Aristophanes And The Poetics Of Low Comedy

Amy Susanna Lewis
University of Pennsylvania

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Aristophanes And The Poetics Of Low Comedy

Abstract
The Greek comic poet Aristophanes often comments on the value of different comic modes. When he articulates his own comic preferences, his “poetics,” he does so using the framework of a dichotomy that contrasts a low-comic mode and a high-comic mode. The low mode is characterized by stock characters and routines, physical humor, obscenity, and a sense of antiquity. The high-comic mode is politically engaged, didactic, sophisticated, novel, and concerned with contemporary events. Aristophanes consistently speaks of the low-comic mode in negative terms. He frequently accuses his rivals of producing low comedy and claims that he would never stoop to such frivolity himself. His own comedy, he claims, is always produced in the high mode. Herein lies the problem of Aristophanic poetics: Aristophanes makes extensive use of all the low comic routines that he disparages so vehemently. This irony has long been noted by scholars but it is usually claimed that Aristophanes includes low comedy as a concession to the uneducated masses in his audience. I argue rather that Aristophanes’ ironic disavowal of the low serves paradoxically to emphasize its necessity for the comic genre. In part one I analyze the concept of low comedy by considering the evidence in Aristophanes’ plays (chapter one) and in the fragments of Sicilian and fifth-century Athenian comedy, testimonia, scholia, and vase paintings (chapter two). This analysis results in a much broader understanding than previous scholarship has offered of the types of humor that could be classed as low comedy. In chapter three I tackle Aristophanes’ definition of the high-comic mode. I identify two distinct modes that Aristophanes opposes to the low: the political mode (angry, aggressive, didactic, offers advice to the city) and the intellectual mode (restrained, verbal, includes parody of tragedy and philosophy). Despite clear differences between these two modes, Aristophanes often comically conflates them, destabilizing his claim to be a high-comic poet. In part two I analyze how the low-high dichotomy functions in Wasps (chapter four), Lysistrata and Thesmophoriazusae (chapter five), and Frogs (chapter six). In each case I demonstrate that the comedies metatheatrically enact the dichotomy revealing the necessity of low comedy as a foundational element of the comic genre. Unlike his low-comic rivals, however, Aristophanes imbues the low-comic mode with novelty, contemporary relevance, and sophistication, resulting in a dual low-high poetics.

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ARISTOPHANES AND THE POETICS OF LOW COMEDY

Amy S. Lewis

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Supervisor of Dissertation

Ralph Rosen

Vartan Gregorian Professor of the Humanities.
Professor of Classical Studies

Graduate Group Chairperson

Cynthia Damon

Cynthia Damon, Professor of Classical Studies

Dissertation Committee:

Ralph Rosen, Vartan Gregorian Professor of the Humanities. Professor of Classical Studies
Sheila Murnaghan, Alfred Reginald Allen Memorial Professor of Greek
Emily Wilson, Professor of Classical Studies
ARISTOPHANES AND THE POETICS OF LOW COMEDY

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ABSTRACT

ARISTOPHANES AND THE POETICS OF LOW COMEDY

Amy S. Lewis
Ralph Rosen

The Greek comic poet Aristophanes often comments on the value of different comic modes. When he articulates his own comic preferences, his “poetics,” he does so using the framework of a dichotomy that contrasts a low-comic mode and a high-comic mode. The low mode is characterized by stock characters and routines, physical humor, obscenity, and a sense of antiquity. The high-comic mode is politically engaged, didactic, sophisticated, novel, and concerned with contemporary events. Aristophanes consistently speaks of the low-comic mode in negative terms. He frequently accuses his rivals of producing low comedy and claims that he would never stoop to such frivolity himself. His own comedy, he claims, is always produced in the high mode. Herein lies the problem of Aristophanic poetics: Aristophanes makes extensive use of all the low comic routines that he disparages so vehemently. This irony has long been noted by scholars but it is usually claimed that Aristophanes includes low comedy as a concession to the uneducated masses in his audience. I argue rather that Aristophanes’ ironic disavowal of the low serves paradoxically to emphasize its necessity for the comic genre. In part one I analyze the concept of low comedy by considering the evidence in Aristophanes’ plays (chapter one) and in the fragments of Sicilian and fifth-century Athenian comedy, testimonia, scholia, and vase paintings (chapter two). This analysis results in a much broader understanding than previous scholarship has offered of the types of humor that could be classed as low comedy. In chapter three I tackle Aristophanes’ definition of the high-comic mode. I identify two distinct modes that
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INTRODUCTION

“Boileau rêvait un Molière académique; le vrai Molière est celui qu’un tableau de la Comédie-Française nous montre au milieu de tous les farceurs illustres... Voilà ses maîtres; et voilà d’où il sort. Il est assez grand pour ne pas rougir de ses origines.”

Aristophanes is a self-conscious comic poet who comments explicitly and often metatheatrically on the value of different comic modes. When he articulates his comic preferences, his “poetics”, he uses the framework of a dichotomy that contrasts two modes of comedy: a “low” mode (which he calls τὸ φορτικόν or ἡ κωμωδία φορτική) and a “high” mode. The low mode consists, broadly speaking, in stock characters, stock routines, and physical humor, all of which is unsophisticated and easy to understand. Obscenity is also a key element of the low mode. Aristophanes consistently speaks of such humor in negative terms, attributing it to the bad comedy of his rival comic poets and claiming never to put such frivolous nonsense on stage himself. His own comedy, he says, is always done in the high comic mode. This mode is characterized by political engagement, didacticism, cleverness, novelty, and intellectual humor, and claims to offer substantive advice to the audience and the city. So far, so simple. But herein lies the problem of Aristophanic poetics: Aristophanes uses, and uses extensively, all the bad, low, unsophisticated comic routines, characters, and jokes that he disparages so vehemently. In the Peace parabasis, for example, he claims to have dispensed with the stock mythological hero the hungry Heracles, but this character appears in at least three

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1 Lanson 1901, 153.
2 The dichotomy has been discussed also by Cortassa 1986, 187-204, and Robson 2017, in relation to audience and different types of spectators; Platter 2007, 87-107, as it pertains to the prologue of Wasps and the relationship between high and low in Clouds and Wasps; Tedeschi 2007, 57-69, considers the dichotomy as part of the historical development of ancient comedy; and Rosen, forthcoming, on the concept of “popular” comedy and relative value in the comic aesthetic hierarchy.
of his comedies. Likewise he denies ever stooping to a gratuitous slave-beating routine, yet we see just this at *Frogs* 641-73. The list goes on. The question is, why? Scholarship on Aristophanes tends to take his vilification of low comedy at face-value. Though scholars will acknowledge the irony in Aristophanes using comic routines he claims to hate, the irony is usually treated either as “just a joke” without need for further comment, or more commonly the inclusion of τὸ φορτικὸν is excused as a concession to the unsophisticated tastes of the mass audience. A particularly ingenious approach to Aristophanic irony comes from Keith Sidwell’s *Aristophanes the Democrat*, which proposes that it is evidence of metacomedy. Aristophanes, according to Sidwell, must be parodying the low-comic mode of his rivals rather than using it in earnest. The problem with such approaches is that they assume we must believe Aristophanes when he tells us how bad ἡ κωμῳδία φορτική is.

A few scholars have considered low comedy, or aspects of it, worthy of serious study. Obscenity, a key feature of the Aristophanic low mode, has been well-studied in Henderson’s *Maculate Muse* (1991), which examines in detail Aristophanes’ sexual and scatalogical language. Henderson discusses many aspects of obscenity including its psychological effect, its satirical efficacy, and its dramatic function. He does not,

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3 *Birds, Frogs, and Aeolosicon* (fr. 11)
4 E.g. Major 2006, on the joke of *Clouds*’ parabasis; Murphy 1972 argues that the low functions only as “borrowed material to season…his literary comedies and make them more acceptable to the ‘groundlings’ in his audience” (169); See also Paduano 1974, 13; Cortassa, 1986; Cartledge 1990, e.g. 46, 57; Bremer 1993, 127; 139; Tedeschi 2007, 60-1; Sommerstein 2009, especially 131-2.
5 Sidwell 2009, e.g. 31. Sidwell himself offers up the prime objection to the argument when he writes, “Vickers has in fact ventured to identify the Sausage-Seller as a caricature of Alcibiades. Of his thirty-seven arguments, however, none is compelling, and, since I shall argue that he is, nonetheless, correct, this is a good demonstration of how difficult it is to pry from the text what it was not meant to reveal *per se*” (158). The evidence-base Sidwell uses is extremely unstable, and his interpretation also assumes that an audience would be able to get, interpret, and understand the sometimes extremely subtle implications that his analysis proposes.
6 Cf. the approach of Mario Telò (2016, 27-124) to *Wasps*, where he argues that Philocleon’s use of ἡ κωμῳδία φορτική must be as a parody of Cratinus.
however, integrate obscenity into a larger discussion of lowness, and tends to treat it only as politically significant, arguing, for example, that excrement in Peace is a symbol for a world at war. The low-comic mode has much in common with Bakhtin’s notion of the “carnivalesque,” which is characterized by low images of bodily function. Scholars such as Carrière have sought to understand Aristophanes in the carnivalesque terms that Bakhtin used to analyze Rabelais. For Carrière, Aristophanes and the carnivalesque are both about renewal and reversal, and he argues that it is the tension between the carnivalesque and its politicization which creates Aristophanic ambiguity.

Dobrov catalogues many of the low routines in Aristophanes under the rubric “farce” and accords them extensive discussion, but he interprets the irony of their presence in Aristophanic comedy as a reflection of the ritual origins of the genre, concluding that “Farce…is that most tenacious element of the ritual inheritance that refuses to ‘be made sense of’, that the comic logos cannot tame. As we have seen, the Aristophanic logos, though largely successful in making general sense of ritual material, simply cannot make sense of this most violent and ecstatic ritual core that yet remains an indispensable feature of the comic performance, and is, therefore, isolated and artificially ostracized." This approach has the advantage of highlighting the antiquity of the low-comic mode and its originary role in the genre, but Dobrov’s analysis assumes that Aristophanes lacks control over the inclusion of the low in his comedy, or that the

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7 On psychological effect, see 6-12; its satirical efficacy, 17; and its dramatic function, 56-107. On Peace, see 63. On obscenity see also Willi 2002, 10-12; Robson 2006, who argues that it is a mode of social cohesion (82-3); and Rosen 2015, who argues against the primitiveness of obscenity in comedy.
8 Bakhtin 1984, 18.
9 Carrière 1979, 24, 29-32. The Bakhtinian framework, however, limits Carrière somewhat, making the low essentially ritual (cf. Dobrov below, n.11) and the high merely political. On the carnivalesque as a model for understanding Aristophanes, see also See also Goldhill 1991, 176-88; Platter 1993, 2007.
10 Dobrov 1988, 28.
low does not make sense in his plots. The artistry and deliberateness of Aristophanic composition, however, argue against such an interpretation.

A more promising approach is that of Edwards, who examines the dual implications and ambiguities of three common Aristophanic motifs (τρύξ, scatology, and σκοτεινα). He argues that Aristophanes presents a coherent poetics that incorporates and surpasses the simplistic opposition between high and low. Edwards’ discussion of τρυγωδια (from τρύξ) is particularly valuable as he demonstrates that Aristophanes’ word for “comedy” is imbued with the double notion of newness and fertility (τρύξ as “new wine”), and as the old and trashy (τρύξ as “dregs”). The conclusion drawn from this observation is that Aristophanes uses low imagery to vouch for the seriousness and importance of the comic genre. Edwards’ study is valuable for emphasizing the tension between high and low that lies at the heart of Aristophanes’ conception of the comic genre, but, like so many others, the low aspect of the dichotomy is only given value insofar as it contributes to a serious politically-motivated aim.

Like Edwards I argue that a dichotomy between comedy’s high and low modes lies at the center of Aristophanic poetics. I argue further that Aristophanes’ ironic disavowal of the low mode serves paradoxically to emphasize its necessity for the comic genre. By telling us how bad low comedy is, Aristophanes forces his audience to imagine a comedy that does not contain any obscenity, scatology, physical farce, or any of the other beloved traditional jokes, characters or routines that can guarantee a laugh. Aristophanes uses his ironic renunciation of the low-comic mode to re-value it as the essential part of the comic genre. Aristophanes often achieves the irony by means of

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metatheater. He stages characters staging plays in both high and low modes, and within these meta-performances it is the low that meets with success. In *Thesmophoriazusae*, for example, Aristophanes depicts Euripides, the director-figure, staging a series of tragic parodies in the high comic mode, but Euripides is unable to succeed in saving himself and his relative from the Scythian archer except by performing a low-comic routine involving a prostitute distraction scene. Likewise in the *Lysistrata* the eponymous character, who takes on the directorial role, vacillates between the high-comic and low-comic modes to stop the war with Sparta, and it is the low that proves most efficacious. In the *Wasps*, Aristophanes anticipates the victory of his own comedy in the low-comic director-figure Philocleon’s victorious dance contest, while the high comic director-figure Bdelycleon fails to harness comedy as an educative, reformatory tool. And in the *Frogs*, the tragic *agôν* between Euripides and Aeschylus is configured as dramatic contest between two rival comic poets. Euripides critiques Aeschylean dramaturgy using sophistic and intellectual tragic parodies in the high mode, while Aeschylus performs comic critiques in the low mode, and is crowned victor by Dionysus.

Where does this leave the high-comic mode? If the low mode is, for Aristophanes, the *sine qua non* of good comedy, a generic requirement, what should we do with the political satire and tragic parody that is seen as so characteristically Aristophanic? Aristophanes’ claim to do *only* intellectual or politically important comedy must be viewed as ironic, but the cleverness, novelty, and contemporary relevance that Aristophanes deems characteristic of the high mode are essential to his poetics. Throughout this study, I argue that Aristophanes simultaneously demonstrates that high comedy is impossible without the generically necessary low, and that what distinguishes

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14 Several recent studies focus on metatheater, including Taaffe’s 1993 *Aristophanes and Women* and Slater’s 2002 *Spectator Politics*. Sidwell 2009 and Telò 2016 also use metatheater as the basis for many of their arguments.
the Aristophanic brand of low from that which he imputes to his rivals is precisely
cleverness, novelty, and relevance. Where I differ from previous scholars such as
Edwards, who likewise argue for a combined high-low poetics, is my emphasis on the
positive re-valuation of the low: low comedy wins competitions, and this is not something
a comic poet should be ashamed of. Frogs is emblematic. The figure of Aeschylus
embraces the old, traditional, low comic mode and his victory asserts the importance of
this mode for the comic genre. But what could be cleverer or more novel than making
the stodgy, moralistic, old Aeschylus the personification of low comedy? What could
symbolize the novel comic potential of low comedy better than raising an ancient poet
from the dead?

Such an approach, it may be objected, skirts but not address the contentious
issue of Aristophanic seriousness. The seriousness debate has raged since Gomme
published his 1938 essay “Aristophanes and Politics”, which argued against moral and
political didacticism as the aim of Aristophanic comedy. Since Gomme, many scholars
have either defended the serious didacticism model or proposed alternatives, the most
common of which argues that Aristophanes is “just entertainment.” More recent

15 As Reckford (1987, 421) puts it “Certainly, as Aristophanes said throughout his career, it is
poor taste and vulgar to rely on buffoonery alone in the absence of comic ideas and comic wit; yet
old comedy keeps returning, and rightly, to its base and basic self...it has always rejected efforts
to clean up its act.”
16 For the most up-to-date assessment of the state of the question, see Rosen (forthcoming,
2020). Those who have continued to defend the moral/ political didactic interpretations include de
Ste. Croix 1972, 370-1; Cartledge 1990; Konstan 1995, 5-7; Sommerstein 2009, 2-3; Mhire and
Frost 2014. See also Henderson, 1990 and MacDowell 1995, 3-6. Konstan is more nuanced in
his approach than some, arguing that Aristophanic comedy both contributes to and is an
expression of current ideology. On the other side, Heath 1987a (rev. 2007) is the major proponent
of non-serious or non-political readings of Aristophanes. He argues that claims to seriousness
were meant to be a joke, and that Aristophanes told the audience what they wanted to hear.
Rosen 1988, 5 argues that the generic conventions of iambic or satiric poetry are as much or
even more behind the ‘I’ of invective as ‘real’ enmity, which should push us to question the aims
of comic poetry. In Making Mockery (2007), Rosen considers Aristophanes’ own comparison, in
the parados of mystic initiates in Frogs (368-76) between ritual mockery and mockery in old
comedy, suggesting that both are “forms of confrontational expression intrinsically removed from
scholarly approaches have recognized the problematic nature of the serious vs. non-serious interpretive model and sought to re-frame it. Silk, for example re-directs the question of seriousness from politics to aesthetics, arguing that Aristophanic seriousness lies in literary skill for which politics is exploited. Though I do indeed side-step the question of seriousness, the background to the debate is essential to my conception of Aristophanic poetics. I began this project wanting to look at how Aristophanes himself exploited the dichotomy between the apparently serious advice he dispenses and the entertainment factor, or, in other words, how the modern debate reflected a key tension in Aristophanes’ conception of his genre. The dichotomy in Aristophanic comedy that I ultimately focus on in not identical to the serious/ not-serious binary that has been the framework for modern scholarship, but the Aristophanic high mode does have much in common with the “serious,” as does the low with “entertainment.”

The recent turn in Aristophanic scholarship has been towards poetics, and the current dissertation continues that trend. Analyses of Aristophanic poetics ask what the motivating forces are behind Aristophanes’ poetic technique, plot construction, and thematic emphasis. Studies in this vein include Biles’ *Aristophanes and the Poetics of Competition* (2011), which, as the title makes clear, argues that Aristophanic comedy is a lived reality." That is, that they are both a mimesis of mockery, but not real mockery (2007, 30-1). An important and often neglected article by Halliwell also contested the seriousness of Aristophanic satire. He argues that comedy is protected from political involvement by its festive content, and that, in satire against individuals, Aristophanes transformed real political figures into stock comic types that allowed appreciation by a popular audience who may or may not have been familiar with the real Socrates, Cleon, Euripides, etc (1984, 7-8; 9-10). See also Dover 1972, 52-3.

Silk 2000, 301-49. This indeed was the approach implied by Gomme. Silk offers a critique of scholarly definitions of the term “serious” concluding that in Aristophanes it can be understood not as sobriety or sincerity, but only as weight. This non-political seriousness is an important step in Aristophanic criticism and seems to lie behind studies like that of Wright’s *Comedian as Critic*, which looks at the ludic treatment of serious issues and takes literary criticism in Aristophanes seriously (2012, 1-17). Ruffell 2011, like Silk, attempts to move beyond the quagmire of the seriousness question. He addresses the problem by considering models of fictionality as a way for Aristophanes to stake a claim in ideological production whilst presenting extreme forms of it (17-19; 26). See also Slater 2002, 5.
a creative response to the competitive context in which it was composed; Telò’s *Aristophanes and the Cloak of Comedy* (2016), which contends that a “proto-canonical” response to the failure of *Clouds* lies at the center of *Wasps* and the revised *Clouds*; and Farmer’s *Tragedy on the Comic Stage* (2017), which argues that an engagement with tragedy lies behind Aristophanes’ poetic impulses. These studies, like my own, all use metatheater as a way of analyzing Aristophanes’ relationship to his art. Like Biles and Telò, I consider Aristophanes’ rivalries with other comic poets a key facet of his poetics as I focus on the intra-generic discourse about the comic genre, rather than an inter-generic rivalry with other dramatic genres. The poetics of rivalry and competition are an important foundation for my own study, and I build on the work of these and other scholars in my analysis of Aristophanes’ response to what I argue is a key tension inherent in the comic genre in fifth-century Athens: the tension between the ancient, originary, tried-and-tested crowd pleasing low-comic mode, and the newer, sophistic, political mode that developed in the fifth-century.

There are two parts to this dissertation. In Part One: Definitions I define the terms of the low-high dichotomy. In chapter one I look at moments where Aristophanes self-consciously discusses the comic genre to determine the type of humor, characters, and routines that count as part of the low mode, or τὸ φορτικόν. In chapter two I look beyond Aristophanes to the fragments of old comedy, testimonia, and comic vase paintings to flesh out Aristophanes’ sometimes cryptic remarks on the low. Chapters one and two significantly expand our knowledge of what poet and audience alike could call low, and as a result I am able to identify far more moments of low comedy in Aristophanes’

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18 Biles 2011, 2.
19 Telò 2016, 2-3
20 Farmer 2017, 3-7. Cf. Sells’ 2019 *Parody, Politics, and the Populace in Greek Old Comedy*, which argues for the centrality of not just tragic parody, but also parody of satyr play and lyric.
comedies than previous scholarship. In chapter three I return to Aristophanes’
parabases to look at what kind of comedy he counts as part of the high mode and to
examine the rhetoric surrounding his ironic claim to do only comedy in this mode. I
contend that in the very language he uses to talk about high comedy, Aristophanes
demonstrates its essential reliance on the low mode, arguing, for example, that
Aristophanes picks Heracles as his anti-Cleonian alter-ego in the high mode precisely
because the low-comic Heracles was such a ubiquitous symbol of the genre.

In Part Two: The Dichotomy in Action I analyze how the high-low dichotomy
identified as the driving force behind Aristophanes’ poetics plays out in practice. In
chapter four I argue that the protagonists of Wasps, Philocleon and Bdelycleon,
represent the low-comic and high-comic modes respectively. The first half of the comedy
reveals a metatheatrical attempt by the high Bdelycleon to suppress the low farce of his
old father and inculcate in him his own anti-Cleonian politics. The second half of the
comedy, however, exposes the unstoppable low-comic force of Philocleon, suggesting
the futility of a political, didactic, moralizing comedy that does not acknowledge, and
indeed tries to banish, its inherent generic lowness. In chapter five I look to two plays
often neglected in discussions of Aristophanic poetics, the Lysistrata and
Thesmophoriazusae. In Lysistrata the eponymous character acts as a metatheatrical
director figure who oscillates between the political and low-comic modes to affect her
sex-strike plan, framed as a play-within-the-play; in Thesmophoriazusae Euripides (the
director figure) attempts to free his relative from the women celebrating the
Thesmophoria using high literary parodies of his own tragedies, only to ultimately
succeed with a low comic skit. In both plays, metatheatrics reveal the value and
necessity of the low, while the comedies writ large affect this revelation only by
combining metatheatrical performances of high and low. Aristophanes ironically values
the low by representing how it can be successfully incorporated into a complex, novel, and intellectual comic performance. In the final chapter I analyze the Frogs, arguably Aristophanes’ most intense exploration of the high-low dichotomy. The comedy is nominally divided in two by the dichotomy with its first half performed in the low mode and its second half in the high-mode. Aristophanes, however, complicates the simplistic separation of high and low by imbuing the first half with a highly self-aware metatheatrical discourse, and by transforming the high tragic agôn of the second half into a contest of comic technique. Aeschylus wins the contest because of his superior abilities as a low-comic performer.

Finally, a word on terminology. Aristophanes refers to what I have called the low-comic mode using various terms, but most frequently τὸ φορτικόν or ἡ κωμῳδία φορτική. There is no single satisfactory translation of this concept in English. It has been translated as “vulgar low comedy,” “vulgar farce” and even “disgusting, obscene farces.” Vulgar in English can have the meaning of “ordinary” and “commonplace” in its etymological derivation from vulgus, or common people. More commonly it is used to mean “coarse” or “unrefined” and “without good taste.” But in idiomatic English, when applied to comedy, it designates a particularly crude, obscene, and often sexual humor.

Like “vulgar,” φορτικός can also be used of the “common man,” and similarly implies a lack of education and low social status. But it also conveys additional nuances

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21 In Peace 748, he also refers to it as κακά, φόρτον and βωμολοχεύματα. On the term φορτικός see Rosen, forthcoming.
22 These are the translations of Wasps 66 by Sommerstein 1983, 11; McGrath 1999, 11; and Meineck 1998, 138.
23 To give one example: a review of the movie Good Boys, describes the film as “a vulgar but adorable comedy” and the vulgarity is said to consist in “12-year-old boys making references that they do not really understand, sex jokes and crude humor” (https://mainecampus.com/2019/09/good-boys-a-vulgar-but-adorable-comedy, retrieved 1/29/20).
that the English “vulgar” does not. The etymological origin of φορτικός lies in the verb φέρω, apparent in its application to boats: τὸ πλοῖον φορτικόν is literally a ship that conveys goods. The idea of a burden is carried over into a second meaning of φορτικός: something that is annoying or tiresome, i.e. hard to bear. There is, undoubtedly, some overlap between the English “vulgar” and Greek φορτικός, but the type of comedy Aristophanes can designate as τὸ φορτικόν is much broader than the crude, sexual humor implied by “vulgar comedy.” Translating φορτικός to entail a sense of “disgusting” and “obscene” is also somewhat misleading. While ᾗ κωμῳδία φορτική certainly could entail obscenity and gross humor (like Dionysus shitting himself in Frogs), there is nothing intrinsically “disgusting” about the stock routines of slapstick violence or Heracles’ being hungry.

On the face of it, “farce” seems to avoid the problems of “vulgar”. It is a word that pertains primarily to drama, and characteristic of it were short stock scenes (often slapstick) and stock characters. It was also, like the Aristophanic κωμῳδία φορτική, looked down upon because of its appeal to unsophisticated mass audiences, and it had laughter as its primary goal. “Farce” however has two problems. In general usage, it refers primarily to comic routines and though a farce may, of course, be obscene, obscenity is not a primary valence of the word. Farce also has a very specific and complex history as a dramatic form, referring especially to a medieval and early modern

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24 E.g. Aristotle Politics 1342a19-21, discussing the dual nature of the theater audience, writes ὁ μὲν ἑλεύθερος καὶ πεπαιδευμένος, ὁ δὲ φορτικὸς ἐκ βαναύσων καὶ θητῶν καὶ ἄλλων τοιούτων συγκείμενος
25 E.g. Thucydides 6.88; Cassius Dio 56.27.
26 E.g. Demosthenes 5.4
27 It is used of Aristophanic low comedy especially by Dobrov 1988, 15-32.
European drama, originating as a comic interlude in religious plays.\textsuperscript{29} I have opted, therefore, for the very broad term “low.”\textsuperscript{30}

What I have termed the high mode is more problematic. Aristophanes does not use a consistent word for the type of comedy he contrasts with ἡ κωμῳδία φορτική, but he refers to it variously as μέγα (“important,” “grand”), σοφός (“clever”), and σώφρων (“modest,” “controlled”).\textsuperscript{31} He also does contrast two different types of comedy with τὸ φορτικόν: political satire and intellectual parody (including paratragedy and philosophical parody). I argue in chapter three that Aristophanes treats both types of comedy, sometimes disingenuously, as a unified phenomenon. I use “high” because it is an appropriate contrast for “low.” It is also a stark reminder to the reader that what Aristophanes claims is high is thoroughly reliant on the low. Consider, for example, how his anti-Cleon satire in \textit{Knights} (which he frequently holds up as the height of his non-φορτικόν achievement), is rife with obscenity and stock-routines. Paduano opts to call such comedy “commedia ideologica” but this term does not account sufficiently for the artistic aspect of the Aristophanic high mode, its artfulness, intelligence, and novelty. I acknowledge that “low” and “high” are not ideal English translations, and it is partially for this reason that I dedicate the first three chapters to defining them.

\textsuperscript{29} Milner Davis 1978,6-12; Hüsken and Schoell 2002, 8-9.
\textsuperscript{30} Cf. Paduano 1974, 13ff termed ἡ κωμῳδία φορτική “la commedia pre- o anti-ideologica”
\textsuperscript{31} E.g. \textit{Wasps} 56; \textit{Clouds} 522; \textit{Clouds} 537.
PART 1: DEFINITIONS

CHAPTER 1: Aristophanic lows

Introducing the Dichotomy

The most extensive diatribes against low comedy in Aristophanes’ work are found in the parabases of *Peace* and *Clouds*. In both passages the playwright describes the good type of comedy that he claims to do (high), and the bad type of comedy that he claims his rivals do (low). In *Peace* he asserts that he has made comedy better by getting rid of the low elements present in his rivals’ comedy; in *Clouds* he complains that his high comedy has been defeated by the low comedy of his rivals. These rival poets in *Clouds* are described as low comic poets (ἀνδρῶν φορτικῶν, 542) and the type of comedy they are accused of doing revolves around the obscene humor of the costume phallus (538-9); stock low characters like the anonymous old man (πρεσβύτης ὁ λέγων, 541) and the drunken old woman (γραμμέθυσην, 555); and physical routines such as cordax dancing (540, 555), stick-hitting (541-2), and running around with torches (543), all to cover up bad jokes (ἀφανίζων πονηρὰ σκώμματα, 542). This is opposed to a type of humor reliant on cleverness (520-2; 547) and words alone (544). The details are different, but the parabasis of *Peace* and that of *Clouds* are based on a comparable framework. In *Peace* Aristophanes states that his rivals’ comedy is “bad stuff, low-brow, ignoble buffoonery” (κακὰ καὶ φόρτον καὶ βωμολοχεύματ᾽ ἀγεννῆ, 748), and that it is characterized by slave-beating routines (743-7) and “market-place jokes” (σκώμμασιν… ἀγοραίοις, 750). The type of comedy that Aristophanes prefers is distinguished by its artistic merit (ἐποίησε τέχνην μεγάλην ἣμῖν κάτωργῳς’ οἰκοδομήσας/ ἔπεσιν μεγάλοις καὶ διανοιαίς, 749-50) and political import (752-61). In both passages the bad comic mode is described using words derived from the φορτ- stem: in *Clouds* bad comedy is
typical of ἄνδρες φορτικοὶ, and in Peace it is called φόρτον. We see φορτικός elsewhere describing the same phenomenon. In the prologue of Wasps the “Megarian” comedy of slaves and hungry Heracles routines is termed κωμῳδία φορτική (66); and in the Lysistrata a character reluctantly stoops to a torch routine disparagingly called φορτικὸν τὸ χωρίον (1218). The phortic comedy described in Clouds and Peace is exemplified in each case by a different set of comic routines and characters, but their essential components amount to the same thing: physical comedy, crude jokes badly told, and stock characters and routines.¹

The opposite end of Aristophanes’ dichotomy is broadly characterized as verbally and artistically skillful. But where Clouds contrasts the low with restrained intellectual sophistication (522, 537) and novel inventiveness (547), Peace contrasts it with aggressive political satire that purports to save the city: he attacks important targets (μεγίστοις ἐπεχέρει, 752) and fights for the audience (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν πολεμίζων, 759). Clouds figures the dichotomy as primarily verbal (high) vs. physical (low), while Peace figures it as important (high) vs. frivolous (low). Aristophanes often conflates the intellectual and political modes as part of the same anti-phortic strain of comedy despite their clear differences and even contradictions (the political is angry and aggressive, the intellectual is restrained). For example, he pairs them together in the Wasps prologue, where low comedy is contrasted with “Cleon being minced up” (political, 63) and “Euripides treated outrageously (intellectual, 61). Additionally, he characterizes both as novel and skillfully executed. In Aristophanes’ articulation of his poetics the high mode is treated as impossible without its low counter-part and the ironic claim to do only comedy in the high mode and never the low allows us, readers and spectators, to admit the necessity of the low.

¹ Dobrov 1988, 21.
In this chapter I look in detail at the parabases of Peace and Clouds, the prologue of Wasps, and a selection of other passages where Aristophanes defines τὸ φορτικὸν.

**Peace**

χρῆν μὲν τὔπτειν τοὺς ῥαβδούχους, εἰ τις κωμῳδοποιητής  
αὐτὸν ἐπῆνει πρὸς τὸ θέατρον παραβάς ἐν τοῖς ἀναπαίστοις. ἐφ’ ὅσιον εἰκός πινα τίμησαι, θύγατερ Δίος, ὅσιος ἀριστος κωμῳδοδιδάσκαλος ἀνθρώπων καὶ κλεινότατος γεγένηται, ἀξίου εἶναι φησ’ εὐλογίας μεγάλης ὁ διδάσκαλος ἡμῶν. πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ τοὺς ἀντιπάλους μόνος ἀνθρώπων κατέταυσεν εἰς τὰ δάκτυλα σκύπτοντας ἃεὶ καὶ τοῖς φθειρόν πολεμοῦντας, τοὺς τού μάπτοντας καὶ τοὺς πεινώντας ἀκίνοις ἐξῆλασ’ ἀτύμωσας πρῶτος, καὶ τοὺς δούλους παρέλυσεν τοὺς φεύγοντας καταπατώντας καὶ τυπτομένους ἐπίθηκες, ὅσιος ἐξήλασ’ κλάσοντας ἃεὶ, καὶ τούτους οὖν ἐκεῖνο δυτὶ

745 ἰν’ ὁ σύνδουλος σκύπσας αὐτὸ τὰς πληγάς εἶτ’ ἀνέροιτο, “ὡς κακόδαιμον, τί τὸ δέρμ’ ἐπαθεῖς; μὴν ὅστις εἰσεβαλέν σοι εἰς τὰς πλευρὰς πολλῆς στρατιὰ κάδεν δεινότητα τὸ νύτων;” τοιαῦτ’ ἀφελὼν κακὰ καὶ φόρταν καὶ βωμολοχεύματ’ ἀγεννὴ ἐποίησε τέχνην μεγάλην ἡμῶν κάπτυργω’ οἰκοδομήσας ἐπεμεινει μεγάλοι καὶ διανοιαίς καὶ σκώμασιν οὐκ ἅγιοις, οὐκ ἐπεμεινεις ἀνδρὶς Ὀμήρους κωμῳδίοις οὐδὲ γυναῖκας, ἀλλ’ ὁ Ῥακλέας ὁργὴν τίν’ ἐχθιν οὕς σειστιος ἐπεχεῖρε, διαβᾶσθαι βουρσῶν ὀχμάς δεινὰς κάπειλας βορβοροθύμους, καὶ πρῶτον μὲν μάχομαι πάντων αὐτῷ τῷ καρχαρόδοντι,  

750 οὐ δεινότατα μὲν ἀτ’ ὁρθισμῶν Κύννης ἀκτίνες ἐλαμπὼν, ἐκατόν δὲ κύκλῳ κεφαλίς κολάκων οἰμωξομένων ἐλιχμῶς περὶ τὴν κεφαλὰν, φωνὴν δ’ ἐίχεν χαράδρας ὀλέθρον τετοκείας, φώς τις δ’ ὑμήν, Λαμίας ὄρχης ἄπλυτους, πρωκτόν δὲ καμήλου. τοιοῦτον ἰδὼν τέρας οὐ καταδείκν’ ἀλλ’ ὑπέρ ὑμᾶς πολεμῶν ἀντεχθέν ἃεὶ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων νῆσων. ὃν οὖν καὶ νυν ἀπεδειγμαί μοι τὴν χάριν ὑμᾶς εἰκός καὶ μνήμονας ἐναι. (Peace 734-761)

If any comic poet praised himself to the spectators  
735 in the parabatic anapests, the stewards should beat him. So if, daughter of Zeus, it is reasonable to praise the best and most famous comic poet, our poet says that he is worthy of great praise. For he alone stopped his rivals  

740 from always mocking rags and warring with lice. He first scorned and drove off those Heracles who bake and go hungry. And he put an end to slaves

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2 I maintain the ἡμῖν of the codd. Wilson prints ὑμῖν, proposed by Blaydes (Wilson 2007b, 313)  
3 I use the text of Wilson 2007b and c throughout except where noted.
who run off or play tricks or get beaten on purpose -
\{the ones they always bring on stage wailing – and just for this:\}

745 so that his fellow slave, mocking his injuries, can ask
“what happened to your skin, you poor thing? Did the whip attack you
in the ribs with a great army and lay waste to your back?”
He got rid of all this bad stuff, low-brow, ignoble buffoonery
and made our art great, building it up with lofty word towers

750 and ideas, without market-place jokes,
and not mocking ordinary little men nor women either.
But with the anger of Heracles he tries his hand at the biggest target,
passing through the terrible smell of leather and muddied threats.
He says “I, first out of everyone, do battle with the jag-toothed one himself,
from whose eyes terrible rays shone out like those of Cynna,
one hundred heads of accursed flatterers licked him in a circle
around his head, he had the voice of a torrent spawning destruction,
the smell of a seal, the unwashed balls of Lamia, and the ass of a camel.
Seeing such a monster I am not afraid, but, on your behalf

760 I always held out in battle, and on the islanders’ behalf too. Because of this, now
it’s reasonable that you thank me and remember me.”

The characters that Aristophanes considers typical of low comedy are low on two
counts: first, they come from the lowest ranks of society. In line 740 Aristophanes’ rivals
are described as “always mocking rags and warring with lice” (εἰς τὰ ῥάκια σκώπτοντας
ἀέι καὶ τοῖς φθειρσίν πολεμοῦντας), implying that this is what their characters typically
do, and thus that these characters are poor.\(^4\) Slaves are also typical as we see from

742-7. In 751 we learn that “ordinary little men” (ἰδιώτας ἀνθρωπίσκους) and “women”
(γυναῖκας) are standard in low comedy. The lack of distinction attributed to male

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\(^4\) Attributing stage action to the comic poet rather than their actors is a standard formulation, seen
e.g. at Knights 522-3 and Frogs 14-15. Platnauer 1964, 131; Sommerstein 1985, 167; Olson
1998, 218-9. Σερντίδης 740 interprets τοῖς φθειρσίν as a way of referring to “ἐυτελεῖς καὶ ὀδόξους ἄνδρας.” Bugs as a low comic motif may also point to a broader source of inspiration in animal
fables. Pertsinidis 2009, 209 lists passages which could be termed “fables” in the extant
Aristophanic corpus, as does Schirru 2009. Rothwell 1995, 233-235 argues that fables were a
form of popular literature and that this categorization should be extended so as to view fable-
tellers as lower class and oppressed. See also Hall 2013, 279 who emphasizes the obscene
aspects of fables and sees fables as “indeed expressions of the tensions that underpinned a
deply hierarchical society, but expressed that tension dialectically in ways that spoke with an
equally loud voice to people on both side of the power divide” (295-6). Pertsinidis 2009, 222-224
argues against Rothwell that fables are more associated with age (the old rather than the young),
tradition, and cleverness and that fable-tellers are always likeable protagonists because the fable-
mode is similar to the comic-mode of the comic poet. Hall 2013, 283ff also focuses on what she
terms “knowingness” as a key feature of fable-tellers.
characters is shown both by the diminutive ἀνθρωπίσκους and the qualifier ἰδιώτας, which can mean “ordinary”, “common”, or “stupid” as well as someone without public office. In this way Aristophanes distinguishes the male characters of low comedy from the important or famous characters of his own political comedy (μεγίστοις, 752). The female characters of low comedy require no adjectival qualification suggesting that to put on a comedy with female characters was low in and of itself. The characters of low comedy are also low because they are stock characters. The hungry Heracles, whom we encounter in 741, was a stock character from mythological burlesque and satyr play, inevitably depicted eating or stealing food. The plural Ἡρακλέας points to the ubiquity and popularity of the Heracles theme.

The slave routine described in 742-7 is a stock routine. The slaves are characters whom the low-brow rivals “always bring on stage” (οὐς ἐξήγουν... ἄει, 744), and the series of present participles describing their actions (τοὺς φεύγοντας κάζασατοντας καὶ τυπομένους ἐπίτηδες... κλάοντας, 743-4) is indicative of the repetitive nature of the scenes. Aristophanes also complains that low poets put on these slave routines for one reason only (ἐπίτηδες, 743): for the sake of a joke. This accusation implies that such scenes have no value for plot, artistry, or moral betterment but are only there because they guarantee a laugh.

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5 LSJ ad loc. esp. II.2; III.3 and III.4
6 On the hungry Heracles see chapter two.
7 The Heracles character is also said to “knead” (μάττοντας), referring to a typically servile activity. Olson 1998, 218-9 suggests this occurs when he is working for Eurystheus. Cf. Birds 1689-92. See also Degani 1995.
8 Wilson 2007b, 313 suspects this line to be an explanatory interpolation.
9 Ruffell 2011, 423-4 misunderstands the irony when he writes that this slave routine is “an example of the comic innovation which Aristophanes will proceed again to champion.” He also calls it a renovation of the slave routine which supports the claims to sophistication he makes later. Renewing and innovating on traditional themes is, as I will argue, part of Aristophanes overall program, but there is nothing to suggest such a reading of this passage.
“Market-place jokes” are also denigrated as low comedy. The scholiast on the passage glosses “ἀγοραῖοις” (750) as κατημαξευμένοις (stale, hackneyed, common), putting such jokes on the same level as the stock slave and hungry Heracles scenes – they are old jokes that get repeated time and again. “Market-place jokes” can also be understood more literally as jokes that pertain to the agora. What this might mean, we see clearly from a metatheatrically-inflected description of the sausage-seller in Knights: φωνῇ μιαρᾷ, γέγονας κακῶς, ἀγόραιος εἶ (Knights 218)

Hideous voice! Low-born scum! How agoraic you are.

The sausage-seller’s character and actions in Knights bear out what this means. His “hideous voice” refers to his constant aggressive and crude insults. His low-birth and market-place savviness make him a skilled thief. Elsewhere, ἀγοραῖος is synonymous with κόβαλος and πανοῦργος, both referring to roguish tricksters who will do anything to accomplish their aims. “Market-place jokes”, therefore, are not only the hackneyed repetitions of the scholiast, but also crude, aggressive, and insulting humor that is typically associated with people who frequent the agora.

_Wasps_

Several elements characteristic of the low-comic mode described in _Peace_ make their first appearance in the _Wasps_ prologue:

55 φέρε νυν κατείπω τοῖς θεαταῖς τὸν λόγον, ὀλίγ᾽ ἄθετ᾽ ὑπετιτῶν πρῶτον αὐτοῖσιν ταδί, μηδὲν παρ᾽ ἡμῶν προσδοκάν λίαν μέγα, μηδ᾽ οὐ γέλωτα Μεγαρόθεν κεκλεμμένοι, ἣμῖν γὰρ οὕκ ἔστ᾽ οὔτε κάρυ᾽ ἐκ φορμίδος δούλω διαρριπτοῦντε τοῖς θεωμένοις,

60 οὔθ᾽ Ἡρακλῆς τὸ δεῖπνον ἐξαπατώμενος, οὔδ᾽ αὐθίς ἀνασελγαίνόμενος Εὐριπίδης: οὔδ᾽ εἰ Κλέων γ᾽ ἔλαμψε τῆς τύχης χάριν, αὐθίς τὸν αὐτὸν ἄνδρα μυτωπτεύσομεν.

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10 Στ. 750.
11 Cf. _Frogs_ 1015
ἀλλ’ ἐστὶν ἡμῖν λογίδιον γνώμην ἔχον,
ὑμῶν μὲν αὐτῶν σοφότερον,
κωμῳδίας δὲ φορτικῆς σοφῶτερον. (Wasps 54-66)

Come now, I should explain the plot to the spectators,
but first I’ll say this little thing to them as a preface:
they should not expect anything excessively grand from us
but then again, no laughs stolen from Megara either.
We don’t have a pair of slaves throwing nuts
to the spectators from a basket,
nor a Heracles cheated of his dinner.
There’s no Euripides being treated outrageously,
and if Cleon’s in the news by chance
we won’t make sausage meat out of the man again.
What we have is a little story with a point,
not smarter than you lot in the audience,
but cleverer than a low comedy.

The passage defines two types of comedy: one that Aristophanes calls λίαν μέγα
(“excessively grand”), the other γέλωτα Μεγαρόθεν (“laughs from Megara”).

We have already seen in the Peace parabasis that slave routines and the hungry Heracles are
typical of low comedy, and aggressive contemporary satire is typical of high comedy. We
should therefore read this passage chiastically:

A: λίαν μέγα
B: γέλωτα Μεγαρόθεν
B: κάρυ᾽ ἐκ φορμίδος δούλῳ διαρριπτοῦντε καὶ Ἡρακλῆς τὸ δεῖπνον ἐξαπατώμενος
A: ἀνασελγαίνομενος Εὐριπίδης καὶ Κλέων

The phrasing of the Greek also suggests such a reading: the audience should expect
nothing grand, and, on the other hand (αὖ) nothing Megarian. No nut-throwing slaves
and hungry Heracles, but on the other hand (αὖθις, 61) no Euripides and Cleon either.

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12 Platter 2007, 87-89 analyzes the term “Megarian” as a “convenient tool either to excuse (while
drawing attention to) one’s own vulgarity or to denigrate the work of other, less self-aware rivals.”
Cf. my own analysis of the term “Megarian” in chapter two. Van Leeuwen 1893, 12, argues that
“Laughs stolen from Megara” is a quotation from another poet (“apparet aliena verba hic citari”).
He proposes Eupolis criticizing the Megarian scene in Acharnians. His evidence is Eupolis fr. 254
from Prospaltians, which he assumes must be directed at the same thing.

13 Most scholars agree on this chiastic reading. See Paduano 1974, 16; Kerkhof 2001, 20-1;
Konstantakos 2012, 125-6; Biles and Olson 2015, 101; Ornaghi 2016, 249-50. Cf. Rosen,
The phrase γέλωτα Μεγαρόθεν κεκλεμένον encodes three aspects that Aristophanes regularly attributes to low comedy: low comedy is the comedy of laughter (e.g. *Clouds* 539; *Frogs* 1-2; *Ecclesiazusae* 1155-6); κεκλεμένον ("stolen") suggests the repetitiveness of low comedy (someone else has done it before, cf. *Wasps* 1044, 1051-4; *Clouds* 546-59), and "Megarian" as we shall see in chapter two, is a term elsewhere used to describe easy and unsophisticated jokes. In line 66, such humor is termed ἡ κωμῳδία φορτική.

*Clouds*

540 οὐδὲν ἡλικίᾳ σκυτίον καθειμένον,
οὐδὲν κόρδαξ’ εἶλκυσεν,
οὐδὲν περιβύτης ὁ λέγων τάπη τῇ βακτηρίᾳ
tύπτει τὸν παρόντ’, ἀρανίζων πονηρὰ σκώμματα,
οὐδ’ εἰσῆξε δάδας ἱχουσ’ οὐδ’ “ἰοῦ ios” βοό,
ἀλλ’ αὐτή καὶ τοῖς ἐπεσιν πιστεύουσ’ ἐλήλυθεν.

First, she has come
without any dangling leather stitched to her
that’s red and thick at the tip to make the children laugh.

540 She doesn’t mock the bald or dance the *cordax*,
the old man with the leading part doesn’t hit
whoever’s at hand with a stick to conceal his bad jokes,
she doesn’t rush in with torches crying ‘iou iou’,
but she has come trusting in herself and her words.

In this passage Aristophanes lists the costume phallus, bald jokes, the *cordax*, old men hitting people with sticks, and torch routines as characteristic of low comedy. He

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14 Biles and Olson 2015, 102-3. Kerkhof 2001, 23 suggests we should read plagiarism into “stolen” too. There is a possible textual variation which records κεκλημένον “called from Megara” preserved in the Anonymous commentator on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics.

15 See chapter four on the *Wasps* finale for an example of these tropes in action.
criticizes use of the costume phallus because it is used “to make the children laugh” (τοῖς παιδίοις ἵν’ ἔγελως, 539).

Since children are young and not fully educated, their sense of humor cannot be very sophisticated. It is an easy and cheap way to incite laughter and implies that the comic poet has not put much effort into the humor. We can compare Aristophanes’ own assertion at the opening of the parabasis that he had to work hard on Clouds (ἡ παρέσχε μοι ἔργον πλεῖστον, 523-4; ἐπραγματευόμην, 526). The old man who hits people with a stick to cover up his bad jokes likewise implies an easy humor that the φορτικοὶ poets have not had to sweat over. The jokes are bad because low-comic poets do not put any effort into verbal dexterity; but the physical, slapstick humor of the stick-beating will guarantee a laugh anyway, thereby distracting from the badness. This is comparable to the slave-beating routines we hear about in Peace, said to be included for a guaranteed easy laugh.

There is not much textual evidence for mocking the bald, but visual evidence indicates that there were plenty of bald characters. These are mostly old men, and we may surmise that the comic poets did not pass up opportunities for mocking their hair.

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16 Sommerstein 1982, 188-9 and Dover 1968, 168-9. both unnecessarily argue that “red and thick at the tip” must be referring to a specific type of (circumcised) comic phallus and not the use of the item in general. See Sommerstein 2009, 122 on children.
18 Robson 2017, 84-5.
19 Thesmophoriazusae 227; Wealth 266; comic adespota 1050 (κρανίολειος) and 1123 (πριαμωθήσαμαι). Cf. Photius ad loc. ἐξορισθήκην τὸ γάρ τοῦ Πρίαμου πρόσωπον ἔμφραγμα ἔστίν (“to be shaved: for the mask of Priam was a shaveling”); Eustathius Commentary on the Iliad (4.884.4): ἵστεν δὲ ὁ Ὀμήρος ἐφ’ ὅσον ἔχρην διασκευάσατο τὸ κατὰ Πρίαμον πάθος, οἱ μεθ’ Ὀμήρον καὶ κείρουσιν αὐτὸν. δὲν καὶ πριαμωθήκην τὸ ἔμφραγμα. ἴν δὲ, φασί, σκώμμα, ἐπεὶ ὁ τραγικὸς Πρίαμος ἔμφραγμα εἰσίητε. δοκεῖ δὲ καὶ τὸ τοιοῦτον σύννεφος εἶναι τοῖς παλαιοῖς, ὡς δηλοὶ καὶ τὸ ἐπιστότου κειραμένου. Hesychius ad loc. The scholiast on Ecclesiazusae 932 informs us that a certain Geres was poor and bald, but not bald because of old age. Such a presentation of this trait indicates that he was mocked for his unnatural baldness. Cf. Acharnians 603 Σερ calls Geres “the bald” (φαλακρός) and says he was mocked for being πανούργος.
Mocking the bald is a joke based on physical appearance and so fits with the unsophisticated visual humor typical of the low-comic mode. Baldness may also have obscene implications because a bald head is sometimes compared to a penis.

The *cordax* was a comic dance. In Theophrastus’ *Characters*, the Shameless Man, who is “rustic, obscene, and ready for anything” (ἀγοράδος τις καὶ ἄνασσαυμένος καὶ παντοποιος, 6.3) enjoys this dance. Not only is the *cordax* itself named as a low-comic routine at *Clouds* 540, but at 554-6 Aristophanes also complains that Eupolis debased his *Knights* by adding a drunken old woman dancing the *cordax*, copied straight from Phrynichus. According to a scholion on *Frogs* 13, Phrynichus was known for being especially low (φορτικευομένου) and was mocked “for the baseness of his poetry” (ἐπὶ φαυλότητι ποιημάτων). In *Clouds* low comedy is distinguished from the clever comedy of words that Aristophanes claims as his preferred comic mode. The contrast between the verbal and physical modes is made explicit in lines 543-4: “She doesn’t rush in with torches crying ‘iou iou,’” but she has come trusting in herself and her words” (οὐδ᾽ εἰσήξε δύσις ἔχουσ’, οὐδ᾽ ιοὺ ιοὺ βοᾷ ἀλλ᾽ αὑτῇ καὶ τοῖς ἔπεσιν πιστεύοσῃ ἐλήλυθεν, 543-4). On these lines, Dover notes that “Ar. is simply making, in somewhat rhetorical form, the claim that his play does not rely on noise or violence for its comic effect.”

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20 See the catalogue of mask types in Webster 1978, 14-20 especially Masks ES, F, G, GA, P.
21 Henderson 1991, 244-5
22 See also Athenaeus 1.20e; XIV.630e; 631d-e; *Clouds* 540 ΣΕΜΕΡC; Aristoxenus fr. 103; 104; 105; 106; 109: ὃ μὲν κόρδαξ παρ’ Ἑλλησ πορτικός, ὥ δὲ ἐμμέλεια σπουδαία (“The *cordax* for the Greeks is vulgar, the *emmeleia* serious”). According to the entry in Hesychius’ lexicon, the *cordax* was “a form of dance in which one moves <the butt> in an undignified manner” (εἴδος ὀρχήσεως ἄσεμνης κινούσῃς <τὴν ὀσφύν>). Cf. a fragment of the middle comic poet Mnesimachus from the *Horse Groom* who describes a *cordax* as being “thrashed out” (λέπτεται, fr.4, 18). See also chapter four below.
23 See also *Clouds* ΣΕ 555-6.
24 Dover 1968, 169.
torch-scenes in comedy strongly indicates that torch-lit revels leading to violence were typical comic routines. The following passage from *Lysistrata* is especially significant:

1220

Athenian A: (To the slaves) Open the door! You have to get out of the way! Why are you sitting down? Do you want me to burn you with my torch? It’s a low-brow cliché.

1220 Athenian B: (To Athenian A) And I will suffer along with you!

1220 (To slaves) Won’t you go away? Or you’ll shriek loudly for your hair!

In this passage, the threat to beat and burn slaves with torches is called a “low-brow cliché” (φορτικόν τὸ χωρίον). The apparent unwillingness to stoop to such a skit (οὐκ ἂν ποιῆσαιμ’) functions like the denial of low comedy in the parabatic passages we saw above. But such a routine, the speaker of 1220 concedes, is pleasing to audiences (ὑμῖν χαρίζεσθαι). The φορτικόν in this passage is explicitly aligned with popular taste, and so the actor proceeds with the routine. Here, as at *Wasps* 57 and *Clouds* 539, laughter and the pleasure of comedy are explicitly associated with ἥ κωμῳδία φορτική.

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25 Torch scenes fall into three categories: torches in weddings (*Peace* 1317); torches in mystic rites (*Thesmophoriazusae* 101, λαμπάδα; 1151, λαμπάσιν; *Frogs* 313, δάδων; 340, λαμπάδας; 350, λαμπάδα; 1525, λαμπάδας; *Wealth* 1194) and torches in revels (in addition to the *Wasps* scenes cited above, see *Ecclesiazusae*, 692, δάδα 978; *Wealth* 1041). Additionally, there are several scenes that involve violence with torches: at *Thesmophoriazusae* 726, 749 the chorus threaten to burn the relative with torches and at 917 they threaten to hit him with it (λαμπάδα). In *Lysistrata* 316 the old men of the half chorus have torches to attack the female half chorus. See Athenaeus 15.699ff for a discussion of torches including many references to torch scenes in comedy, especially Alexis fr. 107.

26 Sommerstein 1990, 142-3 also suggests that this scene in *Lysistrata* is introduced with drunken revel-action. In New and Roman Comedy, such scenes certainly became typical routines. See e.g. Horace’s discussion in *Sermones* 1.4.48-52 and Handley commenting on Bremer 1993, 169.
The beginning of the *Clouds* parabasis juxtaposes visual, physical humor with clever verbal humor. Verbal humor in low comedy is either a bad joke (πονηρὰ σκώμματα) or meaningless noise (ιοῦ ιοῦ). In the second half of the *Clouds* parabasis, Aristophanes contrasts two further aspects of the low and high: repetition vs. novel invention:

οὐδ’ ύμᾶς ζητῶ ἰπταταν δίς καὶ τρὶς ταύτ’ εἰςάγων, ἀλλ’ αἰεί καινὰς ἱδέας ἐσφέρων σοφίζομαι, οὐδὲν ἀλλήλαισιν ὁμοίας καὶ πᾶσας δεξιάς· δὸς μέγιστον ὄντα Κλέων’ ἔπαισ’ εἰς τὴν γαστέρα,  
κοῦκ ἐτόλμησ’ αὐθίς ἐπεμπηδήσ’ αὐτῷ κειμένω.  
οὕτω δ’, ὡς ἄπας παρέδωκεν λαβὴν Ἰπέρβολος, τοῦτον δείλαιον κολετρῶς’ αἰεὶ καὶ τὴν μητέρα.  
Εὔπολις μὲν τὸν Μαρικᾶν πρώτιστον παρείλκυσεν ἐκστρέψας τους ἡμετέρους ἵππεας κακὸς κακῶς,  
προσθείσι αὐτῷ γραῦν μεθύσην τοῦ κόρδακος οὔνεχ’, ἢν Φρύνιχος πάλαι πεποίηχ ἢν τὸ κήπος ἦσθιν.  
εἴθ’ Ἐρμιππος αὐθίς ἐποίησεν εἰς Ἰπέρβολον, ἀλλοί τ’ ἠδὴ πάντες ἐρείδουσιν εἰς Ἰπέρβολον, τὰς εἰκοὺς τῶν ἐγχέλεων τὰς ἐμᾶς μιμούμενοι.  

δός τις οὖν τούτοις γελᾷ, τοῖς ἐμοίς μὴ χαρέτω· ἢν δ’ ἐμοὶ καὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖς εὐφραίνησθ’ εὐρήμασιν, εἰς τὰς ὡρὰς τὰς ἐτέρας εὐ φρονεῖν δοκῆσετε (*Clouds* 546-62).

I don’t try to deceive you by bringing on stage the same things two or three times. No, I am a clever deviser and I find new ideas every time, never the same and always clever.

I who struck Cleon in the stomach when he was great don’t dare to jump on him again now he’s down.

But as soon as Hyperbolus offered the opportunity, *they* repeatedly trampled on the poor wretch and his mother.

First, Eupolis mauled Marikas on stage, a bad poet badly turning my *Knights* inside out by adding a drunk old woman to it just to dance the *cordax*. Phrynichus invented her long ago and the sea monster ate her. Then Hermippus wrote yet another comedy against Hyperbolus and all the others attacked him too, copying my eel simile.

Whoever of you laughs at this nonsense, may he not enjoy my plays. But if you look kindly upon me and my inventions You will seem sensible in future ages.
In this passage Aristophanes attributes a lack of originality and inventiveness to his φορτικοί rivals (Clouds 524). Aristophanes claims, on the contrary, that he would never even repeat his own ideas, let alone anyone else’s. And, he says, even when his rivals copy his good (high) ideas, they inevitably render them low by taking them to a physical excess (κολετρῶσ’ ἀεί, 552) or adding female characters like Hyperbolus’ mother or Phrynichus’ drunken old woman dancing the cordax. I note once again that laughter (γελᾷ, 560) is pinned to low comedy, while all a spectator is said to get from enjoying Aristophanes’ intellectual comedy is a good reputation in the future (εἰς τὰς ὑρας τὰς ἔτέρας εὗ φρονεῖν δοκήσετε, 562).

Wealth 788-801

In Wealth the eponymous god returns rejuvenated to the home of Chremylus, whose wife wishes to shower him with καταχύσματα (handfuls of nuts) in a customary manner of welcome:

795 Γυνή εἴτε’οὐχὶ δέξει δῆτα τὰ καταχύσματα;
795 Πλοῦτος ἔνδον γε παρὰ τὴν ἑστίαν, ὡστε περ νόμος
ἔπειτα καὶ τὸν φόρτον ἐκφύγοιμεν ἀν.
οὐ γὰρ πρεπῶδες ἔστι τῷ διδασκάλῳ ἱσχαδία καὶ τρωγάλια τοῖς θεωμένοις προβαλόντ’ ἐπὶ τοῦτοις εἰτ’ ἀναγκάζειν γελαν.
800 Γυνή εἶ πάνυ λέγεις· ὡς Δεξίνικος γ᾿ ὄουσι
ἀνίσταθ’ ὡς ἄρπασόμενος τὰς ἱσχάδας. (Wealth 794-801)

Wife: Then you won’t let me shower you with nuts and figs?
795 Wealth: I will, but inside at the hearth as is customary.
That way we might also avoid the low comic act.
It is not proper for our producer
to oblige the spectators to laugh
by throwing figs and nuts to them.
800 Wife: Well said! Because there’s Dexinicus
up and ready to grab some figs!

As in the Wasps prologue, throwing nuts to the audience is named as a characteristic of low comedy, which is here termed ὁ φόρτος (cf. Peace 748). The high-low dichotomy maps clearly on to the poetic preferences of the poet (high) vs. the desire of the
audience (low): It is not fitting for the poet-producer to do low comedy, but that is what the audience, metonymically represented by Dexinicus, wants (798-9). The ἀναγκάζειν of 799 demonstrates the mechanical and inescapable force at work in the use of the low comic mode. It forces the audience laugh, because, as a tried, tested, and oft-repeated comic device, it always makes the audience laugh.27

_Ecclesiazusae 884-9 and Plato’s Phaedrus 236c_

At _Ecclesiazusae_ 884-923, a young lady and an old woman compete in song for the right to sleep with the former’s boyfriend. In the lead-up to this lyric duet, the young lady says:

нυν μεν με παρακύψασα προφθης, ὦ σαπρά.
885 ὧν δ᾽ ἐρήμας, οὐ παρούσης ἐνθάδε ἐμού, τρυγήσειν καὶ προοπάξεσθαι πινα ἀδουσ᾽ ἐγὼ δ᾽, ἴν τούτο δρᾶς, ἀντάσσομαι. κεὶ γάρ δι᾽ ὧχλου τούτ᾽ ἐστι τοῖς θεωμένοις, δῶμις ἔχει τερπνόν τι καὶ κυμοδίκον. (Ecclesiazusae 884-9)

You popped your head out before me this time, you rotten old bag!

You thought I wasn’t there and that you could strip the vines bare and draw him in with your song. But if you do this, I will sing a song in response. Even if this is annoying to the spectators, it still has a certain comic pleasure.

The passage does not use the word φορτικός, but it is rhetorically akin to passages such as _Lysistrata_ 1216-22 or _Wealth_ 794-801 in that a comic device is spoken of negatively, but is nevertheless deemed a source of laughter or comic pleasure. The phrase translated “annoying”, δι᾽ ὧχλου, means, in a literal sense, “like the mob”, signifying “popular” or “appealing to the masses.” Aristophanes often divides his audience into a small elite sub-group who appreciate his high comic mode, and the large majority of

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27 Sommerstein 2001, 186. One can imagine the scene being played so that the wife does, in fact, throw the nuts out to the spectators as Wealth turns his back to her to enter the house.
ordinary spectators who enjoy τὸ φορτικόν. Calling out a comic device as annoying because of its association with the masses, therefore, likens it to other low comic routines. The routine to which the younger woman refers is singing in competitive response (ἀντήσομαι, 887), but it is difficult to tell where precisely Aristophanes means the popular “comic pleasure” to lie. The alternating songs sung by the young woman and the old woman do not correspond precisely in meter, but, in Bowra’s words, neither are they "μέλη ἀπολελυμένα.” Bowra indeed suggests that the close but not exact metrical responsion evokes the idea of extempor composition. Palumbo Stracca also argues that various scenes in Aristophanes represent versions of the “canto alterno”, which she defines as “[la] prova di due avversari che si sfidano sul piano della creazione poetica estemporanea: l’uno propone di volta in volta il tema, l’altro risponde formalmente nella stessa maniera, ma apportando elementi di variazione o di contrasto.” Palumbo Stracca does not discuss the song-contest between the old woman and her younger adversary, but it fits her definition: the two women compete in song for the young man’s attentions; the old woman introduces a theme to which the young woman competitively responds:

Γραῦς οὐ γὰρ ἐν νέαις τὸ σοφὸν ἐνεστιν, ἀλλ’ ἐν τοῖς πεπείροις (Ecclesiazusae 895)

Old Woman: There is no wisdom in the young, instead it’s in the experienced.

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28 E.g. Clouds 521-7 and Wasps 1046-50. The idea is implicit also in the Frogs prologue, where Dionysus represents a high comic spectator and the entire audience low spectators. On Aristophanic audiences see Robson 2017.
29 There is a joke in Aristophanes’ phrasing. The spectators are simultaneously cast as high (because the routine is annoying to them) and low spectators (because implicit in its irritating qualities is its appeal to them).
30 Bowra 1958, 382. On the meter see Parker 1997, 536-42. For example, the middle two verses sung by the young lady and the old woman correspond very closely, the beginnings of 893-4 and 900-1 are both trochaic, and the beginnings of 911 and 918 are both an iambic and a cretic. The young girl interrupts the old woman at 921, but the end of her second verse and the end of her third verse (which is an interruption of and continuation of the old woman’s third verse) both end in the same series glyconic + Aeolic heptasyllable + polyschematist + adonean.
31 Bowra 1958, 382.
900 Kόρη καὶ φθόνει ταῖς νέαισι·
tὸ τρυφερὸν γὰρ ἐμπέφυκε
tοῖς ἀπαλοῖσι μηροῖς,
κάτι τοῖς μήλοις ἐπάνθετε· (Ecclesiazusae 900-4)

Girl: Don’t be jealous of the young.
Softness is inherent
in soft thighs
and blooms in breasts.

The old woman claims that wisdom does not exist in the young. The young woman
competitively takes up the claim. She repeats the dative plural νέαισ(i), and asserts what
does exist in young women – softness in thighs and breasts. In agonistic spirit she takes
longer to express the qualities in young women than the old woman took to say what
they lack. Obscenity is also a key feature of the canto alterno in this passage.33 The form
of this exchange can be compared to the practice of “combative capping” discussed by
Hesk. Bowra, Palumbo Stracca, and Hesk all note that improvised capping of this kind
reflects popular, sub-literary practices that would have called to mind ancient pre-literary
comic traditions.34

A passage from Plato’s Phaedrus also names as φορτικόν a phenomenon akin to
combative capping:

Περὶ μὲν τούτου, ὃς φίλε, εἰς τὰς ὁμοίας λαβὰς ἐλήλυθας. ῥητέον μὲν γάρ σοι παντὸς
μᾶλλον οὐτὶς ὡς οἶς τε εἶ, ἵνα μὴ τὸ τῶν κωμῳδῶν φορτικὸν πράγμα ἀναγκαζώμεθα
ποιεῖν ἀνταποδιδόντες ἀλλήλοις, εὐλαβήθητι καὶ μὴ βούλου με ἀναγκάσαι λέγειν ἐκεῖνο τὸ
εἰ ἔγω, ὡς ὁκρατησ, ὑποκρίνην ἀγνοοῦ, καὶ ἐμαυτοῦ ἐπιλέλησμαι, καὶ δὴ ἐπεθύμει μὲν
λέγειν, ἐθρύππετο δὲ· (Plato Phaedrus 236c-d)

You’ve got a fair grip on the matter, dear man. But you must speak such that we are not
compelled to do that low-brow act the comedians do when they say things back and forth
to each other. Take care you don’t make me say, “If I, o Socrates, do not know Socrates, I
have also forgotten myself” and “he wanted to speak, but pretended to decline.”

33 Ussher 1973, 197 also suggests that the gesture indicated at 890 by the phrase τούτῳ
dιαλέγου may be comparable to a pose used in the cordax.
34 Bowra 1958, 382; Palumbo Stracca 1996, 42; Hesk 2007, 129; 135-41. Hesk notes an
association with prostitutes.
The “low-brow act of the comedian” (τὸ τῶν κωμῳδῶν φορτικὸν πρᾶγμα) is “saying things back and forth to each other” (ἀνταποδιδόντες ἀλλήλοις). This is a kind of competitive response like the ἀντάδειν of Ecclesiazusae, but more prosaic. The example given by Plato, the explication of an ancient commentator, and the precise nuance of the word ἀνταποδίδωμι all demonstrate that the φορτικὸν πρᾶγμα indicated by Plato here is direct repetition. To illustrate what he means by φορτικὸν πρᾶγμα, Phaedrus repeats, slightly altered, the words Socrates had earlier directed against him. The 5th century CE commentator on the Phaedrus, Hermias, explains the passage as follows:

ὅπερ ὁ ἐρωτῶν ἠρώτα τοῦτο ὁ ἀποκρινόμενος τῷ ἐρωτῶντι τὸ αὐτὸ ἔλεγεν, οἷον "δέδωκά σοι τοῦτο," εἶτα ἐκεῖνος "δέδωκά σοι τοῦτο". (Hermias, in Platonis Phaedrum scholia, 49.16-18)

Whatever one speaker said, the other said the same thing back in answer, e.g. “I gave this to you” and then the other says “I gave this to you.”

The word ἀνταποδίδωμι can also have the meaning “correspond” or “echo.” This φορτικὸν πρᾶγμα is much more basic than that of Ecclesiazusae. It may indeed exemplify the kind of bad verbal joke (πονηρὰ σκώμματα) Aristophanes complains of in the Clouds parabasis. The Ecclesiazusae passage is evidence that scenes of obscene competitive singing could be considered comically stale, while the additional testimony of Plato

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35 εἰ ἐγὼ, ὦ Σώκρατες, Σωκράτην ἄγνω, καὶ ἔμαυτον ἐπιλέλησμαι; Socrates had earlier said: εἰ ἐγὼ Φαίδρον ἄγνω καὶ ἔμαυτον ἐπιλέλησμαι (Plato Phaedrus 228a5)
36 LSJ ad. loc.
37 Sharrock 2009 argues that the comedy of repetition is “so deeply ingrained in the comic project that it has some status as a generic marker” (165). She understands repetition as more than the verbal repetition signalled by Plato; stock characters and scenes, which we have already seen associated with low-comedy, are also modes of repetition: “Repetition is also…a better way of understanding the ‘stock plot’ which we are taught is the basis of new comedies, and the ‘stock characters’ which go along with it. The audience’s fun in the stock elements of comedy comes from the humorous pleasure of recognition and in spotting the sameness and difference – what one might perhaps call the gaps in iterability” (203-4). Sharrock also counts as repetition verbal pile-ups, alliteration and assonance, and “pop-ups” (characters appearing, disappearing and reappearing often without logical reason).
suggests that a more basic and prosaic version of competitive capping—a character’s words repeated *verbatim* against him—was likewise an overused joke.

**The Frogs prologue**

In the prologue of *Frogs*, there is a strong divide between the kind of jokes the audience wants to hear and the kind the poet (represented by Dionysus) claims to prefer. Xanthias, a typical slave character, wants to tell the audience “one of those usual jokes that the audience always laugh at” (τι των εἰθότων... ἐφ’ οἷς ἀεὶ γελώσιν οἱ θεώμενοι 1-2). These jokes turn out to be a series of obscene scatological jokes that accompany the physically funny exertion of carrying baggage. This type of scene is described as a common stock scene, often repeated:

τί δὴ ἐδει με ταῦτα τὰ σκεῦη φέρειν
εἴπερ ποίησο μηδὲν ἄντερ Φρύνιχος
ἐίουθε ποιεῖν; καὶ Λύκις κάμειμιας
15 σκεῦη φέρουσ’ ἐκάστοτ’ ἐν κωμῳδίᾳ. (*Frogs* 12-15)

**Why do I have to carry all this baggage**

*if I can't even do any of the jokes Phrynichus usually does?* Lycis and Ameipsias

15 do baggage-carrying scenes in every one of their comedies too.

