

A Handbook of
CLASSICAL
DRAMA

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1. *ACHARNIANS

(Lenaia, 425 B.C.)

The *Acharnians* was produced not by Aristophanes himself but by Callistratus, and it won first prize. Cratinus won second with his *Storm-Tossed Men* (*Cheimazomenoi*) and Eupolis third with his *New Moons* (*Noumeniai*). Nothing is known of either of these lost plays, but it is noteworthy that the three competitors were the three most eminent poets of Old Comedy and that they are here ranked as they were later by ancient critics. It is often assumed that the role of Dicaeopolis in the *Acharnians* was played by Aristophanes and that the audience knew this.¹⁴

The *Acharnians* is a brilliant production. Any one of several scenes—the parody of the *Telephus*, the scene with the Megarian selling his starving daughters, or the final scenes with Lamachus—would make a comic poet's reputation secure for life. A vast array of incidental characters appears in the play, and the poet repeatedly rushes over change of scene and passage of time with bewildering rapidity and non-chalance. The variety of incidents, also, is amazing. In the first half of the play each incident follows naturally from what precedes, and the chorus plays an important role. In the second half of the play the chorus loses almost all its characterization and importance. The episodes here are practically unconnected, but all clearly show the advantages of peace.

Historical note.—Since the geography of Greece made communication difficult and defense easy, the country naturally developed many small independent units. Independence was fostered also by slight differences in language and race and by petty jealousies. Some degree of Panhellenism had been achieved under the stress of the Persian invasions, but this was superficial and brief. Afterward Greece tended to divide into two groups, neither very harmonious, under the leaderships of Sparta and Athens.

Sparta was a land power, governed as a socialistic oligarchy. Spartan citizens were vastly outnumbered by their dissatisfied serfs and slaves. This basic instability added to their conservatism, Sparta had no ambition to expand her power or increase her commercial activity. Her citizen army required no pay, and money was of little value in the very simple life of her citizens. Sparta's chief concern was in maintaining the *status quo*. The states which recognized her leadership, therefore, were not required to pay any tribute; but democratic governments were distrusted and oligarchies governing in the Spartan interests were supported on occasion by the use of force.¹⁵

Athens was a sea power, the natural leader of the islands and Ionian cities during the crisis with Persia. All these contributed to the maintenance of a fleet—much more expensive than an army. At first only the smallest states contributed money rather than men and ships; but later payments in money became obligatory, and the treasurers were Athenians. This was a definite step toward the formation of an empire from a league of presumably independent states.

The second administrative step came with the discontinuance of league assemblies at Delos, the religious center of the Ionian Greeks, and with the transference of the treasury from Delos to Athens (454/53 B.C.). The third step was the appropriation of the league's funds by Athens. Pericles argued that the members of the league had nothing to say about the disposition of the money as long as they were protected by Athens (about 443 B.C.).¹⁶

Simultaneous with these administrative developments was an ominous hardening of attitude toward states within the league's sphere which were not members and toward states which chose to secede. Force was used in both cases as early as about 470 B.C. Such use of force was extremely distasteful to the Greeks, who were most jealous of any encroachment upon rugged individualism; and Athens gradually came to be considered the tyrant of Greece.

Various factors encouraged Athens in her imperial designs. Attica was naturally a poor country, and prosperity came only with foreign trade and mastery of the sea. Pericles, furthermore, had discovered and was systematically exploiting the great weakness of democracy—the corruption of the electorate by the use of public funds. He had come into power by this method about 461 B.C., and by it he maintained control of the government for the remainder of his life.

At Athens public funds came largely from levies on trade and imperial tribute. It was natural, therefore, that Pericles should maintain a policy of ardent imperialism. Vast schemes of expansion were conceived. Expeditions were sent to Egypt with results only less disastrous than the results of the later expeditions to Sicily. Vast programs of public works were undertaken at home. These had the most glorious results for art—the Parthenon and the sculptures of Pheidias. But for the city this policy in the end was ruinous. The limitless ambitions of Pericles and Athens under his leadership finally led to a serious clash with Sparta in 431 B.C. Pericles deliberately chose to fight at this time; and, since he was an able commander, he might well have prosecuted the war to a successful finish if the unforeseen, as happens so frequently in war, had not occurred.

