected in the symmetrical back-and-forth structure: the old men sing and dance (614-25) and their leader then speaks (626-35), the old women repeat this order of events (636-47, 648-57), then the whole pattern repeats (the old men: 658-70, 671-81; the old women 682-95, 696-705).

Throughout the parabasis, the old men act as proud defenders of democracy, but through **mentalising** the audience also recognises them as paranoid, and suffering from delusions of grandeur when it comes to their importance in preserving the democratic

[40] Henderson (1987) *ad loc.*

state. They are, in short, a comic exaggeration of a demographic known to the audience, and we can expect that the comic **beats** involving them would have been processed variously to different audience members based on their own perception of this demographic.[41]

The men start with a call to action, calling for alertness from anyone, ὅϲτιϲ ἔϲτ' ἐλεύθεροϲ (614). The old men fear the loss of their political freedoms to a tyrant, and their intense fear (πάνυ δέδοικα 620) is fuelled by their comically hackneyed suspicion of tyranny. At 616-9, the old men will claim that they 'smell… tyranny', once again overestimating the extent of the women's ambitions, and furthering their own characterisation as preoccupied with a long-gone threat. References to tyranny in Old Comedy tend to be emotive clichés suggesting the paranoia of the characters who use them,[42] as when in *Birds* a reward is offered to 'anyone who kills one of the long-dead tyrants'.[43] There, Aristophanes calls attention to the pointlessness of such proclamations: the tyrants are dead, rendering both aid or opposition to them impossible. Similarly here, the men's preoccupation with tyranny is humorously out of touch.

The comic synaesthesia here is a whimsical addition: ὄζειν is used often of abstract nouns,[44] but nevertheless generates humorous **incongruity** by attributing sensory information to a non-sensible abstract concept. Further on, the olfactory rhetoric will continue as both groups decide to strip further to smell like the men or women they are (662-63, 687). Apart from this use of the olfactory as a signifier of one's true essence (the women smell of Hippias' tyranny because they are really, the men allege, sympathisers; the men should strip naked in order to emanate the smell of their true manliness; the women

[41] See my introduction, section 4.1.
[42] Cf. *V.* 463-507. Henderson (1987) *ad loc.*: 'In Ar. 'tyranny' (like 'conspiracy') is a smear-word… associated with demagogues… the old men's overheated clichés are a caricature of those heard in assembly and court'
[43] *Av.* 1074-75. This may parody a real Assembly announcement calling a curse upon those who aid or aspire to be a tyrant: *Th.* 331ff. parodies this announcement, and it is referred to at D. 19.70 and 20.107.
[44] E.g. *Clouds* 49-51.

do the same), the focus on smells later occurs in tandem with the old men's increasing interest in the women's bodies.

The men's song ends on a more ignominious note, as they turn from concern for the political freedom of the city, to the security of their own wages (624-25). Their behaviour as rabid defenders of democracy is revealed to have a strong personal motivation underlying the ideological one. Of course, the pay of councillors and jurymen was instrumental to the operation of the Athenian democracy, so withholding these wages by seizing the treasury would constitute an attack upon democracy. Still, the way in which the choral song ends by dwelling upon the men's wages as the reason for their great fear emphasises their personal interest. This bathetic descent from the lofty to the grubby punctures the pretensions of the speakers. To the many audience members with qualms about Athens' democracy and her champions, it is easy to see how a welcome feeling of **superiority** may accompany their **mentalising** about these characters: radical democrats are self-interested money-grubbers at heart, no matter what their grand anti-tyranny rhetoric suggests.

As the chorus leader goes on, they invoke a number of female stereotypes, such as babbling (627),[45] and a propensity to be deceived and used by foreign men (628-29).[46] They then describe the women as weaving a trick (630). Weaving is a traditionally associated with women and deception,[47] and is particularly appropriate in light of how the women have recently said they will treat the state (567-86).

The men then pledge constant vigilance, even when shopping (623), in order to emulate the tyrannicides and prevent an overthrow of democracy. The reference to the familiar physical space of the Agora heralds the start of the conjuring of a deliberately

[45] McDonald (2016) 161.
[46] Gardner (1989) 53-55.
[47] E.g. *Il.* 6.187, *Od.* 2.93-106.

confusing imagined **text world**. The old men imagine a **world** where they take on the role of the tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogeiton, the famous symbol ‘of an indomitable democratic spirit’.[48] Clearly, the old men are aligned with these heroes of democracy in spirit and intention, but their fantasy is inappropriate. The old women are not Pisistratids, and the old men are suffering from a delusion of grandeur in likening their actions to the tyrannicides’. The speech ends with a humorous image that relies upon the audience’s ability to visualise the imagined **world** which takes the Agora as an input. A bronze statue of the tyrannicides stood in the Agora, from the late 6th or early 5th century,[49] known to us from later marble reproductions . The old men here envisage taking on the heroic triumphal stance of Harmodius in this statue, but rather than clasping a sword in preparation to strike a tyrant dead, the old men have fist outstretched ignobly, having punched an old woman on the jaw! Through **mentalising** the old men are not only liable to engage in paranoid conspiracy theories about tyranny, but they also harbour personal delusional dreams of fulfilling the heroic role of the tyrannicide.

Religious Duties 636-57

Χορὸς Γυναικῶν

οὐκ ἄρ’ εἰσιόντα ϲ’ οἴκαδ’ ἡ τεκοῦϲα γνώϲεται.

ἀλλὰ θώμεϲθ’, ὦ φίλαι γρᾶεϲ, ταδὶ πρῶτον χαμαί.

ἡμεῖϲ γάρ, ὦ πάντεϲ ἀϲτοί, λόγων

κατάρχομεν τῇ πόλει χρηϲίμων·

εἰκότωϲ, ἐπεὶ χλιδῶϲαν ἀγλαῶϲ ἔθρεψέ με. 640

ἑπτὰ μὲν ἔτη γεγῶϲ’ εὐθὺϲ ἠρρηφόρουν·

[48] Markantonatos (2020) 179.
[49] Paus.1.8.5. Most likely an archaic statue was taken as spoils by Xerxes in 480 and a replacement installed shortly afterwards.

εἶτ’ ἀλετρὶς ἦ δεκέτις οὖσα τἀρχηγέτι·

καὶ χέουσα τὸν κροκωτὸν ἄρκτος ἦ Βραυρωνίοις·   645

κἀκανηφόρουν ποτ’ οὖσα παῖς καλὴ ’χους’

ἰσχάδων ὁρμαθόν.

ἆρα προὐφείλω τι χρηστὸν τῇ πόλει παραινέσαι;

εἰ δ’ ἐγὼ γυνὴ πέφυκα, τοῦτο μὴ φθονεῖτέ μοι,

ἢν ἀμείνω γ’ εἰσενέγκω τῶν παρόντων πραγμάτων.   650

τοὐράνου γάρ μοι μέτεστι· καὶ γὰρ ἄνδρας εἰσφέρω.

τοῖς δὲ δυστήνοις γέρουσιν οὐ μέτεσθ’ ὑμῖν, ἐπεὶ

τὸν ἔρανον τὸν γενόμενον παππῷον ἐκ τῶν Μηδικῶν

ἐξαναλώσαντες οὐκ ἀντεισφέρετε τὰς εἰσφοράς,

ἀλλ’ ὑφ’ ὑμῶν διαλυθῆναι προσέτι κινδυνεύομεν.   655

ἆρα γρυκτόν ἐστιν ὑμῖν; εἰ δὲ λυπήσεις τί με,

τῷδέ σ’ ἀψήκτῳ πατάξω τῷ κοθόρνῳ τὴν γνάθον.

Well then, your own mother who birthed you won’t recognise you when you get home.

But first, dear old women, let’s put this down on the ground.

For, of all you citizens, we are beginning to give

Useful advice to the city.

Rightly so, since she raised me in sumptuous splendour.   640

At age seven I was straight away a sacred carrier,

Then at ten years I ground up flour for cake for the hero,

And then I had a yellow dress as a bear at the Brauronia,   645

And once I was a basket-girl, a pretty child wearing

A necklace of figs.

So then I owe some good advice to the city:
And if I am by nature, a woman, do not begrudge me it,
If I should introduce ideas better than how matters stand. 650
For I've got a stake in this venture, because I contribute men,
But you have no stake in it, wretched old men, since
The contribution said to be your grandfathers' from the Medes,
You've used up, and you are not bringing in tribute to replace it,
But indeed we are at risk already of dissolution because of you. 655
Are you having a grumble? If you irritate me,
I'll strike you with this untanned boot to your jaw.

The women answer threat with threat, and their threat to make the men unrecognisable even to their own mothers entertainingly juxtaposes extreme physical violence with maternity, and its connotations of nurturing care and affection.

The women then go on to justify their attempts to direct and aid the city as recompense for the city's nurturing of them (εἰκότως, ἐπεὶ χλιδῶϲαν ἀγλαῶϲ ἔθρεψέ με 640). They enumerate female religious duties, in what Bierl describes as a '*cursus honorum*' of women's festival roles.[50] Their argument, that these ceremonial duties entitled the women to a say in the present inter-polis crisis, is not grounded in historical practice. The Athenians simply did not see female participation in cult worship as earning them the right to wield political influence.

[50] Bierl (2011) 275.

There is also a strong sense of luxury in the description of these religious duties: as initiates of the *arkteia* they wear expensive saffron robes (645), and as basket-bearers each finds themselves to be a παῖϲ καλὴ 'χουϲ᾽ ἰϲχάδων ὁρμαθόν (646-47). This luxury may in itself have suggested that the women represent an elite, pro-oligarchic perspective, in contrast to the men, but in addition to that, the women use loaded political vocabulary. The claim to offer 'valuable' (χρηϲτόν) advice at 648 (and cf. 638-9) stands out as carrying political connotations, since at the time χρηϲτοί and πονήροι were loaded class terms.[51] The Old Oligarch's *Constitution of the Athenians* uses the word χρηϲτόϲ eighteen times to refer to the better (i.e. conservative, elite, anti-democratic) sort of politicians and their aims.[52]

The women then admit their natural inferiority (649-50), but assert that it does not preclude the possibility of them giving good advice. The women explain their input to the city, since they have contributed men to the ἔρανοϲ. While an ἔρανοϲ was usually 'a cash contribution to an organization of friends (cf. *Ach*. 615)'[53] it was also a sort of potluck picnic spread.[54] This sort of punning is a good example of semantic means of generating humour, as the audience is called upon to notice and recognise two meanings, both apt. ἔρανοϲ as a sort of meal arrangement gives a domestic spin to the women's complaints which echoes the description of political activity through the domestic metaphor of weaving at 567-86. Women take on politics, but understand it primarily through the familiar lens of the domestic.

The women go on to make a strong accusation against men: they have squandered the wealth they inherited from their forefathers, and failed to replace it. This certainly risks

[51] Rosenbloom (2004) 59-66; Cagnetta & Petrocelli (1977).
[52] Kopp (2020) discusses *euboulia* in *Lysistrata*, and its ambivalence, since it can hold oligarchic connotations, or denote an improved form of democracy.
[53] Henderson (1987) *ad loc.*
[54] As at e.g. *Od*.1.226, 11.415.

being an unpalatable claim to the audience. On the other hand, it is likely that very few individuals would have felt personally culpable for the squandering of resources. If no one **psychologically identified** with the group responsible, the accusation may have had little sting.

Unwrap the Dolmades! 659-81

Χορὸϲ γερόντων

ταῦτ᾽ οὖν οὐχ ὕβριϲ τὰ πράγματ᾽ ἐϲτὶ πολλή;
κἀπιδώϲειν μοι δοκεῖ τὸ χρῆμα μᾶλλον. 660
ἀλλ᾽ ἀμυντέον τὸ πρᾶγμ᾽, ὅϲτιϲ γ᾽ ἐνόρχηϲ ἔϲτ᾽ ἀνήρ.
ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐξωμίδ᾽ ἐκδυώμεθ᾽, ὡϲ τὸν ἄνδρα δεῖ
ἀνδρὸϲ ὄζειν εὐθύϲ, ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ἐντεθριῶϲθαι πρέπει.
ἀλλ᾽ ἄγετε, λευκόποδεϲ, οἵπερ ἐπὶ Λειψύδριον
ἤλθομεν ὅτ᾽ ἦμεν ἔτι, 665
νῦν δεῖ νῦν ἀνηβῆϲαι πάλιν κἀναπτερῶϲαι
πᾶν τὸ ϲῶμα κἀποϲείϲαϲθαι τὸ γῆραϲ τόδε. 670

εἰ γὰρ ἐνδώϲει τιϲ ἡμῶν ταῖϲδε κἂν ϲμικρὰν λαβήν,
οὐδὲν ἐλλείψουϲιν αὖθιϲ λιπαρᾶϲ[55] χειρουργίαϲ,
ἀλλὰ καὶ ναῦϲ τεκτανοῦνται, κἀπιχειρήϲουϲ᾽ ἔτι
ναυμαχεῖν καὶ πλεῖν ἐφ᾽ ἡμᾶϲ, ὥϲπερ Ἀρτεμιϲία· 675
ἢν δ᾽ ἐφ᾽ ἱππικὴν τράπωνται, διαγράφω τοὺϲ ἱππέαϲ·
ἱππικώτατον γάρ ἐϲτι χρῆμα κἄποχον γυνή,
κοὐκ ἂν ἀπολίϲθοι τρέχοντοϲ· τάϲ γ᾽ Ἀμαζόναϲ ϲκόπει,

[55] Wilson's *OCT* has λιπαροῦϲ; see below for my reasoning for preserving the codices' reading.

ἃς Μίκων ἔγραψ’ ἐφ’ ἵππων μαχομένας τοῖς ἀνδράσιν.

ἀλλὰ τούτων χρῆν ἁπασῶν εἰς τετρημένον ξύλον 680

ἐγκαθαρμόσαι λαβόντας τουτονὶ τὸν αὐχένα.

Well isn’t this matter a great bit of arrogance,

Then? And I think it will grow greater still. 660

But the matter calls for assistance, to every man with balls.

So let’s strip off our tunics, so a man can smell

Like a man straight off, not be all wrapped up like dolmades.

But come on, whitefeet, all of us who went upon Leipsydrium back

when we were something, 665

Here and now we must grow young again, grow wings again

And shake the old age off our whole bodies. 670

For if one of us should yield to these women, even just the smallest grip,

These women will leave no slippery handiwork undone,

But they’ll even fit together ships and try even to

Fight us at sea, and sail upon us, just like Artemisia. 675

And if they turn to cavalry, I can strike off our knights:

For a woman is a thing most equestrian and good at riding,

And she doesn’t slip off even at a sprint: consider the Amazons,

Whom Micon painted fighting men on horseback.

But what we ought to do to all these women, is grab them by the 680

Neck and clap them in the stocks.

The men respond to the rhetorical question of the old women with a rhetorical question of their own (659-60), continuing the sense of balance between the two forces. While earlier the men called upon free men (ἐλεύθερος 614), they now call upon all men with balls (ἐνόρχης 661), and strip off their one-armed tunics (662), so they can smell like men. All this creates a humorously overblown sense of machismo. An audience member engaging in **mentalising** may also detect more afoot here. Although this section of the plot more concerns the 'occupation' strand of Lysistrata's dual plot, the context of the sex strike is still relevant, and the reference in quick succession to sex organs (ἐνόρχης 661), stripping (662), and bodily scent (663) may also suggest that the men are getting rather worked up, even before the run of innuendoes at 671ff.

The virility of the men is stressed by their smell, and the image of being trussed up like a θρῖον (an egg- and cheese-stuffed fig leaf) suggests that clothing (the creation of women) is hampering their manly strength and scent. A θρῖον is used metaphorically to describe a foreskin at *Acharnians* 158, and *Ecclesiazusae* 708, and this connotation might be detected here as well.[56] Certainly, the men are engaged in stripping down even further, and seem to have sex on the mind shortly after.