The scholiast on this passage writes that Phrynichus had a reputation as a low comic poet:38

Φρύνιχος: Διδυμός φησιν ὅτι νῦν Φρυνίχου τοῦ κωμικοῦ μέμνηται, ώς παρ’ ἔκαστα ἐν ταῖς κωμῳδίαις φορτικευομένου. ἔστι δὲ πατρὸς Εὐνομίδου. κωμῳδεῖται δὲ καὶ ώς ξένος, καὶ ἐπὶ φαυλότητι ποιημάτων, καὶ ώς ἄλλατρια λέγων καὶ ώς κακὸμετρα. εἰσὶ δὲ καὶ ἄλλοι τρεῖς Φρύνιχοι. (Φρύνιχος δὲ ὁ κωμικὸς οὔδὲν τούτων ἐποίησεν ἐν τοῖς σωζομένοις αὐτοῦ· εἰκὸς δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἀπολυμάδιας εἶναι αὐτοῦ τοιοῦτον τι.)

Phrynichus: Didymus says that Aristophanes is now referring to the comic poet Phrynichus as one who constantly does low-brow skits in his comedies. He is the son of Eunomides. He is also mocked as being a foreigner and for the baseness of his comedy and for saying things that belong to others and for being bad at meter. There are also

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38 On this passage see also chapter six below.
three other men called Phrynichus. (Phrynichus the comic poet did none of these things
in what survives. They are likely to be found in his lost works). The scholiast accuses Phrynichus of being base (φορτικευομένου, φαυλότητι
τοιχώματων), and artistically incompetent (ἀλλότρια λέγων καὶ... κακόμετρα), reiterating the link between low comedy and bad comedy. Nevertheless, it is such low, Phrynichean
comedy that, despite its badness, always guarantees a laugh. The Frogs prologue highlights this in its repetition of laughter words (ἀεὶ γελῶσιν, 2; πάνυ γελοῖον, 6; γελοῖον, 20). The physicality, obscenity, and stock-nature of the jokes made in Dionysus' praeteritio, alongside the mention of Phrynichus’ φορτικός reputation, make the humor of this scene consistent with Aristophanes' complaints about humor in the low mode elsewhere.

**Low comic animals: Magnes in the Knights and the Megarian in Acharnians**

In the parabasis of Knights Aristophanes laments the fickleness of the audience, and to justify his mistrust of them he offers the examples of several comic poets, beginning with Magnes:

520 τοῦτο μὲν εἰδὼς ἅπαθε Μάγνης ἀμα ταῖς πολιαῖς κατιούσαις, δός τελεύτα χορῶν τῶν ἀντιπάλων νίκης ἔστησε τροπαία· πάσας δ᾽ ὑμῖν φωνὰς ἱεὶς καὶ ψάλλων καὶ ππερυγίζων καὶ λυδίζων καὶ ψηνίζων καὶ βαπτόμενος βατραχεῖος οὐκ ἐξήρκεσεν, ἐξεβλήθη πρεσβύτης ὤν, ὁτὶ τοῦ σκῶπτειν ἀπελεύθη. (Knights 520-5)

520 He knew this from what happened to Magnes when his hair went grey. That poet set up more trophies to victory than any of his rivals’ choruses. He performed every kind of voice for you, twanging like a lyre, flapping like a bird, speaking Lydian, buzzing like a fig-wasp and being dyed green like frogs. But it wasn’t enough. Finally, in old age – not when he was young though –

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39 This is Didymus Chalcenterus, a grammarian and scholar from the 1st century BCE-CE. We learn from Athenaeus (9.371f) that he had written a commentary on Phrynichus’ Kronos. The fact that the scholiast cites a source and the source does not merely reiterate the critique Aristophanes gives in Frogs, but offers additional comments (on his plagiarism, bad meter, and foreignness) suggests not necessarily that Didymus was correct in his assessment of Phrynichus (though he may have been) but that, at the very least, he is voicing Phrynichus’ reputation in the fifth century, a reputation that may have come as much from other comic poets’ agonistic engagement with him as from his own output.
the old man was cast out because he lacked satirical power.\textsuperscript{40}

This passage offers a different take on low comedy from what we have seen so far. However, several features attributed to Magnes’ comedy are consistent with Aristophanes’ other definitions of the low. First and foremost, the type of humor characteristic of Magnes is simple, physical, and visual. His comic force derives from his physical imitations of animals (πτερυγίζων, βαπτόμενος βατραχείοις) and his non-verbal sound effects (ψάλλων, λυδίζων, ψηνίζων), a more extreme version of Clouds’ ιοῦ ιοῦ.\textsuperscript{41}

Additionally, Magnes exhibits a lack of “satirical power”; in other words, there was no political humor in his comedy. That this is how we should understand the phrase τὸν οἰκώτιτεῖν ἄπελεύφη is implied by the fact that Magnes is followed, as an example of audience fickleness, by Cratinus, the arch-poet of satirical power. Cratinus’ devastating onomastix komoidein is described like a flood rushing through the plains, sweeping up oak trees, plane trees, and his enemies from the root (παρασύρων ἐφόρει τὰς δρῦς καὶ τὰς πλατάνους καὶ τοὺς ἔχθρους προθελύμνους, 527-8). The capriciousness of the spectators will be most effectively conveyed if Aristophanes meant to contrast their dislike of Magnes for his lack of satire with their dislike of Cratinus despite his satirical power.

Magnes’ theriomorphic imitations can also be considered examples of comedy in

\textsuperscript{40} “Satirical power” is Sommerstein’s phrase (1981, 61).
\textsuperscript{41} The testimonia about Magnes offer contradictory information on his career. The Suda states that he wrote eight comedies and won two victories, while the anonymous On Comedy (Koster III.18-19) says that he won eleven victories and there are nine comedies attributed to him. One likely victory and two certain victories are recorded for him in the victory lists (see Storey 2011b, 342-3.) That Frogs, Fig-Wasps, and Birds etc. were the titles of Magnes’ comedies is a supposition by a scholiast on this passage. It is no guarantee that these participles refer to the titles of comedies by Magnes, but one piece of evidence suggests that it is likely: one of the participles Aristophanes uses is λυδίζων (act like a Lydian) and we do have independent evidence that Lydians (Λυδοὶ) was the title of a comedy by Magnes (we have two fragments, cited by Athenaeus 690c and Pollux 7.188). The attribution of the action of the play to the poet seems to have been a usual way to talk about a comedy’s content. Cf. Frogs 13-14 where Phrynichus, Lycis, and Ameipsias are all said to “carry luggage”, meaning that characters in their plays did this. Rothwell 2007, 117-19.
the low mode because of their antiquity. As I argue at length in the next chapter, the antiquity of the routines that Aristophanes designates as low is one of their unifying features. The antiquity of animal choruses goes beyond Magnes. Sifakis demonstrates this by linking Magnes’ choruses with a series of late sixth- and early fifth-century Attic vases that depict animal choruses.

Animals on stage as a feature of the low-comic mode may also be evident at *Acharnians* 719-835. In this scene, a poor Megarian comes to Dicaeopolis’ private agora to sell his daughters, disguised as pigs. “Megarian” as we saw above, could be used as a term to designate low comedy, and the scene itself is marked as metatheatrical when the Megarian admits that he has come to the market with “a certain kind of Megarian ploy” (Μεγαρικά τις μοχανά, 738). The scene which follows does indeed prove to be metatheatrical, as the father costumes his daughters as pigs to perform in a farce routine. Throughout the scene the Megarian acts as a director, instructing his daughters in what to do and say (e.g. at 777 he instructs one of the pigs to squeal). The whole scene also revolves around an obscene double entendre based on the word χοίρος which means both ‘pig’ and female genitalia, contributing to the sense of lowness.

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42 Aristotle *Poetics* 1448a34 names him as one of the earliest Attic comic poets. In the *Knights* parabasis Aristophanes names him as one of the most successful early comic poets (518-25). His earliest victory was 472 (IG ii2 2318.7).

43 For earlier scholarship on the relation between the animal vases and Greek comedy see Sifakis 1971, 73-85 and Rothwell 2007, 37. Cf. below, chapter four on the wasp chorus and chapter six on the frog choruses as emblems of low comedy.

44 Both Olson 2002, 261, and Sommerstein 1984, 194 note that this looks like a reference to low-brow Megarian farce. On the metatheatrical implications of μηχανή see Konstantakos 2012, 128, with bibliography at n.23

45 Konstantakos 2012, 147.

46 Konstantakos 2012, 126-58 also argues that this scene represents a Megarian farce He offers a metadramatic reading of the scene as subverting “real” Megarian farce, in which “the native man of Megara would doubtless appear in the role of the clever hero, the triumphant deceiver and trickster, brilliantly outwitting his antagonists.”
Conclusion

Aristophanes presents a consistent and coherent vision of low comedy: it is physical or visual, easy, and obscene. It typically involves low status and female characters, animals, and stock routines such as slave-beating, stick-hitting, torch-running, nut-throwing, baggage-carrying, and the hungry Heracles. Aristophanes talks about it mostly in the negative: it is characteristic of his rivals; it is not fitting for a poet to put on stage; it is lazy and unsophisticated; it has no point; it lacks satirical power. Despite this, however, it is almost always represented as the type of comedy that produces laughter, and the type of comedy that the audience wants to see.47

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47 Magnes’ depiction in the Knights may appear an exception, since the audience are ultimately described as abandoning him because of his lack of political content. However, we should not forget that Aristophanes’ also tells us that in his youth he was extremely popular and won many trophies (Knights 521; 524).
CHAPTER 2: Low comedy in context

Introduction

The fragments of old comedy, together with testimonia and comic vase paintings, help to flesh out further what the low-comic mode consists in, and they illustrate above all that most of what Aristophanes calls τὸ φορτικὸν was perceived to belong to a very ancient comic tradition that looked back to the genre’s origins. In this chapter, I consider the potential range of routines, jokes, and characters that would have been recognizable to an audience as τὸ φορτικὸν. I examine the characters of low comedy whom Aristophanes refers to as “ordinary little men and women”; the evidence for routines of physical comedy; the hungry Heracles and other stock figures of mythological burlesque; and the question of Megarian comedy.

Several dissertations from the early 20th century – including von Salis’ *Doriensium ludorum in comoedia Attica vestigiis* (1905) and Wilhelm Süß’ *De personarum antiquae comoediae Atticae usu atque origine* (1905) attempted the task of categorizing low-brow aspects of Attic comedy and both aimed to trace the low-brow to a Doric origin.¹ Their work provides a useful foundation for the present study, but I do not share these scholars’ aim of tracing historical development. Rather, I identify the broad range of comic methods that could be considered low based on Aristophanes’ own definition. It is true that many of these comic devices can also be seen in our meagre evidence for non-Athenian comedy and pre-comic traditions. Instead of arguing for real historical influence on the development of Athenian comedy, however, I argue that the antiquity and ubiquity of low comic forms was treated by Aristophanes as evidence of their generic necessity.

¹ See also Zielinski 1885 (*Die Gliederung der altattischen Komödie*) and Mazon 1904 (*Essai sur la composition des comédies d’Aristophane*).
Until quite recently many scholars treated the political invective of Aristophanes, Eupolis, and Cratinus as paradigmatic of all fifth-century comedy. But as fragmentary material becomes more accessible and better studied, this view is becoming considerably less orthodox. The bias of the Byzantine commentators, who speak of Old Comedy as though Aristophanes, Eupolis, and Cratinus were its only purveyors, is one of the reasons why political invective has only slowly been accepted as just one among many comic subgenres in the fifth century. Platonius, for example, writes the following:

ὑποθέσεις μὲν γὰρ τῆς παλαιᾶς κωμῳδίας ἦσαν αὕται· τὸ στρατηγοῖς ἐπιτιμᾶν καὶ δικασταῖς οὐκ ὀρθῶς δικάζουσι καὶ χρήματα συλλέγουσιν ἐξ ἀδικίας τοι καὶ μοχθηρὸν ἔπανηγμένοις βιον. ἢ δὲ μέση κωμῳδία ἀφήκε τὰς τοιαύτας ὑποθέσεις, ἐπὶ δὲ τὸ σκώπτειν ἱστορίας ῥηθείσας ποιηταῖς ἦλθον…τοιαῦτα δὲ δράματα καὶ ἐν τῇ παλαιᾷ κωμῳδίᾳ ἔστιν εὑρεῖν, ἅπερ τελευταῖον ἐδιδάχθη λοιπὸν τῆς ὀλιγαρχίας κρατυνθείσης· οἱ γοῦν Ὀδυσσεῖς Κρατίνου οὐδένος ἐπιτίμησιν ἔχουσι, διασυρμὸν δὲ τῆς Ὀδυσσείας τοῦ Ὀμήρου. (Platonius On the Different Sorts of Comedy, Koster I)

These were the topics of Old Comedy: to disparage generals and jurors who do not judge correctly, those who get money from committing crimes, and those who live an immoral life. Middle Comedy dispensed with these themes and turned instead to mocking the narratives of poets…One can find such plays in Old Comedy too but they were put on late when the oligarchs were in power. E.g. the Odysseuses of Cratinus has no disparagement of anyone but ridicule of Homer’s Odyssey.

Byzantine scholars such as Platonius aimed to categorize and neatly historicize cause and effect, resulting in an obliteration of other types of fifth-century comedy from their analyses. But the passage of Platonius just cited easily demonstrates their error, since Cratinus’ Odysseuses was produced in the 430s. I speculate that there was a desire among ancient scholars to attribute a moral value to Old Comedy and so they

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2 See for example Henderson 2015, 146-7.  
3 On Platonius see Nesselrath 1990, 30-4.  
4 Cf. Anonymous on Comedy (Koster IV), who attributes to comedy an origin in correcting wrongdoing, and Tzetzes Prolegomena on Comedy (Koster Xla69-104), who also attempts to periodize comedy based on the presence or absence of personal mockery.  
5 Platonius is of unknown date. Sommerstein 2009, 273 suggests a date close to the fourth century CE based on his audience’s assumed familiarity with Menandrean masks and the discussion of Cratinus and Eupolis as well as Aristophanes.  
6 Storey 2011a, 335 suggests the 430s. On Platonius’ erroneous dating see Storey 2011a, 332-5; Sommerstein 2009, 272-88.
studied and preserved above all those comic poets who claimed to be teachers of morality and correctors of social wrongs. Recent scholarship, as I said, has gone some way to correcting this ancient bias. There are now two edited volumes on fifth-century comedy outside Aristophanes (Beyond Aristophanes and The Rivals of Aristophanes), and new editions and commentaries on the fragmentary comic poets. In his essay “Types and Styles of Comedy between 450 and 420,” Henderson surveys the evidence of the Old Comic fragments to show that Aristophanes was not paradigmatic of Old Comedy and that there was significant continuity between the comedy of the Old, Middle, and New periods. He provides a list of the different types of comedy we find in the fifth century that includes mythic comedy (burlesque and paratragedy/para-epic); utopian, Golden Age, or escapist fantasy; political (or “forensic”) comedy; hetaera comedy; and domestic comedy. Henderson does much to emphasize the dynamism of and differences between the comic writers of the fifth century, but he may, I think, overestimate the parochial and civically-engaged orientation of fifth-century comedy, arguing that much mythic comedy was more political than we might suspect, and that there was little private or domestically-themed comedy with “ordinary people” as characters. The fragmentary nature of our evidence means that argumentation remains speculative.

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7 Horace Satires 1.4.
8 Other scholars who discuss the variety of Old Comedy include Csapo 2000, 115-21; Green 2006, 141-2; Bakola 2010, 7.
9 The edited volumes are Dobrov 1995, and Harvey and Wilkins 2000. Editions include Olson 2007; Rusten 2011; Storey 2011a-c; the updated PCG and the FrC. For a similar sentiment see Bakola 2010, 1-2.
10 Henderson 2015.
11 Henderson 2015, 146-7. Next to domestic comedy he has included a ?, though he does discuss domestic comedy at 155-6.
12 The fragmentary nature of the evidence is, of course, problematic. The transmission of a fragment is inherently unstable, because it relies on the memory or accuracy of the transmitter and is usually cited in a particular context for a particular purpose, which may obscure or even alter its original meaning. We should not despair, however. As Han Baltussen (2017, 399) remarks in the epilogue to an edited volume on fragments, “skepticism should not lead to inertia: we want to do something rather than nothing.” Like Baltussen, and like Emmanuela Bakola in her
own interpretation of this evidence suggests, however, that we should be open to the possibility that there were a sizable number of domestic comedies with ordinary characters, and non-allegorical burlesques among the comedies performed in fifth-century Athens. To Henderson’s assumptions about the prevalence of civic comedy, I point also to the bias at work in the survival of fragments: commentators were likely to copy or comment on komoidoumenoi or allusions to them, to explain who they were or to date a particular play, whilst stock or fictional characters did not require such explanation.

In what follows, I identify examples in the fragments of what Aristophanes calls “low” in order to provide some texture to his sometimes cryptic remarks.

“Ordinary little men and women”

In the parabasis of Peace Aristophanes contrasts comedies that mock “ordinary little men and women” (ἰδιώτας ἀνθρωπίσκους...γυναίκας, 751) with his own bitter attacks on “great men” (μεγίστοις, 752) like Cleon. Aristophanes mentions slaves as typical “ordinary” characters, but offers little further indication of who such people could be. A survey of the fragments provides some evidence for who his “ordinary little men and women” are.13 Often we must rely on titles alone. Titles do not guarantee subject matter,
but we can be confident that when they name a character or group of characters, 99% of the time they played a role in the comedy.

One group of comedies whose titles suggest ordinary people as protagonists are *hetaera* comedies.14 There are 7 comedies whose titles bear the names of *hetaerae*: Diocles’ *Thalatta*, Pherecrates’ *Corianno*, and Eunicus’ or Philyius’ *Anteia* are cited by Athenaeus as “plays which take their title from *hetaerae*.“15 Additionally Cephisodorus has a comedy entitled *The Rival of Laïs*, and Pherecrates has a *Forgetful Man* or *Thalatta*, a *Kitchen* or *Pannychis* and a *Petale*, all of which are probably *hetaera* names. Additionally Strattis’ *Macedonians* or *Pausanias* has a pimp as a character, and it has been suggested that Alcaeus’ *Palaestra* might be a hetaera, because fr. 23 of this play indicates a female character anointing someone and putting them to bed (μυρίσασα συγκατέκλεισεν).16 Other titles which indicate prominent female characters include Alcaeus’ *Sisters in Adultery*, Pherecrates *Old Women*, Magnes’ and Phrynichus’ *Poastriae* (“female herb collectors”), and Theopompus’ *Barmaid* and *Pamphile*.

Beyond titles, we see plenty of further evidence of women on stage. Fr. 39 of Pherecrates’ *Old Women* mentions, “Athenian women and their allies” (Ἀθηναίαις αὐταῖς τε καὶ ταῖς ξυμμάχους), which is reminiscent of Aristophanes’ own *Lysistrata*.17 Pherecrates’ *Slave-trainer* featured female slaves in training (frr.50-1) and a woman speaks fr.113 of his *Miners* describing the joys of the underworld. In fr.122 of the same

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15 Athenaeus 567c
16 *Macedonians* fr. 27; Storey 2011a, 53. *Palaestra* could also mean “wrestling ground.” Cf. also Poliochus’ *Corinthiastes* which is derived from the verb κορινθιάζω meaning “be a prostitute” (Storey 2011c, 203).
17 See chapter five below.
poet’s *Ant-Men*, someone announces “An old foreign woman is here” (ξένη γυνὴ γραύς ἄρτιώς ἀφιγμένη). Several of Pherecrates’ unassigned fragments are also about women: fr.185 says “the old women are hotting up again”; fr.186 describes a woman as “a man-eating, drunken, sorceress” (ἀνδροκάπτραινα και μεθύση και φαρμακής) and fr.206 states “I see the women” (ἀλλ᾽ ὅτα γυνάς). This brief survey should serve to demonstrate the popularity of plays which focused on or included female protagonists, usually *hetaerae*, old women, or women who performed menial labor/ market women. They are especially prevalent in Pherecrates, whose comic female stereotypes, I argue in chapter five, are the basis for Aristophanes’ own depiction of low-comic women. In *Peace* Aristophanes associates his ordinary men and women with “market-place jokes.” This could refer in general to crude jokes such as those commonly directed at the bibulousness or ugliness of women, but in the fragments we also see women in the market-place joking about food.18

The titles and fragments that focus on ordinary, anonymous, male characters likewise lean towards low-class or rustic men (e.g. Chionides’ *Beggars*, Eupolis’ *Nanny Goats*, Pherecrates’ *Miners and Slave-trainer*, and Hermippus’ *Basket-bearers*) and old men (Apollonophanes’ and Plato’s *Mighty Old Man*), the male equivalents of working women and old women. In addition we see men who behave in an effeminate manner (Cratinus *Malthakoi* and Eupolis’ *Draft dodgers or Men-Women*), foreigners (Crates’ and Pherecrates’ *Metics*, Chionides’ *Persians or Assyrians*, Callias’ *The Egyptian*; Eupolis’ *helots*; Metagenes’ *Thurio-Persians*), and even children (Epilycus’ *Coraliscos* and Plato’s *Small Child*) all of whom conform to Aristophanes notion of “ἰδιωταὶ ἄνθρωπισκοί.”

The importance of identifying Aristophanes’ “ordinary little men and women” with slaves, working women, and old people will be seen in chapters four to six. It allows us

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18 E.g. Pherecrates *Slave-Trainer* fr.43; *Kitchen or Pannychis* fr.70
to see, for example, Philocleon, the women of *Lysistrata*, and the female innkeepers in *Frogs* as characters that Aristophanes and his audience associated with the low-comic mode.

**Physical humor**

Aristophanes complains about several types of physical humor: slaves running around and getting beaten (*Peace* 742-7); obscene costume humor such as use of the stage phallus (*Clouds* 538-9; *Frogs* 1-12); dancing, especially the *cordax* (*Clouds* 540; 555); running around with torches (*Clouds* 543); beating with sticks to cover bad jokes (*Clouds* 541-2); baggage carrying jokes (*Frogs* 1-12); and throwing food at the audience (*Wasps* 59; *Wealth* 795-9). The *Clouds* parabasis even figures the low-high dichotomy primarily as a physical-verbal opposition. Physical humor is a challenging and thus under-valued aspect of comic poetics. It is a largely visual phenomenon, which, though indicated in the text (think of Dionysus and Xanthias being beaten at *Frogs*), is mostly lost to us. There is likely to have been much more of this stage action than we have evidence for.

Therefore I try throughout this study to pay attention to textual indicators of physicality in order to fully incorporate stage action into my interpretations. This will have particular relevance in my analysis of the tragic *agōn* between Euripides and Aeschylus in *Frogs*. The fragmentary textual evidence is even more problematic since, without context, it is hard to know if a fragment is simply relating action off-stage or referring to something happening before the eyes of the audience. Much as with the ordinary or stock characters, citation bias is a problem. Scholiasts would probably not have seen the comedies performed and they are often not interested in stage action. Nevertheless, there are important conclusions that can be drawn from fragmentary references to

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19 MacDowell 1988, 3-4.
20 See chapter six below.
physical humor. Vase painting is also a crucial source of information about physical humor because vases tend to commemorate scenes that were visually interesting. Very few scenes of comedy are preserved on fifth-century Attic vases, but the fourth-century south Italian “phlyax” vases preserve numerous examples of scenes now generally acknowledged to be representations of fifth-century Athenian comedy.

The main categories of physical humor in the fragments and vase evidence are: dancing, baggage-carrying, and slapstick violence.

Dancing

Many fragments refer to characters dancing. In the Clouds parabasis Aristophanes

21 The term “phlyax” is problematic because it refers to a local Italian type of farce (see Taplin 1993, especially 48-9; 52-4 for discussion). Scholars thought, as Taplin notes, that the images on the vases were too crude to be Athenian Old Comedy, and that Athenian Old Comedy was too topical for exportation (Taplin 1993, 48-9. See also Kerkhof 2001, 1-4.). Taplin has shown, however, (and it is now generally accepted in the scholarly world) that the South Italian vases do largely represent Athenian comedy, and several of them can be linked to specific performances of fifth-century comedy despite the vases being produced in the fourth century (the view was first put forward by Webster 1948, 19. See Taplin 1993, 89 for vases which appear to represent 5th-century comedy). We cannot, of course, prove, or even assume that all the South Italian vases depicted fifth-century comedy, and therefore I have limited my discussion to those which can be linked to a fifth-century comedy and those dated to the first quarter of the fourth century, still contemporaneous with Aristophanes, into which category fall most of those named by Taplin as representations of fifth-century plays. The very fact that the images on these vases are so farcical that scholars believed for centuries that they could not represent fifth-century comedy serves to demonstrate both that the low mode was more common in fifth-century comedy than has previously been seriously acknowledged, and that it was these scenes by and large that people wanted to commemorate and remember. It is particularly noteworthy that the Attic fifth-century vases are poorly-made, of low quality and rare. Taplin’s explanation of this phenomena is instructive: “Attic vase-painting” he writes “is on the whole decorous and aesthetically idealizing; it has little taste for images that are grotesque, fantastical, satirical, obscene – the very characteristics of Old Comedy…on the whole export-quality painted pottery avoided physical grossness and demeaning situations. It may be no coincidence that most of the few comic scenes which we have are on small jugs or on rough household ware. This explanation, that comedy was somehow too ‘cheap’ for pottery painters, is confirmed by the large number of mass-produced terracotta figurines that represent comic actors” (Taplin 1993, 10, with Foley 2000, 287; Wrenhaven, 2013, 124.) See also Sells 2019, 53-88.

22 There are also some examples of obscene bodily humor in the fragments, but not in the vase paintings, e.g. a scholion on Clouds 293-7 claims that Eupolis and Cratinus both had characters who “shit and do other shameful things” on-stage (χέζοντας τε καὶ ἔτερα αἰσχρὰ πιοῦντας). Eupolis Autylochus fr. 51 (ἀρα σφόδρ᾽ ἐνεόουρησεν οὐζώλωξις γέρων; “did the abominable old man piss excessively?”); perhaps also 52 and 57. Pherecrates’ Kraptaloi fr.93 (πρός την κεφαλήν μου λάσανα καταθεῖς πέρδεται “he put a chamber pot beside my head and farted”). See also Phrynichus fr.66. (ἔμει καταμηλῶν. φλέγματος γάρ ἐν πλέως “Put in the probe and vomit. You’re full of phlegm”).

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complains about a comic dance called a *cordax*. He speaks of it as “low” without qualification, but later complains about a particular *cordax* in Eupolis’ *Maricas*, because it is gratuitous, danced by a drunk old woman, and plagiarized. Other examples of dancing in the fragments are often likewise attributed to low characters: in Eupolis’ *Baptae* there were men who danced like women; in Metagenes’ *Thurio-Persians* someone dances like a barbarian; in Cratinus’ *Delian Maidens*, the dancing is accompanied by farting; and in Eupolis’ *Nanny Goats*, someone tries to teach a rustic farmer to dance, but he does so only badly. Badness, low characters, and other low actions, all indicators of the low mode, accompany these fragmentary references to dancing, reinforcing its low comic status. In chapter four, Philocleon, an old, drunk low character dances the *cordax*, and in *Frogs*, Aeschylus performs a bad dance to some Euripidean lyrics. Both, I contend, would have been generically marked as low.

Two fifth-century Attic vase paintings show dancing scenes: the Anavyssos Perseus vase depicts a comic Perseus mid-dance on a stage and on the Cyrene Heracles vase, the centaur-drawn chariot is led by a dancing figure with a stick or a torch in his hand. Among the early fourth-century South Italian vases is an Apulian askos depicting a naked woman, perhaps of African descent, in the middle of a dance, along

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23 Eupolis *Baptae test.* iib and fr. 88; Metagenes *Thurio-Persians* fr. 7 (cf. the same poet’s *Breezes* fr. 4 which refers to dancing prostitutes, though it is not clear that this is happening on stage).
24 Cratinus *Delian Maidens* fr. 27; cf. Aristophanes’ *Peace* 335.
25 Eupolis *Nanny-Goats* fr. 18.
26 See also Cepsisodorus’ *Amazons* fr. 2 and Cratinus’ *Nemesis* fr. 127 (cf. also Aristophanes’ *Centaur* fr. 287,) which reference a dance called the *apocinos*, which seems to have been similar to the *cordax*. Athenaeus mentions this dance in a list of γελοῖαι ὀρχήσεις (14.629ff) and tells us that it was later referred to as the μακτρισμός, and that it was usually danced by women. μακτρισμός seems to be related to ἡ μάκτρα (‘kneading tray’) and μακτός (‘kneaded’). Pollux (4.101) further relates that it involved ἤ τῆς ὀσφύος περιφορά (‘circular movement of the butt’). Pollux calls it, along with other such dances φορτικὸν ὀρχήμα.
with a comic actor. As in the fragments, the comic dances are performed by characters already generically marked as low: mythological stock figures, women, foreigners.

**Baggage-carrying**

The baggage-carry routines that Dionysus complains about in *Frogs* are represented in the fragments only by two titles: Hermippus' *Basket-Carriers* and Leucon’s *Baggage-bearing Donkeys*. The vase paintings, however, demonstrate the prevalence and popularity of such scenes. An Apulian calyx crater from the early fourth century depicts an old man followed by a slave laden down with baggage. The Berlin Heracles vase depicts a Heracles figure knocking on a door while behind him a slave carrying baggage sits on a donkey. The vase, though poor in quality and crudely illustrated, looks a lot like the opening scene of *Frogs*. There is some dispute as to whether or not it actually represents a production of *Frogs*, one of the main problems being that Heracles appears to be Heracles, and not Dionysus disguised. If the vase does depict *Frogs*, it, like the *Demes* vase I discuss below, is evidence of a painter selecting a scene of low comedy to paint from a play that also had plenty of comedy in the high mode. If it is not *Frogs*, it demonstrates that the comedy’s opening was common stock material.

The *obeliophoroi* vases depict a different kind of baggage-carrying scene. There are two such vases, one from fifth-century Athens, and the other a fourth-century Apulian

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27 Anavysos Perseus: Athens, Vlastos coll.; BAPD 216566. Though this vase is in bad condition, the raised foot of Perseus in a dance pose is clearly visible. See Hughes 2006. Cyrene Heracles: Louvre L9 (N3408); BAPD 217495. Apulian askos: Ruvo, Jatta coll. 1402. Other examples include Tillyard Hope coll. 224 depicting a dancing actor; and Heidelberg B134, BAPD 4648 (Attic, 4th century).
28 Bari 2795, from Valenzano; Trendall 1967, 49.
29 Formerly Berlin, Staatliche Museen F3046, now lost. C.370-50.
30 Taplin 1993, 45-7. Taplin explains the discrepancy away as a product of the artist's lack of skill, or that the commissioner wanted only to remember this scene with no emphasis on what followed; or even that the lion skin being taken off was an indication that it did not really belong to the figure.
31 Since the vase is dated to the mid-fourth century it may also be either a misremembering of the *Frogs* scene, or an adaptation of it in another play which did not include Dionysus.
Both depict two men balancing a tray between them and above their heads with a large cake on it. The repetition across vases may point to a particularly memorable scene in one play. However, the characters in each are wearing different costumes, and on the Apulian vase an auletris has been added. This could either indicate a later reperformance of a single play, or offer evidence that the routine was a standard one, often repeated or inserted into different plays. An early fourth-century Apulian bell crater known as the Cheiron vase also alludes to a funny variation on the baggage-carrying scene. The vase depicts Cheiron ascending some steps pushed and pulled by two slaves. At the top of the steps lies a baggage-pack. The effort which the two slaves expend getting the old man up the steps, together with the presence of a baggage-pack suggests that this scene may have been accompanied by typical load-bearing jokes, with Cheiron, instead of the baggage, being the load. These vases, together with the opening of Frogs, point to the prologue of that play as more of a stock routine that has generally been appreciated.

Slapstick violence

In the fragments, as in the surviving Aristophanic corpus, slapstick violence is rife, and on-stage action can often be indicated by a series of imperatives as we see in Cratinus fr. 341: “kill, flay, beat!” (σφάττε, δαῖρε, κόπτε).

Among the vase paintings, an Apulian bell crater, possibly from as early as 420 BCE, shows a man with a stick pulling along a

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33 London, British Museum F151, Apulian bell crater c.380.
34 Pherecrates Petale fr. 144; Hermippus Soldiers fr. 51, and his unassigned frs. 72 and 74; Cratinus fr. 303; Eupolis fr. 99, 104-5 has an informer say he was beaten and tied up. This action may have occurred in the play much like Dicæopolis’ treatment of the informer in Acharnians. In the unassigned fragment 73 of Phrynichus a character (perhaps Dionysus) claims all his molars have been knocked out. Fr. 2 of Plato’s Adonis suggests someone has been or is about to be beaten (περὶ τῶν δὲ πλευρῶν οὐδέμιαν ὄραν ἔχεις, “You have no thought for my/your ribs”) as does fr. 12 of the same poet’s Festival Women (λέπει τραχείαν ἔχων, “he thrashes with a rough whip?”). In his Riff-raff fr. 180 someone threatens: σὲ μὲν, ὦ μοχθηρέ, παλινδορίαν παῖσαι αὐτοῦ καταθήσω (“I will give you a hiding and lay you out flat, you idiot”).
slave with a rope tied around his neck; a fourth-century Italian vase shows a character labeled “Pyronides” dragging the musician Phrynis along by his lyre. Taplin argued that the vase represents Eupolis’ Demes. In some respects Demes is characterized by elements of the Aristophanic high mode: it featured the return from the dead of four Athenian statesmen (Solon, Miltiades, Aristides, and Pericles), who seem to have successfully saved the city in the play, and were honored and praised at the end of it, making political concerns a central theme. It is noteworthy, as with the Berlin Heracles, that the painter decided to depict a particularly slapstick scene from this play to commemorate. Lastly, two late fifth- or early fourth-century Apulian vases depict an unknown comedy known as the Goose Play, which featured a policeman armed with a stick. Neither vase depicts any slapstick action per se, but the movement of the plot from one vase to the next suggests that the policeman caught a goose-thief. The prominent presence of the stick in both images suggests its slapstick role in the arrest.

The Goose Play vases point to another popular routine: theft. Several other vases also attest to the popularity of this kind of routine. On the Milan Cake-Eaters vase, two figures share a plate of cakes while a third sneaks off hiding a cake in his chiton; the Berlin Drinker vase depicts a man eating a cake and holding an amphora as he runs

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35 Slave beating: Berlin F 3043 by the Amykos painter. Trendall 1967, 49 dates the vase to the end of the fifth century and Denoyelle 2010, 106 dates it to 420. Pyronides and Phrynis: Salerno, Museo Provinciale, from Pontecagnano; Trendall 1967, 43. This vase is dated to the mid-fourth century but depicts a fifth-century subject (the musician Phrynis. It has been suggested that this may be a representation of Eupolis’ Demes (see Taplin 1993, 42).
36 Cf. an Athenian fifth-century oenochoe (Athens, Agora P 23985; BAPD 9016744), which depicts two figures labelled [ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ and ΦΟΡ…], possibly Dionysus and Phormion from Eupolis Taxiarchs (Trendall 1967, 24). This vase is in very poor condition but may show the two characters in a physical altercation.
37 New York Goose Play: New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, 24.97.104: Apulian calyx crater c. 400 BCE. The Attic inscription makes it likely to represent an Attic comedy. Boston Goose Play: Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 69.695, Apulian bell crater c.370 BCE. Since this image clearly represents the same play as the New York Goose Play vase, we have here a definite instance of a fourth-century depiction of a comedy first performed several decades earlier. On the interpretation of these vases see Taplin 1993, 30-32.
from a woman chasing after him. Theft scenes abound in extant Aristophanes, and in the fragments. Popularity and physicality are strong markers of the low mode. We also learn from the Laconian historian Sosibius (3rd century BCE, cited by Athenaeus) that theft routines were characteristic of an early form of Spartan comedy:

Παρὰ δὲ Λακεδαιμονίοις κωμικῆς παιδιάς ἦν τις τρόπος παλαιός, ὡς φησὶ Σωσίβιος, οὐκ ἄγαν σπουδαῖος, ἀτε δὴ κἀκεῖ τὸ λιτὸν τῆς Σπάρτης μεταδικούσης. ἐμιμέετο γὰρ τις ἐν εὐτελεῖ τῇ λέξει κλέπτοντας τινας ὀπώραν ἢ ξενικὸν ἴατρόν τοιαυτή λέγοντα…(621d1-2)

Among the Spartans there was a certain ancient mode of comic play, as Sosibios says, not excessively serious since the Spartans, even in this type of matter, sought after simplicity: someone would imitate, in simple language, people stealing fruit or a foreign doctor saying something… The phrase κωμικῆς παιδιάς τις τρόπος παλαιός points to the informal, pre-literary, probably improvised nature of this comic performance. It would be useful if we could know whether τις τρόπος παλαιός was a quotation or paraphrase from Sosibius, or whether it was the words of Athenaeus (i.e. whether the mode of comic play was ancient in the 3rd century BCE or in the 3rd century CE). Based on Athenaeus’ parenthetical usage of ὡς φησὶ elsewhere, it seems probable that Sosibius used the phrase or something like it.  

40 Παλαιός is often used of the quasi-legendary past, and Sosibius could certainly be discussing comic origins. From this same passage, it also appears

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38 Milan cake-eaters: Milan, Museo Civico Archeologico, AO.9.284, Apulian bell crater from Ruvo; Berlin Drinker: formerly Berlin Staatliche Museen F3047, destroyed or plundered.  
39 Eupolis Spongers fr.162 - φόροσίν, ἄρτι ἄρκουσιν ἐκ τῆς σκίας τὸ χρυσίον, τάργυρια πορθεῖται (“they are carrying off and stealing from the house, the gold and silver is being robbed”); and a character in Nicophon’s Birth of Aphrodite fr. 2 tells someone to “get their hands off my staff and wallet.” Other examples: Pherecrates’ Krapataloi fr.99 has someone suggest stealing honey cakes in the street; two fragments from Plato’s Cleophon reference a thief (fr. 58: ἀνδρὸς ἁρπαγιστᾶτου and 59), and the same poet’s Envoys reports the theft of ladles and other accoutrements (fr. 128, 129). Cf. Plato Griffins fr. 15. a corrupt fragment from Strattis’ Chill-Seekers (fr.62) mentions people stealing a wine-cooler and bronze ladle. Cf. comic papyrus 1095. An unassigned fragment (356) of Cratinus reads: ἄγουν ἐσορθήν οἱ κλέπται (“The thieves are having a party”).  
40 E.g. Athenaeus 1.6d; 1.15c; 1.26a (there are many other examples). See 15.678b for another example of ὡς φησὶ Σωσίβιος, where the pre-parenthetical remarks clearly come from Sosibius.  
41 E.g. Plato Cratylus 411b; Thucydides 1.1.3; 1.5.2 etc;
that the “foreign doctor” was an early stock figure. The simplicity and imitativeness emphasized in relation to this stock scene and character point to a pre-cursor of the fifth-century Athenian low mode.

**The hungry Heracles and Cowardly Dionysus**

The hungry Heracles was a stock mythological figure. He appears in mythological burlesques throughout the fifth century, but he also appears in other types of comedy (e.g. Aristophanes’ own *Birds*). Aristophanes was not alone in his complaints about the ubiquity of the hungry Heracles, and nor was he the only one to associate it with poor comic craft. *Peace* ΣRV 741 cites the following fragment of Cratinus:

υπὸ δὲ Ἡρακλέους πεινώντος ἀεὶ καὶ σκύπτοντος ταῦτα † οὐ βιωτόν ἐστι (fr. 346)

Life’s not worth living when Heracles is always hungry

And making these jokes

Until recently, mythological burlesque was considered more characteristic of Middle Comedy than of Old Comedy because we see little of it in the surviving plays of Aristophanes. Ancient scholarship, including Platonius’ περὶ διαφορᾶς κωμῳδίων contributed to this misconception. 2003, 61-2. See Rosen 1995, 119-138; Csapo 2000, 116-17; and Sidwell 2000, 247-258 on the problems of “Middle Comedy” as a category. As Rosen notes, for ancient scholars a play’s categorization as “Old” or “Middle” was not chronological, but depended on how much invective it had. Mythological burlesques were often assumed to have none and therefore classed as “Middle.” Recent work has brought attention to the popularity of mythological burlesque among the fifth century comedians too: despite Nesselrath’s claim (1990, 204, 236-41; 1995, 1-2; 12-13) that myth was the distinctive feature of Middle Comedy, Webster, as early as 1952 had noted that 31/67 plays performed between 420-400 were mythological, while only 15/108 were mythological between 400-350 (25). On mythological burlesque see Reinhardt 1996 (on the origins of mythological burlesque); and Casolini 2003, 62-126. Bakola 2010, 188-192 offers a reassessment of Cratinus’ *Dionysalexander* which refocuses attention on the elements of mythological burlesque rather than the political allegory. Aristophanes’ mythological plays may have included *Aeolosicon*, *Daedalus*, *Danaids*, *Dionysus Shipwrecked*, *Lemnian Women*, and *Phoenician Women*.

The text is corrupt. The MSS have δυσι (ΣRV) or δύιν (Σ) for ἄει (a conjecture of Bergk); and βιωτόν or βιωτῶν (even σοβοιωτῶν “swine-Boeotians”) was conjectured for βιωτόν. According to Dubeber “vel ante vel post tauto plura exciderunt.” Kaibel’s suspicions were aroused by the similarity of Cratinus’ words and sentiment to those of Aristophanes, so he suggested that the scholia read: Κρατίνος δε ἐστίν ὁ τοὺς Ἡρακλέας πεινώντας εἰδόγην καὶ σκύπτων εἰς ταῦτα. For full apparatus and bibliography see Kassel and Austin 1983, 290-1. I accept the reading given above. The change to “it is not Boeotian” (sc. famem pati? Goebel) does not make much sense with the ὑπό retained, whereas with βιωτόν, ὑπό would have the sense of attendant circumstance (LSJ ad loc. A.II.4). βιωτόν also appears nowhere, so far as I can tell, with an infinitive (ἀγειν), but very often with a genitive phrase with or without a preposition (e.g. Plato *Crito* 47ε3; Plato
Cratinus too, it seems, was none too fond of the hungry Heracles, and it may have been in vogue to mock the character as an over-used comic trope. If ἄει is the correct reading for ἄγει in the manuscripts, Cratinus mocks the insufferable ubiquity of the Heracles routine in much the same way as Aristophanes’ plural Ἡρακλέας does. The fragments of old comedy, and the vase paintings, bear out the complaints about Heracles’ popularity.

Four South Italian vase paintings from the early fourth century depict Heracles in various situations: stealing food from Zeus, reclining at a banquet, bringing the captured Cercopes to Eurystheus, and, in the Berlin Heracles, in a *Frogs*-like situation. Even one of the rare Attic comic vases shows Heracles with Nike in a chariot drawn by centaurs, perhaps a parody of his apotheosis. The diversity of situations in which the comic Heracles appears in vase paintings is mirrored in the fifth-century fragments.

Five or six comedies have Heracles as a title character, and these titles indicate several different situations in which Heracles could appear. Two are titled *The Marriage of Heracles* (Archippus and Nicochares), and would have depicted Heracles feasting at his marriage. Nicochares’ *Heracles the Choregus* and Pherecrates’ *Mortal Heracles* and/or

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*Republic* 4.445a7 etc. ὑπὸ δὲ Ἡρακλέασ πεινῶντος ἄγειν καὶ σκώπτοντας ταῦτα ὦ βιώτιον ἔστι (“When Heracles is hungry, it’s not Boeotian to also bring someone mocking such things”?) could be a possible alternative grammatical solution, but what exactly it would mean I do not know.

44 Heracles at altar of Zeus: Leningrad inv.299 (St. 1775; W. 1121), from Ruvo. See Trendall, 1967, 33. Heracles reclining at banquet: London, Victoria and Albert Museum 1776-1919. See Trendall 1967, 37. These are both by the same painter and dated c.380-70. Cercopes: Catania, Museo Civico (Biscari 735), from Camarina; Trendall 1967, 31. “Frogs”: Berlin F 3046, from Apulia; Trendall 1967, 29. Additionally Heracles, together with Odysseus and other mythological figures is depicted on several of the so-called “Kabirion vases” which show a comic tradition local to Thebes. See Breitholtz 1960 198-200 for a summary of evidence and scholarship. See also Braun 1981.

45 Louvre L9 (N3408); BAPD 217495; Trendall 1967, 21.

46 On the abundance of Heracleses see Galinsky 1972, 81.

47 We can compare to Epicharmus’ *Marriage of Hebe* (whose subject is the same marriage of Heracles) and which contains a famous description of Heracles eating. Archippus’ *Marriage of Heracles* has several fragments to do with food (ffr.9-12). There is also a comedy by Phyllilius simply called *Heracles*, whose single fragment is concerned with food.
False Heracles, however, suggest Heracles inserted into contemporary situations. A further three comedies have titles referring to Heraclean myths: Cratinus’ Busiris, Phyllilius’ Auge and Plato’s Wool-Carders or Cercopes. Lastly, there are three other comedies that we know featured Heracles as a character: Phrynichus’ Monotropos, Plato’s Zeus badly-treated, and Strattis’ Callipides. Monotropos and Callipides likely had contemporary or non-mythological settings. In Zeus badly-treated, Heracles is depicted playing the popular drinking game cottabus.

The complaints of Aristophanes and Cratinus about the ubiquity of the hungry Heracles, and the implication that to use the character was bad form, can be usefully elucidated by this fragmentary and vase evidence. His appearance both in his natural mythological burlesque, and in a variety of contemporary situations suggests that anyone in a play on any subject could insert a hungry Heracles routine for an easy laugh, however detached he was from the plot. This, I maintain, is the main focus of the complaints.

There were other stock mythological characters too. In another scholiastic note on the Peace parabasis (Συρία), the commentator asserts that the complaints about slaves and the hungry Heracles are an allusion to Eupolis:

αἰνίτεται ταῦτα εἰς Εὐπολίν, δός ἐποίησε τὸν Ἰρακλέα πεινώντα καὶ Διόνυσον δεῖλον καὶ

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48 Mortal Heracles and False Heracles may be alternate titles of the same play (Storey 2011b, 505).
49 Busiris was a king of Egypt whom Heracles killed; Auge was the mother of Telephus by Heracles. Storey 2011c, 135 suggests that Wool-carders (masc) could be the story of Heracles’ servitude to Omphale when he wore women’s clothes and carded wool. The alternative title Cercopes also points to Heracles, and indeed in Diodorus of Sicily (4.31.5-8) the Cercopes story is part of the Heracles and Omphale story. Cratinus’ Archilochoi fr. 13 also references the Cercopes and Hermippus had a play of that title whose fragments imply the theme of hunger.
50 Phrynichus Monotropos fr.24. The title character suggests the loner character familiar from the later comedy of Menander. The other fragments of the play reference contemporary figures (Storey 2011c, 59). Strattis Callipides fr.12. The play was about a tragic actor and the fragments suggest feasting as a theme. Plato Zeus badly-treated fr.46.
Δία μοιχὸν καὶ δούλον κλαίοντα.\textsuperscript{51}

These things allude to Eupolis, who made a hungry Heracles and a cowardly Dionysus, and Zeus as an adulterer, and a crying slave.

It is impossible to know if the scholiast was aware of specific passages of Eupolis or was drawing suppositions from the text alone. The more relevant point is that the scholiast names for us two other stock mythological figures that he views as parallel to the hungry Heracles (and the crying slaves of the stock slave routine): the cowardly Dionysus and Zeus the adulterer.\textsuperscript{52}

The cowardly Dionysus is best known from Aristophanes’ \textit{Frogs}, though his stock-figure status has sometimes been contested or under-emphasized.\textsuperscript{53} Like the hungry Heracles, the cowardly Dionysus could appear in mythological and contemporary situations: in Eupolis’ \textit{Officers} he joins the navy, and in a contemporary setting he probably also appeared in Aristophanes’ \textit{Babylonians}. In Strattis’ \textit{Phoenician Women} he is seen hanging from the mechanē.\textsuperscript{54} He probably appeared also in Archippus’ \textit{Dionysus Shipwrecked}, Aristomenes’ \textit{Dionysus in Training}, and Cratinus’ \textit{Dionysalexandros} and \textit{Dionysuses}.\textsuperscript{55} Many other plays had Dionysus in the title or probably involved him, and

\textsuperscript{51} Eupolis test. xxxiii c (test. 19 K-A). As with many of the scholia, there are textual problems here. The MSS have \textit{Εὐρίπιδην} and \textit{Εὐπολίν} is a conjecture of Dobree.

\textsuperscript{52} Zeus the adulterer may have appeared in Aristophanes’ \textit{Daedalus} (see fr. 198). He may be the figure depicted on an Apulian bell-crater by the Cotugno painter (c. 380 BCE). This vase shows a comic Zeus running to embrace a girl facing away from him, who is actually an old man dressed up (Getty Museum, Villa Collection, 96.AE.1113). See Rusten 2011, 437. Adultery was probably the theme of Plato’s \textit{Zeus badly-treated}. The same poet’s \textit{Long Night} treated the conception of Heracles by Alcmena and Zeus disguised as her husband. Zeus the adulterer may have appeared in Alcaeus’ \textit{Ganymede, Callisto} and \textit{Endymion}, Crates’ \textit{Lamia}, Hermippus’ \textit{Birth of Athena} and \textit{Europa}, and Plato’s \textit{Europa} among others.

\textsuperscript{53} See chapter six.

\textsuperscript{54} E.g. Eupolis frs. 272, 273 and 281; and Strattis fr. 46. \textit{Officers} is dated to 415 by Storey, on grounds that the theme is “Dionysus goes to Sicily” (Storey 2011b, 211-12), but an earlier date is possible on the grounds that the general Phormion disappears from Thucydides’ narrative in 428. Storey argues for the later date, since he appears in Aristophanes’ \textit{Lysistrata} 804, and could have been raised from the dead in Eupolis’ comedy. Strattis’ \textit{Phoenician Women} is dated to 410-408.

\textsuperscript{55} Archippus’ play is also attributed to Aristophanes. Aristomenes’ play is dated to 394. On Cratinus’ “Dionysian poetics” see Bakola 2010, 16ff. Dionysus may also have been a character in
there would have been ample opportunity in these plays for a cowardly Dionysus scene. Like Heracles, then, the cowardly Dionysus could be readily inserted into an endless range of situations, and he was clearly a popular figure of fifth-century Attic comedy.

The Sicilian comedies of Epicharmus and his contemporaries Phormis (or Phormus) and Dinolochus, (late-sixth and early-fifth centuries) attest to the antiquity of the hungry Heracles and cowardly Dionysus as stock figures. About half of Epicharmus’ titles show plays that were mythological in subject (21 out of 43). All the comedies of Phormis that we know of were mythological, and all bar two for Dinolochus. Of Epicharmus’ mythological plays, two have Heracles as the titular character (\textit{Heracles in search of the belt} and \textit{Heracles with Pholus}). A further two, his \textit{Cow-herders} (430s-420s) whose fragments 18 and 19 refer to danger and threats. \textit{Dionysalexandros} and \textit{Dionysuses} may be the same play. The date of \textit{Dionysalexandros} is usually considered to be 430/29, though Storey argues it could be earlier (Storey 2011a, 284-5). Fr. 41 suggests the cowardly Dionysus in its description of someone grinding their front teeth, elsewhere associated with fear (Storey 2011a, 287). Fr. 45 may indicate Dionysus in the disguise of a ram. The hypothesis in p. Oxy. 663 also tells us that Dionysus is mocked, and he appeared in the role of Paris, who could also be stereotyped as a coward.

Demetrius \textit{Dionysus’} [...], Dioecles \textit{Bacchae}, Ecphantides \textit{Satyrs}, Lysippus \textit{Bacchae}, Magnes \textit{Dionysus}, Phyrinicus \textit{Satyrs}, Polyzelus \textit{Birth of Dionysus}. He also appears to have been a character (alongside Heracles) in Ameipsias \textit{Cottabus Players} (fr. 4), Hermippus \textit{Cercopes}, and (without Heracles) in Phrynichus \textit{Cronos} (fr. 10). Storey suggests he may have appeared in Hermippus’ \textit{She-Soldiers} (2011b, 305) and \textit{Basket-bearers} (2011b, 306).

Dinolochus is likely a generation later than Epicharmus and Phormus since the testimonia say he is either a son or pupil of Epicharmus (Dinolochus test. 1). The debate surrounding Sicilian comedy’s influence on fifth-century Attic comedy has raged since Zielinski argued in 1885 that Epicharmus was unknown in Athens before Plato brought his plays there. Zielinski 1885, 243. See Kerkhof 2001, 52-55 for the scholarship on the question. I consider it quite unlikely that the Athenian playwrights knew nothing about their Sicilian counterparts given the known cultural exchange between the two areas (e.g. Boscher 2012, 97-111 on Aeschylus in Sicily; Taplin 2012, 226-236 on tragedy in the Greek West). Kerkhof ultimately concludes that Epicharmus had a greater influence on Athenian tragedy and satyr play than comedy (e.g. 143), but that Athenian comedy’s preferred mythological figures were so ubiquitous that “man den Komikern der Archaia wohl zutrauen muß, von sich aus, ohne die Anregnung Epicharms, diese Sujets gewählt zu haben” (162).

The non-mythological plays of Dinolochus have intriguing titles – \textit{Doctor} and \textit{Tragicomedy}. The non-mythological plays of Epicharmus are largely about agricultural life and religious festivals, and some, including \textit{Citizens, Persians, Megarian Woman, Islands, Sausage,} and \textit{Logos and Logina} may be about contemporary politics. On \textit{Sausage} and its relation to Aristophanes’ \textit{Knights} see Kerkhof 2001, 132.
Busiris and The Marriage of Hebe (later reproduced as Muses), have him as a main character. He may also have appeared in Dexamenos, Antanor, and Amycus. The hunger of Heracles is vividly depicted in fr.18 from Bousiris:

πράτον μὲν αἱ ζῇς θοντ᾽ ἱδοῖς νιν, ἀποθάνοις.
βρέμει μὲν ὁ φάρυγξ ἔνδοθ᾽, ἄραβεὶ δ᾽ ἀ γνάθος,
ψοφεὶ δ᾽ ὁ γομφίος, τέτριγε δ᾽ ὁ κυνόδων,
σίζει δὲ ταῖς ρίνεσσι, κινεῖ δ᾽ οὖστα

First of all, if you saw him eat, you’d die.
His throat roars inside, his jaw grinds,
his molars mash, his canines creak,
he snorts in his nostrils, he moves his ears.

Dionysus was probably a character in Bacchae, Dionysuses, and Hephaestus or Revellers. Bacchae fr. 16, cited in Athenaeus for the word ἐπίπλοος, contains what I consider to be a reference to the cowardly Dionysus:

καὶ τὸν ἀρχόν ἑπικαλύψας ἑπιπλῶ

And covering his anus with his bowel

If my reading of this line is correct, Epicharmus furnishes us with the earliest image of Dionysus defecating from fright.

The hungry Heracles and cowardly Dionysus figures also appear frequently in satyr play. The generic similarities between comedy and satyr play have often been

60 Kerkhof 2001, 117; Olson 2007, 40-41.
61 Athenaeus tells us that this is a description of Heracles. See also the food theme in Marriage of Hebe frs. 40-5; 47-55 on fish; fr. 46 on bread; and Muses e.g. 85, 88.
62 “Used to mean fat and membrane” (ἐπὶ τοῦ λίπους καὶ τοῦ ύμνον), Athenaeus 3.106e.
63 Ὅ ἀρχός can mean leader (and is so translated by Olson 2006, 3), but both ἀρχός and ἐπίπλοος have scatalogical shades of meaning, so I maintain that at the very least there is scatalogical inuendo in this passage. I think it more likely refers outright to defecation.
64 Cf. Frogs 308 and 479-86.
65 Heracles: e.g. Pratinas Wrestlers; Aeschylus Heralds, Nurses, and perhaps Lion; perhaps Aristias Fates; Sophocles On Taenarum, Cerberus, Little Heracles, and Heracles; Euripides Busiris; Ion Omphales. See O’Sullivan and Collard 2013, 510 for more. He also, of course, appears in Euripides’ pro-satyric Alcestis, in which, at lines 750ff a slave complains about his excessive and inappropriate eating. Marshall 2000, 234 argues that in this scene, “Euripides shows his audience what it is they are missing - κῶμος – and then takes it away from them” and many commentators agree that the presence of Heracles in the Alcestis is one of this prosatyrinc
noted, and Shaw has argued that both developed from similar rituals or early performances. The key features of satyr play are mechanical stock plots and characters, obscenity (albeit of a milder sort than is found in Old Comedy) and physical comedy, especially the vigorous sicinis dance that is often a result of drunkenness. These features all look remarkably like the low-comic mode described by Aristophanes. The satyr play also has a close relationship to Doric performances: the genre’s earliest known author, Pratinas, came from the Doric region of Phlius and his best-preserved fragment, the so-called “hyporcheme” is composed in Doric dialect and mentions a Doric dance (Δώριον χορείαν, 17). Shaw argues for a connection between the early fifth-century comedy of Sicily and satyr play, noting their similar mythological settings and stock characters, subtle obscenity, and stock themes.

The close generic links between Aristophanes’ low comedy, satyr play, and Sicilian comedy, all of which made frequent use of the stock mythological characters of the hungry Heracles and the cowardly Dionysus, reinforce the antiquity and pan-Greek popularity of the figures. Their presence in satyr play as well as comedy in the fifth century lends extra weight to the complaints of Aristophanes and Cratinus: low comic poets use a comic device that was so unoriginal it could even appear outside the comic genre.

Megarian humor

In the prologue of Wasps Aristophanes refers to the hungry Heracles and nut-throwing
slaves as “laughs stolen from Megara” (γέλωτα Μεγαρόθεν κεκλεμμένον, 57). We know from *Peace* and *Wealth* that both routines were also considered φορτικόν, but what is the connection between low comedy and Megara? In what follows, I argue first that sub-literary Doric comic genres almost certainly existed on mainland Greece in and prior to the fifth century, and that an Athenian cultural stereotype of such comedy made “Megarian” a suitable designation for fifth-century Athenian comedy in the low mode that looked primitive and unsophisticated. Perhaps in fifth-century Megara, comic entertainment had not developed the political and civic streak that it did in Athens? I then consider the range of humor designated “Megarian” and argue that the Megarian prostitute was a stock character of Doric comedy, who often appeared in fifth-century Athenian comedy.

A lot of scholarly effort has been expended debating the existence of a Doric comic tradition on the Greek mainland in the fifth century and earlier and its influence on the development of Athenian Old Comedy. Three recent monographs review the evidence and scholarship in detail: Breitholtz' 1960 *Die dorische Farce im griechischen Mutterland vor dem 5. Jahrhundert. Hypothese oder Realität?* reprises a theory of Wilamowitz that rejects the existence of an early farce tradition on the Greek mainland.

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70 Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship on this question tends to approach it structurally and teleologically, asking what aspects of Attic comedy came from Doric farce and thus preserved remnants of an earlier, more primitive form of comic entertainment. E.g. Zielinski 1885, 244-5 suggested that episodic composition came from Doric comedy (cf. Poppelreuter 1893); Süß 1905 sought to show that stock figures like the *alazon doctus* (8-45) or the parasite (48-54) came from Doric comedy. Von Salis (1905) attributed a Doric origin to a wide variety of elements of Attic comedy, including obscene jokes (e.g. 14). See Kerkhof 2001, 1-12 for a detailed discussion of this scholarship and more bibliography.

71 Breitholtz 1960; Wilamowitz 1875, recanted in Wilamowitz 1895, 33-4, but restated in Wilamowitz 1921, 209 (“comoedia tota Attica est, sicut hodie credere malo”). Cf. Henderson 1991, 223-228. Breitholtz' aim in *Die dorische Farce* is to establish that there is no evidence that Doric farce (defined narrowly as “einem scherzhaften Ensembledrama mit gesprochenem Dialog – in dorischem Bereich…der Dialog vielleicht improvisiert und von nur zwei Personen ausgeführt”, 17) existed early enough to have influenced Attic comedy (18). In attempting to prove this, Breitholtz ends up devaluing all the literary evidence. See e.g. his comments on
Kerkhof’s 2001 *Dorische Posse, Epicharm und attische Komödie*, on the other hand, argues that Doric farce did exist, though his major contention is that the Sicilian Epicharmus, though probably known in fifth-century Athens, did not have a large impact on the development of Attic comedy.\(^{72}\) Finally Ornaghi’s 2016 *Dare un Padre alla Commedia* reviews all the evidence concerning Susarion and the Megarian tradition of comedy to suggest that, while dramatic traditions probably existed on the Greek mainland, the references to “Megarian jokes” in the fifth-century fragments do not refer to an established literary theatrical form.\(^{73}\) All these scholars, including Breitholtz, accept that there was some form of proto-dramatic performative tradition on the Greek mainland at some point. Though much of the evidence we have for ancient non-Athenian traditions comes from the fourth century, I venture to argue that these fourth-century comic sub-genres cannot have appeared suddenly and out of nowhere, especially given the fifth-century evidence we do have. It is not surprising that there is little evidence of what was probably an informal and perhaps improvised non-literary form of entertainment that was not taken seriously before Aristotle.\(^{74}\)

Two fragments of fifth-century comedy demonstrate a negative attitude to Megarian comedy in much the same way as the prologue of *Wasps*: Eupolis

*Prospaltians* fr. 261 and Ecphantides fr. 3. Both are preserved by the same source, the

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Anonymous on Aristotle’s citation of Ecphantides: “das unsichere Ekphantides-Fragment ist in der Diskussion über das megarische Drama des 5. Jahrhunderts vollkommen wertlos” (74) and his general comments in the introduction to the literary evidence for Doric farce (31), which argue that problems with textual evidence render such evidence worthless. The problem with Breitholtz’ and Henderson’s arguments is that they essentially deny that anywhere outside of Athens had a comic tradition, but (pace Henderson 1991, 225), I do not think that Doric farce’s supposed “international influence” need be a guarantee of survival, especially for something “low”, which, as Aristotle notes (*Poetics* 1449a38 “ἡ δὲ κωμῳδία διὰ τὸ μὴ σπουδάζεσθαι ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἔλαθεν”) did not interest ancient thinkers as a theoretical topic.

\(^{72}\) Kerkhof 2001, e.g. 24; 150.

\(^{73}\) Ornaghi 2016.

\(^{74}\) On the improvised, non-literary nature of such comic performances see Giangrande 1963, 15, and Kerkhof 2001, 5.
anonymous commentator on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* IV (1123a 21-25). In the passage, Aristotle describes the excessive man (ὁ ὑποβάλλων) as one who spends a lot of money on unimportant things, and in this vein he compares him to someone “acting as a choregos for comedies” (κωμῳδοίς χορηγῶν), who “brings in the purple in the parodos like the Megarians do” (ἐν τῇ παρόδῳ πορφύραν εἰσφέρων, ὡσπερ οἱ Μεγαροί). Aristotle’s observation is itself interesting, suggesting as it does that contemporary Megarian comedy (presumably what Aristotle is talking about here) was excessively showy and gaudy. But it is hard to assess whether or not this has any relevance for the earlier Megarian comedy known to the fifth-century comic poets. The anonymous commentator says the following on this passage:

καὶ κωμῳδοίς χορηγῶν. σύνηθες ἐν κωμῳδίᾳ παραπτέσματα δέρρεις ποιεῖν οὐ πορφυρίδας. Μυρτίλος ἐν Τιτανόπασι ***

Eupolis fr. 261: “τὸ δεῖν ἀκούεις; Ἡράκλεις, σύνηθες ἐν κωμῳδίᾳ παραπτέσματα δέρρεις ποιεῖν. ἄλλα καὶ Ἐκφαντίδης παλαιότατος ποιητῆς τῶν ἀρχαίων φησὶν.”

Ecphantides fr. 3: “Μεγαρικῆς κωμῳδίας ἁσμα δίειμαι ἀἰσχυνόμενος τὸ δράμα Μεγαρικὸν ποιεῖν.”

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75 The anonymous commentator also cites the prologue of *Wasps.*
77 Olson 2016, 351 provides the history of the text. Transmitted is σέλας ὡς τὰ παιδία, which makes little sense. The Aldine edition of the anonymous commentary on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* prints γελᾶς (i.e. γελᾷς) for σέλας (“as you see, you mock the children”). Cobet’s conjecture, which I have adapted here, is γελᾶ, <γάρ, ὡς> ὡς τὰ παιδία (“for as you see, the children are laughing”), which scans as an iambic trimeter. Even if this conjecture is incorrect, the connection between children and bad jokes remains. See also Kassel-Austin 1986, 450 and Ornaghi 2016, 106-7.
78 On the textual problems of the Ecphantides citation see Bizzarro 1994, 155-6. He takes the second line as belonging to the commentator. Kaibel further suggested that that we should take φησὶν <περὶ τῆς> Μεγαρικῆς κωμῳδίας as a comment of the scholiast (cf. Ornaghi 2016, 107;
And acting as a choregos for comedies: it was usual in comedy to make the curtains from leather, not purple fabric. Myrtilos in Titan-Pans ***

Eupolis fr. 261: “The thing, do you hear? By Heracles, your joke is outrageous and Megarian and very frigid. For as you see, the children are laughing.”

For the Megarians are ripped to shreds in comedy, since they also lay a claim to it, that it was first invented by them. If indeed Susarion, the inventor of comedy, is Megarian. They slander it as vulgar and frigid and using purple curtains in the parodos. Also, Aristophanes, mocking them, says somewhere “nor again laughter stolen from Megara.” But also Echphantides, the most ancient of the early poets, says:

Echphantides fr. 3: “I have dismissed the song of Megarian comedy, being ashamed to put on a Megarian drama.”

It is shown by all these things that the Megarians were the founders of comedy.

The Eupolis line comes from a comedy called Prospaltians produced in 429 BCE or 428 BCE. Eupolis characterizes a joke as Megarian, ἀσελγές (“outrageous”), and ψυχρόν (“frigid”). Ἀσελγές indicates an over-the-top joke that aims to get a laugh at any cost, but is otherwise pointless. It is comparable, in this sense, to what Aristophanes says about slave-beating routines in Peace. Ψυχρός implies a failed joke. The childishness of the

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246). Even if this is the case it does not diminish the importance of the fragment, since the phrase τὸ δρᾶμα Μεγαρικὸν remains and at least one must have come from Echphantides. If both did come from the commentator, he must have had more context than the line which has survived and a reason to mention Megarian comedy twice. Cf. the scholia on Wasps 57 which also cite the Eupolis fragment. On Echphantides see further below chapter four.

79 Storey 2011b, 192ff. Prospaltia was a deme of Athens located about 30km south of the city. The play has been compared, for this reason, to Acharnians, since both have titles (and presumably choruses) representing people of an outlying deme. It is impossible to say anything more about the comedy with certainty, though other fragments do seem to show a preoccupation with comedy. E.g. fr. 259, from a papyrus commentary in a very corrupt state, contains the following: line 6: τοὺς τολήτας μη γράφειν (“not to write about citizens”); γελωτ’ in line 24; 119-120: φαύλον…φλαύρον κακόν (“base…bad nonsense”).

80 Cf. Eupolis fr. 172 (Flatterers), 14-16: οἶδα δ’ Ἀκέστορ’ αὐτὸ τὸν στιγματίαν παθόντα σκώμμα γάρ εἶπ’ ἀσελγές, εἶτ’ αὐτὸν ὁ παῖς θυράζει ἐξαγαγόν ἔχοντα κλωίν παρέδωκεν Οινεῖ. (“I know that this happened to the tattooed Akestor. For he told an aselges joke and then the slave dragged him outside in a collar and turned him over to Oineus”).

81 See Olson 2007, 68; 2016, 352. Aristotle defines frigidity in bad rhetoric at Rhetoric 1405b34ff as being the use of compound words (τοῖς διπλοῖς ὁνόμασιν, 1405b35); strange words (γλώτταις, 1406a7); long, out of place, or frequent epithets (τοῖς ἐπιθέτοις τὸ ἡ μακροίς ἢ ἁκαίροις ἢ τυπκοῖς, 1406a10-11); and metaphors (τοῖς μεταφοράς, 1406b5). Additionally, Aristotle says using poetic language in prose results in laughable frigidity of language (τὸ γελοίον καὶ τὸ ψυχρόν ἐμποιούσι, 1406a32). Cf. Chirico 1990, 109ff. At Thesmophoriazusae 848, the relative uses ψυχρός to explain the failure of Euripides’ Palamedes.
humor mocked by Eupolis indicates simplicity and a lack of sophistication. It is apt for the speaker of the fragment to swear “By Heracles" given that Aristophanes calls the hungry Heracles routine “Megarian”. In the Ecphantides fragment, a character refuses to indulge in a bit of Megarian comedy, hinting at a metapoetic context. If the second line does come from Ecphantides and not Anonymous, the shame imputed to a producer of Megarian farce may point to obscenity or the failure of the joke. Overall, the term Megarian shares with Aristophanes’ descriptions of the low comic mode, its simplicity, perhaps obscenity, and a generic sense of badness.