The Spartans and their allies invaded Attica, as Pericles had ex-

pected, for they were much superior on land. They camped in the neighborhood of Acharnae and hoped that the Acharnians, now within the walls of Athens and themselves a considerable part of the Athenian state, would be impatient at the destruction of their property and would communicate a desire to fight to the whole Athenian people.¹⁷ But Pericles succeeded in restraining them. This was excellent strategy but perhaps unfortunate; for the next year, when the invasion recurred, a dreadful plague broke out in the overcrowded city, and vast numbers of fighting men and other citizens died. Pericles himself fell a victim in 429 B.C. A minor epidemic broke out again in 427. Meanwhile Athens had her share of successes in the field; but these did not begin to offset the dreadful ravages of the plague.

The main successor of Pericles was Cleon. Like his predecessor, Cleon was a master of political device; but, unlike Pericles, Cleon was small and mean and cowardly. Suffice it here to say that in 427 Cleon induced the Athenians to order the death of all male citizens of Mytilene, which had recently revolted, and the enslavement of all the women and children. This decree was fortunately revoked before it was executed, but the day was soon coming when Athens passed such decrees and did not revoke them.

At this crucial period of Athenian history—and during the fifth century Athenian history almost alone constitutes the cultural history of Western civilization—the precocious Aristophanes produced his first comedy. That a young genius should be attracted to comedy at such a time seems strange only to one unfamiliar with the seriousness and vigor of Athenian comedy during the fifth century. In point of fact, it is inconceivable that such a man as Aristophanes, at once a fiery patriot and a literary genius, should have been attracted to any other type of expression at this time.

Aristophanes' first production was awarded the second prize in 427 B.C. Called the *Banqueters* (*Daitales*) and produced by Callistratus, it was a social satire of Sophistry and the newer education. It was a very timely piece, for in this year the Sicilian Sophist Gorgias was to create a sensation at Athens with his novel and affected oratory.

At the City Dionysia in 426, Aristophanes' *Babylonians* was produced by the same Callistratus. This play was a very bold attack upon the imperialistic policy of Cleon and Athens, the cruelty of which had clearly been shown in the recent proposed treatment of Mytilene. It has been conjectured that the play took its name from a chorus of cities being worked by Cleon as Babylonian slaves. This called down the wrath of Cleon as related in the *Acharnians*, and Aristophanes was launched on his great career.

Happy idea and theme.—When Dicaeopolis finds that not even the god Amphiheus ("Divine-on-both-sides") can advocate peace in the assembly without being manhandled by the police, he decides to have this deity negotiate a private peace for him. As a consequence, the Acharnians accuse Dicaeopolis of treason, and he must attempt to defend his actions even before these hard-bitten old charcoal burners. The second half of the play shows Dicaeopolis' private peace in action. The Dionysiac delights of feasting, drinking, and wenching are described with such sustained vividness and such youthful exuberance that even the most martial spectators must finally have been overcome with a nostalgic longing for the gay abandon of peaceful celebration. This emotional appeal for peace is the main purpose and the main effect of the play.¹⁸

The intellectual appeal for peace is comparatively weak. This consists first of the defense of Dicaeopolis. Perhaps in parody of the story of Helen and the Trojan War, he explains the whole Peloponnesian War as originating over three hussies, and lays the blame for it (496–556) upon Pericles and the Athenians, where, of course, the blame actually belonged. The short scene with Lamachus which follows harks back to the theme of envoys and political corruption. The parabasis carries on these same topics in much the same vein. The anapests (626–58) are a defense of the poet, it seems, against the charge of treasonable sentiments, just as the agon has been a defense of Dicaeopolis against this charge. Indeed, Dicaeopolis, with the loose informality of Old Comedy, has identified himself with the poet in the earlier part of the play (377–82) and in his defense proper (502–7; cf. 595) in order to lash out fiercely at Cleon, who has been repeatedly attacked from the first lines of the play. Now the coryphaeus identifies himself with the poet for the same purpose ("choker" or *pnigos*, 659–64).¹⁹ The mention of the Lacedaemonian proposals for peace, of course, is strictly pertinent to the main theme of the play.