The old men then reference Lipsydrium, but their narrative is rather confused. The Alcmaeonids and other exiles fortified Lipsydrium, during the time of the Pisistratids, who ultimately captured it.[57] Their valour was commemorated by a skolion. Referring to Lipsydrium as if it were a success or source of military pride is a little misguided, and potentially undermines the old men, as does the epithet 'white-footed' (λευκόποδες 665), which could suggest pallor quite as much as it could suggest feet dusty from military pursuits. Henderson notes that it is 'likely that "white-feet" is an honorific way of referring

[56] Henderson (1987) *ad loc.*
[57] Hdt. 5.62.

to footsoldiers generally, "bare-/dusty-/nimble-footed"',[58] but the quotation used to support this, Euripides *Cyclops* 72, has the chorus of satyrs speak about pursuing nymphs alongside βάκχαιϲ cὺν λευκόποcιν. Surely there the epithet does not designate 'manly endurance of hardship',[59] but rather the fact that the Bacchants were women, and so conventionally pale as a signifier of female beauty. In *Lysistrata*, the word may suggest that the old men are white-footed now, when before they were more outdoorsy and therefore tanned, or the chorus are intending to suggest they are nimble with dusty feet, but express this in an underminingly ambivalent manner. Their lack of bodily strength now is indeed stressed by their pleonastic wish to slough off old age (669-670).

The men turn their attention outward once again, to the women, who they allege will leave no 'slippery handiwork' undone (λιπαρᾶc χειρουργίαc 672), if allowed 'even a small grip' (κἂν cμικρὰν λαβήν 671). The codices have λιπαράc or λιπαρᾶc, the feminine accusative plural and feminine genitive singular from λιπαρόc respectively, and this word means 'shiny' or 'oily'. Editors have largely accepted Bentley's emendation, supported by a scholium,[60] of λιπαροῦc, from λιπαρήc, which means instead 'indefatigable' or 'enduring'. Even in this emended version of the text, there is discernible innuendo, as χειρουργία suggests masturbation, and adds new meaning to the phrase 'small grip' (cμικρὰν λαβήν) in the previous line.[61] These words may first be considered as referring to a wrestling grip in the physical confrontation which the semi-chorus foresees.[62] However, without the sexual connotation of χειρουργία, the phrase is vague, and since the passage continues to dwell on physical contact with the female semi-chorus, it seems reasonable that the **mentalising** audience member will recognise that sex is still on the minds of the

[58] Henderson (1987) *ad loc.*
[59] *ibid.*
[60] Σ *Lys.* 673.
[61] Henderson (1975) 160; Perusino (2020) *ad loc.*
[62] *LSJ* A II.

old men. Therefore, it seems preferable to retain the manuscripts' λιπαρᾶς, suggesting the use of olive oil as a sexual lubricant.[63] Clearly, the chorus of old men have more than the preservation of democracy on their minds.

Sexual slang continues as the old men envisage the women attacking them, by sea or on horseback, since ναυμαχεῖν, πλεῖν, and riding can all be euphemisms referring to a partner being on top during sexual intercourse.[64] The old men claim to be concerned about being dominated by the old women, and to be dominated, sexually or otherwise, by a woman would be shameful to an Athenian man. Still, the recurrence of sexual imagery here also suggests that the old men are preoccupied with the thought.

The Amazons, depicted with one breast bared, next come into focus. The reference to the painting of Micon suggests that the chorus are visualising these women in some detail. Markantonatos writes of the references to Amazons and Artemisia, that 'These stories showcase the widely celebrated Athenian supremacy in the never-ending conflict with Persian invaders and, more broadly, barbarian assailants.'[65] By the same token, these stories 'other' the women, aligning them with foreign peoples.

The sexual imagery turns finally to the violent subordination of women,[66] playing further into this dynamic which evokes and channels sublimated aggression through humour. Simultaneously, through **mentalising** the old men are revealed to be sex-starved and single-minded.

Panebianco argues that in this passage, the sexual humour is used to disrupt and nullify the potentially disruptive or threatening image of gender reversal.[67] Further, she finds that these jokes are not intended solely to provoke humour but they are 'used as

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[63] Kilmer (1993) 81-9, Stafford (2022) 222-6.
[64] E.g. *Lys.* 59–60, 411, *Ra.* 434, *Th.* 803–4.
[65] Markantonatos (2020) 184.
[66] Henderson (1975) 114 argues for a rather involved innuendo whereby the women's necks represent phalluses, and the stocks vaginas.
[67] Panebianco (2021).

powerful means to create meaning and orient the audience's understanding of the play.'[68] I concur and add that sexual humour does more than nullify the threat of gender reversal. It also mutes the worrying political aspects of the narrative – the overthrow of democracy – by casting it in sexual terms.

Release the Sow! 682-705

Χορὸc Γυναικῶν

εἰ νὴ τὼ θεώ με ζωπυρήcεις, λύcω

τὴν ἐμαυτῆc ὗν ἐγὼ δή, καὶ ποιήcω

τήμερον τοὺc δημότας βωcτρεῖν c' ἐγὼ πεκτούμενον.

ἀλλὰ χἠμεῖc, ὦ γυναῖκες, θᾶττον ἐκδυώμεθα, 686

ὡc ἂν ὄζωμεν γυναικῶν αὐτοδὰξ ὠργιcμένων.

νῦν πρὸc ἔμ' ἴτω τις, ἵνα μή ποτε φάγῃ cκόροδα,

μηδὲ κυάμους μέλανας. 690

ὡc εἰ καὶ μόνον κακῶc ⟨μ'⟩ ἐρεῖc, ὑπερχολῶ γάρ,

αἰετὸν τίκτοντα κάνθαρόc cε μαιεύcομαι. 695

οὐ γὰρ ὑμῶν φροντίcαιμ' ἄν, ἤν γέ μοι ζῇ Λαμπιτὼ

ἥ τε Θηβαία φίλη παῖc εὐγενὴc Ἰcμηνία.

οὐ γὰρ ἔcται δύναμιc, οὐδ' ἢν ἑπτάκιc cὺ ψηφίcῃ,

ὅcτιc, ὦ δύcτην', ἀπήχθου πᾶcι καὶ τοῖc γείτοcιν.

ὥcτε κἀχθὲc θἠκάτῃ ποιοῦcα παιγνίαν ἐγὼ 700

ταῖcι παιcὶ τὴν ἑταίραν ἐκάλεc' ἐκ τῶν γειτόνων,

παῖδα χρηcτὴν κἀγαπητὴν ἐκ Βοιωτῶν ἔγχελυν·

[68] Panebianco (2021) 146.

οἱ δὲ πέμψειν οὐκ ἔφασκον διὰ τὰ σὰ ψηφίσματα.

κοὐχὶ μὴ παύσησθε τῶν ψηφισμάτων τούτων, πρὶν ἂν

τοῦ σκέλους ὑμᾶς λαβών τις ἐκτραχηλίσῃ φέρων. 705

If, by the two goddesses, you provoke me,

I will release my sow, indeed, and I will make you today

So shorn you'll call out to the commoners for help. 685

But we too, oh women, strip off quickly,

So that we may smell like women angered and ready to bite.

Come and have a go at me then, if you don't ever want to eat whole

Foods again. 690

Because if you speak just one wrong word against me, I'll boil with anger so much

That I'll midwife you like the beetle did the eagle. 695

For I will not worry about you lot, if my Lampito lives

And that dear Theban girl, noble Ismenia.

For there will be no power, not even if you should vote for it seven times over

You who, oh wretch, are hated by everyone and even your neighbours.

Just yesterday I was having a game for Hecate, 700

With the girls and I invited my companion from next door,

A good girl, an eel from Boeotia I'm fond of,

They refused to let her come, because of your decrees.

And you won't stop with these decrees, not until someone grabs you by

The legs and takes you off to break your neck. 705

The women threaten if provoked to 'unleash their sow' (684). Henderson comments that 'the animal stands for its characteristic quality', and notes that ''sow' could be used of wives (1001, *Ach.* 741) and other sexually mature women'.[69] All words for female pigs in the Greek language had sexual connotations. χοῖρος is the most popular slang expression for female genitalia, in particular depilated ones,[70] and those of young women, and can be used as an obscene synecdoche to refer to young girls in general.[71] The word ὗς, like δέλφαξ, can indicate the genitalia of older women.[72] Hence, although the flow of the passage suggests that the half-chorus of old women are intending to say that they will release their anger – certainly they are not suggesting here that they are giving up on the sex strike – the language they use expresses their force as a sexual one.

Like the men, the old women further strip off (ἐκδυώμεθα 686), to smell like women about to bite (687), and throw out some rather colourful threats. They invite the men to attack them, if they wish never to eat garlic or black beans again (689-90). Henderson argues that since garlic was a staple food, and old men are often described as chewing beans during court and assemblies (e.g. *Knights* 41), 'this threat = 'to stay alive'.'[73] However, it could also, in light of the previous threats to the opponents' jaws (657 in response to 635), be a threat to render them unable to chew as a result of injury to the jaw or teeth, hence my translation of 'to eat whole foods'.

They also threaten to 'midwife them as the dung beetle did the eagle', a reference to an Aesopic fable in which a beetle takes vengeance on an eagle by rolling the bird's eggs out of its nest.[74] Henderson notes that this line may suggest a threat to the men's testicles in light of 661, rather than an act of infanticide, but it is also obviously a playful

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[69] Henderson (1987) *ad loc.*
[70] E.g. *Ach.* 738ff., *V.* 1353, *Th.* 538, *Ec.* 724.
[71] *Th.* 289, *Pl.* 308.
[72] Henderson (1975) 132.
[73] Henderson (1987) *ad loc.*
[74] Aesop 7 (Halm).

incongruity playing upon the traditional role of women as midwives, and conjures the image of a midwife maliciously dropping an infant as the dung-beetle makes fall the eagle's eggs.

The old women go on to describe a cause of their anger towards the men, that their decrees have prevented their foreign neighbours attending their gatherings (700-3). The speech reimagines inter-*poleis* relationships as a cosy neighbourhood, bringing the scale of Hellenic conflict down to a smaller, more domestic scale. The reference to a woman as a Boeotian eel points to the privations of war, but since fish were a delicacy, the association of seafood and beautiful women became an established trope.[75] Gilhuly notes that the description of the invitee as a *hetaira* effects 'a collocation of woman as ritual practitioner, sexual object, and food.'[76]

The women end their speech with a neck-related threat (704-5) to parallel the men's at 681. This is the culmination of a climactic progression of bodily threats throughout this quasi-parabatic exchange.

4. *Thesmophoriazusae*

Thesmophoriazusae's parabasis is not typical in form, either. It has no choral odes, and the stage is not entirely emptied during the speech – Mnesilochus is present on stage, though he does not interrupt. It is telling that, in both the features by which *Thesmophoriazusae* diverges from other parabases, it more closely resembles an agonistic speech of tragedy. The speech resembles, in theme if not through direct linguistic resonances, the *agon*

[75] Davidson (1998) 10.
[76] Gilhuly (2008) 173.

speech of Euripides' *Melanippe Desmotis*,[77] or Medea's speech at *Med.* 410-30.[78] In a play that revolves around Euripides' presentation of women, this cannot be coincidental, and the audience were primed by the play's plot to pick up on the fact that what unfolds before them is a comic variation on this tragic *topos*, amounting to loose paratragedy.

In the scene preceding the parabasis, Mnesilochus copies a plot central to a Euripides play when he tries to take a baby a hostage (769-84), in the manner of Telephus. In the scene that follows, he attempts to escape by imitating Euripides' *Helen* (850-944). Tsakmakis argues using **text-world theory** that Mnesilochus' purposeful use of scenes from Euripides plays to manipulate other characters creates a new hybrid comic **text-world** which utilises these tragedies as **inputs**.[79] The same could be said for the parabasis, where the **world** takes as **input** the sorts of Euripidean tragedies which revolve around formidable women. However, while Mnesilochus is well-versed in tragic theatre and purposefully uses this knowledge to try to influence the world around him, the parabatic speaker shows no clear awareness that she is acting like a Euripidean heroine. And while Mnesilochus' plot fails because of the ignorance of his audience – Critylla does not have the knowledge of tragedy required to access the **text-world** Mnesilochus constructs[80] – the chorus leader in the parabasis will fail to persuade the audience because they know too much: an audience *au fait* with Euripidean heroines could not miss that this parabasis is a comic instantiation of the trope. Therefore, the message should be subjected to some scrutiny, since the plot of this very comedy has so insistently reminded us of the deceitfulness and villainy of Euripides' women.

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[77] Frr. 493, 494 (*TrGF*); Miller (1947). These fragments may be spoken by the good wise Melanippe, or the wicked murderous queen, Siris. Collard and Cropp 2008) 588-89 suggest they are more likely to emanate from the Melanippe, perhaps in response to her misogynistic son, but the assertion that women are better than men is so subversive that it could also plausibly emanate from the mouth of a manipulative villainess.
[78] Austin and Olson (2004) *ad loc.*
[79] Tsakmakis (2019).
[80] *Ibid.* 163.

This framing, which makes the speaker a pseudo-Euripidean heroine of ambiguous intent, invites the audience to question the entire parabasis, and calls upon them to be on their guard for manipulation. Accordingly, though at times humour is generated in a straightforward way by shots targeting male members of the audience,[81] much of the humour of the piece comes from the recognition of the ways in which the speaker attempts to deceive. The **world** she conjures deviates meaningfully from the real **world** of Athens which it takes as an input, and her arguments are playfully specious. Moreover, since the framing of the speech as a comic take on a Euripidean trope is patent to the audience, but not to the character, the audience have privileged knowledge over the unwittingly unconvincing speaker, and mirth may be generated through the audience's subsequent sense of **superiority**. Her attempts to persuade may be at times pleasingly clever, but they are also disarmed by their framing as emanating from a suspect character.

Absconding Evils 785-99

ἡμεῖϲ τοίνυν ἡμᾶϲ αὐτὰϲ εὖ λέξωμεν παραβᾶϲαι· 785
καίτοι πᾶϲ τιϲ τὸ γυναικεῖον φῦλον κακὰ πόλλ' ἀγορεύει,
ὡϲ πᾶν ἐϲμεν κακὸν ἀνθρώποιϲ κἀξ ἡμῶν ἐϲτιν ἅπαντα,
ἔριδεϲ, νείκη, ϲτάϲιϲ ἀργαλέα, λύπη, πόλεμοϲ. φέρε δή νυν,
εἰ κακόν ἐϲμεν, τί γαμεῖθ' ἡμᾶϲ, εἴπερ ἀληθῶϲ κακόν ἐϲμεν,
κἀπαγορεύετε μήτ' ἐξελθεῖν μήτ' ἐκκύψαϲαν ἁλῶναι, 790
ἀλλ' οὑτωϲὶ πολλῇ ϲπουδῇ τὸ κακὸν βούλεϲθε φυλάττειν;
κἂν ἐξέλθῃ τὸ γύναιόν ποι, κᾆθ' εὕρητ' αὐτὸ θύραϲιν,
μανίαϲ μαίνεϲθ', οὓϲ χρῆν ϲπένδειν καὶ χαίρειν, εἴπερ ἀληθῶϲ
ἔνδοθεν ηὕρετε φροῦδον τὸ κακὸν καὶ μὴ κατελαμβάνετ' ἔνδον.

[81] At 793, 796, 804-5, 808-9, 814-29, and indirectly through one's mother, 834-49.

κἂν καταδάρθωμεν ἐν ἀλλοτρίων παίζουϲαι καὶ κοπιῶϲαι, 795

πᾶϲ τιϲ τὸ κακὸν τοῦτο ζητεῖ περὶ τὰϲ κλίναϲ περινοϲτῶν.