Given Ecphantides’ early date (450s-430s), the Athenian social construction of Megarian comedy’s badness pre-dates Aristophanes. Some have denied that “Megarian jokes” necessarily imply Megarian stage comedy (and thus a metacomic discourse), arguing instead that ethnic stereotypes are at play. But, in the case of the Ecphantides’ text, the presence of one or both of the words κωμῳδία and δράμα strongly vitiates this claim, as do the purple curtains of Myrtillus’ Titan-Pans and the theatrical routines that Aristophanes can claim were “stolen from Megara.” A further important aspect of

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82 Cf. Clouds 539: ἐρυθρὸν Ἐξ θύρας παράχ, τοῖς παιδίοις ἤν’ ἤ γέλως. Even if Cobet’s conjecture is not correct, the word παιδία is secure in the fragment indicating some aspect of childishness associated with Megarian humor.
83 Ornaghi 2016, 110.
84 We only have two play titles for Ecphantides, Πειραι (Experiments, Trials) and Satyrs. We are not sure if this fragment comes from one of these two or another unknown comedy. However, a play with the title Experiments has definite metaliterary potential, and Satyrs is comparable to the play of Myrtillus also cited, Titan-Pans (the quotation is not preserved, only the title).
85 Cf. Thesmophoriazusae again, where the relative assumes Euripides is ashamed (αἰσχύνεται, 848) of his failed tragedy.
86 Storey 2011b, 4.
87 Henderson 1991, 226; Florence 2003; and Ornaghi 2016, 247.
88 As Ornaghi 2016, 252 says on this point, we should suppose that “nella specifica caratterizzazione del Megarese siano stati impiegati alcuni motivi diffuse nell’immaginario collettivo degli Ateniesi,” though he later concludes (incorrectly as I have argued) that “In Aristofane e nei poeti comici del V secolo a.C, perlomeno, non ritroviamo riferimenti a vere e proprie forme letterarie comico-farsesché riconducibili ad ambiente megarése” (279). He does concede, however, that for Megarian claims to comedy made in the fourth century to work, there must have been “la pre-esistenza di tradizioni rituali e/o mitiche a cui tali teorie avrebbero potuto
Megarian drama remains to be considered: according to Aristotle, the Megarians (both mainland and Sicilian) claimed to have invented comedy:

τῆς μὲν γὰρ κωμῳδίας οἱ Μεγαρεῖς οἳ τε ἐνταῦθα ὡς ἐπὶ τῆς παρ᾽ αὐτοῖς δημοκρατίας γενομένης καὶ οἱ ἐκ Σικελίας, ἐκεῖθεν γὰρ ἔγρα Επίχαρμος ὁ ποιητής πολλῶν πρῶτος ὡς Χιωνίδου καὶ Μάγνητος. (Poetics 1448a25-35)

The mainland Megarians claim comedy because it originated in the time of their democracy and the Sicilian Megarians because the poet Epicharmus, much earlier than Chionides and Magnes, was from there.

For this claim to make sense (I do not mean for it to be true), there must have been a cultural perception of the antiquity of Megarian comedy.89

I propose, therefore, that “Megarian” could designate (perceived) ancient, long-lived (and therefore popular) comic routines that were simple to appreciate. In this way the term acknowledges the originary primacy of the routines so designated. But it could be used (and mostly was) as an insulting way to talk about a foreign comic mode denigrated as bad by poets who considered themselves more sophisticated and inventive, perhaps under the influence of negative political relations between Athens and mainland Megara.

In Aristophanes and the fragments we also see a selection of Megarian characters, including the Megarian trader of Acharnians, a Megarian pharmacist (Theopompus Althaea fr. 3), and a number of Megarian prostitutes. In what follows, I suggest that the prevalence of Megarian prostitutes can be linked to a stock character

89 There is a huge bibliography on the so-called “Megarian claim.” Scholars have claimed that it was an interpolation or that though Aristotle mentions it, he does so only as a rejection of it. For a recent summary of scholarship on the issue see Kerkhof 2001, 13-17.
associated with Megarian comedy. Scholars have argued that the characterization of a comic character as “Megarian” depends on ethnic stereotypes in the context of anti-Megarian sentiment stemming from the ongoing Athenian-Megarian conflict in the Peloponnesian War. There are certainly examples in the Aristophanic corpus of Megarians mocked on ethno-political grounds (e.g. *Peace* 481-3). In the particular case of prostitutes, however, their proliferation in the fragments, and evidence of a Megarian prostitute in a context unconnected with Athenian-Megarian antipathy, makes a strong case for considering Megarian prostitutes a stock theatrical character.

In fifth-century Attic comedy, we see Megarian prostitutes (or the prostitution business) in Callias, Philonides, and Strattis. Callias fr. 28 comes from Hesychius’ lexicon, where the phrase “Megarian sphinxes” (Μεγαρικαὶ σφίγγες) is glossed as “certain prostitutes” (πόρνας τινὰς). The characterization of a Megarian prostitute as “sphinx” may indicate that the stock figure was a wily, clever type. Philonides fr. 5 speaks of “brothel-tax collectors” (πορνοτελῶναι) as part of the “terrible race” of Megarians. Strattis’ *Macedonians* featured a pimp bringing prostitutes, including the famous Lais, from Megara:

Α] εἰσίν δὲ πόθεν αἱ παïδες αὕται καὶ τίνες;

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90 Florence 2003, especially 38-40 notes the peculiarity of Athenian comic treatment of Megarians, observing that in their representation as “inferior, violent, childlike, poor, conniving, and uncivilized” they are treated differently from other non-Athenian Greeks. See also Ornaghi 2016, 279.
91 Philonides’ *Kothurnoi* fr. 5; Callias fr. 28; Strattis *Macedonians* or *Pausanias* fr. 27. Additionally, Aristophanes *Acharnians* 524-9.
92 Cf. Anaxilas (fl. c. 340) fr. 22, line 22-4: “it is possible to call all prostitutes a Theban sphinx, who say nothing simply, but in riddles they declare sweetly that they love you, care for you, sleep with you” (Σφίγγα Θηβαίαν δὲ πάσας ἔστι τὰς πόρνας καλεῖν, αἱ λαλοῦσ’ ἀπλῶς μὲν οὐδέν, ἀλλ’ ἐν αἰνηματικὴς τισιν, ώς ἔρωσι καὶ φιλοῦσι καὶ σύνεσιν ἔχεις).
93 “An utterly cursed race, collectors of brothel-taxes, terrible Megarians, parricides” (παναγής γενέα, πορνοτελῶναι, Μεγαρείς δεινοὶ, πατραλοίδαι). Despite the odd word order (with Megarians in the middle), the designation of the group as a single γενέα alongside an ethnic marker, leads us to understand all Megarians as brothel-tax collectors and parricides (or all tax collectors and parricides as Megarian).
Lais was a historical figure from Corinth. So why have the prostitutes been in Megara? It may simply be a jibe at Megara’s prostitution business. There could also, however, be a metatheatrical joke at work: since everyone knows that comic prostitutes are Megarian, even a Corinthian prostitute must come from Megara.

It may be objected that three Megarian prostitutes do not a stock figure make. But the presence of a Megarian prostitute in Epicharmus vastly improves the odds. The Sicilian playwright wrote a play called the *Megarian Woman*. The early date of Epicharmus and his geographic removal from Athens mean that the Megarianness mocked in the play is not subject to the same Athenian biases that could be implicit in the fragments already considered. Several scholars have suggested that the title character was a prostitute. In fragment 79 the speaker compares a certain Theagenes to a fish, paying great attention to his bodily appearance and commenting on his sides (τὰς πλευρὰς), bum (τὰν ὀπισθίαν), belly (τὰν λαπάραν), and head (τὰν κεφαλάν).

Perhaps a prostitute is looking over a potential sexual partner in an amusing scene of

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94 On the text see Orth 2009, 149-50. The mss. read ἦ μέγα κλεος ἴδι in the last line. The emendation is Meineke’s.
95 The corrupt third line may hide a joke based on a Μέγαρα/μέγα as in the *Wasps* prologue.
96 Kapparis 2018, 270. Apollodorus in his speech *Against Neeara* 35-6 intimates that during the war with Sparta (373-1) prostitutes in Megara were low on business, suggesting that there was at one time a booming prostitution business.
97 Note the use of the form Μεγαρόθεν “from Megara” as we saw also in the *Wasps* prologue. The presence of a booming prostitution industry in Megara does not necessarily invalidate a metatheatrical reading of this fragment. If Megara was historically a center for prostitution, that could account for a strong presence of prostitute characters in the local comic tradition.
98 It is unclear whether the Megarian woman came from the mainland city or Megara Hyblaea in Sicily, said by some to be Epicharmus’ hometown.
role-reversal? Fragment 80 mentions a woman who is “good at singing hymns, she has every kind of musical ability, and she loves the lyre” (εὔμνος καὶ μουσικὰν ἔχουσα τπάσαν, φιλόλυρος). Since prostitutes could also be sympotic performers, this fragment too supports Rusten and Kerkhof’s interpretation of the Megarian woman as a prostitute.

The presence of a Megarian prostitute in the early fifth-century comedy of Epicharmus (probably influenced by sub-literary Doric comedy imported to Sicily from the mainland, such as that described by Sosibius) is a strong indicator that the Megarian prostitute character was more than an Athenian ethnic stereotype.

From this brief survey of the term “Megarian” I draw the following conclusions: an early form of comedy existed (or was assumed by Athenians to have existed) in Megara (and elsewhere on the Doric mainland), and it became stereotyped as quintessentially bad comedy by the Athenians, so much so that the word took on the valence of failed or ineffective comedy. The humor was viewed as simplistic and probably had stock characters like the foreign doctor or Megarian prostitute. Because of the sense of antiquity that was associated with Megarian comedy (based on their claim to be inventors of it, whether they were or not), when Aristophanes calls out a comic device as Megarian, he is simultaneously denigrating it, and identifying it as something related to the genre’s birth. As such it forms a key part of Aristophanes’ ironic vocabulary concerning the low comic mode.

Conclusions

The fragments, vase paintings, and testimonia examined in this chapter have contextualized Aristophanes’ statements about ἡ κωμῳδία φορτική. I have shown the kinds of “ordinary little men and women” that populate the comedy of Aristophanes’

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100 See Kassel and Austin 2001, 54 for the text and apparatus.
101 Kerkhof 2001, 5; 11
contemporaries to suggest that his complaints were directed against comedies whose plots focused on old people, menial laborers or slaves, working women, and foreigners. Such characters are seen in Aristophanes among the female innkeepers of Frogs, the Scythian archer of Thesmophoriazusae, and the old market-women of Lysistrata. That such characters were typically associated with the low-comic mode also explains why the old, poor juryman Philocleon is so closely associated with low comedy in Wasps. In examining the evidence for physical humor, particularly its prevalence in vase paintings, I have called attention to the need to consider it important as a part of comic poetics. I have argued that the cowardly Dionysus was a stock figure of the same calibre as the hungry Heracles. Both characters can be traced back to the earliest comic evidence we have – Epicharmus. Their ubiquity seems to have contributed to the complaints of Aristophanes and Cratinus that it was a lazy, simple routine that could be inserted into any plot situation. Finally I argue that “Megarian” was a useful term for Aristophanes that could simultaneously serve to insult low comedy and point to its foundational generic importance.
CHAPTER 3: Aristophanic highs

The high comic mode is much in evidence among the fifth-century fragments, and its political iteration was considered the standard mode of all Old Comedy by Byzantine commentators, as I discussed above. Some fragments preserve defenses of the high mode, not dissimilar to Aristophanes’ own: Eupolis fr. 392 contrasts foreign poets loved by the audience with younger native poets like himself, whose novelty he defends. Metagenes and Pherecrates both also defend their own inventiveness; and the titles and fragments reveal an abundance of comedies on political, philosophical, and literary themes.¹ Aristophanes’ treatment of the high mode, as I demonstrate in chapter one, distinguishes two modes that he contrasts with the low: the political and the intellectual. Aristophanes treats these two distinct modes as part of one and the same anti-phortic comic mode, characterized by contemporary relevance, cleverness, and novelty. This is one way in which he destabilizes his claim to be a high-comic poet.

The Clouds parabasis describes the intellectual mode, which centers on philosophical and literary parody. The parabases of Wasps and Peace describe the political mode, which takes aim at political komoidoumenoi and claims to teach the city by offering advice. In the first part of this chapter I look at how Aristophanes characterizes the intellectual and political comic modes. I then consider how Aristophanes’ articulation of the high-low dichotomy in the parabases of Clouds and Peace, and the prologue of Wasps rhetorically situates the relationship between the high and low modes.

¹ Metagenes fr. 15; Pherecrates fr. 102. Titles and comedies that suggest the high mode include Ameipsias Connus, Archippus Fishes, Hermippus Bakery Women, Pherecrates Crapataloi, Phrynichus Muses, Plato Hyperbolus, Peisander, Cleophon, Strattis Callipides.
Peace and the political mode

In the Peace parabasis, Aristophanes compares the process of doing political comedy to

Heracles battling a monster:

‘Ἡρακλέος ὀργήν τιν’ ἔχων τοῖς μεγίστοις ἔπεχείρει,
διαβὰς βυρσῶν ὀσμὰς δεινὰς κάπτειλάς βορβοροθύμους,
καὶ πρῶτον μὲν μάχομαι πάντων αὐτῷ τῷ καρχαρόδοντι,
οὐ δεινότατα μὲν ἀπ” ὀφθαλμῶν Κύννης ἀκτίνες ἔλαμπον,
ἐκατόν δὲ κύκλῳ κεφαλαί κολάκων οἵμωσις ἔλιμωσιν
περὶ τὴν κεφαλήν, φωνῆν δ’ ἔχειν χαράδρας ἀπλύτους,
φύκης δ’ ὀσμῆν, Λαμίας ὀρχεῖς ἀπλύτους,
τοιούτων ιδίων τέρας οὐ κατέδειος’, ἀλλ’ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν πολεμίζων
ἀντείχον ἀεὶ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων νῆσων. ὃν οὐνεκα νυν
ἀποδοῦναι μοι τὴν χάριν ὑμᾶς εἰκός καὶ μνήμονας εἶναι. (Peace 752-61)

But with the anger of Heracles he tries his hand at the biggest target,
passing through the terrible smell of leather and mud-churning threats.
He says “I, first out of everyone, do battle with the jag-toothed one himself
from whose eyes terrible rays shone out like those of Cynna.
One hundred heads of accursed flatterers licked him in a circle
around his head, he had the voice of a torrent spawning destruction,
the smell of a seal, the unwashed balls of Lamia, and the ass of a camel.
Seeing such a monster I was not afraid, but on your behalf
I always held out in battle and on the islanders’ behalf too. Because of this now
you must thank me and remember me.”

The targets of political comedy are οἱ μέγιστοι, the biggest and most important people.

For Aristophanes the biggest target of all is his arch-nemesis, the demagogic politician
Cleon, the leather-smelling καρχαρόδους. In comparing political comedy to battling a
monster, Aristophanes highlights several key features of this mode: 1) mocking
important public figures is dangerous. The poet who risks doing so must face mud-
churning threats (κάπτειλὰς βορβοροθύμους), a reference to Cleon’s aggressive oratory
and his attempt to prosecute Aristophanes for the political content of his Babylonians
(426 BCE). 2) The political satirist is angry (ὀργήν τιν’ ἔχων) and 3) political comedy is a

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2 Cleon had some links to the leather-tanning business, and in his Knights Aristophanes portrays
him as a leather-seller (e.g. Knights 135). In the same comedy, Cleon-Paphlagonian calls himself
a καρχαρόδους (1017). Cf. Wasps 1031.
3 See Acharnians 377-82; 502-3.
benefit to the city, its people, and allies (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν... καὶ τῶν ἄλλων νῆσσων) and because of this deserves thanks (χάριν) and recognition (μνήμονας).

The image of Aristophanes as Heracles battling the Cleon monster in *Peace* was taken over almost *verbatim* from the parabasis of *Wasps*. The *Wasps* parabasis offers further corroboration of political satire’s key features:

νῦν αὕτε, λεώ, προσέχετε τὸν νοῦν, εἴπερ καθαρόν τι φιλεῖτε. μέμψασθαι γὰρ ὑμᾶς θεταῖς ὁ ποιητὴς νῦν ἐπιθυμεῖ. ἀδικεῖσθαι γάρ φησιν πρὸτερος πόλλ’ αὐτοὺς εὗ πεποιηκώς ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων νῆσων (Wasps 1015-17)

Now listen people, pay attention if you like anything pure. Our poet wants to blame you spectators. He says you wronged him even though he did you favors before.

Aristophanes, the chorus say, has benefitted the city (πόλλ᾽ εὗ πεποιηκώς) with his comedy, but the spectators are ignorant of the fact and do not give him the thanks and recognition he wants. Aristophanes returns to spectator ignorance of high comedy’s benefits at the end of the *Wasps* parabolic anapests:

τοιούτων ἵδων τέρας οὐ φησιν δείσας καταδρωδοκήσαι, ἀλλ᾽ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν έτι καὶ νυνὶ πολεμεῖ: φησιν τε μετ᾽ αὐτόν τοῖς ἡπιάλοις ἐπιχειρήσαι πέρυσι καὶ τοῖς πυρετοῖς, οἳ τοὺς πατέρας τῆς χώρας τῆς μαρτυρίας συνεκόλλων. ἀναφηδὲς ἅμα χωρίς καθαρῦν αἰσχροτῆς τῆς ιδίης τῆς γνώσεως τοῖς μην δειξαν παραχρῆμα, ὅ δὲ ποιητῆς οὐδὲν χεῖρων παρὰ τοίς σοφοῖς γενόμετα, εἰ παρελαύνων τοὺς ἀντιπάλους τῆς ἔπινοιαν ξυνέτριψεν. (Wasps 1036-50)

Seeing such a monster, he says that he is not afraid and doesn’t take bribes, but even now he still battles on your behalf. He says that after Cleon, last year, he attacked the nightmares and fevers that strangled your fathers nightly and choked your grandfathers, lying down in the beds of the uninvolved citizens among you, gluing together affidavits and court-summonses and evidence so that tons of you jumped up in fright and ran to the polemarch.
Though you found such a poet as a purifier to keep evil from this land,
last year you betrayed him as he sowed the newest ideas.

You enfeebled them by not understanding them purely.
And yet over many libations he swears by Dionysus
that no one ever heard better comic words than these.
Those of you who didn’t recognize this immediately should be ashamed.
But the poet is held in no less esteem by the wise
if, in the rush to face his opponents, he tripped up on his clever idea.

The comedy from “last year” to which Aristophanes refers is probably the Merchant Ships.¹ In this play Aristophanes must have attacked the judicial system, much as he does in Wasps. He uses a medical metaphor this time to describe the political comic mode: the poet is a purifier (καθαρτήν) who treats the disease of sycophantism. Where the Heracles metaphor emphasizes aggression and danger, the disease metaphor emphasizes the healing benefit of the comic poet. In the Peace and Wasps parabases Aristophanes characterizes political comedy as artistically skillful. In Peace he says that he “made our art great, building it up with lofty word towers and ideas” (ἐποίησε τέχνην μεγάλην ἡμῖν κάπυργωσ᾽ οίκοδομήσας/ ἔπεισιν μεγάλοις καὶ διανοίαις, 749-50), and in Wasps he claims that “no one ever heard better comic words than these” (μὴ πῦπτος᾽ ἀμείνον᾽ ἐπὶ τούτων κωμῳδικὰ μηδέν᾽ ἀκούσαι, 1047).

The parabases of Acharnians and Knights likewise claim that Aristophanic comedy benefits the Athenians politically. In Acharnians Aristophanes claims to have taught the Athenians not to be deceived by the flattery of foreigners (628-58) and he characterizes himself as a bold and just teacher (παρεκινδύνευσ᾽ ἐπὶ ταῦ Ἀθηναίοις τὰ δίκαια, 645; 656, 658). In the Knights parabasis the chorus praise Aristophanes because “he hates the same men we do, he dares to say what is right, and he nobly goes to face

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¹ Biles and Olson 2015, 390. Clouds was produced the year before Wasps in 423, but it has no political or juridical theme, so, despite the ancient scholiast on the line, it must refer to something else. Merchant Ships is favored because in one of the hypotheses to Peace (A3) it is named alongside Acharnians and Knights as a play that urges peace, ridicules Cleon, and attacks Lamachus. Henderson 2007, 161 and 313 also proposes Farmers as a candidate.
the typhoon and the hurricane” (νῦν δ’ ἀξίος ἔσθ’ ὁ ποιητής ὅτι τοὺς αὐτοὺς ἥμιν μισεῖ, τολμᾷ τε λέγειν τὰ δίκαια καὶ γενναιῶς πρὸς τὸν Τυφῶν χωρεῖ καὶ τὴν ἐριώλην, 509-10). In each of these passages, Aristophanes describes the political mode as bold, just, difficult, didactic, and a great benefit to an audience who do not always appreciate it.6

In Wasps, as in Peace, a contrast is drawn between political comedy and low comedy: Aristophanes complains that the audience “did not understand purely” (μὴ γνῶναι καθαρῶς) the very newest ideas (καινοτάτας...διανοίας) he offered them. They also did not recognize the artistry of Aristophanes’ political comedy (“he swears that by Dionysus that no one ever heard better comic words than these”). Μὴ γνῶναι figures the audience as too simple and stupid to understand new things. That the audience cannot perceive artistry correlates with the consistent representation of low comedy as badly-executed. In other words, the audience prefer the same old comedy they always see, which is easy to understand and funny but not well-crafted.

**Clouds and the intellectual mode**

In the Clouds parabasis Aristophanes contrasts simple, physical low comedy to his own clever but modest (σοφὸς /σώφρων) comedy. The text of Clouds that has come down to us is a revision of an earlier version of the same play (Clouds I). It was defeated by Cratinus’ Pytine in 423 and in the revised parabasis Aristophanes chastises his audience for letting him lose to a rival he considered a has-been.6

5 The problem of the audience is also thematized in Acharnians 628-32 and Knights 515-19.
6 Knights 531-6.
7 The passage is problematic. On the text see Wilson 2007a, 67ff. The problems are twofold – first, ἀναγεύειν is a hapax legomenon. Dover 1968, 165-6. cynically states “if ἀναγεύειν was a
other comic poets. blame of comedy, but offer a slightly different take, suggesting that those who enjoy mocki

Wilson in accepting van Herwerden’s emendation which fits well in this context of praise and manuscript reading wou

proposed by Blaydes is that even those who had a tendency to be critical praised

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Sommerstein that it is a joke. However, the joke is not, as they both take it, that Aristophanes

Wilson’s discussion, however, takes the statement too seriously, and I agree with Dover and Sommerstein below “[I] saw fit to give you the first taste of it” (Sommerstein 1982, 59). Whatever the precise nuance of the ἀνα- prefix, this translation seems to reflect the general sense. Scholars have also seen πρωτός as problematic because it is odd for the poet to emphasize that this audience is the first to see the play (Wilson 2007a, 68). Wilson’s discussion, however, takes the statement too seriously, and I agree with Dover and Sommerstein that it is a joke. However, the joke is not, as they both take it, that Aristophanes pretends he had another venue in mind to perform the premier of his cleverest comedy, but rather that he had the ability to choose his audience, and only discerning audience members at that. See also Sidwell 2009, 9, who argues that there is no joke but a factual temporal progression is indicated and “give you the first taste” refers to a pre-competition preview where he really did have a small, select audience.

a ψέγειν van Herwerden: λέγειν codd. Wilson 2007a, 70, on the grounds that Aristophanes claims that even those who had a tendency to be critical praised Banqueters. The other alternative proposed by Blaydes is οἷς for οἰς meaning “by men whom it is also a pleasure to speak of.” The manuscript reading would mean “for/to whom it is even/also a pleasure to speak.” I agree with Wilson in accepting van Herwerden’s emendation which fits well in this context of praise and blame of comedy, but offer a slightly different take, suggesting that those who enjoy mocking are other comic poets.
and I, still a girl, not yet allowed to give birth, exposed my baby and another girl adopted her, and you nourished her and nobly educated her, from that time, I have had trustworthy oaths of your good opinion. So now, like Electra, this comedy has come, looking for some clever spectators and she will recognize the lock of her brother’s hair if she sees it. Consider how modest she is in nature.

Aristophanes characterizes his comedy above all as labor-intensive (ἔργον πλεῖστον, 524; ἐπραγματευόμην, 526) and clever (σοφός, 520; σοφώτατ’, 522). Later in the parabasis, cleverness is linked to novel invention (ἄλλ’ ἀεὶ καὶ νῦν ἴδεας ἐσφέρων σοφίζω, 547). Aristophanes compares intellectual comedy in search of a sufficiently clever audience to the tragic Electra in search of her brother. The intellectual comic mode is also described as modest or self-controlled (σώφρων, 537). Aristophanes’ personification of his comedy as a tragic heroine is particularly revealing and suggests that tragic parody is an essential element of intellectual comedy. The παιδεία that intellectual comedy demands is implicit in Aristophanes’ recollection of Banqueter’s positive reception. Banqueters is personified as the baby of an unmarried girl, exposed and picked up by someone else, reflecting the fact that Aristophanes was too young to produce the comedy himself. The positive reception of the play is metaphorically figured as the audience nourishing it and educating it (ἐξεθρέψατε γενναίως κἀπαιδεύσατε, 532). The metaphor implies that because the audience positively received the Banqueters, it encouraged later Aristophanic comedy to be similarly well-educated, that is, to know the literary, philosophical, historical, and moral touchstones of the day. Finally, as we saw in chapter one, Aristophanes’ intellectual mode is based in words (τοῖς ἔπεσιν πιστεύουσ’ , 544), not in the physical humor characteristic of low comedy.

9 Performed 427 BCE. The plot involved two brothers, one who had undergone the traditional education (ὁ σώφων) and one who preferred the new education (ὁ καταπύγων). They may have been comparable to the Better and Worse Arguments of Clouds. Dover 1963, 166.
Aristophanic Irony and the Deconstruction of the Dichotomy

To the reader familiar with Aristophanic comedy, it may seem odd that the poet so clearly differentiates between the political mode and low mode. The comedy that he holds up as his own political masterpiece in the parabases of *Peace*, *Wasps*, and *Clouds*, and which is explicitly contrasted with low comedy in *Peace* and *Wasps*, is the *Knights*, a sustained attack on the demagogue Cleon. But his μέγιστος target is figured as a stock comic slave (the Paphlagonian), contemporary events like the victory at Pylos are described as a stock cake-theft scene, and politics is reduced to market-place obscenity. The same can be said about Aristophanes’ opposition between intellectual comedy and the low mode: think of the obscenity in the agōn between Better and Worse Argument in *Clouds*, or, as I argue in Chapter Six, the physical comedy that pervades the tragic agōn between Aeschylus and Euripides in *Frogs*.

I now examine the ironies in Aristophanes’ claim to an exclusively high poetic mode, how they function, and what they ultimately mean for his poetics.

Cleon and the Ironies of *Peace*

At the beginning of the *Peace* parabasis, the chorus declare that poets who praise themselves in the parabasis should be beaten, but that Aristophanes says that he should be praised:

χρῆν μὲν τύπτειν τοὺς ῥαβδούχους, εἰ τις κωμῳδοποιητής αὐτὸν ἐπηγεῖ πρὸς τὸ θέατρον παραβάς ἐν τοῖς ἀναπάστοις.
εἰ δ᾿ ὦν εἰκός τινα τιμῆσαι, θύγατερ Διός, ὅστις ἄριστος κωμῳδοδιδάσκαλος ἄνθρωπων καὶ κλεινότατος γεγένηται,
ἀξιός εἶναι φησ᾽ εὐλογίας μεγάλης ὁ διδάσκαλος ἡμῶν. (*Peace* 734-8)

If any comic poet praised himself to the spectators in the parabatic anapests, the stewards should beat him. So if, daughter of Zeus, it is reasonable to praise the best and most famous comic poet, our poet says that he is worthy of great praise.

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10 *Peace* 754-61; *Wasps* 1029-37; *Clouds* 549-50.
“Our poet says” (φησ…ό διδάσκαλος ἡμῶν) in line 738 has a paradoxical effect. It momentarily accentuates the fiction that the chorus is speaking for itself in the lines that precede it. Initially it seems that the chorus (independently of the poet) asserts that poets who praise themselves in the parabasis should be beaten. But Aristophanes says that he should be praised. At the same time, the strangeness of saying “our poet says” forces us to remember that in fact our poet has said everything because he composed the chorus’ lines. Effectively, Aristophanes says “poets who praise themselves in the parabasis should be beaten, but I should praise myself in my parabasis.” The claim is rhetorically significant: Aristophanes repeatedly calls out certain things for being bad (like low comedy), but when he does them they are good and worthy of praise. The rest of the Peace parabasis can be read along similarly ironic lines.

Aristophanes not only claims to produce comedy in the high mode, but even to have invented the mode, when he asserts that he “made our art great, building it up with lofty word towers” (ἐποίησε τέχνην μεγάλην ἡμῖν κάτηγροσ’ οἰκοδομήσας, 749). Aristophanes does not make this important, even programmatic claim in his own words, however, but steals them from a rival comedian, Pherecrates:

δὸς ἄντος παρέδωκα τέχνην μεγάλην ἔξοικοδομήσας (Pherecrates Crapataloi fr. 100)

I who gave them this great art
Building it up...

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12 Hubbard 1991, 140ff treats the dialectic between high and low in Peace as a central theme, but only notes in passing the “self-undercutting irony” (146) of claims not to do low comedy, without explaining the irony.
13 Rosen 1988, 37 discusses how, despite Aristophanes’ claim to be inventor of aggressive political satire, Cratinus was generally recognized as such. Wright 2012, 77-8 argues convincingly for the irony of poets’ claims to do “something new” since arguing for ones’ own novel innovations was itself a well-worn comic (even poetic) trope.
14 Biles 2011, 37; 245
In *Crapataloi*, an underworld-themed play similar in many respects to *Frogs*, Aeschylus says these words presumably about his own tragedy. There is a double irony in Aristophanes’ articulation of his poetics here. First, he expresses his claim to a new high poetic mode in the words of another older poet, and a poet, moreover, who had a reputation for producing non-political comedies in the low mode. Second: it is highly probable that in *Crapataloi* Aeschylus is being mocked (as in *Frogs*) for his pretension in claiming the greatness of his art. The double layer of quotation (Aristophanes quoting Pherecrates “quoting” Aeschylus) immediately begs the question of how seriously to take Aristophanes when he claims to have invented the high comic mode.

In line 740, Aristophanes imputes to his rivals the low comic tropes of “mocking rags and warring with lice.” Commentators on the passage have resisted detailed discussion of the irony. In his treatment of Euripides in the *Acharnians*, however, Aristophanes had extensively mocked the tragedian for putting his characters in rags. The protagonist of *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis, visits Euripides to borrow the rags of Telephus, and the scene offers an extensive catalogue of Euripides’ ragged costumes. Platnauer suggests that the war against lice should be contrasted to Aristophanes’ Heraclean monster battle, but neglects to mention the slaves struggling against a giant

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15 Aristophanes was later to give the chorus of *Frogs* a similar line to describe the tragedy of Aeschylus (*Frogs* 1004-5), on which see below, chapter six. On the comparison between *Crapataloi* and *Frogs* see Tedeschi 2007, 66-7.

16 Urios Aparisi, 1997; Storey 2011b, 449; Storey 2014, 108-9. Pherecrates’ comedy seems to have had a domestic and female focus. Titles include “Old Women” and “The Slave Teacher.” He also wrote a comedy about Heracles which may have been entitled “Heracles the Mortal” or “False Heracles” (Storey 2011b, 431; 505). On women in Pherecrates see Henderson 2000, 135ff. He appears to have been known as an inventor or innovator of *hetaera* comedy. According to the Anonymous essay “On Comedy” (Koster III.29-31) Pherecrates was known for “keeping away from political mockery” (τοῦ μὲν λοιδορεῖν ἀπέστη). Tarkow 1982, 3.

17 Tarkow 1982, 3.

18 Platnauer 1964, 131; Sommerstein 1985, 167, notes some irony, but says that mocking rags and warring with lice refers only to poor people; Olson 1998, 218 makes the same point.
dung beetle in the prologue of *Peace*. In this prologue, two slaves imagine a conversation in the audience where a clever spectator (δοκησίσοφος, 44) wonders aloud about the significance of the beetle, and an Ionian responds that it is an allegory for Cleon (δοκέω μέν, ἐς Κλέωνα τούτ᾽ αἰνίσσεται ὡς κεῖνος ἐν Αἴδεω σπατιλὴν ἐσθίει, 47-8). The dung beetle is a Cleon joke, but also a Euripides joke: Trygaeus’ assent to the heavens astride the beetle is a parody of Euripides’ *Bellerophon*. When Aristophanes attributes “mocking rags” and “warring with lice” to the low comedy of his rivals, he is also making a point about his own comedy: the political mode that he claims is high and devoid of market-place jokes and ordinary people is achieved by precisely these low comic means. By claiming not to do low comedy, but exemplifying the low mode with allusions to his own comedy, Aristophanes forces us to re-imagine *Acharnians* or *Knights* or *Peace* without rags, bugs, market-place, jokes, and ordinary people as characters. The impossibility of so doing highlights how necessary the low mode is even for poets who work in the high mode.

In the *Peace* parabasis the figure of Heracles creates a further irony. Aristophanes says that to make the comic art great he had to scorn and drive off “those Heracleses, who bake and go hungry” (τούς Ἡρακλέας τοὺς μάττοντας κάει τοὺς πεινώντας ἐκείνους ἐξήλασ’ ἀπιμώσας πρώτος, 741-2). Ten lines later, however, he figures his own political mode of comedy as Heracles battling the Cleon monster.

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19 Platnauer 1964, 131. Cf. Olson 1998, 218. To be sure, the beetle in *Peace* is a dung beetle (κάνθαρος) not a flea (φθείρ), but there is an easy way to overcome this difficulty if we ask whether it is any more low-brow to have characters battle a dung beetle rather than a flea. In a play about a dung beetle, Aristophanes complains about his low-brow rivals battling fleas.

20 Rosen 1984 argues that we are meant to understand the Ionian’s interpretation as incorrect. However, there is a delicious irony in presenting Cleon/ dung beetle as the means of effecting peace since he was so always so eager for the war with Sparta to continue (see e.g. Thucydides 5.16.1). Cf. *Knights* 668-70 in which Paphlagon/ Cleon desperately suggests a peace treaty with Sparta to win back the *boulē*’s favor from the sausage seller.

21 *Peace* 135; 146-8.
Heracles, as we saw in chapter two, is the iconic stock figure of low comedy. Despite the existence of other stock mythological figures like the cowardly Dionysus or adulterous Zeus, comic poets selected the hungry Heracles as the representative figure of the genre. By claiming, therefore, that his own high comedy is like a Heracles, of all the hero-figures he could have picked, Aristophanes is not only being humorously ironic, but also indicating the inextricable and inescapable interconnectedness of the high and low modes.\footnote{Cf. Lauriola 2004 on Cleon and Heracles in the Frogs.} Such an interpretation is emphasized by Aristophanes’ almost \textit{verbatim} repetition of the political satirist as Heracles image from \textit{Wasps}. A crucial difference between the \textit{Peace} and \textit{Wasps} versions is that in \textit{Wasps}, the chorus represent the words of the poet in indirect speech, but in \textit{Peace} the chorus suddenly start to speak in the first person, in the voice of the poet:

Since he first began to produce plays, he says that he does not attack ordinary men but with the anger of Heracles he tries his hand at the most important targets, courageously battling against the jagged-toothed one himself right from the outset, from whose eyes terrible rays shone out like those of Cynna. One hundred heads of accursed flatterers licked him in a circle around his head, he had the voice of a torrent spawning destruction, the smell of a seal, the unwashed balls of Lamia, and the ass of a camel. Seeing such a monster, he says that he was not afraid and took no bribe, But still even now he battles on your behalf.
οὐ δεινόταται μὲν ἀπ’ ὥφθαλμών Κύννης ἀκτίνες ἐλαμπον,
ἐκατόν δὲ κύκλω κεφαλαὶ κολάκων οἰμωξομένων ἐλιχμόντο
περὶ τὴν κεφαλήν, φωνὴν δ’ ἔχεχ χαράδρας ὀλεθρὸν τετοκυίας,
φώκης δ’ ὁσμήν, Λαμίας ὅρχεις ἀπλύτους, πρωκτὸν δὲ καμήλου.
τοιοῦτον ιὸν τέρας οὔ κατέδεισ’, ἀλλ’ ὑπὲρ οὐμὸν πολεμίζων
ἀντεῖχον οἱ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων νήσων. ἦν οὖνεκα νυνί
ἀποδουναί μοι τὴν χάριν ὕμας εἰκός καὶ μνήμονας εἶναι. (Peace 752-761)

But with the anger of Heracles he tries his hand at the biggest target,
passing through the terrible smell of leather and mud-churning threats.
He says “I, first out of everyone, do battle with the jag-toothed one himself
from whose eyes terrible rays shone out like those of Cynna.
One hundred heads of accursed flatterers licked him in a circle
around his head, he had the voice of a torrent spawning destruction,
the smell of a seal, the unwashed balls of Lamia, and the ass of a camel.
Seeing such a monster I was not afraid, but on your behalf
I always held out in battle and on the islanders’ behalf too. Because of this now
you must thank me and remember me.”

The change from third to first person highlights the self-quotation, which can stand for
other moments of Aristophanic self-quotation: Aristophanes always comes back to the
same old Cleon jokes. Although Aristophanes makes Cleon comedy almost
metonymically representative of the high comic mode, by its repetitious nature it is
shown to be no different from the oft-repeated and predictable hungry Heracles or slave-
beating routines.23

“Nobly Educated” Comedy

Unlike the ironies of the Peace parabasis, those of Clouds have been extensively noted
and discussed.24 The costume phallus formed a part of Strepsiades’ costume (especially

23 On Aristophanes as epic Heracles see Sommerstein 1985 168; Lauriola 2004, 85-7; Wright
2012, 77; 90ff on the humor of repeated jokes and old jokes in Frogs.
24 Sommerstein 1982, 188-9 notes only some of the ironies. Hubbard 1986, 188-193 and
Hubbard 1991, 98-102 argues that the irony is meant to draw attention to the fact that the original
Clouds really did not have any low comedy in it but that Aristophanes added it to the revised
version to give the play a broader appeal and better chance of success (101, 105). However, the
linguistic grounds on which he argues are insecure – see Olson 1994, who argues rather that we
should view the irony as part of the normal program of ironic self-representation, which one sees
throughout the parabases of Aristophanes; Silk 2000, 47n12; Major 2006 argues that the irony is
part of an alazoneia joke which runs throughout the whole parabasis; Sidwell 2009, 17ff, views
the irony as parody: when Aristophanes uses the vulgar tropes he claims not to be he is actually,
according to this argument, parodying other comic poets who do use them. Without specific
mocking the bald occurs at 545 where Aristophanes mocks his own baldness, but may also refer to the portrait mask of Socrates; the cordax was probably danced at 1201-13; Strepsiades is the old man with the stick at 1296-1302 and the phrontistērion is burned down with torches and cries of “iou iou” at the end of the comedy (1490-3). All these tropes are present in Philocleon’s drunken revelry at the end of Wasps. It is also possible that, as the chorus performed the parabasis, they mimed some of this physical low comedy, to make sure that no one in the audience missed the irony.

In lines 546-50, Aristophanes states that his comedy is always new and original: I don’t try to deceive you by bringing on stage the same things two or three times. No, I am a clever deviser and I find new ideas every time, never the same and always clever. I who struck Cleon in the stomach when he was great don’t dare to jump on him again now he’s down.” Aristophanes makes the claim never to repeat himself in a revised version of a comedy that is literally a repeat performance. It is not only a repeat of Clouds I, but features repetitions from Wasps (rustic father and pretentious son), and

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indications in the text, the argument cannot be sustained. Cf. Dover 1968, 168-9, who sees no irony whatsoever in the claims made here. Nineteenth-century scholars such as Van Leeuwen 1898, 94-5 thought Aristophanes incapable of self-criticism and so argued that the low-brow tropes mentioned here could not refer to his own use of them (for further bibliography see Hubbard 1986, 190-1, n.30; 32-7).

25 Hubbard 1991, 98 with n.33
26 Aristophanes mocks his own baldness on several occasions: Peace 767ff, Knights 550; see also Eupolis, fr. 89. On Socrates’ baldness, Dover 1967, 26-8; Hubbard 1991, 99. The scholia also point out two jokes which seem aimed at Socrates’ baldness at Clouds 145 and 223.
27 The scholion to 541 suggests that this refers either to Eupolis in Prospaltians or to a specific actor named variously as Hermippus, Simeron, or Hermon, who often plays the role of leading old man. Slater 1999, 358-9.
28 The comedy also opens with the words “iou iou”.
29 Wasps was performed the year after the failed Clouds, but Platter 2007, 94 sees a close link between Wasps and the revised Clouds (the date is uncertain but between 420-417 is a generally accepted range – see Kopff 1990; Henderson 1993; Rosen 1997, 400-401) such that the parabasis of the latter can be read as a commentary on the parabasis of the former. It makes sense too that the revised parabasis of the Clouds would look back to the play which “revised” the original Clouds. Without knowing what the original Clouds was like it is of course impossible to say what the full significance of the comparison is.
*Banqueters* (traditional vs. new education). The claim that he never attacked Cleon again after *Knights* is demonstrably untrue since both *Wasps* and *Peace* both offer unsubtly disguised attacks on Cleon, and in *Peace* the anti-Cleon jokes were made not only when the demagogue was “down”, but when he was dead. The irony goes deeper when Aristophanes complains that his unoriginal low rivals do copy his ideas and repeat them, just as Aristophanes himself copies and repeats his own ideas. It is particularly suggestive that Aristophanes mentions Eupolis’ *Maricas* as a copy of his own *Knights*. Aristophanes’ claim that Eupolis “mauled” his *Knights* by adding a drunken old woman dancing the *cordax* implies that, by contrast, his *Knights* was the type of high, modest comedy that Aristophanes valorizes in *Clouds*. Anyone who knows the *Knights* knows how ironic a suggestion this is. For one, *Knights* is full of obscenity, stock slave characters and traditional theft routines. Further, if Aristophanes were to claim that *Knights* is an anti-phoric comedy, he would surely claim that it was because of its political content, not its modesty and intellectualism. Aristophanes’ conflation of the two distinct anti-phoric modes here destabilizes his claim to be a high-comic poet. That Aristophanes and his φορτικοί rivals do the same thing looks back to the association of low comedy and victory expressed at the opening of the parabasis, where he complains that ἄνδρες φορτικοί won the dramatic contest (524-5). It also looks forward to Aristophanes’ statement at the end of the parabasis: when Aristophanes says “whoever of you laughs at this nonsense (of my rivals), may he not enjoy my plays” (ὅστις οὖν τούτοις γελᾷ, τοῖς ἐμοῖς μὴ χαιρέτω, 560) he means “whoever laughs at Aristophanic plays put on by rivals should not enjoy genuine Aristophanic plays that are actually doing

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30 The mention of *Banqueters* earlier in the parabasis (ὁ σώφρων τε χαταπύγων, 529) reminds the audience that the *Clouds* is a reworking of an old theme. Hubbard 1991, 92-3; Biles 2011, 179-80.
31 Biles 2011, 183.
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the same thing as and are the basis for what the rival poets are doing." It is not that Aristophanes’ rivals should lose because they are φορτικοί, but because they are not Aristophanes. When it comes down to it, all the obvious irony and disingenuousness of Aristophanes’ claim to modest comedy reveals that not only does he do the same kind of low comedy that his rivals do, but that his rivals defeated him using his own low comic devices.32

Aristophanes describes the process of producing a comedy as difficult and toilsome (ἡ παρέσχε μοι ἐργον πλεῖστον, 523-4; ἐπραγματευόμην, 526), and he emphasizes the point by describing the production of his first comedy, the Banqueters, as giving birth to a child that he had to expose because he was too young to give birth (i.e. he had to let someone else produce the comedy he had written). Aristophanes, his comedy, and the producer who takes up the comedy for him (παῖς δ᾽ ἐτέρα τις, 531) are all described as children. Shortly after, Aristophanes says that children are emblematic of the audience of low comedy; it is to make them laugh that low comic poets use props like the costume phallus. The irony suggests that if low-comic humor is characteristically associated with children, and Aristophanic comedy, Aristophanes, and Aristophanes’ producer are all like children, Aristophanic comedy must be low. The feminine characterization of Aristophanes and his producer may also suggest the inherent lowness of Aristophanic comedy as women were its stereotypical characters. The child-metaphor, however, is initially mentioned in the context of the hard, challenging work of

32 Biles 2011, 181ff; There is some discrepancy between the low rivals mentioned here and those referenced at the opening of the parabasis (524). The opening refers to those who defeated the original Clouds in 423 – Cratinus, who won with Pytine and Ameipsas, who came second. Eupolis’ Maricas, however was not produced until 421, so this reference points to the updated rivals that Aristophanes may have been facing when he was revising the play (Biles 2011, 184). However, this does not detract from the broader impressionistic result of Aristophanes’ rant against his rivals, especially since he did not name Cratinus and Ameipsas but referred to them simply as ἄνδρῶν φορτικῶν. Cf. Biles 2011, 179: the audience of Clouds is assumed to be the same as the audience of Banqueters, even though this surely cannot have been accurate.
producing comedy (like giving birth). The irony, therefore, symbolizes a paradox that is central to Aristophanes’ poetics: he puts immense effort and artistry into producing low comedy, which usually poets do not put much effort into because even done badly it guarantees a laugh.33

That Aristophanes’ comic poetics consists in the combination of high and low (in which the low is the foundational basis for the high) is also reflected in the parabatic sibling pairs. Aristophanes metonymizes Banqueters as its two protagonists, a pair of brothers, one of whom is modest (ὁ σώφρων, 529) like Aristophanes’ intellectual mode, and one of whom is vulgar (literally, “buggered”, ὁ καταπύγων, 529) like Aristophanes’ low comedy. It is the combination of the two that was well-received by the audience. Aristophanes goes on to describe his current comedy, the revised Clouds as a modest Electra seeking the recognition token of her brother, figured as the audience. If, on the analogy of Banqueters, we are to view success as deriving from the combination of low and high, and if Electra is figured as the modest sibling, the audience she is looking for is then not modest at all, but the necessary low half of the sibling duo.

The Wasps prologue and the middle mode

in the Wasps prologue, Aristophanes claims that Wasps is neither too high (λίαν μέγα, 56) nor too low (γέλωτα Μεγαρόθεν κεκλεμένον, 57). The high comic mode is comedy about Cleon or Euripides, representing both the political and the intellectual modes with which Aristophanes contrasts the low.34 Wasps, Aristophanes claims, is not one of his usual high comedies, but a comedy in the middle mode, half way between the extreme

33 Rosen 1997, 407-8 offers a different interpretation of the comedy-as-child metaphor. He argues that it refers more to the “vagaries of a poet’s work once it is out of his hands” just like a biological parent is interested in, but has no control over, the development of a child brought up by surrogate parents.
34 MacDowell 1971, 136 suggests that the word μέγα does not necessarily mean “high-brow” and that Aristophanes has nothing specific in mind here. Sommerstein 1983, 157 interprets it to mean “a play…of major political import” only.
low and the extreme high. The irony of this is that Aristophanic comedy, *Wasps* included (as I argue in Chapter four), is a middle mode comedy not because it disposes of the extreme lows and highs, but because it combines them. The verbs used of Euripides and Cleon in lines 61 and 63 demonstrate this: in the phrase Εὐριπίδης ἀνασελγαῖνός (“Euripides being treated outrageously”), the verb ἀνασελγαίνω is related to the adjective ἁσελγής (“outrageous” or “excessive”), which Eupolis uses in combination with “Megarian” and “frigid” to describe a bad joke;35 and the verb μυττωτεύω (“make sausage meat out of”) applied to Cleon is calls to mind a low, physical, obscene, market-place humor. Aristophanes is clearly referring, by mention of Euripides and Cleon, to *Acharnians* and *Knights*.36 Not only the verbal descriptors, then, but also recollection of the comedies that Aristophanes says are λίαν μέγα reveal the disingenuousness of his claims and deconstructs the high-low dichotomy even as he offers it as a poetic truth to his audience: the grand *Acharnians* features a Megarian character doing Megarian humor, and *Knights* contains all the low-brow tropes of slaves, theft, obscenity, and food. Everything Aristophanes claims as high, cannot be comic without the low.

**Conclusion**

All Aristophanes’ statements about the grand nature of his comedy are ironically inflected. Every time he makes a claim that his comedy is high, close examination of the claim reveals that it is simultaneously a claim to lowness. Aristophanes deconstructs the dichotomy between high and low in the very words he uses to construct it. This suggests

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35 Eupolis fr. 261.
36 Paduano 1974, 14-15. He points out that Cleon and Euripides are such central figures of the Aristophanic comic world that mention of them can only refer to his own works. See also Biles and Olson 2015, 104. Cf. Sommerstein 1983, 157, and MacDowell 1971, 137, who argue that ἀσελγάινω is not a word a poet would use of his own work, and that therefore Aristophanes cannot be referring here to the *Acharnians*. 
an inevitability: there cannot be a high-low dichotomy because there cannot be comedy that exists only in the high mode. A comedy about Cleon that only points out the politician’s flaws and offers political advice to the city would not be funny. It must have the physical, slapstick humor and obscenities to generate laughter. Low comedy, as we saw in chapter one is the comedy of laughter. The ultimate effect of high comedy, as Aristophanes presents it, is never laughter. It is having a good reputation, receiving political advice, being educated and becoming clever. Though these are good things, they alone cannot make a comedy because comedy is generically determined by its ability to produce laughter.
CHAPTER 4: Wasps

Introduction

In 423 BCE Aristophanes placed third in the City Dionysia with *Clouds*, the play that he claimed was “the cleverest of my comedies” (σοφώτατ᾽...τῶν ἔμων κωμῳδιῶν, *Clouds* 522). In recent scholarship *Wasps* has been analyzed as a response to the failure of *Clouds*. Such analyses are challengeable given our lack of evidence about the original comedy and the changes it underwent in revision. In this chapter, I consider *Wasps* a response to *Clouds* only insofar as that play’s failure may have inspired Aristophanes to produce a comedy that deals so extensively with the relative successes and failures of different comic modes.

At the end of the previous chapter I argued that the metatheatrical prologue of *Wasps* ironically claims the play to be a middle mode comedy because it has neither extremely high political or pedagogical pretensions (λίαν μέγα, 56) nor does it contain any Megarian low comedy (γέλωτα Μεγαρόθεν κεκλεμμένον, 57). The claim is ironic because not only does *Wasps* contain comedy in the low and the high modes, but it even pits the two modes against each other in a metatheatrical comic contest. In this chapter I argue that *Wasps* conveys the central place of low comedy in Aristophanes’ poetics embodied in the character of Philocleon, whose victory at the end of the comedy prefigures and represents Aristophanes’ own hoped-for victory in the Lenaea of 422.¹

One major focus of scholarship on *Wasps* is, in fact, the problem of the play’s finale. Wilamowitz declared, in 1911, that “mit der Fabel des Stückes hat sie [sc. the

¹ The comedy placed second after a comedy called *Proagon* produced by Philonides. *Proagon* was probably written by Aristophanes. See Wright 2012, 33-5.
ending of the comedy] nicht das mindeste mehr zu tun." Scholars have been trying to prove him wrong ever since. Scholarship is divided over whether to view the finale of Wasps positively or negatively. Telò, for example, has recently argued that “Wasps is a narrative of failure” because it re-constructs the defeat of Clouds to delegitimize the generic credentials of Aristophanes’ rivals – particularly Cratinus, whose Pytine took first prize at the Dionysia of 423. He argues that Philocleon’s euphoria in the finale has a “sinister tragic quality” that compromises his ostensible triumph, and finally concludes that “Wasps ends as a cautionary tale for the comic audience: a warning about the consequences of its liberation from the protective affect of Aristophanes’ chlaina through its choice of Cratinus’ tragic comedy in the contest of 423.” Others, including Hubbard and Olson have also seen a negative implication in Philocleon’s final triumph. All three scholars strongly identify the character of Bdelycleon with the comic poet and thus view Bdelycleon’s failure as Aristophanes’ expression of his own failure. Hubbard, for example, argues that in Wasps, Aristophanes’ recognizes the comic poet’s inability to change the nature of the comic audience represented by the incorrigible Philocleon.

Positive interpretations of Wasps’ ending have also been proposed. Some simply emphasize the comedy’s celebration of the exuberance of life and freedom. Others have seen a positive metatheatrical message: Biles, for example, views Wasps as a contrafact of Cratinus’ Pytine. In the finale, Biles views Philocleon as representing a drunken, iambic, Cratinean mode of comedy and suggests that “the metatheatrical

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2 Wilamowitz 1911, 479. See also Jedrkiewicz 2006, 62, n.1.
3 Telò 2016, 55; 88.
4 Telò 2016, 89; 109-10.
5 Hubbard 1991, 136-7; Olson 1996, 145; see also Biles and Olson 2015, lviii.
6 Whitman 1964, 157; MacDowell 1971, 6-7; Reckford 1987, 277; Silk 2000, 370-4.
implications of the closing scene emphasize Aristophanes’ effort to put Cratinean poetics to work for his own advantage in the contests."7

Jedrkiewicz, Wright, and Farmer argue that the central conceit of *Wasps* is a contest between tragedy and comedy, with the ending representing the comic genre’s superiority.8 Farmer argues that Philocleon embodies the genre of tragedy and Bdelycleon that of comedy, and that Bdelycleon successfully converts his father “to his proper comic nature.”9 The dance contest between Philocleon and the tragic sons of Carcinus at the end of the comedy, and Philocleon’s victory in it, represent the victory of comedy.10 Jedrkiewicz also correlates the submission of tragedy to comedy with the submission of the verbal to the gestural.11 For him, the superiority of gesture to language has a political point in its denunciation of political verbal manipulation.12 Like Jedrkiewicz, Wright, and Farmer, I view a metatheatrical contest as *Wasps*’ central conceit. I argue, however, that the contest can be figured as a generic battle between the low and high comic modes, with Philocleon, ultimately victorious, as the low and Bdelycleon, the high. The submission of verbal to gestural noted by Jedrkiewicz forms part of a wider subsumation of high to low.

Therefore, using the lens of the high-low dichotomy, I read the end of *Wasps* as a positive valuation of comedy’s farcical, low-brow, laughter-inducing aspect. By vindicating Philocleon, Aristophanes celebrates the audience’s taste for low comedy. In

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7 Biles 2011, 134-66, especially 156; 165.
9 Farmer 2017, 130. See also e.g. 117-8; 126.
10 Farmer 2017, 152.
11 Jedrkiewicz 2006, 88: “La sottomissione del tragico al comico fa corpo, nelle Vespe, con quella del linguaggio al gesto: così come la gestualità dà scacco al logos, il comico deforma e piega il tragico ai suoi fini espressivi.”
12 Jedrkiewicz 2006, 72: “inscenando l’uso della parola come melliflua coercizione, assegna un ruolo positivo a ciò che le è strutturalmente opposto, il gestuale, il corporeo, l’animalesco, l’oggettuale.”
Wasps’ first half, the high comic Bdelycleon metatheatrically attempts to suppress the low satyric comedy of his old father and inculcate in him his own anti-Cleonic politics. The second half of the comedy, however, exposes the unstoppable low-comic force of Philocleon, implying the futility of a comedy in the high mode that does not acknowledge the prime value of its inherent generic lowness. That Aristophanes allows a character named “Love-Cleon” to bear the weight of comic victory suggests a blatant disregard for political “messaging.”

Wasps has a diptych structure, as scholars have often noted. The first half of the comedy plays out Bdelycleon’s attempt to cure his father of his obsession with jury duty, and in the post-parabatic half, Bdelycleon attempts to re-educate his father in the ways of high society. Hubbard argues that the two halves represent two different facets of Aristophanes’ comic career, with the political first half reflecting comedies such as Babylonians, Acharnians, and Knights, and the social and educational program of reform in the second half representing Clouds. In this way, argues Hubbard, Aristophanes intimates that he (equated with Bdelycleon) is successful when doing political comedy, just as Bdelycleon successfully cures his father of his philelastic ways. But when he attempts to educate and reform the audience (represented by Philocleon) – as he had tried to do with Clouds – he is less successful. The hard and fast equation of Aristophanes with Bdelycleon becomes problematic in Wasps’ second half. Rather than seeing Wasps as a retrospective career evaluation, I propose to use the high-low dichotomy outlined in the prologue as a hermeneutic guide to understanding the comedy.

14 Hubbard 1991, 126; 137.
The programmatic prologue

At lines 54-66, the slave Xanthias turns to the audience with the by now familiar announcement:

φέρε νυν κατείπω τοῖς θεαταῖς τὸν λόγον,

ολιγ' ἀθ' ὑπειπῶν πρῶτον αὐτοῖσιν ταδί,

μηδὲν παρ' ἡμῶν προσδοκῶν λίαν μέγα,

μηδ' αὐ γέλωτα Μεγαρόθεν κεκλεμένον.

ημῖν γὰρ οὐκ ἔστ' οὕτε κάρυ' ἐκ φορμίδος
dούλω διαρριπτοῦντε τοῖς θεωμένοις,

οὐθ' Ἡρακλῆς τὸ δεῖπνον ἐξαπατώμενος,

οὐδ' αὐθις ἀνασελγανόμενος Εὐριπίδης·

οὐδ' εἰ Κλέων γ' ἐλαμψε τῆς τύχης χάριν,

ἄλλον οὕτω πρὸς τὸν αὐτόν ἀνδρα 

μηδὲν λογίδιον γνώμην ἔχον,

οὐμῶν μέν αὐτῶν οὐχὶ δεξιότερον,

κωμῳδίας δὲ φορτικής σοφώτερον.

Come now, I should explain the plot to the spectators,

but first I'll say this little thing to them as a preface:

they should not expect anything excessively grand from us

but then again, no laughs stolen from Megara either.

We don't have a pair of slaves throwing nuts
to the spectators from a basket,

nor a Heracles cheated of his dinner.

There's no Euripides being treated outrageously,

and if Cleon's in the news by chance

we won't make sausage meat out of the man again.

What we have is a little story with a point,

not smarter than you lot in the audience,

but cleverer than a low comedy.

In chapters one and three, I demonstrated how this passage simultaneously defines,

reifies, and collapses the dichotomy between high and low comedy. It separates out and

opposes the low mode (the Megarian, the nut-throwing slaves, and the hungry-Heracles)

and the high mode (Euripides, Cleon, and criticism of contemporary events).

Aristophanes then collapses the dichotomy in two ways. First, he denies that he will use

either extreme, opting rather for a middle mode between them. This proves to be ironic

because Aristophanes achieves this middle mode by combining the extreme high and

the extreme low. Second, as I argued at the end of chapter three, the words
Aristophanes uses to describe the high comic mode - ἀνασφιλγίνω and μυστωτεύω – are both indicative of the low routines and themes that achieve the Cleon and Euripides comedy. The language of this part of the prologue, therefore, subsumes the high into the low, verbally representing the dependence of high comedy on the low. The interdependence of the two comic modes creates the underlying structural tension of *Wasps*. The comedy’s first half illustrates high comedy’s dependence on the low, especially when the audience is also figured as low. The second half illustrates the ability of the low to absorb and transform the high into low.

**Bdelycleon vs. Philocleon**

The contest between low and high in the *Wasps* is embodied in the principle characters of the father-son duo. Philocleon ("Love-Cleon") and Bdelycleon ("Hate-Cleon") exemplify respectively the low and the high comic modes. Scholars have long noted that Bdelycleon shares characteristics with the high poetic persona Aristophanes claims for himself in the parabasis of *Wasps*. As a metapoetic character, Philocleon is usually argued to be a reflection of the ordinary Athenian spectator in the first half of the comedy, taking on a more active performative role only in the post-parabatic scenes. Like Purves, I view Philocleon both as a spectator (especially in the main *agōn* and the dog trial), and a performer-poet in the play’s first half, whose performative attempts are suppressed by Bdelycleon.

Before the *agōn*, there are several indications that we ought to see Bdelycleon as a metatheatrical poet of the high-comic mode. Shortly after the announcement by

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15 Cf. Farmer 2017, 118 who argues that we should view Philocleon as tragic and Bdelycleon as comic.  
17 Hubbard 1991, 117, 125, 132; Biles 2011, 164; Biles and Olson 2015, xxxiii; Telò 2016, 28, 30.  
18 Purves 1997, 8, 13.
Xanthias that the audience should “expect nothing excessively grand” (μηδὲν...
...προσδοκάν λίαν μέγα, 56), the slave points to Bdelycleon, explaining that “we have a master, that man up there asleep on the roof, the grand man” (ἐστιν γὰρ ἡμῖν δεσπότης, ἐκείνοι, ἀνω καθεύδων, ὁ μέγας, οὐπὶ τέγους, 67-8). Pointing out Bdelycleon as the μέγας immediately after claiming that there will be nothing μέγα, both figures Bdelycleon as the purveyor of high comedy, and hints already that the programmatic claims of the prologue are going to be proved ironic. The name Bdelycleon, announced at 133, points to Bdelycleon’s association with Aristophanes’ high poetic persona, as the anti-Cleon comedian par excellence. The name “Hate-Cleon” and his father’s name, “Love-Cleon” also add to the prologic irony that Wasps will have nothing to do with Cleon.

In the lead-up to the battle between Bdelycleon and the wasps, Bdelycleon addresses the chorus with the words “Listen to the matter at hand, my good men, and don’t yell” (ὦ γαθοί, τὸ πρᾶγμα ἀκούσατ᾽, ἀλλὰ′ μὴ κεκράγετε, 415). This sounds remarkably like an address to the spectators in an Aristophanic parabasis or expository prologue, especially given the metatheatrical valence of πρᾶγμα, which can mean “plot” or “main problem of the play.” With these words, Bdelycleon urges a verbal rather than a physical confrontation. A similar preference for words over action can be seen a little later at 471-2, where Bdelycleon says, “could we possibly come to dialogue and reconciliation with each other without fighting and this sharp yelling?” (ἐσθ᾽ ὅπως ἄνευ μάχης καὶ τῆς κατοξείας βοῆς εἰς λόγους ἐλθοίμεν ἄλληλοις καὶ διαλλαγάς;). The answer, of course, is no, and indeed the inability of Bdelycleon (high comedy) to make his point without first yielding to the physical slapstick of the low mode is one instantiation of high comedy’s dependence on its low counterpart.

In the ἀγὼν, Bdelycleon explicitly marks himself as a high comic poet at lines 650-1 when he says, “it is a difficult task, and one requiring a awfully clever gnōmē,
something greater than what comic poets usually say, to cure the ancient illness ingrained in the city” (χαλεπὸν μὲν καὶ δεινῆς γνώμης καὶ μείζονος ἢ ἴππη τρυγῳδίας ἱάσασθαι νόσον ἀρχαίαν ἐν τῇ πόλει ἐντετοκυῖαν). As scholars have noted, the language of “healing” (ἱάσασθαι) correlates with Aristophanes’ claim in the parabasis to have “tried his hand against the agues and fevers” (τοῖς ἡπιάλοις ἐπιχειρήσαί...καὶ τοῖς πυρετοῖσιν, 1038) and to be a purifier (καθαρτήν, 1043). In this line, Aristophanes makes a direct claim about his own comedy – which surpasses what comedy usually does – using Bdelycleon as a mouthpiece.\(^{19}\) Bdelycleon, momentarily transformed into Aristophanes, is comparable with Dicaeopolis in *Acharnians*, who also “becomes” Aristophanes to claim the efficacy of comedy for teaching the city. Both Bdelycleon and Dicaeopolis use the coinage τρυγῳδία to mean comedy:

Don’t hate me, spectators
if, though a beggar, I am going to speak to the Athenians about the city in a comedy.

For comedy too knows what’s right.
I will say awful things, but they will be right.

Dicaeopolis, like Bdelycleon, claims his comedy has powers beyond what a normal comedy has. The γνώμης and μείζονος of Bdelycleon’s words in *Wasps* explicitly recall and counter Aristophanes’ claim in the prologue that *Wasps* is just a λογιδίον γνώμην ἔχον with nothing ἄλοι μέγα. Bdelycleon on the contrary claims that *Wasps* is no ordinary story with a point, but that it is excessively grand in its aim to “cure the city” (ἱάσασθαι).

Bdelycleon’s old father, Philocleon, is also a metatheatrical character, who can be viewed as a low comic poet. The main clue to Philocleon’s metatheatrical

\(^{19}\) Macdowell 1971, 219
performative status lies in his association with old comic playwright Ecphantides.

Philocleon is locked up in the house by his son, who can conceive no other way of stopping his father’s obsession with jury duty. Philocleon first tries to escape through the chimney, and as Bdelycleon tries to stop him he says:

δύου πάλιν· φέρ᾽ ἐπαναθῶ σοι καὶ ξύλον.
ἐνταυθά νυν ζήτει τιν᾽ ἄλλην μηχανήν.

150 ἀτάρ δῆλος γ᾽ εἰμ᾽ ὡς ἔτερος οὐδεὶς ἄνηρ,
δότις πατρός νῦν Καπνίου κεκλήσομαι. (*Wasps* 148-51)

Go back down! And let me put this wood on here for you too.
Now stay there and find some other stratagem.

150 I am more wretched than any other man,
I who will now be called the son of Smokey!

The scholia (ΣνΑI 151) on this line and recent commentators all note that “Smokey” was a nickname given by Cratinus to the comic poet Ecphantides. Sommerstein denies that there could be a reference to Ecphantides here because his theatrical career probably ended in the 430s. However, it is precisely the oldness of Ecphantides that makes him an appealing model for Philocleon – the old juror, associated with the “old” style of comedy, who elsewhere in *Wasps* professes to love the old tragedy of Phrynichus. We know sadly little about Ecphantides. Cratinus coined the portmanteau Choeirclephantides (Χοηριλεκφαντίδης, fr. 502), not dissimilar to Euripidaristophanize (εὐριπιδαριστοφανίζων, fr. 342). This is usually taken to suggest that Ecphantides engaged with Choeirus’ tragedy, but Choeirus was also known for his satyr plays. Since Ecphantides’ best known comedy was entitled *Satyrs*, it is possible that the portmanteau

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20 E.g. MacDowell 1971, 152; Sommerstein 1983, 165; Biles and Olson 2015, 134-5; Wright 2012, 113. MacDowell and Biles and Olson suggest that because Bdelycleon is a character in Aristophanes, he laments that he might be thought of as the product of an inferior dramatist.
21 Ecphantides is recorded to have had four victories, though the titles of only two comedies remain: *Satyrs* and *Experiments or Attempts* (Πείραι). His career probably spanned the mid 450s to the mid 430s. See Storey 2011b, 4-5; Bagordo 2014, 73.
22 E.g. *Wasps* 220, 269, 1490, 1524
recalls not a tragic but a satyric influence on Ecphantides. Bagordo has seen a close connection between Cratinus and Ecphantides, suggesting that there may be a relationship between Ecphantides’ *Peirai* (which he takes to mean “theatrical rehearsals”) and Cratinus’ *Didaskalia*, and between *Satyrs* and *Dionysalexandros*. I propose, however, that Ecphantides, with his outdated, poor quality comedy (according to Cratinus), is alluded to as a representative low comic poet. Satyr plays, as I argue in chapter one, share common features with low comedy. And it was Ecphantides who was cited by the anonymous commentator on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* as saying “I have dismissed the song of Megarian comedy, being ashamed to put on a Megarian drama” (Μεγαρικῆς κωμῳδίας † ἄσμα δείμαι αἰσχυνόμενος τὸ δράμα Μεγαρικὸν ποιεῖν, fr.3). The fragment may have been spoken in an ironic context, the joke being that he is putting on a Megarian-style comedy. It is my contention, therefore, that Bdelycleon’s lament that he will now be called “the son of Smokey” serves to characterize his father, Philocleon, as an ancient, incompetent, satyric, and possibly Megarianizing comic poet.

Even before the mention of Smokey, Bdelycleon’s words highlight the metatheatrical implications of this passage when he tells his father to “find some other stratagem” (ζήτει τιν’ ἄλλην μηχανήν, 149), i.e. means of escape. The word μηχανή has a metatheatrical valence meaning something like a “stage ploy.” Philocleon’s actions are

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23 A comic adespota reads ἡνίκα μὲν βασιλέως ἦν Χοιρίλος ἐν σατύροις (fr. 38 in Demianczuk, 1912) – “when Choerilus was king of the satyrs.” Cf. Wright 2012, 9, who writes that “like Aristophanes, Ecphantides was interested in writing comedy of the sophisticated, intertextual type, characterized by literary parody and stylistic imitation.” Though he admits that “it could be that Ecphantides himself did not consciously set out to model his own work on that of Choerilus, and that Cratinus is the one who is making the connection between the two authors (as it might be for satirical or critical purposes).”

24 Is it possible that Philocleon’s series of escape attempts represent πείραι?


26 According to the scholiast on *Wasps* 151 (*ΣΕΥΜΔΑΙΩ*), Cratinus called him Smokey because that is how one referred to wine that has gone off because it is old. Hesychius κ716 suggests it is just because “he wrote nothing great” (διὰ τὸ μηδὲν λομπτρόν γράφειν). “Smokey” could also refer to comedy that was ephemeral and empty.
also described as a μηχανή at line 365, where the chorus urge him to “invent a stratagem as quick as you can” (εκπόριζε μηχανήν ὃπως τάχισθ᾽).

Finally, one of Philocleon’s defining features, in addition to his love of judging, is his love of singing.27 When his fellow jurors first describe him, they say he is ἀνὴρ φιλωδός (269-70). Philocleon himself also complains at 318-9 that the result of his son locking him up is that “I am unable to sing” (οὐ γὰρ οἷος τ᾽ εἴμ᾽ ὀδειν), symbolizing Bdelycleon’s attempted suppression of the low.