Parody of tragedy.—Criticism of Euripides and parody of scenes from his tragedies are already favorite devices of Aristophanes in this the earliest of the extant comedies. Here, at least, this parody is not mere fun or mere literary criticism. Euripides in this period was supporting the national effort with plays glorifying the martial spirit, like the *Heracleidae*, and with plays bitterly attacking the Spartans and Delphi, like the *Andromache*. To discredit Euripides, then, is to forward the cause of Aristophanes.

Here, as later, the *Telephus* of Euripides is Aristophanes' favorite victim. Dicaeopolis' seizure of the charcoal basket as hostage and his threat of slaughtering it is a brilliant travesty of *Telephus*' seizure of

the child Orestes in order to gain a hearing from the Greek chiefs.²⁰ All this nicely prepares for the following scene, introduced by mock tragic lyrics, in which Dicaeopolis appeals to Euripides for the rags and paraphernalia of a suppliant. Incidentally the tragic device for showing an interior scene is satirized by having Euripides appear upon the *eccyclēma*. An amazingly long list of ragged heroes is recited before Euripides comes to the miserable Telephus. But Dicaeopolis is not satisfied with the mere rags; he continues his detailed requests for equipment until Euripides, as the experienced spectator might anticipate, complains that he is being stripped of his whole tragic art. Thus Aristophanes intimates that the art of Euripides consists wholly of external trappings.

The more formal defense of Dicaeopolis before the chorus, also, is a parody of the defense of Telephus, and perhaps the sudden entrance of the panoplied Lamachus when half the chorus has been convinced is reminiscent of the entrance of Achilles when Telephus had almost persuaded Agamemnon.²¹

Parody plays an important role also in the later part of the comedy. Dicaeopolis greets the Copaic eel like a long-lost child recognized in a Euripidean melodrama.²² The chorus announces the messenger who comes to summon Lamachus in such a way that the mask may be identified as that of the tragic messenger bringing news of calamity (1069-70). The servant who reports the fate of Lamachus also delivers a speech that is reminiscent of tragedy.

2. *KNIGHTS (HIPPIES, EQUITES)*²³

(Lenaea, 424 B.C.)

The *Knights* was produced by Aristophanes himself and won first prize; Cratinus won second with his *Satyrs*, Aristomenes third with his *Wood-Carriers (Hylophoroi)*. Eupolis in his *Dippers (Baptai)*, 415 B.C.) claimed that he collaborated with Aristophanes in writing the *Knights*, and ancient commentators attribute the later part of the second parabasis (1264-1315) to Eupolis.²⁴

The *Knights* is one of the least interesting plays of Aristophanes for the modern reader. It is wordy and lacking in progressive action. Four contests are dramatized and a fifth is reported. In these contests the various charges against Cleon are repeated over and over again. The point that he stole the victory at Pylos is made no less than four times (56, 745, 778, 1201). In spite of these faults, however, the play doubtless made a strong appeal to the original audience owing to Aristophanes' boldness in so attacking Cleon at the height of his glory. The general conception and the comedy of the opening scenes, furthermore,

are brilliant. Aristophanes' political analysis and also his kindly satire of Demos are most apt.