κἂν ἐκ θυρίδοϲ παρακύπτωμεν, τὸ κακὸν ζητεῖτε θεᾶϲθαι·

κἂν αἰϲχυνθεῖϲ' ἀναχωρήϲῃ, πολὺ μᾶλλον πᾶϲ ἐπιθυμεῖ

αὖθιϲ τὸ κακὸν παρακύψαν ἰδεῖν.

And so, let's step forward and praise ourselves, 785

Despite the fact that each of you says many awful things about the female species.

That we are entirely a curse for mankind, and it all comes from us:

Strife, quarrels, difficult civil conflict, pains, war. Come on now,

If we are a curse, why do you marry us, if we really are a curse?

And why do you order us not to go outside or be caught peeping out? 790

But instead you want to guard 'the curse' with great urgency like this?

And if a little woman should go out somewhere, and you then find it outside

You're mad with madness, when you should pour celebratory libations and rejoice, if really truly

You have found your curse clean gone from the house, and won't come upon it at home.

And if we should become sleepy at someone else's home, playing and growing weary, 795

Each man seeks out this curse, wandering around to each couch.

And if we should ever peek outdoors, you seek to gaze upon the curse:

And if growing embarrassed it retreats, each man desires all the more

To look upon the peeping out curse again.

The speech begins by acknowledging traditional opinions about women. In particular, the reference to woman as the origin of all strife (787) may allude to Helen of Troy, the most famous woman as a cause of strife,[82] and frequently the central figure in discussions of causation and blame.[83] Perhaps most recently, she starred in Euripides' escape drama, which will be travestied at length in the next scene, and in which she is not an adulteress but an exemplary wife who far surpasses her husband in intelligence. Helen often epitomises female qualities, 'and insofar as women are stereotypically ambivalent in Greek myth, [Helen] is so especially.'[84] Acknowledging women's bad reputation is, of course, the speaker's first step towards dispelling it, but the speaker does spend quite some time on the accumulation of evils at 788, and the mention of ϲτάϲιϲ ἀργαλέα seems likely to have 'struck a painful chord in Athens in 411'.[85] The way in which the speaker summons the ambivalent spectre of Helen, and dwells upon the enumeration of woman-caused evils for far longer than necessary could be interpreted, through **mentalising**, as a humorous misstep.

The reference to women as a separate race or class (τὸ γυναικεῖον φῦλον 786) makes them sound alien, and the description of them as a curse to mankind (πᾶν ἐϲμὲν κακὸν ἀνθρώποιϲ 787) calls to mind the Hesiodic story of Pandora.[86] This description also implicitly excludes women from ἄνθρωποι, a group in which they usually would number, and so dehumanises them. Not only that, but the way in which this character excludes women from the group ἄνθρωποι so casually, as an uncontested premise for the patently unconvincing argument to follow, suggests her acceptance and internalisation of this idea,

[82] E.g. *Il.* 2.376.
[83] E.g. Stesich. *Palinode* frr. 90-1 (Davies & Finglass), Gorg. *Hel.*, Hdt. 1.3, Thuc. 1.9.
[84] Allan (2008) 51.
[85] Austin & Olson (2004) *ad loc.*
[86] Hes. *Op.* 42-105.

which seems to run somewhat counter to her overt purpose to eulogise women. This is therefore a case in which the speaker comically undermines herself.

The chorus leader then asks a question: if women are a curse, as men call them, why do men go to such pains to keep them? The word κακόν, predicated of womankind, is used eight times in this epirrhema, and κακά has already been used once earlier to describe how men speak of them (786). The neuter singular is dehumanising, and its repetition in the following lines turns the term into 'an ironic leit-motif in this section'.[87] The sentiment is a commonplace,[88] picking up the central complaint of the women in the play, that Euripides has styled them as μέγ' ἀνδράσιν κακόν (394). As a recurring feature of the chorus leader's speech, the tone must indeed be ironic, as she belabours the point that the way in which men refer to women (as curses) is at odds with how they treat them (as valuable).

The chorus leader creates in her speech a new **text-world**, in which women are guarded vociferously, their excursions from the house a source of stress and anxiety for men. This is a particularly clear case of **text-world** building because of the frequent spatial references, which function as world-building elements (ἐξελθεῖν 790, κᾆθ' εὕρητ' αὐτὸ θύρασιν 792, ἔνδοθεν ηὕρετε φροῦδον… μὴ κατελαμβάνετ' ἔνδον 794). At first, as in these quotations, the **text-world** constructed consists of only two binary and simple spatial locations: inside and outside. According to the speaker's obviously specious logic, the men should be glad to have their women disappear from the household. But of course, **text-worlds** are built in analogy to the real world, and the audience can easily answer the rhetorical questions of the speaker: men marry women for procreation; men keep their female family members inside to ensure their safety and the legitimacy of their offspring.

[87] Austin and Olson (2004) *ad loc.*
[88] See section 1 of this chapter.

These obvious ideas are carefully omitted by the speaker, who never refers to the fact that women might have nefarious purposes in 'peeping out' (ἐκκύψασαν 790, παρακύπτωμεν 797, παρακύψαν 799), although in *Peace* this is identified as precisely the behaviour of adulterous wives.[89]

An audience member trying to understand the speaker's mental state (**mentalising**) might reach one of two possible conclusions: firstly, that the female speaker is legitimately clueless as to why a woman's disappearance would cause anxiety; secondly, that she is aware and purposefully omits this in order to suggest the innocence of womankind. Given the framing of the parabasis, which recalls the speeches of outspoken and morally ambivalent Euripidean heroines, the latter seems the dominant interpretation. The diminutive τὸ γύναιον at 792 also adds to this sense that the female speaker is intentionally playing innocent.

Testing the Genders 799-813

οὕτωϲ ἡμεῖϲ ἐπιδήλωϲ
ὑμῶν ἐϲμεν πολὺ βελτίουϲ, βάϲανόϲ τε πάρεϲτιν ἰδέϲθαι. 800
βάϲανον δῶμεν πότεροι χείρουϲ. ἡμεῖϲ μὲν γάρ φαμεν ὑμᾶϲ,
ὑμεῖϲ δ' ἡμᾶϲ. ϲκεψώμεθα δὴ κἀντιτιθῶμεν πρὸϲ ἕκαϲτον,
παραβάλλουϲαι τῆϲ τε γυναικὸϲ καὶ τἀνδρὸϲ τοὔνομ' ἑκάϲτου.
Ναυϲιμάχηϲ μέν #γ'# ἥττων ἐϲτὶν Χαρμῖνοϲ· δῆλα δὲ τἄργα.
καὶ μὲν δὴ καὶ Κλεοφῶν χείρων πάντωϲ δήπου Ϲαλαβακχοῦϲ. 805
πρὸϲ Ἀριϲτομάχην δὲ χρόνου πολλοῦ, πρὸϲ ἐκείνην τὴν Μαραθῶνι,
καὶ Ϲτρατονίκην ὑμῶν οὐδεὶϲ οὐδ' ἐγχειρεῖ πολεμίζειν.
ἀλλ' Εὐβούληϲ τῶν πέρυϲιν τίϲ βουλευτήϲ ἐϲτιν ἀμείνων

[89] *Pax* 982-5.

παραδοὺϲ ἑτέρῳ τὴν βουλείαν; οὐδ᾽ Ἄνυτοϲ τοῦτό γε φήϲει.

οὕτωϲ ἡμεῖϲ πολὺ βελτίουϲ τῶν ἀνδρῶν εὐχόμεθ᾽ εἶναι. 810

οὐδ᾽ ἂν ζεύγει κλέψαϲα γυνὴ κατὰ πεντήκοντα τάλαντα

εἰϲ πόλιν ἔλθοι τῶν δημοϲίων· ἀλλ᾽ ἢν τὰ μέγιϲθ᾽ ὑφέληται,

φορμὸν πυρῶν τἀνδρὸϲ κλέφαϲ᾽, αὐθημερὸν ἀνταπέδωκεν.

And so, we are clearly

Far better than you, and a test of our superiority can be seen. 800

Let's give a test: who's worse? For we say it's you,

While you say it's us. Indeed, let's consider, and compare one to another

Putting side by side the name of each woman and man.

Nausimache ['Sea-battle'] at any rate has bested Charminos: that's obvious.

And indeed Cleophon is in every way inferior to Salabaccho, of course. 805

For some time now, with *Aristomache* ['Best-battle'], and with *Stratonike* ['Army-victory']

At Marathon, none of you have even tried to do battle.

But is there a counsellor among last year's bunch, who've handed on their

Role, better than *Euboule* ['Good-planning']? Not even you yourself could say that.

Thus we boast to be far better than men. 810

And no women having stolen fifty talents from the public coffers

Goes into the city in a carriage: But the greatest thing a woman has made away with

Is a measure of wheat stolen from her husband, and she gives something in turn the same day.

The women's claims about their sex transform from self-defence to self-aggrandisement, as they argue that women are provably superior to men. This parallels the *agon* of *Melanippe Desmostis* particularly closely, as in a fragment from that scene the female speaker (possibly Melanippe, or possibly the wicked queen Siris) makes the same claim, that women are superior to men. In both, the allegation is subversive, but phrased in the language of testing and proof.[90] Such language is suggestive of logical reasoning, but in *Thesmophoriazusae* the argument to follow has no more than comic logic, as the speaker goes on to compare historical men with the virtues implied by female names. So Charminos has been bested by 'Sea-battle', no man has tried to beat 'Best-battle' or 'Army-victory' at Marathon, and no councillor has done their job better than 'Good-planning'.[91] These constitute personal attacks on named (male) *komoidoumenoi*, Charminos (804) and Cleophon (805), and a vague imputation of ill-counselling by last year's magistrates (808-9), aimed at provoking laughter at the expense of these **out-groups**, but the patently false logic which pits historical persons against abstract concepts suggested by feminine Greek speaking names, is also entertainingly fanciful.

Salabaccho was a well-known prostitute according to a scholium on *Knights* 765, in which play Paphlagon-Cleon conjectures that he has done the most for the people of Athens 'after Lysicles and Cynna and Salabaccho.'[92] The placement of her name at the end of the line at *Knights* may suggest that Salabaccho is the most infamous of the bunch. At the end of the line in *Thesmophoriazusae*, it is a delayed surprise stressing the politician Cleophon's iniquity. Apart from this targeted humour at named *komoidoumenoi*, there is also a reference to men performing less valiantly in the current war than they did at

[90] Fr. 494.3-4: αἱ δ᾽ εἰϲ᾽ ἀμείνουϲ ἀρϲένων δείξω δ᾽ ἐγώ… ξυμβόλαι᾽ ἀμάρτυρα; cf. βάϲανόϲ (800), βάϲανον (801), ϲκεψώμεθα δὴ κἀντιτιθῶμεν πρὸϲ ἕκαϲτον (802).
[91] Austin & Olson (2004) *ad loc.* note that no Nausimache is attested in classical Athens, but the other names are more or less common: *LGPN* ii. s.v.
[92] Σ *Eq.* 765d.

Marathon; hardly an incisive or offensive observation given Marathon's status as the Athenian military triumph *par excellence*.[93]

She next argues that women are superior because they do not steal on the same scale as men. The scale of the thefts they allege of men is exaggeratedly huge, making the theft by a woman of one measure of wheat pale in comparison. References to women stealing have occurred throughout the *Thesmophoriazusae,* and was a common stereotype of women, as discussed in section one of this chapter. Theft of wine is a particular common trope in comedy, and one that will be particularly salient given the prolonged *Telephus* parody at 689-761. Here the theft is less salacious than wine, and the women supposedly return it the very same day.

Austin and Olson say that this is 'no simple theft… but a complicated illicit transaction, in which the woman filches the wheat, lends or sells it to someone else… and gets it back by the end of the day. No details are supplied, and what matters is that the existence of a complex, shadowy world of female thievery and intrigue is taken for granted.'[94] This is rather a complicated backdrop to extrapolate from such a short description (812-3), and interpreting this line and a half thus renders them without any discernible comic **beat**. Alternatively, it could have carried a sense of sexual innuendo, which would have provided a comic **beat**. ἀνταποδίδωμι can mean to return something, but it can also mean to pay back. In the context of a woman to her husband, it seems plausible that this could means paying back in sexual favours. In *Wealth* a shortened version of this compound verb, ἀποδίδωμι, clearly implies repayment through sexual favours,[95] and the same verb is used again, albeit as part of a support-verb construction

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[93] For more on Aristophanes' treatment of Marathon, see my chapters on *Acharnians* and *Wasps*, and Hunt (forthcoming).
[94] Austin & Olson (2004) *ad loc.*
[95] *Pl.* 1031.

(ἀποδίδωμι χάριν) in *Ecclesiazusae*, when a young man declares that he will repay his young female saviour with a 'big, thick thank you'.[96]

The innuendo in *Thesmophoriazusae* is less overt, but could have been made obvious through gesture or intonation, and the idea that women might harness their sexuality to procure food from men seems to be the implication of Hesiod's advice in *Works and Days*: 'Do not let a woman in clothes that draw attention to her bottom deceive you, coaxing you with blandishments; she is after your granary'.[97]

Parasol-Throwers 814-29

ἀλλ' ἡμεῖϲ ἂν πολλοὺϲ τούτων
ἀποδείξαιμεν ταῦτα ποιοῦνταϲ, 815
καὶ πρὸϲ τούτοιϲ γάϲτριδαϲ ἡμῶν
ὄνταϲ μᾶλλον καὶ λωποδύταϲ
καὶ βωμολόχουϲ κἀνδραποδιϲτάϲ.
καὶ μὲν δή που καὶ τὰ πατρῷά γε
χείρουϲ ἡμῶν εἰϲιν cῴζειν· 820
ἡμῖν μὲν γὰρ cῶν ἔτι καὶ νῦν
τἀντίον, ὁ κανών, οἱ καλαθίϲκοι,
τὸ ϲκιάδειον·
τοῖϲ δ' ἡμετέροιϲ ἀνδράϲι τούτοιϲ
ἀπόλωλεν μὲν πολλοῖϲ ὁ κανὼν 825
ἐκ τῶν οἴκων αὐτῇ λόγχῃ,
πολλοῖϲ δ' ἑτέροιϲ ἀπὸ τῶν ὤμων

[96] *Ec.* 1047-8. *Pax* 966-67 also has the verb δίδωμι take on a sexual meaning, though there the innuendo may be dependent on the object given: κριθή can mean either barley-corn or penis.
[97] *Op.* 373-4; see West (1978) *ad loc.*

ἐν ταῖς στρατιαῖς

ἔρριπται τὸ σκιάδειον.

But we could show many of you men

Who do these things. 815

And in addition are gluttons, more so than

Us, and robbers,

And altar-thieves and people-snatchers.

And clearly you are worse than

Us at preserving ancestral goods: 820

For we still now keep our

Loom, pole, baskets

And parasol:

But for these our men

Many of them have lost their pole 825

From your house, spear-head and all,

And many others of you have thrown from your shoulders

On campaign

And abandoned your parasol.

In this anapaestic *pnigos* women say that many men are guilty of stealing from the public coffers. They add a string of additional accusations revolving around crimes typically committed by men, before accusing men of failing to look after their property as proficiently as women can. Women’s role in the preservation of household goods was an

acknowledged virtue, as in the agonistic female encomium of Μελανίππη ἡ Δεcμῶτιc,[98] and here it finds pointed purpose, as it is used to denigrate men by contrast. Austin and Olson detect an innuendo in the word used to signify both the women's weaving pole, and the men's spear-shafts (κανών 822, 825), although this innuendo is swerved away from when the κανών of the men is revealed, in a moment of **incongruity**, to be a spear-pole.[99] The passage ends in another *para prosdokian*, as the expected allegation of desertion symbolised by shield-throwing is replaced by the recurrence of τὸ cκιάδειον (829).