**Philocleon as satyr**

I argued above that the satyric-comic Ecphantides lies behind Philocleon’s characterization as a low-comic poet. Philocleon also has other satyric features. The general shape of *Wasps*’ narrative – a hero locked up by a tyrant whom he must try to escape – reflects the stereotypical plot of a satyr play, which, as Dana Ferrin Sutton has argued, tend to be extremely predictable and recognizable.28 Many of the key features of the genre that he notes can be seen in the opening escape scenes of *Wasps*: a villain, ogre, or tyrant abuses xenia and kidnaps the hero, who must escape and/ or destroy his captor.29 The tyrant, of course, is Bdelycleon, who, with the help of his two slaves, Xanthias and Sosias, has locked Philocleon up. In a comic re-working of the satyric motif, Bdelycleon has not abused xenia, but, as we learn later, is keeping his father locked up in order to offer him the very best xenia. The first word used to describe Philocleon, in line 4 is κνώδαλον. Translators tend to render this word as “monster” and the scholiast thinks we are meant to imagine of a sea monster (κυρίως ἐπὶ τοῦ θαλασσίου θηρίου). However, the word is relatively common in our meagre remains of satyr play, appearing three or possibly four times. Twice the word is used of the satyrs

27 Farmer 2017, 125-6.
themselves.\textsuperscript{30} that Aristophanes chose this word, I suggest, to evoke the satyr-like qualities of Philocleon.\textsuperscript{31} So, Philocleon is introduced to us as a satyr-like beast, a prisoner of his “tyrant” son, and in the first escape attempt we see, he is compared to the comic poet Ecphantides, best known for his comedy Satyrs and for having affinities with the tragedian Choerilus, nicknamed “the king of satyrs.” When we see Philocleon’s second escape attempt, clinging to the underbelly of a donkey like Odysseus to the Cyclops’ ram, we are therefore primed to view this scene as satyric, and to see Philocleon as a deviser of satyric mēchanai. There are two satyric treatments of the Cyclops episode from the Odyssey that we know: the Euripidean, and a much earlier Cyclops by Aristias.\textsuperscript{32} The Euripidean Cyclops probably post-dates Wasps, and the ram-escape is not a part of its action, so the scene in Wasps is unlikely to be a direct parody of Euripides. It rather evokes a satyric-style escape ploy.\textsuperscript{33} Sells has recently argued for Aristophanes’ Peace as a parasatyric comedy, noting the following as key features that evoke satyr play: the hero’s call for help; his plea for silence so as not to rouse the tyrant/ monster; and the hauling of a special object.\textsuperscript{34} Each of these elements is also present in Wasps, further contributing to a satyric atmosphere. Philocleon calls on the chorus for help, explicitly urging them to free him at 353: “You have to find some other way [for me to escape!]” (ἀλλ᾽ ἄλλο τί δεῖ ξητεῖν ύμᾶς); and 400: “Won’t you help me!” (οὐ ξυλῆψεσθ’). At 336, Philocleon tells the chorus “Don’t shout! My son happens to be

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\textsuperscript{30} Aeschylus Amymone fr. 15; Aeschylus Net-Haulers fr.47a, 775; in Sophocles’ Trackers fr.314, 308 the word is used of a tortoise in a monster guessing game. See additionally Sophocles fr. 905.
\textsuperscript{31} It is possible that Philocleon’s mask also highlighted satyric qualities. E.g. he may have a particularly pronounced phallus and/ or be bald. See Hall 2006, 144.
\textsuperscript{32} In addition, the cyclops appeared in Cratinus’ Odysseuses and Epicharmus’ Cyclops. Ussher 1978, 178.
\textsuperscript{33} See further Davies 1990. On the parallels between Euripides’ Cyclops and the Wasps see Ussher 1978, 202-4. He is unconvinced.
\textsuperscript{34} Sells 2019, 104.
\end{flushright}
asleep just up there. So keep it down!" (ἀλλὰ μὴ βοᾷ· καὶ γὰρ τυγχάνει οὕτωςι πρόσθεν καθεύδων. ἀλλ᾽ ὑφεσθε τοῦ τόνου). In his argument for the satyric nature of *Peace*, Sells points to the hauling of the statue of *Peace* as an example of the satyric theme of recovering a cult object (seen also in Aeschylus’ *Sisyphus* and, perhaps most vividly in Aeschylus’ *Net-haulers*). In *Wasps* the following lines may have been indicative of a satyric hauling scene:

400  οὐ ξυλῆψεσθ᾽ ὑπόσοισι δίκαι τῇ̣τες μέλλοθσιν ἔσεσθαι, ὦ Σμυκθῖον καὶ Τεἰσιάδη καὶ Χρῆμων καὶ Φερέδειπνε; πότε δ᾽, εἰ μὴ νῦν, ἐπαρηξετέ μοι, πρίν μ᾽ εἰσὼ μᾶλλον ἄγεσθαι; (400-402)

Won’t you help me, all of you who are going to have lawsuits to judge this year? Smikythion, Teisiades, Chremon, and Pheredeipnus? When, if not now, will you help me, before I am dragged further back inside?

This scene may have been staged as a hauling contest between the jurors pulling from below and Bdelycleon pulling from within. Part of the comic adaptation of this satyric theme is no doubt that the hauled object is no object but the satyric Philocleon himself.

The satyric atmosphere invoked at the opening of *Wasps*, primes the audience to view Philocleon’s escape *mēchanai* – his mini metatheatrical performances – as satyric, particularly the Odyssean escape beneath the donkey.

**Physical and verbal contests**

So far, I have offered evidence that we ought to see both Bdelycleon and Philocleon as poet-performer figures, the former a purveyor of high comedy and the latter of low. The conflict between the two comic modes is realized in the two *agōnes* that take place between lines 400 and 728. the first (400-460) is a physical contest, and the second the main verbal *agōn*. In the physical contest we see both father and son taking on a

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36 Sells 2019, 105-6. See also Hall 2006, 340. In *Sisyphus* the titular character pushed his stone up from the underworld; in *Net-haulers*, a fisherman finds the box in which Danae and Perseus were locked. We may also compare the hauling of the fire-brand to put out the Cyclops’ eye in Euripides’ *Cyclops*, 656-62.
directorial role and standing back from the action themselves (Bdelycleon out of choice, and Philocleon by compulsion). Each directs their own acting troupe: Bdelycleon has Xanthias and three other slaves, while Philocleon has the chorus of old wasps.

Philocleon directs his chorus in the following way:

430 εἴα νυν, ὦ ξυνδικασταῖ, σφήκες ὑξυκάρδες,
οἱ μὲν εἰς τὸν πρωκτὸν αὐτῶν εἰσπέτεσθ’ άγισμένοι,
οἱ δὲ τῷμφαλμῷ κύκλῳ κεντεῖε καὶ τοὺς δακτύλους. (430-2)

430 Go now, my fellow-jurors, sharp-hearted wasps
Enraged, some of you fly into their asses
And the rest, sting their eyes all around and their fingers.

As Biles and Olson note in their commentary on these lines, “the idea of buggery (~ 'jam it up their arse!') lurks just below the surface of the text.”

Philocleon’s directorial style thus leans towards the obscene. We may expect Bdelycleon, as the high comic poet, to be more restrained, but he is compelled, in this scene of physical farce, to be just as low-brow as his father. He instructs Xanthias to “beat them with a stick” (παίε τῷ ξύλῳ, 458, cf. Clouds 541-2) He also orders another slave to “smoke them with lots of smoke” (τῦφε τολλῷ τῷ καπνῷ, 457). This is not anywhere attested as a low-comic skit, but it fits the parameters of low comedy seen in chapters one and two, and additionally it recalls the earlier reference to Philocleon as the Ecphantidean Smokey. Both protagonists, therefore, act as metatheatrical directors in this scene of low-comic slapstick. Bdelycleon must stoop to the low-comic level in order to gain the upper hand he needs to pursue his verbal comic program. This illustrates the phenomenon, recurrent throughout the first half of Wasps, of high comedy’s reliance on the low: the high comic “message” (γνώμη) requires low comic action and gains authority from it.

Despite resorting to low-comic means, Bdelycleon’s high-comic credentials remain intact from his desire, expressed twice, at 415 and 471-2, not to fight, but to

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37 Biles and Olson 2005, 224.
engage in dialogue. Philocleon’s low-comic affiliations are developed further in the physical confrontation, and are embodied by his acting troupe, the chorus of wasps. The wasps have two characteristics reminiscent of low comedy: their advanced old age and their theriomorphic identity.

Many features of what Aristophanes calls low comedy, as I have argued in chapter two, are associated with the earliest traditions of comedy in Greece. Low comedy is therefore also considered old comedy, (opposed to the novelty consistently associated with Aristophanes’ high comedy). The old Philocleon, and the old wasps, are thus apt representatives of this older comic tradition because of their advanced age. The conflict of generations is not only a human conflict between old father and young son, but a generic conflict between old, low comedy, and new, high comedy.

At the start of the physical contest, the wasp-jurors reveal their theriomorphic identity as real (and not just metaphorical) wasps. At line 408 they remove their cloaks (θαϊμάτια λάβοντες), and several lines later Xanthias exclaims: “By Heracles they’ve even got stingers! Don’t you see, master?” (Ἡράκλεις, καὶ κέντρ᾽ ἔχουσιν. οὐχ ὁρᾷς, ὦ δέσποτα;, 420). As I argue in chapter one, theriomorphic choruses were typically associated with an early tradition of comedy that has features in common with the contemporary low-comic mode. The theriomorphic choruses depicted in Attic vase painting are limited to birds (cocks, ostriches), dolphins, and knights on horseback, but in the literary record, the early comic poet Magnes, whose comedy could stand for a kind of paradigmatic early, low comedy, wrote a Frogs, a Fig-Wasps, and a Birds.}

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38 The age of Philocleon and the wasps is mentioned at 224, 230-1, 235-6, 357, 441. See also their association with Phrynichus, the paradigmatically old tragic poet at 220 and 269.
39 Sifakis 1971, 98.
40 See also Reckford 1987, 410, 413; Hubbard 1991, 201-2; Dover 1993, 56; Dobrov 2001, 145; Biles 2011, 228.
41 See above, chapter one and below chapter six on Frogs.
wasps) and σφήκες (wasps) are similar winged insects and Rothwell has recently suggested that the wasps of *Wasps* may be fig-wasps.\(^{42}\) Aristophanes may or may not have been explicitly recalling Magnes in his choice of chorus, but he was certainly evoking a type of early chorus of which Magnes’ *Fig-Wasps* remains our only example.\(^{43}\)

Bdelycleon wins in the physical *agón* and convinces his father to engage in a political, verbal *agón* with the wasps as judges. In the wasps’ formal announcement of the contest, they say:

526 νῦν δὴ τὸν ἐκ θημετέρου γυμνασίου δεῖ τι λέγειν καινόν, ὡς φανήσει...

531 μὴ κατὰ τὸν νεανίαν τονδὶ λέγων. ὅρας γὰρ ὤς καὶ μέγας ἐστὶ ἀγών <νῦν> καὶ περὶ τῶν ἀπάντων...

535 εἰ γὰρ, ὃ μὴ γένοιθ’ ὁ ὦτος σε λέγων κρατήσει...

540 οὐκέτι πρεσβυτῶν ὀχλος χρήσιμος ἐστὶ’ οὖδ’ ἀκαρη’ σκωπτόμενοι δ’ ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς θαλλοφόροι καλούμεθ’, ἀντωμοσιῶν κελύφη. (526-8; 531-6; 540-544)

526 Now the man from our gym must say something new so that you will be shown...

... as a better speaker than this youth. You see that there is a great *agón* before you and one that concerns everything.

535 For if – may it never happen – that man overpowers you in speech...

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\(^{42}\) Rothwell 2007, 117. However, on the differences between wasps and fig wasps see Aristotle *historia animalium* 627b23ff (on wasps) and 557b26 (on fig wasps).

\(^{43}\) There are several other comedies with insect titles. Pherecrates wrote an *Ant-men* which may have been performed before *Wasps*. Plato and Cantharos both produced comedies called *Ants*, though their dates are uncertain (probably post *Wasps*); and Diocles (active in the 410s) produced a comedy called *Bees*. 
the crowd of old men will no longer
be useful in the least.
Mocked in the streets
we will be called useless old olive-bearers
And affidavit-husks.

Just as Bdelycleon and his troupe required the resources of the low-comic mode in the
physical agôn, so now the wasps urge Philocleon to compete in the verbal agôn using
qualities of the high-comic mode: novelty (καινόν) and good speaking. They
metatheatrically mark the verbal contest as an agôn, and not just any old agôn, but a
“great agôn...that concerns everything” (μέγας...ἀγών...καὶ περὶ τῶν ἁπάντων, 533-4).
The metatheatricality of the remark and the use, again, of the word μέγας recalls and
ironizes the prologue’s claim that Wasps has nothing λίαν μέγα. The comic stakes of the
agôn are implicit in lines 540-3: what is old will no longer be considered useful in
anyway, but will just be mocked in the streets. The use of the passive σκωπτόμενοι
emphasizes that the old mode of comedy will no longer be making the jokes, but
become the object of mockery. While the chorus sing this introduction, Bdelycleon
interrupts them to call for his writing kit, punctuating the announcement of the high comic
agôn with reminders of his own high comic affiliations.44

The subject of the agôn is political: Philocleon argues that as a juror he has the
power of a king, while Bdelycleon proves to him that he is being duped by Cleon and is
really a slave. This central, μέγα, political moment of the comedy is the apex of
Bdelycleon’s high-brow comedy, where he is most fully characterized as a high comic
poet. I remarked above that his deployment of the word τρυγῳδία at 650-1 recalled
Dicaeopolis’ use of the same term in Acharnians. The parabasis of Acharnians and the
claims Aristophanes makes therein, can usefully be viewed as a model for Bdelycleon’s
arguments in Wasps:

44 Olson 1996, 144; Telò 2016, 30.
Our poet says that he deserves many good things from you because he stopped you from being excessively deceived by foreigners' words and from enjoying flattery and from being gape-mouthed citizens. Previously ambassadors from the cities deceived you, first by calling you “violet crowned.” If anyone said this, immediately, just because of those “crowns” you sat up on the edge of your little butts. And if anyone called Athens “gleaming” to flatter you, he could get anything from that “gleaming”, though giving you the honor of a mere sardine.

Philocleon, in Wasps, argues that he enjoys being a juror because “what kind of flattery can a juror not hear in the law court?” (τί γὰρ οὔκ ἔστιν ἀκοῦσαι θώπευμι’ ἐνταῦθα δικαστῇ; , 563).45 Bdelycleon, using rational argumentation and, it is worth noting, with very little humor, shows Philocleon that his enjoyment of flattery is really a form of slavery. I do not necessarily propose that there is an intertextual link between the Acharnians and the Wasps, but the example serves to show Bdelycleon – rather humorlessly – demonstrating the effect that Aristophanes had elsewhere claimed to bring about with his political comedy.

Philocleon’s arguments in the agōn are also not devoid of metatheatrical nuance. Telò has pointed to the fact that Philocleon’s joy in the theatrical spectatorship involved in law-court histrionics renders Philocleon a stand-in for the theatre audience.46 As a spectator Philocleon enjoys exaggerated misery (“some lament their poverty and pile misfortune on misfortune”, οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἀποκλάονται πενίαν αὐτῶν, καὶ προστιθέασιν κακὰ
πρὸς τοῖς οὖσιν, 564-5); stories (μύθους, 566); “anything funny from Aesop” (Αἰσώπου τι γελοίον, 566); and jokes (οἱ δὲ σκῶττουσ’, 567). He also likes it when a defendant brings on his children and they perform like lambs (βληχάται, 570; εἰ μὲν χαίρεις ἄρνος φωνῇ, 572) or piglets (εἰ δ’ αὗ τοῖς χοιριδίοις χαίρω, 573). Each of these “spectacles” can be seen as a facet of low comedy that Philocleon clearly enjoys as a spectator as much as a performer. While one may assume that “lamenting poverty and piling misfortune on misfortune” is more tragic than comic, the exaggeration implied by προστιθέασιν suggests that the lamentation comes off as humorously overdone. All the other modes of entertainment can easily be related to the low-comic. Μῦθοι are associated by Aristotle and the anonymous (probably Byzantine) author of On Comedy with Crates, Pherecrates, and the non-political, non-iaemic comic tradition. Laughter (γέλοιον) is the characteristic result of humor in the low-comic mode, and Aesopic fables share theriomorphism with the low-brow. Animal entertainment is implicit also in the comparison of defendants’ sons to lambs and daughters to pigs. The latter indeed may call to mind the Megarian in Acharnians who disguised his daughters as pigs to put on a metatheatrical Megarian farce for Dicaeopolis at his market.

Bdelycleon is successful in the verbal agōn just as he was in the physical, and the chorus pronounce him the victor: “I have decided that you are the winner by far” (οὐ γὰρ οὖν νῦν μοι νικᾶν τολλῷ δεδόκησαι, 726). What does his success tell us about the poetics Aristophanes espouses in this comedy? Up until this point, the claim to a middle-comic mode appears ironic. Wasps seems to be mostly high comedy, dealing with

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47 The Aesopic in Wasps has been widely discussed, by e.g. Rothwell 1995; Pertsinidis 2009; Lefkowitz 2009, 10-82; Schirru 2010, 56-70; Hall 2013, 277-97. Rothwell argues that Philocleon’s penchant for Aesopic narratives is a marker of his low socio-economic status. Pertsinidis and Lefkowitz do not view fable as reflecting a class-based distinction. A consideration of the low-high dual status of Aesopic fable would be pertinent to this study but is unfortunately beyond its scope.

48 Acharnians 729-835.
contemporary political satire in which Cleon plays a prominent role. More importantly, the victory of Bdelycleon, equated with Aristophanes, implies the supremacy of the high-comic mode. The poetics of *Wasps* at this point in the comedy acknowledge that sometimes the high mode requires the resources of the low. Philocleon’s defeat suggests that the low is not equally able to avail itself of the resources of the high mode and thus it is defeated. However, Bdelycleon’s victory is not a complete victory. Philocleon still wants to go to court and judge. After establishing the superiority of the high mode, therefore, Bdelycleon proceeds to put on a second metatheatrical performance to find a permanent cure.

**The middle mode**

Bdelycleon’s dog trial can usefully be viewed as the λογίδιον γνώμην ἔχον that *Wasps* itself is claimed to be in the prologue. It is an allegorical fable with a point that is not too sophisticated for Philocleon (the audience) to understand. The prologue, prior to the exposition, even offers the audience a how-to guide to understanding allegory in *Wasps*, demonstrating the interpretive act using the example of dream interpretation. 49 In using this combined middle-comic mode Bdelycleon hopes that the fun entertainment of the trial play will succeed in making Philocleon understand the corruption of Cleon and the jury system on a level more suited to his viewing abilities and preferences. The *agôn* was too μέγα to really make an impact on such an innately *phortikos* spectator.

**Dream interpretation in the prologue**

*Wasps* opens with two slaves who tell each other their dreams and interpret them as they watch over their master’s elderly father. Xanthias dreams of a giant eagle who snatches up a bronze asp/shield (playing on the ambiguity of ἀσπίς) and then turns into

49 Reckford 1987, 221: “The dialogue points in a self-reflexive way to a series of important affinities between dreams and dream-interpreting on the one hand and jokes, riddles, comedy, and comedy interpreting on the other.” See also Pertsinidis 2005, 210-11; Hall 2013, 205-6.
Cleonymus and drops it. This dream contains both the allegory (an eagle snatching a snake) and its interpretation (the eagle represents Cleonymus, the famous shield-abandoner). Sosias exclaims “Cleonymus is no different than a riddle!” (οὐδὲν ἄρα γρίφου διαφέρει Κλεώνυμον, 20). As Biles and Olson remark, this “signals Sosias’ interest in interpreting rather than merely recounting” and highlights the importance of interpretation as a spectatorial mode in the *Wasps*. When Sosias comes to tell his own dream, he introduces it as follows: “Mine’s an important one. It’s about the state, about the whole ship of it” (ἀλλ᾽ ἐστιν μέγα. περὶ τῆς πολέως γάρ ἐστι, τοῦ σκάφους ὅλου, 28-9). Xanthias responds “well hurry up and tell me the keel of the matter” (λέγε νυν ἄνύσας τι τὴν τρόπιν τοῦ πράγματος, 30). The metatheatrical valence of πράγμα suggests to the audience that Xanthias’ important πράγμα about Athenian politics is going to be as much a plot exposition as a dream exposition, priming them to think of the act of interpreting the dream as a mode of comic interpretation. Sosias’ dream is about some sheep in the assembly wearing cloaks and holding sticks (πρόβατα...βακτηρίας ἔχοντα καὶ τριβώνια, 32-3). A voracious, loud-mouthed whale with the voice of a boiled pig (φάλλαινα πανδοκεύτρια, ἔχουσα φωνὴν ἐμπεπτημένης ύός, 35-6) makes a speech to them in the assembly. Xanthias signals to the audience that the whale is Cleon by saying “This dream smells horribly of rotting leather!” (ὀζει κάκιστον τούνύπτιον βύρσης σαπράς, 38). The dream interpretation scene not only establishes allegory and its interpretation as a hermeneutic mode for understanding the *Wasps*, but also tells the audience the answer to the allegory in the dog-trial. Just as the answer to the dream-riddle was Cleon, so the answer to the play-allegory is also Cleon.

50 Biles and Olson 2015, 88.
51 Πανδοκεύτρια properly means “female innkeeper” who were known as foul-mouthed. But it etymologically refers to someone who “takes everything in” i.e. is greedy. Biles and Olson 2015, 93.
52 On Cleon as tanner cf. *Knights* 44-9; 134-9; 203; 315; 740; 892.
The dog-trial

In the first two *agōnes* of the *Wasps* the relationship between high and low is antagonistic. They compete against each other and the high (whose authority was established by means of the low) comes out on top, but fails to achieve its hoped-for effect on Philocleon. In the middle-mode of the metatheatrical dog-trial, high and low are combined to produce a λογίδιον γνώμην ἔχον – a play that is funny but has an important point. In the expository part of the prologue, we saw how the vocabulary used to describe the high mode implies the necessity of the low; the same reliance of high on low is implied in the dog-trial: Bdelycleon’s political γνώμη (Cleon is bad and Philocleon should stop judging) requires a low-comic mode of expression (domestic animal story). I will argue that Philocleon enjoys the λογίδιον but does not comprehend the γνώμη, a fact that demonstrates that while high requires low, the reverse is not true. For Philocleon’s spectatorial type, the low part of the dog-trial play is a successful and enjoyable spectacle. This ability of low entertainment to function separately from the γνώμη demonstrates the low’s generic superiority.

Bdelycleon creates a law-court scenario at home, and as we witness its set-up, the metatheatrical nature of the scene becomes clear. At 798, Bdelycleon declares, “you wait here and I’ll come with the stuff” (ἀναμένε νυν ἐγὼ δέ ταῦθ’ ἡξω φέρων). He subsequently lists all the props required for his play: a chamber pot (ἀμίς, 807); fire (πῦρ, 811); bean soup (φακῆν, 811); and a bird (probably a cockerel, ὄρνιν, 815). Philocleon requests several further props: the altar of Lycus (819), which Bdelycleon improvises by asking a fat slave to sit or stand near the household altar; and the court railings (830), which Philocleon improvises from the household pig pen. Before the show

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53 Apparently there was a shrine to the obscure hero Lycus outside the Athenian law court. See MacDowell 1971, 184 (n.389); Sommerstein 1983, 180 (n.389); Biles and Olson 2015, 211-2 (n.389-94).
begins, Bdelycleon realizes that he has forgotten voting urns (καδίσκους, 854) and a water-clock (κλεψύδρα, 858), but desperate for it to get underway, Philocleon has already improvised these out of cups and the chamber pot respectively.\textsuperscript{54} I note that Bdelycleon tells Philocleon, “you are good at finding solutions” (ἐὖ γ᾽ ἐκτορίζεις αὐτά, 859). Εκτορίζω, meaning “inventing,” “contriving,” or “procuring” may be metatheatrically taken to acknowledge that Philocleon has directorial qualities of an improvisatory nature.\textsuperscript{55} In contrast, when Bdelycleon brings out his props, Philocleon praises them as “wise” (σοφόν, 809); “appropriate” (πρόσφορον, 809); and “clever” (δέξιόν, 812), all markers of the high poetic mode.

In the choral prayer before the trial begins, the wasps ask that Apollo bring fortune to “this scene which he has devised” (τὸ πρᾶγμα, ὃ μηχανᾶται, 870). In Bdelycleon’s own prayer he emphasizes the novelty of his “play” when he calls it as “a new rite” (τελετὴν καινήν, 876\textsuperscript{56}) that he has “innovated” (καινοτομοῦμεν, 876). He also outlines the very real effect that he hopes the play will “teach” his father: to stop being so harsh, take pity on defendants, listen to supplications, and soften his temper. He compares the effect of his “comedy” on Philocleon to a medical remedy: “mixing a bit of honey into his little old soul, like you would do with new wine” (ἀντὶ σιραίου μέλιτος σμικρὸν τῷ θυμιδίῳ παραμείξας, 878). Honey, especially honey mixed with wine was frequently used as a medical cure.\textsuperscript{57} Bdelycleon’s desire to “cure” his father looks directly back to his claim in the agōn that “it is a difficult task, and one requiring an awfully clever gnōmē, something greater than what comic poets usually say, to cure the

\textsuperscript{54} This scene is comparable to the highly metatheatrical scene of Cinesias’ seduction in Lysistrata. See chapter five.
\textsuperscript{55} Cf. Wasps 365.
\textsuperscript{56} For a comic performance referred to as a “rite” cf. Frogs 357.
\textsuperscript{57} See e.g. the Hippocratic Affections Ch. 61, 6.270.15-17; Internal Affections Ch. 6, 7.182.6; Diseases of Women 1 Ch. 105, 8.222.11.
ancient illness ingrained in the city” (650-1). During the trial, Bdelycleon, who takes on the role of defense attorney for the mute dog Labes, continues to highlight the need for moral justice that he wants to convey. For example, he declares outright to Philocleon that he should “pity those who are wretched” (ἔλέξει τούς ταλαιπωρομένους, 967) and he also makes an explicit political allusion when he compares Labes’ muteness to that of Thucydides when he was on trial (947). Each of these elements further contributes to Bdelycleon’s high comic persona and the importance he places on the γνώμη of his λογίδιον.

The low mode in this metacomedy is abundantly apparent. In the words of MacDowell, the political allegory of the dog trial also “provides some amusing farce.”58 The protagonists are animals and kitchen utensils;59 the accusation is of food theft; and throughout, Philocleon provides amusing farcical and obscene commentary on the proceedings. For example, at lines 912-14, Philocleon claims that cuōn’s accusations must be true because “the disgusting creature [Labes] just belched the hideous stench of cheese at me” (ἔμοι γέ τοι τυροῦ κάκιστον ἀρτίως ἐνήρυγεν ὁ βδελυρός οὗτος). At 918-9, when Philocleon declares, “this man is as devilish as my soup” (θερμὸς γὰρ ἀνὴρ οὐδὲν ἠπει ός φακῆς), Biles and Olson suggest that “perhaps the old man has just burned his tongue, allowing for a bit of distracted, mute clowning somewhere in the course of the previous ten lines.”60 As the kitchen utensil witnesses are being summoned, there is some amusing stage-action involving the chamber pot (935):

Bdelycleon asks “are you still peeing?” (ἄλλ᾽ ἐπὶ σὺ γ’ οὐρεῖς; 940) to which Philocleon

58 MacDowell 1971, 249.
59 We may compare the “Megarian farce” that a Megarian trader puts on in Acharnians 729-835, where he disguises his children as pigs and has them perform a routine. However, it is unclear if “Megarian” would have implied improvised animal skits in general, or if pigs were particularly Megarian. If the former, the dog trial may have read to the audience as a laugh stolen from Megara that also makes mincemeat out of Cleon.
60 Biles and Olson 2015, 356.
responds “well I think he [Labes] will be shitting himself today!” (τούτον δὲ γ´ οἶμ´ ἔγὼ χεσεῖσθαι τήμερον, 941).

In the trial’s opening speech, Bdelycleon announces that “the dog from Cydathenaem has indicted Labes of Aexone for wrongdoing because he ate the Sicilian cheese without sharing” (ἐγράψατο Κύων Κυδαθηναιεύς Λάβητ´ Αἰξωνέα τὸν τυρὸν ἀδικεῖν ὅτι μόνος κατήσθιεν τὸν Σικελικόν, 894-7). This is the riddle expected by the audience and it is very thinly disguised. The cuōn of Cydathenaem is clearly Cleon of Cydathenaem, and Labes of Aexone Laches of Aexone. The audience has been primed in multiple ways to understand the allegory. Sosias’ dream also presented an allegory of Cleon (as an innkeeper whale), and the wasp chorus mentioned at 240-1 that Cleon was going to indict Laches. The theater audience are clearly in the know (and expected to be), but there is no indication that Philocleon gets the allegory. He understands the “performance” in simple terms, as we see, for example, at 921: “the situation is obvious. It’s loud and clear” (τὸ πράγμα φανηρόν ἐστιν· αὐτὸ βοᾷ). He says this after the indictment, and clearly has not learned (as the chorus did at 725-6) to hear both sides of the story, nor has he perceived that the cuōn is Cleon once again trying to manipulate him into convicting his personal enemy Labes/ Laches.61

In the end, though Philocleon is moved by Labes’ defense (973-4). But he attributes the feeling to his soup, not a political change of heart, and he resolves still to

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61 One could argue that Philocleon’s reference to Labes’ thievery at 933 as κλέπτον τὸ χρῆμα τάνδρός (“the thievery of that man”) is indicative of the fact that he does understand the allegory. I read this, however, as a humorous indicator of how ingrained in Philocleon the language of judging is. τῷ κοινῷ (917) is read by many as suggestive Philocleon’s political understanding of the situation, and is taken as a synonym as δῆμος by Sommerstein 1983, 90 and Biles and Olson 2015, 355-6. Using κοινός instead of δῆμος leaves the meaning ambiguous: the theater audience can certainly understand the political significance from what Philocleon says, but it does not necessarily indicate that this is how Philocleon intends it. He may mean it in an adverbial sense “he didn’t share the cheese in common with me” or it may even mean “with me, his partner,” implying that Philocleon and his dog Labes have some shared interest.
convict. The only way Bdelycleon can force his γνώμη on him, to teach him to acquit and not to fall for Cleon’s manipulations, is by resorting to the thoroughly low-comic deceptive trick of switching the voting urns (ἐξηπάτηται κἀπολέλεκεν οὐχ ἐκὼν, 992).

The parabasis follows the trial and in it Aristophanes claims to be a Cleon-hating healer fully aligning himself with Bdelycleon and his high-comic program. Bdelycleon’s dog-trial, which conforms to the parameters laid out in the prologue that there would be “a little story with a point,” further ties protagonist to poet, leaving the audience with a clear message. High comedy established its authority in the agōn and successfully used and suppressed the low comedy of Philocleon. The agōn, however, failed to convince Philocleon qua low spectator to quit jury duty, so Bdelycleon presented a second metatheatrical performance, a λογίδιον γνώμην ἔχον, which concedes to the low tastes of Philocleon in order to advance its political and moral point.

It is precisely this neat wrap-up, fully conforming non-ironically to Aristophanes’ parabatic claim to a high-comic poetics, that has caused problems for scholars in Wasps’ second half, in which Bdelycleon fails to reform his father for polite society and Philocleon is let loose to perform his extravagantly low-comic finale that celebrates all the low comedy that Clouds had been so eager to distance itself from. The ending is not, however, as unexpected as many have thought, and we have seen hints throughout the first half of the comedy that suggest a comeback for the low mode: Bdelycleon had to engage in scene of physical slapstick to convince Philocleon to face him in a verbal agōn; the middle-mode dog trial revealed that while the low will always be funny and comprehensible, the high (which relies on these funny, comprehensible elements) can be misunderstood; and finally it should be emphasized that Bdelycleon only succeeds in convincing Philocleon not to judge any more by resorting to a low-comic ruse.
The tension between Philocleon as audience of Bdelycleon’s dog-trial and the theater audience as audience of Aristophanes’ dog-trial is constructive for thinking about how Aristophanic metatheater functions with respect to the poet’s relationship with his audience. The audience are mocked as having low taste and being too stupid for high comedy because they are likened to Philocleon. However, the audience know that this mockery is at least partly disingenuous because they are not as stupid as Philocleon and “get” the allegory. The end of Wasps celebrates the low comedy of Philocleon, and thus Wasps itself simultaneously celebrates the low tastes of the audience (mocked in the dog trial and the parabasis) and praises their abilities to comprehend the complexities of high comedy.

**Bdelycleon’s practice symposium**

After the parabasis Bdelycleon and Philocleon reappear on stage in yet another overtly metatheatrical situation. Bdelycleon, still the διδάσκαλος, costumes Philocleon and teaches him how to play the role of a sophisticated, gentlemanly symposiast. As we shall see in the next chapter, this is not the only comedy in which Aristophanes puts on a metatheatrical play-within-the-play where the high-brow director figure must work with a low comic actor figure. Philocleon’s metatheatrical role in the Wasps, I note, is about to come full-circle. He began as a failed poet-performer, directing and starring in his own satyric escape comedy; in the ἀγῶν and the dog trial, he is figured as a spectator; in the “dream symposium” scene (1122-1263) he is once again an actor, but in the hands of a high-comic director; and in the final scenes of the play, he breaks free from Bdelycleon and becomes a fully-fledged and successful low-comic poet-performer.

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63 See chapter five on Lysistrata and her acting troupe of low-brow women; and on Euripides (as director) and his low-brow, satyric relative (as actor).
Bdelycleon’s practice symposium has four parts, and resembles in these steps a dramatic rehearsal. First, he costumes Philocleon (1122-1167); then he teaches him how to walk like a member of the elite (1168-1173); third, he instructs him in how to talk and the kind of songs and stories he should tell (1174-1207); and finally, he teaches him what to do at a symposium (1208-1263). In each instance Philocleon offers a low comic interpretation of Bdelycleon’s high-comic program, preparing us for his low-comic comeback at the end of the play.

In the costuming scene Bdelycleon tries to get his father to take off his old τρίβων and put on a new, warm, and expensive χλαίνα: “take off your tribōn and throw on this chlaina as if it were a tribōn” (τὸν τρίβων’ ἄφες, τηνδὲ χλαίναν ἀναβαλοῦ τριβωνικῶς, 1132-3). For Telò the tribōn reflects the bodily experience of Cratinean poetry, “a sensation of squalor [linked to] the disease-inducing, vociferous, emotionally turbulent…primitive stage of the genre prior to the refinement of comedy wrapped in the Aristophanic chlaina.” While I, like Telò, link the tribōn and the chlaina to low and high comedy respectively, I do not believe the costumes entail such a negative implication, but rather that they would have visually suggested the difference between high and low comedy, representing the genres in social terms. A tribōn, as Dover translates it, is “a workday cloak that has worn thin.” The etymological sense of tribōn is something well-worn (τριβω), but also something well-known because it has been done over and over again, much like low comedy. Thus, a tribōn is not only the cloak of someone lower down the socio-economic scale, but it also has built into its etymology the idea of wearing something down or out by repetition. The chlaina on the other hand is, as Bdelycleon represents it, a luxurious item of great expense: “It’s woven by foreigners...
and costs a lot – it’s easily consumed a talent of wool” (άλλα τοῦτο τοῖς βαρβάροις ύφαίνεται πολλαῖς δαπάναις. αὕτη γέ τοι έριων ταλάντων καταπέπωκε ρήδιώς, 1145-7). ύφαίνω has an overt poetic meaning. As well as “weave” it can also mean “contrive,” “create,” or “write.” The chlaina, therefore, is not only “woven by foreigners” but is also “contrived/ created at great expense.” 67 The cloak is like an expensive and elaborate performance-piece, much like a high comedy.

Bdelycleon forces new shoes on his old father, and instructs him in how to walk wearing them: “step out voluptuously, richly, like this, and behave pretentiously” (πλουσίως ώδι προβάς τρυφερόν τι διασαλακώνισον, 1168-9). Philocleon tries and fails to follow Bdelycleon’s instructions, reducing them to a comic parody of Bdelycleon’s social and comic pretensions; it is a mockery high comedy. 68 When Bdelycleon critiques him (1172) Philocleon responds “and yet I really want to do a butt-waggle” (καὶ μην προθυμοῦμαι γε σαυλοπρωκτιᾶν, 1173). Sommerstein translates this line “But I really am trying to do an arse-wiggle” and explains that “Philocleon does not think his efforts to imitate the walk of an effeminate rich man are being properly appreciated.” 69 For MacDowell, however, the line should be interpreted, “Actually I’m trying to do the waggle-bottom.” 70 I find MacDowell’s reading the more plausible, taking καὶ μήν...γε as adversative rather than progressive. 71 Philocleon mocks Bdelycleon’s attempt to teach him aristocratic behavior by overemphasizing the moves and reducing them to an obscene dance move. The movement indicated by σαυλοπρωκτιᾶν probably resembled

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67 We may compare the Knights parabasis 538, where Aristophanes tells us that Crates did not waste a lot of money on his comic productions (ἀπὸ σμικρᾶς δαπάνης).
68 Pütz 2007, 85-87
69 Sommerstein 1983, 114; 224.
70 MacDowell 1971, 282.
71 Denniston 1996, 357, n.8
a move from the comic *cordax* or *apokinon*, both of which were characterized by excessive butt-waggling.

In the next part of the lesson, Bdelycleon teaches his father what kinds of stories to tell and songs to sing (1174-1207). He announces his intention in programatically high-comic language, saying, “come now, do you know how to tell dignified stories in the presence of learned and clever men?” (ἄγε νυν, ἐπιστήσει λόγους σεμνοὺς λέγειν ἀνδρῶν παρόντων πολυμαθῶν καὶ δεξιῶν, 1175). Λόγοι σεμνοί, as we see later in *Lysistrata* and *Frogs* is a phrase elsewhere used as indicative of the Aristophanic high, its cleverness and its learnedness. Philocleon states that yes, he does know and proceeds to offer several examples, all of which, naturally, turn out to be paradigmatically low. The first story Philocleon would tell is “how Lamia farted when she was caught” (ὡς ἡ Λάμι᾽ ἁλουσ᾽ ἐπέρδετο, 1177)” and then how Cardopian did something to his mother (Bdelycleon cuts him off before we find out what). Lamia was a folk-tale monster, and the subject of a comedy by Crates that also references her notorious fart. Nothing is known of Cardopion except what this passage suggests: that he was a folkloric figure similar Lamia and did something outrageous to his mother. Bdelycleon interrupts to tell his father “no more legends, but stories of human matters like the ones we usually tell at home” (μὴ ἴμοιε μύθους, ἀλλὰ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων, σίους λέγομεν μάλιστα, τοὺς κατ᾽ οἰκίαν, 1180-1). Philocleon misunderstands what his son means by τοὺς κατ᾽ οἰκίαν, and instead begins to narrate a story that happened in a domestic setting: “Once upon a time there was a mouse and a cat…” (οὕτω πιοτ’ ήν μῦς καὶ γαλῆ, 1182). This recalls an Aesopic fable, perhaps the cat and mice (άιλουρος καὶ...

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72 *Lysistrata* 1109 and *Frogs* 1004.
73 *Crates* fr. 20
74 As Biles and Olson 2015, 428 note, “Bdelycleon cuts his father off before the vital verb can be expressed, probably because it would have been even more shocking than ἐπέρδετο, e.g. ἐτύππησε ~ ἐτυψε... or more likely ἐβίνησε (‘fucked’)."
μύες). 75 κατ’ οίκιαν also suggests that this fable refers to Philocleon and Bdelycleon’s situation at home - two incompatible characters living in the same house. 76 Bdelycleon calls Philocleon and his fable “stupid and uneducated” (ὦ σκαῖε κάταϊδευτε, 1183). According to him, λόγοι σεμνοί are important stories of human accomplishment (1180). They should be “grand” (μεγαλοπρεπεῖς, 1186) and relate to important political achievements such as accompanying Androcles and Cleisthenes on a state delegation (1187). 77 If Philocleon has no stories of personal achievement, Bdelycleon says he should tell of historical achievement like Ephrudion’s victory in the pankration despite his old age (1190-4) because οἱ σοφοί customarily tell such stories (1196). Throughout this scene, there is a contrast between Bdelycleon’s stories of human achievement featuring important contemporary or historical characters, and Philocleon’s uneducated, obscene, mythological or animal fables.

Bdelycleon’s final lesson is about how to be a sociable symposiast (ξυμποτικός καὶ ξυνουσιαστικός, 1209). As in the walking lesson, Philocleon reduces to slapstick Bdelycleon’s attempts to teach him, this time how to “recline elegantly” (1210). Throughout this rehearsal symposium (or “dream banquet”, ἐνύπνιον ἐστίωμεθα;, 1218) Philocleon displays a similar tendency to that already seen: he turns a praise song into an accusation of thievery (1227); and comes up with another Aesopic maxim: “one can’t play the fox and be a friend to both parties” (οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλωτεκίζειν, οὔδ’ ἀμφοτέροις γίγνεσθαι φίλον, 1241-2). The symposium that Bdelycleon conjures, he populates with guests that surprise us given his earlier political alliances and his name. They are all

75 Fable 81.
76 Biles and Olson 2015, 428.
77 Androcles was a radical democratic politician mocked also in Ecphantides, fr. 5 and Telecleides fr.16 as being a “cutpurse.” Cratinus in Seriphoi called him a ’shameful nouveau riche (fr. 223) and in Seasons says he was a male prostitute (fr.281, with Wasps Σὺ νομίζας 1187). Cleisthenes is a frequent butt of jokes in Aristophanes for his effeminacy.
associates of Cleon (Theorus, Aeschines, Phanus, and Cleon), and Bdelycleon himself plays Cleon: “and what if I am Cleon (καὶ δὴ γὰρ εἶμι ἐγὼ Κλεών, 1224).”

This is not the first time Bdelycleon (Hate-Cleon) has been identified with Cleon. At line 342 the chorus, speaking for a moment as a “real” chorus of Aristophanes and not in their fictional Cleon-supporting wasp personae, refer to Bdelycleon as “demagogocleon” (Δημολογοκλέων) because of his tyrannical attempt to control his father. The same sinister quality of Bdelycleon was implicit in Philocleon’s casting of him as the tyrant or cyclops in the satyric action of the comedy’s first act. The identification of Bdelycleon and Cleon has been taken by Reckford and Hubbard to indicate Aristophanes’ acknowledgement of the manipulative and coercive potential of high comedy. The explicit alignment of Bdelycleon and Cleon as theatrical and political manipulators respectively begins the process of distancing Bdelycleon from the Aristophanic with whom he seemed to be so strongly aligned in the parabasis. After all, Aristophanes called attention in the parabasis to his Heraclean battle against the Cleon monster. The high-comic poet not only failed to get his political message across fully to his audience, but he has now been revealed to be as manipulative and amoral as the politician he claimed to hate. Line 1224, therefore, marks the transferal Aristophanes’ poetic allegiance from Bdelycleon to the low Philocleon. Political high comedy is revealed to be an unstable paradox, in contrast to its ever-reliable low counterpart.

The move from a high to low aesthetic preference is symbolically marked in the second parabasis. The ode and the epirrhema make an initial show of praising someone

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78 Theorus was mocked elsewhere by Aristophanes for being a flatterer of Cleon (Wasps 418-9); a perjurer (Clouds 400); and in Acharnians he is the ambassador to Thrace (134-166). Aeschines “son of brag” is mocked for claiming wealth he did not have; Phanus was an associate of Cleon (Knights 1256).

for a high-comic quality, only to undercut the praise with the revelation that what appeared high is actually utterly low. The chorus open the ode by opposing cleverness and stupidity: “I have often thought myself to be clever and never stupid, but Amynias son of Brag more so” (πολλάκις δὴ Ἰδες ἐμαυτῶς δεξιός πεφυκέναι καὶ σκαίδος οὐδεπιώπτοτε· ἀλλ’ Ἀμυνίας ὁ Σέλλου μάλλον, 1265-7). The passage praises Amynias for his cleverness, his pretentious hairstyle and the company he keeps, but in the end, his “cleverness” turns out to be that after becoming a poor man he dines with the Poor Men of Thessaly.80

Likewise, the epirrhema begins as a praise of the clever musical talents of Automenes’ sons:

1275 ὤ μακάρι᾽ Αὐτόμενες, ὡς σε μακαρίζομεν. παιδᾶς ἐφύτευσας ὅτι χειροτεχνικωτάτους· πρώτα μὲν ἄτπαι φίλον ἄνδρα τε σοφώτατον, τὸν κιθαροιδῶτατον, ὦ χάρις ἐφέσπετο· τὸν δ’ ὑποκριτὴν ἔτερον ἄργαλέον ὡς σοφόν·
1280 εὖ’ Αριφράδη πολὺ τι θυμοσοφικῶτατον, ὅτι ποτ’ ἔσσει μαθὸν ἅπασι φίλον ἄνδρα τε σοφώτατον, κιθαροιδῶτατον ὑποκριτὴν ἐκμαθῆσαι· ἐκάστοτε.81 (Wasps 1275-83)

1275 Blessed Automenes, how we lucky we think you are to have born the most talented children. First a man dear to all and very clever, a brilliant cithara player, whom grace attends. Then another, an actor, remarkably smart.
1280 And then Ariphrades, by far the most naturally clever. His father once swore that, though he learned it from no one, he exercised his tongues every time he went…to the brothel!

The programmaticness of this passage is marked by its poetic, musical, and theatrical theme. The chorus praise Automenes’ eldest son (Arignotus) with the superlatives σοφώτατον and κιθαροιδῶτατον, marking the high qualities of cleverness and talent. His

80 The Πενέσται in Thessaly were a peasant class much like the helots of Sparta (Biles and Olson 2015, 452-3).
81 I exclude the line 1282 bracketed by Wilson 2007b as an explanatory gloss: ἀλλ’ ὑπὸ σοφῆς φύσεως αὐτόματον ἐκμαθῆσαι.
second son, is praised as a (literally) “difficult to say how clever” actor. We expect, in line
with this praise of musical and theatrical talent, a third such compliment. Ariphrades, the
chorus say is “by far the most naturally clever” (πολύ τι θυμοσοφικώτατον). His skill is
γλωττοποιεῖν, a hapax meaning literally “tongue-doing.” In the area of poetics, this would
have initially implied cleverness with words, but it is proved at the end of the line to be an
obsene double-entendre for cunnilingus with prostitutes. Both passages are jokes, of
course, but in the metapoetic circumstance of Wasps they can be viewed as
exemplifying a shift in what Aristophanes claims to positively value: no longer the
cleverness of the social elite and their musical talent, but the lower social classes and
their obscene sexual skill.

In the antepirrhema (the antode is missing), the chorus speaks in the first person
as Aristophanes:

1285 ήνίκα Κλέων μ´ ύπετάραττεν ἐπικείμενος
καὶ με κακίσας ἐκνισε· κἀθ´, δι´ ἀπεδειρόμην,
οὐκτός ἐγέλων μέγα κεκραγότα θεώμενοι,
οὐδὲν ἄρ` ἐμοῦ μέλον, ὅσον δὲ μόνον εἰδέναι
σκωμμάτων εἶποτέ τι θλιβόμενος ἐκβαλώ.

1290 ταῦτα κατιδὼν ὑπὸ τι μικρὸν ἐπιθήκαισα·
εἴτα νῦν ἐξηπάτηκεν ἡ χάρα τὴν ἀμπελον.
(Wasps 1284-91)

There are some who say I have been reconciled again
after Cleon stirred up trouble for me and pressed me
and abused me and pounded me. And then, when I was being skinned alive,
everyone laughed outside when they saw him yelling loudly.
They didn’t care about me but only wanted to know
whether I’d toss out a joke as I was being squeezed.

When I saw this, I pulled a little trick:
now the vine-prop has deceived the vine.

The passage implies that Aristophanes had promised Cleon that he would not mock him
in comedies any more (καταδιηλλάγην), but that the promise was a trick: the vine prop
(Aristophanes) deceived the vine (Cleon) who was relying on him to keep his word. This
confession of Aristophanes’ looks directly back to the prologue and directly, authorially
renders ironic his claim not to do anything λίαν μέγα like mocking Cleon. The trick Aristophanes has played on Cleon is more than just breaking the promise not to mock him. It is also that Bdelycleon (Hate-Cleon), whom he initially equated with his own poetic voice, has turned out to be a facsimile of Cleon himself. The phrase “the vine prop has tricked the vine” applies equally well to the situations of Philocleon and Bdelycleon. Bdelycleon (now equated with Cleon), the vine, trusts that his father, the vine prop, will learn all his lessons and perform admirably at the symposium, but Philocleon deceives him and retains all his old ways. If this is the case, the following set of associations become clear:

Vine prop = Aristophanes = Philocleon (= low comedy)  
Vine = Cleon = Bdelycleon (=high comedy)

The notion of comic dependency is one that I have argued is central to *Wasps*. High comedy relies on the low and is impossible without it. At the end of the comedy we see the low detach itself from the high and prove that it, unlike the high, can stand on its own two feet. The association between Cleon and Bdelycleon was made clear by the latter performing as the former. A story told by Philocleon in his son’s rehearsal serves to link Philocleon to the vine prop: “That, that was the bravest of my actions when I nicked Ergasion’s stakes!” (ἐκεῖν ἐκεῖν ἀνδρείοτατόν γε τῶν ἐμῶν, ὁτ’ Ἐργασίωνος τὰς χάρακας ὑφεσέλομην, 1200-1201). This adds further corroboration to the equations illustrated above.

**Philocleon’s Symposium**

Xanthias relates the events of the real symposium that Philocleon attends. The narrative, and the events that follow it, exhibit a remarkable intertext with the parabasis of the

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82 Cf. Lefkowitz 2009, 78-80 who suggests that “the vine prop has tricked the vine” previews Philocleon’s use of fable at the end of the comedy: Philocleon offers the fables as reconciliation, but they end up as mockery.
revised *Clouds*. Philocteon enacts almost all (if not all) the low-brow tropes that Aristophanes professes to disdain in the earlier comedy, making it not only a prime and programmatic example of Aristophanic κωμῳδία φορτική, but also making it the central moment of *Wasps*’ response to the failure of the earlier comedy.83 *Clouds* 537-44 mentions 1) humor coming from the stage-phallus; 2) mocking the bald; 3) dancing the *cordax*; 4) the old man with the leading part hitting whoever’s at hand; and 5) rushing around with torches. In Xanthias’ account of the symposium he highlights 4), especially in lines 1323-4: “Then, when he’d got drunk, he left for home, beating everyone he happened to meet.” (ἔπειτα ἐπειδὴ μέθυεν, οἶκαδ’ ἔρχεται τύπτων ἄπαντας, ἦν τις αὐτῶ ξυντύχη). On his way home, he also beats Myrtia with a torch (1390, cf. 1422-3). Philocteon was almost certainly wearing a bald mask, accounting for 2).84 When he appears on stage after the symposium, he waves a torch and threatens: “If you don’t go away, you bandits, I’ll cook you up like small fry with my torch!” (οἷον, εἰ μὴ ἵππησεθ’, ὑμᾶς, ὦ πόνηροι, ταυτῇ τῇ δαδὶ φρυκτοὺς σκευάσω, 1329-31). When Bdelycleon catches his father with the flute-girl he has kidnapped, Philocteon pretends she is a torch (1371-8), and even cries out ἄ ἄ when his son confiscates her, (like *Clouds*’ ἵοι ἵοι). The flute girl scene also contains obscene humor centered around Philocteon’s stage phallus and the girl’s costume body:

ánáβαινε δεύρῳ χρυσομηλολόνθιον,
τῇ χειρὶ τοῦ δια λαβομένη τοῦ σχοινίου.
ἐχοῦ· φυλάττει δ’, ὡς σαπρὸν τὸ σχοινίον·
δόμως γε μέντοι τριβόμενον οὐκ ἂχθεται. (1341-4)

Come here, my little golden cockchafer,  
take a hold of this rope with your hand.  
Hold onto it, but watch out – it’s a bit worn.

83 Telò 2016, 90-1 similarly argues that this scene looks back to the κωμῳδία φορτική of the *Clouds* parabasis, but for him this a negative moment, enacting the comic style of Cratinus (whom he assumes is one of the ἄνδρες φορτικoi of *Clouds* 524).  
84 See above n.31.
Still, it doesn’t mind being rubbed.

Biles and Olson suggest that Dardanis grabs a hold of Philocleon’s phallus and he pulls her up out of the orchestra by it. As Philocleon pretends that she is a torch, the following exchange takes place:

**Βδελυκλέων**

δὰς Ἦδε;

Filokleon

δὰς δῆτ’, οὐχ ὀρᾶς ἐσχισμένην;

1375

**Βδ**. τί δὲ τὸ μέλαν τοῦτ’ ἔστιν αὐτής τούν μέσω;

Phil. ἢ πίττα δήπου καομένης ἐξέρχεται.

**Βδ**. ὁ δ’ ὅπισθεν οὐχὶ πρωκτός ἔστιν οὐτοσί;

Phil. ὃς μὲν οὖν τής δαδὸς οὗτος ἐξέχει. (1373-7)

Bd: This is a torch?

Ph: Of course it’s a torch. Don’t you see where it’s split?

1375 Bd: What’s this black bit in the middle?

Ph: The pitch comes out there as it burns.

Bd: And this bit at the back, isn’t it an arse?

Ph: This is the knot sticking out of the torch

The humor of this scene stems very simply from pointing out the “obscene” parts of Dardanis’ costume. Ἐσχισμένην refers to cleavage or legs and τὸ μέλαν to pubic hair.

The whole scene is illustrative of the obscene costume-based humor of Clouds 538-9.

Finally, as I argue more extensively below, Philocleon and the sons of Carcinus end the Wasps with an extravagant cordax (1523-30).

The low comedy of Philocleon’s symposium is more extensive than just a response to the Clouds parabasis. Consider Xanthias’ account of Philocleon’s behavior at the symposium:

οὐ γὰρ ὁ γέρων ἀπηρότατον ἀεὶ ἦν κακόν

καὶ τῶν ἐξυνόντων πολὺ παροικίκωτας;

καί τοι παρῆν ἵπππυλλος, Ἀντιφῶν, Λύκων, Λυσίστρατος, Ὀσύφραστος, οἱ περὶ Φρύνιχον.

τούτων ἀπάντων ἦν ὑβριατότατος μακρό.

εὐθὺς γὰρ ὡς ἐνέπλητο πολλῶν κάγαθων,

1305 ἐνήλιατ’, ἐσκίρτα, ’πεπόρδει, κατεγέλα,
Wasn’t the old man the most terrible nuisance
and the most drunk out of everyone who was there?
Even though Hippiillus was there, and Antiphon, Lycon,
Lysistratus and Thouphrastus, all those in Phrynichus’ crew.
And he was the most outrageous of all of them!
As soon as he’d filled himself with goodies
he leaped and bounded and farted and mocked
just like a little ass feasted on barley.
And he beat me, lustily calling out “boy, boy!”
When Lysistratus saw him, he made a funny comparison:
“Old man, you’re just like newly-rich Phrygian
or a pig in clover. Philocleon cried out a
comparison in response, that Lysistratus was like
a locust who’d cast off his wings
or Sthenelus shorn of his equipment.
They all clapped, all but Thouphrastus.
He made a scornful face like a clever man would.
Then the old man asked Thouphrastus:
“Why are you so pretentious? Why do you pretend to be so refined,
When you’re always playing the parasite to whoever’s having some success?
Such outrages he committed against them one at a time,
making rustic jokes and telling stories that were
very unlearned and not at all fitting to the situation.
Then, when he’d got drunk, he left for home,
beating everyone he happened to meet.
At 1305, we hear of Philocleon leaping, bounding, farting, and mocking. He and another guest engage in the low-comic, extemporaneous, popular game of *eikones*. At the end of the passage, Xanthias describes his mode of entertainment as “making rustic jokes and...telling stories that were very unlearned and not at all fitting to the situation (1320-1). This remark precisely reflects Bdelycleon’s critiques of his father in the practice-run, where, in 1183, he calls Philocleon “stupid and uneducated” (σκαί ἄπαιδευτε) for not telling λόγοι σεμνοί (1174). The applause of the fellow-symposiasts (ἀνεκρότησαν, 1314) at the *eikones* metatheatrically marks the positive reception of such a performance in the low-comic mode. They all applaud but one: Thouphrastus “He made a scornful face like a clever man would” (1315). Telò has argued that Thouphrastus represents the Aristophanic comic mode. To rephrase for my own purposes, I argue that Thouphrastus represents the high-comic mode that Aristophanes ironically claims for himself in the *Wasps* parabasis. Telò points to the adjectives of κομψός (refined) and δεξιός (clever) as markers of Thouphrastus’ affiliations with the high-comic mode, arguing that “Xanthias’ presentation of Thouphrastus as dexios echoes the parabasis’s alignment of Aristophanic comedy with dextotēs...as well as Bdelycleon’s endorsement of this quality...It is also significant that Philocleon’s accusation of affected kompsotēs (‘elegance’) accompanies a disparaging reference to ‘putting on airs,’ literally ‘wearing long hair’...a habitus that serves as an external marker of Bdelycleon’s semnotēs.” According to Telò’s argument, we are meant to understand Philocleon “ventriloquizing” the anti-Aristophanic stance and the audience’s dislike of Aristophanes’ high-comic mode. I understand the scene in simpler terms: Xanthias relates a metatheatrical “performance.” The audience enjoy the low-brow farce of Philocleon’s comic mode.

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86 See chapter six on *Frogs* 905-6.
87 Telò 2016, 95
Thouphrastus does not because he thinks of himself as affiliated with the high-comic mode but his high-comic credentials are understood by Philocleon to be fake. He makes a scornful face as if he were clever, (δὴ marks the sarcasm88), but he is not. Likewise he pretends to be refined (προσποιεῖ), but he is not really refined. Finally, Philocleon accuses Thouphrastus of “playing the parasite,” a loose translation of the hapax κωμῳδολοιχῶν or “comic-licking.” The κωμῳδο- part of the coinage certainly points to the metatheatrical nature of this scene and Thouphrastus’ portrayal as a comic poet of sorts. The whole word suggests a not-very-flattering assessment of high-brow comic poets pandering to public opinion. Together with Bdelycleon’s “transformation” into Cleon at 1224, and the three passages of the second parabasis discussed above, this metatheatrically reflects a positive appreciation of the low-comic (indicated by the applause), not a complex ventriloquization of anti-Aristophanic sentiment in the audience.

A Contest of Crabs

In the final scene of the comedy Xanthias announces:

By Dionysus, some god has rolled impossible happenings into the house. The old man, after drinking for a long time, heard a flute and, delighted by the event, he danced all night long without stopping. He danced those ancient dances that Thespis used to compete with. And he says he’s going to show up these modern tragedians as old Cronuses, dancing a dancing match against them soon.

88 Biles and Olson 2015, 466-7
This final scene of *Wasps* has recently been interpreted as an instantiation of comedy’s contest with and superiority to the tragic genre, as the comic Philocleon defeats the tragic sons of Carcinus in a dancing *agōn*. In what follows, I argue that that this final scene can be read as a low-comic extravaganza in which Philocleon proves the positive value and agonistic efficacy of the low. At the end of the comedy the discredited high mode is reintegrated with the low as an illustration of Aristophanes’ dual poetics. In the final contest between the low-comic Philocleon and the paratragic sons of Carcinus, the low wins and transforms the high-brow paratragedy of the Carcinites into an old style *cordax*-dancing animal chorus. The rejuvenation of Philocleon, the embodiment of low comedy, illustrates that what Aristophanes’ comic poetics offers is a new, reinvigorated version of traditional low comedy. This positive, celebratory interpretation of *Wasps*’ finale is of a piece with much contemporary scholarship on Aristophanes and argues against the pessimistic interpretations of scholars such as Hubbard and Telò. Telò, for example, argues that “This Cratinean Philocleon is much less clearly victorious than his dominating presence may indicate at first sight.” He reads a kind of tragic doom into the finale, which would have utterly escaped the comic audience’s notice amidst the hilarious spectacle of dancing crabs.

There are three key markers of low comedy in Philocleon’s dance-off with the sons of Carcinus: Philocleon’s dance is a *cordax* and the dance of the crablets also

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89 Especially Farmer 2017, 148-52. See also Wright 2013, 161-4.
90 E.g. Silk 2000, 428; Jedrkiewicz 2006, 87-9; 374; Biles 2011, 166; Farmer 2017, 166. Hubbard 1991, 136-7 argues that “The *Clouds* and the *Wasps* both end with the hero’s failure, and it is perhaps no surprise that the plays themselves were relative failures with the public. Neither play is able to articulate a positive vision of the world as it ought to be, in the sense that the *Acharnians*, *Knights*, and some of Aristophanes’ later plays do.” Telò 2016, 109.
features several defining moves of that dance. There is also a strong animal presence in the scene, and Philocleon continues to emphasize his allegiance to old traditions.

In ancient descriptions of the *cordax*, the dance has a couple of notable consistencies: it features unseemly, vulgar movements, especially of the bum; and those dancing the dance are said to “drag” or “draw” it out, (ἔλκω) or “thrash” it out (λέπται). Philocleon uses several terms to describe the dance he performs at 1484-96:

καὶ δὴ γὰρ
1485 σχήματος ἀρχή

... 1487 πλευραν λυγίζαντος ὑπὸ ρύμης:
οὸν μυκτὴρ μυκάται καὶ
σφόνδυλος ἀχεῖ. (Wasps 1484-5; 1487-9)

Here’s the opening of the dance-move...

1487 **Twisting my side** in a rush. How loudly my nostrils bellow and **how my spine aches.**

The verb λυγίζω, “to twist” is synonymous with συστρέφω (twist), περιάγω (rotate), and κάμπτω (bend). Schnabel has therefore linked the verb, and the movement Philocleon describes here, with the verb ῥικνέομαι, defined by Pollux (4.99) as “rotating the butt vulgarly (τὸ τὴν ὀφρὺν φορτικῶς περιάγειν) and by Photius (ad loc.) as “to bend in an unseemly way either in sex or in a dance where you bend your butt” (τὸ καμπύλον γίγνεσθαι ἀσχημόνως καὶ κατὰ συνουσίαν καὶ ὀρχήσιν καμπτοντα τὴν ὀφρῦν).

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91 In *Clouds* 555, Aristophanes complains about Eupolis adding a drunk old woman who performs a *cordax*. Likewise Philocleon here is a drunk old man performing the dance solo.
92 Hesychius ad loc.; *Clouds* ΣΕΜΜατ 540; Aristoxenus fr. 103; 104; 105; 106; 109. See also Athenaeus 1.20e; XIV.630e; 631d-e;
93 ἔλκω: *Clouds*; λέπτω: Mnesimachus *The Horse Groom*, fr. 4.18
94 Hesychius ad loc.; Schnabel 1910, 7.
Ῥικνοῦσθαι, for Schnabel was one of the key elements of the *cordax*. So can the phrase “twisting my side” be related to the unseemly bending and butt rotating noted above. I suggest that it can. Philocleon must be twisting his whole torso to one side in an exaggerated movement (perhaps indicated by ὑπὸ ρῦμης). The aching spine he mentions suggests that his back is also bending or twisting, resulting in his butt sticking out on the opposite side to where his torso has twisted.

Philocleon’s next move is usually interpreted as an old-fashioned *tragic* dance-move:

1490 πτήσσει Φρύνιχος ὥς τις ἀλέκτωρ
1492 σκέλος οὐρανίαν ἐκλακτίζων
       πρῶκτος χάσκει. (Wasps 1490; 1492-3)

1490 Phrynichus crouches like a cock
1492 kicking his leg up sky-high
       his arse gapes.

In this move, Philocleon bends down and then leaps up, jumping and throwing one leg out in front of him. The focus here on the obscene gaping of the butt suggests that, despite the reference to Phrynichus, we remain in solid comic *cordax* territory. The cowering cockerel move may be derived from a tragic *schema*, but in its basic element, it is a crouching bend not dissimilar to the twist or bend move we saw in the first *schema*. That ἐκλακτίζων or “kicking out” was a comic dance move can be seen by comparing Philocleon’s dance to the automatic choral dance at *Peace* 324-36. As in *Wasps*, the

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95 Schnabel 1910, 4. Schnabel also cites Eustathius *Commentary on the Iliad*, 3.164.15 (οἱ κυμαδούμενοι ἐν φαύλαις ὑρχήσασι λυγισμοί)
96 This is the pose of several figures from a Corinthian aryballos (British Museum A 1437) thought to depict a *cordax*. See Hincks 1911.
98 Schnabel 1910, 10 suggests that πτήσσει was the name of the *schema*, which Philocleon parodically associates with the tragic Phrynichus.
dance is interrupted by irritated comments from an onlooker (Trygaeus). The chorus describe their dance moves in the following way:

328 ἐν μὲν οὖν τοιτὶ μ’ ἔασον ἐλκύσαι, καὶ μηκέτι. 

...  
332 τὸ σκέλος ρίψαντες ἤδη λήγομεν τὸ δεξιόν.  

... ἀλλὰ καὶ τάριστερόν τοῖ μ’ ἔστ’ ἀναγκαίως ἐχον. 
335 ἥδομαι γὰρ καὶ γέγηθα καὶ πέπορδα καὶ γελῶ μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ γῆρας ἐκδύς ἐκφυγὼν τὴν ἁστίδα. (328; 332; 334-36) 

328 Let me draw out this one schema and then I’ll stop. 

...
332 We’re done once we’ve kicked up our right leg. 

...
335 But I have to do the same with the left! 

I’m delighted, I rejoice, I fart, and I laugh, happier to have fled my shield than if I’d cast off my old age. 

In this comic dance (where there is no sign of tragic parody), the movement is described with the verb ἐλκω as the cordax is in Clouds 540. The main action involves kicking the legs up alternately. τὸ σκέλος ρίψαντες must describe a similar movement to Philocleon’s σχέλος οὐρανίαν ἐκλακτίζων.99 In Peace this dance is associated with celebratory joy as it also is in Wasps, giving it more of a comic, not a tragic, vibe. So it may be that Philocleon is parodying an old-style Phrynichean tragic dance, but if that is the case, it has been heavily inflected with notes of the cordax, to render it essentially and to all intents and purposes a comic dance. The Phrynichus mention which spawned the tragic interpretations of the dance, may also point to the comic playwright Phrynichus: at Clouds 555-6 the cordax that Eupolis added to his Maricas was originally the cordax from the comic Phrynichus’ parody of the Andromeda story. Additionally, the reference to Phrynichus and his cockerel points to the two further low elements in this scene: animals and old, traditional entertainment. 

99 ἐκλακτίζω seems usually to refer to kicking backwards, but together with οὐρανίαν and the image of πρώκτος χάσκει, it must here mean kicking the leg forward and up, like ῥίπτω.
The reference to Phrynichus' cockerel figures Philocleon as a bird dancer, and the sons of Carcinus, against whom he competes are likened to crabs (Καρκίνος = crab), and comically described as such as each appears successively on stage (1500-11). MacDowell has argued that the real sons of Carcinus performed the dance, and thus that the parody was complimentary rather than parodic.\textsuperscript{100} This seems unlikely given that Aristophanes mocks Carcinus elsewhere, and there is no evidence of komoidoumenoi playing themselves anywhere else.\textsuperscript{101} The dance is also a comic version of the Carcinites’ dancing rather than a real representation of it. The Carcinites are not invited on stage to perform one of their own dances, but others parody their famous dance steps. Biles and Olson suggest that the actors playing the sons of Carcinus were seated in the audience and so could not have been wearing elaborate crab costumes.\textsuperscript{102} The dancers must have been the three mute boy actors who accompanied the chorus in the parodos and later played the kitchen utensils in the dog-trial. They may well have been seated in the audience but there is nothing specific in Philocleon’s language when he declares the contest to indicate it, and I find it hard to believe that Aristophanes would miss the chance to bring on actors playing the sons of Carcinus costumed as comic crabs. This may be in part what the chorus’ declaration of novelty in the play’s final line refers to.

The style of dance favored by the sons of Carcinus was called the βέμβιξ, literally a “spinning top” (βεμβικίζων, 1517). The chorus act as dance directors, calling out the

\textsuperscript{100} MacDowell 1971, 327.
\textsuperscript{101} Clouds 1261 and after Wasps also at Peace 781-2, 864, and Thesmophoriazusae 441. Sommerstein 1983, 246, and Biles and Olson 2015, 506 argue that it is better to assume a growing antipathy (or dramatic rivalry) between the two.
\textsuperscript{102} Biles and Olson 2015, 506.
moves the dancers should do. First, they tell them to “leap” (πηδάτε, 1520); then “whirl your foot in swift circle” (ταχύν πόδα κυκλοσοβεῖτε, 1523); they tell one of the to “kick out the Phrynichus kick” (καὶ τὸ Φρυνίχειον ἐκλακτίσατω τίς, 1524-5) so they audience will marvel when they see the leg go up (ἰδόντες ἀνω σκέλος, 1526); and finally they say: “Twist! Go around in a circle and slap your belly! Throw your leg up to the sky! Add in the spinning tops!” (στρόβει· περίβαινε κύκλῳ καὶ γάστρισον σεαυτόν· ῥίπτε σκέλος οὐράνιον· βέμβικες ἐγγενέσθων, 1529-30). The change to the singular has been assumed by Vaio and Roos to indicate that the chorus are now addressing Philocleon, but there would need to be a transition, such as σὺ δὲ, to mark this change. More likely, the chorus are either referring to the whole group in the singular, or pointing out one of the three dancers for each move, bringing them all back together with βέμβικες ἐγγενέσθων at the end. The dance has key moves in common with Philocleon’s dance: their leap (πηδάτε) reflects the crouch to kick move (1490-2); their Phrynichus kick in which one leg goes up (1524-6), and the throwing of the leg to the sky (1530) are this same move repeated. All of this is combined with the spinning movements indicated by ταχύν πόδα κυκλοσοβεῖτε, (1523); περίβαινε κύκλῳ (1529); and βέμβικες ἐγγενέσθων (1530) and the belly slapping. The whirling circular movements are a parody of the dance typical of the so-called “new music” that the sons of Carcinus were famous for.