Historical note.²⁵—During the summer following the presentation of the *Acharnians*, the Athenians carried out one of their most successful campaigns during the whole war. As a fleet of forty ships was being made ready to sail to Sicily, Demosthenes, perhaps the best Athenian general at this time (not to be confused with the great orator of the next century), gained permission to use the fleet as he chose when it was coasting along the Peloponnesus. He had secretly conceived the brilliant idea of establishing a garrison at Pylos, a strong position on the coast some fifty miles west of Sparta. This was to be held by Messenians, who had been the original inhabitants of the country before being driven out by the Spartans, and who spoke the same dialect as the Spartans and could therefore disguise themselves and very effectively make incursions into Spartan territory. When the Athenian fleet actually reached Pylos, Demosthenes made known his plan; but he was unable to convince the commanders or the men of the wisdom of such a bold venture, and they would have refused to put in despite Demosthenes' official commission if bad weather had not suddenly forced them to take shelter at this point.

When the weather continued adverse, the men as a mere pastime began the fortification for which Demosthenes was pleading. They worked six days with the stone and natural timber at hand. Then good weather returned and the fleet sailed on, leaving five ships with Demosthenes and his folly.

The Spartans were more amused than frightened at the first news of this; but on second thought they began to take the matter more seriously. Their army had already invaded Attica; but, after only fifteen days of ravaging, it was withdrawn to be sent against Pylos. The Spartan fleet, an encounter with which was the immediate objective of the Athenian fleet, eluded the Athenians and also came to Pylos. The temporary garrison under Demosthenes was attacked by these vastly superior forces but not before two ships had been sent to summon the Athenian fleet, which returned to surprise and defeat the Spartan ships. This event left four hundred twenty Spartan heavy infantry stranded near by on a wooded island, Sphacteria, and now at the mercy of the Athenians.

When officials from Sparta perceived the desperateness of the situation they asked for a truce, and envoys were sent to Athens. Their suit for peace was rejected, mainly at the instance of Cleon (*Knights* 794-96), an enemy of peace "because he fancied that in quiet times his rogueries would be more transparent and his slanders less credible."²⁶

Hostilities were resumed after the Athenians had treacherously refused to return sixty ships which the Spartans had given over as a guaranty for maintaining the truce.

Weeks passed. The Athenians did not dare attack the Spartans on the rough and dense island. Great ingenuity was shown in getting supplies to the Spartans despite the constant watch of the Athenian ships. As time passed, the Athenians at home became fearful that winter would overtake the siege and allow the Spartans to escape; they became incensed at Cleon for causing them to reject the Spartan overtures. Cleon laid all the blame on the command; and pointing at Nicias, the leading general still at Athens, he said that it would be easy, if the generals were real men, to sail against the island and take the Spartans, and that he would do just this if he were general. To Cleon's surprise Nicias was quite ready to allow him to take this command. Cleon was forced to do so, therefore, and boasted that within twenty days he would kill or capture the men on the island. At this, "the wiser sort of men were pleased," says Thucydides (4. 28, Jowett), "when they reflected that of two good things they could not fail to obtain one—either there would be an end of Cleon, which they would have greatly preferred, or, if they were disappointed, he would put the Lacedaemonians into their hands."

By a happy accident a fire had swept over the island and denuded it, and Demosthenes was preparing an attack when Cleon arrived. The attack was successfully carried out as Demosthenes had planned, and "the mad promise of Cleon was fulfilled."

On his return to Athens, Cleon was rewarded with a golden crown, with the privilege of dining in the Prytaneum along with the descendants of great national heroes—the greatest honor in the Athenian state and one never enjoyed even by Pericles (*Knights* 283). Cleon was also given a seat of honor in the theater at all public festivals (702); but at the very next festival Aristophanes presented his *Knights*!

Meanwhile Nicias had sailed across the Saronic Gulf with an Athenian force including two hundred cavalry. Mainly by the aid of this cavalry he scored a minor success against the Corinthians. A reference is made to this expedition in the *Knights* (595–610).