Mothers Rewarded, Mothers Punished 830-45

πόλλ' ἂν αἱ γυναῖκεc ἡμεῖc ἐν δίκῃ μεμψαίμεθ' ἂν 830
τοῖcιν ἀνδράcιν δικαίωc, ἓν δ' ὑπερφυέcτατον.
χρῆν γάρ, ἡμῶν εἰ τέκοι τιc ἄνδρα χρηcτὸν τῇ πόλει,
ταξίαρχον ἢ cτρατηγόν, λαμβάνειν τιμήν τινα,
προεδρίαν τ' αὐτῇ δίδοcθαι cτηνίοιcι καὶ cκίροιc
ἔν τε ταῖc ἄλλαιc ἑορταῖc αἷcιν ἡμεῖc ἤγομεν· 835
εἰ δὲ δειλὸν καὶ πονηρὸν ἄνδρα τιc τέκοι γυνή,
ἢ τριήραρχον πονηρὸν ἢ κυβερνήτην κακόν,
ὑcτέραν αὐτὴν καθῆcθαι cκάφιον ἀποκεκαρμένην
τῆc τὸν ἀνδρεῖον τεκούcηc. τῷ γὰρ εἰκόc, ὦ πόλιc,
τὴν Ὑπερβόλου καθῆcθαι μητέρ' ἠμφιεcμένην 840
λευκὰ καὶ κόμαc καθεῖcαν πληcίον τῆc Λαμάχου,
καὶ δανείζειν χρήμαθ'; ᾗ χρῆν, εἰ δανείcειέν τινι
καὶ τόκον πράττοιτο, διδόναι μηδέν' ἀνθρώπων τόκον,

[98] E. fr. 494.9-11: νέμουcι δ' οἴκουc καὶ τὰ ναυcτολούμενα/ ἔ[cω] δόμων cῴζουcιν, οὐδ' ἐρημίᾳ/ γυναικὸc οἶκοc εὐπινὴc οὐδ' ὄλβιοc.
[99] Austin and Olson (2004) *ad loc.*

ἀλλ’ ἀφαιρεῖϲθαι βίᾳ τὰ χρήματ’ εἰπόντας τοδί,

"ἀξία γοῦν εἶ τόκου τεκοῦϲα τοιοῦτον τόκον." 845

We women could by right bring many accusations 830

Against men rightly, but one is most extraordinary.

For we ought, if one of us should bear a son who is useful for the city,

A taxiarch or a general, to take some reward,

And a front-row seat be given to her at the Stenia and Skiroi

And in the rest of the festivals which we hold: 835

And if a woman should bear a cowardly or wretched man,

A worthless trierarch or a bad helmsman,

She ought to sit with her hair in a bowl-cut behind

The woman who bore a real man. For is it fitting, oh city,

That the mother of Hyperbolus sits, wearing 840

White and with her hair down, near the mother of Lamachus,

And lends out money on interest, when really one ought, if they borrow money

From her and owe interest, no man should give her the interest,

But they ought to make off even with the capital by force, saying:

‘Are you really worthy of interest, when you’ve created such an interesting son?’ 845

This last passage begins with the claim that women could accuse men of many sins ἐν δίκῃ… δικαίωϲ (830-31), the pleonasm underlining the alleged unassailable righteousness of their claims, but also the speaker’s indignance. Instead of attacking men wholesale, the real thrust of the insult of this passage is directed towards Hyperbolus’ mother, who sits in prominent festival seats with loose hair and dressed in white, and was apparently actively

engaging in loan-sharking. Presumably, as a woman, the mother of a controversial politician (Hyperbolus was exiled in 416), and a loan-shark to boot, Hyperbolus' mother made an easy target for disparagement humour, and the audience would appreciate the hostile jokes at her and her son's expense, while the alliterative and punning wordplay of τόκου τεκοῦcα τοιοῦτον τόκον also generates humour through semantic means as the audience are called to **resolve** the **incongruity** produced by the differing meanings of τόκος invoked in quick succession.

5. Conclusions

In these two back-to-back 'women' plays, Aristophanes uses misogynistic humour, harnessing pre-existing gendered **in-group** and **out-group** dynamics. Given the stereotypes about women that existed, this was surely a promising means of generating humour. However, he is not heavy-handed with this kind of humour in the parabases.

Instead, in the Lysistrata, we find that the layering of political identities onto gender identities is just as important. Indeed, the political clash is the central conceit of the plot, and Aristophanes was is keen to satirise devotees of democracy in the form of the paranoid, delusional old men. In the parabasis, innuendo and gendered jokes balance out politically provocative aspects of the plot.

Later, in *Thesmophoriazusae*, the dramatic **world** of the play takes Euripidean heroines as its input, framing the speech of the coryphaeus in defence of her gender as suspicious. The fact that the coryphaeus seems unwittingly to fall into the role of a manipulative advocate for womankind allows the audience to enjoy a feeling of **superiority** over the character, since they know more than her, and also seems to confirm, in comic form, Euripides' (supposed) presentation of women.

Amphibians and Ambivalence

Slippery Oligarchs in *Frogs*

The epirrhema of *Frogs* has been understood, almost unanimously, as eschewing jokes in favour of serious, practicable advice, earnestly endorsed by the poet. All σπουδαῖα, no γελοῖα. Such a reading makes the passage anomalous in all of Aristophanes. In this chapter I argue that the parabasis is not uniquely humourless, but merely subtle in its humour. The passage constitutes satire, as the speakers represent a familiar political viewpoint: the crypto-oligarch, who proclaims democratic values when under scrutiny, while *sotto voce* urging leniency for attempted oligarchs. The euphemism and double-speak in their attempt to manipulate the audience would appear, to at least some audience members, laughably absurd.

At the same time, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, political satire can invite simultaneous variant interpretations, and while to a hardcore democrat the figure on stage may seem a humorous and purposeful send-up by Aristophanes of a particular faction of the *demos*, to the audience member with anti-democratic inclinations, the speakers will seem like slightly exaggerated figures, but ones whose viewpoint is fundamentally correct and sympathetic, and they may laugh more at the expense of the new 'base' sort of politician whom the speaker mocks in the antepirrhema. It is the fundamental ambivalence of such comedy that has led to the *Frogs* being so misunderstood for so long.

1. Aristophanes' Politics

The *Frogs* holds a uniquely important position in debates concerning Aristophanes' own political stance and influence.[1] The parabasis of the *Frogs* does not feature the poet's voice or discuss him, as in the first five extant Aristophanic plays. Nevertheless, the pointedness and supposed seriousness of the political advice involved,[2] combined with the evidence of the ancient testimonia which suggests that the parabasis was particularly well-received by the Athenian audience,[3] has led many to take this advice as a true reflection of the poet's own politics. The *Frogs* parabasis advises the audience to re-enfranchise those who were without citizenship rights, particularly those who lost these rights due to their involvement in the oligarchic coup of 411. This advice has been almost ubiquitously accepted as earnestly endorsed by the poet.[4] Even Heath, who for all other plays argues that Aristophanes' oeuvre had no serious political intent at all, admits to there being a direct and discernible political motive to the piece, noting that the call for this sort of amnesty 'was a practicable policy in 405' and the parabasis seems 'by the criterion of jokelessness, to be a good candidate for the ascription of serious intent.'[5] The *Frogs* parabasis, by this reading, is an anomaly, apparently the only passage of Aristophanes with direct political purpose and no humour, where elsewhere the poet's voice is ambiguous.

Recently there have been two dissenting voices: Smith has recently argued, on the basis of the impracticality of the advice, the tone in which the restoration of would-be oligarchs is put forward, and the political inconsistencies of the piece, that the parabasis

[1] For these debates, see my introduction, pages 2-3.
[2] de Ste. Croix (1972) 358: 'the seriousness of [the Frogs parabasis] is not, I think, denied by anyone'; Arnott (1991) 19: 'Nobody has ever doubted that these lines… were meant to be taken seriously as a call to political action.'
[3] See section 3.
[4] Stanford (1963) 131: 'The Chorus now (as usual in a *Parabasis*) expresses Ar.'s personal opinion on current political matters.'
[5] Heath (1987) 19-20. Silk (2000) 301-20 explores the binary of 'serious' and 'funny' in Aristophanic scholarship, and what it presupposes.

cannot be understood as earnestly meant advice.[6] In fact, Smith argues, Aristophanes is 'blending all of the most dangerous and foolish political extremisms into a stew of nonsense, and then presenting it to the audience to see how good it looks... showing them that the kinds of ideas that many of them were actually now considering should be seen as madness.'[7] To Smith, Aristophanes' purpose is didactic, but only indirectly, as he satirises contemporary political thought in order to urge his audience to think things through. Stella, likewise recognises the argument as inconsistent and manipulative: 'è evidentemente assurdo, è scopertamente pretestuoso.'[8]

I concur that the speech is politically inconsistent and that the tone is more complicated than previously allowed. I do not believe, however, that the piece is intended to blend together foolish contemporary ideas into a 'stew of nonsense',[9] nor that the piece should be understood as didactic, even indirectly. In fact, what we see in *Frogs* is a chorus that represents, and comically misrepresents, a particular political viewpoint. This is typical of parabases, where, save for a few less obvious choral identities (clouds, unspecified Greeks, birds), the choruses embody and satirise a particular recognisable demographic.[10] In *Frogs*, it is oligarchic sympathisers placed for study under the comic microscope. The parabasis satirises this particular political viewpoint, and it is their opinions and rhetoric which is skewered for political effect.

A close reading of the text reveals that the parabasis is, counter to what many have stated, not devoid of humour, but in fact replete with subtle comic **beats**, as the speakers make jibes at their political enemies – the πονηροί – and at the same time comically

[6] Smith (2019).
[7] *Ibid.* 41.
[8] Stella (2016) 30. Stella's article focuses more on how loaded political language warps meaning in this parabasis, and aside from observing that Aristophanes holds a 'specchio parodico' (ibid.) up to a particularly tricky sort of agitator, he does not comment on Aristophanes' intent.
[9] Smith (2019) 41.
[10] Elderly Marathonomachoi in *Acharnians* and *Wasps*; the hippic class in *Knights*; men, women, and die-hard democrats in *Lysistrata*; women in *Thesmophoriazusae*.

undermine themselves with obviously faulty and disingenuous rhetoric. The nonsensical inconsistencies arise as these figures try to get what they want (the re-enfranchisement of the ἄτιμοι), and simultaneously to toe the democratic line by endorsing the enfranchisement of the slaves and metics that fought at Arginusae, yet cannot hide their aristocratic elite prejudices.[11]

As ever in Aristophanes, the comedy retains its broadest possible appeal because it is two-faced; the individual audience member is liable to selectively interpret ambiguous humour in order to render it non-threatening to their own identity and political beliefs,[12] and here Aristophanes' comedy – whether intentionally or not – enables this potential for differing and simultaneously valid interpretations by providing us moments to laugh with and laugh at the speakers in turn. One audience member will see the representation of oligarchic sympathisers as embodied by the parabasis, note the inconsistencies, euphemisms and double-speak, and interpret the passage as a send-up of the pro-oligarchic faction of Athens who generally toe the democratic line while *sotto voce* opining about oligarchy. This audience member will accordingly see Aristophanes, since he targets this perspective for derision, as a champion of democracy, satirising pro-oligarchy sentiment for political effect. Another audience member will **identify** with the speakers, appreciate the anti-newcomer sentiment with its colourful targeted humour of πονηροί in the antepirrhema, and understand the parabatic speeches to constitute a somewhat exaggerated portrait of nonetheless sympathetic and politically savvy thinkers. This audience member sees Aristophanes as endorsing these sentiments, and acting as a political ally of theirs.

[11] This comes out particularly at lines 693-9.
[12] See my introduction, section 4.1.

2. Before and After the *Frogs*

It will be helpful to my argument to adumbrate the historic context of the *Frogs*' first production.

In 411, an oligarchic coup was staged. The events are narrated by Thucydides and the constitutional reforms are explained in the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Athenians.*[13] Accounts have been elaborated by various historians who combine and augment these sources.[14] The most relevant facts are these: the coup was initially aimed at securing the support of the Persians by changing the city's constitution. There was discord between the orchestrators from early on, and the oligarchs ended up breaking into factions. The ones supporting the stricter sort of oligarchy (e.g. Phrynichus), and those who supported a more diluted form. The oligarchy lasted less than half a year, and ended with the public assassination of Phrynichus, who was later tried and condemned posthumously, and his murderers honoured. Democracy was put on pause in Athens only for reasons of expedience; the pause was short-lived; violence ensued; the perpetrators were publicly condemned. The temporary loss of democracy was a traumatic event, and one that was publicly condemned after the fact.

Exceptionally, after the coup the city enacted a decree proposed by Demophantus which stated that every citizen would swear an oath, in public before the City Dionysia of 409, that they would kill – personally or through the mechanisms of state justice – anyone attempting to overthrow the city's democracy, and the killer of such a person would be rewarded.[15] At the same Dionysia, gold crowns were announced as an honour to the

[13] Th. 8.63.3-97, Arist. *Ath.* 30.1-32.1.

[14] E.g. Kagan (1987) 106-210, Andrewes (1992b).

[15] Andoc. 1.96-8. Canevaro & Harris (2012) have questioned the trustworthiness of the texts preserved in *On the Mysteries*; Sommerstein (2014) defends the oath of Demophantus as preserved in this speech as being a perhaps slightly corrupt but basically genuine artefact. Even if Canevaro and Harris are correct to question the document as preserved, this should not cast doubt upon the basic fact of the event, which is referenced in Dem. 20.159 and Lycurg. 124-7 as well. Shear (2008) examines the consequences of the oath with regard to Athenian political identity.

murderers of the leading oligarch, Phrynichus.[16] An oath was 'a powerful and important ritual in the creation of Athenian civic identity',[17] and the Athenian citizen swore oaths before performing various offices crucial to the running of democracy. Lycurgus could even say, in a speech prosecuting a private citizen for betraying Athens around 331, that 'the oath is the thing which holds democracy together.'[18] An oath is a particular type of speech act, to borrow a term from philosophy of language,[19] and one which in this case constituted a public commitment on the part of each citizen to defend democracy. The oath of Demophantus may even have been a factor in the successful deposing of the next Athenian oligarchy, as the oath prevented pro-democrats from being 'paralysed by a revolutionary coordination problem', and thus facilitated 'large-scale mobilization in defense of the democracy'.[20] All this is to say, while sympathy for oligarchy and the would-be oligarchs of 41 lived on in the city, it must have been an unpopular sentiment to express publicly, at least in the immediate aftermath of the coup and the oath of Demophantus.

The war continues, and Athens is still in a dire state. In this context, the battle of Arginusae, an Athenian victory, may have seemed like a turning point for the better, and the citizens chose to mark this victory by enfranchising the slaves and metics who fought.[21] This was an extraordinary measure.[22] Prior to this, extending citizenship rights to outsiders was a rare event. On the other hand, during the Peloponnesian War there is an emerging pattern of granting such rights. The Plataeans were granted citizenship rights in

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[16] *IG* i3102.6–14.
[17] Fletcher (2012) 103.
[18] Lycurg. *Leoc*. 79.
[19] Austin (1962).
[20] Teegarden (2014) 17.
[21] Hellanic. *FGrH* 323a F 25; *Ra.* 33-4, 190-1, 693-6.
[22] Worthington (1989) advises caution in reading these sources, but nevertheless accepts that the evidence of *Ra.* 693-4 tells decisively in favour of the historicity of the enfranchisement of the slaves and metics who fought at Arginusae.

427,[23] formalising what had been an honorary arrangement from the late 6th century, and the later re-enfranchisement of ἄτιμοι with the decree of Patroclides, along with the enfranchisement of Samians, can be seen as further iterations of the pattern.[24] Athens at this point had lost between a third to a half of its population since the start of the Peloponnesian War due to the combined devastating effects of plague and warfare.[25] The city's increasing willingness to enfranchise non-citizens *en masse* was expedient, and is an indication of the manpower shortage it was suffering.