Carcinus, finally appears on stage, probably the actor who played Bdelycleon dressed as a giant crab. The plural ἐξάγετ’ (1535), used by the chorus as they tell the actors to “lead us off,” is directed at all those on stage – Philocleon, the crablets, and

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103 This too suggests that the dancers were actors and not the real sons of Carcinus, who presumably would not need instructions in their own dances.
104 A corrupt scholion on this passage suggests that Eupolis used the same phrase (Συγ). Is it possible that he used it in the cordax in Mariyas in reference to the comic Phrynichus whose cordax he apparently appropriated?
105 Roos 1951, 95; Vaio 1971, 348; Biles and Olson 2015, 512.
106 Griffith 2013, 147.
crab Carcinus himself. Biles argues that, “The play’s closing sequence fuses the dramatic action with the festival and emphasizes the poet’s interest in obtaining a victory as the protagonist on whom he has pinned his hopes of victory faces his stage adversaries in formal competition before the theater.”

In other words, the victory of Philocleon in the dance contest against the crabs reflects Aristophanes hope for victory in the Lenaea of 422. Some scholars have contended that the ending is ambiguous as to who wins the dance-off, or even that the crablets win. I argue that the transformation of the crabs’ new tragic dance into an old-style animal chorus cordax represents Philocleon’s victory in the contest and metatheatrically-speaking demonstrates his success in rendering a tragic parody (high mode) into a traditional low” comic choral spectacle. Philocleon has achieved what Bdelycleon could not: the cohesion of high and low.

The victory of Philocleon at the end of the Wasps embodies one of the major themes of the comedy, the contest between old and new. Philocleon, the old man, figures himself as the ancient Thespis and Phrynichus (1478-9; 1490), and performs an old style cordax competing against “modern tragic dancers” (τοῦ κ τραγῳδοῦς…τοῦ νῦν, 1480) played by children. The new tragic dance becomes a new comic dance when infused with the old, traditional cordax moves. This, and the rejuvenation of old Philocleon as he dances like a young man, reflect the heart of Aristophanic poetics: do the same old low-comic stuff in a new way and you’ve got a successful comedy.

**Conclusion**

The first half of Wasps presents Bdelycleon as the comic protagonist, the Aristophanic voice on stage, whose healing, political comedy matches Aristophanes’ claims in the

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107 Biles 2011, 166  
108 Roos 1951, 140 and Vaio 1971, 351 respectively.  
109 Wright 2013, 157; Farmer 2017, 152.
parabasis about the superiority of the high. The first half also demonstrates, however, that high comedy requires and relies on the low comedy’s farcical, physical, slapstick fun to get its message across. Bdelycleon must compete in a slapstick fight scene to establish the authority to speak in a verbal, political agōn. The agōn cannot fully convince its audience of its point, so Bdelycleon must delve deeper into low comedy’s resources to perform a comedy in the middle mode, but this fails too. After the dog trial, Bdelycleon can only stop his father judging using a physical trick, by swapping the voting urns to force him into acquittal. In the post-parabatic scenes of the Wasps, Bdelycleon’s further attempt to make Philocleon a performer in the high mode not only fails, but ends up with the transformation of Bdelycleon into Cleon, rendering the political mode, which claimed a morally-beneficial, healing didacticism, a paradoxical and unstable mode that cannot really offer concrete advice. The second parabasis offers a reformulation of Aristophanic poetics as one that values the low. The overly-serious political poet character at Philocleon’s symposium is mocked and applause is meted out for the low-comic antics. Philocleon escapes the grasp of Bdelycleon and is let loose as a low-comic force. Finally, in the dance contest, the old Philocleon transforms the new tragic dancers into an ancient, low-comic cordax-dancing animal chorus, symbolizing the power of low comedy to absorb the high and transform it into a new low comedy. The end of Wasps acknowledges the unstoppable necessity of comedy’s low mode which succeeds at transforming the high into the low, where Bdelycleon failed at transforming the low into high. How Aristophanes’ poetics in Wasps may relate to the poetics of the failed Clouds is hard to say. Perhaps Aristophanes really did attempt a purely high-brow comedy, and Wasps acknowledges the failure of such an approach by strongly asserting a dual low-high poetics that establishes the generic necessity of the low; or perhaps he felt that the audience took his ironic parabatic claims to high-brow poetry too seriously and failed to
acknowledge the low elements of the comedy.
CHAPTER 5: *Lysistrata and Thesmophoriazusae*

**Introduction**

*Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae* exemplify the interaction between low comedy and the political and intellectual modes respectively: in *Lysistrata*, the eponymous character acts as a metatheatrical director figure who oscillates between political and low-comic modes to affect her sex-strike plan, framed as a play-within-the-play; in *Thesmophoriazusae*, Euripides (the director figure) attempts to free his relative from the women celebrating the Thesmophoria using literary parodies of his own tragedies, only to ultimately succeed with a low-comic routine. In both comedies, the main plot issue (τὸ πρᾶγμα) requires the low-comic mode for its resolution, and in both this is brought about by a typically low-comic prostitute distraction scene. In each of these comedies Aristophanes’ comic poetics is revealed through the unfolding of the plot alone, using the metatheatrical device of the play-within-the-play to comment on the workings of the comic poet. Aristophanes’ comic voice does not emerge through explicit commentary, as it does in the prologue and parabasis of *Wasps*. In *Wasps*, we saw a tension between identifying “Aristophanes” with Bdelycleon and identifying him with Philocleon, with the dual high-low poetics emerging in the combination of the two and their metatheatrical contest for poetic authority. In *Thesmophoriazusae*, there is a similar embodiment of high and low by Euripides and his relative respectively, which is, however, resolved more fully than in *Wasps*. In *Wasps*, Bdelycleon disappears at the end of the comedy, leaving the low comic spectacle to Philocleon alone, while in *Thesmophoriazusae* it is Euripides who realizes he must make his comedy what the audience (represented by the Scythian archer) want, and he and the relative work together to accomplish the low-comic finale. Ultimately high and low are shown to be united in the character of Euripides. Similarly in *Lysistrata*, the high-low tension is embodied respectively in the
protagonist and her troupe of low-comic women, but resolved at the end into the single metatheatrical director figure of Lysistrata herself.

Despite the overt metatheatricality of *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae*, sufficient attention has not been paid to them in discussions of Aristophanic poetics. I argue, however, that the metatheatrical bent of these two comedies lends itself to an analysis of Aristophanic poetics, because the high-low dichotomy articulated in the parabatic passages of earlier comedies is so thematically central to them. As in *Wasps*, Aristophanes expresses in these comedies the generic necessity of the low mode to successful comedy by demonstrating its efficacy in resolving the metatheatrical problem posed by the plot. As in *Wasps*, this claim to the necessity of the low does not preclude the high as an important aspect of Aristophanes’ poetics: in *Lysistrata* it is a political problem that Lysistrata must solve, and in the *Thesmophoriazuse*, it is a literary quandary that Euripides is faced with.

**LYSISTRATA**

*Lysistrata* is the most commonly performed of Aristophanes’ comedies today. Its popularity is due in no small part to its exploration of gendered political power and the conceit of the sex-strike, both of which are relatable to contemporary audiences. But its popularity also stems from its universally comprehensible, low, obscene, slapstick humor. Despite this, *Lysistrata* is one of the most undervalued comedies in scholarship for its contribution to Aristophanes’ poetics. The only scholar to analyze in detail the

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1 E.g. Hubbard 1991, 182. In recent scholarship, focus has been on the early Aristophanic comedies in which the poet uses prologues, parabases, and metatheatrical stand-ins to talk about his comedy in an open and obvious manner. Discussion of *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae* is missing from e.g. Biles 2011 and Wright 2012. Slater 2002 and Farmer 2017 both discuss *Thesmophoriazusae* but not *Lysistrata*.

metatheater and poetics of *Lysistrata* is Lauren Taaffe in *Aristophanes and Women*. Taaffe argues that we can understand Lysistrata as a metatheatrical dramatic director, whose plan to save Greece from war can be viewed as a play-within-the-play.

I build on Taaffe’s observations and argue further that the dualism in Lysistrata’s character, which scholars have often noticed, can be viewed as a function of her presentation as a dramatic director. She, like Aristophanes himself, claims a role as political advisor to the city and distances herself from physical action and the stereotypes of low-comic women typical of playwrights such as Pherecrates. But simultaneously, she cannot avoid using the routines and tropes of low comedy as the most efficacious means for solving the central issue (πρᾶγμα) of the play. This πρᾶγμα is a political problem: peace with Sparta. In attempting to resolve the problem, Lysistrata oscillates between the high mode (direct political advice) and the low mode (physical violence, obscene jokes, stock routines). Ironically, it is the low, as the *sine qua non* of the comic genre, that is shown to have a superior efficacy for solving Athens’ serious political problem.

**The comic women of the *Lysistrata***

In the parabasis of *Peace*, Aristophanes singles out women as typical characters of low comedy and contrasts them with the important (male) political adversaries of his own comedy. *Lysistrata* explores the tension between the high mode of political comedy and the low mode of female comedy by constructing a metatheatrical play-within-the-play, directed by a woman with serious political aims, but whose troupe of actors consists in

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3 E.g. Loraux 1993, 173 as a representative of Athene and Aphrodite; Taaffe 1993, 62 as male and female; Faraone 2006, 214-222 as priestess and procuress.

4 We should note especially the wording of Aristophanes’ at *Peace* 751: the men whom Aristophanes associates with low-brow comedy are described with an adjective (ἰδιώτας) and diminutive (ἀνθρωπίσκους), which qualify the particular type of man that low-brow comedy deals with. But women are denoted simply with the word γυναῖκα indicating that for Aristophanes all women are low-brow characters.
the stereotypical women of low comedy. In the first part of this chapter, I argue that, contrary to scholarly consensus, we should understand the women of *Lysistrata* as the stereotypical women of low comedy.

For Taaffe the metatheatricality of *Lysistrata* is a means to negotiate the novel presentation of female characters undertaken by Aristophanes in *Lysistrata*. The assumption that *Lysistrata* is the first female-centered comedy is often repeated by scholars, but it is one that I believe requires revision. I will demonstrate that the *Lysistrata* was not the first comedy to focus on female characters, and indeed that it exploits long-established comic stereotypes of women.

Jeffrey Henderson argues that, aside from the women of mythological burlesque and a few “disreputable types” (market women, wives or mothers of demagogues, wealthy wastrels), married or marriageable women are not portrayed on the comic stage before *Lysistrata* in 411 BCE. The fragmentary state of the evidence, however, means that it is impossible to draw such a conclusion with certainty. A look at the fragments reveals an abundance of feminine participles indicating female speakers or subjects, and often the gender of speakers is impossible to tell. There are also numerous examples of women mentioned in a manner that indicates their presence on stage. It is true that such evidence does not necessarily point to married or marriageable women, but in many cases, the social status of the fragmentary woman is impossible determine.

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5 Taaffe 1993, 49 and 55.
6 Henderson 2002a, 78 is particularly insistent on the point.
7 These include e.g. the women of plays whose titles indicate a female protagonist such as Eunicus *heiress*, Hermippus *Bakery Women*, Theompompos *Barmaids*, Magnes/ Phrynichus *Lady Herb-Pickers*, Plato *Wool-Carders*, Alcaeus *Sisters in Adultery*. Some of these probably post-date *Lysistrata*, but Phrynichus *Lady Herb-Pickers* is dated to the 410s and Hermippus *Bakery Women* predates the revised *Clouds*, c.418.
8 E.g. Eupolis *Demes*, fr.124 and unassigned fr. 393; Leucon fr. 7, Pherecrates *Lēroi* fr.110 among many others
9 E.g. Teleclides *Sterroi* fr.33 (ὦς οὖσα θήλυς εἰκότως οὐθαρ φορῶ); Eupolis *Taxiarchs* fr.273, unassigned fr. 346; 357; Pherecrates fr.168; 169; 186; 187; 206, among many others.
In fact, there is some concrete evidence of wives on stage before the *Lysistrata*, and it deserves emphasis. In Pherecrates’ *Tyranny* fr.152, the chorus (possibly in a parabasis) complain that the women have had shallow drinking cups made for their husbands but deep bowls for themselves. In Cratinus’ *Wine Flask*, the poet depicts his troubled marriage to the personified Comedy. Frr. 193-4 are spoken by Comedy as she complains about her husband, demonstrating the play’s marital theme. In Cantharus’ *Tereus*, a character addresses a woman about a pre-marital embrace with a man (fr. 7), and a second fragment of the same play refers to a woman, probably Procne, as a “beautiful and good Athenian wife” (fr. 5).

Henderson argues that we should not consider allegorical and mythological wives in the same category as ordinary Athenian wives because “marriageable women were secluded from the male public world, and any public mention of them even in a comedy counted as an attack on the males to whose household they belonged.” This argument, however, is irrelevant to the *Lysistrata* and presumably other comedies too, in which the women are fictional. Allegorical wives, especially in an Athenian domestic setting like *Wine Flask*, would certainly have made use of comic wife stereotypes and cannot have been much different from the portrayal of wives elsewhere. Likewise,

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10 The dating of many of the plays is uncertain, but Pherecrates’ career probably ended in 410, so it is likely that his *Tyranny* was put on before the *Lysistrata* in 411.
11 Storey 2011b, 492-3. While this does not confirm the presence of women on stage, the title and the fragment are highly suggestive. Cf. Plato’s *Long Night* fr. 89, where a female speaker complains about her husband and Cephisodorus’ *Trophonius* fr. 4 where a woman compares her shoes to those of her maid (implying she is high enough status to have a maid). These latter fragments are undated but are likely to post-date *Lysistrata*.
12 See especially Cratinus fr. 194: γυνὴ δ’ ἐκείνου πρότερον ἠ, νῦν δ’ οὐκέτι. Procne, of course, was an Athenian woman, but by drawing attention to her Athenianess in the Athenian theatre, it establishes a link with contemporary Athenian women. The use of the formula καλὴν τε καγαθὴν also reflects a contemporary Athenian ideal.
14 Further, if Henderson’s argument that married women could not be spoken of in comedy were correct, we would not have jokes such as those found in Eupolis fr. 295 and elsewhere in which Lycon is mocked because of his wife.
mythological burlesque derives its humor from situating mythological characters in everyday contemporary life, so at least some mythological wives would have been portrayed with an eye to Athenian women. Henderson also draws a strong line between private women, such as those I have been discussing, and public women, such as hetaerae, prostitutes, and flute-girls, who, he concedes, were far more common on the Athenian stage. Unlike Henderson, I do not see the need for so strong a distinction between comedy’s representation of public and private women. As Stroup has recently argued, the comic representation of wives necessitates “hetairization” by the very fact that women are being represented as acting outside the domestic sphere and on a par with men. In sum, Aristophanes was not the first comic poet to depict women, nor the first to depict citizen wives. And further, women on the comic stage, whether married or not, were often depicted using the same set of low-comic female stereotypes often drawn from the common character of the prostitute, who can be traced back to the earliest traditions of Greek comedy.

The constructedness of the female comic stereotype identified by Taaffe cannot, then, be a way to negotiate the novel presentation of women on stage, but it serves rather to characterize Lysistrata’s women as a metatheatrical troupe of actors consisting not only in women, but the low-comic stereotype of women familiar from the low comedies of playwrights such as Pherecrates.

15 Stroup 2004, 40-1. Henderson himself (2000, 141-2) also argued that the women of Lysistrata may be modeled on the hetaerae of Pherecrates.
16 See chapter two on Megarian prostitutes.
17 Pherecrates’ comedy features the typical characters of low comedy: prostitutes, old women, the hungry Heracles, and slaves. His titles include many hetaera names e.g. Corianno, Thalatta, Petale. Other titles and fragments also indicate an interest in women, e.g. Tyranny and Old Women. He had at least one (perhaps two) Heracles comedies, False Heracles and Heracles the Mortal (these may be the same comedy). Miners and Slave-Trainer are both about slaves, and Metics and Persians are about foreigners. The anonymous essay “On Comedy” (Koster III.29-31) demonstrates Pherecrates’ distaste for political comedy when it claims that “like Crates he kept away from political mockery (καὶ αὖ τοῦ μὲν λοιδορεῖν ἀπέστη). Cf. Aristotle Poetics 1449b5-9,
I turn now to the opening scene of the Lysistrata to analyze how Aristophanes establishes the women of his comedy as the low-comic stereotype:

άλλ᾽ εἰ τις εἰς Βακχεῖον οὐτὰς ἐκάλεσεν,
ἣ´ς Πανὸς ή´τι Κωλιάδ′ εἰς Γενετυλλίδος,
οὐδ᾽ ἄν διελθεῖν ἢν ἄν ὑπὸ τῶν τυμπάνων. (Lysistrata 1-3)

But if someone invited them to a Bacchic revel or Pan’s grotto or to Colias to the shrine of Genetyllis you wouldn't be able to pass through for all the drums.

This passage highlights the two main stereotypes of comic women prevalent in low-brow female-focused comedy like that of Pherecrates: their obsession with wine and their obsession with sex. Women’s obsessions with wine is encoded in the “Bacchic revel,” while Pan’s grotto and the shrine of Genetyllis were both locations with a sexual significance. We can see, among the surviving fragments of Pherecrates, a particularly vivid illustration of the stereotypical bibulousness of comic women:

A. ἀποτός, ὡ Γλύκη.
Γλ. ὑδαρῆ νέχεέν σοι; A. παντάπασι μὲν οὖν ὑδώρ.
Γλ. τί εἰργάσω; πῶς ὑ κατάρατε <δ´> ἐνέχεας; 
Β. δὺ´ ὡδατος ὡ μάμμη. Γλ. τί δ´ οἶνον; B. τέτταρας. 
Γλ. ἐρρ´ ἐς κόρακας. βατράχοισιν ὀινοχοεῖν σ´ ἐδει. (Pherecrates Corianno, fr. 76)

A. It’s undrinkable, Glyce!
Gl. Did she pour in too much water for you? A. It’s entirely water!
Gl. What did you do? How did you pour it, you wretch?
Gl. Go to hell! You should have poured wine for frogs!

where Aristotle writes that Crates preferred to keep away from political mockery (καὶ αὖ τοῦ μὲν λοῖδορείν ἀπέστη) and had more in common with the Sicilian comedians like Epicharmus.

There was a grotto of Pan on the slopes of the Acropolis where Cinesias and Myrrhine meet to have sex later in the Lysistrata (911ff). Colias was a sanctuary to Aphrodite, and the shrine to Genetyllidis was probably a part of it (Henderson 1987a, 67). Cf. Clouds 51-2, where Strepsiades says that his wife is redolent of myrrh, saffron, lascivious kisses, extravagance, gluttony, Colias and Genetyllis (μύρου κρόκου καταγλωττισμάτων / δαπάνης λαφυγμοῦ Κωλιάδος Γενετυλλίδος). Here then, Aphrodite Colias and Genetyllis are associated not only with sex, but also with excessive femininity.

The usual ratio for wine to water was three parts water to one part wine or five parts water to two parts wine (according to Athenaeus 10.426) so two parts water to four parts wine is already stronger than usual – and it is still not strong enough for these wine-obsessed characters. See also fr. 75 of the same play and Pherecrates Tyranny fr. 152.
The nymphomanical stereotype of women in Pherecrates is implicit in the fact that the vast majority of his female characters are prostitutes. Several Pherecratean fragments hint at sexual promiscuity as a theme; for example, in fr. 186 a woman is described as “a whorish sow” as well as “a drunkard and a witch” (ἀνδροκάπραινα καὶ μεθύση καὶ φορμακίς). When the first woman, Callonice, arrives on the scene, Lysistrata laments womankind, “because men think we are villainous and up for anything” (ὅτι οἱ πορὰ μὲν τοῖς ἀνδράσιν νενομίσμεθα/ εἶναι πανοῦργοι, 11-12). Callonice’s reply, “and so we are by Zeus!” (καὶ γὰρ ἔσμεν νῆ Δία, 12), confirms and reifies the dramatic truthfulness of the comic stereotype: women are what men (comic poets) think they are.

Lysistrata’s disgust with the women, for Taaffe, separates her from this comic stereotype. Taaffe, as I have noted, draws attention to the metatheatrical way in which Aristophanes constructs the women on stage in these opening lines. We observe this in Callonice’s explanation of women’s skills:

τί δ᾽ ἂν γυναῖκες φρόνιμον ἐργασαίατο ἢ λαμπρόν; ἡ λαμπρόν; δὲ καθήμεθ’ ἐξηνθισμέναι, κροκωτοφοροῦσαι καὶ κεκαλλωπισμέναι καὶ Κιμμερίκ’ ὀρθοστάδια καὶ περιβαρίδας; (Lysistrata 42-5)

What could women do that’s sensible or intelligent? All we do is sit around making ourselves look pretty, wearing saffron dresses and putting make-up on and Cimmerian tunics and fancy shoes.

Taaffe writes, “This list of actions and clothes defines ‘woman.’ From the beginning, plot, character, and text all indicate that ‘woman’ is primarily a mimetic construct, a being

20 See above, n.17.
21 The bizarre coinage ἀνδροκάπραινα ("man" + "sow") indicates a woman who lusts after men, in the same way that ἀνδροβόρος ("man" + "gluttonous") indicates a man-devourer. Κάπραινα as licentious woman is seen also at Hermippus fr. 10, where it appears alongside the word πασιπόρνη, "whore to all." The strong link between women and sex can also be seen in Plato Europa fr.43; Long Night fr.89; Phaon fr.188; and perhaps Strattis Atalantus fr.3. Aristophanes’ Thesmophoriazusae 331-519 also highlights the stereotype.
22 Taaffe 1993, 54.
whose outer appearance differs from the inner self (if there is one). Her outer image is constructed to be seen and so she is a kind of theatre in and of herself.” Taaffe’s astute observation that Callonice’s words not only describe women as a form of theater, but as a specific mode of comedy: the comedy of women is not “sensible and intelligent” (φρόνιμον… ἦ λαμπρόν) like the comedy of Aristophanes’ high mode. Rather, it is a theater based on the visual effects of costume, a key element of Aristophanes’ low mode.

Aristophanes characterizes the women of the Lysistrata as mimetic constructs and reified comic stereotypes, but not in order to comment on being the first to put women on the comic stage. He is rather highlighting that the women are players in Lysistrata’s metatheatrical dramatic troupe and that they are the women typical of domestic low comedy like that of Pherecrates. Aristophanes presents us with a director-figure (Lysistrata), who wants to do serious political drama and give advice to the city, in tension with her cast, who are an embodiment of domestic low comedy. Aristophanes achieves this tension by integrating within the Lysistrata a series of intertextual links with the comic poet Pherecrates, whose comedy was characterized by the low mode.

Lysistrata’s women and Pherecrates’ women

There are several indications in the Lysistrata that Aristophanes engages with Pherecratean comedy – and does so as a marker of the generic low-comic associations that he wanted his comedy to have. I begin my investigation of Pherecrates in the Lysistrata at line 158, where he is mentioned by name:

Κα. τί δ’ ἦν ἀφίωσ’ ἀνδρες ἦμας, ὦ μέλε; Λυ. τὸ τοῦ Φερεκράτους, κύνα δέρειν δεδαρμένην. Κα. φλαρία ταύτ’ ἐστὶ τὰ μεμιμημένα. (Lysistrata 157-9)

23 Taaffe 1993, 54.
24 See above n.17.
Ka: What if our husbands leave us, my dear?
Lys: Do a Pherecrates and skin the skinned dog.
Ka. Those imitations are foolery!

Here, Lysistrata answers the objections of the women to her metatheatrical sex-strike plan. It is significant that in her response, Lysistrata tells her troupe to “do what Pherecrates does” i.e. do something appropriate to Pherecratean comedy. Since Pherecratean comedy contains such an abundance of hetaera characters, it could be taken to mean “act like a Pherecratean hetaera and entice your husband without giving into him.” Callonice misunderstands the phrase “skin a skinned dog” and takes it mean “use a dildo” (dildos could be made of dog-skin leather and κύων was a euphemism for penis).25 Diogenianus, however, tells us that the phrase is used “of someone doing something in vain” (ἐπὶ τῶν μάτην τι ποιούντων).26 The phrase is clearly used for its potential to be misunderstood as a sexual innuendo, but Lysistrata could mean something like “just keep acting like a Pherecratean hetaera even if it doesn’t seem to be working.” A scholiast on this passage said that he could not locate the phrase “skin a skinned dog” in the Pherecratean corpus.27 This is not a sure indication that it was not there, but it could also indicate that Pherecrates did not use the phrase himself. It may rather have been a stereotype that others imputed to his comedy, i.e. that he did the same kind of comedy over and over again, even if it was not effective.28 Though Callonice misunderstands Lysistrata, her response can also be interpreted metatheatrically. When she says “those imitations are foolery,” she means that dildos

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25 Henderson 1987a, 86.
26 Diogenianus 5.85.
27 Σ-158b.
28 Ruffell 2011, 394 offers a similar interpretation of this line, which is usually taken to imply a quotation of a phrase in Pherecrates (e.g. Henderson 1987a, 86; Sommerstein 1990, 163). However, he does not view it as having any dramatic significance and argues that it merely refers to the repeated female-centric subject-matter of Pherecrates’ comedy.
(imitation penises) are no good. But τὰ μεμιμημένα could also mean “the things that are imitated in Pherecratean comedy” and φλυαρία is an appropriately literary-critical term to use of bad comedy.  

If this passage is a statement on poetics, it is hilariously ironic. Lysistrata tells her low-comic women to act as if they were in a Pherecrates comedy – a stereotype to which, as we have seen, they already conform. Callonice, the model of the low-comic woman, ironically claims, through the polyvalence of her reply, that such comedy is nonsense, even though it is the exact kind of comedy appropriate to her exaggeratedly low-comic persona. The effect is similar to the low-comic cowardly Dionysus’ disavowal of low-comic scatology in the Frogs prologue.

The fragmentary nature of the Pherecratean corpus makes it difficult to pinpoint the relationship between his comedy and the Lysistrata precisely, but there is evidence to suggest that the Lysistrata was suffused with Pherecratean themes, furthering the irony of Callonice’s disavowal of his style: Old Women likely had a chorus of old women, like the semi-chorus of Lysistrata. Fr. 39 of this play reads “for the Athenian women themselves and their allies” (Ἀθηναίαις αὐταῖς τε καὶ τοῖς συμμάχοις), which suggests the joining together of Athenian and non-Athenian women at some point in the comedy. Lysistrata has the same pan-Hellenic premise. Another Pherecratean play has the title Tyranny, and fr.152 indicates that the battle of the sexes was part of its plot. The meter of Tyranny fr. 152 is trochaic tetrameter catalectic, which is indicative of a parabatic contest like that between the two semi-choruses of old men and women in Lysistrata. The title Tyranny suggests that “women in power” was a theme of the comedy. Storey is suspicious of the idea and suggests that Tyrannis might be the name of a hetaera.

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29 Aristophanes claims that his own comedy is not φλυαρία in the parabasis of Knights 545.
30 Frogs 1-20.
31 Storey 2011b, 492.
instead of a theme of the comedy, but the two are not mutually exclusive. If there is a more extensive intertextual engagement with Tyranny in the Lysistrata than we can now recover, the accusation at Lysistrata 630-1 that the women have set up a tyranny is intriguing (ἀλλὰ ταύθ᾽ ὑφηναν ἡμῖν, ἰνδρεὺς, ἔπι τυραννίδι ἀλλ᾽ ἐμοῦ μὲν οὖ τυραννεύσους’). Fragments of other Pherecrates comedies further hint at a Pherecrates-Lysistrata intertext: in the Forgetful Man or Thalatta, fr.56, we see the theme of silence:

κάν μὲν σιωπῶ † φέρεται † πνίγεται,
καὶ φησι τί σιωπᾶς; ἐσν δὲ <γ’> ἀποκριθῶι,
οἴμοι τάλας, φησίν, χαράδρα κατελήλυθεν.

If I’m silent […] he’s choked
and says “why are you silent?” But if I answer
he says “alas poor me! The torrent has been unleashed!”

This is comparable to Lysistrata’s speech on women’s silence at 507-29, where she relates how hard it is to keep quiet when her husband and the other men make bad decisions in the assembly. In the Pherecratean fragment there is no indication of the gender of the first speaker, but since the comedy is a hetaera comedy, it could well be the titular Thalatta herself speaking. In Kitchen or Pannychis, a character gets ash in his eyes from blowing on fire (fr.66), which is reminiscent of the male semi-chorus trying to carry fire up to the acropolis and getting smoke in their eyes (296-301). Lēroi fr. 106 lists items of women’s clothing and weaving accoutrements suggesting an interest in female dress also prominent in Lysistrata. Unassigned fr.181 says, “we celebrate the Adonia and cry for Adonis” (Ἀδώνι’ ἁγομεν καὶ τὸν Ἀδωνιν κλάομεν) which recalls the magistrate’s complaint at Lysistrata 387-98 about women celebrating the Adonia.

32 Storey 2011b, 493.
33 See also Lys. 617-625. Cf. an unassigned fragment of Pherecrates which may belong to this play: “we think these women are saviors of the city” (ἡγοῦμεθο τῆς πόλεως εἶναι ταύτας σωτῆρας, fr. 200).
Ruffell argues that Aristophanes points to the women of Pherecratean comedy in order to critique his rival’s non-involvement in politics and highlight by contrast his own innovatively political citizen wives.\(^{34}\) I argue instead that Aristophanes uses the Pherecratean intertext to represent his citizen wives as an embodiment of the Pherecratean low-comic mode, which, ironically, succeeds in solving the political problem of the *Lysistrata* more effectively than the comedy of direct political advice that Lysistrata attempts to use.

**Lysistrata as comic director**

In her discussion of the metatheatricality of the *Lysistrata*, Taaffe writes that Lysistrata’s “role is …that of author, director, and producer; the women make up her dramatic troupe.”\(^{35}\) Like the later Plautine *architecti*, Lysistrata creates the plot of the play and arranges the other characters to carry it through, standing aside from most of the action herself.\(^{36}\) The metatheatricality of the *Lysistrata* serves as a means by which Aristophanes can comically present the challenge of being political in a comedy. I consider, in the following pages, four moments in which Lysistrata’s metatheatrical role as a dramatic director comes to the fore: the prologue, the oath scene, the slapstick battles in the parodos and first episode, and the parabasis. Each case portrays a tension between Lysistrata as director of political drama and the *Lysistrata* as a female comedy in the low mode.

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\(^{34}\) Ruffell 2011, 394-5.

\(^{35}\) Taaffe 1993, 52.

\(^{36}\) Sharrock 2009, 17 uses the term (derived from Platus’ *Poenulus* 1110) to indicate “a controlling character, often a slave, who writes the plot with, for, or against the playwright.”
The prologue

Lysistrata’s directorial debut occurs in the prologue. Here, she establishes the comedy’s πράγμα— a metatheatrical term denoting the problem of the plot — and her approach to solving it: 37

Ka. τί δ’ ἐστίν, ὡς φιλή Λυσιστράτη, ἑφ’ ὃ τι ποθ’ ἡμᾶς τάς γυναίκας ξυγκαλεῖς;
πῆλυκον τι;
Λυ. μέγα.
Ka. μῶν καὶ παχὺ;
Λυ. νῆ τὸν Δία καὶ παχύ.
Ka. κάτα πῶς ὦξ ήκομεν;
25 Λυ. ὦξ ὁπτος ὁ τρόπος· ταχὺ γὰρ ἄν ἐξυνθλομεν. ἀλλ’ ἐστίν ὑπ’ ὑμοὶ πράγμα’ ἀνεζημένον πολλαῖσι τ’ ἄγρυπνιαισιν ἐρριπτασμένον.
Ka. ἢ ποῦ τι λεπτόν ἐστι τούρριπτασμένον.
Λυ. οὕτω γε λεπτόν ὡσθ’ ὅλης τῆς Ἑλλάδος
30 ἐν ταῖς γυναιξίν ἐστιν ἡ σωτηρία. (Lysistrata 21-30)

Ka.: What is it Lysistrata? Why on earth have you called us women together? What’s the problem? How big a thing is it?
Ly.: Oh, it’s big.
Ka.: And juicy?
25 Ly.: It’s juicy by Zeus.
Ka.: Then how come we’re not all here?
Ly.: I don’t mean that. Otherwise we would all have come quickly. No, this is a problem I’ve been investigating, tossing it back and forth on many a sleepless night.
Ka.: If you’ve tossed it that much then it’s probably shrunk to a tiny size by now.
30 Ly.: Is it a tiny issue that the salvation of all Greece is in the hands of women?

For Lysistrata, the war with Sparta presents a difficult and dense problem (μέγα, παχύ) – one that has taken many a sleepless night to think through. Callonice, however, misunderstands Lysistrata’s “difficult and dense issue” as a “big and juicy thing”, i.e. an erect comic costume phallus. This double entendre is more than just an obscene joke. It

37 Here, as in many other Aristophanic prologues, a character explains the plot to the audience. For πράγμα as a metatheatrical term (which can also mean “on-stage shenanigans”) cf. e.g. Acharnians 474, 494, 837, Knights 36, 39, 214, 241, 314 (to note but a few examples). Later Lysistrata refers to her plan with another metatheatrical term, μηχανή (111). Cf. Acharnians 738, Peace 307, Thesmophoriazusae 87, 765, 927, 1132.
offers the audience a preview of the central tension of *Lysistrata* between the high-brow political comic mode and the low-brow female comedy of obscene costumes and phallus jokes. Ultimately, of course, *Lysistrata* is about both: the comic phallus becomes the symbol of the war and a low-comic routine (the prostitute distraction) offers its successful resolution. This tension and its resolution reflect a central aspect of Aristophanic poetics: even in a comedy with a politically significant, high-brow conceit, the presence of low comedy is indispensable and even essential.

A second comic misunderstanding follows the “big and juicy” double entendre: Lysistrata says she has “tossed the problem back and forth on many a sleepless night”, but Callonice’s obscene answer “it’s probably shrunk to a tiny size by now” turns hard labor into a hand-job. Λεπτόν, which I have translated here as “tiny,” also has the aesthetic valence of “insubstantial.” The idea that Lysistrata has worked hard only to produce something insubstantial looks much like the irony of the *Clouds* parabasis, where Aristophanes admits that he took pains to produce something purposefully low and trivial.38

**The oath**

In her discussion, Taaffe briefly noted the oath as a scene of metatheater, in which Lysistrata outlines the “special rules” of her plan.39 Fletcher, in *Performing Oaths in Classical Greek Drama*, develops the idea of the oath as metatheater further. The oath, for her, is the basis of the plot and “gives the drama its direction and form.”40 Like the oracle that Lysistrata invents when the women attempt to stray from their vows of chastity (770-6), the oath has the power to make the women follow the plan, and

38 See above, chapter three.
39 Taaffe 1993, 52.
40 Fletcher 2012, 222. Cf. 234, “the oath is a kind of prescriptive text which functions on a deep programmatic level throughout the remainder of the play.”
Lysistrata, as the author of both oath and oracle, is thus shown to be in authorial control of her troupe of comic women.\(^41\) I add to the observations of Taaffe and Fletcher that the oath scene has additional metatheatrical significance: the director figure, Lysistrata, says a line, and one of her actors repeats it after her in the same way that a comic producer might teach actors their lines.\(^42\)

The plan Lysistrata outlines in the oath is a plan of no action. The women should dress up and play the role of seductress, but under no circumstances are they to engage in any physical activity with their husbands. This non-engagement is well-illustrated in the oath when the women swear not to “lift my Persian slippers to the ceiling” (229-30) nor to “take up the lioness-on-a-cheese-grater position” (231-2). However, the emphasis on these specific physical actions highlights the potential for a joke where the women act out the very actions that they are swearing not to do. It hints at an irony that is made explicit in the seduction scene between Myrrhine and Cinesias in fulfilment of the oath: Lysistrata’s high-comic plan of no action generates low-comic scenes of exuberant physical and obscene farce.

**Slapstick battles in the parodos and first episode**

The chorus of the *Lysistrata* is divided into two semi-choruses for most of the comedy, one half made up of old men, and the other of old women. The parodos culminates in a slapstick battle between the two semi-choruses. Each side crudely threatens the other with obscene and violent insults:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Χορὸς γυναικῶν} & \quad \text{καὶ μὴν ἰδοὺ· παταξάτω τις· στάσι· ἕγω παρέξω,}
\text{Χορὸς γερόντων} & \quad \text{κού μὴ ποτ’ ἄλλῃ σοῦ κύων τῶν ὀρχεων λάβηται.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
365 \quad \text{Χορὸς γυναικῶν} & \quad \text{εἰ μὴ σιωπήσει, θενύων σου 'κκοκκιώ τὸ γήρας.}
\text{Χορὸς γερόντων} & \quad \text{ἀψαι μόνον Στρατυλλίδος τῷ δακτύλῳ προσελθὼν.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Χορὸς γυναικῶν} & \quad \text{τί δ’ ἦν σποδώ τοῖς κονδύλοις; τί μ’ ἐργάσει τὸ}
\text{Χορὸς γερόντων} & \quad \text{κρατήσω τους.}
\end{align*}
\]

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\(^41\) Fletcher 2012, 237.

\(^42\) Cf. Fletcher 2012, 223: “The oath then functions as a kind of script authored by Lysistrata and dictated to and enacted by her troupe of women.”
Χορός γυναικών: δεινόν;
βρύκουσά σου τούς πλεύμονας καὶ τάντερ᾽ ἐξαμήσω. (Lysistrata 363-7)

Chorus of Old Women: [offering her cheek] Fine, look, someone punch me right here. I’ll stand here and let you, and no other bitch will ever grab your balls again.

Chorus of Old Men: Unless you shut up, I’ll punch you so hard, your old age will show.

365 Chorus of Old Women: If you touch any single bit of Stratyllis or approach with even a finger…

Chorus of Old Men: What if I smash her with these knuckles? What terrible thing will you do to me?

Chorus of Old Women: I’ll chew out your lungs and guts and devour them.

The scene concludes with the physical farce of women throwing buckets of water over the men (381-7). As I argued in chapter two, generic old people were typical “ordinary” characters of low comedy. The crudity, obscenity, violence, and slapstick hilarity of the parodos, combined with the old age of the choral characters makes this introduction of the chorus an exemplary scene of low comedy.

At the beginning of the first episode a proboulos accompanied by Scythian archers steps up to make a second assault on the semi-chorus of old women by forcing open the gates to the Acropolis to arrest them. After a series of obscene double entendres intended to explain the licentiousness of women (404-19), the proboulos arrays his archers to break down the gate. At that moment Lysistrata emerges on stage and declares:

430 μηδὲν ἐκμοχλεύετε·
ἐξέρχομαι γὰρ αὐτομάτη. τί δεῖ μοχλῶν;
οὐ γὰρ μοχλῶν δεῖ μᾶλλον ἣ νοῦ καὶ φρενῶν. (Lysistrata 430-2)

430 Don’t lever anything.
I’m coming out of my own accord. What need is there for levers?
We don’t need levers but rather good sense and brains.

Her words put a stop to further physical action (ἐκμοχλεύετε) and she calls instead for intelligence (νοῦ καὶ φρενῶν). As in the Clouds parabasis, the dichotomy in comic
modes is here figured as physical vs. verbal, with Lysistrata firmly on the side of the latter. Lysistrata’s call for good sense and a peaceful solution, however, is ignored and another slapstick battle ensues. Though only moments ago Lysistrata had advocated good sense and brains, she now, in her metatheatrical directorial role, organizes her troupe of comic women and directs them as to how to counter the Scythian archers. She calls these women, in typically comic neologisms, the “market-place race of porridge and veggie sellers” (σπερμαγοραιολεκθολαχανοπωλιδες, 457) and “garlicky innkeepers and bread sellers” (σκοροδοπανδοκευτριαρτοπωλιδες, 458) – women of low social status who were typical of the non-prostitute/ non-slave women (i.e. citizen women) often portrayed in comedies. Lysistrata ironically betrays her words-not-violence program, instructing the women in the following way:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{οὐχ ἔλξετ’, οὐ παιήσετ’, οὐκ ἀράξετε;} \\
\text{οὐ λοιδορήσετ’, οὐκ ἀναισχυντήσετε;} \\
\text{παῦσασθ’, ἀπανασχωρεῖτε, μὴ σκυλεύετε. (Lysistrata 459-61)}
\end{align*}
\]

Won’t you drag them, beat them, smash them to bits,

won’t you abuse them and behave shamelessly!

Stop, retreat, don’t strip the bodies!

Lysistrata not only instructs the women in violent physical action (which was doubtless staged to great comic effect), but she does so in programmatically comic language, telling the women to abuse their enemy (λοιδορήσετ’) and to behave outrageously (ἀναισχυντήσετε).

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43 E.g. Pherecrates Old Women, Hermippus Bakery Women, Theopompus Barmaids, Magnes/Phrynichus Lady Herb-Pickers, Plato Wool-Carders.
44 We observed Bdelycleon do the same at Wasp 415-59.
45 E.g. Dicaeopolis at the opening of Acharnians says he is going to λοιδορεῖν the speakers at the assembly (38). In the epirrhea of the second parabasis of Knights (1274) the chorus say λοιδορῆσαι τοὺς πονηροὺς οὐδὲν ἔστι ἐπίφθονον (to abuse bad people is not an evil thing); Stronger Argument in Clouds calls Weaker Argument καταπύγων and ἀναισχυντὸς and Aristophanes’ heroes are often characterized by the term, e.g. the chorus refer several times to Dicaeopolis as ἀναισχυντὸς (288, 491) and Hermes calls Trygaeus by the same adjective at Peace 182.
The parabasis

The division of the chorus in the Lysistrata means that the comedy lacks a proper parabasis.\textsuperscript{46} It does, however, have parabatic moments that help construct Lysistrata as a metatheatrical director figure in the mould of a political dramatist, above all the agón between her and the proboulos. In this agón, authority to advise the city is debated and advice is given.\textsuperscript{47} When Lysistrata attempts to critique male handling of the war and explain the reasoning behind her plan for women to be in charge of city politics, the proboulos consistently denies her the authority to speak with exclamations such as “what a thing to say!” (δεινόν γε λέγεις, 499), “By Demeter, how unjust!” (νὴ τὴν Δήμητρ’, ἄδικον γε, 500), and “I can barely control my hands I’m so mad!” (χαλεπὸν γὰρ ὑπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτὰς ἰσχεῖν, 504-5). Even when he allows her to speak, he denies the legitimacy of what she says (e.g. 516, 521, 529). When Lysistrata tells the proboulos to be quiet so that she can give advice, the proboulos refuses (530) on the grounds of Lysistrata’s gender.\textsuperscript{48} Words, persuasion, and rhetoric – hallmarks of high, political comedy – do not work for Lysistrata, and the only way she can silence the proboulos is to dress him up as a woman in a visually funny scene of gender-bending costume humor, incorporating him against his will into her dramatic troupe. The scene looks back to Callonice’s claim about women’s role in comedy in the prologue: women in comedy cannot produce “sensible” or “intelligent” comedy (φρόνιμον…ἠ λαμπρόν, 42-3) but must rely on the low-brow comedy of visual costume humor. Lysistrata’s gender betrays her: she is female and so must achieve her comic aims with the low-comic mode associated with women in comedy, whatever her high-brow pretensions. Her gender plays the role of Aristophanes’ genre:

\textsuperscript{46} Henderson 1987a, 149.
\textsuperscript{47} Henderson 1987a, xxix.
\textsuperscript{48} Cf. Acharnians 593 where Lamachus denies the legitimacy of what Dicaeopolis says because he is a beggar.
Aristophanes must use the low-comic mode because it is integral to the comic genre, just as Lysistrata must use the low-comic mode because it is integral to her gender within generic conventions.

In her *makra rhēsis* of the *agōn*, Lysistrata uses the metaphor of wool-working to explain how to save the city (574-86). The speech is quite humorless, and scholars have often viewed it as a genuine piece of political advice from Aristophanes. Aristophanes’ presentation of the director figure stepping forward to deliver a speech offering political advice after an extended stichomythic *agōn* contributes to a general sense that Lysistrata is delivering a parabatic speech in the persona of director (rather than having the chorus report the poet’s advice or speak in his voice). Shortly after Lysistrata’s speech, the two semi-choruses repeat many of its themes in a choral *agōn* structured as a parabasis (615-705). Though the chorus remains divided, it is impossible to agree with Moulton that “the typical motifs of the Aristophanic parabasis are absent.” Fletcher too notes that “it is significant that there is no outlet for the poet’s voice in the drama – no formal parabasis for the Aristophanic ego. Instead the illusion is that Lysistrata controls the text.” It is because Lysistrata controls the text that we ought to see her as the outlet for Aristophanes’ voice. I argue, therefore, that the parabasis does have many features of the typical Aristophanic parabasis, but functions as a meta-parabasis for Lysistrata’s play-within-the-play. Lysistrata, as internal *didaskalos*, is the voice of the poet, and so

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50 Biles 2011, 240-50 makes a similar argument for Aeschylus delivering Aristophanes’ parabasis in *Frogs*’ epirrhematic *agōn*, rather than a parabasis proper. Cf. the structure of *Acharnians* (*agōn* between Lamachus and Dicaeopolis followed by parabasis, 572-718); *Knights* (*agōn* between sausage-seller and Demosthenes, and Paphlagon followed by parabasis, 409-610).
51 Moulton 1981, 58. She goes on, “there is no serious political advice delivered directly to the audience, no flattery of the public or judges, no invocation of the Muse or gods.”
52 Fletcher 2012, 223.
when the female semi-chorus speak on her behalf, it is as though they are speaking on behalf of the poet.

There are several structural indications that point to the parabatic nature of this parabasis: first, it does follow the typical structure of a parabasis. Each semi-chorus has its own *kommation*, and the men’s semi-chorus sing an ode and epirrhema, answered by the antode and antepirrhema of the women’s semi-chorus. In the *kommatia* typical of early Aristophanic parabases, the chorus remove their costumes to indicate that they are stepping out of their choral identity to speak on behalf of the poet.53 Sommerstein however, suggests that the chorus’ stripping in *Lysistrata* is done only as an indication of preparation for “vigorous activity” as at *Wasps* 408 and *Thesmophoriazusae* 656, because the *Lysistrata* chorus maintain their choral identity throughout. Neither the *Wasps* nor the *Thesmophoriazusae* passages, however, are parabatic, and in the *Wasps* example, the chorus actually exposes its theatrical identity by taking off the cloaks to reveal their stings. Sommerstein is right to the extent that in practice the chorus strip to make dancing easier. However, the position of the stripping in the parabasis, regardless of whether the chorus lose or maintain their identity, should still be regarded as a marker of the older-style Aristophanic parabases where the chorus speak out for the poet.

The parabasis also has other features consonant with the earlier Aristophanic parabases (or parabatic moments), including a defense of speaking out, threats and rebukes, and advice for the city.54 The male half of the chorus reaffirm the sentiments of the *proboulos*. But when the women step forward to speak their half, the parabasis, in

53 Explicit in *Acharnians* 626-7; *Peace* 729-33. Sommerstein 1990, 186. See also Sifakis 1971, 103-8; Henderson 1987a, 149.
effect, re-starts with a new *komination* (636-7) in which the women remove their outer clothes. Their antode begins: “All you citizens, we begin with some useful words for the city, fittingly since she nourished me in splendid luxury” (ἡμεῖς γὰρ, ὦ πάντες ἀστοί, λόγων/ κατάρχομεν τῇ πόλει χρησίμων/ εἰκότως, ἐπεὶ χλιδώσαν ἀγλαώς ἔθεσε με, 638-40). The vocative address, ὦ πάντες ἀστοί, whose ambiguity means it could be addressed either to the internal audience (the male semi-chorus) or the external audience, makes it comparable to other opening parabatic addresses to the spectators.55 The antepirrhema also begins by re-asserting the desire to advise the city: “So I owe it to the city to publicly give it some useful advice. And if I was born a woman, don’t hate me if I offer something better than the current state of affairs” (Ἀρα προσφέειλω τι χρηστὸν τῇ πόλει παραινέσαι. εἰ δ’ ἐγὼ γυνὴ πέφυκα, τούτο μὴ φθονεῖπέ μοι ἢν ἀμείνω γ’ εἰςενέγκω τῶν παρόντων πραγμάτων, 648-50). The defense of being a woman offering advice to the city recalls the words of Dicaeopolis in the *Acharnians*, spoken in an openly metatheatrical context: “Don’t hate me, spectators, if I am going to speak among the Athenians about the city in a comedy though I am a beggar. For comedy too knows what’s right” (μη μοι φθονήσητ’, ἀνδρες οἰ θεώμενοι εἰ πτωχὸς ὡν ἐπει’ἐν Ἀθηναίοις λέγειν μέλλω περὶ τῆς πόλεως, τρυγωδίαν ποιῶν, τὸ γὰρ δίκαιον οίδε καὶ τρυγωδία, 497-500).56 The rhetoric of both passages is similar – don’t hate me (φθονέω) even though I am someone who should not normally be offering advice to the city. In the *Acharnians* passage, the character explicitly equated with a comic *didaskalos* (τρυγωδίαν ποιῶν) is – like the women of Lysistrata – a character typical of low comedy:

55 *Clouds* 518-19: ὦ θεώμενοι, κατερίῳ πρὸς ἔλευθερῳς τάληθη, νῇ τὸν Διόνυσον τὸν ἐκθρέσαντά με (“Spectators, I will tell you the truth freely by Dionysus who nourished me”); and *Peace* 732-3: ἡμεῖς δ’ αὐ τοῖς θεσαπίς ἢν ἔχομεν ὕδων λόγων εἰπώμεν ὅσα τε νοῦς ἔχει (“Let us say to the spectators the path of words which is in our mind”). Cf. also *Acharnians* 655-6; *Wasps* 1015. 56 Wright 2012, 181, n.39
an “ordinary little man” who is dressed up in rags.  The women’s antode and antepirrhema, therefore, have a metatheatrical, parabatic feel, which highlights the generic importance of low-comic characters even at moments of pointed high comedy. By putting advice to the city in the mouth of Lysistrata, and a defense of the advice in the mouths of the female semi-chorus in a parabatically structured passage, Aristophanes leaves no doubt that we are meant to view Lysistrata as a director-figure in his own image.

Lysistrata’s advice to the city, as I indicated above, comes in the form of a humorless wool-working metaphor: she tells the proboulos to get rid of all the villains in the city as if washing sheep-dung from raw wool and picking out burrs; to get rid of politicians who club together as if combing out matted wool; and to card the wool into a basket of concord, mixing all the good people in together, including immigrants, friendly foreigners, and colonies (574–86). Lysistrata’s wool-working abilities associate her with the “respected occupation of Greek citizen women.” Wool-working, however, had other connotations for a Greek audience too. As several recent studies have highlighted, wool-working was heavily associated with hetaerae in iconographic representations. In the episode that follows the parabasis, Aristophanes offers several vignettes that reorient the image of wool-working from a chaste, wifely activity used metaphorically to offer political advice, to an emblem of the hetaera.

Lysistrata, it turns out, has locked the younger women in the Acropolis to force them to keep their sex-free oath. But the young women are having none of it, and attempt to flee using a variety of excuses. The first woman attempting escape says: “I

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57 Peace 740; 751.
58 Neils 2000, 208.
59 “Spinnende Hetären,” so-called by Rodenwalt 1932, 7-21. See also Neils 2000, 208-9; Cohen 2006, 99; 104-8.
60 On the “domestication” of the acropolis in Lysistrata see Foley 1982, 6-13.
want to go home! My Milesian wool is at home being destroyed by moths!"
(οἰκαδ’ ἐλθεῖν βούλομαι. οἶκοι γάρ ἐστιν ἔρια μοι Μιλήσια ὑπὸ τῶν σέων κατακοπτόμενα, 728-30). When Lysistrata does not buy the excuse, she goes on to say: “but I’ll come back quickly, by the two goddesses, only just as soon as I have spread them on the bed” (άλλ’ ἰξω ταχέως, νῇ τῷ θεῶ ὅσον διαπετάσας’ ἔπι τῆς κλίνης μόνον, 731-2). This recalls Lysistrata’s wool-working metaphor, where raw fleece was laid out on a bed (ἐπὶ κλίνης, 575) to be thrashed, a metaphor for ridding the city of bad people. Here the wool is spread out (διαπετάσας) on the bed (ἐπὶ κλίνης) to save it from the moths, and the lack of direct object for διαπετάσας produces an obscene double-entendre. Next, a second woman comes out, exclaiming: “Oh poor, poor me, my flax! I left it at home un-thrashed!” (τάλαιν’ ἐγὼ, τάλαινα τῆς ἀμόργιδος/ ἦν ἀλοπον οἶκοι καταλέλοιφ’, 735-6). At Lysistrata’s complaint, she continues: “But by the light-bringer, I’ll come right back as soon as I’ve stripped it!” (άλλα νῇ τῇν Φωσφόρον/ ἔγω ἀποδέίρασ’ αὐτίκα μάλ’ ἀνέρχομαι, 738-9). Here, the thrashing of raw materials in preparation for making fabric has been turned from its political significance in Lysistrata’s speech to a sexual stripping.61

If we look back to earlier parts of the play, the association between the comic women and hetaerae is clear. Stroup argues that the oath scene in the Lysistrata marks the hetairaization of the wives represented by the kylix of wine which they “sacrifice” to ratify the oath. She argues that the kylix was, in visual and literary sources, definitively associated with symposia, at which the only women were hetaerae.62 She adds that in the oath, as the women list the positions they will not have sex in, they mention that they

61 Cf. Faraone 2006, 211.
will not raise their Persian slippers to the ceiling (229-30), in reference to a position often associated with *hetaerae* in art.\(^63\)

Aristophanes thus opposes two different uses of the wool-working image: as humorless political advice (which fails to persuade), and as a ribald joke on Athenian wives acting like *hetaerae*. The transformation of the image from high to low marks the eventual success of comedy's low mode in stopping the war, as Lysistrata increasingly sees the utility of using her acting troupe's natural predilection for the low. \(^64\)

**From politics to prostitution**

Lysistrata's metatheatrically-inflected political advice to the city fails to persuade the *proboulos* of anything and does nothing to advance Lysistrata's plan. Indeed, to get rid of him she must resort to another visually funny costuming routine, this time arraying him like a corpse for a funeral (599-613). Again, the only way that Lysistrata can achieve any real action on stage is through physical and visual humor. The inconsequentiality of the wool-metaphor, together with its double significance as politics (high) and prostitution (low) marks a change in Lysistrata's directorial persona. As we shall see, she ceases to claim the efficacy of political rhetoric in the execution of her plan, but rather uses the tropes of low comedy to successfully bring about peace.

When Myrrhine seduces her husband Cinesias, Lysistrata's directorial role is highlighted again. When Myrrhine recognizes the approach of her husband (838),

\[^{63}\] Stroup 2004, 52.

\[^{64}\] McClure 2015 suggests that the recent arguments for *hetaerae* as the comic models behind the wives has been overstated. She demonstrates this by offering evidence from contemporary Athenian vase paintings that show that "displays of female sexuality...are entirely compatible with the representation of marriageable girls and free citizen women" (59). I do not disagree, and I am not arguing that the women are *hetaerae*. I am arguing that in the comic presentation of citizen women Aristophanes 1) uses Pherecratean stereotypes to characterize them as the women typical of low-brow comedy, who were often prostitutes or *hetaerae* and 2) that representing citizen wives like *hetaerae* is the means by which Aristophanes makes the women comic. It is a comic conceit that the wives are acting like *hetaerae* in order to be good wives. It is what their husbands seem to want, and it is how they save Greece from war.
Lysistrata says:

σὸν ἔργον ἢδε τοῦτον ὄπταν καὶ στρέφειν
καὶ ἔργον ἤδε τὸ ὑπείρου τὸ πλήν ὃν σύνοιδεν ἢ κύλις ἢ
καὶ μὴν ἄγω
συνηπεροπεύσω <σοί> παραμένοντος ἐνθαδὶ,
καὶ ξυσταθεύσω τοῦτον. ἀλλ' ἀπέλθετε. (Lysistrata 839-44)

840

Now your task is to roast him and torment him
and deceive him and love him and not love him
and do everything except the wine cup knows what.
...And I'll stay here and help you deceive him
and roast him. Off you go!

Lysistrata stands aside from the action but instructs one of her women in what to do. The
seduction scene is the enactment of the oath sworn at the beginning of the comedy, and
therefore the culmination and realization of Lysistrata's play-within-the-play. Myrrhine's
continual recourse to different props also contributes to the sense of metatheater in the
scene: she is performing seduction as an actress at the director Lysistrata's behest, not
actually seducing Cinesias. Myrrhine's performance – her initial reluctance, teasing, and
trickery – are also consonant with later depictions of hetaerae, suggesting that she is
meant to be understood as playing the role of a comic hetaera.65 The name Myrrhine,

65 The only substantial evidence we have comes from the comedies of the fourth century BCE or
later. Henderson 1987a, 178 says it “must have been a situation familiar to any Athenian with
very much experience of hetaira, if we can judge from their portrayal in fourth-century comedy
and from many of the vast number of anecdotes about hetaira and their careers which were
collected e.g. by Athenaios.” The large number of titles and comedies of the fifth century which
we know to have featured prostitutes suggest to me that at least some elements present in later
comedy pre-dated Aristophanes. See especially Anaxilas Neottis fr.22 and Alexis Equivalent, fr.
103. We can compare the women on the acropolis portrayed as prostitutes with an anecdote from
the historians Theopompus and Timaeus who relate how, during the Persian Wars, the
prostitutes of Corinth gathered at the temple to Aphrodite to pray for the salvation of the Greeks
(in Athenaeus XIII.572d). The hetaerica nuances of the seduction scene have been argued for by
2015, 75-7 who argues that the presence of the baby, references to Euripides' Alcestis, and a
proliferation of kin terminology highlights the domestic, familial aspect of the scene. Again, I do
not deny that Myrrhine and Cinesias are husband and wife and thus that the scene has the
nuances McClure argues for. But part of the humor of the scene is that Cinesias must procure his
own wife as if she were a hetaera. His later request, after Myrrhine has denied him the sex he so
indeed, is a sexual pun based on the word *myrton*, a euphemism for female genitalia that also appears elsewhere as a *hetaera* name.⁶⁶ Myrrhine’s characterization as a *hetaera* is highlighted by the comic conflation of Lysistrata’s directorial role with the role of procuress: at line 861, Cinesias asks Lysistrata to help him get to Myrrhine, and Lysistrata replies, “what will you give me?” (δώσεις τί μοι;). This establishes the transactional nature of the scene and sets Lysistrata up in the role of a madam.⁶⁷

The “play” that Myrrhine puts on reflects key programmatic aspects of low comedy: it is physical and repetitive, as Myrrhine time and again runs back and forth with different props. Cinesias’ phallus is a prominent fixture of the scene, and the whole debacle is rife with obscene humor. Cinesias refers to his phallus as “Heracles at the banquet” (ἀλλ᾽ ή τὸ πέος τὸδ’ Ἡρακλῆς ξενίζεται; 928). This comparison of a sex-deprived phallus to the hungry Heracles renders the already low-comic motif of the comic phallus doubly and programmatically low, as if he is pointing at his phallus and saying “look, this is low-brow comedy right here!” That this scene represents the play that Lysistrata has directed confirms that, despite her attempt to distance herself from the low and offer advice to the city, Lysistrata is, inevitably, the director of a comedy in the low mode.

Ironically this attention to the low, the physical, and the sexual brings about success for Lysistrata’s political plan, and thus Aristophanes’ high-brow political conceit for *Lysistrata*. Consider again the programmatic opening of the comedy, where

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badly wants, for a prostitute (*Lys*. 954-8), which McClure suggests militates against hetaerica interpretations, actually underscores the fact that Myrrhine was acting as a *hetaera*. Stroup 2004, 59; Faraone 2006, 210; E.g. Eupolis’ *Auylochus* fr. 50b; Athenaeus 13.590c-d; 13.567f; 593a. Athenaeus also mentions that that Demetrius of Phalerum (late fourth-early third century) saw a prostitute called Lampito (XIII.593e-f). See also Henderson 1991, 134-5.

⁶⁶ *Hetaera* could mean an educated woman whose relationships with her clients tended to be longer term than those of *pornai*, but it could also be used as a euphemism for low-class prostitutes or as the general term for the category of prostitutes within which distinctions could be made.
Aristophanes asked his audience to consider whether its προγμα consists in a political solution to the serious problem of war or low-comic phallus jokes. The effect of Lysistrata’s high-brow sex-strike plan of no-action is ironically to make the phallus, not the war, the bigger issue for the men of the *Lysistrata*. In the seduction scene, for example, Myrrhine reminds Cinesias several times to make peace, but Cinesias is concerned only with sex (e.g. 931-4). When the Spartans arrive, we see that none of the men care remotely about the war anymore, but they are only concerned to solve the problem of their erect phalluses. Phallic humor becomes the central focus of the comedy, with a series of jokes directed at the Spartans such as: “are you a man or a cock?” (πότερ ἄνθρωπος ἢ Κονίσαλος; 982); “is that why you’ve come with a hidden spear?” (κάπειτα δόρυ δὴθ ὑπὸ μάλης ἥκεις ἐχων; 985); “are your groins swollen from the journey?” (βουβωνιᾶς ὑπὸ τῆς ὀδοῦ; 986-7); “What’s that you’ve got there?” “A Spartan walking stick!” (τί ἐστί σοι τοδί; σκυτάλα Λακωνικά, 991), and more. All this time, in the meeting between Cinesias and the Spartan Herald, there is barely a mention of the war, except to note that “the women aren’t letting us touch their myrtle berries until we all agree to make treaties for Greece” (τα ἱκαρ γυναῖκες οὐδὲ τῶ μύρτω σιγήν/ ἐῴντι, πρίν χ’ ἀπαντες ἐξ ἐνὸς λόγω/ σπονδὰς ποιημομεθά ποτὰν Ἑλλάδα, 1004-6). There is no discussion of whether they should make peace; they simply agree to because the bigger problem is their erections.

**Reconciliation**

In her final scene, Lysistrata achieves peace between the Spartans and the Athenians. The chorus, now unified, introduce her for this final scene in the following way:

χαῖρ, ὥ πασῶν ἀνδρειοτάτη· δεὶ δὴ νυνὶ σε γενέσθαι δεινὴν <μαλακήν>, ἀγαθὴν φαύλην, σεμνὴν ἀγανήν, πολύπειρον (*Lysistrata* 1108-9)

Greetings most manly of all women! Now you must be terrible, <soft>, good, low, lofty, gentle, much-experienced.
The chorus speak of Lysistrata with a series of opposing adjectives, highlighting her dual character. Wilamowitz, and most editors since then, have read these as three contrasting pairs summed up at the end with πολύπειρον. The division between the pairs is, however, more fungible than this, and φαύλος and σεμνός stand out as a central contrast in the line. These two words sum up the programmatic tension in Lysistrata’s character and, more broadly, in Aristophanic comedy: she is dignified, reverent, and haughty like the high-comic poet, but also low-brow, crass, and ordinary. Other Aristophanic uses of these two words reiterate their metapoetic potential. At Knights 213, the sausage-seller has received the oracle about his impending leadership of the people, and he asks the slave Demosthenes how he is supposed to undertake the task.

Demosthenes’ reply metatheatrically marks the sausage-seller as a comic poet:

φαυλότατον ἔργον· ταῦθ’ ἀπερ ποιεῖς ποίει·
τάραττε καὶ χόρδευ’ ὁμού τὰ πράγματα
ἀπαντα, καὶ τόν δήμον ἀεὶ προσποιοῦ
ὕπογλυκαίνων ῥήματοις μαγειρικοῖς.
τὰ δ ἄλλα σοι πρόσεστι δημαγωγικά,
φωνῆ μιαρά, γέγονας κακῶς, ἀγόραιος εἶ· (Knights 213-218)

It’s a very phaulos task – just do the same things you’re already doing: mix everything up and make it into sausages and always win over the people coaxing them with phrases fit for cooks. And you have all the other qualities of a demagogue: Hideous voice! Low-born scum! How agoraic you are

In the Knights, the sausage-seller is a poet figure, whom we are meant to equate, at least to some extent, with the Aristophanic poet in competition with his arch-nemesis, Cleon. Putting on a comedy, like being a demagogue, involves mixing things up and

68 Hence why Wilamowitz 1927, 186 saw the need (required by the meter) to insert μαλακήν to pair with δεινήν as characteristics of Lysistrata’s speech, followed by ἀγαθήν and φαύλην as characteristics of her birth (noble and base), and σεμνήν and ἀγαθήν referring to haughtiness and gentleness of character.
69 The contrast between φαύλος and σεμνός is also apparent at Ecclesiazusae 617, but in its application to appearance.
winning over the people.\textsuperscript{70} The sausage-seller’s repulsive voice, low-birth and
association with the agora all reflect elements of low comedy as Aristophanes defines it:
a φωνὴ μισρὰ suggests excessive use of obscenities, and his low birth and agoraic
tendencies reflect the base characters typical of low comedy, as articulated in the \textit{Peace}
parabasis (καὶ σκώμμασιν οὐκ ἀγοραίοις/ οὐκ ἰδιώτας ἀνθρωπίσκους κωμῳδῶν οὐδὲ
gυναῖκας, 750-1). The word φαῦλος at the opening of this passage has a double
meaning. It is often translated as “it’s a very easy task,” but the emphasis on baseness
in the rest of the passage suggests that it also refers to an aesthetic quality of lowness,
connecting it to the art of comedy.\textsuperscript{71}

We see the metapoetic potential of σεμνός in \textit{Wasps} and \textit{Frogs}. In the latter, it is
said to be characteristic of the art of Aeschylus. The chorus address him as “O first of
Greeks to have built distinguished word towers and to have brought order to tragic
nonsense” (ὦ πρῶτος τῶν Ἑλλήνων πυργώσας ῥήματα σεμνὰ καὶ κοσμήσας τραγικὸν
λῆρον, \textit{Frogs} 1004-5).\textsuperscript{72} Σεμνός is here associated with the more dignified genre of
tragedy. In \textit{Wasps}, σεμνός appears at another moment of metatheatre, as Bdelycleon
tries to teach his father how to behave decently at a symposium, saying, “you will know
how to tell dignified stories” (ἐπιστήσει λόγους σεμνοῦς λέγειν, \textit{Wasps} 1174).

The introduction of Lysistrata for her final scene, which characterizes her using
these two programmatic terms, re-emphasizes at the comedy’s end her embodiment of
Aristophanes’ dual high-low poetics.

\textsuperscript{70} Compare comedy as “mixing everything up and making it into sausages” with “Cleon being
made into sausage-meat” as political comedy in the \textit{Wasps} prologue.
\textsuperscript{71} Φαῦλος is the key term for characterizing comedy in Aristotle’s \textit{Poetics}, e.g. 1448a2; 1448b26;
and especially 1449a32.
\textsuperscript{72} This passage in turn reflects Aristophanes’ description of his own high comedy in the \textit{Peace}
parabasis (749-50), and both passages probably derive from Pherecrates’ \textit{Krapataloi}. 
In the reconciliation scene, Lysistrata reappears in her procuress guise, leading the naked prostitute Reconciliation onto the stage to make peace between the Spartans and the Athenians. In her speeches, she rebukes each party in turn. Nominally, Lysistrata appears to use political rhetoric to solidify the peace, but as the scene unfolds we see that it is the comic costume body of the prostitute that ultimately persuades. In her address to the Spartans, she asks them to recall the Laconian Pericleidas’ request to the Athenians for aid during the helot revolt in 464: “Coming with four thousand hoplites, Cimon (the Athenian) saved the whole of Sparta” (1143-4). Lysistrata neglects to mention that Cimon was unsuccessful, accused of sympathizing with the helots and that the endeavor ended his career. It was, as Henderson puts it, “a milestone in the history of enmity between the two states.”

The Spartan’s response is “we were in the wrong. But that bum is unspeakably fine” (ἀδικίομες· ἀλλ᾽ ὁ πρωκτὸς ἀφατὸν ὑς καλός, 1148). The Spartan does not notice the elision of events which makes Lysistrata’s political persuasion unconvincing, because he is occupied solely with the prostitute’s body. Likewise, when Lysistrata turns to the Athenians, she reminds them that the Spartans came to Athens to help depose Hippias and the Thessalians. But again, she omits a key piece of the story: the fact that the Spartan king Cleomenes, who had forced Hippias into exile, later returned to Athens to install the aristocrat Isagoras as tyrant and dissolve the boulē. He even occupied (unsuccessfully) the Acropolis, and these events caused hostilities between Sparta and Athens. As with the Spartan, the Athenian does not notice the omission, preoccupied as he is with the prostitute: “I’ve never seen a more beautiful pussy” (ἐγὼ δὲ κύσθον γ’οὐδέπω καλλίονα, 1158) is his only response. This

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73 Henderson 1987a, 201.
74 Herodotus 5.64-73
75 It has been argued by Sonnino 2017, 370-4. that we should not view Lysistrata’s omissions as “a comic deformation of historical memory” as Wilson 1982, 161 argued, but rather than we
scene juxtaposes side-by-side the political and low-comic modes that may be used to resolve the plot. The internal audience to her performance pays attention only to the low-comic, obscene costume of the prostitute, practically ignoring Lysistrata’s political, verbal motions. This signals to the external audience that while Aristophanes is a master of both modes, the low is the one essential to the success of the comedy.

The prostitute Reconciliation, though figured as the representative of the low-comic mode, in the end also becomes the embodiment of Aristophanes’ dual poetics as her costume (especially the obscene bits of it) is transformed into the map of Greece on which an accord is reached between the Athenians and the Spartans: her bum is Pylos, her pubic hair is Echinus on the Thessalian coast, and her vagina is the Malian gulf. The last body parts up for negotiation are the prostitute’s “Megarian legs (τὰ Μεγαρικὰ σκέλη), leaving us with the final impression that Reconciliation is not just any prostitute, but a Megarian prostitute, the ultimate low-comic character, whose ethnicity also makes her a vehicle of contemporary political humor.

**THESMOPHORIAZUSAE**

Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae* features the tragic playwright Euripides who must rescue the relative he has sent to infiltrate the women-only Thesmophoria festival. The comedy has often been read as a critique of Euripidean tragedy (for veering into the territory of comedy) and as an assertion of the superiority of the comic genre over the

should understand that “Lysistrata’s aim… is to employ the actual style of Assembly speeches, not to deride it. As for those historical distortions that she does introduce, they are of the type one would expect from political oration” – what he terms “modulation du paradigme.” Cf. MacDowell 1995, 245, who argues that the context renders Lysistrata’s suggestions unserious; and Heath 1987a, 7-8 makes a similar point, arguing that Lysistrata’s extreme seriousness makes the comic deflation funnier.
tragic in a kind of inter-generic rivalry. This inter-generic rivalry is, of course, one aspect of the *Thesmophoriazusae*, but I propose that the comedy can also be viewed as an expression of intra-generic rivalry that pits two comic modes against each other: the high comedy of paratragedy, which relies on recognizing verbal echoes, clever word plays, and, in this case, the “real” contemporary characters of Euripides and Agathon, is opposed to the low comedy exemplified by the relative, the women, and the Scythian archer, characterized by obscenity, stock routines, and physical humor. Hubbard hints at such a reading, when he writes, “Aristophanes…represents the same conflict between highbrow dramatic sophistication and lowbrow audience appeal that characterized his earlier reflections on his own work, particularly in the *Clouds* and *Wasps.*” He goes on to conclude, however, that ultimately the *Thesmophoriazusae* is a victory of comedy over tragedy for the purposes of moral edification. The question of didacticism aside, the *Thesmophoriazusae* is not just an example of comedy’s victory over tragedy, but more pointedly demonstrates comedy’s low mode as a successful means of plot resolution where intellectually sophisticated, paratragic comedy fails.

**High comedy, low spectator**

The prologue of the *Thesmophoriazusae* accomplishes two aims: it establishes the character of Euripides as the metatheatrical comic director in the high mode, and it focalizes the problem of spectatorship through the relative, posing the dilemma of why a poet should put on an intellectually sophisticated drama for an audience whose tastes veer towards the low. The first 24 lines of the comedy exemplify the problem. The

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76 E.g. Zeitlin 1981, 303-7; Taaffe 1993, 85; 98; Bowie 1993, 217-20; Nelson 2016, 242; 250-1; Farmer 2017, 181-92. Bobrick 1991, 74, however argues that the *Thesmophoriazusae* reflects the “marriage of Aristophanic comedy and Euripidean tragedy” and not a failure for the character Euripides, but “the triumph of his ingenuity and versatility.”

77 Hubbard 1991, 185-6.

78 Hubbard 1991, 186: “Aristophanes felt he could be more successful than Euripides in using female dramatic figures to influence dominant social, political and literary values.”
relative has clearly been following Euripides for quite some time and wants to know where they are going. Euripides responds with some pseudo-philosophical remarks on the senses, which the relative fails to understand correctly:79

5 Εὐριπίδης ἄλλ’ οὐκ ἄκουειν δεῖ σε πάνθ’, ὡς αὐτίκα ὅμως παρεστῶς.
Κηδεστής τῶς λέγεις; αὐθίς φράσον.
Εὖς οὐχ ἂ γ’ ἀν μέλλης ὁρᾶν.
Κῆς οὔδ’ ἄρ’ ὁρᾶν δεὶ μ’;
Εὖς οὐχ ἂ γ’ ἀν ἄκουειν δεῖ.
Κῆς πῶς μοι παραίνετε; δεξιὼς μὲντοι λέγεις.
10 Εὔχωρις γὰρ αὐτοῖν ἐκατέρου ἑκατον ἡ φύσις. (Thesmophoriazusae 5-11)

5 Euripides But you who will presently see do not need to hear.
Relative What do you mean? Tell me again, I shouldn’t hear?
Euripides Not what you are going to see.
Relative So I shouldn’t see?
Euripides Not what you’ve got to hear.
Relative What are you telling me to do? Whatever it is, you say it so cleverly. Are you saying that I should neither hear nor see?
Euripides Yes, for the nature of each sense is different.

Euripides continues with an account of the origin of seeing and hearing, to which the relative responds that he does so enjoy learning and such intellectual conversation (αἱ σοφαὶ ξυνουσίαι, 20-1). But when Euripides suggests that there is more where that came from, the relative’s real preferences emerge: “could you also find out how I might learn to be lame in both legs” (ἐξεύροις ὅτις ἐπὶ προσμάθοιμι χωλὸς εἶναι τῶ σκέλει.; 23-4). In this passage, Euripides is established as a comic intellectual, who turns the most basic of questions into a discourse of the senses, and indeed, who pays so little attention to his unintelligent interlocutor that he ends up agreeing with his mistaken interpretation of

79 Cf. chapter six on Frogs 1169, where Dionysus comments on Euripides’ critique of Aeschylus, acknowledging his intelligence but failing to actually understand what he says.
the philosophical point. Euripides is also named four lines in, so that everyone in the audience is on the same page: this is the tragic playwright with a reputation for intellectualism. His relative, however, is characterized as a low comic spectator in several ways: his anonymity (which remains throughout the comedy) renders him an "ordinary little man" (Peace 751); his inability to understand Euripides characterizes him as uneducated and thus low class; and his initial politeness about the clever things he could learn from Euripides is revealed as phony once he is faced with the prospect of more philosophy. The immediate point of the relative asking to learn how to be lame, is that if he can no longer walk, he will not have to keep following Euripides around listening to his incomprehensible philosophizing. But by asking to learn lameness, the relative points to an alternative stereotype of Euripidean tragedy: his predilection for presenting lame beggar characters. It may even recall the list of lame beggar characters in Euripidean tragedy given by Euripides in Acharnians as Dicaeopolis attempts to extract the Telephus costume from him. The relative prefers the kind of Euripidean tragedies that offer low characters with physical deformities; in other words "low" tragedy.

It is worth briefly pausing at this point to consider the stereotype of Euripides offered elsewhere in the work of Aristophanes. In Acharnians, a key intertext for the Thesmophoriazusae, Euripidean tragedy is characterized as a high genre that can teach

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80 The relative concludes that he should neither see nor hear, to which Euripides responds with an affirmative γὰρ. On the philosophical background to the prologue see Clements 2014.
81 He refers to himself as a κηδεστής (relative by marriage) of Euripides at line 74, but is never named. The scholia in manuscript R identify him as Mnesilochus, Euripides’ father-in-law, but since he is nameless throughout the play, I maintain his anonymity and refer to him simply as the relative.
82 Acharnians 418-30. Euripides there mentions Oeneus, a beggar king; Phoenix, who was a blind beggar; Philoctetes, who was a lame beggar; Bellephon, who was lame; and, of course, Telephus, who was lame (Acharnians 429) and disguised himself as a beggar. Cf. also Peace 146-8.
the city and that must be co-opted by comedy’s high mode if it also wants to be considered a source of advice to the city. The highness of Euripidean tragedy is demonstrated in *Acharnians*, as in *Thesmophoriazusae*, by pseudo-philosophical babble (spoken by Euripides’ slave), to which Dicaeopolis responds: “thrice-happy Euripides – even your slave greets me so cleverly!” (ὦ τρισμακάρι Ἐὐριπίδη ὦ θ’ ὁ δούλος ὁ ὑπωγι σοφῶς ὑποκρίνεται, 400-1). But the “reality” of Euripides, when Dicaeopolis meets him, is that he is a crippled beggar. The simultaneous highness and lowness of Euripides is also thematized in *Frogs*. Throughout this comedy Euripides is characterized, like the Aristophanic high mode, as clever and novel, associated with an intellectual audience and teaching the city. But his audience is, at the same time, portrayed as low, consisting in thieves and father-beaters (772-3), or, as Xanthias puts it, “the criminal population” (ὁ δῆμος ὁ τῶν πανούργων, 779-81). When Aeschylus critiques Euripides in the *Frogs*, his critiques are largely based on the low content of Euripidean tragedy. He calls him “son of the vegetable goddess” (ὦ παῖ τῆς ἀρουραίας θεοῦ, 840), referring to the apparently low socio-economic status of his mother as a vegetable seller, and he also complains about his beggars, cripples, sexual misdemeanors, women, slaves, and domestic themes. In fragment 488 from *Women Claiming Tent Sites*, Aristophanes also articulates the dual high-low characterization of Euripides:

χρώμαι γάρ αὐτοῦ τοῦ στόματος τῶν στρογγύλων, τοὺς νοῦς δ’ ἀγοραίους ἧττον ἣ’ κεῖνος ποιῶ. (Fr. 488)

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83 Evident in the word τρυγῳδία (*Acharnians* 500) by which Aristophanes refers to his comedy. The whole of line 500 (τὸ γάρ δικαιον οἶδε καὶ τρυγῳδία) implies that comedy like tragedy also knows how to say just things. See Foley 1988, 35-8.
84 Performed in 405 and thus later than *Thesmophoriazusae*. But the stereotypes there represented were certainly current in 411 too.
85 E.g. cleverness: 96-7; 775-6; 956-8; novelty: 99; 890; intellectual (book-reading) audience: 52-3; 1114; advice to the city: 954-8; 962; 970-5. See also below chapter six, 231-3.
86 E.g. beggars: *Frogs* 842; 1063-4; cripples 846; sexual misdemeanors 850; 1046-7; women and slaves 949-50; domestic subject matter: 959; and in general, 1079-86.
I make use of his compactness of expression,
But I create concepts less vulgar than he does.

Στρογγύλος refers to a certain type of compact and terse style of expression, and is elsewhere associated by Aristophanes with clever speaking.87 Aristophanes here draws a distinction between the clever sophistic style of Euripidean tragedy (which he claims to co-opt) and the low-brow subject-matter of Euripidean tragedy.88 Aristophanes is ironically claiming to be more tragic than Euripidean tragedy.

So Euripides, at least as Aristophanes presents him, has a dual reputation for being both “high” (clever, sophisticated, novel) and “low” (of low-status, prone to presenting low characters, domestic themes, and sexual misdemeanors). In this sense he is the tragic equivalent to the ideal of Aristophanic poetics – simultaneously high and low, whose lowness makes him universally appealing. In the opening lines of Thesmophoriazusae, therefore, we are offered a paradigm of the high/low poet, figured in the character of Euripides, opposed to the low preferences of his spectator, the relative.89 The relative is characterized as the stereotypical low-comic buffoon throughout the rest of the prologue, for example at lines 59-62, he re-works the slave’s description of Agathon’s creative process using craftwork metaphors (53-7) into a metaphor for a graphic sexual encounter.90 The slave responds: “I’m sure you were outrageous when you were young old man” (ἲ που νέος γ’ ὑβριστής, ὦ γέρον, 63). This remark points to the traditionalistic and repetitive nature of the obscene jokes

87 Acharnians 686-7, it is set alongside the idea of verbal traps (σκανδάληθρον) as a characterization of young sophistic speakers.
88 For ἄγοραῖος cf. Peace 750
89 On the relative as a spectator, see Taaffe 1993, 79-82.
90 See also relative’s interruptions of Agathon’s slave’s prayers for silence with βομάξ (45) and βομβαλοβομβάξ (48), called by Austin and Olson (2004, 68) a “bomolochic interjection”; this buffoonery culminates in the relative’s crude additions of μῦν βινείθαι; (50) and καὶ λακκάζει (57). Agathon’s slave calls the relative ἄγροιώτας (58), marking his rusticity and thus his out-of-placeness in the urbane company of Euripides and Agathon.
the relative is making. The jokes are not new or innovative but the same old jokes the audience has heard year after year. The slave views such traditional and repetitive jokes as boring, and no longer capable of causing outrage, thus pointing to a central tension in the *Thesmophoriazusae* between what is old and repeated (stock comic scenes and obscene jokes), and what is new and innovative (Euripidean and Agathonian tragedy and parody thereof).  

The relative’s paradigmatically low spectatorship, which had been briefly illuminated in the opening 24 lines, is expanded upon when he is faced with the spectacle of Agathon and is again put in the position of spectator. When Agathon is rolled out onto the stage on the *ekkyklēma*, much as Euripides himself had been twenty-four years earlier, the relative exclaims, “but I don’t see any man here, I see Cyrene” (ἐγὼ γὰρ οὐχ ὄρῳ ἄνδρ’ οὐδεν’ ἐνθάδ’ ὄντα, Κυρήνην δ’ ὀρῷ, 97-8). Cyrene was a famous Athenian courtesan, and by seeing a prostitute instead of a poet, the relative reveals again his low viewing preferences. The relative’s reaction to Agathon’s song (130-3) is also overtly sexual and the titillation he expresses is a more fitting reaction to a courtesan’s song than to that of a tragic poet.

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91 *Pace* Farmer 2017, 191-2 who argues that because the paratragedy is a repeated version of an original tragedy, it is in fact the comic scene at the end of the comedy that is marked as novel and innovative. My argument does not invalidate this interpretation, which works well if one is thinking about the inter-generic rivalry between tragedy and comedy. But in the context of an intra-generic rivalry, the low-brow stock routine at the end is very much marked as un-innovative next to the inventive (para)tragedies of Euripides.

92 Whitehorne 2002 argued that we ought to see, in the ekkyklemic tableau laid out before us, a reflection of iconographic depictions of intellectuals, but we may detect a reflection of iconographic representations of courtesans here too. A good example of an iconographic depiction of a courtesan with a lyre is the early fifth-century Athenian red-figure cup from Vulci, British Museum E44, BAPD 203219.
The relative as satyric actor and Euripides as director

The relative’s move from spectator to actor is marked at line 134, when he addresses Agathon using a parody of Aeschylus.93 The relative clearly identifies who he is parodying and the source of the parody, when he says, “I want to ask you, young man, in the words of Aeschylus in the Lycurgus plays, who you are” (καὶ σ’, ὦ νεανίσχ’ ἤτις εἶ, κατ’ Αἴσχυλον ἐκ τῆς Λυκουργείας ἐρέσθαι βούλομαι, 134-5). The relative, thus far clearly marked as low, seems to have changed tack by joining in with the high paratragic comedy. The opening of the parody is tame, as the relative asks, “from what land comes this man-woman, what is his homeland, what is this dress?” (ποδαπὸς ὁ γύννις; τίς πάτρα; τίς ἡ στολή;, 136). The relative goes on to note the mismatch between masculine and feminine features of Agathon’s get-up, and ends with some mild obscenity: “Were you brought up as a man? Then where’s your cock? Or perhaps as a woman? Then where are your tits?” (πότερον ὡς ἀνήρ τρέφει; καὶ ποῦ πέος;…αλλ’ ὐς γυνῆ δήτ’; εἶτα ποῦ τὰ πιθία;, 141-3). Of the ten-line parody, the scholiast to the Thesmophoriazusae cites the first half of the first line (ποδαπὸς ὁ γύννις;) as belonging to Aeschylus’ Edonians. This was the first tragedy of the Lycurgeia tetralogy and dealt with Dionysus’ arrival in the kingdom of Lycurgus and the king’s rejection of him and subsequent punishment. The other plays in the tetralogy were Bassarids (Orpheus’ rejection of Dionysus in favor of Apollo and murder by the followers of Dionysus), Youths (perhaps dealing with the reconciliation of the cults of Apollo and Dionysus94), and the satyr play Lycurgus. Sommerstein has argued that the Lycurgeia tetralogy is remarkable because

93 Austin and Olson 2004, 99 also note that the relative moves to center stage at this point, a move that also marks the transition from spectator to actor.
94 West 1990, 46-7; Seaford 2005, 606. Note that the title of this play, Νεανίσκοι, is reflected in relative’s address to Agathon as ὦ νεανίξ‘.
the satyr play enacts the same myth as the opening tragedy *Edonians*. I argue in fact that the relative is here parodying not the *Edonians*, or not only the *Edonians*, but the *Lycurgus*, which itself may have parodied the *Edonians*. There are several indications of this: first, the fact that the relative refers to his parody as “the words of Aeschylus in the Lycurgus plays”, not “the words of Aeschylus in the *Edonians*.“ By using the name of the tetralogy, the relative leaves it ambiguous as to whether he is referring to the tragic or satyric version of the Lycurgus story. *Lycurgeia* may suggest to the audience *Lycurgus* more strongly than *Edonians*. Second, the word γύννις is not especially tragic in flavor. It appears nowhere else in extant tragedy, but does appear in another satyr play of Aeschylus, *The Sacred Delegation*, which likewise features an effeminately dressed Dionysus. Third, after the parody Agathon explains to the relative his theory of composition: what a poet lacks, he must make up for by imitation (149-56). Because he is composing about women, Agathon must imitate a woman. The relative responds:

“Whenever you’re writing a satyr play, then, call me and I’ll write it with you, going at you hard from behind” (δήν σατύρους τοίνυν ποίης, καλεῖν ἔμε ἵνα συμποιῶ σοὔπισθεν

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95 Only one fragment of the *Lycurgus* remains, but since Lycurgus dies at the end of *Edonians*, the satyr play likely covers some ground that was covered in the *Edonians*. Sommerstein 2008, 126-7 argues that Apollodorus *Library* 3.5.1 reflects the plot of the *Edonians*. It mentions that Dionysus’ retinue consisted in both satyrs and bacchants, but mentions only the miraculous release of the bacchants. Sommerstein argues, therefore, that the detail about the satyrs’ presence was likely due to the satyr play *Lycurgus*, while the miraculous release of the bacchants was part of the *Edonians*. It further seems likely that Sommerstein is correct because two plays in the same tetralogy with a very similar plot would be likely to result in some confusion of attribution, especially if Aeschylus parodied the *Edonians* in the *Lycurgus*. This could explain the oddly humorous line in fr. 62 of the *Edonians*, which appears more suited to a satyr play than a tragedy: μακροσκέλης μέν· ἄρα μὴ χλούνης τις ἔν; (“he’s got long legs, was he a clothes-snatcher?”). I would not go so far as to agree with Sommerstein that “the plot of the satyr drama was blatantly inconsistent with that of the tragic part of the production”, but would suggest rather that the *Lycurgus* is a comic re-working of the *Edonians* focusing on the satyrs rather than the bacchants.

96 We might compare *Frogs* 1124, where Euripides tells Aeschylus to give the prologue ἐξ Ὀρεστείας (“from the *Oresteia*”) and Aeschylus recites the opening of the *Libation Bearers*, a play which features Orestes and was indeed his first appearance.

97 Aeschylus Fr.78a88. A scholion on Euripides *Orestes* 1528 explains that Phrygians were γύννιδες, cf. *Knights* ΣΕΕΓ36 1374 (Cleisthenes and Straton were γύννιδες); Athenaeus 10.435a.
The fact that the relative figures himself as co-composer (συμποιῶ) and that he would be the one engaging in the active sexual act, establishes him here as a satyric poet – a remark which would be most apt if the parody immediately preceding this was in fact a parody of satyr play. It is impossible to know for sure whether the relative’s first paratragic performance is actually a satyric performance or whether it is paratragedy in a satyric mode. Either way, the relative’s ten-line parody of Aeschylus would be understood as satyric in one sense or the other, especially after the relative has effectively declared himself a satyric poet at 157-8. Because of satyr play’s generic affinities with low comedy, the relative’s Aeschylean parody establishes him, like Philocleon in Wasps as a performer of the low comic mode.

Starting from line 176, Euripides explains his problem to Agathon in the hopes of convincing him to infiltrate the Thesmophoria. It is clear from this that Euripides intends to be a tragic director, directing a fellow tragedian to be a tragic actor. In contrast to the relative’s satyric performance, Agathon’s performance is thoroughly tragic. The high humor of the scene between Agathon and Euripides consists in de-contextualized quotations from their own works, and the humor relies on an audience being familiar with the source of the quotations, for example, when Agathon refuses Euripides by using his own words (from the Alcestis) against him. Aristophanes, therefore, presents the

98 On satyr play in Thesmophoriazusae see also Sells 2018, 91; 113-15.
99 Cf. Philocleon as satyric poet, above chapter four. On the generic relationship between satyr play and old comedy see above, chapter two.
100 Thesmophoriazusae 101-29. The performance was no doubt rendered humorous by the fact that Agathon was playing two roles, and the actor could have easily hammed up the scene. There was probably some metrical and musical parody that would have contributed to the humor of the passage. There is, however, nothing especially parodic in the words themselves. There may be a slight irony if Austin and Olson 2004, 87 are correct in seeing the dramatic context of Agathon’s song as a Trojan victory hymn after the supposed departure of the Greeks from Troy. As they say, “this is not a happy omen for Euripides’ great plan.”
101 Thesmophoriazusae 194. In addition Euripides quotes his own Aeolus at 177-8 and Agathon quotes himself at 198-9 (or at least speaks in a style noticeably characteristic of his work); much of the rest of the language of the passage is paratragic and at least some derives from specific
audience with two possible scenarios: Euripides as director of a low-comic (satyric) actor and Euripides as a director of a high-brow tragic actor. Agathon refuses to take part and immediately after this refusal, a scene of excessive farce ensues in which Euripides, with the help of Agathon’s costumes and accoutrements, dresses the relative up as a woman. Particularly farcical are the shaving moments: At line 224 the relative runs off half-dressed with a half-shaved beard and at 240 his nether regions are singed. As in the *Lysistrata*, this opening scene serves to establish the metatheatrical basis of the Thesmophoriazusae, similarly distinguishing between a poet figure with high-brow intentions (Euripides, Lysistrata) and low-brow actors (Euripides’ relative, Lysistrata’s women). The two modes are portrayed in tension but not in competition as they were in *Wasps*. In fact, because Euripides must use the relative as actor, the opening of Thesmophoriazusae figures the relationship between high and low as collegial rather than antagonistic.

**The women of the Thesmophoriazusae**

When the chorus of women enter, they, like the women of *Lysistrata*, are straightaway characterized as stereotypical low comic women. In Critylla’s opening prayer, she says:

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335 ἐὰν τις ἐπιβουλεύει τι ὁ σήματι κακὸν
τῶν γυναικῶν, ἢ ἐπικηρυκεύεται
Εὐριπίδη Μῆδος τ’ ἐπὶ βλάβη τινὶ
τῷ τῶν γυναικῶν, ἢ τυραννεῖν ἐπινοεῖ,
ἡ τὸν τύραννον συγκατάγειν, ἢ ταῖον
340 ὑποβαλλομένης κατείπευν, ἢ δούλη τινὸς
προσαγωγὸς οὐσ’ ἐνεργύλισεν τῷ δεσπότῃ,
ἡ πεπυμένης τις ἀγγελίας ψευδεῖς φέρει,
ἡ μοιχὸς ἐὰν τὶς ἐξαπατᾶ ψευδὴ λέγων
καὶ μὴ διδωσιν ἄν υπόσχηται ποτε,
345 ἢ δώρα τις διδωσι μοιχῶ γραυς γυνῆ,
ἡ καὶ δέχεται προδιδοῦσα ἐταίρα τῶν φίλον,
κεῖ τις κάτηλος ἢ κατικλίς τοῦ χούς
ἡ τῶν κοτυλῶν τὸ νόμισμα διαλυμαίνεται,
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tragedies (Austin and Olson 2004, 120.). Especially Agathon’s excuse for why he won’t go at 203-5 looks like it could be referencing the plot of a specific tragedy.
κακῶς ἀπολέσθαι τοὺτον αὐτὸν κῷκιαν
ἀράσθε (Thesmophoriazusae 335-50)

335 If anyone plots any evil against the women
or conspires with Euripides
or the Medes to do harm
to the women or thinks about being a tyrant
or restoring the tyrant or denounces

340 a woman bringing in a baby who's not hers, or if a slave,
acting as a procuress for someone, whispers to her master,
or if anyone sent as a messenger brings back false messages,
or if any adulterer deceives with false words
and does not give what he promised,

345 or if any old woman gives gifts to an adulterer,
or if a courtesan receives gifts while betraying her lover,
and if any inn-keeper or inn-keeperess debases
the standard measure of the cups,
pray that such a person and their household perish

350 wickedly.

The women’s priorities are standard low-comic tropes: they want to deceive their
husbands, have easy access to lovers, and drink a lot. When a second woman (Mica)
explains Euripides’ crime, however, it becomes clear that the women are not only low-
comic stereotypes, but also Euripidean stereotypes: 102

390 ποῦ δ’ οὐχὶ διαβέβλητον, ὁποιοτερ ἐμβραχυ
εἰσίν θεστὶ καὶ τραγῳδοὶ καὶ χοροῖ,
tὰς μοιχοτρόφους, τὰς ἀνδρεστρίας καλῶν,
tὰς οἰνοπίπτας, τὰς προδότιδας, τὰς λάλους,
tὰς οὐδὲν υγίες, τὰς μέγ’ ἀνδράσιν κακόν. (Thesmophoriazusae 390-4)

390 Where out of all the places in which there are
spectators and tragedies and choruses, has he not slandered us,
Calling us adulteresses, man-lovers,
wine-drinkers, betrayers, blabbers,
Unsanitary, a great evil for men?

This list reiterates Critylla’s prayer which had, in turn, pre-emptively confirmed the
truthfulness of Euripides’ stereotype. It also equates the low-comic stereotype with the

102 As Nelson 2016, 248 succinctly puts it: “The first half of the Women at the Thesmophoria
makes this point repeatedly, as the main focus of the humor is that Euripides is condemned for
portraying women as promiscuous, deceptive, wine-guzzlers—exactly the portrayal of women
that Aristophanes is currently engaged in.”
Euripidean low-tragic stereotype. The fact that Euripides slanders the women “where...there are spectators and tragedies and choruses” draws attention to the discrepancy between the tragic performance context of Euripides and the comic subject matter of his plays. The women at the Thesmophoria are in effect the embodiment of the Euripidean paradox of low tragedy: they are low because they conform to the low-comic stereotype of women but they are high because they are Euripidean and therefore tragic. This confluence of low comedy and Euripidean tragedy marks the ultimate compatibility of lowness and intellectualism in Aristophanes.

As the trial of Euripides ensues, the Euripidean women and Euripides’ relative offer paradigms of the different comic modes that could be used to mock women. Each represents one side of Euripides’ paradox: the relative, with his preference for satyr play and Euripides’ lame characters represents his low-comic half, and the women (despite their stereotypical low-brow depiction), represent Euripides’ intellectual side. In the trial, Mica offers jokes in the high, paratragic mode, while the relative offers jokes in the low-comic mode. To get Mica’s jokes, one needs a certain degree of familiarity with Euripidean tragedy. For example, the fact that when a woman drops a utensil, her husband exclaims, “for whom did the pot break?” (τῷ κατέσαν ἥ χύτρα, 403) makes little sense unless you are familiar with Euripides Stheneboia. The chorus react to Mica’s speech by exalting her as crafty (πολυπλοκωτέρας, 434), as one who speaks cleverly (δεινότερον, 435), who says just things (πάντα γὰρ λέγει δίκαια, 436), who scrutinizes ideas (ἰδέας ἐξήτασεν, 437), and invents manifold plots (ποικίλους λόγους

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103 At the opening of the comedy, Agathon’s depiction as a high-tragic poet with a predilection for writing tragedies about women suggests the double function of women in the comedy as both the height of tragic pretension, and the embodiment of low-brow comedy.

104 Mica’s speech also parodies Euripides’ Phoenix (Thesmo. 413, cf. Eur. Phoenix fr. 804.3), and other tragedies that we cannot now identify.
This praise of cleverness and inventiveness looks remarkably like the way in which Aristophanes praises his own high comedy elsewhere.

The relative’s defense of Euripides mocks women not with paratragedy, but with pure low comedy in a series of vignettes about the outrageous behaviors of women that Euripidean tragedy does not reveal to the husbands of Athens. The relative, pretending to be a wife, tells how, when she was just married, an old lover came to the house, so she told her husband that she had a stomach ache and needed to use the toilet. While her husband made her a remedy, she went off to sleep with her former lover. The explicit language and sexual and scatological theme render this version of the deceitful wife trope low rather than (para)tragic. The other stories the relative tells are also about adultery and supposititious babies which sound like typical comic plots and bear no resemblance to any extant Euripides.

Framed as an agón between Mica and the relative, then, these alternate methods of comedy – the paratragic and the low-comic – are established here as competing comic modes.

The Telephus parody

The first parody in the Thesmophoriazusae is of Euripides’ Telephus. Extended parody of this tragedy begins at line 688, but there have been hints of the Telephus, and of Aristophanes’ earlier parody of it in Acharnians, from the very beginning of the comedy. The comic logic of this is that Telephus is the play Euripides had in mind all

105 Because of the fragmentary state of the Telephus it is difficult to tell what is parody of the Telephus and what is only parody of the Acharnians or how the two are related. The scene in which Euripides and Agathon dress up the relative certainly looks like a parody of the scene in which Dicaeopolis borrows Euripidean costumes to dress up as Telephus, but it is unclear how closely related to the Telephus this scene is. Other earlier references to Telephus in Thesmophoriazusae include line 472, αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἐσμεν (“we are alone”), which recalls Dicaeopolis’ words at Acharnians 504 in the introduction to his defense speech (αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἐσμεν).
along as the model for his metatheatrical plan. In *Telephus*, the eponymous hero, wounded by Achilles when the Greeks attacked Mysia thinking it was Troy, infiltrated an assembly of Greeks disguised as a beggar to speak in defense of his own people and possibly of the Trojans. Similarly, Euripides, threatened with death, sends his relative disguised as a woman to infiltrate the women’s assembly and speak in his defense. From line 688, we see the relative bringing to fruition Euripides’ metatheatrical play. Though ostensibly being a tragic parody, the relative’s performance turns into a low-comic farce because the women conform to a comic, not a tragic stereotype. When the relative snatches Mica’s baby, he expects the act to work as it worked in the *Telephus*, where worry for the baby Orestes’ safety compelled the Greeks to let Telephus speak. In *Thesmophoriazusae*, however, the baby turns out to be a wine flask and its “death” results in a drink for Mica, so she does not try to save it (754-5). The parody turns Euripides’ *Telephus* into a low-comic farce that combines two themes of domestic low comedy: women doing anything for a drink, and suppositious babies. The suppositious baby theme is comically up-turned: Mica has snuck a suppositious wine flask into the Thesmophoria disguised as a baby, reversing the usual theme of disguising a baby as a household item.

The *agōn* offered us two models of how to do comedy: paratragedy and typical low-comic obscene humor and stock plots. This parody of the *Telephus* combines both elements, offering one model of how to do parody: turning tragedy into a low comedy. Since this mini *Telephus*-inspired drama appears to be the plan Euripides had from the

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106 Austin and Olson 2004, 197 suggest that the line is adapted from *Telephus* because of its appearance here and in *Acharnians.*

107 There is some paratragic language, though it is unclear how much is paratragic in tone and how much directly parodies the language of the *Telephus*. See Austin and Olson 2004, 243ff.

108 Cf. the story that the relative tells at 505 about a baby being snuck in in a pot.
start, it accomplishes further characterization of Euripides and Euripidean tragedy in the Thesmophoriazusae: the ease with which a Euripidean tragedy can be turned into a low comedy suggests that there is something innately comic and low about Euripides despite his intellectual pretensions. Euripides, as director-figure, can also be equated, to some extent, with Aristophanes himself, given that the relative’s performance could as easily be seen as a parody of Acharnians’ Telephus parody. The parody of Telephus in Acharnians also ends up as a representation of low comedy, and so we are encouraged to see Euripides as a second Aristophanes, combining as he does aspects of high comic parody and low-comic stock themes and stereotypes.\textsuperscript{109}

\textbf{Three paratragic escape attempts}

In the remainder of the comedy, the relative and Euripides perform a series of parodies in order to free the relative. Each presents a different approach to parody: the parody of Palamedes reveals the innately farcical nature of the tragedy by reducing its most intellectual moment to physical slapstick. The Helen parody tries something totally different, offering a purely intellectual parody, relying on intimate knowledge of the original production. The Andromeda parody is likewise played (mostly) straight by Euripides and his relative, but devolves into a low comedy because of the presence of Euripides’ Echo (an innately low character) and the audience, a Scythian archer. Each of the parodies comments of the problem of high poet-low spectator highlighted in the prologue. The Palamedes parody fails to garner an audience at all (a joke on the tragedy’s poor reception); Critylla (a spectator intimately familiar with Euripidean tragedy) fails to perceive the Helen parody because the humor is too obscure, even for her; and the Scythian fails to perceive the Andromeda parody because he is too stupid.

\textsuperscript{109} The parody of Telephus in Dicaeopolis’ makra rhesis in Acharnians characterizes the war with the Spartans as a Megarian farce, initiated by thefts of prostitutes (Acharnians 523-9).
Palamedes

When the relative has been secured and is guarded by Critylla, he begins to cast around for a Euripidean “salvation ploy” (μηχανή σωτηρίας, 765) to get the playwright to come and save him. The play he lands on is the Palamedes, a tragedy about a paradigmatically clever and inventive man, whose cleverness resulted in his downfall. Indeed, the name Palamedes seems to have been synonymous with cleverness: in the Frogs, Dionysus, on hearing Euripides’ advice to the city, exclaims, “that’s all well and good you clever-clogs Palamedes” (εὖ γ’, ὦ Παλάμηδες, ὦ σοφωτάτη φύσις, Frogs 1451). Palamedes, as the inventor of writing, is also a fitting image for Euripidean intellectualism since, again according to Frogs, Euripides was associated with bookishness and a literate audience. By just the title of the play, the relative indicates that he will attempt to use the Euripidean intellectualism and sophistication (which he failed to comprehend in the prologue) as the means of his salvation. In the parody the relative plays the role of Oiax, Palamedes’ brother, who uses his brother’s invention to write a message about Palamedes’ fate on oar blades, which he throws into the ocean in the hope that they will reach their father. Like Oiax, the relative plans to write on the oar blades and throw them (τὰς πλάτας ῥίψω γράφων, 770-1) but the lack of oar blades changes his plan: “what if I write on these votive tablets instead of oar blades and fling them around” (τί δ’ ἂν, εἰ ταῦτα τάγάλματ’ ἀντὶ τῶν πλατῶν γράφων διαρρίπτοιμι;, 773-4). The change from ῥίπτω to διαρρίπτω signals the change from tragic to comic,

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110 Palamedes used his clever inventions to uncover the madness feigned by Odysseus by which he hoped to avoid going to Troy. As a result Odysseus accused him of being a traitor to the Greek cause and planted evidence of gold he had received from the Trojans. When the Greeks discovered this, they stoned him to death. See Collard and Cropp 2008, 47-8.
111 He says it ironically, see chapter six.
112 Frogs 943, 1109-18, 1409.
113 In 774, the relative declares βέλτιον πολύ. Most commentators understand this comment to mean “much better…than having no oar-blades at all” (Austin and Olson 2004, 260). However, it
since the latter has a far more disorganized sense to it, and indeed is the word used in the *Wasps* prologue for throwing nuts out into the audience. As several commentators have noted, the relative uselessly throwing bits of wood around stage is farcical in and of itself, but it also reveals a proverbially clever Euripidean μηχανή σωτηρίας to be a scene more fitting to a low comedy. The parody fails to garner an audience, or even the attention of its own playwright. The relative puts this down to the tragedy's “frigidity” (ψυχρόν ὄντ’, 848), of which Euripides must be ashamed (αἰσχύνεται, 848). The badness of Euripides’ *Palamedes* stems from the ease with which it can be transformed into “bad” comedy: ψυχρός, as we saw in chapter two, is a word that could be used to critique easy “Megarian” humor.

**Helen**

The *Telephus* and *Palamedes* parodies turned high Euripidean tragedy into low-comic farces, but the parody of the *Helen* contains no low comedy at all. There is almost no obscenity, no opportunity for physical comedy, and no stock comic routines. The humor comes instead from the audience’s (Critylla’s) failure to perceive the parody because the original Euripidean humor has been removed and the tragedy “re-tragified.” In the original *Helen* lines 437-59, where Menelaus meets an old woman at the palace gates, were notoriously untragic, even featuring some physical slapstick

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114 *Wasps* 59.
115 See above, chapter two.
116 Nelson 2016, 249: “in the parodies of the Helen and Andromeda, the “tragedy” is played straight, and the humor comes from the refusal of Aristophanes’ comic characters to buy into the ‘serious’ scene.”
117 Just the one slightly obscene slip in the opening lines of the parody, where the relative refers to μελανοσυρμαίον λεών (857), meaning “dark and fond of purges, but sounding like it might also mean “with black trailing robes”.
118 Nelson 2016 also argues that Aristophanes makes Euripidean plays into “proper tragedies” (251), though she does not mention this particular scene. She argues rather that Aristophanes removes the happy ending/ successful rescue.
action when the old woman hits Menelaus. When Euripides enters as Menelaus, we may expect a parody of this scene, but instead Euripides uses the words of Teucer to ask, “who holds the power of these mighty walls?” (τίς τῶν ἐρμηνῶν δωμάτων ἔχει κράτος; Helen 68, Thesmophoriazusae 871). He passes over the argument with the old woman, and skips straight to Helen 460, originally spoken by the old woman, here replaced by the relative playing Helen. This parody pointedly re-tragifies Euripides. The humor of this passage is intellectual not only because it removes the low-comic humor from an original Euripidean composition, but also because the audience would need to be intimately familiar with the plot of Helen, and specific lines from it remembered in context, in order to get the joke. The parody ultimately fails and it fails for two reasons: first because the low-comic buffoon, the relative, fails to play his high-brow tragic role convincingly. Critylla calls him a πανούργος (858, 893) indicating that she knows he is the comic buffoon and not the tragic maiden. It also fails because Critylla does not perceive that a comic parody is happening, constantly correcting the actors with reference to “reality.” For example, she assumes that the relative is talking about the dead general Proteas instead of Helen’s Egyptian king Proteus (ironically also dead).

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119 Euripides Helen esp. 437-459. E.g. at 445 Menelaus says ἂ: μὴ προσέλει χείρας μηδὲ ὠθεὶ βίᾳ (“Ah don’t put your hand on me or push me force”) suggesting that the old woman does exactly this. And she responds (446) τεῖϑη γὰρ οὐδὲν ὤν λέγω, σὺ δ’ αἰτιος (“but you’re not listening to me, so it’s your fault”) cf. 452 where she threatens to push him again. She also insults Menelaus at 454 and 458. 120 At Thesmophoriazusae. 895-6, Aristophanes reminds his audience of the Helen scene, but does not play it out. 121 See Nieddu 2004 on the precise mechanisms of the parody. He emphasizes that unlike other moments of paratragedy in Aristophanes, the Helen parody of Thesmophoriazusae “works in complete dependence on the model, resorting to it with extreme precision, not only in the evocation of the dramatic action but also by repeating, whenever possible, the exact words pronounced by the characters” (337). 122 Similar comments are made at Thesmophoriazusae 861; 879-80; 887-8; 897-8.
Andromeda

Euripides’ Andromeda, the last tragedy to be parodied, was also a Euripidean escape play, originally performed alongside the Helen in 410 (the year before Thesmophoriazusae). Like the Helen parody it is announced to the audience (1010-12) and features Euripides in the role of hero (Perseus) rescuing the relative playing the damsel in distress Andromeda. It is also played to an audience (a Scythian archer) who, like Critylla, refuses to engage in the tragic illusion. Much of the scene’s humor is generated from this. The relative and Euripides attempt a straight parody as they had done with the Helen, but the low-comic nature of the audience (the Scythian) and the innate lowness of Euripidean comedy (illustrated by Echo) combine to render the parody a failed escape attempt, and a failed attempt at high comedy.

In the parody of the Andromeda the relative adapts the Euripidean original to fit his situation much more closely than he did in the Helen. For example, he asks how he might escape from the Scythian (1017, 1026), he wants to go home to his wife (1020-1), and he mentions Euripides’ shaving and dressing him up (1043-6). There is also a joke about the contemporary Glauces, mocked elsewhere as a glutton, who is called out as the sea-monster that is going to eat Andromeda (1033). But like in the Helen parody, there is, in “Andromeda’s” monody, no obscenity or physical humor and the relative sticks close to the original script.123 We have been prepared by the Helen parody to expect the appearance of Euripides as Perseus to attempt the rescue. But instead an old lady wanders onto the stage, announcing that she is “Echo, the mocking imitator of words, the same who last year, in this same place, also competed for Euripides” (Ἡχῷ λόγων ἀντωδὸς ἑπικοκκάστρια ἣπερ πέρυσιν ἐν τῷ δὲ ταύτῳ χωρίῳ Εὐριπίδη καῦτη

123 See Austin and Olson 2004, 313ff.
Echo, we are supposed to imagine, is a genuine Euripidean creation, left behind after the performance of *Andromeda*. The relative gets through three of Echo’s repetitions, clearly originally intended to heighten the pathos of Andromeda’s suffering by repeating her lamentations, before he begins to find this novel Euripidean invention too annoying and the parody takes a downward turn. Repetition itself, as we saw in chapter one, was called by Plato “that vulgar ploy of the comedians” (τὸ τῶν κωμῳδῶν φορτικὸν πρᾶγμα, *Phaedrus* 236c), and so staging the Euripidean embodiment of repetition as a representation of genuine Euripidean dramaturgy has the effect of suggesting once again that Euripides is naturally suited to being a low poet.

Because repetition is more suited to low comedy, Echo’s appearance necessarily results in the parody descending into this mode, as she repeats the ever more aggressive insults of the relative. When the Scythian archer returns to the stage, a scene of low comedy divorced entirely from the *Andromeda* parody occurs, in which Echo repeats the Pidgeon Greek of the archer as he chases her voice (and her at 1096). The scene establishes the archer as a low-comic character and prepares the audience for the low-comic scenario that will eventually fool him. It also suggests that he is the wrong audience for a high-tragic parody and we expect Euripides’ parodic rescue attempt to fail.

When Euripides comes back on stage and the *Andromeda* parody restarts, it is once again played straight like the *Helen* parody. There is a similar play on mythic vs. contemporary names (the Gorgan is mistaken by the archer for Gorgo at 1103-4 just as

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124 Cf. *Clouds* 553-6 where Aristophanes complains about a drunken old lady from a parody of the Andromeda myth in a Phrynichus play. Some scholars have argued that Echo was Euripides disguised as Echo (e.g. Zeitlin 1981, 316), but I agree rather with Farmer 2017, 184-5 that she is her own character. The argument for this is twofold: first, the audience has already (briefly) seen Euripides dressed as Perseus, as indicated by the relative’s words at 1011; second, since Echo is clearly on-stage at 1096, and Euripides at 1098, the actor would have to have a very inconvenient, quick costume-change.

125 On Echo as an embodiment of repetition (and thus secondariness) see Farmer 2017, 186-7.
Proteus was understood to be Proteas by Critylla at 875-6), and the archer does not catch on that Euripides is in on the trick since he feels the need to explain that the relative is not a παρθένος, but an old man, a thief, and a πανούργος (1111-12).

Euripides does not attempt to incorporate the archer into the play as he had done with Critylla, but he continues in a paratragic tone despite the archer’s increasing obscenities. The archer assumes that, because Euripides keeps saying he is in love with the relative, he wants to bugger him (1119-20; 1123-4). Euripides’ infamously erotic tragedy has been rendered by the Scythian a comedy about a man wanting to have sex with another man dressed up as a woman and tied to a plank.126 The transformation of erotic tragedy into low-brow obscenity recalls the relative’s reaction to Agathon’s sensual tragedy in the opening of the *Thesmophoriazusae*. It points to a kinship between the relative and the archer: the archer is the perfect audience for the kind of low comedy associated with the relative and which, from the beginning, we have expected the relative to offer. In the *Andromeda* parody it is the low tastes of the audience which transform the high-comic parody into low-comic farce and compel Euripides to direct a real low comedy. By representing the external theater audience as the stupid Scythian on stage, Aristophanes appears to be mocking the audience for their stupidity and bad taste. But the ultimate success of the low-comic routine that follows vindicates the low tastes imputed to the audience.

**The low comic escape attempt**

Euripides realizes that there is no way the barbarian archer will buy into his (para)tragic scheme and in this vein he says:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{αἰαῖ·} \; \text{τί δράσω; πρός τίνας στρεφθώ λόγους;} \\
\text{ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ἀν <ἐν>δέξαιτο βάρβαρος φύσις;} \\
1130 \; \text{σκαιοῖσι γάρ τοι καὶνά προσφέρων σοφὰ}
\end{align*}
\]

126 *Frogs* 51-4
μάτην ἀναλίσκοις ἄν. ἀλλʼ ἄλλην τίνα
tούτῳ πρέπουσαν μηχανήν προσοιστέον. (1128-32)

Alas, what shall I do? To what words can I turn?

But his barbarian nature could not understand.
If one offers clever new things to stupid people
time is wasted in vain. But some other
device must be brought on stage, more fitting for this.

As Hubbard notes on this passage, the remark sounds like something Aristophanes
would say, complaining about how a stupid audience cannot understand his clever new
type of comedy. It is verbal parody (λόγους) that Euripides says the barbarian cannot
understand, suggesting that a more physical μηχανή is needed. The change from
singular φύσις to plural σκαιοῖσιν in line 1130 is due to the fact that this line is cited from
Euripides’ Medea (298). It also be functions, however, to explicitly implicate the theater
audience in the archer’s bad spectatorship and low tastes. When Euripides says that a
trick must be brought on stage, more fitting τούτῳ, the lack of stated referent for τούτῳ
again leaves it ambiguous as to whether Euripides means the archer or, perhaps τῷ
θέατρον. By pointing to the audience at large here, Aristophanes indicates that his final
escape ploy will be one suited to the comic audience. and thus more fitting for the comic
genre.

Euripides disguises himself as a procuress and comes on stage with an aulos-
player and a dancer. He distracts the Scythian by getting the dancer to seduce him, and
while she does so, Euripides finally frees his relative. Scholarship on this scene tends to
view it as indicative of comedy’s victory over tragedy, or read it as Aristophanes getting
the last laugh over his tragic rival.127 As a stereotypical scene of low comedy, I read it as
a vindication of the low mode because it has succeeded where tragic parody failed. The
humor of the scene is physical and sexual, and the character Euripides imitates is a low-

comic woman, rather than one of his tragic heroes. Farmer has recently argued that the scene demonstrates comedy’s ability to innovate where tragedy cannot. However, it is likely that the prostitute-distraction scene was a traditional stock scene in low comedy. It therefore suggests that whilst novelty (here indicated by Euripidean innovation and Aristophanic parody of it) is all well and good, the same old low-comic jokes, scenes, and characters that people have seen time and again are a generic necessity. In *Thesmophoriazusae* this generic necessity is shown to come from the audience. As in the *Wasps* the stupidity that Aristophanes mocks his audience for is clearly – when one considers the comedy as a whole – a tongue-in-cheek accusation because Aristophanes knows that his audience will get the *Helen* and *Andromeda* parodies unlike their on-stage counterparts. It is not the audience’s stupidity that really necessitates low comedy, but rather the fact that the audience are a comic audience with expectations of seeing that genre’s defining and traditional routines and characters.

**Conclusion**

In both the *Lysistrata* and the *Thesmophoriazusae* the relationship between the high- and the low-comic modes is construed as a relationship between a high-comic director figure (Lysistrata and Euripides) and her/his acting troupe and audience respectively, each of which are configured as low. Lysistrata’s acting troupe was a group of stereotypical low-comic women. Lysistrata’s high-comic plan of words and no action (no sex) ironically transforms the πρᾶγμα of her play-within-the-play from stopping the war to dealing with the comic costume erections of Greece’s men. It is only the low comedy of a Megarian prostitute that can successfully bring about resolution. In *Thesmophoriazusae* Euripides must also make do with a low-comic actor to perform his paratragedy, but it is ultimately the audiences of these paratragedies that compel him to turn to the low. By

figuring these essential parts of the comic performance as low-brow (there can be no comedy without actors and audience), Aristophanes highlights the generic necessity of the low. But in both comedies he figures himself as a director who can use the resources of high and low: the paradoxical Lysistrata, a woman with political ambition (but a woman nonetheless), and Euripides, the playwright of a dual high-low tragedy.
Chapter 6: Frogs

Introduction

Frogs is Aristophanes’ most explicit expression of his high-low poetics. The comedy is ostensibly split down the middle by the dichotomy, with a farcical first half and an intellectually-focused tragic contest in its second half. Its dual chorus seems to represent in miniature the structure of the play, opposing the traditional theriomorphic frog chorus and the modern political moralizing of the mystic initiates. Many interpreters of Frogs have wrangled with the question of the comedy’s coherence. What do the obscenity, stock characters, and old jokes of the first half have to do with the prize-winning political parabases and the tragic ἀγῶν of the second half? Inspired by Segal’s seminal 1961 essay “The character and cults of Dionysus and the unity of the Frogs,” some view the two halves of the play as unified by a development in Dionysus’ character from a “timorous and almost despicable figure” to the “arbiter of a contest of the gravest consequences.”¹ Such interpretations inevitably result in a negative assessment of Frogs first half: it is only there to demonstrate a development into something better: a better Dionysus, or, as Hubbard sees it, a better, more serious, and more useful form of

¹ Segal 1961, 207-8 “Whereas in the earlier plays the magical transformations which succeed the parabasis are the logical (or illogical) extensions of the wish of the protagonist and thus provide a strong unifying theme, the two parts of Frogs are somewhat loosely joined...The presence of Dionysus alone, therefore, unites the two parts of the play.” Citations from 208. See also e.g. Reckford 1987, 410-12; 424 (though he assigns a more positive role to traditional comedy as a revitalizing comic force); Hubbard 1991, 200; Habash 2002. Others have seen the development in Dionysus’ character as a progression from hedonistic individual to polis-minded dramatic divinity, e.g. Lada-Richards 1999, 218-20. Against such an interpretation see Halliwell 2011, 98-99, 129-30; Rosen 2004. Other attempts to link the two halves of the comedy include Dobrov 2001, 133-56, who argues that we ought to see the first half of Frogs as a parody of Euripides’ Perithous, thus connecting it to the tragic contest in the second half of the play. Biles 2011, 212, 216-18 connects the tragic ἀγῶν of the second half to agonistic themes in the first, arguing that “rather than marking a shift in overall conception, the contest of Euripides and Aeschylus is a natural, if surprising, elaboration of ideas established in the first half of the play.”
comedy. I argue in this chapter that the low comedy of *Frogs'* first half should be seen as an essential foundation for the second half, which demonstrates how low comedy can be put to use in a high-brow scenario. Indeed, the central argument of this chapter, is that *Frogs* is a metatheatrical representation of the ability of high comedy to do low comedy better than low-comic poets. As such, the low comedy of *Frogs* is just as important as its high comedy. Like me, Hubbard also argues that *Frogs* represents the double high-low poetics of Aristophanic comedy but he supposes that the victory of Aeschylus places the emphasis on the high end of the dichotomy, with its moralism, elitism, and idealism, only conceding the necessity of comedy’s entertaining, farcical side to appease the democratic masses.

I offer a reassessment of this conclusion – common among many scholars of the *Frogs* – by demonstrating that in the supposedly high-brow tragic *agōn* between Euripides and Aeschylus, Aeschylus employs the techniques of low comedy in order to out-low Euripides. I thus question the assumption of many scholars that Aeschylus is a rather boring and pompous character.

The contest between Euripides and Aeschylus is the culmination of a series of *agōnes* between high and low contestants. In the prologue, Aristophanes sets up the *Frogs* as a high comedy in competition with the low comedy of his rival in the *Lenaea* of 405, Phrynichus. In the parodos Dionysus, who claimed in the prologue to be a high-

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2 Hubbard 1991, 200 “The overall movement of the play progresses from a farcical first half with a weak and uncertain Dionysus to a more serious second half, in which Dionysus assumes the role of judge and mediator.” He further argues that the *Frogs*’ atypical structure makes a point about the relation of the comic and the serious – that the serious must be approached through the comic (201). Segal 1961, 229 makes a similar observation. Such an interpretation, however still over-values the “serious” aspect of *Frogs*, with the farcical comedy a mere means to an end. See also 203 on the double chorus: “Thus each chorus [the “low” frog chorus and the “high” chorus of mystai] initiates an important register of comic meaning, one more democratic and commonplace, with an accent on pure entertainment value, the other more elitist and sophos, using Comedy as a vehicle to articulate a higher agenda.”


4 Wright 2012, 15 is representative of modern scholarly opinion on Aeschylus when he writes that he “appears as a pompous old bore, who professes to know about life but has never even had a girlfriend.”
brow spectator, competes against the chorus of frogs, whose theriomorphic identity render them an embodiment of low comedy. Lastly there is the tragic contest. In the epirrhematic agōn that precedes it, Aeschylus presents himself as having many of the features consonant with Aristophanic high comedy, and Euripides shows many of the qualities of Aristophanic low comedy. As such, the contest can be viewed as an internal metatheatrical representation of the contest at the Lenaea of 405 as Aristophanes figures it in the prologue. This is made explicit at several moments. As Biles argues, Aeschylus is assimilated to Aristophanes' parabatic persona in the epirrhematic agōn, and during the contest, Aeschylus appropriates elements of Phrynichus' Muses, which he uses to out-low the low-brow Euripides.

The ending of Frogs has proved to be one of the most contentious issues in scholarship on the comedy. Even though Aeschylus obviously defeats Euripides in poetic terms, his victory is not enough to convince Dionysus, who introduces the additional criterion of political advice. Many scholars have read this moment as an assertion of the necessity of politics to comedy, and have viewed Aeschylus' political advice as a reflection of Aristophanes' own beliefs. Reading along these lines, one would conclude that politics, for Aristophanes, must be the determining criterion in judging comedy. I argue, however, that Dionysus does not choose Aeschylus for his political views. After all, he dismisses Aeschylus' advice in much the same terms as he dismisses the bizarre advice of Euripides. Rather, with scholars such as Rosen and Halliwell, I view the finale of Frogs as a comic exploration of potential different criteria for judging dramatic performance. I suggest, however, that Aristophanes does, in the end, tell us the measure by which a good (and winning) comedy might be determined: a good comedy is that which the audience approves of. This in itself is a comic and self-serving

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conclusion. In the prologue, Aristophanes described the audience as an audience who enjoy low comedy. At the end, Aeschylus’ victory is attributed to audience preference (1475). And if the audience are said to have chosen Aeschylus, the high-brow poet who out-lowed the low Euripides, then surely they must also chose Aristophanes, the high comic poet who out-lowed the low-comic Phrynichus.

The prologue

I begin this chapter by analyzing the low-comic elements of Frogs’ first 673 lines, demonstrating that Aristophanes imbues the traditional characters and routines with a metatheatrical self-awareness: he points out to the audience that he is doing low comedy, and that he is doing so self-consciously. Low comedy in Frogs’ first half is explicitly assigned a chronological dimension: it is the old style of comedy, and this sense of oldness is embodied by the traditional-style theriomorphic chorus of frogs.

It is not a new observation to state that Frogs’ first half consists in stock, traditional, low-comic scenes, themes, characters, and jokes. Baier summarizes, for example: “Vielmehr haben sich Dionysos und Xanthias verkleidet, um eine kleine ‘Komödie’ aufzuführen, die ihnen den Weg in die Unterwelt erleichtern soll. Sie befleißigen sich einer Komik, wie sie besonders für die vorliterarische Bühne prägend ist.” 6 Baier goes on to claim, however that the prologue does not offer any relevant information about the comedy to the audience, but it is done purely for its own sake (“ist reiner Selbstzweck”). 7 With this statement, I disagree. The prologue establishes the central importance of low comedy as a comic mode in the Frogs and points us, crucially,

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7 Baier 2002, 192.
to Aristophanes’ co-competitor in the Lenaea of 405, Phrynichus, as a paradigmatically low-comic poet.

As Baier does correctly note, the Frogs prologue opens with a metatheatrically inflected mini-comedy, indicated by Dionysus’ Heracles costume. The joke of the prologue is also highly metatheatrical: it is a comic praeteritio that devalues low-comic jokes, but does so by telling them:

Ξανθίας Ἐἴπω τι τῶν εἰωθότων, ὡ δέσποτα, ἐφ’ οίς ἄει γελώσιν οἱ θεώμενοι;

Διόνυσος νὴ τὸν Δί’ ὁ τί βούλει γε, πλὴν “πτεζομαί,” τοῦτο δὲ φύλαξαι· πᾶνυ γάρ ἔστ’ ἥδη χολῆ.

5 Ξα. μηδ’ ἔτερον ἀστεῖον τί;

Δι. πλὴν γ’ “ὡς θλίβομαι.”

Ξα. τί δαί; τὸ πάνυ γέλοιον εἴπω;

Δι. νὴ Δία θαρρῶν γε· μόνον ἐκείν ὑπὸς μὴ ἑρεῖς—

Ξα. τὸ τί;

Δι. μεταβαλλόμενος τὰνάφορον ὁτι χεζητίς.

Ξα. μηδ’ ὅτι τοσοῦτον ἄχθος ἐπ’ ἐμαυτῷ φέρων,

10 εἰ μὴ καθαρίσῃς τις, ἀποταρδήσουμαι;

Δι. μὴ δῆθ’, ἱκετεύω, πλὴν γ’ ὅταν μέλλω ἐξεμεῖν.

Ξα. τὶ δῆτ’ ἐδει με ταῦτα τὰ σκέυη φέρειν, εἴπερ ποιήσω μηδὲν ὕπτερη Φρύνιχος εἰώθε ποιεῖν; καὶ Λύκις κάμειψιας

Ξα. σκεύη φέρουσα ἑκάστοτ’ ἐν κωμῳδίᾳ.

Δι. μὴ νυν ποιῆσῃς· ὑς ἐγὼ θεώμενος,

Ξα. τὸν τούτων τῶν σοφισμάτων ἰδω, πλεῖν ἢ ’νιαυτῷ πρεσβύτερος ἀπέρχομαι.

Ξα. ὃ τρίσκακοδαιμόν ἄρ’ ὁ τράχηλος οὕτως, ὅτι θλίβεται μὲν, τὸ δὲ γέλοιον οὐκ ἔρει. (Frogs 1-20)

Xanthias: Shall I tell one of the usual jokes, master, that the spectators always laugh at?

Dionysus: Yes, by Zeus, tell any one you want, except “I’m being squashed.” Watch out for that one, it really makes me mad.

5 Ξα: What about another witty one?

Δι: Any, except “how chafing it is!”

Ξα: Ok, so can I say the really funny one?

Δι: Yes by Zeus, go right ahead, only don’t say...

Ξα: What?

Δι: The one where you shift the weight onto the other shoulder and

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See also Farmer 2017, 3.
say you need to shit.

Xa: What about the one where I say I’m carrying such a load on my back that if someone doesn’t take it off me I’m going to let rip a fart?

Di: Please not that one, not unless I’m already about to barf.

Xa: Why do I have to carry all this baggage if I can’t even do any of the jokes Phrynichus usually does? Lycis and Ameipsias do baggage-carrying scenes in every one of their comedies too.

Di: Just don’t do it. Whenever I go to the theater and see one of these “clever” routines, I start aging on the spot.

Xa: Thrice unlucky, this poor neck of mine, that it is chafing so and can’t tell a joke about it!

Several things characterize these jokes as low-comic humor: first, they are scatologically obscene and the obscenity stems from the physical exertion of carrying luggage. Such jokes are also characterized as “the usual” (τῶν εἰςβότων, 1), meaning that they are old and often repeated – a point also made by the reference to Phrynichus, Lycis, and Ameipsias, who all (apparently) had baggage-carrying scenes accompanied by these jokes in their plays. In response to Xanthias’ wish to do Phrynichean comedy, Dionysus exclaims “whenever I’m in the theater and I see one of those ‘clever tricks’ I leave a year older!” (ὡς ἐγὼ θεώμενος, ὅταν τι τούτων τῶν σοφισμάτων ἴδω, πλεῖν ἢ νιαυτῷ πρεσβύτερος ἀπέρχομαι, 17). Low comedy, complains Dionysus, literally makes him age. This remark hints at the perceived oldness of low comedy – it is so old that it makes Dionysus feel old just watching it. Finally, scatological baggage-carrying jokes are the ones that “the spectators always laugh at” (ἐφ’ οἷς ἀεὶ γελῶσιν οἱ θεώμενοι, 2), and laughter, as we saw in part one, is always associated with low-comic humor. The

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9 On physical baggage-carrying comedy see chapter two. The initial jokes mentioned by Dionysus are obscene only by innuendo. But as the scene develops, the scatological reference is made explicit (ἀποπαρδήσομαι, 10).

10 On Aristophanes’ rivalry with Phrynichus, see also Wright 2012, 92-3.

11 Wright 2012, 95 ponders whether “it is fanciful to suggest that the very idea of setting a play in the underworld, among the spirits of the dead, automatically carries connotations of the antiquated and out-of-date.”
The irony of this opening routine goes beyond the praeteritio. The description of Dionysus’ get-up (46-7) makes it clear that in the prologue the audience would be able to see both the typical Dionysian costume (κροκωτός, a saffron gown, and κόθορνος, a women’s shoe), and the Heraclean disguise he is wearing on top (λεοντῆ, the lion’s skin, and ρόπαλον, a club). The figure would, therefore, be immediately recognizable as Dionysus dressed up as Heracles. On the comic stage, wearing the costume of a mighty hero over women’s clothing, the figure would not only be a recognizable Dionysus, but the low-comic figure of the cowardly Dionysus, disguised as the low-comic figure of the hungry Heracles. That this traditional stock figure is the one who claims to despise low-comic jokes, is ironic enough, but it is also the case that scatological humor was the particular purview of the cowardly Dionysus. The opening of Frogs, then, presents a traditional stock comic character dressed up as a second stock character, banning his slave from telling the exact kind of jokes that were associated with his persona, which his slave goes on to tell regardless, and which he is guilty of as the comedy progresses.

Dionysus’ professed disdain for low comedy looks very much like Aristophanes’ own (always ironic) dismissal of τὸ φορτικόν. The ironic σοφισμάτων of line 17

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12 This is the usual point made in e.g. Hubbard 1991, 201; Slater 2002, 184, Halliwell 2011, 100-1; Griffith 2013, 19-20.
13 For another interpretation of this costume see Lada-Richards 1999, 18-21.
14 There is a tendency among scholars to downplay the typicality of the low Dionysus here presented, e.g. Segal 1961, 210-1; Biles 2011, 217-219; Dobrov 2001, 145; and Slater 2002, 184.
15 Epicharmus fr. 16 is an early example of Dionysus defecating in comedy, presumably from fear. In Frogs too, Dionysus farts excessively during his mini-agon with the frogs (237, 255), and defecates from fear twice afterwards at 308 and 479.
16 Biles 2011, 213 argues that the praeteritio represents the transformation of physical comedy into clever verbal comedy (“comic ergon becomes comic logos”). This assertion, however, ignores the fact that there was almost certainly physical comedy on stage to accompany Dionysus’ praeteritio; when Xanthis tells the forbidden jokes, too, he probably performs the accompanying physical actions.
17 Biles 2011, 214 makes a similar point, though he does not account for the irony of putting it in the mouth of a cowardly Dionysus. See also Halliwell 2011, 100-1.
underscores this: vulgar baggage-carrying jokes are not really σοφίσματα, but real σοφίσματα are presumably what Dionysus, like Aristophanes, claims to prefer. That Aristophanes begins his comedy with this statement of poetic preference, usually reserved for parabases, and that he so strongly indicates the irony of it by putting it in the mouth of a traditional low-comic character, tells the audience (already framed as an audience who like low comedy) that low comedy is going to be a major theme in the *Frogs*.

It is instructive that, in the very opening of the comedy, Aristophanes points out his co-competitor at the Lenaea, Phrynichus, as a model of the low-comic poet. He names two other comic poets, Lycis and Ameipsias, but it is clear that Phrynichus is the main target of the joke – his name is positioned alone at the end of the line (13), and he alone is the subject of εἴωθε ποιεῖν. Lycis and Ameipsias are tagged on at the end as an afterthought, and as a demonstration of Phrynichus’ lack of originality. The very fact that he was a co-competitor also suggests that Phrynichus, rather than all three, is the main butt of the joke. Baier among others takes the reference to Phrynichus as essentially meaningless, stating “wichtig ist nur das Geplänkel, die Form, der Inhalt ist bedeutungslos.” However, such a pointed reference to one of his competing rivals in the opening lines of *Frogs* must be more than meaningless banter. At the very least it is a competitive allegation, and indeed I would argue that it is rather more than that. It marks for the audience that *Frogs* is going to engage with Phrynichus and that part of the engagement may focalize around the issue of low comedy. According to the scholiast on this passage, Phrynichus had a reputation as a low-comic poet:

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18 Baier 2002, 192. He refers to the mockery as “höchstwahrscheinlich...ein Stilmittel” (191-2) and suggests that Phrynichus is mentioned mostly for the sake of a wordplay on ποιεῖν as “tun” and ποιεῖν as “dichten” which leads to Phrynichus’ poetry being equated with the action of πέρδεσθαι.
Phrynichus: Didymus says that Aristophanes is now referring to the comic poet Phrynichus as one who constantly does low-brow skits in his comedies. He is the son of Eunomides. He is also mocked as being a foreigner and for the baseness of his comedy and for saying things that belong to others and as being bad at meter. There are also three other men called Phrynichus. (Phrynichus the comic poet did none of these things in what survives. They are likely to be found in his lost works).

As I argue in chapter one, though the scholiast himself cannot identify any of these characteristics of low-brow comedy in the works of Phrynichus that he has at his disposal, his source, the first century BCE-CE grammarian Didymus must have had more material to work with because he identifies aspects of Phrynichus’ work that cannot simply be inferred from the *Frogs*. Harvey has recently attempted to rescue Phrynichus’ reputation from the mockery of his contemporaries, concluding “so much for the ancient verdicts on Phrynichos, unanimously derogatory. They are worthless. All of them are jokes.” However, the accusation that Phrynichus used the same old stock baggage-carrying scenes (possibly stolen from Lycis and/or Ameipsias?) need not be accurate to be meaningful. Didymus’ assessment of Phrynichus does not necessarily reflect the reality of Phrynichean comedy, but it almost certainly reflects to some degree his reputation in the fifth century.

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19 See chapter one. On Phrynichus in the scholia see Chantry 2001.
20 Harvey 2000, 113. He claims that the accusation that Phrynichus always does the same old jokes is just standard comic abuse, as is the accusation of plagiarism. The accusation of being bad at meter is, according to Harvey, probably conservative critics unable to appreciate his metrical innovations (108-13).
21 There is some evidence of attention to traditional comic themes in the titles and fragments of Phrynichus. His *Cronus*, on which Didymus wrote a commentary, was a mythological burlesque that featured Dionysus and perhaps some Megarian action if fr. 1062 does belong to it. His *Hermit*, which competed against Aristophanes’ *Birds*, mentions “the light-feeding Heracles” (fr. 24), indicating the hungry Heracles theme. His *Herb-Collectors* (Ποάστριαι) has a female working-class chorus and a woman dressing up as a slave. He also wrote a play entitled *Satyrs* which may have contained some of the mythological burlesque associated with satyr plays.
In *Frogs*, a comedy that begins by highlighting the thematic importance of comedy’s low mode, it is Phrynichus whom Aristophanes cites as an example of a repetitive, plagiarizing, stock-scene using paradigmatic low-comic poet. I discuss the importance of Phrynichus for the *Frogs* further below. For now it suffices to highlight that there is some meaningful reason for Aristophanes to call him out in the prologue.

**The cowardly Dionysus and the hungry Heracles**

Dionysus is characterized from the outset as the traditional low-comic cowardly Dionysus. Segal, however, argues that “Aristophanes is not merely reproducing the stock comic Dionysus, for his is a god with a *pothos* for Euripides, an intellectual seeking a ποιητήν δεξίον.” While it is true that Aristophanes has added an intellectual, and probably self-referential twist to the conventional figure, it is also the case that Dionysus’ Euripides-obsession remains consistent with other contemporary representations of the traditional cowardly Dionysus. This can be shown by comparing the portrayal of Dionysus in the opening 160 lines of *Frogs* to his characterization in Cratinus’ *Dionysalexandros* and Phrynichus’ *Cronos*, both of which play around with the god’s traditional depiction as a coward. In Phrynichus’ *Cronos* fr.10, someone addresses Dionysus in the following way:

ἀγαμαι, Διονῦ, σου στόματος, ὡς σεσέλλισαι † κεκομμένα πολλάκις (Phrynichus fr. 10)

I am amazed, Dionysus, at the bragging that comes out of your mouth… so often

The word used of Dionysus’ bragging, σελλίζομαι, was associated with a man named Aeschines. He was given the nickname ὁ Σέλλος (“son of brag) because he bragged

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24 Also mentioned at *Wasps* 459, 1220.
(ἀλαζών) and pretended to be rich when he was in fact very poor. In this Cronos fragment Dionysus too may be making an unfounded boast about wealth. It is possible that the troublesome κεκομμένα conceals a reference to money. If Dionysus could be presented as bragging not just about martial feats he is unable to accomplish, but also about other unfounded attributes, the boast about his superior theatrical taste could be understood similarly by an ancient audience: he says he is a better spectator with better taste, but really he can’t help but fall for the “usual jokes” just like everyone else.

In Cratinus’ Dionysalexandros, Dionysus-as-coward is paired with a second comic Dionysus stereotype: Dionysus-as-lusty-lover unable to get the girl (because of his cowardliness). Dionysus’ pothos for Euripides in the Frogs is a humorous re-working of the traditional theme of Dionysus in love with someone he shouldn’t be. Indeed, in the Frogs Heracles assumes that “Dionysus in love” is the unfolding plot line, when he asks if his pothos is for a woman, a boy, or a man. Aristophanes’ Dionysus, then, has high-brow pretensions in his love for Euripides, but this pretension is framed within the existing and traditional sphere of low-comic humor about Dionysus.

The Heracles that Dionysus meets is likewise the traditional hungry Heracles that Aristophanes so deplores in Peace and Wasps. Later in Frogs, when we hear how...

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25 Hesychius ad loc. Hesychius and Photius (507.8-10) in fact seem to derive the verb from Aeschines, suggesting that, at least in its early usage, it maintained the particular valence of “acting like Aeschines” i.e. pretending to be rich when you are poor. In the fifth century the verb appears only in this Phrynichus fragment. Perhaps indicating that it was a new coinage of Phrynichus.