The enfranchisement of slaves may have served a practical purpose, in disincentivising desertion,[26] but it is also telling that the Athenian people would rather extend citizenship to slaves and foreigners at this stage, than re-enfranchise the ἄτιμοι. There may have been talk, something in the air, about re-enfranchising the men involved in the oligarchic coup of 411. Perhaps this prospect was made even more palatable after the execution of the generals of Arginusae,[27] which may have shaken trust in the wisdom of the democracy, and deprived the city of eight notable politicians – six executed, two fled. Nevertheless, with the oath of Demophantus – a public, divinely secured pledge to defend democracy – less than four years in the past, it seems unlikely that an endorsement of re-enfranchising the ἄτιμοι could be voiced on the public stage of the Lenaea festival without some element of satire, some hint that the message spoken was tongue-in-cheek.

In this context, the *Frogs* was staged. In the summer that followed, the Athenian navy was destroyed in the battle of Aegospotamoi.[28] This military disaster effectively ended the war, since the Athenians could now be starved into submission by siege. It was in this climate that the Athenians enacted the decree of Patroclides, an amnesty for the ἄτιμοι, and

[23] Isoc. 12.94, D. 59.104.
[24] See section 2.4 below.
[25] Kagan (1987) 110, Hansen (1988).
[26] Hunt (2001) 359.
[27] X. *HG.* 1.6.33-7.35; D.S. 13.100-103.2; see Kagan (1987) 354-75.
[28] X. *HG.* 2.1.22-30; D.S.13.105-6. Later versions derive from Xenophon's.

at this time they also granted citizenship rights to the Samians – an act of desperation from a broken city.[29] The siege did not last long, and the unfavourable terms which Athens accepted included the demolition of the Long Walls.[30]

3. The Decree of Patroclides

An aspect of the *Frogs* parabasis that has marked it out as exceptional, is the fact that its advice was apparently followed. The decree of Patroclides was passed towards the end of 405, and enacted an amnesty policy for the ἄτιμοι, as the *Frogs* parabasis advised. The advice of the parabasis was not just practicable, but apparently practised.[31] However, this evidence does not prove that the parabasis was seriously meant by Aristophanes as political advice, or received by the audience as such. The crude chronological pattern – Aristophanes' chorus advised it, the people then enacted it – is no evidence for causation, but a clear case of *post hoc ergo propter hoc* thinking.[32]

Nor is it hard to understand why Patroclides' decree was enacted if we remove *Frogs* from the picture. Athens had lost so many men, even before the battle of Aegospotami, that it was willing to grant citizenship to slaves and metics. The situation was even more dire after Aegospotami, when the city lost her navy. In this context, the re-enfranchisement of those who had lost their citizenship rights following the 411 coup is simply another iteration of this pattern,[33] motivated by the perilous situation. The chorus' advice in the parabasis was timely, and probably reflected ongoing debate, but it seems highly unlikely that it would have significantly impacted the debate; partly because

[29] Andoc. 1. 77-79; for discussion of the trustworthiness of this text, see Hansen (2015), rebutting Canevaro & Harris (2012); For the Samians: *ML* 94.
[30] Xenoph. *HG.* 2.2.20-3.
[31] Arnott (1991) 20-1 judges this decree to have been enacted 'without, or more probably with the influence of that parabasis'. Allan (2012) 101 thinks the Athenians implemented Aristophanes' advice, not just through the decree of Patroclides, but also when they ruled that Theramenes had failed his *dokimasia*.
[32] Smith (2019) 39.
[33] It was also at this point that Athens gave citizenship status to the Samians: *ML* 94, Andrewes (2002) 495.

political satire rarely has a significant impact on the opinions of its audience members,[34] and partly because, as I discuss, the message of the parabasis is ambivalent, since one can either laugh at or with the crypto-oligarchic speakers.

4. The Hypothesis and *Vita*

In the play's hypothesis and the poet's longest *Vita*, we find more substantial evidence than the decree of Patroclides to suggest that the play's parabasis was taken seriously by the audience.[35] The hypothesis declares:

> οὕτω δὲ ἐθαυμάϲθη τὸ δρᾶμα διὰ τὴν ἐν αὐτῷ παράβαϲιν ὥϲτε καὶ ἀνεδιδάχθη, ὥϲ φηϲι Δικαίαρχοϲ.
>
> 'The play was so admired on account of the parabasis in it that it was even reperformed, as Dicaearchus says.'

The evidence of this hypothesis is strengthened when read in combination with the longest surviving *Vita* of Aristophanes, the relevant section of which reads:[36]

> μάλιϲτα δὲ ἐπηινέθη καὶ ἠγαπήθη ὑπὸ τῶν πολιτῶν ϲφόδρα, ἐπειδὴ διὰ τῶν αὐτοῦ δραμάτων ἐϲπούδαϲε δεῖξαι τὴν τῶν Ἀθηναίων πολιτείαν, ὡϲ ἐλευθέρα τέ ἐϲτι καὶ ὑπ' οὐδενὸϲ τυράννου δουλαγωγουμένη, ἀλλ' ὅτι δημοκρατία ἐϲτὶ καὶ ἐλεύθεροϲ ὢν ὁ δῆμοϲ ἄρχει ἑαυτοῦ. τούτου οὖν χάριν ἐπῃνέθη καὶ ἐϲτεφανώθη θαλλῷ τῆϲ ἱερᾶϲ ἐλαίαϲ, ὃϲ νενόμιϲται ἰϲότιμοϲ χρυϲῷ ϲτεφάνῳ, εἰπὼν ἐκεῖνα τὰ ἐν τοῖϲ Βατράχοιϲ περὶ τῶν ἀτίμων· τὸν ἱερὸν χορὸν δίκαιον πολλὰ χρηϲτὰ τῇ πόλει ξυμπαραινεῖν.
>
> 'And he was especially praised and loved very much by the people, since through his plays he sought to show the constitution of the Athenians, how it both is free

[34] See my introduction, section 4.2.
[35] Hyp. I^{C}, *PCG* iii.2 test. 1.35-40.
[36] *PCG* iii.2 test. 1.35-40.

and enslaved by no tyrant, but that it is democracy, and since it is free the people govern themselves. And so, thanks to this he was praised and crowned with a branch of holy olive wood, which is considered of equal worth to a golden crown, having said those things in the *Frogs* about the disenfranchised: 'It is right for a holy chorus to give lots of good advice to the city.''

Scholars stress Dicaearchus' trustworthiness as a source: he was 'a learned and reliable scholar',[37] a 'disciple d'Aristote'.[38] Reperformance of a play on the city-wide scale was a relatively rare occurrence,[39] an honour otherwise at this point only bestowed to Aeschylus posthumously, if indeed it was.[40] The hypothesis, then, is certainly strong evidence that *Frogs* was reperformed and that this was an unusual honour shown to Aristophanes. Reading the hypothesis and the *Vita* together, scholars have inferred that both sources draw on one common source, an official decree honouring Aristophanes after the performance of the *Frogs* because of its parabasis and commissioning a reperformance of the play, and that this decree was probably Dicaearchus' source as well.[41]

However, this is speculative,[42] and Rosen urges caution in reading these two texts.[43] Although the reperformance itself seems likely to have occurred, there is reason to question the idea that this was due to the parabasis, 'a handful of lines that had nothing to do with the plot anyway.'[44] To summarise just a few of Rosen's arguments: we do not know whether Dicaearchus attested to the parabasis being the reason for *Frogs'* reperformance, or if he only vouched for the fact of its reperformance; we cannot exclude

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[37] Arnott (1991) 20.
[38] Salviat (1989) 171.
[39] Lamari (2015), Lamari (2017).
[40] Pickard-Cambridge (1968 [1953]) 86, 100; Hutchinson (1985) xlii-xliii argues that it is unlikely that Aeschylus' plays were reperformed before 386, and Biles (2006) argues against the historicity of the decree honouring Aeschylus.
[41] *PCG* iii. 2.2; Sommerstein (1993, 2009); MacDowell (1995)
[42] Smith (2019) calls this a 'remarkable speculation'.
[43] Rosen (2015b)
[44] Rosen (2015b) 255.

the possibility that διὰ τὴν ἐν αὐτῷ παράβασιν was an inference made by the hypothesis author, or by Dicaearchus himself; the phrasing of the *Vita* is quite vague, and while εἰπών may have an explanatory sense (i.e. he was crowned *because* he said those things in the *Frogs*) it could be temporal and suggesting the *Frogs* as merely one example of the kind of comic political messages for which Aristophanes was known; τούτου οὖν χάριν seems to refer to what precedes, and so chalks Aristophanes' being honoured up to his career as a whole, rather than necessarily looking forwards to the mention of the *Frogs*; ancient biographies show a marked tendency to mix fact with inference,[45] and this may be the case here in the *Vita*'s treatment of the *Frogs*.

I concur and add that a decree quoting or paraphrasing a line from the play as justification for Aristophanes' honouring would represent an unprecedented level of detail amongst Athenian honorary decrees of this time period.[46] It is therefore best to be careful with these sources. It certainly seems very likely that *Frogs* was reperformed, possibly at the Lenaea of the following year,[47] but the idea that this honour was bestowed solely on the basis of what must have been highly context-specific, topical advice, is less certain, since we cannot rule out the possibility of faulty inferences on the part of the biography author, the hypothesis author, some intermediary source(s) or Dicaearchus himself. Alternative reasons for *Frogs*' selection for reperformance have been suggested.[48] Weil suggested that the play was really performed because of the aesthetic appeal of the play's *katabasis*, and διὰ τὴν ἐν αὐτῷ παράβασιν was corrupt and ought to be emended to διὰ τὴν εἰς Ἅιδου κατάβασιν.[49] This emendation has been roundly rejected on methodological

[45] Lefkowitz (1981).
[46] Hellenistic decrees tend to be more verbose, e.g. *IG* II^3 1160.3-21.
[47] Salviat (1989).
[48] Sommerstein (2009) thinks the reperformance was pushed by enemies of Cleophon to sway public opinion against him. Cleophon is indeed mocked by *Frogs* more than any other *komoidoumenos*, but this amounts to only three occasions (674–85, 504, 1532–3). This is a mild and indirect means of waging political war if it is so, particularly when compared to Plato Comicus' *Cleophon*, against which *Frogs* competed.
[49] Weil (1882).

principles, since it ‘corrects’ something that makes perfect sense, but the impulse behind Weil’s conjecture is appealing. Is it not more likely, ignoring the hypothesis, that *Frogs* was honoured for the humorous parody of Heracles’ *katabasis*, or some other aesthetic appeal of the play, rather than for its parabasis? Or perhaps because *Frogs* revived and gave an appropriate send-off to a treasured Athenian celebrity, the recently deceased Euripides?

Two further points. Firstly, if Aristophanes was honoured by the city – for any reason whatsoever – and his rewards included a restaging of *Frogs*, it would be an easy mistake to make, if Dicaearchus, or the hypothesis author, or the ancient biographer or some unknown intermediary source inferred that Aristophanes was being honoured because of the *Frogs*.

Secondly, it has been noted that audiences are liable to misattribute intentions to the authors of comedy,[50] and that the perceived impact of political satire frequently dwarfs its actual effects.[51] It is therefore plausible that the *Frogs* parabasis was interpreted by some portion of the audience as earnest advice from Aristophanes, and was perceived after the fact as having influenced political tides in Athens, because comedy was seen as wielding more political power than it typically does, and because the decree of Patroclides does seem to enact the advice. Aristophanes advised it, the people enacted it. This is, as already mentioned, *post hoc ergo propter hoc* thinking, but there is a reason why this logical fallacy is common. The narrative is simple and appealing. Thus, it is plausible that *Frogs* was viewed retrospectively as endorsing an opinion which in fact it merely raises and satirises. The *Frogs* parabasis need not have been unanimously or even widely

[50] Audiences are liable to misattribute intentions to the authors of comedy: see my introduction, section 4.1.
[51] Esralew & Young (2012), and see my introduction, section 4.2.

interpreted as an earnest endorsement of amnesty for the ἄτιμοι for this to have nevertheless later become the dominant narrative.

5. The Master-Slave Theme

It is important also to note that the chorus' advice is not presented in a vacuum. The audience would naturally understand the parabasis in light of what they have just seen in the preceding scenes.[52] In the parabasis, the chorus advise the audience to re-enfranchise those failed oligarchs of the 411 coup, and in particular they contrast the plight of these ἄτιμοι with the boon experienced by the slaves who fought at Arginusae and were granted their freedom. But the theme of slavery and mastery and the shifting of places is prominent in the first half of *Frogs* and particularly in the scenes framing the parabasis, so the audience is likely to have understood the parabasis as part of a continuing discourse on the topic, and this discourse has tended to be even-handed. I submit that the parabasis continues this tone. The speakers, who represent a conservative viewpoint better aligned with the 'master' end of the spectrum, mock the slaves and political newcomers represented metaphorically by the new, base coinage. But simultaneously they undermine themselves throughout with their obviously disingenuous rhetoric and paranoia.

In the scene directly before the parabasis, there is a farcical series of events in which Dionysus gets Xanthias to take on his Heracles costume, and to pretend to be the master while he pretends to be the slave, so Dionysus can avoid being beaten (464-674). For similar selfish reasons, the pair swap outfit back and forth repeatedly. Now, this dynamic duo is introduced from the very first line of the play in light of their master-slave

[52] Bowie (1982) 29 describes a parabasis as functioning as 'a prism through which the play's chief themes are passed', reflecting and refracting in new directions the ideas presented in the surrounding dramatic context.

relationship, as Xanthias addresses Dionysus: ὦ δέσποτα.[53] Xanthias has also twice already been explicitly associated with the slaves who fought at Arginusae, among whom he wishes he had been numbered. Indeed, he would have been, were it not for a poorly-timed case of ophthalmitis.[54] The master-slave dynamic is thus brought to the fore, as is the context of the recent manumission of the slaves who fought at Arginusae. Considered against this backdrop, the scene preceding the parabasis in which master and slave swap places enacts on the level of the characters the sort of societal upheaval that Athens was undergoing.[55] The blurring of citizenship status, acted out on stage by these two characters, is an important theme.[56] Later, in the scene directly following the parabasis (738-755), Xanthias and another slave make fun of Dionysus' predilections for drinking and sex (πίνειν... καὶ βινεῖν 740). The mockery of the masters continues, before the pair bond over their shared slavish foibles, such as meddling and eavesdropping (743-55).

Thus, we find that the parabasis is wedged in between two scenes which comment on the nature of mastery and slavery, and in which both masters and slaves are roundly mocked in an even-handed fashion that could be described as characteristically Aristophanic: Aristophanes frequently puts two contradictory perspectives on stage, has them clash humorously, and neither side comes off scot-free, so the playwright cannot be said fully to endorse or condemn either.[57] Similarly the *Frogs* parabasis, although the chorus represent the pro-master perspective within it, has the same controlled balance between two opposing viewpoints, because even as the chorus makes its arguments, and

[53] *Ra.* 1.
[54] *Ra.* 33-4, 190-2. Dover (1993) *ad loc.* notes that an eye disease precludes someone from fighting in Hdt. 7.229.1, although the point may be that this could be read as a coward's excuse.
[55] Hutchinson (2011).
[56] Konstan (1995) 70-71.
[57] E.g. the *agon* of the Just and Unjust Logos: *Nub.* 889-1104; the parabatic exchange at *Lys.* 614-705, for which see the previous chapter; the near constant conflict between Bdelycleon and Philocleon in *Wasps.*

makes fun of the 'base coinage' which now holds power in Athens, they also undermine themselves with their faulty rhetoric and patent attempts at manipulating the audience.

6. Choral Identity

Another aspect that may influence our understanding of the parabasis is the question of the chorus' intra-narrative identity. Once the eponymous amphibians have hopped off, the chorus represent a revelling band of dead Eleusinian initiates, delighting in the benefits which μύσται enjoy after death. Some have suggested that during the parabases, the intra-narrative identity of the chorus is sometimes laid aside, and the chorus speak as comic chorus *qua* comic chorus.[58] Could this be the case in *Frogs*? When the chorus' intra-narrative identity seems to be laid aside, they speak about the poet and his life,[59] even taking on the voice of poet himself.[60] On the other hand, in the rest of Old Comedy's parabases, the dramatic identity takes centre stage, and in these cases the unique focalisation of the chorus' identity group gives the parabasis its appeal.[61] Which category does *Frogs* fall into? And if the chorus are to be understood as Eleusinian initiates when they speak in the parabasis, how would this influence the audience's understanding of their speech?

There is no indication that the chorus change or remove their costumes, the rags worn by initiates,[62] and in the first line of the epirrhema, the chorus refer to themselves as the ἱερὸν χορόν (686), which seems aimed at reaffirming their intra-narrative role as a group

[58] E.g. Zieliński (1885) 186.
[59] *Ach.* 659-664; *Nu.* 518-62; *V.* 1284-91; *Pax.* 754-74; cf. Plato Com. fr. 99. The anapaests of *Knights* provide a counter-example, as they retain their hippic identity: 510 with my discussion.
[60] *Ach.* 659-64, *Nub.* 518-62, *V.* 1284-91, *Pax* 754-79.
[61] *Ach.* 665-718; *Eq.* 551-610; *Nu.* 563-626, 1113-1130; *V.* 1060-1121; *Pax.* 775-818, 1127-1190; *Av.* 676-800, 1059-1117; *Lys.* 614-705; *Th.* 785-845.
[62] *Ra.* 406. Initiates were expected to dedicate their clothing, which probably led to them wearing rags out of frugality; Melanth. Hist. *FHG* 326 F4 = Σ *Pl.* 845.

of dead Eleusinian initiates.[63] It is in-line with their characterisation earlier in the play at 354-71, where their opening command, 'to keep religious silence and stand aside for our dances' (354), directed at 'whoever is inexperienced' (ὅστις ἄπειρος 355) suggests their religious cleanliness and exclusivity. It is likely then that the intra-narrative identity of the chorus as Eleusinian initiates is retained and foregrounded.

An adumbrated demographic profile of the chorus' dramatic identity may be helpful here. Initiation as an Eleusinian μύστης was open to all Greek-speakers, including women and slaves. Only murderers were excluded. It was therefore the most open of Greek mystery rites.[64] Ideologically, it was not an elite affair. On the other hand, despite the Mysteries' ideological openness, it is possible that the practicalities and expenses of the festival could have prevented many poorer or slave would-be initiates from attending: the festival was long and fell within sowing season,[65] required a certain amount of fees,[66] and it was also BYOP (bring your own piglet).[67] Slave-owning masters with time and money to spare would have been the most well-represented group attending, skewing the demographic, perhaps noticeably.

Whether or not they were seen as representing mainly the comfortably-off, or masters over slaves, other aspects of their identity – as a religious group, as not wholly Athenian, and as separated from the audience by virtue of being already dead – must also mediate the

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[63] A weaker interpretation, that it refers only to their role as dramatic performers in a religious festival competition, is possible.
[64] Jameson (2014) 284-85.
[65] Initiation involved optional attendance at the Lesser Mysteries (a single day event in the month of Anthesterion), and compulsory attendance at the Greater Mysteries, which spanned ten days (15th-24nd Boedromion) with a few days break in the middle. It is plausible that many households could not easily have spared a family member, let alone a slave, from their domestic or agrarian duties for a period of such duration.
[66] Although epigraphic evidence mentions modest fees perhaps totalling 10 obols per female initiate and 12 per male, it is unclear whether smaller sub-fees are meant to be paid daily or are one-offs, since *IG* I^3 6 is fragmentary: Osborne & Rhodes (2017) 28-41. Mylonas (1961) 237 argues that the initiation expenses amounted to 15 drachmai on the basis of *IG* II^2 1672, 1.207. D. 59.21 and Ath. 2.40d-e both imply that initiation was considered a costly affair.
[67] Mylonas (1961) 249-50; Bowden (2010) 33-34.

audience's understanding of their message in some way. Their multi-faceted identity would foster differing interpretations. Their foreignness may, for example, make them an **out-group**, with a distancing effect which might cause their motives to seem suspect to some audience members. The eschatological blessings which they enjoy may seem, to another, a sign of their wisdom.[68] I note three more possible complications. Firstly, it may make a certain comic logic for those already dead to harbour more conservative political opinions: the deeds of one's aristocratic forebears may matter to one already dead rather more than, for example, the recent sea-battle at Arginusae. Secondly, there is a grim irony in taking advice from those already dead and who have already secured eternal blessings in the afterlife, since they have no skin in the game. Thirdly, whatever expectations their identity as Eleusinian initiates conjures up in the play, choruses do sometimes buck expectations in their parabases.[69] In these cases, the surprise factor may contribute to the humour. So here the 'conservative and aristocratic'[70] bent of their rhetoric may be a surprise to the audience.

Thus, the effect which the chorus' dramatic identity has on mediating their political message is very hard to pin down, but what is clear is that there are several aspects which could create distance between them and the Athenian *demos*, or indeed Aristophanes. This distance should give us pause before we assume a straightforward identification between their opinions and the opinions of the poet.

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[68] The singing and dancing typical of a chorus is also emblematic of the playfulness which the Eleusinian initiates get to indulge in after death: Kidd (2019) 184-5.
[69] See note 32 in my chapter on *Acharnians*.
[70] Hubbard (1991) 203 uses this phrase to describe both the chorus of initiates, but also Comedy's 'utopian aims', which he sees as the purification of the state and exclusion of undesirables.

7. The Parabasis

Come, Muse, and See Their Wisdom 674-85

Μοῦcα, χορῶν ἱερῶν ἐπίβηθι καὶ ἔλθ’ ἐπὶ τέρψιν ἀ-

οιδᾶc ἐμᾶc, 675

τὸν πολὺν ὀψομένη λαῶν ὄχλον, οὗ cοφίαι

μυρίαι κάθηνται

φιλοτιμότεραι Κλεοφῶντος, ἐφ’ οὗ δὴ χείλεσιν ἀμφιλάλοις

δεινὸν ἐπιβρέμεται 680

Θρῃκία χελιδὼν

ἐπὶ βάρβαρον ἑζομένη πέταλον, τρύ-

ζει δ’ ἐπίκλαυτον ἀηδόνιον νόμον, ὡς ἀπολεῖται,

κἂν ἴcαι γένωνται. 685

Muse of holy choruses, approach for the joy of

My song, 675

To see the bulk of the people, whose myriad

Wisdoms sit

More honour-loving than Cleophon, upon whose double-babbling lips

There terribly roars

A Thracian swallow

Sitting upon a barbarian leaf, and warbles

A tearful nightingale song, how he will perish

Even if the votes are equal.

The introductory ode invokes the Muse and takes us to reality,[71] breaking the fourth wall by mentioning the audience. The invocation of an appropriate Muse is common in parabases, and bears comparison to the beginning of a hymn, suggesting therefore Aristophanes' faux poetic pretensions as he places his work on a par with other, more righteous modes of poetic expression.

The audience, primed by previous plays to expect abuse and praise in the parabasis, may immediately regard σοφίαι as irony or as targeted flattery. When the audience are envisaged later on as obeying the chorus' advice, they are wise (700), but their previous actions, or their actions should they shun the chorus' advice, make them foolish (705, 734). The audience are accustomed to this carrot-and-stick rhetoric, which in this case transitions into abuse of a *komoidoumenos* (Cleophon, and in the later antode, Cleigenes). Cleophon's apparent Thracian blood is targeted for mockery here. A scholium tells us that Plato Comicus' play *Cleophon* portrayed his mother on stage speaking like a barbarian.[72]

Tripped by a Long-Dead Scapegoat 686-692

τὸν ἱερὸν χορὸν δίκαιόν ἐστι χρηστὰ τῇ πόλει

ξυμπαραινεῖν καὶ διδάσκειν. Πρῶτον οὖν ἡμῖν δοκεῖ

ἐξισῶσαι τοὺς πολίτας κἀφελεῖν τὰ δείματα,

κεἴ τις ἥμαρτε σφαλείς τι Φρυνίχου παλαίσμασιν,

ἐκγενέσθαι φημὶ χρῆναι τοῖς ὀλισθοῦσιν τότε 690

αἰτίαν ἐκθεῖσι λῦσαι τὰς πρότερον ἁμαρτίας.

Εἶτ' ἄτιμόν φημι χρῆναι μηδέν' εἶν' ἐν τῇ πόλει·

[71] Del Corno (1985) *ad loc*: l'abile nesso ὀψομένη… ὄχλον offere subito il trapasso all'attualità.
[72] Σ *Ra.* 681b.

It is just for the holy chorus to advise and to teach 686
What's right for the city. And so first we think it's best
To make citizens entirely equal and take away their fears,
And if someone made a mistake at all, tripped by Phrynichus' wrestlings,
I say it must be allowed for those that slipped then 690
To plead their case and dissolve their prior errors.
Then I say that there ought to be no disenfranchised in the city;

In χρηστά class tone may be detected. Around this time χρηστοί is used as the opposite of πονηροί in the context of political factionalism.[73] The word is used in the Old Oligarch's *Constitution of the Athenians* eighteen times to refer to the right sort of politicians, their magistracies and goals, and of course the author of this pamphlet, seems to represent exactly the sort of elite and conservative perspective which is satirised in this parabasis.[74] In this parabasis, the neuter plural characterises the chorus' advice, and so while it does not refer to a political faction directly, it still imbues them with a class aspect. Later on, this impression is confirmed and its implications for their character explored, when the chorus' oligarchic sympathies and fear of changing social hierarchies in Athens are revealed.

Next, they turn to their top concern: the disenfranchised. They think these men, currently living in fear (δείματα) should have their rights restored.[75] But the coup in which they participated is described in terms of wrestling, and the unenfranchised are framed as passive victims of the conveniently dead Phrynichus. Sommerstein notes that here the 'language is highly slanted in their [viz…] favour'.[76] Indeed, here the language is so

[73] Rosenbloom (2004) 59-66; Cagnetta & Petrocelli (1977).
[74] The *Constitution* sees Athenian democracy as effective in preserving the interests of the people, but the author, 'seems steeped in instinctive, old-fashioned class prejudice' Marr & Rhodes (2008) 16.
[75] Andoc. 1.75 suggests that some had only partially lost their rights: the soldiers in Athens during the coup were deprived of their right to participate in the Assembly or take on roles in the Council.
[76] Sommerstein (1996a) *ad loc.*

obviously biased that the audience member will recognise, engaging in **mentalising**, that this framing is indicative of the chorus' personal political sympathies, and humorously undercuts their attempts at persuasion. By scapegoating Phrynichus, who is conveniently long dead, the chorus attempt to absolve the other oligarchic agitators of any blame or responsibility, removing their agency from the equation. Phrynichus was the perfect scape-goat. He was publicly murdered following the ousting of the Four Hundred,[77] and the city honoured his assassins shortly after his death.[78] On the motion of Critias – later leader of the Thirty tyrants, and as oligarchic in sympathies as they come – he was tried for treason posthumously, his body exhumed and cast out of the city, and anyone who so much as tried to defend him was condemned to death.[79] But of course, Phrynichus did not engineer this coup single-handedly, and the rhetorical shifting of blame away from his co-conspirators will be, to some audience members, humorously disingenuous and unconvincing.

The manoeuvrings of Phrynichus are described as παλαίσμασιν, painting his co-conspirators as passive victims by turning their willing participation into a matter of physical subjugation by an aggressor. Insofar as they do admit others were at fault, this fault is distanced by the conditional (κεἴ τις ἥμαρτε 689). Presenting the coup as a bout of wrestling euphemistically minimises the seriousness of the coup, and encourages the audience, when attempting to understand the chorus' perspective, to identify them as figures who take such attacks on democracy lightly. The drastic disjunct between the chorus' flippancy and what must have been the more publicly acceptable opinion (that the coup was a grave event which could have had potentially devastating effects for the city's political structure), is so jarring as to generate humour at the expense of the chorus' out-of-touch perspective, and at their patently manipulative rhetoric.

[77] Lycurg. *Leoc.* 112-14; Th. 8.92.2; Lys. 13.70-6.
[78] *IG* I³ 102
[79] Lycurg. *Leoc.* 113-14.

Athletic pursuits such as wrestling were associated with an aristocratic upbringing;[80] while an Athenian education traditionally comprised athletics, music and writing, evidence suggests that the poorer families of Athens would have forgone the first two.[81] The metaphor from athletics therefore characterises Phrynichus and his fellow wrestlers as a member of the elite, and the action of contriving an oligarchic coup is likened to a sport mainly practised by the rich. If the conveniently dead wrestler Phrynichus is condemned by the chorus here, later it is clear that their disavowal is not of his class, or even of his actions: for although the language of wrestling and tripping is used here euphemistically of an oligarchic coup, scapegoating Phrynichus and absolving his co-conspirators, in the antepirrhema later the image of wrestling recurs, and there the same actions will in fact be endorsed by the chorus.

Ist einmal keinmal? 693-705

καὶ γὰρ αἰςχρόν ἐςτι τοὺς μὲν ναυμαχήςαντας μίαν
καὶ Πλαταιᾶς εὐθὺς εἶναι κἀντὶ δούλων δεςπότας—
οὐδὲ ταῦτ’ ἔγωγ’ ἔχοιμ’ ἂν μὴ οὐ καλῶς φάςκειν ἔχειν, 695
ἀλλ’ ἐπαινῶ· μόνα γὰρ αὐτὰ νοῦν ἔχοντ’ ἐδράςατε.
πρὸς δὲ τούτοις εἰκὸς ὑμᾶς, οἳ μεθ’ ὑμῶν πολλὰ δὴ
χοἰ πατέρες ἐναυμάχηςαν καὶ προςήκουςιν γένει,
τὴν μίαν ταύτην παρεῖναι ξυμφορὰν αἰτουμένοις.
ἀλλὰ τῆς ὀργῆς ἀνέντες, ὦ ςοφώτατοι φύςει, 700
πάντας ἀνθρώπους ἑκόντες ξυγγενεῖς κτηςώμεθα
κἀπιτίμους καὶ πολίτας, ὅςτις ἂν ξυνναυμαχῇ.

[80] Kyle (1987) 124: ‘athletic participation continued and remained elitist’. Cf. *Eq.* 571-3.
[81] Ar. *V.* 1122–64, E. *El.* 528, Isoc. 7.45, Aeschin. 2. 147, 149: Pritchard (2003) 311-22.

Εἰ δὲ ταῦτ᾽ ὀγκωσόμεσθα κἀποσεμνυνούμεθα,

τὴν πόλιν καὶ ταῦτ᾽ ἔχοντες κυμάτων ἐν ἀγκάλαις,

ὑςτέρῳ χρόνῳ ποτ᾽ αὖθις εὖ φρονεῖν οὐ δόξομεν. 705

For it is shameful that while those who fought in one sea-battle

Straight away become Plataeans and masters instead of slaves

– Not that I would actually be able to deny that it was a good thing, 695

But I praise it: in fact it's the only sensible thing you've done.

But in addition to this it seems fitting for you, that those who fought

Many sea-battles with you, and their fathers, and are your relatives,

To forgive them this one misfortune, as they beg.

But let go of your anger, oh you who are wisest in nature, 700

And let us willingly make all men our kin

And enfranchised, and a citizen, whoever has fought together with us at sea.

But if we puff ourselves up and become haughty,

Holding the city and its affairs in the crooks of the waves,

At some later time again we will not seem to be wise. 705

The description of the slaves freed for their service at the battle of Arginusae diminishes the impact of their service by making it singular: μίαν 693. This is correct in a sense – it was only for the fighting in the sea-battle at Arginusae that the slaves and metics were enfranchised, but in reality slaves were amongst the crews of triremes repeatedly.[82] Moreover, the word αἰσχρόν, denoting disgrace, dishonour or physical repulsiveness, is rather a strong pejorative to leave hanging as they do. The sentiment they go on to express,

[82] Graham (1992), (1998).

that the city's treatment of the ἄτιμοι is unfair while the slaves who fought at Arginusae win their freedom, could have been phrased in any number of ways which did not front-load abuse of the slaves with αἰσχρόν.