26 I.e. κεκομμένα νομίσματα. This becomes all the more likely if Storey 2011c, 55 is correct to link PCG VIII 1062 to this play, in which Rhea complains about Cronos selling their children in Megara for food. On the text see Stamma 2014, 94-8.

27 From the hypothesis and fr. 45 we learn that Dionysus transforms himself into a ram to avoid detection. Fr. 41 also refers to someone with their teeth set on edge (ἡμώδεις…τοὺς προσθίους ὀδόντας), probably from fear and likely Dionysus (Storey 2011a, 286-7).

28 He assumes the man must be Cleisthenes, who had a reputation as a passive homosexual (Frogs 56-7).

29 Peace 741; Wasps 60. See also Birds 1574-1692. Padilla 1992, 361 argues against the idea that Heracles is a common stereotype suggesting rather that he is an aristocratic emblem.
Heracles treated the innkeepers on his last underworld visit, the character’s typical rapacious appetite is highlighted. The comic hunger of Heracles is also why Dionysus must explain his pothos for Euripides in terms of pea-soup (ἠδὴ ποτ’ ἐπεθύμησας ἔξαιφνης ἔτνους; 62). Wright points to the metaphorical significance of this line: pea-soup is found in a fragment of Callias as a metaphor for traditional comedy, and Dionysus’ deployment of it here, Wright argues, points to the same. Pea-soup, along with the other food referenced in the Callias fragment (turnips, radishes, olives, and flat cakes) is “plain, cheap, everyday food” which metaphorically designates repetitive old comedy that is put on time and again. The joke has two points. First, as Wright notes, there is an Aristophanic in-joke at work. His own version of the repetitiveness of the low mode is repeated recourse to Euripides jokes, with which, it turns out, Frogs is going to be replete. Second, Heracles response, “Pea soup? Oh my, thousands of times in my life!” (ἔτνους; βαβαιάξ, μυριάκις ἐν τῷ βίῳ, 63) sets Heracles up as someone whose taste in drama is simple, easy, low comedy full of old jokes (of which he is himself one). Dionysus, in comparing his own taste for Aristophanic Euripides-comedy with pea-soupy low comedy implicitly confirms that there is not so much difference between the two as one might think. The pea-soup metaphor explicates Dionysus’ quest in Frogs – to retrieve Euripides. The plot of Frogs is itself, therefore, metaphorically described as a low-comic hungry Heracles plot. We know that such plots were often about how hungry

30 549-78. It is not possible to sustain the idea, proposed by Dobrov 2001, 151, that we are meant to view Heracles as the tragic Heracles, in particular the character from Euripides’ tragedy Perithous.
31 Later in the same scene Dionysus tells Heracles “teach me about eating!” (δειπνεῖν με δίδασκε, 107).
32 Wright 2012, 94. Callias fr. 26 (cited in Athenaeus 2.57a) refers to ancient comedy (περὶ τῆς ἀρχαῖαττος τῆς κωμῳδίας) as pea soup.
33 Wright 2012, 94.
34 Wright 2012, 94-5.
Heracles was because he was denied food, and so framing the plot of *Frogs* in this way is already a hint that Dionysus will not be successful in fulfilling his desire for Euripides.

The first exchange between Dionysus and Heracles foregrounds laughter and its relation to the low:

Heracles: By Demeter, I can’t help but laugh!
I’m biting myself, but I’m still laughing!

Dionysus: Come over here, I need something from you.

Heracles twice repeats that he is laughing (δύναμαι μὴ γελᾶν, 42; οὔτοι μὰ τὴν Δήμητρα δύναμαι μὴ γελᾶν· καὶ τοῖς δίκων γ’ ἐμαυτόν· ἄλλ’ ὃμως γελῶ, 45), and on both occasions he emphasizes the compulsion to laugh. He cannot not laugh.

Heracles: I just can’t stop laughing
when I see a lion-skin over a saffron gown!
What were you thinking? Why bring the boot and the club together? Where on earth have you been?

Imagine the scene: Dionysus dressed as Heracles with Xanthias and the luggage on a donkey. They are a mise-en-scène of low-comic humor: two stock characters rolled into one, a stock slave, a comic animal, and baggage signifying its associated scatological jokes. When the real Heracles witnesses this, he laughs. This equates him, in effect, with one of those spectators referred to in the opening lines of the comedy who always laugh at the usual jokes. Heracles twice repeats that he is laughing (δύναμαι μὴ γελᾶν, 42; οὔτοι μὰ τὴν Δήμητρα δύναμαι μὴ γελᾶν· καὶ τοῖς δίκων γ’ ἐμαυτόν· ἄλλ’ ὃμως γελῶ, 45), and on both occasions he emphasizes the compulsion to laugh. He cannot not laugh. When Heracles tells Dionysus that it is the costume in particular that has caused such mirth, he points not only to the incongruity of the effeminate Dionysus wearing his own manly get-up, but also to the combination of low-comic character dressed up as another low-comic

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35 For the compulsion to laugh at low comedy see *Wealth* 758, where throwing nuts at the audience forces (ἀναγκάζειν) the audience to laugh.
character. While Dionysus is portrayed as a pretentious comic spectator who prefers high comedy, Heracles is the ordinary spectator who enjoys all the old jokes. The two characters' tastes in tragedy match this characterization: Dionysus is after a clever tragic poet (δεξίου, 71), one who can speak nobly (δυστις ῥήμα γενναίον λόκοι, 97) and who is daring (δυστις φθέγξεται... τι παρακεκινδυνεμένον, 99). Heracles, however, considers such tragedy, i.e. Euripidean tragedy, to be terrible artless nonsense (κόβαλα, 104; ἀτεχνῆς... παμπόνηρα, 105).36 This highlights the high-low duality of Euripidean tragedy that we witnessed in *Thesmophoriazusae*: Euripides can simultaneously be viewed as the intellectual tragic master, and as low-brow trash.

When Heracles first sees Dionysus in lines 42-8 (quoted above), he greets him with words reminiscent of the relative greeting Agathon in *Thesmophoriazusae* (136-140) in a parody from the Aeschylean *Lycurgeia*. In chapter five I argued that this parody is not, as is usually assumed, of the tetralogy's tragic *Edonians*, but rather of its satyr play *Lycurgus*.37* Frogs* 46-8 parodies the same Aeschylean scene as *Thesmophoriazusae*.38 The scene in *Frogs* is much shorter than that in *Thesmophoriazusae*, but shares several identifiable features with it, and therefore with the original. Most obvious is the pairing of incongruous items of clothing. In *Thesmophoriazusae* the relative points to the absurdity of the *barbitos* paired with the saffron gown (*Thesmo.* 137-8); in *Frogs*, Heracles points to his famed lion-skin oddly matched with the saffron gown, and the *kothornos* (a soft

36 The differences between the opinions of Dionysus and Heracles should not be seen as fundamentally separating the characters into low-brow (Heracles) and intellectual low-brow with potential for development (Dionysus) as Segal 1961, 210 argues when he says “Aristophanes has detached the intellectual element in Dionysus and set it in contrast to Heracles, to whom he has also transferred most of the gluttony usually associated with Dionysus.” As I argue above, the characterization of Dionysus is perfectly within the traditional sphere, and gluttony is certainly more associated with Heracles than Dionysus in the tradition.
37 See chapter five.
38 Dover 1993, 195 says the scene is “founded on the hostile interrogation of Dionysos by Lykurgos” and Sommerstein 1996, 160 says the parody in *Thesmophoriazusae* is “parallel” to the exchange in *Frogs*. 
Another similarity between *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Frogs* lies in the series of questions posed to Agathon and Dionysus respectively. In *Frogs*, the series is shorter with only three questions (τίς…τί…ποϊ). The final question points to a humorous reversal of the situation in *Lycurgus*. In that play, the king questions Dionysus (the foreigner) about which land he has come from that he dresses so strangely (ποδαπός ὁ γύννις, *Thesmophoriazusae* 136 with scholia). In *Frogs*, Heracles asks, “where on earth have you been?” (ποῦ γῆς ἀποδήμεις; 48) implying that Dionysus has been abroad somewhere and learned to dress so oddly there. In the *Frogs*, unlike in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, Heracles directs the lines at Dionysus, to whom they would also have been said by Lycurgus in the original. The effect of Heracles’ first words to Dionysus being a parodic re-working of Aeschylus should not be underestimated. The first tragic parody, in this comedy of tragic parody, is not of Euripides but of Aeschylus. Aeschylus is immediately situated in the realm of laughter and the low-comic, and is linked with Heracles and the ordinary (Heraclean) spectator. If the scene between Lycurgus and Dionysus referenced here is indeed from the satyric *Lycurgus* rather than the tragic *Edonians*, Aeschylus’ low-comic association is stated all the more strongly because of satyr play’s generic proximity to low comedy. It puts him on a par with the *Thesmophoriazusae*’s satyric relative and *Wasps*’ Philocleon. Aeschylus, indeed, had a reputation in antiquity for being the master

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39 Shoes are not mentioned in an incongruous pairing in the *Thesmophoriazusae* parody, but they may have been mentioned in the original. The in-law does ask, “where are your laconians?” (ποῦ λακωνικαί; 142).
40 The parody in *Thesmophoriazusae* had 15 questions in a row. This may be a humorous expansion of the original, which probably looked a little more like *Frogs*.
41 Other scholars have also seen associations between Heracles and Aeschylus, e.g. Padilla 1992, 360.
42 See chapter two.
of the satyr play. Interestingly, he is also said to have been the first to bring drunkards on stage in his Cabeiroi. Athenaeus, who offers the testimonium, says, “Aeschylus first brought the sight of drunkards to tragedy, not, as some say, Euripides” (πρῶτος γὰρ ἐκεῖνος καὶ οὐχ, ὡς ἔνιοι φασίν, Εὐριπίδης παρῆγαγε τὴν τῶν μεθυόντων δῶμιν εἰς τραγῳδίαν). These testimonia suggest that in antiquity Aeschylus had a more complex reputation than we might assume, part of which involved a comic streak. Introducing the theme of tragedy with an Aeschylean parody, perhaps even a parody of an Aeschylean satyr-play, suggests that there is going to be more at stake in the later tragic contest of Frogs than just tragedy.

**Aeacus and the innkeepers**

After the parodos, Dionysus and Xanthias arrive at the house of Pluto. A short exchange between the two protagonists serves to indicate to the audience that they should expect more traditional low comedy in the scene to come:

Διόνυσος Ξανθίας

άροι άν ἀθικός, ὦ παῖ.

tοἰ τί ἢ τὸ πράγμα

ἀλλ᾽ ἢ Δίος Κόρινθος ἐν τοῖς στρώμασιν; (437-9)

Dionysus: Pick it up again, boy.

Xanthias: What is all this but Corinthus son of Zeus in the luggage?!

“Corinthus son of Zeus” was an Attic phrase meaning “the same old thing again."

Xanthias is not only complaining about having to pick up the luggage again, but metatheatrically hinting that in the following scene we are going to get more of the typical

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43 Diogenes Laertius 2.133; Pausanias 2.13.6.
44 Athenaeus 10.428f
45 Athenaeus 10.428f. See Aeschylus Cabeiroi fr. 96. Plutarch Quaestiones convivales 1.5.1 mentions that Aeschylus used to compose while drunk. Cf. the testimonia about Crates that states “he was very funny and cheery and he was the first to put drunk people on stage in comedy” (πάνυ γελοῖος καὶ ἱλαρὸς γενόμενος, καὶ πρῶτος μεθύοντας ἐν κωμῳδίᾳ προῆγαγεν).
46 Ussher 1977, 288.
And indeed, that is just what we do get: Dionysus and Xanthias replay the beginning of the comedy as they approach a second door that they must knock on. But they do not receive the same welcome from Aeacus that they had received from Heracles. Dionysus, announcing himself as Heracles, is faced with a melodramatic tirade of abuse from Aeacus threatening punishment for the theft of Cerberus. Dionysus, in characteristic style, and now for the second time, responds by defecating from fear (479) and Xanthias calls him “the most cowardly of gods and men” (ὦ δειλότατε θεῶν σὺ κάνθρωπων, 486) highlighting his traditional characterization.

The costume-switching scene is an extended version of the post-parodos “Empusa” scene (279-311). In the Empusa scene, Xanthias spots a monster and, in true cowardly fashion, Dionysus does everything he can to get himself out of harm’s way (286-7). Xanthias describes the creature changing shape, at one point saying it has turned into “a very beautiful woman” (γυνὴ ὑραιοτάτη τις, 290-1). This prompts Dionysus to switch from his cowardly persona to his lusty-lover persona, and he replies, “where? Let me go after her!” (ποῦ ’στι; φέρ’ ἐπ᾽ αὐτὴν ἵω, 291). When the creature turns into a dog, both characters panic and Dionysus defecates from fear (307-8). As if to emphasize the contrast between the god’s traditional, low-brow character and the pretentious Euripides fan he claimed to be in the prologue, Dionysus exclaims, “What god should I blame for my destruction? Aether the bed of Zeus or the foot of time?” (τίν᾽ αἰτῶσομαι θεῶν μ’ ἀπολλύναι; αἰθέρα Διὸς δωμάτιον, ἢ χρόνου πόδας; 310-11), recalling some daring Euripidean phrases from the prologue, and juxtaposing his inevitable lowness and feigned highness. In this juxtaposition, Dionysus represents a microcosm of Aristophanic comic poetics: always and inescapably low, always claiming to be high-brow.

47 Wright 2012, 97.
The costume-swapping scene itself follows the same pattern as the Empusa scene: threat-attractive woman – threat, with defecation as a reaction to one or the other threat. In the second iteration of the scene-patternning, Aeacus threatens Dionysus-Heracles for stealing Cerberus (“threat”) at which Dionysus defecates. When Xanthias becomes Heracles, he is greeted by a maid who offers him food and an attractive flute player (503-21, “attractive woman”). And when they swap back, Dionysus-Heracles is threatened by the innkeepers (549-89). This repeated pattern, which alternates between the two stock Dionysian comic personae (coward and lusty lover) looks very much like a stock routine.

When the female innkeepers abuse Dionysus-Heracles, they recollect Heracles’ previous visit, when he ate everything in their inn and behaved violently. Their recollection recalls a description of a low comedy or a satyr play, giving the scene a metatheatrical air. The innkeepers themselves are stereotypical low-comic female characters. The anonymous innkeeper begins by describing Heracles’ greed:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{o } & \pi \nu o\gamma o\varsigma \omicron \upsilon \tau o \varsigma \\
\delta \zeta & \epsilon i \varsigma \tau o \pi \alpha \nu \delta o\kappa e\zeta \varsigma \nu \epsilon i \sigma e\lambda \iota \omega \nu \pi o\tau e \\
\epsilon \kappa k\alpha \iota \delta e \kappa & \acute{\alpha} \tau o \varsigma \kappa a t e \phi a \gamma \acute{\iota} \mu \iota \nu \omega \nu (549-51)
\end{align*}
\]

That wretch is here,
The very man who once came to the inn
And ate up sixteen loaves of our bread!

\text{Εἰσέρχομαι} is the normal verb for “coming on stage.” Combined with the typical hungry Heracles plot described, the passage points to a performance – a play in which Heracles got so hungry he destroyed an inn. This could be a parody of a particular dramatic treatment of Heracles’ kidnapping of Cerberus or it may indicate a generic hungry

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48 In Wealth 456, Chremylus assumes Poverty must be an innkeeper (πανδοκεύτρια) or a porridge-seller (λεκιθόπωλις). Blepsidemus thinks she must be a Fury, so perhaps there is an element of antithesis in typical tragic figure (Fury) and typical comic figure (innkeeper).

49 E.g. Acharnians 14; Plato Republic 580b; Xenophon Anabasis 6.1.9
Heracles skit. The metatheatrical air about this scene is further suggested by Dionysus’ response to the innkeepers: “you are talking nonsense, woman” (Ἀλήρεις, ὦ γυναι, 555). Ληρέω and its cognates, throughout the Aristophanic corpus but especially in Frogs, is a word of metatheatrical significance.\textsuperscript{50} Euripides, for example, refers to Aeschylean tragedy with the verb at 923 (ληρήσειε) and again by implication at 945 (ἔληροῦν). The chorus, at the end of the comedy, also call Euripidean tragedy σκαιριφήσμοι λήρων (“quibbles of nonsense,” 1497). Ληρέω in this context refers to excessively showy drama without real point or utility. If we are supposed to imagine the innkeepers’ recollections of Heracles’ visit as a past performance of a Heracles play, the excessive, over-the-top eating and violence would certainly seem to qualify as λήρος. Xanthias emphasizes the repetitive, old, and (apparently) boring nature of hungry Heracles comedy when he responds to the innkeepers’ accusations by saying “That’s just like him [Heracles], he acts like this everywhere!” (τοῦτο πάνυ τοῦργον· οὔτος τρόπος πανταχοῦ, 563) and later at 568 “that’s just like him too” (καὶ τοῦτο τοῦτο τοῦργον).

The scene ends with Aeacus alternately whipping Dionysus and Xanthias in order to determine which of them is a god. In Peace Aristophanes had described this type of slave-beating scene as characteristic of low comedy:

\begin{quote}
τοὺς δούλους παρέλυσεν
toûs doulous parélusen
τοὺς φεύγοντας κάζαμπατώντας καὶ τυπτομένους, ἐπίτηδες
toûs feúgonantas kázamptwontas kaì typitomēnous, epitēdeis
{oûs eûtigôn kláontas àei, kaì toûitous ouýkea toûdî,}
745
i̇n̄’ o’ sundoulos skwmas autou tâς plêgâs eít’ ánérōito.
’ó kakódaimon tî tî dêmi’ épîthèseis; múvû ústríchis eisĕbalên sôi
eîs tâs plêurâs pollhê stratîph kâdendroutómhe to nâvotôn;’ (Peace 742-7)
\end{quote}

And he put an end to slaves who run off or play tricks or get beaten on purpose - {the ones they always bring on stage wailing – and just for this:}

so that his fellow slave, mocking his injuries, can ask “what happened to your skin, you poor thing? Did the whip attack you

\textsuperscript{50} Knights 536; Wasps 1370; Thesmophoriazusae 622, 880: Frogs 809, 923, 945, 1005, 1377, 1497; fr.62.
in the ribs with a great army and lay waste to your back?"

Aristophanes’ main criticism of such scenes is that they are brought on stage just for the sake of the jokes that can be made, and not because they contribute anything further to plot or characterization. That the slave-beating scene in *Frogs* is as gratuitous as the scene described in *Peace* is made clear by Aeacus and Dionysus at its conclusion:

Aeacus: By Demeter, I just can’t figure out which of you is a god. But come inside. (670)

Dionysus: The master will know who you are and Pherephatta, being gods themselves. Right you are. I do wish you’d thought of that before I took the beating though!

The joke “for the sake of which” the scene unfolds is the characters’ abilities to disguise their yells of pain as something else, such as a line of Hipponax (661). The repetitious alternation of beating each character and each characters’ attempt to outdo the other (first they both pretend not to notice, 645-7; then they each make a small noise, 649-55; then Dionysus recites whole lines of poetry, 659-67) suggests a scene of “combative capping” and has an air of improvisation about it, which may have struck the audience as reminiscent of an ancient style of informal comedy. Baier suggests that Xanthias’ *Strafenkatalog* at 618-22 is also characteristic of traditional comedy, citing modern examples and Plautine comedies as comparative evidence.51

The beginning of the underworld scene repeats and replays stock low-comic scenes that have already occurred in *Frogs*: knocking at a door with luggage and Dionysus’ threat-woman-threat routine. Aristophanes thus makes the repetitious nature

51 Baier 2002, 197.
of low comedy into a metatheatrical joke within *Frogs*. Both the stock hungry Heracles scene and the stock improvisatory slave-beating scene are also presented as moments of metatheatricality.

To conclude this first section, I return to Aristophanes’ calling out of Phrynichus in the prologue. He claims, through the mouth of Dionysus, to hate low-brow comedy and sets himself up in direct competition with Phrynichus as a high-brow rival. His mode of competing, however, is to offer up every single low comic trope he can think of— including plenty of the baggage-carrying he imputes to Phrynichus. But by imbuing these scenes of low comedy with a self-consciously playful amount of metatheater, he goes one better than Phrynichus and produces a kind of advanced low comedy. As we shall see below, in the *agōn* within this *agōn*, Aeschylus, a mouthpiece for the Aristophanic poetic persona, explicitly uses Phrynichean material to out-low his low-brow rival, Euripides.

**The Double Chorus**

Before turning to the famous tragic *agōn* it is necessary to consider the role of the chorus, and how the chorus contributes to the dual high-low poetics of the *Frogs*. *Frogs* has an unusual double chorus. They first appear in theriomorphic form as frogs and later reappear as mystic initiates. Hubbard argues that that the chorus of frogs and the chorus of initiates each introduce “an important register of comic meaning, one more democratic and commonplace, with an accent on pure entertainment value, the other more elitist and *sophos*, using comedy as a vehicle to articulate a higher agenda.” In other words, there is a double chorus because the frogs are “symbols of traditional Old

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52 The unusual structure of *Frogs* is discussed by e.g. Fraenkel 1962, 163-188; Hooker 1980; Vaio 1985; Dover 1993, 55-69.
Comedy…in its most extravagant and farcical aspects,” while the initiates represent comedy’s “more serious transcendence” in a dialectic between high and low. The double chorus thus imitates, according to Hubbard, the diptych structure of the comedy as a whole, with its nominally low first half and high second half. However, this simplistic dichotomizing of Frogs’ choruses cannot be sustained without adding some nuance. While the frogs are symbols of the low, and the initiates claim to be politically high-brow, Aristophanes imbues each with some element of their opposite, offering, in the depictions of his choruses two alternative possibilities for a dual high-low poetics.

The frog chorus

The idea of a theriomorphic chorus, as I and many other scholars have argued, reflects an early tradition of comedy associated with low-comic humor. The evidence for such an assertion, discussed in chapter one, includes a series of early fifth-century vase

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54 See also Reckford 1987, 412: “the frogs’ song is meant to evoke the paradoxical beauty of what was now, to Aristophanes, the old comedy, whether of poets like Magnes or, as it was beginning to appear, of Aristophanes himself.” Biles 2011, 228: the frogs “recall and bring back to the stage the distant past of comic poetry, when animal choruses appear to have been a regular and perhaps defining feature of the genre.”

55 Hubbard 1991, 201.

56 One of the key questions about the frog chorus was whether or not it was visible. The issue is raised by the scholiast on the passage (scholia vetera, 209), who explains that the frog chorus is called a παραχορήγμα because “the frogs are not seen in the theater nor the chorus, but they imitate frogs from backstage” (ἐπειδὴ οὐχ ὄρωνται ἐν τῷ θεάτρῳ οἱ βάτραχοι, οὐδὲ ὁ χορός, ἀλλ’ ἐσωθεν μιμοῦνται τοὺς βατράχους.) One reason why scholars have supported the scholiast’s idea is that the expenditure required by the war had led to the introduction of joint choregai – when cost was a problem, why would Aristophanes have two choruses? Scholars have also noted line 205, where Charon tells Dionysus only that he will hear (ἀκούσει) the songs of the frogs, not that he will see them. See especially Allison 1983. There are, however, good reasons for thinking that the scholiast simply derived the idea of the frogs’ invisibility from line 205 mistakenly. Dover 1993, 57 explains that 1) it would have been difficult for an audience to hear singing that took place off-stage; 2) the main chorus of initiates is dressed in rags, and would have cost virtually nothing, rendering the argument about expenditure null and void. Additionally, it seems odd to me that Aristophanes would include in his comedy an animal chorus that has such pointed comic potential and not take advantage of the spectacle he could produce. I accept therefore that the frog chorus was visible to the audience on stage.

paintings depicting animal choruses and the comedies of Magnes.\textsuperscript{58} In addition to the arguments I make in chapter one about theriomorphic choruses in general, it is worth considering two points in relation to the \textit{Frogs} specifically. First, one of Magnes’ early animal comedies was also entitled \textit{Frogs}. Aristophanes informs us in the \textit{Knights} parabasis that Magnes “was dyed frog green” (βαπτόμενος βατραχείοις, \textit{Knights} 523) suggesting an extravagant choral costume. Second, Sifakis has made two suggestions that indicate that Aristophanes’ frog chorus appeared notably akin to traditional, ancient animal choruses. He compares the situation of the frog chorus to that depicted on the Berlin \textit{skyphos}. This vase depicts a dramatic, not just a choral scene. It shows six men mounted on ostriches and a flute-player. Such scenes are common on the animal-chorus vases, but the Berlin \textit{skyphos} also has another figure standing between the ostrich-riders and the flute-player.\textsuperscript{59} This figure, perhaps a dwarf, is probably a proto-dramatic antagonist involved in a rudimentary \textit{agōn} with the chorus.\textsuperscript{60} Sifakis compares this image with Aristophanes’ frog chorus, in which Dionysus acts as the antagonist, suggesting that the frog chorus’ disconnectedness from the plot, and the inconsistency of having them worship Dionysus but not recognize his presence, makes it likely that the chorus preserves a typical theriomorphic choral performance, in which a quarrel with an outside antagonist was a traditional theme.\textsuperscript{61} Sifakis additionally notes similarities between the frogs’ song and the song that the birds sing in the \textit{Birds} parabasis,

\textsuperscript{58} See above, chapter one.
\textsuperscript{59} The other side of the Boston \textit{skyphos} shows a chorus of men riding dolphins with a flute player. Brommer 1942, 68-74 suggested that this might be indicative of a comedy with two half-choruses. For other animal choruses with flute players see Sifakis 1971, 73-5
\textsuperscript{60} The character has been identified variously as a dwarf, a pygmy, or even Pan. See Sifakis 1971, 91 for further bibliography. On the idea of the proto-antagonist see Sifakis 1971, 92. Rothwell 2007, 72 suggests that because this vase is more likely to be from the early fifth, rather than late sixth century, it probably represents comedy rather than pre-comedy.
\textsuperscript{61} Sifakis 1971, 94-6.
suggesting that both songs may preserve a typical song sung by theriomorphic choruses.\textsuperscript{62}

The sense of oldness with which we should associate the frogs is evident also in the chorus’ language, implied particularly by the aorist \textit{iachēsāmεν} (217): their song is the one they sang “when we sang hymns to Nysian Dionysus son of Zeus, in the marshes” (\textit{ἡνίχ’ ἀμφὶ Νυσήιον Διός Διόνυσον Λίμναις ιαχησαμεν}, 215-17).\textsuperscript{63} As Dover comments, they are the ghosts of old frogs that once lived in Athens.\textsuperscript{64}

The frogs themselves, and the scene in which we encounter them, betray not only their oldness, but also their lowness. They specify the audience of their song as “the hungover mob of people” (ὁ κραιπαλόκωμος…λαῶν ὀχλος, 218-19), not an elite audience but the masses attending the \textit{Chyтроi}, the last day of the Anthesteria.\textsuperscript{65} The frogs’ musical claims identify them primarily as entertainers rather than advisors. Their comic costumes and the encumbered dancing that they surely produced, and their simple, bestial comic refrain of \textit{βρεκεκὲξ κόδις κόδις} also render the frogs a fitting image of the ancient low-brow tradition.

The frogs’ interactions with Dionysus exemplify the low-brow nature of their scene. At first, in line with his earlier pretension, Dionysus is a firm opponent to the traditional chorus of frogs. He ironically expresses this antipathy, however, with a couple of scatological jokes of the type that he clearly railed against in the prologue: “my butt’s

\begin{itemize}
\item Sifakis 1971, 95-6. The similarities include animal noises (the frogs’ \textit{brekekekex} and the birds \textit{tiotiomiomi}), invocations to Apollo, Pan, and the Muses (\textit{Frogs} 229-31; \textit{Birds} 737-40, 745, 772, 781-2) and phraseological similarities (\textit{Frogs} 213-14 = \textit{Birds} 751; \textit{Frogs} 212-17 = \textit{Birds} 771-4; \textit{Frogs} 229-31 = \textit{Birds} 781-3; \textit{Frogs} 247 = \textit{Birds} 746; \textit{Frogs} 205 = \textit{Birds} 769).
\item On the frogs as emblems of antiquity see also Biles 2011, 229, who argues that the elevated lyric tone of the frogs’ song is evidence of “a marked stateliness,” suggesting that the frogs represent ancient poetic traditions.
\item Dover 1993, 223.
\item The people are hung-over (or drunk) because the second day of the Anthesteria, the \textit{Choes}, involved drinking contests, both private and public, in which all male citizens (regardless of wealth) could partake. Callimachus \textit{Aetia} 178.2 suggests that even slaves enjoyed some license during the \textit{Choes}.
\end{itemize}
starting to hurt” (ἐγὼ δ᾿ ἀλγείν ὀρχομαι/ τὸν ὄρρον, 221-2); “my arse has been leaking for a while” (χώ τρωκτός ἰδίει πάλαι, 237). In the end, however, in order to beat the frogs in the game of combative capping that they have begun, Dionysus can only join them, beating them with their own *brekekekex*, perhaps even turning the frogs’ refrain into a fart.66 The combative capping game, in which each side battles over the repetition of the frogs’ refrain, can be compared to the comic skit referred to by Plato as a φορτικόν πράγμα, in which characters repeat back each other’s words to outdo each other.67 The scene between Dionysus and the frogs has usually been seen as an *agōn* of symbolic significance, with Dionysus and the frogs variously anticipating the characters of the main tragic *agōn*.68 I would suggest however, that this choral song has a larger significance: it exemplifies the fact that the apparent desire to get rid of lowness can only be achieved by the incorporation of lowness. Dionysus, the hater of traditional, low comedy, in an attempt to get rid of the low-brow frogs, must use their own low-brow *koax* to defeat them. In the prologue of the comedy, we noted, Aristophanes accused Phrynichus, his fellow-competitor at the Lenaea of 405, of being a paradigmatically low-brow poet. But his own attempt to beat Phrynichus has been to play him at his own game and outdo him in low-comedy. In this sense, Dionysus and his contest with the frogs offer an encapsulation of very contest they are performing in.69

**The chorus of mystic initiates**

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67 See above, chapter one.
68 Defrades 1969 argues that the frogs should be associated with Eurpidean new music (see also Wills 1969a, 317; Worman 2014, 129-30). Segal 1961, 222, however, argues that Dionysus’ “choice of Aeschylus redeems his early insensitivity to the frogs chorus, for the similarities in the compound language of both the frogs and Aeschylus perhaps indicate a deeper sympathy between them.” Similarly, Biles 2011, 230 relates Euripides’ parody of the Aeschylean φλαττόθρατ to the frogs’ βρεκεκέξ.
69 Demand 1970 argued that we are meant to see a reference to Phrynichus in the frogs due to the Greek word, *phryne* meaning toad.
The Mystic initiates' anapestic parodos, and their odes and epirrhemata in the parabasis, to a certain extent, reflect as Hubbard suggested a more “elitist and sophos” chorus than the frogs. They use comedy “as a vehicle to articulate a higher agenda,” employing the typical features associated by Aristophanes with high-brow, elite comedy, namely political invective. In the anapestic section of the initiates' parodos, the chorus explicitly distinguish themselves and their comic mode from the low-brow comedy that has gone before. The anapests are a parody of a prorrhesis, the warning speech given by priests before the rites of the mysteries banning those who could not be initiated. In the context of the comedy the prorrhesis functions to determine the best audience of comedy: “Keep holy silence and stand away from our dances, you who…” (εὐφημεῖν χρή κἀξίστασθαι τοῖς ἡμετέροισι χοοροῖσιν, ὅστις…354-5). Those banned from witnessing the dances (i.e. the comedy) include those ignorant about comedy (ἀπειρος, 355). This implies those whose lack of experience has led to bad taste. Since consistent experience of comedy requires a financial and temporal commitment, ἀπειρος suggests an elite, educated audience. Also excluded are those whose judgement is impure or unclear (γνώμην μὴ καθαρεύει, 355). We can compare this phrasing to a statement in the parabasis of Wasps, where the chorus complain that the audience let Aristophanes down because they “did not understand clearly” (μὴ γνώναι καθαρῶς, Wasps 1045) his new ideas (κοινοτάτας…διανοιας, Wasps 1044). The exclusion of those impure or unclear in their judgement may similarly imply those who do not understand high-brow comedy properly or who do not appreciate it. Excluded next are “those who have not seen or danced in the rites of the noble (γενναίων, 356) Muses.” In the parabasis of Peace, after Aristophanes' description of how high-brow his comedy is and how he got

70 Similarly Segal 1961, 226.
71 Hubbard 1991, 203.
72 Sommerstein 1996, 186.
rid of all the low elements, the chorus call him γενναιότατος τῶν ποιητῶν, “the most noble of poets” (*Peace* 773). The word’s association with high-brow comedy and with tragedy, again suggests an audience who prefer to see and perform in high comedy.

Though I have read these three exclusions metatheatrically, they are broad in reference. The following two exclusions, however, speak explicitly to the subject of comedy: those who have not been initiated into the Bacchic rites of the tongue of bull-eating Cratinus, and those who enjoy buffoonish words (βωμολόχοις ἔπεισιν, 358) performed at the wrong time.73 “Bull-eating” (ταυροφάγος) was a tragic epithet used by Sophocles of Dionysus (*Tyro*, fr. 668) and so suggests Cratinean comedy as one engaged in tragic parody.74 The political nature of these anapests, along with the mention of Cratinus – considered to be the father of aggressive political satire – implies an audience attuned to political comedy.75 This type of comedy is contrasted with buffoonery, which is listed alongside κακά and φόρτον as a descriptor of low-brow comedy in the *Peace* parabasis (748). Those who enjoy (χαίρει, 358) such comedy are excluded.

Following this, several politically dubious personages are excluded, along with those who shit on offerings to Hecate when singing in a cyclical chorus. This refers to the dithyrambist Cinesias, who suffered from bowel trouble.76 One cannot help but recall, however, Dionysus and his recent evacuations. This last banishment suggests not audience, but performers who engage in scatological humor. The *prorrhesis*, therefore, programmatically distances the *Frogs* from the farce of the first half (and the first

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73 Slater 2002, 187.
74 Bakola 2010, 24-9 argues that Cratinus gave himself an Aeschylean persona as Aristophanes gave himself a Euripidean persona.
76 *Frogs* ΣRV0M 366.
chorus), and leads us to expect a more serious, politically engaged, high-brow second act.

Politics is the theme of the mystic initiates’ songs throughout. At 416 they ask, “would you like to mock Archedemus together?” (βούλεσθε δήτα κοινή σκώψωμεν Ἀρχέδημον;) and they continue with some onomasti komoidein against not only Archedemus, but Cleisthenes and Callias too.77 Similarly in the ode (674-85) and antode (706-17) of the parabasis the chorus of initiates also mock Cleophon, the subject of a demagogue comedy by Plato comicus in the same Lenaea of 405, and Cleigenes. Unlike the chorus of the frogs, the chorus of initiates focus on the present day and contemporary politicians. It is in the epirrhema and antepirrhema of the parabasis, however, where the chorus most strongly articulate their elite political identity. The advice given is that the city should re-enfranchise those involved in the oligarchic coup; it was right to enfranchise slaves who fought at Platea, but it is also time to give the aristocrats back their citizen rights. The fact that there is such explicit political advice is itself an element of high-brow comedy, but in this case the advice itself also has an elite bent, which runs throughout the politics of the parabasis. In the antepirrhema, in the famous coinage metaphor, the chorus complain that Athens rejects the “old coinage” (ἄρχαιον νόμισμα, 720) in favor of “new gold” (καινὸν χρυσίον, 720), i.e. rejects the “noble, modest, just men, the kaloikagathoi who were brought up in gyms and choruses and the arts” (εὐγενεῖς καὶ σώφρονας ἄνδρας ὄντας καὶ δικαίους καὶ καλοὺς τε κάγαθοὺς

77 Archedemus, according to Xenophon Hellenica 1.7.2, prosecuted one of the commanders at Arginusai for embezzlement. He was mocked by Eupolis as being of foreign descent (Baptae fr. 80). Cleisthenes was the common komoidoumenos, frequently mocked by Aristophanes as a passive homosexual. Some editors (e.g. Dover 1993, 248-9) take the genitive to indicate that a son of Cleisthenes is meant, but with Sommerstein 1996, 194-5 I take τὸν Κλεισθένους together with πρωκτόν. Callias was also a common komoidoumenoi. He inherited a great deal of wealth but lost it all, and was known for attracting parasites. He was a character in Eupolis’ Flatterers, and is also mocked in Birds 286 and Cratinus’ Archilochoi fr. 12 (unless this refers to his grandfather) for being a sex-crazed adulterer.
καὶ τραφέντας ἐν παλαιστραῖς καὶ χοροῖς καὶ μουσικῇ, 727-9) and instead makes use of “foreigners and redheads, the low-born children of low-born parents” (ξένοις καὶ πυρρίαις καὶ πονηροῖς κἀκεῖνοι, 730-1). The chorus urges Athens to switch, to honor the aristocrats and get rid of the πονηροὶ.

In fact, these debased new politicians are described in language reminiscent of low-comedy, which regularly featured foreigners, low-born people, and the poor and ugly.78 Cleophon is accused of being a foreigner – a Thracian (681). Red hair (πυρρίας) was considered typical of Thracians, thus linking Cleophon directly to the politicians described in the antepirrhema. Cleigenes, also a politician, is described as “that annoying monkey” (ὁ πίθηκος οὖτος ὁ νῦν ἐνοχλῶν, 708), and as “the most wretched bath-man” (ὁ πονηρότατος βαλανεύς, 710), reflecting the low-comic themes of animals and working men. He also fears, we are told, that he’s going to be stripped naked if he walks around drunk without a stick (715-6). Now political life has essentially become a low-brow comedy a confusion has ensued and real-life lowness has been conflated with comic lowness. Therefore the prorrhesis rejects both the political and the comic low. But the parabatic message itself, with its call to return to old ways, can be read as a call to return to the days when good, elite people are in charge politically, and bad, low people appear only in comedy. This point is emphasized directly after the parabasis, when the switch is made from the parabatic mode back to the comic mode. The parabasis encouraged the Athenians to make use of the noble (εὐγενεῖς, 727) in “real life.” Back in the comic story, the underworld slave tells Xanthias “by Zeus the savior your master’s a noble man!” (νῃ τὸν Δία τὸν σωτήρα, γεννάδας ἁνήρ ὁ δεσπότης σου). To this Xanthias replies “Noble indeed is one who knows only how to drink and fuck” (πῶς γὰρ οὕχι

78 The scapegoats of line 733 imply the poor and ugly. See Σεκ 733a; Bremmer 1983, 301-4.
Complicating the choral dichotomy

The above analysis offers an impressionistic interpretation of the two choruses, but a closer analysis suggests nuances and complications. Why, for example, should Aristophanes, albeit comically, make the low-comic frogs claim divinely inspired technical musical skill, while the high-comic initiates are left dressed in rags praising the low cost of their production value? In the song sung by the chorus of frogs, the amphibians say that they sing a “fair-sounding song” (ἐὔγηρν...ἀοιδάν, 213-4) and claim that “the Muses who play the lyre well loved me, as did horn-footed, reed-playing Pan. Apollo the phorminx-player rejoices in us too” (ἐμὲ γὰρ ἔστερξαν εὐλυροὶ τε Μοῦσαι καὶ κεροβάτας Πάν, ὦ φιλῳδὸν γένος, 229-31). Dionysus also calls them “the song-loving race” (ὦ φιλῳδὸν γένος, 240). There is no small amount of comic irony in the image of the typically low-comic frogs, hilariously costumed and clumsily dancing, singing their low-comic, non-verbal brekekekex, while simultaneously claiming to be technically proficient and divinely inspired musicians. But the irony reflects one crucial way in which Aristophanes distinguishes his own brand of low comedy from the low comedy of rivals such as Phrynichus: Aristophanes takes all the beloved traditional routines, jokes, and characters, but does not deploy them lazily or un-artistically.

In the mystic initiates’ songs following the prorrhesis there are also moments that suggest their claim to dismiss low comedy outright is ironic. We see this especially in the chorus’ praise of Iacchus, figured here as a kind of ur-director, for making them wear

79 Campbell 1984; Reckford 1987, 412-3.
80 Cf. above, chapter two on hungry Heracles jokes.
ripped sandals and ragged clothing (σὺ γὰρ κατεσχίσω μὲν...τόδε τὸ σανδαλίσκον καὶ τὸ ράκος, 404-5) "because it's cheap and it gets a laugh" (ἐπὶ γέλωτι κάτ’ εὕτελείς, 405).81

The chorus also pray famously “to say many funny things and many serious things (πολλὰ μὲν γελοῖα μ’ εἴπεῖν, πολλὰ δὲ στουδαία, 389-90), acknowledging that a comedy cannot, as the prorrhesis implied, say serious things alone. Indeed, it is the very combination of playful laughter and political mocking that the initiates say will bring victory: “playing and mocking in a manner worthy of your festival, may we be crowned with victory!” (τῆς σῆς ἔορτῆς ἀξίως παίσαντα καὶ σκώψαντα νικήσαντα ταῖνιοῦσθαι, 391-3). Lastly, we should not forget that Phrynichus, Aristophanes’ model low-brow poet, also wrote a comedy entitled Mystai.82

The political mockery in the mystic initiates’ songs also relies on low-comic obscenity, and, as I argued above of Cleophon and Cleigenes, on using images drawn from low-brow comedy.83 Just as the frog chorus demonstrates that low comedy can use the technical proficiency and artistic skill characteristic of high comedy, so the chorus of mystic initiates demonstrates that high comedy must provoke laughter (ἐπὶ γέλωτι, 405) by using the images and techniques of low comedy. Despite the appearances and claims about each of the two choruses regarding their comic affiliations, therefore, Aristophanes demonstrates that both high and low elements are necessary for a successful comedy. By presenting the frog chorus first, and indeed by naming his comedy after them he highlights the absolute generic necessity of the low comedy they embody.

81 Cf. Peace 740
82 Wright 2012, 96.
83 See especially Frogs 421-30 for the obscene mockery of Cleisthenes and Callias.
Aeschylus vs. Euripides: 738-1410

In the second prologue (738-829) and the epirrhematic agōn (830-1118) Aristophanes sets up the second half of Frogs as a new, nominally high-brow comedy-within-the-comedy. Both of these passages also serve to establish the poetic credentials of the tragedians Aeschylus and Euripides, whose contest for the Throne of Tragedy forms the basis of action for the rest of the play. These two poets are represented as having high and low poetic potential, but Euripides, with his everyday plots and ordinary characters, comes across as primarily low, while Aeschylus’s elitism and morality render him primarily high. Aeschylus, as Zachery Biles has argued, is also assimilated in these passages to the parabatic persona of Aristophanes seen particularly in Peace. Thus Aeschylus follows the model of high-brow competitor already seen in Dionysus (against the frogs), and Aristophanes himself (against Phrynichus). In each case, the high-brow competitor faces a low-brow rival, to be defeated using the rival’s own techniques of low-comedy. Aeschylus too will use the techniques of low comedy to defeat the low-tragic Euripides. I will argue that, in performing critiques of tragedy (a task that belongs only to the comic poets), Aeschylus and Euripides are transformed into comic competitors, and it is as such that they must be analyzed. When we look for comic, rather than tragic, technique in the contest, it becomes clear that Aeschylus performs much funnier, much more entertaining parodies of Euripides, using the techniques of low comedy, than Euripides when he performs his intellectual Aeschylean parodies.

The second prologue and epirrhematic agōn

As I argued at the beginning of this chapter, Aristophanes imbues Frogs’ first half with self-consciously programmatic low comedy. At the start of the play’s second half, he claims just as self-consciously and programmatically that we are now going to witness

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84 Biles 2011, 244-6.
the high-comic part of the play. Aristophanes achieves this by describing the contest using all the key terms of skill, cleverness, importance, and novelty that we have consistently seen associated with high comedy.

At the opening of the second prologue Aeacus’ slave announces the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides by saying, “a matter, a great matter has been stirred up, great I tell you” (πρᾶγμα πτράγμα μέγα κεκίνηται μέγα, 759). He goes on to tell us that the law that precipitated the contest has nothing to do with mundane or everyday technai, but only applies to “those of the arts that are important and intellectual” (ἀπὸ τῶν τεχνῶν, ὃσαι μεγάλαι καὶ δεξιαί, 762). Throughout the epirrhematic agón, the chorus likewise highlight the grandeur and importance of the tragic contest: it is described as an epic battle, a “glancing-helmed struggle of high-crested words” (ὑψιλόφων τε λόγων κορυθαίολα νείκη, 818). With the phrase “high-crested words,” Aristophanes implies that the contest will demonstrate his own linguistic sublimity and skill. A little later the chorus also refer to the contest as “the great contest of wisdom” (ἀγών σοφίας ὁ μέγας, 882), and the “formal dance of words from two wise men” (παρὰ σοφῶν ἄνδρῶν...τινα λόγων ἐμμέλειαιν, 896-7). Dionysus himself also highlights the intellectual aspect of the contest when he calls it “this contest of intellectualisms” (τῶν σοφισμάτων ἀγώνα τόνδε, 872-3). This word looks back to the ironic σοφίσματα mentioned in the prologue (17) in reference to low-comic routines. By contrast, Dionysus expects to see real σοφίσματα, genuine clever comedy, in the scene between Aeschylus and Euripides. In the final choral song of the epirrhematic agón, the chorus reiterate the claims that they have made throughout about Frogs’ up-coming scene:

1099 μέγα τὸ πτράγμα, πολὺ τὸ νείκος, ἄδρος ὁ πόλεμος ἔρχεται.

...
1103 εἰσβολαὶ γὰρ εἰσὶ πολλαὶ χάτεραι σοφισμάτων.
οὶ τι περ οὖν ἔχετον ἔριζειν,
1105 λέγετον, ἔπιτον, ἀνά <ἀ> δέρετον
τὰ τε παλαιὰ καὶ τὰ καινά,
κάποικινδυνεύετον λεπτὸν τι καὶ σοφὸν λέγειν. (Frogs 1099; 1103-1108)

1099 A great matter, a real quarrel, a grand battle approaches.
...
1103 There are many other attacks of intellectualisms to come. So whatever argument you’ve got,
1105 say it, proceed, expose both old and new, dare to say something subtle and clever.

The injunction to “expose both old and new” points to one of the key tensions in the contest between the old Aeschylus and the new Euripides. It also looks back to one formulation of the low-high dichotomy seen already in Frogs. Low comedy, like the comedy of the theriomorphic frog chorus or the traditional routines of Phrynichus, is old, while high comedy, with its concentration on contemporary politics and modern philosophy, is new.

The chorus and Dionysus warn the contestants away from any low-brow content, also indicating to the spectators that they should not expect to see anything low.

Dionysus tells Aeschylus and Euripides that, “it’s not proper for poets to mock each other like baker women” (λοιδορεῖσθαι δ’ οὐ πρέπει ἀνδρὰς ποιητάς ώσπερ ἄρτοπώλιδας, 857-8), contrasting the comic behavior expected from important comic targets like poets (ἀνδρὰς ποιητάς) and the low comedy typical of ordinary little men and women (ἄρτοπώλιδας).86 The chorus’ injunction against low comedy is rather more explicit when at 905-6 they say:

905 ἀλλ’ ὡς τάχιστα χρῆ λέγειν· οὔτω δ’ ὅπως ἐρεῖτον,
ἀστεία καὶ μέτ’ εἰκόνας μήθ’ οἳ’ ἄν ἄλλος εἶποι. (905-6)

But you must speak quickly now. And take care to speak

86 Female bakers seem to be common comic characters. See e.g. Wasps 1388-98 and Hermippus’ comedy titled Bakery Women. The latter is, however, a political comedy.
urbanely – don’t give us any party game comparisons or say what anyone else could say.\textsuperscript{87}

Saying “what anyone else could say” is indicative of ordinariness, and probably vulgarity.

Εἰκόνες were funny comparisons of which we see an example in Wasps:

\begin{verbatim}
Εἰτ' αὐτὸν, ὡς εἴδ᾽, ἡκασεν Λυσίστρατος·
ἔοικας, ὑ πρεσβῦτα, νεοπλούτω Φρυγί.
κλητήρι τ᾽ εἰς ἀχυρόν ἀποδεδράκωτι.
ὅ δ᾽ ἀνακραγὼν ἀντήκας αὐτὸν πάρνοπι
tὰ θρία τοῦ τρίβωνος ἀποβεβληκότι,
Σθενέλω τε τὰ σκευάρια διακεκαρμένω.
οἱ δ᾽ ἀνεκρότησαν, πλὴν γε Θουφράστου μόνου·
οὔτος δὲ διεμύλλαινεν, ὡς δὴ δεξίος.
ὁ γέρων δὲ τὸν Θούφραστον ἦρετ᾽· εἰπέ μοι,
ἔπι τῷ κομᾶς καὶ κομψὸς ἔνα ἑποποιεῖ,
kωμῳδολοιχὼν περὶ τὸν εὐ πράττοντ᾽ ἁεί;
τοιαῦτα περιπρόβατον αὐτὸς ἐν μέρει,
σκώπτων ἀγροίκως καὶ προσέτι λόγους λέγων
ἀμαθέστατ᾽ οὐδὲν εἰκότας τῷ πράγματι. (Wasps 1308-1321)
\end{verbatim}

When Lysistratus saw him, he made a funny comparison: “Old man, you’re just like newly-rich Phrygian or a pig in clover. Philocleon cried out a comparison in response, that Lysistratus was like a locust who’d cast off his wings or Sthenelus shorn of his equipment. They all clapped, all but Thouphrastus. He made a scornful face like a clever man would. Then the old man asked Thouphrastus:

\begin{verbatim}
‘Why are you so pretentious? Why do you pretend to be so refined, When you’re always playing the parasite to whoever’s having some success?’ Such outrages he committed against them one at a time, making rustic jokes and telling stories that were very unlearned and not at all fitting to the situation.
\end{verbatim}

In this passage the game of comparisons is described as rustic and unlearned mockery, detested by (pseudo-) intellectuals, and not fit for an elite occasion such as a symposium.\textsuperscript{88} The comparisons are performed by Philocleon, a character who, as I argue in chapter four, is represented metatheatrically as a low-comic poet. \textit{Eikones} can

\textsuperscript{87} “Party game comparisons” is Sommerstein’s translation of εἰκόνας (1996, 109).
\textsuperscript{88} Cf. Xenophon \textit{Symposium} 6.8-7.1. Here too, the game of \textit{eikasmoi} is deemed inappropriate for symptotic conversation. Hesk 2007, 132-3, argues that the game of \textit{eikones} or \textit{eikasmoi} is a type of combative capping. See also Hobden 2004, 128-132 on \textit{eikasmoi} in Xenophon’s \textit{Symposium}. 
be said to have a secure association with low-brow entertainment, and the chorus’ warning to Aeschylus and Euripides therefore consists in a warning against low-comic modes of critique.  

By highlighting the high-brow qualities of the up-coming contest between the tragic playwrights and by warning the contestants away from low comedy, Dionysus and the chorus lead the audience to expect that Frogs’ second half will be a high-comic pièce de résistance. As always happens in Aristophanic comedy, however, the claim is problematized and complicated even as it is being made. For example, encoded within Dionysus’ injunction to the playwrights not to behave like bakery women, there is both the expectation that such behavior is not appropriate to high comedy and the recognition that it is occurring. This dual high-low nature of Frogs’ second half is also exemplified in the poetic characterizations of Aeschylus and Euripides in the epirrhematic agôn. Both poets are characterized as possessing high and low poetic potential. But in the epirrhematic section, I shall argue, Aeschylus is characterized as primarily high-brow and Euripides as primarily low. The language used to describe each poet reflects this distinction: Aeschylus and Aeschylean poetry are heavy, wordy, martial, and aggressive reflecting the severe importance of his poetic claims.

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90 Even if a version of it was adapted for symposia, the fact that the low-brow version is rejected in our sympotic sources suggests a low-brow origin and/or association of the game. Hesk 2007, 125 argues that Aristophanes “is ambiguous about the social and moral connotations of combative capping discourses, whether they be poetic or prosaic.”

90 He is presumptuous and savage (αὐθαδόστομον, ἀγριοτοιχόν, 837): excessive (ἐχοντ’ ἀχάλινον ἀκρατές ἀπύλωτον στόμα, ἀπεριλάθητον κομποφακελορήμονα, 838-9; 924-6; τέχνην...οἴδούσαν ὑπὸ κομπασμάτων καὶ ῥημάτων ἐπαγθὼν, 939-40); unintelligible (ῥήματ’ ἄν βοεία δώδεκ’ ἐίπεν, ὀφρύς ἔχοντα καὶ λόφους, δεῖν’ ἄττα μορμορωπά, ἁγνωτα τοὺς θεωμένοις, 924-6; 927-30: 1056-8); martial (1013-17; 1018; δράμα ποιήσας Ἀρείως μεστόν, 1021); moral (1013-17; 1030-6; 1053-6); and Aeschylus himself as haughty (ἀτοσμονυνείται, 833; 1017), a hurricane (ὕφαλος, 848), a hailstorm (χαλάζων, 852), angry (844, 855, 856, 1006), and violent (903-5). Scharffenberger 2007 considers the “sound-portrait” that Aristophanes creates of Aeschylus and suggests that he is meant to sound like a demagogue.
hand, is ordinary, vulgar, light-weight, and frivolous.\footnote{His tragedy contains ordinary characters (842; 948-50; 959-61); appealing to the everyday (959-60); thin (901-2, 941-3); clearly organized (945-7); subtle (λεπτῶν...κανόνων εἰσβολάς 956); frivolous (971-9); vulgar (1078-81). On the contrast between Aeschylean and Euripidean tragic styles see Rosen 2008, 144.}

I consider first the dual high-low nature of Euripides in the epirrhematic \textit{agōn}. Aristophanes portrays his high-brow aspect – his cleverness – as in the service of, and resulting in, a form of low tragedy. Indeed, the critique of Euripides that emerges in this passage looks much like the critique that Aristophanes makes of low comedy in the \textit{Peace} parabasis: his characters are “ordinary little men and women” (\textit{Peace} 751), as Euripides himself is proud to proclaim:

\begin{quote}

\begin{verbatim}
ἀλλ᾽ ἔλεγεν ἢ γυνὴ τέ μοι χῶ δοῦλος οὐδὲν ἦπτον
χῶ δεσπότης χῆ παρθένος χῆ γαῖς ἄν. (\textit{Frogs} 949-50)
\end{verbatim}

But in my plays, the woman speaks, and the slave no less,
\end{quote}

Even his important characters, his kings and queens, are dressed up in the rags of the poor (πτωχοποι ἢ ῥακιοσυρραπτάδη, 842) or accused of prostitution (πόρνας, 1043).\footnote{See also \textit{Frogs} 1063-4. Cf. \textit{Peace} 740.} But Euripides is also touted as (and touts himself as) the clever contestant: he plans to analyze tragedy critically and rationally (797-802), and he teaches the audience to think analytically about the subtleties of art (954-8). Each of these high elements of Euripides’ characterization, however, is directly subservient to the more prominent low elements. The language used to describe Euripides’ own critical analysis likens the process to agoraic transactions and banausic \textit{technai}: music will be “weighed out on a scale” (ταλάντῳ μουσικὴ σταθμήσεται, 797) like a sacrificial lamb (μειαγωγήσουσι, 798), and measured out as if making bricks (πλινθέυσουσι, 800). And when Euripides

\begin{quote}

\begin{verbatim}
χῶ δεσπότης χῆ παρθένος χῆ γαῖς ἄν. (\textit{Frogs} 949-50)
\end{verbatim}

But in my plays, the woman speaks, and the slave no less,
\end{quote}

Even his important characters, his kings and queens, are dressed up in the rags of the poor (πτωχοποι ἢ ῥακιοσυρραπτάδη, 842) or accused of prostitution (πόρνας, 1043).\footnote{As Rosen 2008, 144-5 notes, Aeschylus was not free from the charge of representing scandalous women in his tragedies: “why exactly...should we consider Euripides’ Phaedra in \textit{Hippolytus} a more scandalous figure than Aeschylus’ own Clytemnestra?” (145). Xerxes, in Aeschylus’ \textit{Persians}, is also a king in rags.}
describes his teaching, the result transforms Euripidean tragedy into a domestic, comic
situation:94

I taught these people to
think in such a way,
adding rationality to my art
and perceptiveness.
Now they think of everything
and understand it all.
They manage their homes
better than before
and ask with a critical eye
“How are things? Where’s this? Who took that?”

The intellect typical of Euripidean tragedy is here reduced to his ability to make people
manage their homes better. Dionysus’s elaboration on Euripides’ words further links
Euripidean cleverness to lowness:

Yes by the gods! Now, when every
single Athenian gets home
he yells at his slaves
and asks “where’s the pot?
Who bit off the fish head?
Last year’s cup – is it dead?
Where is yesterday’s garlic?”

94 Hunter 2009, 19.
Dionysus effectively renders clever Euripidean tragedy a typically low-brow comic scenario between a master and his greedy slaves. Aristophanes is playing around with Euripides’ reputation as the intellectual tragedian, demonstrating that he can make a low-brow exemplar out of even such a high-brow personality as Euripides.95

Aeschylus is likewise portrayed as having both high and low poetic potential, though scholarship has tended to view him as more monolithic than Euripides, as straightforwardly moral and epic.96 I argue, however, that the epirrhematic agon betrays hints of Aeschylus’ lowness while establishing him as the primarily high-brow contestant by associating him with Aristophanes’ own high-brow parabatic persona. I noted above that the heaviness and epic flavor of the language used to describe Aeschylean poetry is indicative of a seriousness of purpose – as opposed to the frivolity and banality of Euripides. The anger that characterizes Aeschylus is comparable to the anger that Aristophanes says is typical of his own political satire.97

A further similarity between Aeschylus and the Aristophanic persona lies in their audiences. In the second prologue, Aeschylus’ spectators are described as “the few good men” (όλίγον τὸ χρηστόν, 783) as opposed to the vulgar masses who support Euripides (779-81). Likewise, Aristophanes often singles out a small, elite group of spectators separate from the popular crowds as his intended audience. We see this clearly in the Clouds parabasis where he identifies “the clever ones among you” (heimer…τοῦς δεξιοῦς, 527) as an elite subset of his audience, opposed to the majority

95 Compare the treatment of Euripides’ high-low duality in Thesmophoriazusae. In the prologue of that comedy, Euripides’ high-brow qualities are established by means of incomprehensible philosophizing and tragic parody. His high and low aspects are kept separate rather than being implicated in one another as in Frogs.
97 Aeschylus’ anger is vividly portrayed at 843-59; 1004-5. Cf. Peace 752.
who preferred the low comedy of his rivals. Zachery Biles has gone one step further and
argued that not only are we meant to view Aeschylus as similar to Aristophanes’ self-
presentation, but even that we should find Aristophanes’ poetic voice in the *Frogs*
articulated through the mouth of Aeschylus.98 The clearest moment in which Aeschylus’
character overlaps with Aristophanes’ persona is in the chorus’ introduction of
Aeschylus:

\[ \text{ἀλλ’, ὃ πρῶτος τῶν Ἑλλήνων πυργώσας ρήματα σεμνά} \]

1005 καὶ κοσμήσας τραγικὸν λῆρον, θαρρῶν τὸν κρουνὸν ἄφιει.99 (*Frogs* 1004-5)

But you, first of the Greeks to build lofty word towers
1005 and embellish tragic trash, take heart and open your spout!

This passage looks back to Aristophanes’ own claim in the *Peace* parabasis:100

\[ \text{ἐποίησε τέχνην μεγάλην ἣμῖν κάπυργῳ ὁ ἱκοδομήσας} \]

(Peace 749)

He made our art great, building it up with lofty word towers

As I noted in my discussion of this *Peace* passage, Aristophanes’ claim to high-
browness in *Peace* is a citation from Pherecrates’ *Crapataloi*, spoken by Aeschylus in
the underworld about his own tragedy.101 It is impossible now, without more of
Pherecrates’ comedy, to know how Aeschylus was treated in the Pherecratean scenario.
However, the fragments and testimonia are suggestive of some themes. The title itself
offers a clue. The word κραπαταλός, according to Hesychius, can mean ὁ μωρός, a

98 Biles 2011, 240-50 argues that the poet’s voice, absent from the *Frogs* parabasis, is to be
found instead in the epirrhematic ἀγῶν. The parabasis, he says, does not break the dramatic
allusion and the chorus maintain their identity as ἔστατι rather than stepping forward to speak as
or on behalf of the poet. The lack of anapests also provides no opportunity for authorial self-
assertion. He further argues (243) that Aristophanes “invests the contest of the tragedians with
his own parabasis.” He points to the anapestic tetrameters of the chorus preceding Aeschylus’
speech and Aeschylus’ speech itself, noting that anapestic tetrameters are also Aristophanes’
pREFERRED parabatic meter.
99 Wilson 2007c, 180 prints κλῆρον for codd. λῆρον. I maintain the reading λῆρον because the
concept has been a prominent one throughout *Frogs*, and, as I argue below, 236, the phrasing in
1005 provides a fitting ambiguity concerning Aeschylean poetics in *Frogs*.
100 Biles 2011, 244-5.
101 Tarkow 1982, 3.
stupid person. It can also refer to a type of small, worthless fish. This is the name Pherecrates has given to a form of currency worth a drachma. The title of the comedy, then, encapsulates the idea of something of value (a skilled worker’s daily pay), treated as worthless. Monetary value and exchange appear to be key themes elsewhere in *Crapataloi*. In fragment 98, we see the following exchange:

A. τί δαί; τί σαυτὸν ἀποτίνειν τῷ δ’ ἄξιοῖς, φράσον μοι.
B. ἀπαρτὶ δὴπου προσλαβεῖν παρὰ τοῦ δ’ ἔγωγε μᾶλλον.

A. So? What do you think you should pay him? Tell me.
B. On the contrary, I think I should rather get something from him.

This fragment implies that, perhaps in an *agōn*, characters are mis-valuing each other.102 One possibility is that characters find that when they arrive in Hades, moral worth is differently evaluated: that which is considered bad on earth is positively valued in the underworld and vice versa.103 A possible interpretation of *Crapataloi* fr. 100 (ὥστες <γ’> αὐτός παρέδωκα τέχνην μεγάλην ἐξοικοδομήσες) is thus that Aeschylus thinks he should be highly valued but is treated as of little worth in the underworld. In this light *Frogs* 1004-5 can be viewed as serving a double function. First, it links Aeschylus’ and Aristophanes’ claimed high-brow poetics.104 But it also hints at the irony that will be revealed in the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides, in which it is Aeschylus who turns out to be the low-comic performer. The phrasing of the chorus’ praise adds to the ironic ambiguity of 1004-5. They say that Aeschylus “embellished tragic trash” (κοσμήσας τραγικὸν λῆρον), which can be interpreted one of two ways: either Aeschylus

102 Storey 2011b, 459-60. Cf. fr. 91, where a character expected to be welcomed and find a door open, but was disappointed. This also points to a character not treated as they expect.
103 Is it possible that the monetary theme of *Frogs* is also linked to Pherecrates’ *Crapataloi*? The two plays share other features in common, including scatology: fr. 93; sexual innuendo: fr. 89, using chickpea (ἐρεβίθους) for penis, as Dionysus does at *Frogs* 545; slave-beating: fr. 94; and concern for spectators and judges in frs. 101 and 102.
104 While Aristophanes shares e.g. cleverness and novelty with his Euripides, he nowhere explicitly links himself to Euripides as he does to Aeschylus. In *Thesmophoriazusae*, by comparison, Aristophanes links himself much more closely to Euripides as internal didaskalos.
put the tragic trash in order (i.e. made it not trash anymore) or he honored and
embellished it (i.e. made it more trashy than it already was). Aeschylus’ low-brow poetic
potential is also in evidence in the epirrhematic agōn in his Phrynichean audience, his
predilection for chickens and fantasy animals, his reliance on sound effects, and the
stock comic nature of some of his characters.

According to Euripides, Aeschylus’ audience are “idiot spectators nourished
under Phryynchus” (τοὺς θεσσάρους…μύρους…παρὰ Φρυνίχω τραφέντας, 909-10). The
tragic Phrynichus is the natural referent here. Phrynichus was Aeschylus’ tragic
predecessor, and as such, he can be said to have inherited the earlier poet’s audience.
That said, it is impossible to ignore the large-loomng presence of Phrynichus comicus in
Frogs, particularly since “bad spectators” were associated with Phrynichus in the Frogs’
prologue. This line may, therefore, have a metatheatrical valence to it if at the Lenaeae
Phrynichus’ Muses was played before Frogs. In that case, Euripides could point to the
spectators in the theater as the idiots who watched (and enjoyed) that Phrynichean
performance, drawing a connection between those who appreciated Muses and those
who would be likely to favor Aeschylus in the Frogs’ agōn.

A further indication of Aeschylus’ lowness is his propensity to imagine bizarre,
hybrid animals, a tendency for which Dionysus and Euripides mock him. Euripides
blusters about his “griffin-eagles” (γρυπαιέτους, 929), and “goat-stags” (τραγελάφους,
937), and Dionysus claims to lie awake at night wondering what an Aeschylean
“horsecock” (ἱππαλεκτρυόνα, 932) is.106 These hybrid animals not only look back to
Frogs’ “marvels of the frog-swans” (βατράχων κύκνων θαυμαστά, 207), the
paradigmatically low-brow, ancient chorus, but also to the titles of several other

105 Cf. Frogs 783 where his audience were described as “the few good men.”
106 For images of horsecocks and a discussion thereof see Perdrizet 1904, 7-30. On goat-stags
comedies: Metagenes’ *Thurio-Persians*, Myrtilus’ *Titan-Pans*, and Pherecrates’ *Ant-men*. Euripides further debases these Aeschylean creations by asking “should you even be writing about chickens in tragedy?” (ἐν τραγῳδίαις ἐχρήν κάλεκτρυόνα ποιήσαι;, 935), an accusation that will come back to haunt Euripides, as we shall see below.

There are also low-brow implications for Aeschylus in the disciples (μοθηταῖς, 964) Euripides assigns to Aeschylus and himself. Euripides names his own disciples as two opportunistic, sophistic politicians, Cleitophon and Theramenes, while he names Aeschylus’ as Phormisius and Megainetos the Μανῆς. Phormisius is mocked elsewhere for his excessive facial hair and sexual appetites. Megainetos is otherwise unknown, but his nickname “the Manes” is a stock slave name in Athenian comedy. Both these figures seem like apt characters for stock comedy: the over-sexualized, bearded, hyper-masculine soldier and the slave. Indeed, the characters are summarized by the comic coinages σαλπιγγολοχυπηνάδαι (“trumpet-spear-stasched”) and σαρκασμοπιτυοκάμπτης. The σαρκάζω portion of this word should be interpreted as “sneer” or “mock” rather than “rip flesh” and the scholia tell us that word implies “feigned warlikeness” (προσποιουμένους τὰ πολεμικά) – a characteristic of the braggart soldier that we see elsewhere. Aeschylus’ fans are turned into stock low-comic figures because such characters are present in his tragedy too. When Aeschylus describes his

107 All these plays, interestingly, have other links to low-comedy. On *Thurio-Persians* and *Titan-Pans* see above, chapter two; Pherecrates’ *Ant-Men* may have had an animal chorus.
108 Rosenbloom 2017, 75-6, notes that while the politics of Cleitophon, Theramenes, and Phormisius were actually quite similar (they were all listed together in Aristotle’s *Athenian Institution* 34.3 as aiming for an ancestral constitution in 404), the differences between them are stylistic and ethical: Cleitophon and Theramenes are both associated with the sophists, while Phormisius is more violent.
109 Ecclesiaiausae 97, where the name Phormisius stands in for the hairy genitalia of one of Praxagora’s women; in Philetærus’ comedy Huntress, Phormisius is said to have died while having sex (ἀποθανεῖν βίον ἅμα, K-A fr.6).
110 Pherecrates *Wild Men* fr. 10; Hermippus’ *Fates*, fr. 48; Aristophanes’ *Peace* 1146; *Birds* 1311, 1329; *Lysistrata* 1211.
111 Especially Lamachus in *Acharnians* 1174-89.
own typical characters, he says that he uses Lamachus as a model for warriors like Patroclus and Teucer (1039-42). It is usually assumed that, now Lamachus is dead, Aristophanes is speaking of him as a genuine ἥρως (1039), despite the irreverence of his depiction in Acharnians.\textsuperscript{112} It seems more likely to me, however, that we are meant to recall Aristophanes’ Lamachus: a stock braggart soldier, with a speaking name, bearing little resemblance to the real Lamachus.\textsuperscript{113}

As Aeschylus complains about the chattering that Euripides has taught the Athenians (λαλιάν ἐπιτηδέεσαι καὶ στωμολίαν, 1069), he longs for his own days when the only thing sailors knew how to do was “call for their bread and cry ‘ruppapai!’” (μάζαν καλέσαι καὶ ῥυππαπαταί εἶπεῖν, 1074). This reflects a general Aeschylean tendency to emphasize noise over content, seen also at 924-6 and in Dionysus’ delight at the clapping of the Persians chorus and their yells of ἵαυο (1030). Dionysus completes Aeschylus’ description of the “good old days”: the average sailor back then also knew how to “fart in the face of the bottom-bench rower, cover his messmate with shit, and steal clothes on shore” (προσπαρδεῖν γ’ ἐς τὸ στόμα τῷ θαλάμακι καὶ μινθῶσαι τὸν ξύσιτον κάκβας τινα λωποδυτῆσαι, 1074-5). This looks back to the low-comic fart jokes and Dionysian scatology of the Frogs’ opening, and the emphasis on the past reminds the audience that Aeschylus is the old contestant. And oldness, as we have seen throughout the Frogs, is consistently associated with lowness.

If the point of the epirrhematic agōn is, as I argue, to set up Euripides and Aeschylus as, respectively, the low and high competitors in the up-coming contest, then why does Aristophanes imbue the low-tragic Euripides with elements associated with high poetics, and suggestively hint at Aeschylus’ lowness? I offer two reasons: first, it

\textsuperscript{112} Halliwell 2011, 126 with n. 56.