They go on to express misgivings that the slaves should go on to become Plataeans, and masters rather than slaves. Plataeans had Athenian citizenship, maybe nominally since before the Persian War, but definitely after the destruction of Plataea by Theban and Peloponnesian forces in 427.[83] As a point of comparison, the reference to Plataea makes sense, since the slaves who fought at Arginusae were, like the Plataeans, an unusual case in which a non-citizen population was naturalised *en masse*, but it also others the slaves, by associating them with a non-Athenian people.

The chorus' next complaint, that the slaves are becoming masters, is patently ridiculous. Hunt comments that 'Although few slaves would have had the luck to accomplish such a reversal, Aristophanes mentions the theoretical and legal possibility to raise indignation.'[84] The imagined turn-around would have been all but impossible in this timeframe, and so the audience must have recognised that this was a gross exaggeration on the chorus' part, and engaging in **mentalising** would judge this either to be a purposeful exaggeration to raise indignation, or an insight into the chorus' own paranoia over the shifting hierarchies in contemporary Athens.[85]

After the emotive language of αἰcχρόν, and the gross exaggeration that the slaves of Arginusae are becoming masters, the chorus backtrack. Their train of thought is clearly disrupted at 695-6, as is clear from the anacoluthon, which leaves the μέν of 693 hanging until the πρὸς δὲ τούτοις of 697. This sense of interruption, the divergence from

[83] See note 25.
[84] Hunt (2001) 361.
[85] This concern over social mobility, over καλοί becoming κακοί, is central to the poetry of Theognis (e.g. 53-68, 183-92, 315-18), which was known and circulated in Athens, and likely sung in sympotic contexts. For this, see Fox (2002).

expectation effected by the hanging μέν, creates the impression that the chorus realise they have said too much, and are pulling themselves back. They have spoken too strongly about the slaves. The chorus recognise that they have shown too much of themselves, and attempt to backtrack.

Moreover, their change of tune is jarring. For one thing, the syntax of 695 is rather laboured. In conjunction with οὐδέ, καί is superfluous but emphatic; the crasis of κοὐδέ is very rare, and in the 5th and early 4th century it is mainly found in Comedy.[86] It is probably colloquial Greek, and may even sound somewhat clumsy, suggesting that the chorus are tripping over their own words to qualify their attitude towards the slaves. Indeed, line 695 contains this crasis, but also three cases of elision, and synizesis of μὴ οὐ, all of which makes for rather a rushed line. The phrasing also employs the optative mood (ἔχοιμ᾽ ἂν), creating a sense of indefiniteness, and can also be understood as the apodosis of a conditional statement, with suppressed protasis.[87] Logically we can infer that the hypothetical situation the chorus are envisaging is one in which they are challenged to give their opinion on the enfranchisement of slaves, thus making 695 sound rather like an attempt to subdue the challenge they anticipate from the audience (who of course cannot actually respond to issue such a challenge). Their prior sentiments were provocative then, and they felt they needed to explain themselves hastily to retain audience sympathy.

The reversal of stated opinion is also striking: the enfranchisement of the slaves who fought at Arginusae goes from being (contextually) shameful to praiseworthy (ἐπαινῶ 696) in the space of three lines. This shows a concern to manage how they come across to the audience, but the praise is still accompanied by a backhanded compliment, which gives the lie to their earlier flattery of the audience's σοφίαι (677): μόνα γὰρ αὐτὰ νοῦν ἔχοντ᾽

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[86] A *TLG* search shows one instance at S. *Ant.* 1034; for comedy, Eup. 180.2/Pherecr. 163.1, Dionys.Com. 2.26.

[87] Dickey (2016) 78.

ἐδράσατε. Thus, the chorus change their opinion only reluctantly, and begrudge ascribing any intelligent action to the *demos*.[88]

The chorus go on to promote the cause of the ἄτιμοι. The placement of πολλά δή at the end of the line parallels μίαν in 693, emphasising the contrast between these two ideas. This contrast exposes a glaring inconsistency in the logic of their speech. If what is done once, such as an oligarchic coup against the city (τὴν μίαν ταύτην… ξυμφορὰν 699), is anomalous and to be discounted when measured against repeated actions and positions, then by this logic the slaves and metics who fought should not have been enfranchised, their bravery at Arginusae (μίαν) written off as an anomaly.[89] This is uncomfortable logic, and in the context of the chorus' sympathies towards the ἄτιμοι, seems likely to be because the chorus are only half saying what they think. They feel that they have to voice public support for the enfranchisement of slaves, as the anacoluthon and tortured syntax of 695 show, but really they view this as a debasement of the citizen body, a view that will become clearer as the parabasis progresses.

They next go on to appeal to the past deeds of the ἄτιμοι's ancestors. This both makes a certain sort of comic sense – that the dead are naturally more concerned with historic events (697-8) – but also suggests a concern for preserving a citizenry of ancient ancestry. They even appeal to shared blood at 698 (προσήκουσιν γένει), and this emphasis on the importance of breeding surely runs counter to the jumbled support they lent to the enfranchisement of slaves earlier (695-6). The ἄτιμοι and their ancestors are implicitly contrasted with the slaves, who are marked out as alien from birth.

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[88] Konstan (1995) 70 spots the grudging tone, but not the humour at the chorus' expense: 'The recently manumitted citizens… had of course to be accepted, but there is nevertheless a sense of discomfort with the decision.'

[89] Once again, Konstan (*ibid.*) recognises how uncomfortable the chorus' rhetoric is, but does not remark on the humour in it: 'If merit on the part of slaves can earn them the franchise, then an offense against the constitution should by the same logic deserve the privation of citizen status.'

More signs of the chorus' personal biases and of manipulative rhetoric may be found. The ἄτιμοι are described at 699 as begging (αἰτουμένοις) to be forgiven for their own misfortune (τὴν μίαν ταύτην παρεῖναι ξυμφοράν). Not only do we find that the language here minimises their guilt in a humorously obvious attempt to manipulate the audience's sympathy, since ξυμφοράν suggests that they passively suffered the events, but the αἰτουμένοις identifies the chorus with the oligarchs. Although αἰτουμένοις refers to the exiles begging pardon from current citizens outside of the play, the participle perfectly describes what the chorus themselves are doing on stage on the behalf of the disenfranchised, a fact which hints that the chorus **identify** with the ἄτιμοι they defend.

After attempting to pep the audience up with some disingenuous flattery (ὦ σοφώτατοι φύσει), the chorus call for citizen rights to be given to everyone who has fought at sea for Athens. These lines are the most inclusive call for enfranchisement in the parabasis, and can hardly be taken seriously. To enfranchise everyone who has fought together with the Athenians at sea is 'an astounding proposal'[90] and, as Smith points out, hard to square with the abuse of foreigners, people of low ancestry and johnny-come-very-latelys that is to follow in the antepirrhema.[91] In fact, what seems more plausible is that the chorus are cynically harnessing this rhetoric of inclusion, since it serves their purpose, and with the slaves and metics who recently fought already enfranchised, they have little to lose on that count.

The epirrhema ends with the chorus warning that if the people are too proud (i.e. to re-admit the ἄτιμοι to full citizen rights) while the ship of state is in the crooks of the waves, they will not seem wise. Once again, the possibility of being perceived as wise is dangled before the audience, and the implication at 703 that only pride holds the people

[90] MacDowell (1995) 287.
[91] Smith (2019) 40.

back from re-enfranchising the would-be oligarchs constitutes another rather transparent attempt to manipulate.

Cleigenes 706-17

εἰ δ’ ἐγὼ ὀρθὸϲ ἰδεῖν βίον ἀνέροϲ ἢ τρόπον ὅϲτιϲ ἔτ’ οἰμώξεται,

οὐ πολὺν οὐδ’ ὁ πίθηκοϲ οὗτοϲ ὁ νῦν ἐνοχλῶν,

Κλειγένηϲ ὁ μικρόϲ,

ὁ πονηρότατοϲ βαλανεὺϲ ὁπόϲοι κρατοῦϲι κυκηϲίτεφροι 710

ψευδολίτρου κονίαϲ 711

καὶ Κιμωλίαϲ γῆϲ,

χρόνον ἐνδιατρίψει· ἰδὼν δὲ τάδ’ οὐκ εἰ-

ρηνικὸϲ ἔϲθ’, ἵνα μή ποτε κἀποδυθῇ μεθύων ἄ- 715

νευ ξύλου βαδίζων.

And if I see straight the life and manner of a man who will yet wail loud,

Then not long will that monkey, who is now being a nuisance,

Cleigenes the small,

The most vile bath-man of all those ash-stirrers who rule

The lime-adulterated dust

And Cimolian earth,

Linger on. In light of this he’s not

Peaceable, to avoid being stripped when he’s walking

Drunk without a stick.

At 706-17 the antode once again heaps abuse on a named political figure. The *komoidoumenos* slandered here is Cleigenes,[92] and the mockery of this man, apparently a bath-house owner, can be seen as introducing the chorus' wish in the following antepirrhema to discard the πονηροί politicians of the day. Cleigenes is identified by his trade, as is frequently the case with politicians in Old Comedy. Sommerstein sees the οὐδέ of 708 as linking this antode to the ode mocking Cleophon earlier (678-85),[93] and there is also a thematic link in that the chorus predict death for both of these men. Thus the ode and antode stress the chorus' conservative perspective, but also play with the chorus' role as dead initiates by giving them foresight with regard to the deaths of others.

Political Currency 718-33

πολλάκις γ' ἡμῖν ἔδοξεν ἡ πόλις πεπονθέναι
ταὐτὸν εἴς τε τῶν πολιτῶν τοὺς καλούς τε κἀγαθοὺς
εἴς τε τἀρχαῖον νόμισμα καὶ τὸ καινὸν χρυσίον. 720
οὔτε γὰρ τούτοισιν, οὖσιν οὐ κεκιβδηλευμένοις
ἀλλὰ καλλίστοις ἁπάντων, ὡς δοκεῖ, νομισμάτων
καὶ μόνοις ὀρθῶς κοπεῖσι καὶ κεκωδωνισμένοις
ἔν τε τοῖς Ἕλλησι καὶ τοῖς βαρβάροισι πανταχοῦ,
χρώμεθ' οὐδέν, ἀλλὰ τούτοις τοῖς πονηροῖς χαλκίοις, 725
χθές τε καὶ πρῴην κοπεῖσι, τῷ κακίστῳ κόμματι.
τῶν πολιτῶν θ' οὓς μὲν ἴσμεν εὐγενεῖς καὶ σώφρονας
ἄνδρας ὄντας καὶ δικαίους καὶ καλούς τε κἀγαθοὺς

[92] Probably Cleigenes of Halae (*PA* 1 8488).
[93] Sommerstein (1996a) *ad loc.*

καὶ τραφέντας ἐν παλαίςτραις καὶ χοροῖς καὶ μουςικῇ,
προυςελοῦμεν, τοῖς δὲ χαλκοῖς καὶ ξένοις καὶ πυρρίαις 730
καὶ πονηροῖς κἀκ πονηρῶν εἰς ἅπαντα χρώμεθα,
ὑςτάτοις ἀφιγμένοιςιν, οἷςιν ἡ πόλις πρὸ τοῦ
οὐδὲ φαρμακοῖςιν εἰκῇ ῥᾳδίως ἐχρήςατ' ἄν.

Often the city seemed to us to experience the same thing
With regard to its noble upstanding citizens
As it does with its ancient coinage and the new gold. 720
For these coins, which were not counterfeit,
But the finest of all coins, it seems,
And the only ones struck rightly and tested
Among Greeks and barbarians everywhere,
We never use, but instead we use the wretched bronze ones 725
Struck yesterday and the day before – the very worst coinage.
And of the citizens, those whom we know to be well-born
And self-controlled, honest, fine, upstanding men
Raised in the wrestling-schools and choruses and art,
We reject, and the bronze and foreigners and redheads 730
Wretched men from wretched families, we use in everything,
Those johnny-come-very-latelys, whom the city previously
Wouldn't take it lightly to use even as a scapegoat.

The idea that this antepirrhema may be found humorous is not controversial,[94] but it is worth asking in what way it is funny. At least part of the humour seems to be at the expense of the low-born citizens of Athens, who are targeted as an **out-group**, but at the same time the speakers themselves present a hackneyed image of disdainful elites.

Καλοὶ κἀγαθοί has a strong class aspect. These are the 'good old boys' of Athens.[95] They launch into an extended coinage analogy, likening the aristocratic families of Athens to the tried and tested old coinage, and the new riff-raff to the newer minted base coins. Coinage commonly symbolised aristocracy in Greek literature, as it neatly expresses the idea of innate worth which is hard to counterfeit. Such a tradition can be traced at least back to that fount of aristocratic rhetoric, Theognis.[96] Here the analogy is particularly pertinent because Athens has recently struck new silver-plated bronze coins. The influx of lower-value metal coins, the chorus suggests, is parallel to the new citizens, and to the city's growing reliance upon politicians from non-aristocratic families.[97]

The true, old coinage is identified with the χρηστοί, and the base coppers with the πονηροί, and this image is followed by a list of desirable attributes for the politically active citizen (727-9), some of which suggest that an expensive elite education is crucial in forging a good politician, in their eyes. Of particular interest in this list is their mention of παλαῖστραι: wrestling-schools. On the surface level this line merely indicates that to the chorus a good citizen is the kind of person whose privileged upbringing has meant they were educated in, among other things, wrestling. But given that earlier, in the epirrhema (689), the actions of Phrynichus were referred to euphemistically as παλαίσμασιν, the

[94] Heath (1987) 20: 'The antepirrhema, 718-37, does not meet that criterion [of jokelessness] so well, consisting as it does of a wittily extended metaphorical development of what was, as we shall see, a stock joke in contemporary comedy.'
[95] Dover (1974) 41-5.
[96] Thgn. 119-20, 417-18. See note 84.
[97] Kroll (1976). For discussion of this passage in the context of symbolic uses of coinage, see Kurke (1999) 324-7.

audience would be primed to understand this comment in light of their earlier doublespeak. Phrynichus' oligarchic political manoeuvres were earlier described as παλαίσμασιν, and yet here we find the exact activity in which he engaged being praised by the chorus. Phrynichus may have ended up a convenient scapegoat, but this phrase here suggests that he was the exact sort of person which the chorus would normally stand behind. The near juxtaposition of παλαίστραις and χοροῖς once again shows a close identification between the chorus and the sorts of politicians they endorse.

As well as words where the aristocratic significance is overt (εὐγενεῖς… καλούς τε κἀγαθοὺς), σώφρονας also has a specifically oligarchic connotation to it. σωφροσύνη was regarded as a cardinal virtue by Plato, and the importance and polysemy of this word has generated two monographs on its various associations.[98] The word comes to be associated with oligarchy, since σωφροσύνη denotes a sense of self-restraint, which was contrasted then with the supposedly more chaotic democratic system of government. Critically, around the time of the composition and production of *Frogs*, σωφροσύνη came to be used as a political slogan employed by the aristocratic and oligarchic faction which would see the birth of the tyrannical Thirty.[99] Thus, its use here continues the characterisation of the chorus as not holding the sentiments of Athens' conservative elite, but aligns them in sympathies with a pro-oligarchic faction.

Next, a list of unacceptable attributes (730-2) starts with the 'bronze and the foreigners and the redheads'. Πυρρίαι ('redheads') is an interesting item. Red hair was thought to be a Thracian attribute,[100] and so reinforces both of the attributes preceding it, 'bronze' and 'foreigners', the former visually and the latter ethnically. The word becomes a

[98] North (1966), Rademaker (2004).
[99] Rademaker (2004) 216-18.
[100] Xenophanes B16 (Diels & Kranz).

typical slave name in New Comedy,[101] and this may be due to the high proportion of slaves of non-Athenian extraction. However this word, which has been translated as 'redhead' but could be closer to 'tawny',[102] may not refer to a foreign trait in quite such a clear-cut manner: the word is sometimes used of the first beard of a youth, figures on white-ground funerary *lekythoi* often have reddish hair.[103] Whether or not tawny hair was seen as the sole preserve of the foreign-born, it is clearly irrelevant to governing. It is characteristic of Old Comedy to have a mixed list of serious and non-serious items, and this seems more the latter. Furthermore, the chorus' distaste for redheads here, since this trait was suggestive of slavish or foreign origins, is at odds with their previous apparent commendation of the enfranchisement of slaves and metics who fought at Arginusae (695-6).

Πονηρός suggests worthlessness, but as noted above it can also have a class aspect, denoting the low-status enemies of the καλοὶ κἀγαθοί or χρηστοί.[104] And so, once again the chorus speak in coded language with a clear class aspect. Their words are vague, expressing their class prejudices while retaining plausible deniability. No one can deny that it is bad for one's politicians to be πονηρός as in 'worthless', but since the word comes to hold a specific class connotation within the political vernacular of classical Athens, their sentiment can be understood as more controversial than this.

Value the Valuable 734-7

ἀλλὰ καὶ νῦν, ὦνόητοι, μεταβαλόντες τοὺς τρόπους

χρῆcθε τοῖc χρηστοῖσιν αὖθιc· καὶ κατορθώcαcι γὰρ 735

εὔλογον, κἄν τι cφαλῆτ', ἐξ ἀξίου γοῦν τοῦ ξύλου,

[101] Men. *Dys.* 81ff. *Frogs*' own Xanthias ('blonde' or 'auburn') provides another servile example of hair colour as determinant of name.
[102] It is sometimes used of lions: E. *HF*, 360, Arist. *GA* 785b17.
[103] Dover (1993) *ad loc.*
[104] Cagnetta & Petrocelli (1977); Rosenbloom (2004), 59-66.

ἤν τι καὶ πάσχητε, πάσχειν τοῖς σοφοῖς δοκήσετε.

But now, oh foolish ones, change your ways
And use the useful again; for if you are successful, 735
It's a credit to you, and even if you trip up, if you should suffer something,
You'll seem to the wise, to suffer it "at least from a worthy tree."

The chorus move from flattery to attacks in their address to the audience (ὦ σοφώτατοι φύσει 70; ὦνόητοι 734). As noted already, χρηστοί is coded language with class undertones. Therefore the command, χρῆσθε τοῖς χρηστοῖσιν, given that it follows the coinage metaphor which divides Athens' men into the aristocratic and the base, is clearly oligarchic rhetoric. Indeed, this *figura etymologica* belabours the class aspect of their advice, turning the chorus into a humorously exaggerated caricature of the conservative elite voice they represent.

And so, the Athenians are exhorted to put power in the hands of the χρηστοί, who we know from 729 are the sort to have been educated in wrestling. Wrestling has earlier (689) been a metaphor to refer to an oligarchic coup. This context is important when the chorus qualify their advice: 'even if you slip at all, if you suffer something, you'll seem to the wise to suffer it "at least from a worthy tree".' In one sense, σφάλλω means 'fail', and denotes the opposite of κατορθόω,[105] but it properly means to physically trip and fall. This picks up the physical language of the epirrhema, and it is this exact verb which was used euphemistically there to mean participation in a failed oligarchic coup (σφαλείς 689). The audience, recognising the same language as in the epirrhema, may see that this section, coming so soon after a classist rant, is actually using σφαλείς in the same way as the

[105] Thucydides treats them as dichotomous at 1.140.1, 2.65.7, 3.39.7.

epirrhema, as a veiled reference to a hypothetical future oligarchic coup. The danger envisaged in ἤν τι καὶ πάσχητε is not the danger of losing the Peloponnesian War,[106] but rather is a reference to the sort of punishment that one receives for staging an unsuccessful overthrow of democracy. No reference is made to the Peloponnesian War in the antepirrhema, and although the proverb of 'to be hanged from a worthy tree' could no doubt be applied broadly, it is also perhaps more suggestive of execution than of falling in combat.

These lines would be understood, to a **mentalising** audience member, and perhaps specifically to those who were particularly hostile to oligarchy, as amounting to a tacit endorsement of another oligarchic coup. The endorsement is not by Aristophanes, but by the chorus, who are a parody of crypto-oligarchs. To those scholars who see Aristophanes as an elite conservative type, the rhetoric of the conservative elite, and may therefore see the advice to re-enfranchise the ἄτιμοι as earnestly meant, here is a sticking point: it is hard to envisage that the earnest public suggestion of another oligarchic coup would be welcome at a democratic public festival, no matter how euphemistically made,[107] especially when one considers that the theatre audience publicly swore the oath of Demophantus just a few years prior.

8. Conclusions

According to my argument, it is possible to understand this parabasis in a way contrary to how most scholars have taken it historically, not as earnest political advice, but as a subtle form of satire, imitating and exaggerating the opinions and biases that a certain portion of conservative elite Athenians must have held. The patency of the attempts to manipulate the

[106] As e.g. Sommerstein (1996a) *ad loc.* believes.
[107] See my introduction, section 5.3 for a discussion of the demographics of the audience and the political atmosphere of the festival.

audience's sympathies, by use of euphemism, exaggeration and doublespeak, generates humour by evoking the sorts of opinions and rhetoric that would be employed by a section of Athenian society with oligarchic sympathies, and distorting them to the point of parody. To at least a certain section of the audience, this interpretation will be the dominant one.

However, ambiguity is a baked-in aspect of political satire, and it is possible that while aspects of the parabasis are intended to be humorous in the ways I have demonstrated, some viewers would still believe that the political advice which it contains was endorsed by the poet. As discussed in my introduction, individual audience members are liable to re- or, we might think, mis-interpret a piece of comedy so that it is perceived as non-threatening to their own political beliefs.

A radical democrat, for example, who despises the oligarchic strains of Athenian society, might recognise the parabasis as a caricature of these opinions as a humorous lampooning of the prejudices, paranoia, and anti-democratic scheming of those who disagree with them, while one with more sympathy for oligarchy or the traditional elite may recognise the chorus as a little exaggerated, but nevertheless enjoy the jokes at the expense of the base, new coinage.

Conclusions

At the start of this dissertation, I dismissed the search for the historical Aristophanes' perspective. The search for authorial intention has anyway been less fashionable since New Criticism and the Barthesian death of the author,[1] but even for those still intent upon seeking Aristophanes' personal politics, they will not be found in the parabases. The poetic persona featured in the autobiographical passages is as much a figure of fun as any other character, and thus the parabases' promise of direct access to Aristophanes' thought is illusory.[2] Moreover, as discussed in my introduction, results from media psychology suggest that we are less able to divine accurately the political stance of a comedian from their work than we would like to believe.

Even if one takes a step back and looks broadly at Aristophanic political comedy, it is hard to determine a political perspective or 'meaning' in comedy which is so ambivalent. My overview of the parabases has demonstrated a sense of political balance on several levels: even demographics which one might naively expect Aristophanes to praise wholeheartedly, such as the knights,[3] are not fully endorsed, but instead he has them and all other demographics undermine themselves for comic effect. Even the autobiographical parabases preserve political ambiguity on the scale of the entire production, as Aristophanes gives his persona attitudes which are discordant with the overarching ideas which might otherwise be seen as the 'message' of the plays. The poetic persona seems to support the continued pursuit of war in the supposedly pacifist play, *Acharnians*, and he speaks like a sophist in *Clouds*, a play sometimes considered to be a statement against the

[1] Barthes (trans. 1977 [origin. 1967]); Foucault (trans. 1998 [origin. 1969]) has the author return as a function of discourse.
[2] Platter (2007) 94-5: 'the parabasis is a radically double-voiced discourse that only seems to report the straightforward speech of the author, while its promised revelation turns out to be as elusive as the free meals offered at the end of *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*.'
[3] United in their apparent hatred of Cleon, one might expect for the maxim 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' to apply here, as implied by *Eq.* 510.

new forms of education which the sophists were peddling.[4] On top of this, political humour has been shown to be interpreted variously by individuals in accordance with their own political beliefs and biases. Aristophanes' depictions of various groups, since they are political ambiguous in multiple ways, must have lent themselves easily to such variant interpretations, allowing the productions to be well-received across different demographic and political identities. However, this also suggests the difficulty of the job for the scholar who wants to find Aristophanes' real opinions, because it is a reminder that no one is exempt from the probability that all interpretations of a piece of media are conditioned by the interpreter's individual biases.

On top of this broad sense of political balance, my exploration of the parabases through the lens of **mentalising** gives us further pause. Frequently the humour I have identified in these parabases involves theorising about the mental state of the chorus leader and chorus. They often make claims in their speeches, or construct imagined **worlds**, which are starkly at odds with reality. A **mentalising** audience member may recognise this, and understand when the speaker is being purposefully deceptive.[5] At other times, because **mentalising** encourages us to intuit the speaker's underlying thoughts, such a reading can result in the impression that a speaker has failed to express what they mean.[6] Contemplation of a character's motives, rather than taking their words at face value, reveals that their messages are focalised and partial. This cannot but contribute to the overall ambivalence of the plays. Additionally, the construal of a character's motivation,

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[4] Konstantakos (2021) 205 sees *Acharnians* as earnestly endorsing peace, but thinks that 'for the spectators who remain stalwart partisans of the war policy, Aristophanes has included a loud caveat' i.e. the parabasis 'so as to avoid their displeasure.' However, there is no good reason to see the bulk of the play as more likely to express the poet's earnest opinion than the parabasis, or vice versa, or that there even is an opinion here about which the poet genuinely wanted to evangelise.

[5] As, for example, the framing of the *Thesmophoriazusae* parabasis, as a parody of a Euripidean anti-heroine, may suggest deception.

[6] See my discussions of e.g. *Ach.* 655 and *Eq.* 566.

since it requires certain inferences, will no doubt result in varying interpretations, influenced by the political perspective of the individual viewer.

The phenomenon I have called 'identity layering' – Aristophanes' decision not to portray certain demographics straight, but with another social, political or even animal identity added – also complicates the search for political 'meaning'. The strategy seems to make the mockery of certain groups less offensive and therefore more broadly palatable to the audience. For example, to laugh at a geriatric veteran of the Persian Wars might test the boundaries of good taste, but to laugh at a geriatric veteran of the Persian Wars who is also a giant wasp ironically does not have the same sting. This technique therefore allows Aristophanes to tap into the hostilities which audience members may hold and channel those hostilities into laughter (as supposed by **superiority** theories of humour), in a way that will not offend those who **psychologically identify** with the targeted group. Identity layering also has universal comic power, since the collocation of differing identities can also act as a hugely generative premise for **incongruities**. At the same time, when this does happen, it results in a kind of mixed portrayal where it is hard to say that any group is being mocked with particular vitriol.

The most pointed and offensive humour tends to be targeted at named *komoidoumenoi*, who are famous figures well-known to the audience. These figures are frequently politicians, and so mockery of them has historically been seen as important evidence in the debates on Aristophanes' politics.[7] However, it may simply be the case that when it comes to these characters, their prominence, their fame or infamy, was such that the potential for

[7] E.g. Sommerstein (1996b), an influential article which groups *komoidoumenoi* by their reason for receiving scrutiny, which concludes that a conservative bias can be detected in the balance of targeted mockery received by different sorts of politicians. The argument rests largely on some categorisation decisions regarding the few figures who receive positive mentions in Old Comedy, and the few who have the majority of a play dedicated to their mockery. If just a few of these categorisation decisions are questioned, as I believe some should be, a very different picture emerges. See also the next footnote for another argument that explains the supposedly right-wing bias in this genre.

humour elicited through targeted mockery was seen as outweighing the risk of offending them and the section of the population who **psychologically identified** with them.[8]

Overall, the plays' tendency to feature topical political issues and display more than one perspective created, intentionally or not, comedy with a 'something for everyone' effect.[9] The work is poised to be relevant, but basically inoffensive; to appeal to a wide range of spectators without being insipid. It leverages the existing group dynamics in Athens by targeting various demographics for humour, but frequently in ways that reinterpret and transform those targets, rendering their mockery less offensive. Since attempts to pinpoint authorial intention in this sort of text are extremely unreliable, for the reasons already discussed, I will not speculate on whether these effects are intentional, except to comment that *a priori* this seems like a shrewd tactic for a comic playwright who wants to succeed, and whose audience is politically diverse.

Beyond this, this research has led to several more positive results. Firstly, it has illustrated the immensely generative power of comedy. Identity layering in comedy may, as discussed above, have the effect of mitigating offence, but it also is a great formula for (re)invention, producing new images such as the Persian sack of Athens as a wasp-fumigation, or reimagining the triumphant fist of the statue of the tyrannicides socking an old woman in the jaw.[10]

Next, this thesis has demonstrated the central role of human behaviour to comedy. Even when the chorus represent a non-human category, as in *Clouds* and *Birds*, it is either the humorous **incongruities** that arise from the collision between human and non-human **scripts** which drives the humour, or human poor behaviour as seen from an outside

[8] As Dover (1954) notes, 'the good comic writer is almost inevitably committed to rebellion… against the established order', and given that the most influential politicians of this period were mainly radical democrats, it is hardly surprising they receive particular attention in Old Comedy.
[9] Cf. Allan & Kelly (2013) 87-92 on tragedy.
[10] *Lys.* 633-5, *V.* 1079.

perspective. Usually, Aristotle's claim that comedy represents people as worse than they really are is supported,[11] but sometimes the humour is not merely generated by parading poor human behaviour on stage. In these cases, familiar material is reinvigorated by being translated into a new and surprising context. The extended cosmogonic parody with which the *Birds*' parabasis begins, for example, takes a very specific human behaviour (the tendency to tell stories which explains the world in order to situate man within it, along with all the tropes accrued to such narratives) and transforms it by focalising it from the beak and beady eyes of another species.

The fruitfulness of reading comedy as comedy, and with awareness of how comedy is processed, has also been explored. As discussed in my introduction, getting a joke involves a complex mental interaction, where the audience member is made to do some cognitive work. This introduces a degree of ambiguity by leaving connections unspoken. On top of that, the pleasure of getting a joke, and the **relief** from **tension** which jokes sometimes effect, can allow comedians to handle subject matter topics which might otherwise be perceived as uncomfortable or unpleasant.[12] More than that, the **relief** or enjoyment humour provides can so radically change how an idea is portrayed as to mediate the perceived meaning of the text.[13]

This dissertation has focused on foregrounding the particularities of humorous texts and the ways in which humour is typically digested while interpreting Aristophanes, and the same approach and range of tools may prove just as fruitful in reading another comic text. Beyond that, this dissertation is a vindication of the basic overall strategy of applying

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[11] Arist. *Po.* 1448a16-8.

[12] This may be related to *parrhesia*: comic playwrights get away with flouting conventions for public speech because the attendant enjoyment mitigates the risk of upsetting listeners.

[13] In this way, e.g. Panebianco (2021) 144 argued that the obscene jokes in *Lysistrata* 'have the effect of balancing' the sense of threat that might otherwise accompany the gender reversal of the plot.

a cognitive understanding to reading literature of any genre, as the same approach *mutatis mutandis* seems likely to be similarly fruitful.

Finally, this thesis has accepted the conclusion that these texts are polyvalent, feature multiple voices in political counterpoint to one another, and therefore encourage variant readings on the level of the individual which are concurrently valid. This conclusion not only has the advantage of being supported by various studies, but it is a principle of interpretation that is constructive, not destructive, in that it accommodates a diversity of interpretative possibilities. Even if political purpose is elusive, and Aristophanes is only joking, there will always be more to be said.

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