\textsuperscript{113} On Lamachus as a stock-figure see Halliwell 1984, 10-12; Mastromarco 2002. On the stock figure of the braggart soldier in middle comedy see Nesselrath 1990, 325-9.
highlights the interdependency and inextricability of high and low, which, as we have seen, is an important theme throughout *Frogs*; and second, it serves to explain what happens in the course of the contest. There is a crucial difference – not usually emphasized in scholarly discussions of *Frogs*’ second part – between the epirrhematic agōn and the contest proper. In the epirrhematic section, the tragedians make claims about the nature of their tragedy. But in the course of the contest, as they perform parodies of each other’s tragedies, they are transformed into comic performers, since comedy alone has the power to perform tragic parody. This distinction between talking about tragedy in comedy and the performance of tragic parody is one of the central conceits of Farmer’s *Tragedy on the Comic Stage*. When Aeschylus talks about his own tragedy, he claims to be an upright teacher of moral virtue (i.e. to be a high-brow poet) angry at Euripides’ corruption of the art. But when Aeschylus performs tragic parody (i.e. performs as a comic poet), he performs using the low-comic techniques that I discuss below. His ability to do so is foreshadowed by the subtle elements of lowbrowness attributed to him in the epirrhematic agōn. Likewise, Euripides claims to be a tragedian of the everyday, domestic, and comprehensible. But when he performs tragic parody as a comic performer, he relies too heavily on his intellectual, sophistic side, and so his humor is much less accessible to the ordinary spectator. There is, of course, an abundance of humor and irony at work in the conceit Aristophanes lays out: Aeschylus is successful as a comic performer because he has Euripides’ already low-brow tragedy to work from. But Aeschylus’ parodies are also extremely inventive, and in

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114 Farmer 2017 refers to these two elements as “tragic parody” and “tragic culture.” The latter is defined as “all the ways the comic poets depict tragedy as part of the everyday life of contemporary Athens. The comic poets stage conversations about tragic poetry and performance, portray devoted fans and partisans of specific tragedians or eras of tragedy, bring the tragic poets themselves as characters into their comedies, and depict conversations about the festivals of Dionysus, where comedies and tragedies were performed” (5).
some cases do not rely at all on “real” Euripidean tragedy. The low elements of Aeschylus hinted at in the epirrhematic section demonstrate that there is plenty of low-brow Aeschylean material available to Euripides for parodying, but his comic performance fails because he does not take advantage of them.

**The comic tragic contest**

There are four parts to the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides: a contest in prologues, followed by one in lyrics and monodies, a weighing of the words, and finally a contest in political advice. In this section I consider the first three parts of the contest—the poetic elements. I argue that in each case Aeschylus beats Euripides by using a low-brow mode of comic critique, while Euripides attempts a more sophistic, analytic, “clever” critical mode in criticizing Aeschylean poetry. Aristophanes here uses the figures of Aeschylus and Euripides to represent different comic modes of doing criticism: Aeschylus being the low-brow comic and Euripides the high-brow. This is surprising since, as we have seen, the epirrhematic *agōn* sets Euripides up as the low tragedian and Aeschylus as the high tragedian. The difference between Aeschylus and Euripides’ tragic and comic modes allows Aristophanes to represent the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides as a version of the “high-brow contestant out-lowering the low-brow contestant” pattern that we have seen with Aristophanes and Phrynichus, and Dionysus and the frogs. The tragic contest is the ultimate and most complex expression of this pattern. Not only does Aeschylus use Euripides’ own lowness to defeat him, but Euripides proves inept at taking advantage of his own low poetics when it comes to performing comedy—where such a poetics would be appropriate. Euripides’ performance ironically demonstrates the lack of humor and unsuccessful outcome of a purely high comedy, devoid of its essential lowness. This is ironic because the high-
comic mode is embodied in the low-brow contestant (Euripides) at the same time as the high-brow contestant (Aeschylus) is using Euripides’ own low poetics to defeat him.

The contest between Aeschylus and Euripides is, I claim, a contest between high- and low-comic technique, in which low comedy wins. Even the structural form of the contest embodies the high-low tension which forms its basis: it is initially structured as a “capping contest,” in which each contestant builds on the last person’s critique to affect their own critique. Such capping contests, as Hesk has shown, have an ambiguous high/low status, often enjoyed at symposia, but accompanied by a degree of anxiety because of their association with low-brow, informal, agoraic banter. Capping contests always possess the potential to devolve into low-brow form. The structure of the first two contests between Aeschylus and Euripides is as follows:

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<th>Prologue</th>
<th>Euripides: κατ᾽ ἔπος analysis of Aeschylus’ Choephoroi prologue Aeschylus: κατ᾽ ἔπος analysis of Euripides’ Antigone prologue Aeschylus: ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν refrain added to prologues</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lyrics/ monodies</td>
<td>Euripides: ἴῃ κόπον οὐ πελάθεις ἔπι’ ἀρωγάν refrain Euripides: φλαττοθραττοφλαττοθρατ refrain creating ridiculous animal story Aeschylus: Euripides’ Muse parody creating ridiculous animal story Aeschylus: Chicken-theft parody</td>
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Euripides begins the contest with a word-for-word analysis of an Aeschylean prologue. When it comes to Aeschylus’ turn to respond he begins by doing the same to Euripides’ Antigone prologue, but he soon declares “I’m not going to chop up every phrase and examine it word for word by Zeus,” (καὶ μὴν μὰ τὸν Δί’ οὐ κατ᾽ ἔπος γέ σου κνίσω, τὸ ῥήμα ἐκαστὸν, 1198). Instead he adds the refrain ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν to the end of every prologue Euripides tries to recite. In response, in the next contest, Euripides reproduces a series of Aeschylean lyric lines with the refrain ἴῃ κόπον οὐ πελάθεις ἔπι’ ἀρωγάν

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115 Hesk 2007. In Frogs we have already witnessed a basic capping contest in the ἀγον between Dionysus and the frog chorus.
inserted after each line. In his second attack on Aeschylean lyric, he continues with the refrain idea, this time inserting the noise φλαττοθρατοφλαττοθρατ (in imitation of a monotonous lyre) after each line, simultaneously creating a bizarre story about a bird sending the Atreidae, compared to a sphinx, into battle. Aeschylus’ parody of Euripidean lyrics builds on Euripides’ use of bizarre animal imagery (spiders work a loom in the same place as a dolphin brandishes oracles). It also builds on Euripides’ attack on musicality, by having a percussion accompaniment and imitating the new music style which prolonged a single syllable over multiple notes (ειειειειειλίσιτε, 1314).  

Aeschylus caps Euripides, however, by bringing his rival’s “Muse” on stage as percussion accompanist. In Aeschylus’ final cap, he outdoes his own previous attack and all Euripides’ attacks by inventing a Euripidean monody featuring a lowly flax-seller whose neighbor Glyce (a prostitute name) has stolen her chicken (ἀλεκτρυόνα, 1343). Though extending over 250 lines, this formal patterning of the contest evokes, on a large scale, the extemporaneous-sounding competitive songs of Ecclesiazusae (referred to by Aristophanes as a stale low-brow routine), as well as the sympotic capping contests discussed by Hesk, and their sub-literary, agoraic counterparts.

In the prologue contest, Euripides charges Aeschylus with obscurity in the exposition of his plots (ἀσαφής γὰρ ἢν ἐν τῇ φράσει τῶν πραγμάτων, 1122). His technique, by which he identifies errors in Aeschylus’ language, is a parody of sophistic criticism; Segal has argued that it may parody a specific work of Protagoras. While some of the educated elite in the audience would have understood the jokes and parodic references in Euripides’ words, Dionysus seems to summarize the view of the ordinary spectator: “Well-said, by Hermes. I can’t even understand it!” (εὖ, νη τὸν Ἐρμῆν· ὅ τι
λέγεις δ’ οὐ μανθάνω). In other words, whatever Euripides is doing, it sounds clever even to those who have no clue what the critiques really mean.  

Dionysus’ comment also metatheatrically acts as an encouragement to those spectators who may have begun to feel left behind. It implies that they are not necessarily meant to understand.

In Euripides’ sophistic, and, according to Dionysus, incomprehensible and dull exposition of Aeschylean prologues, Aristophanes has demonstrated a high-brow mode of critique. In Aeschylus’ exposition of Euripidean prologues, Aristophanes imbues the high-brow parodic mode with a low-brow twist. Aeschylus begins by using Euripides’ κατ’ ἐπος method to analyze the opening of his Antigone, but soon expresses, like Dionysus, his own exasperation with the technique: “I’m not going to chop up every phrase and examine it word for word by Zeus, but with the help of the gods I will destroy your prologues with a tiny pot of oil” (καὶ μὴν μὰ τὸν Δι’, οὐ κατ’ ἐπος γὲ σου κνίσωτο ῥῆμ’ ἕκαστον, ἀλλὰ σὺν τοῖς θεοῖς ἀπὸ ληκυθίου σου τοὺς προλόγους διαφθερῶ, 1198-200).

The point of the “tiny pot of oil” (ληκύθιον) joke has been extensively debated. Some have considered it to be a joke about Euripidean monotony and metrical predictability, others an unlikely and hard-to-pin-down sexual innuendo. Still other have viewed it as a way for Aeschylus to rob his rival of his tragic worth by highlighting the triviality and ordinariness that Euripides himself attributed to his tragedy in the

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118 Cf. Euripides’ earlier claim, here upended, to be a clear and comprehensible speaker (923-6; 961-2).

119 The same effect is rendered by Dionysus’ apparent boredom at the word-for-word analysis, implied by his exhortation to Aeschylus to “hurry up” (ἀνύσας, 1171) with his recitation. After Euripides has picked out one mistake in this second round, Dionysus wants a change of pace, asking “well how did you write your prologues?” (σοῦ δὲ πῶς ἐποίεις τοὺς προλόγους; 1777).

120 For the bibliography on this issue see Dover 1993, 337-9. See also Goldhill 1991, 216.
epirrhematic _agōn_. Henderson developed this last theory to suggest that there is a slapstick, physical joke at play in the scene that highlights the unheroic nature of Euripidean protagonists, arguing that Aeschylus has a _lekythion_ and is using it to physically beat his opponents. He cites lexical evidence in favor of such an interpretation: when Dionysus, the subject of Euripides’ second prologue, has the ἀπώλεσεν tag attached to his name, he cries out “Ahhhh, we have been struck again by the oil pot!” (ὁἴμοι, πεπλήγμεθ᾽ ἀὖθις ὑπὸ τῆς ληκύθου, 1214), suggesting that Aeschylus has physically struck one or both of them with the object. Later, Euripides says he will knock the _lekythion_ out of Aeschylus’ hands (ἐκκεκόψεται, 1223), and Dionysus warns Euripides to keep clear of Aeschylus’ _lekythion_ (κἀπέχου, 1224). The presence of a physical _lekythion_ on stage also brings an added element of humor to Dionysus’ repeated suggestion that Euripides just buy the _lekythion_ from Aeschylus (1227; 1235-6). This argument, unlike the dubious sexual innuendo or not-very-funny metrical parody, is convincing, and highlights the importance of paying attention to the physical action indicated in the text. We saw in chapter two the pervasiveness of physical action in comedy as evidenced by vase-paintings, and noted that these extra-verbal aspects of comedy, as a central aspect of performance, must be including in any consideration of poetics. The “strikes” may be understood as metaphorical, but what does comedy do better than transforming the metaphorical into the actual? The transformation of literary criticism into a physical fight, a transactional, agoraic scene,

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121 E.g. Bain 1985 focuses on the absolute banality of the _lekythion_ as an object, noting that according to Demosthenes (24.114), it is classed among τὰ φαυλότατα.
123 Henderson 1972, 139-40. He cites Menander’s _Trophonius_ as an example that the _lekythion_ could be used for stage beating. Harpocratus, under the lemma αὐτολήκυθοι (269), notes that “after loosening the strap, they used to use it for beating, Menander in _Trophonius_” (ὅτι δὲ λύσαντες τὴν λήκυθον ἔχρωντο τῷ ἰμάντι πρὸς τὸ μαστιγοῦν, Μένανδρος Τροφώνιω). He cites Aristophanes fr. 435 from _Storks_ as another possible parallel.
encapsulates well the dual high-low poetics of Aristophanes, highlighting the low aspect of the dichotomy through Aeschylus.

In addition to the physicality of the scene, there is a further way in which we might view the scene as low-brow. It has been suggested by several scholars, especially Tucker, Radermacher, and Collins, that we ought to see in Aeschylus’ ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν tag a kind of game. Tucker says, “One may guess with some confidence that the Athenians had a forfeit-game, in which it was ‘one to me’ if I could fit on (προσάπτειν) a certain tag to something being said. In such a case the winner cried ‘forfeit!’ in some such expression as ‘(you have) lost this or that’ (whatever might be at stake). If, on the other hand, the tag could not be affixed, the payment was the other way. If Eur. could get through one prologue without incurring the ληκύθιον he would ‘get it back.’” Tucker uses such a hypothesis to explain some of Dionysus’ seemingly odd expressions – προσάψαι (1216, 1231, 1234), ἀποπρίω (1227), ἀπόδος (1235), and suggests that common and relatively worthless objects like a ληκύθιον, κωδόριον, or θυλόκιον were “natural articles to stake or forfeit.” This is an ingenious reconstruction, but there is little evidence to support it. Radermacher and Collins on the other hand, compare the Frogs “capping game” to symposium riddles such as those described in Athenaeus. These games are described by Athenaeus (citing the fourth-century BCE philosopher Clearchus’ On Proverbs) as exceedingly intellectual and the preserve of the elite – he speaks of these sympotic “riddles” (γρίφων, 457c) as a “demonstration of paideia” (τὴν τῆς παιδείας ἀπόδειξιν, 457c). They involve such iterations as someone reciting a line epic or iambic poetry, and the next person finishing it, or everyone reciting a line with a certain number of syllabbus, or beginning with certain letters. Athenaeus

124 Tucker 1906, 233.
125 Tucker 1906, 233
concludes his account by saying:

ὂστε τὴν παιδίαν μή ἄκεπτον οὖσαν μηνύματα γίνεσθαι τῆς ἐκάστου πρὸς παιδείαν οἰκειότητος. (Athenaeus 457f)

Thus the game was not ill-advised frivolity, but informative about each person’s education.

Clearchus’ account, however, actually contrasts two versions of these riddle games. The “intellectual” version, he says, was played by “the ancients” (οἱ παλαιοί, 457c), while the debased moderns of his own fourth century (οἱ νῦν) play a different version involving questions of preferable sexual positions (τίς τῶν ἀφροδισιαστικῶν συνδυασμῶν, 457d) or fish types (ποῖς ἡχύσ, 457d) at certain times of the year. Clearchus also contrasts the prizes and penalties of the low-brow and high-brow versions of these games: the low-brow prizes were “kisses worthy of disgust to those with elite sensibilities” (φιλήματα μίσους ἀξια τοῖς ἐλευθέραν ἁισθησίν ἔχουσι), and the penalty was unmixed wine. For the high-brow version, the prize was “a garland and good cheer” (στέφανον καὶ εὐφημίαν, 457f). Though Clearchus imbues his own high-low dichotomy with a chronological contrast (in the “good old days” people did elite activities, now they only do a debased version), his comments likely reflect two different versions of similar games. Hesk’s analysis of the phenomenon he calls “combative capping” also seeks to demonstrate that while “capping” games (in which contestants try to outdo each other in a verbal wrangle) do seem to have been a sympotic pastime, there is also evidence for an agoraic, “popular” culture of capping games and jokes. It seems certain that comedians and others could and did associate certain types of capping with “ordinary people” like shop-keepers and prostitutes. 126 This evidence for games to which we might compare Aeschylus’ “tagging” of Euripidean prologues suggests that the mode need not be seen as exclusively elite, as Radermacher and Collins have framed it. And in fact, when we

126 Hesk 2007, 135-41.
compare Clearchus' description of the “intellectual” forms of symposium games to what Aeschylus does in *Frogs*, there is quite a difference. Aeschylus does not have to think a lot about his responses to Euripides because the response is always the same.

Rather than looking to sympotic games for comparanda, we should perhaps pursue another suggestion of Radermacher. He cites several comic parallels for the use of a refrain, including Plautus' *Asinaria* 920ff, where the refrain *surge amator, i domum* is repeated 4 times (921, 923, 924, and 925). This, he says, doubtless had Greek antecedents.\(^\text{127}\) A chronologically more pertinent example is Hegemon of Thasos, a parodist and writer of old comedy, a contemporary of Cratinus.\(^\text{128}\) What we know of this figure suggests that as a comic poet, his reputation conformed to Aristophanes' definition of low-brow. He wrote a *hetaera comedy* entitled *Philinna* "in the old style" (ἐίς τόν ὄρχαιον τρόπον), whose single fragment is about buying food;\(^\text{129}\) and he was apparently nicknamed "Lentil Soup" (Φακῆ).\(^\text{130}\) This dish, like Heracles' pea soup (ἔτνος) was a cheap, everyday food.\(^\text{131}\) Like pea soup and the other foods listed in Callias fr. 26, it too may have been a metaphor for the type of comedy Hegemon was known to produce, i.e. typical, wholesome, low-brow comedy. The other thing we know about Hegemon is that when he started a parody, but got lost, he would use the tag “and the

\(^{127}\) Radermacher 310-11

\(^{128}\) Storey 2011b suspects there may be two Hegemons: a fifth-century parodist and a fourth-century comedian. This is on the basis of the title of a surviving comedy, *Philinna*, which "suggests…a *hetaera* play of the sort familiar from the fourth century" and its "culinary style." However, we have seen in Part One the fifth-century presence of both *hetaera* comedies and of food as a theme. Storey cites the Suda as evidence that there was a comedian called Hegemon in the time of Demosthenes, but the Suda just sees the name Hegemon in Demosthenes *On the Crown* and assumes it is the same one mentioned by Athenaeus. Demosthenes mentions nothing comic about this Hegemon, indeed he is mentioned as a potential funeral orator. It seems safe to assume then, that there was one comic/parodic Hegemon and one non-comic Hegemon, rather than assuming two different comic Hegemons.

\(^{129}\) Athenaeus 699a

\(^{130}\) Suda η 52, Athenaeus 5a, 406e-7c.

\(^{131}\) Evident in the proverb "The perfume in the soup" (τούτι τῇ φακῇ μύρον), meaning something like "pearl before swine."
leg of a partridge” (καὶ τὸ περδίκος σκέλος). In Aristophanes’ *Birds* 974-90 the refrain “It’s in the book!” (λαβὲ τὸ βιβλίον) is used by an oracle-monger, taken up by Peisetairos, who uses it against him to get rid of him. Such tag-humor, it seems, was relatively common, repetitive, and easy to understand, making it typical of low-brow humor.

Still other scholars have compared the “lost his tiny pot of oil” scene to other examples of modern “popular” drama. Dover, for example points to the repetitive nature of the humor, suggesting that it is “the humor more of children’s pantomime than of sophisticated comedy – because the audience can see the fatal phrase coming…and some of them may have shouted it out.” Arnott too highlights the repetition as the key element in this scene, noting that when he has directed, performed, or watched this scene in *Frogs*, it unfailingly produced laughter even in non-specialist audiences. He compares it with the it with the “galley” scene in Molière’s *Les Fourberies de Scapin*. He emphasizes that in both cases the skill in dramatizing the scene lies in the build-up of the repetition and the increase in tempo to avoid monotony.

In sum, there is a multiplicity of evidence that points to Aeschylus’ “lost his tiny pot of oil” tag as evoking an atmosphere of improvised, traditional, low-brow comedy: the repetition, the physical action likely associated with the scene, and the link to a popular game or a popular form of entertainment. Such a mode of critique stands in stark contrast to Euripides’ sophistic, intellectual, largely humorless, nitpicky analysis that Aeschylus and even Dionysus quickly tire of. Euripidean tragedy made a claim to clarity

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132 Von Leutsch and Schneidewin 1839, 406. “Recalling a lame tavern keeper in Athens called Perdix (Partridge), Hegemon of Thasos, whenever he was at a loss in one of his parodies, added ‘and the leg of a partridge’” (Πέρδιξ γὰρ ἢν τις Ἀθηναῖσι χυλὸς κάτηλος, οὐ διαβεβοημένου Ἡγήμων ὁ Θάσιος ὁπότε παριθῶν ἀπορήσει, προσετίθει καὶ τὸ περδίκος σκέλος).
135 Arnott 1977, 176-9
136 Arnott 1977, 180-5
and to appealing to the ordinary spectator, but as comic performer, that clarity is all gone.

In the second contest, Euripides tackles Aeschylean lyrics. Instead of returning to his κατ᾽ ἐπος analysis, he takes a leaf out of Aeschylus’ book and tries a refrain. The refrain he chooses is “Ah the pain, do you not go to aid them?” (ἰὴ κόπον οὐ τελάθεις ἔπτ᾽ ἄρωγάν;). His aim in using the refrain is to “cut all his lyrics down into a single song” (εἰς ἐν γὰρ αὐτοῦ πάντα τὰ μέλη συντεμῶ, 1262), in other words to demonstrate that all Aeschylean lyrics sound the same.137 The first time Euripides says the refrain, he speaks it in its proper context: “Phthian Achilles, why when you hear the slaughter of men, ah the pain, do you not go to aid them?” (Φθιῶτ᾽ Ἀχιλλεῦ, τί ποτ᾽ ἀνδροδάιτικον ἀκούων, ἢ κόπον οὐ τελάθεις ἔπτ᾽ ἄρωγάν 1264-5).138 In the subsequent verses, Euripides adds the tag to lines from other plays, parodying both the dactylic rhythm and Aeschylus’ propensity for refrains.139 Euripides’ use of the tagging technique, however, differs from Aeschylus’ ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν tag in two key ways: first, the addition of the tag to other Aeschylean lines produces nonsense, both grammatically and thematically. Euripides’ joke is that Aeschylean lyric is garbled, nonsensical repetition. Second, Euripides uses a real Aeschylean line, from the Myrmidons, as his tag. Unlike ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν, the tag ἢ κόπον οὐ τελάθεις ἔπτ᾽ ἄρωγάν has no intrinsic humor. In its original context, the line was not a refrain, and this appears to be part of Euripides’ joke: even lines in

138 Aeschylus Myrmidons fr. 132.
139 Borthwick 1994, 21. Dover 1993, 345. He notes Aeschylus’ use of refrains e.g. at Agamemnon 121 = 139 = 159 (ἀλίλον ἀλίλον ἑπτε, τὸ δ᾽ εὗ νικάτω) and Eumenides 328-33 = 341-6. See also Moritz 1979, 187-8 who also notes Eumenides 1035 and 1038 (εὐφημεῖτε) and 1043 and 1047 (ὀλολύσατε νῦν ἑπὶ μολπαῖς), Persians 663 and 671 (βάσκε, πάτερ ἄκακε Δαριάν· οἱ), and Suppliants 117-21 = 129-33, 141-3 = 151-3, 162-7 repeated after 175, and 889-92 = 899-902.
Aeschylean lyric that are not refrains sound like refrains.  

Such a joke relies on spectators recognizing the line and knowing that ἰὴ κόπον οὐ πελάθεις ἐπ᾽ ἀρωγάν was not a refrain. Despite its use of repetition, therefore, Euripides’ tagging parody remains a high-brow joke.

Euripides’ parody in this scene may be high-brow and perhaps incomprehensible to many spectators. But the scene itself has elements of slapstick low comedy produced by Dionysus. When Euripides announces his intention to cut all Aeschylus’ lyrics down into one song, Dionysus says “and I’ll keep a count of them with some pebbles” (καὶ μὴν λογιοῦμαι γ᾽ αὐτὰ τῶν ψηφῶν λαβῶν, 1263). After Euripides’ first two refrains, Dionysus exclaims, “two strikes to you, Aeschylus!” (δύο σοι κόπω Αἰσχύλε, τούτω, 1268).

Sommerstein suspects Dionysus is acting like a boxing umpire keeping count of how many punches have landed. The combination of pebbles and strikes, however, leads me to suspect that perhaps Dionysus is literally striking Aeschylus with his pebbles – perhaps a response to being beaten with the lekythion in the previous scene. Dionysus may throw the pebbles at Aeschylus as Euripides says ἰὴ κόπον. I translated this above as “ah the pain,” but it literally means “ah the strike.”

The actualization of metaphor (the metaphorical strike becoming a literal strike) is a common Aristophanic technique, seen also, for example, in the weighing of the words contest.

In his second attack on Aeschylean lyric, Euripides continues with the refrain technique. This time he inserts the sound φλαττοθραττοφλαττοθρατ after a series of

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140 Refrains tend to be stand-alone phrases. But the κόπον in the line Euripides uses as a refrain is gramatically attached to ἀνδροδατικον ἄκουων in the previous line.
141 Sommerstein 1996, 270.
142 This may explain the joke Dionysus makes at 1279-80. He claims to “need a bath to help my kidneys – they’re swollen from all that striking?!” (ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν εἰς τὸ βαλανείον βουλομαι· ὕπο τῶν κόπων γὰρ τῷ νεφρῷ βουβωνιῶ). Dionysus speaks as if he is the one who has been repeatedly struck, when in fact the physical exertion the line implies comes from the fact that he has been the one doing the striking.
lines from Aeschylus' tragedies *Agamemnon*, *Memnon*, *Thracian Women*, and the satyr play *Sphinx*. The sound imitates a monotonous lyre tune. In this parody, Euripides seems to have been more successful in producing a low comic parody of Aeschylean lyric. The refrain is a non-verbal noise, universally comprehensible to the audience.

The parody also picks up on a low-brow element of Aeschylean dramaturgy hinted at in the epirrhematic section: his predilection for animal imagery:

1285 ὅτις Αχαιῶν διθρονον κράτος Ἑλλάδος ἦβας
1287 Σφίγγα, δυσμερίαν πρύτανιν κύνα πεμπει
1289 ξῦν δορί καὶ χερὶ πράκτορι θούριος ὀρνις
1291 κυρεῖν παρασχώμην ἵππαις κυοῦν ἀεροφότοις
1293 τὸ συγκλίνες τ᾽ ἔπτ᾽ Αἰάντι (1285-93)

1285 How the impetuous bird sends the double-throned might of the Achaeans,
1287 the Sphinx of the youth of Greece, a bad omen, ruling dog,
1289 with spear and avenging hand
1291 after handing over the force aimed at Ajax
1293 for the rushing, air-roaming dogs to find.

Line 1287, from the satyr play *Sphinx*, transforms the sons of Atreus into a sphinx.

This is followed by a whole confusion of further animal imagery. Without the context of the *Agamemnon*, in which the "impetuous bird" is clearly an omen, it sounds like a bird is commanding a sphinx (described as a dog, but in fact part bird, part lion, part woman) who should be the one in charge (πρύτανιν). The bird also hands over τὸ συγκλίνες τ᾽ ἔπτ᾽ Αἰάντι to birds described as air-roaming dogs. The parody is aimed at attacking Aeschylus' propensity for hybrid animals, which looks rather like a complete ignorance of animals on the part of the older playwright.

143 Borthwick 1994, 21
144 Still, as Slater 2002, 199 rightly remarks, Euripides' parody "does not have quite the same comic bite" as Aeschylus'.
145 I reproduce the text without the φλαττοθραττοφλαττοθρατ to more easily demonstrate the "story" Euripides cobbles together out of Aeschylean lyrics.
146 Sommerstein 1996, 272 argues that this imagery is not entirely inappropriate. He notes that *Agamemnon* and *Menelaus*, like a sphinx, destroy the young men they take into war.
147 τὸ συγκλίνες τ᾽ ἔπτ᾽ Αἰάντι is either an enemy force attacking Ajax, or a group of Greeks surrounding Ajax to protect him.
Euripides may have produced a somewhat successful low-brow parody of Aeschylean lyric, but Aeschylus wastes no time in capping his rival. He takes two elements from Euripides’ parody – the music and the animals – but caps him by adding a third: instead of parodying Euripides’ musical sounds himself, he brings on stage Euripides’ own Muse: “Where’s that woman who plays the castanets? Come here, Muse of Euripides – these songs are appropriate for you to accompany!” (ποῦ ἴστιν ἡ τοῖς ὀστράκοις αὐτή κροτοῦσα; δεῦρο, Μοῦσ’ Εὐριπίδου, πρὸς ἤντερ ἐπιτήδεια ταῦτ’ ἀδειν μέλη, 1304-7). There has been much debate surrounding this Muse of Euripides. Was she a young prostitute (implied by the reference to πορνῳδίων at 1301 and to the famous courtesan Cyrene at 1328), or was she an old and ugly woman, implied by Dionysus’ comment “she didn’t act like a Lesbian woman” (οὐκ ἐλεσβίαζεν, 1308)? Or was she even Hypsipyle herself, whose eponymous tragedy is mocked in Aeschylus’ following parody? One other suggestion put forward about this Muse, which pace Harvey I find most convincing, is that she reflects a chorus member from Phrynichus’ Muses, Frogs’ co-competitor in the Lenaea of 405. That Phrynichus’ play contained a Muse of Euripides was first proposed by Meineke. Harvey, however is unconvinced. Focusing on the title and its relation to the chorus’ identity, he cites parallel examples of mythological figures with a defined number being increased to fit comic and tragic choruses. He argues that an abundance of Muses would provide ample comic

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148 Dover 1993, 352 calls her “an ugly old woman, as good as dead”; Borthwick 1994, 26-7 argues that despite the Hypsipyle parody, the Muse of Euripides was probably a typical comic prostitute; Sommerstein 1996, 274 suggests she looks like one who plies or might have plied the trade of prostitute. See also Griffith 2013, 145-6 and de Simone 2008, 482.
149 Meineke 1839, 593, speaking of Muses fr. 34 (ὦ κάτῃρα καὶ περίπολις καὶ δρομάς), proposed, "verbis illis fortasse Euripidis Musa compellatur. K-A 1989, 410 cites the parallel from Frogs 1306.
150 Harvey 2000, 103-8.
opportunities for Phrynichus. Harvey goes on to cite examples of individualized choruses which would have allowed for individual poets’ Muses to make up the chorus, such as Aristophanes Birds, Eupolis’ Demes or Ameipsias’ Conus. Despite all this, he concludes that, while it is likely that the chorus consisted in 24 Muses, it is unlikely that they were individualized because “so many idiosyncratic Muses might have presented him with material too rich to cope with. And there is no evidence for it.” It does not seem to me, however, that a chorus of individualized Muses would have been any more idiosyncratic and challenging than Ameipsias’ chorus of individualized intellectuals in Conus. Further, there is one piece of evidence linking Euripides’ Muse in Frogs to Phrynichus’ Muses that has been overlooked. Before beginning his parody, Aeschylus, speaking of the sources of his tragic lyrics, says:

ἀλλ᾽ οὖν ἡγῶ μὲν εἰς τὸ καλὸν ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦ
ἡνεγκον αὐθ’, ἵνα μὴ τὸν αὐτὸν Φρυνίχῳ
1300 λειμῶνα Μουσῶν ἰερὸν ὀφθειῆν δρέπων. (1298-1300)

I took my songs from a good source and put them to good use so that I don’t look like I’m plucking the same holy meadow of the Muses as Phrynichus.

The commentators unambiguously state that this Phrynichus is the tragedian. However, the mention of Muses would surely not escape the audience’s notice, since Frogs was being performed alongside the comic Phrynichus’ Muses. Aeschylus’ phrasing ἵνα μὴ…ὀφθειῆν (“lest I be seen”) implies that he is taking inspiration from Phrynichus, but doing something new with this Phrynichean material such that its source

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151 Harvey 2000, 106-7, e.g. in tragedy Aeschylus’ Eumenides (traditionally 3, increased to 12); Euripides’ Supplices (originally 7, increased to 15); and in comedy Aristophanes’ and Cratinus’ Seasons (originally 3 or 4, increased to 24).
152 Harvey 2000, 107.
153 Harvey 2000, 108.
154 Athenaeus 218c (Ameipsias test. ii) tells us that Protagoras was not included in the chorus implying that everyone else in the chorus was an individual intellectual.
155 Cf. Birds 749-51. Phrynichus the tragedian is certainly one referent of this line.
is disguised. I propose, therefore, that we are meant to understand both that Aeschylus is claiming to have been inspired by his older contemporary, the tragic Phrynichus, and that his parody of Euripides is inspired by the comic Phrynichus, signaled, in the prologue, as an archetypal low-comic poet.

The Muse who emerges on stage is an appropriately low figure. Whether she is an old and ugly prostitute who does not get business anymore or a youthful, lascivious prostitute, she is undoubtedly represented as a prostitute. As Bélis argues, she is also represented as a bad musician: she plays the *ostrakoi* (potsherds) as a percussion instrument, which, in the musical hierarchy occupies "le dernier rang." Bélis also notes that the use of κροτέω with the dative (ἡ τοῖς ὀστράκοις...κροτοῦσα, 1305-6) rather than as a transitive verb suggests a degree of incompetence: Euripides’ Muse does not play the *ostrakoi*, she plays on them. Dionysus’ remark, οὐκ ἔλεσβίαζεν (1308), similarly implies a lack of musical skill in as much as it refers to her ignorance of the grand Aeolic lyric tradition. The verb λεσβίαζω also has a sexual connotation, referring, in the Classical period, to *fellatio*. Thus when Dionysus says “that Muse was never one in the Lesbian tradition, oh no” (αὕτη ποθ’ Μοῦσ’ οὐκ ἔλεσβίαζεν, οὐ, 1308), he means both that Euripides’ Muse is mutilating the music of the old Aeolic lyric tradition, and that as a prostitute she is not very good at her job. This personification of Euripides’ bad music as a prostitute bad at her job transforms Euripides’ high-brow pretensions into a low-brow character typical of his own tragedy and of low comedy.

Aeschylus’ parody is based loosely on Euripides’ *Hypsipyle*, with lines from *Electra* and *Meleager* interspersed. Just as Euripides had picked out Aeschylus’

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156 Bélis 1991, 44.
157 Bélis 1991, 45. Though I should add that κροτέω with the dative is a relatively common way to speak of playing percussion instruments.
158 Bélis 1991, 46
159 On the precise valence of λεσβίαζω, see de Simone 2008; Borthwick 1994, 28.
propensity for bizarre animal imagery, so Aeschylus demonstrates the same for Euripdean tragedy: he describes spiders working the loom in the same place as a dolphin, who is in turn pictured brandishing an (ἐπαλλέ) oracle, racetracks, and grape clusters – the recognition symbols from Hypsipyle. Aeschylus has taken Euripides’ musical critique of his lyrics and not only outdone him by bringing on the Muse from Phrynichus, but he has also turned Euripides’ accusation against him back on Euripides.

What happens at the end of Aeschylus’ parody is hotly contested. The first question is what happens when Aeschylus finishes the parody with the words “Hug me, my child!” (περίβαλλ᾽ ὦ τέκνον ὑλένας, 1322)? Borthwick suggests that the Muse runs to hug Euripides – a joke on his mother’s low origins. Sommerstein prefers to think that the Muse embraces Dionysus because of the god’s connection to the Euripidean Hypsipyle and because it would play into the running theme of Dionysus’ frustrations with getting a girlfriend. Neither scholar can endure the thought that the Muse might embrace Aeschylus, the character who says “hug me.” It seems sensible to me, however, that Aeschylus and the Muse embrace, a fitting finale for the pair of low-comic performers. The second question concerns the joke about feet at lines 1323-4. As Aeschylus and the Muse’s performance finishes, Aeschylus asks, “do you see this foot?”

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160 The scholia vetera attribute 1309-12 to Iphigenia at Aulis, but the lines do not appear there. Sommerstein suggests that they may be from the Hypsipyle. The “loom-stretched shuttle” of Frogs 1315 is also mentioned in Hypsipyle (fr.1.ii.11-12), but is not identical with what is going on here, with the spiders doing the weaving. A tuneful shuttle (Frogs 1316) is mentioned in Euripides’ Meleager (fr. 523); 1317-18 quotes Eur. Electra 435-7. “Oracle and the race-track” in 1319 may refer to Hypsipyle and its recognition scene, and 1320-1 is also likely to come from that play, and 1322, or something like it, would probably have been spoken by Hypsipyle in her recognition scene. See Borthwick 1994; Sommerstein 1996, 275-6.


162 Sommerstein 1996, 276. Dionysus appeared deus ex machina at the end of Hypsipyle. He was also Hypsipyle’s grandfather.

163 Borthwick 1994, 33 writes, “Tucker oddly imagined it was Aeschylus who sought to embrace the Muse.” (Tucker 1906, 247). Sommerstein 1996, 276, “If Ar. here makes the "Muse"...suit her action to Aeschylus’ words, whom does she embrace? Not Aeschylus, for the text carries no suggestion that his dignity is made to suffer at this point.”
Someone replies "I see it" (ὁρῶ) and Aeschylus exclaims "Ah ha! Do you see this foot?!" (τί δοι; τούτον ὁρᾶς; 1324). I follow Dover’s interpretation of these lines. He argues that Aeschylus performed a particularly clumsy dance to accompany the metrical irregularity of περίβαλλ’ in 1322.164 If this is the case, he and the Muse perhaps fall over together as she embraces him during the clumsiest moment of his dance. His ὁρᾶς τὸν πόδα τούτον; (1323) points both to his foot which has slipped out from under him and the metrical foot which caused the slip. Euripides’ bad Aeolic meter causes some hilarious on-stage slapstick dancing.

In Aeschylus’ final parody he goes after Euripides’ monodies, parodying a distinctly Euripidean tendency to have characters in distress utter long, astrophic laments. Unlike all the previous parodies, this last one looks to be largely invented by Aeschylus (Aristophanes).165 It reflects Euripides’ claim in the epirrhematic agōn to bring ordinary characters (948-50) and everyday matters (οἰκεῖα πράγματ’, 959) onto the stage. This monody, it turns out, is sung by a flax-seller whose chicken has been stolen by her neighbor Glyce:

τοῦτ᾿ ἐκεῖν᾿· ἤ-
 ὤ ξύνοικοι. τάς τέρα θεᾶσθε· τὸν ἄλεκτρωνα
μου ξυναρτά-
σασα φρούδη Γλύκη.
Νῦμφαι ὑρεσάγονοι,
1345 ὧ Μανία. ξύλλαβε. (Frogs 1341-5)

That’s it, o housemates
Do you see this monstrosity?
Glyce has stolen my chicken clean away!
Mountain nymphs,

164 Dover 1993, 356. The usual two syllable base of the Aeolic meter (x x) is replaced by u u -.
165 Dover 1993, 358-9 notes some reminiscences, for example the opening lines may be modelled on Hecuba 68-72 and 1347-9 recall Orestes 1431-3. 1356 are assigned by the scholia to Cretans and Cantarella 1963, 31, 803, has argued that 1356-63 is entirely taken from Cretans. But Dover rightly notes that "a summons to ‘surround the house’ is hard to accommodate to the predicament of Ikaros seeking to escape from the labyrinth.”
1345 House-slap, catch her!

The main speaker is a working woman (the typical low-comic character), who speaks of how she has been “winding a spindle of flax with my hands to take it to the agora to sell” (λίνου μεστόν ἀτρακτον εἰειειειλίσσουσα χεροῖν...δπῶς...εἰς ἀγορὰν φέρουσ᾿ ἀποδοίμαν, 1348-52). The other characters mentioned are the thieving neighbor Glyce, whose name is associated with low-brow women, and Mania, a slave woman.166 The οἰκεῖα πράγμα that Aeschylus chooses is the theft of a chicken. This looks back to Euripides’ accusation against Aeschylus in the epirrhematic agōn, that it was not fitting for Aeschylus to write about chickens in tragedy (935), but here Aeschylus has restored the lowly chicken to its rightful place, in a comic parody of his rival. Aeschylus ends (and wins) the capping contest by re-writing Euripidean tragedy replete with a thematic center reminiscent of low-brow comedy.

The weighing of the words is the last poetic contest between Aeschylus and Euripides. Here, Aeschylus shows up Euripides’ high-brow pretensions by turning them into a low-comic extravaganza. In the second prologue, we heard that, at Euripides’ behest, “art is going to be weighed in the balance” (καὶ γὰρ ταλάντω μουσικὴ σταθμῆσεται, 797). I argued above that this high-brow, intellectual element of Euripidean poetics was described in such a way as to emphasize its low-brow, agoraic quality. In the weighing of the words scene Euripides’ desire to weigh art is actualized using an Aeschylean device. Despite the slaves’ assumption in the second prologue that Aeschylus would resent an overly intellectualizing measuring of art (803), it is Aeschylus who says, at 1365, “I want to bring Euripides to the scales” (ἐπὶ τὸν σταθμὸν γὰρ αὐτὸν

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166 A Glyce is a character in Pherecrates’ hetaera comedy Corianno, and she may be a hostess or tavern owner. Aristophanes Ecclesiazusae features a bibulous Glyce at 43. See also Herodas’ Mime 9.2. Since the name means “Sweetie” it may have been associated with prostitutes. There is a slave called Mania in Thesmophoriazusae (728); Pherecrates fr. 130; and Ameipsias Cottabus-players fr. 2
ἀγαγεῖν βούλομαι). The weighing itself is a parody of Aeschylus' tragedy *Weighing of the Souls*. This tragedy featured a spectacular stage device which utilized the *mechanē*. The use of such extraordinary spectacle may be considered a low-brow element of dramaturgy because it relies only on the visual for its effect. In *Frogs*, there must likewise be a giant scale on stage, and the chorus are amazed by it, calling it a "novel monstrosity, more than bizarre" (τέρας νεοχμόν, ἄτοπις πλέων, 1371-2). Low the scale may be in its visual appeal, but Aeschylus as the on-stage voice of Aristophanes, now also offers something new. Aeschylus, like Aristophanes, combines old and new, low and high, in this final assault on Euripidean tragedy. The chorus add to their initial observation that that if anyone other than Aeschylus had come up with the idea, they would think that "he was doing something trashy" (αὐτὸν αὐτὰ ληρεῖν, 1377). This remark looks back to the chorus' earlier assertion that Aeschylus was the poet who embellished tragic trash (κοσμήσας τραγικὸν λῆρον, 1005) and the dual implications of the ambiguous language: Aeschylus as a tragic poet who puts tragic trash in order making it better than trash, or Aeschylus the pseudo-Aristophanes who develops and improves low-brow subject matter.

In analyzing the poetic contest between Aeschylus and Euripides in the light of a high-low dichotomy, I have argued that we should pay attention to the action being performed on stage, as well as noting elements of low-brow humor that have often gone unrecognized. Aeschylus is the clear winner because his *comic* performance is far more successful than Euripides'. Despite the sober morality that characterized Aeschylus in the epirrhematic *agōn*, he has proved to be a worthy voice for Aristophanes, revealing his ability to perform low comedy. Indeed, it is precisely in his claim to be a morally solid,

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167 Zeus weighs the souls of Achilles and Memnon as theirs mothers look on. Plutarch *How the young should study poetry* 17a.
168 Pollux 4.130
high-brow teacher matched with his low-brow performance that reflects the Aristophanic persona familiar from *Clouds* and *Wasps*, in the parabases of which Aristophanes also claimed to be a model of morality, while presenting a low-brow extravaganza in the plots of his plays.

**The politics of *Frogs*' finale**

The *Frogs* has been a comedy about *agônes*, in which we have consistently seen the metatheatrical vindication of low comedy in the hands of a high-comic character. In the poetic part of the contest we have just examined, Aeschylus has emerged the clear winner in every way. Nevertheless, Dionysus is still unable to judge between Aeschylus and Euripides. He declares at the end of the poetic contest:

> ἅνδρες φίλοι, κάγῳ μὲν αὐτούς οὐ κρινώ. οὐ γὰρ δὴ ἔχθρας οὐδετέρῳ γενήσομαι. τὸν μὲν γὰρ ἱγούμαι σοφὸν, τῷ δὲ ἠδομαί. (*Frogs* 1411-13)

The men are my friends and I can’t decide between them. I don’t want either of them to hate me! I think the one was clever, and the other I enjoy!

There is not inconsiderable debate about which playwright Dionysus means when he says one was clever and the other enjoyable. From my own analysis, however, it is clear. Euripides is the clever (but boring) one, while Aeschylus is the enjoyable one. The order in which Dionysus points to each trait suggests the same conclusion: Euripides went first in every contest and is marked first in the sentence with σοφὸν, and Aeschylus, likewise went second in every contest and is marked second in the sentence. This remark of Dionysus points to two possible criteria for judging dramatic contests: cleverness and entertainment. His inability to decide between these criteria lends equal

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169 He has outdone Euripides in every contest, and moreover dramatic convention dictates that the character who speaks second always wins.

170 The debate goes back to antiquity, as we see in the scholia on this line. Aristarchus interpreted as I do. On this passage see Hurst 1971 and Wright 2012, 24. Some scholars have seen the ambiguity as the key point, e.g. Goldhill 1991, 218.
In the final contest of the *Frogs*, Dionysus adds in yet another criterion for the judgement of art: its political message.

Scholars are divided on how to read this turn to politics at the end of *Frogs*. For some, it is the deciding factor in Dionysus’ choice of Aeschylus: he chooses the older poet primarily because of his politics. For others, *Frogs*, and particularly the *agōn* of the second half, has been about the judging of dramatic contests. It suggests various criteria that a spectator might bring to bear on choosing a dramatic winner, but determines that ultimately all criteria are equally silly. I follow the second school of thought insofar as I believe it is clear that politics, like intelligence and entertainment, is rejected as a deciding criterion. However, I do not understand the victory of Aeschylus as arbitrary, as many of these scholars do. I will argue that at the end of the *Frogs* Aristophanes does, in fact, provide us with a single determining criterion in the judgement of drama. In what follows, I demonstrate first that Dionysus rejects politics as a category for judging between Aeschylus and Euripides, and second that he – and thus Aristophanes – points to the audience as the deciding factor.

The politics passage (1417-1456) is beset by textual issues. Dionysus asks two questions, and for each three answers are preserved. In the case of the first question (what should the city do with Alcibiades?), there is no problem with attribution. The

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172 E.g. Hubbard 1991, 200, “Dionysus’ choice of Aeschylus is determined more by political symbolism than by aesthetic superiority.” See also Lada-Richards 1999, 10; Biles 2011, 250-5. Some scholars have seen a negative or sinister implication in Dionysus’ choice of Aeschylus e.g. Whitman 1964, 231, 256, views *Frogs* as a tragedy in comic form, with the choice of Aeschylus representing the paradox that Athens cannot be saved.
173 Silk 2000, 366; Rosen 2004; Halliwell 2011, 93-154, especially 140-154; Wright 2012, 23: “The idea of poetic ‘advice’ is being pursued to absurd lengths and Aristophanes is actually making fun of doggedly literal attempts to extract lessons from poetry.” Wright’s broader argument here is that the end of *Frogs* is inflected by an intertextual play on Eupolis’ *Demes* in which politicians had been brought back from the dead to save Athens: “Aristophanes’ version…distorts Eupolis’ original idea by substituting poets for politicians and it may be that this is funny precisely because it is an intrinsically silly idea.” See also 54, where Wright suggests that *Frogs* is a “sustained, ironic critique of of the Athenian prize-awarding system.”
manuscripts give Euripides’ answer (1427-9) and two versions of the same sentiment as Aeschylus’ answer. Neither answer helps Dionysus. Euripides unhelpfully expresses his own hatred of Alcibiades, and Aeschylus, equally unhelpfully, essentially says “you’ve made your bed, now lie in it.” Neither answer appears outrageous in the context of Frogs. Euripides emphasizes the collective good of the city and the need to get rid of individuals who cause her harm, which reflects the general sentiment of the prorrhesis, while Aeschylus’ acknowledgement of the influence and power of Alcibiades reflects the chorus’ call to forgive past mistakes and make use of the aristocracy in city politics again.

The multiplicity of answers to the second question, however, is problematic. Dionysus asks for one more piece of advice to ensure the city’s salvation, and the manuscripts preserve three distinct answers. The first, a bizarre fantasy in which Cleocritus is given wings so he can spray vinegar at the enemy during a naval battle, unquestionably belongs to Euripides. The third, a cryptic call to consider “enemy land theirs and theirs the enemies’, their fleet their wealth and their wealth nothing” (τὴν γῆν ὅταν νομίσωσι τὴν τῶν πολεμίων ἐίναι σφετέραν, τὴν δὲ σφετέραν τῶν πολεμίων, πόρον δὲ τὰς ναῦς, ἀπορίαν δὲ τὸν πόρον, 1463-5), is unanimously assigned to Aeschylus. Many editors give the middle answer to Euripides, assuming that it reflects his answer to Dionysus’ call for advice in a second performance. Dover argues that Aeschylus must have spoken the second answer (lines 1442-50) in a second performance of Frogs, because his original answer (1463-5) would have been inappropriate given that the fleet

174 Οὐ χρῆ λέοντος σκύμον ἐν πόλει τρέφειν (1431a) and μάλιστα μὲν λέοντα μὴ ἑν πόλει τρέφειν (1431b)
175 1437-41; 1451-3. The mention of Cephisophon is the clincher. He was a close associate of Euripides and is mentioned as such also at Frogs 944 and 1408. Some have deleted these lines as spurious to avoid the three-answer problem, e.g. Stanford 1971, 64 and 194-5.
had been destroyed at Aegispotami. Euripides’ answer at 1437-41, however, also relies on the strength of the Athenian navy. I follow the majority of scholars, who view the text as a conflation of two performances, with Euripides’ speaking the second piece of advice in the second iteration.

In the first performance, therefore, Euripides gives his non-sensical fantasy advice, to which Dionysus responds “All well and good, you clever-clogs Palamedes, but did you come up with it or was it Cephisophon?” (ἦ γ’, ὦ Παλάμηδες, ὦ σοφωτάτη φύσις. Ταυτὶ πότερ’ αὐτὸς ἦμερες ἢ Κεφισοφῶν:, 1451-2). Dionysus also dismisses Aeschylus’ advice about the city’s wealth in a similar way, remarking, “fine, except that the juror drinks it all down by himself” (ἦ, πλὴν γ’ ὦ δικαστής αὐτὰ καταπίνει μόνος, 1466). Both poets’ political advice is similarly rejected, and there is no indication in Dionysus’ words that he buys Aeschylus’ any more than Euripides’.

In the second performance, Aristophanes makes the same point, the rejection

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177 Dover 1993, 373-6. Not all commentators buy the idea (which goes back to Dindorf and Hermann) that the textual problems are derived from the conflation of two performance, especially MacDowell 1959. Against Dover’s interpretation see Sommerstein 1996, 287-8. Other proposals are put forward by Dörrie 1956 and Newiger 1985. See more recently Wilson 2007a, 183.

178 This mockery of Euripides as Palamedes characterizes him as his own tragic character whose eponymous play, was not a big success, and had been mocked as farcical at Thesmophoriazusae 765-81; 846-9. Major 2013, 158 has recently argued that one reason for Palamedes’ failure with Athenian audiences was that it represented the bad decision making of the masses because Palamedes was wrongly condemned to death by “the judgement of the foolish masses.”

179 There is some debate as to the precise ideological inflection that Aeschylus’ advice would have had for the Athenians. The scholia link Aeschylus’ strategy – to focus on the navy at the expense of all else – to that advocated by Pericles at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War (τὴν Περικλέους γνώμην λέγει, cf. Thucydides 1.143.4, accepted e.g. by Griffith 2013, 78). Sommerstein 1974 and 1996, 291-2 (building on arguments already put forward by Dörrie 1956) sees it as essentially reflecting current Athenian policy, thus making Aeschylus offer a true and pertinent piece of advice for saving the city that renders the political criterion essential. Wright 2012, 23 suggests that the advice would have been controversial. I prefer to see the political advice as anachronistic as befits Aeschylus’ characterization as “old” in all other sense. As Stanford 1971, 196 writes: “perhaps A[eschylus] is being made to appear old-fashioned deliberately.”

180 Sommerstein 1996, 292 has viewed Dionysus’ response as ideologically loaded, equating him with the right-wing anti-democratic faction who did not want to spend state funds on jurors.
politics as a criterion of aesthetic judgment, but in even starker terms than he had in the first. The piece of advice given, in my view and in the view of most scholars, by Euripides is as follows:

ὅταν τὰ νῦν ἄπιστα πίσθ᾽ ἡγώμεθα,
tὰ δ᾽ ὄντα πίστ᾽ ἄπιστα. (Frogs 1443-4)

Whenever we consider trustworthy things now untrustworthy and untrustworthy what is now trustworthy.

When Dionysus fails to understand, Euripides clarifies:

Εἰ τῶν πολιτῶν οἶσι νῦν πιστεύομεν,
Τοῦτοις ἄπιστήσαμεν, οίς δ᾽ οὐ χρώμεθα,
Τοῦτοις χρησαίμεθα (Frogs 1446-8)

If we cease to trust the citizens we now trust and use those whom we currently ignore.

This is a clear and undeniable reflection of the advice given by the chorus of mystic initiates at 718-35. It has troubled scholars that such advice is given to Euripides, with various explanations being offered: Hubbard argues that the advice of Euripides does not square with that of the chorus because the chorus urge the Athenians to stop making use of the “new gold” (καινὸν χρυσίον, 720), i.e. “bronze pieces, foreigners, red-heads, bad children of bad parents…who’ve only just arrived…” (τοῖς δὲ χαλκοῖς καὶ ξένοις καὶ τυρρίαις καὶ πονηροῖς κάκ πονηρῶν…ὑστάτοις ἀφριγμένοισιν, 730-2) and to go back to the “ancient coinage” (τάρχαίον νόμισμα, 720), i.e. the aristocracy. According to Hubbard, Euripides’ advice is not this, but rather to use “new men for the sake of using new men.”

Euripides may not specify the moral qualities of each party, but the temporal emphasis (“cease to trust the citizens we now trust”) and the repeated use of χράομαι provides a secure link to the choral sentiment. Dover, on the other hand, attacks the idea that Euripides spoke lines 1443-4 and 1446-8 at all, assigning them

instead to Aeschylus. His argument rests on the fact that by the time of the reperformance in 404, Athens had lost her navy at Aegispotami. Therefore Aeschylus’ advice at 1463-5 would no longer make sense and must have been replaced by a different piece of advice, i.e. the loose 1443-8. However, both pieces of advice, Euripides’ fantasy and Aeschylus’ exhortation to consider the fleet the city’s wealth relate to the navy. Since Aeschylus has been stuck in the underworld for over fifty years, it makes sense that he is unaware of the destruction of the fleet, and adds to the sense of nostalgia already present in his advice in 405. That Euripides repeats the advice of the chorus also emphasizes the rejection of political opinion as a defining criterion for the judgement of art. Aristophanes has Dionysus reject the very character who voices the political opinion given in Frogs!

At the end of this contest about contests both low-comic entertainment and high-brow political advice have been rejected as insufficient criteria on their own for determining the winner of a dramatic competition. But Dionysus does, in the end make a choice – Aeschylus. Scholarly attention has been focused on Dionysus’ attribution of his choice to his soul: “I will choose the one whom my soul desires,” (αἱρήσομαι γὰρ ὄντερ ή ψυχη θέλει, 1468) he says, probably parodying a line of Euripides. I propose,

\[\text{References}\]

\[\text{Dover 1993, 373-6. See also Dörrie 1956, 304-9 and Wills 1969b.}\]

\[\text{Additionally, he argues that Dionysus’ injunction to the speaker to “speak less learnedly and more clearly” (ἀμαθέστερον πως εἴπε καὶ σαφέστερον, 1445) because he does not understand the sentiment (οὐ μαθήματω) must apply to Aeschylus, but as we have seen in the poetic contests, Euripides and not Aeschylus is the one who speaks too learnedly despite his claim to clarity in the epirrhematic section. Cf. Frogs 1169, where Dionysus also fails to understand Euripides’ sophistic utterances (οὐ μαθήματω). Newiger 1985, 438-9 argues that the style of 1443-4 is equally characteristic of Aeschylus and Euripides (against MacDowell 1959, 370, who associated it primarily with Euripides). As such style alone is not enough to determine the speaker.}\]

\[\text{Dover 1993, 373 argues that the fantastical nature of Euripides’ advice means it could have been spoken with or without the existence of a real fleet.}\]

\[\text{The debate has concentrated on the question of whether ψυχή implies a decision based on emotion or one based on reason. For the former interpretation see e.g. Wilamowitz 1929, 474 (who paraphrases ψυχή as “seine innere Neigung und Stimmung ohne Rücksicht auf οοφία oder sonstige Erwägungen”); Dover 1993, 19; for the latter see e.g. Biles 2011, 254; Griffith 2013, 213-}\]
however, that we might more usefully look towards line 1475 to understand Dionysus’ choice. Euripides has complained about Dionysus’ “shameful deed” (αἰσχροῦ ἔργον, 1474), at which point Dionysus justifies his choice: “what is shameful if it does not appear so to the spectators?” (τί δ’ αἰσχροῦ, ἣν μὴ τοῖς θεωμένοις δοκῆι; 1475). However he arrived at his decision, he justifies it as the correct decision because it aligns with audience judgment. Halliwell dismisses the line as an example of “Euripidean relativism” used “to sidestep any further demands for explanation” and as part of his refusal to clarify his verdict. The line, however, both explains and clarifies, even if retrospectively: his choice was the correct choice because audience taste must be the ultimate criterion.

In order to understand what Aristophanes might mean by attributing the ultimate criterion in judging aesthetic value to audience taste, let us consider briefly how Aristophanes talks about Frogs’ audience elsewhere. When Aristophanes talks about the audience in the theater at the Lenaea of 405 he uses the present participle (οἱ) θεώμενοι, “those watching.” He uses this designation at three key moments for talking about his audience. In Frogs’ very first lines, Xanthias characterizes the audience as one that always laughs at the usual old low-comic jokes: (εἰπω τι τῶν εἰθότων… ἐφ’ οἷς

4. See Halliwell 2011, 146, n. 91 for further bibliography. Halliwell himself (147) argues that “the choice of Aeschylus is presented as the very reverse of an act of intelligible or rationalizable ‘criticism.’” See further Lada-Richards 1999, 219, Walsh 1984, 87; Hunter 2009, 36-8, who argue that tragedy should properly appeal to the ψυχή.

186 This line, and line 1468 and 1471 are (probably) parodies of Euripidean lines. The source of 1468 is unknown. 1471 parodies Hippolytus 612 (cf. Frogs 101-2). Roselli 2011, 30 argues that the line was meant to recall to spectators their outraged reception of this line in its original context, as related by Plutarch (Moralia 33c). Their outrage at Euripides on that occasion sanctions their choice of Aeschylus in Frogs.

187 Halliwell 2011, 147.

188 There are other moments when he talks about past audiences of Aeschylus and Euripides (e.g. 1022) and Frogs’ internal audience, the denizens of the underworld (especially 779-83). Many of these references to other audiences are imbued with a certain amount of metatheatricality. In the discussion here, I consider, for the sake of brevity, only the explicit references to Aristophanes’ audience in the theater at the Lenaea of 405.
ἀεὶ γελώσων οἱ θεώμενοι; 1-2). Our first impression of the audience (or what Aristophanes thinks of his audience) associates them with low comedy. Dionysus claims to distinguish himself from such an audience, describing himself as a much more refined spectator. The audience may laugh at low-comic routines, but Dionysus is exasperated by them, and even claims that they literally cause him to age (16-18). This separation is, as I argue above, palpably ironic, as Dionysus is himself one of the low-comic jokes that the audience always laugh at.

The second moment at which Aristophanes offers us a characterization of his audience is during the epirrhematic agōn, in a passage which has received much scholarly attention for its mention of books:

εἰ δὲ τοῦτο καταφοβεῖσθον, μὴ τις ἁμαθία προσῆ 

1110 τοῖς θεωμένοισιν, ὡς τὰ λεπτὰ μὴ γνῶναι λεγόντοιν, 

μηδὲν ὄρφωδεῖτε τοῦθ᾽, ὡς οὐκέθ᾽ οὕτω ταῦτ᾽ ἔχει. 

ἐστρατευμένοι γάρ εἰσί, 

βιβλίον τ᾽ ἔχων ἔκαστος μανθάνει τὰ δεξιά· 

1115 αἱ φύσεις τ᾽ ἀλλὰς κράτισται, 

νῦν δὲ καὶ παρηκόννηται. 

μηδὲν οὖν δείσητον, ἀλλὰ 

πάντ᾽ ἐπέξιτον, θεατῶν γ᾽ οὖνεχ᾽, ὡς ὄντων σοφῶν. (1109-18)

If you’re afraid that there will be ignorance 
1110 among the spectators, that they won’t be able to understand the subtleties of what you say, don’t hold back! It’s not like that anymore. They are all veterans of the theater, they’ve all got a book and they all understand clever things. 

1115 They are naturally gifted and now their talent has been honed. So don’t be afraid, but go through it all for the spectators’ sake – they’re a clever lot!

This passage, ostensibly addressed to the internal characters about the internal audience, is clearly also a statement about Aristophanes’ own external audience. They
are described as an amalgamation of an Aeschylean audience and a Euripidean audience: the military language and metaphorical implication of ἔστρατος ἐπιμένοι, which implies a long service in the theater, is a clear nod to Aeschylus and his military antiquity;\textsuperscript{190} while the audience’s cleverness, even bookishness, speaks to Euripides’ claim to intellectualism.\textsuperscript{191} These two characterizations of the audience – as lovers of the usual old low-comic jokes, and as an audience trained by long experience and the intellectual promptings of Euripides in the subtleties of literary criticism – may at first sight seem like a contradiction. But their dual high-low nature reflects Aristophanes own comic poetics, simultaneously high and low. They are clever and sophisticated, but enjoy all the old jokes characteristic of the genre.

That such an audience chooses Aeschylus as the winner contributes to a joke at Euripides’ expense that has been in the works since the epirrhetic agōn, where Euripides claims to have taught the audience so well that they can cross-examined his art knowledgably (ξυνειδότες γὰρ οὗτοι ἢλεχχον ἀν μου τὴν τέχνην, 960-1). The audience has developed an expertise in literary matter from Euripides, but that has allowed them to judge knowledgably that they prefer the old style of drama embodied by Aeschylus.

The joke about Euripidean tragedy being used against Euripides is seen also in Dionysus’ dismissal of the playwright using a series of paratragic quotations taken from his own work.\textsuperscript{192} In the second version of Frogs, when Euripides advises the city to make use of those we now ignore and ignore the people now in vogue, the joke is heightened:

\textsuperscript{190} E.g. Frogs 1021  
\textsuperscript{191} E.g. Frogs 943  
\textsuperscript{192} 1475 is a parodic re-working of Aeolus fr.19, where the son of Aeolus defends the rape of his sister with the words: “what is shameful if it does not appear so to the one who does it?” (τί δ’ αἰσχρὸν ἢν μὴ τοῖοι χρωμένοις δοκή;). The fragment (if not the play) appears to defend subjective, individualistic criteria for judging situations, which is here turned against Euripides as it defends a mass decision which has prevailed. Cf. n. 179 above.
Euripides advises Dionysus to get rid of the new (Euripides) and bring back the neglected old (Aeschylus).\textsuperscript{193}

So, the audience are experienced and they like the old jokes typical of Phrynichian comedy. But they are also smart, and they have learned from the new-fangled Euripides how to properly value the old style of drama. Aristophanes had also, of course, invested Aeschylus with aspects of his own comic poetics, and so the victory of Aeschylus – and the attribution of that victory to audience preference – is a way for Aristophanes to pre-empt his own victory as the people’s choice.\textsuperscript{194}

\textbf{Conclusion}

\textit{Frogs} appears to be a comedy split in two by Aristophanes’ high-low dichotomy, and this mode of viewing the \textit{Frogs} has been the basis for many interpretations of the play. I have argued, however, that such a simplistic dichotomizing of \textit{Frogs} makes it easy to miss the essential aspects of Aristophanic poetics that this comedy explores. \textit{Frogs} is not about the inferiority of the low, nor its development into a superior form of comedy. It is rather about the essential low-brow foundation of the genre, which, if removed or ignored, ceases to be comic. \textit{Frogs} demonstrates the inextricability of high and low by giving the frog chorus – the symbol of traditional farce comedy – a claim to technical musical excellence, and by embodying high-brow comedy in the chorus of mystic initiates – elite and sophos as Hubbard claims, but also ancient, traditional, and cheap to costume. Similarly, the “low-brow” first half of \textit{Frogs} is imbued with a sense of metatheatrical self-awareness that reflects Aristophanes’ intelligent grasp of the genre, while the “high-brow” second half turns out to be a contest in low-brow comic performance.

\textsuperscript{193} On the jokes against Euripides at the end of \textit{Frogs} see further See e.g. Goldhill 1991, 219-20; Wright 2012, 95; Major 2013, 146-78; Farmer 2017, 233.
\textsuperscript{194} Biles 2011, 255.
Aristophanes begins the *Frogs* by complaining about the low comedy of Phrynichus. The victory of Aeschylus, a high-brow poet exploiting low-comic technique (including a character plucked straight from the comedy with which Phrynichus was competing against him) demonstrates both the value of low comedy and how low comedy can be imbued with novelty, sophistication, and cleverness to produce something which is simultaneously high and low. The bringing back to life of Aeschylus at the end of *Frogs* is a potent image of the renewal of the old and the low as a source of novelty.
Conclusion

I began this dissertation seeking to investigate an irony in the poetic claims that Aristophanes makes in the parabases of his early comedies. The irony always struck me as too pervasive, too ubiquitous, and frankly too ironic to be "just borrowed material to season...his literary comedies and make them more acceptable to the 'groundlings' in his audience." Murphy’s assessment remains a common and often unquestioned assumption among scholars of old comedy. But I have shown that Aristophanes’ use of ubiquitous jokes, stock scenes, and stock characters is far more than "borrowed material." Aristophanes uses low comedy in a sophisticated and often novel way: the vulgar and despicable cordax, which Aristophanes claims to hate (especially when some drunken old character gratuitously dances it), is deployed at the end of Wasps to transform the paratragic dances of Carcinus’ sons into a low-comic animal chorus extravaganza which metatheatrically prefigures Aristophanes’ hoped for victory at the Lenaea of 422. The comic body of the stock Megarian prostitute is transformed, in Lysistrata, into a political map of the Greek world on which peace between city states can be negotiated. Low-comic physical slapstick, and repetitious, improvisatory tagging are deployed by Aeschylus in Frogs as techniques of literary criticism against the tragedies of Euripides. Murphy, and others, are also mistaken to suggest that low comedy is mere “seasoning.” This culinary metaphor implies that low comedy is like a small handful of parsley, scattered here and there, but never the central taste in the comic meal. I have demonstrated, however, not only that low comedy is ubiquitous in the Aristophanic corpus, but also that it is inextricably implicated in Aristophanes’ claims to do only high comedy. Thesmophoriazusae, for example, contains a spectrum of ways

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1 Murphy 1972, 169.
that a poet can do tragic parody, which stretch from the impenetrably un-funny *Helen* parody, which functions by *removing* Euripidean humor and expecting an audience to be able to get such a high level of humor; to the *Palamedes* or *Andromeda* parodies, which are parodic precisely because they incorporate slapstick, obscenity, and repetition.

My study of Aristophanic poetics has also gone beyond investigation of the obviously metapoetical moments in Aristophanes, where the poet talks openly about his comedy. I have looked for evidence of Aristophanes’ poetics in the plots of his comedies, whose metatheatrical messages contradict the claims of his parabases. With the exception of Lauren Taaffe, few scholars have sought to understand Aristophanes’ approach to comedy by reading the *Lysistrata* or the *Thesmophoriazusae*. *Thesmophoriazusae*, together with *Wasps*, and *Frogs*, have, of course, all been mined for what they can tell us about Aristophanes’ relationship to comedy’s more serious sister-genre of tragedy. In my own work, I have sought to shift the conversation away from this well-trodden path, and rather analyze paratragedy as a species of *comedy*, which Aristophanes claims is part of the high-comic mode. This approach has opened up new possibilities for interpretation, allowing me, for example, to analyze the *agon* between Euripides and Aeschylus is *Frogs* not just for what it can tell us about tragedy or literary critical discourse in fifth-century Athens, but also as a *comic* contest, in which contestants deploy comic techniques to get their points across. In *Frogs* and *Thesmophoriazusae*, I also demonstrate that in the case of Aeschylus, his reputation as one of the best producers of satyr play – a genre historically related to low comedy – is as important as his tragic repute.

I began this study with a quote from Gustave Lanson’s essay “Molière et la farce” published in *La Revue de Paris* in 1901. I return to it in full at the end:
Acceptons donc le propose de la malveillance contemporaine: Molière est « le premier farceur de France ». Ce mot d’un ennemi est plus vrai que celui de Boileau reprochant à son ami d’avoir été trop populaire. Boileau rêvait un Molière académique; le vrai Molière est celui qu’un tableau de la Comédie-Française nous montre au milieu de tous les farceurs illustres, italiens et français. Dans ce tableau des Farceurs, Molière figure en compagnie d’Arlequin et de Gros-Guillaume, de Scaramouche et de Guillot-Gorju. Voilà ses maîtres; et voilà d’où il sort. Il est assez grand pour ne pas rougir de ses origines.

Molière, wrote Lanson, was great enough not to blush at his origins. His friend Boileau was ashamed of his popularity and dreamed of a more academic, more respectable playwright. But popular judgement, and the scorn of his detractors, which accused him of being “le premier farceur de France” were, according to Lanson, closer to the true Molière. Scholars of Aristophanes (with some notable exceptions), have likewise been afraid to admit the lowness of Aristophanes, or to admit that it, rather than academic moral reform, political partisanship, or educational intention, should be taken as an interpretive starting point. I have argued that Aristophanes too was great enough not to blush at the low-comic mode that formed the most ancient and essential kernel of his chosen genre. It is perhaps not at all surprising – given low comedy’s generic centrality - that as the comic genre developed and changed in the fourth century, stock characters and routines and “ordinary little men and women” remained consistent features of the genre.
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