Happy idea and theme.—At the opening of the play, Nicias is racking his brain for some clever Euripidean plot for the overthrow of Cleon, and with the aid of the prophecies he and Demosthenes hit upon the idea of finding a greater rogue than Cleon to supplant him. The idea is itself a satire of the tendency of democracy, once having begun a course of basic corruption, to fall victim to more and more depraved leaders. Pericles, though personally incorruptible and mag-

nanimous, had begun the corrupt practice of maintaining his power by the use of public funds. After his death, various demagogues, including Cleon, exploited these same devices in the most shamelessly corrupt fashion. Cleon was fated to be succeeded by Hyperbolus, an even more depraved scoundrel, who is ominously looming upon the horizon even in the *Acharnians* (846) and whose fantastic scheme for an expedition against Carthage is attacked in the *Knights* (1300–1315).

The *Knights* is a merciless satire of the contemptible practices of these demagogues. It also shakes a paternal finger at the Athenians for being taken in by such practices. But the thought that Athens was inevitably going from bad to worse, however sound, is not a happy one, and Aristophanes refuses to maintain it throughout the play. Agoracritus does beat down Cleon by shouting louder and by stealing more cleverly; but long before Demos actually renounces Cleon, there is a change in Agoracritus' attitude toward Demos; indeed, Agoracritus is gradually metamorphosed into Aristophanes. Thus when Demos first enters, Agoracritus upbraids him for his rejection of the "good and fair" gentlemen in favor of lamp-sellers (Hyperbolus), hide-stitchers, cobblers, and leather dealers (Cleon). This repeats the criticism of Athens' rejection of educated leaders voiced by Demosthenes (*Knights* 191–93) and by the chorus in the early part of the play (334; cf. 986). At the end of the play, furthermore, Demos does not remain under the control of rogues but is rejuvenated and restored to his condition under Aristides and Miltiades. The serious plea of the *Knights*, therefore, is much the same as that of the *Frogs*—the return to the limited democracy of the period of the Persian wars.

Only minor references are made to peace in the course of the play; but in the end Aristophanes repeats the sensual appeal of the *Acharnians* for a thirty years' truce with Sparta.

Structure.—The *Knights* is somewhat peculiar in form. In an amusingly frank address to the audience, the action of the play is more thoroughly anticipated than usual in Aristophanes.²⁷ Here all the main charges against Cleon are listed, and the ensuing action consists largely of dramatic illustration of the points here made. The happy idea, furthermore, leads only to interminable abuse and to one contest after another. The first extended clash between Cleon and Agoracritus becomes a formal agon (303–460), which ends in Cleon's taking his adversary, as he had once taken Aristophanes (*Acharnians* 379), before the Council. After the parabasis, Agoracritus delivers a long speech, modeled on such reports in tragedy, in which the results of the contest before the Council are made known. Cleon then enters and insists on carrying his case to Demos himself.²⁸ A second formal agon is the

result (756-941). This ends with a demonstration of the baseness of Cleon's motives and with Demos' dismissal of Cleon as his steward.

There is now a shift from the construction with interlarded lyrics, which characterizes a formal agon (epirrhematic), to the episodic structure. This change is made not because the coming scenes are any less eristic but because both Cleon and Agoracritus must retire before each episode for the preparation of their equipment and doubtless because the poet wishes to avoid monotony.

The contest in oracles satirizes the gross abuse of popular superstition which had become so common during the war.²⁹ This contest, too, ends in favor of Agoracritus. After a lyric interlude, another episode follows. This time, food is the bait for gaining the favor of Demos. The climax of this scene, and indeed of the whole play, comes when Agoracritus steals the hare which Cleon is about to give Demos and presents it as his own, just as Cleon stole the victory at Pylos.³⁰ But the final test of the rivals is an examination of their baskets. Cleon's is found loaded with good things which he is holding back for himself.

The short closing scene showing the rejuvenated Demos is the only one which exhibits the result of the contests, the function to which, as a rule, the whole second half of an Aristophanic comedy is devoted.

The cast of the *Knights* has only five roles—the smallest of all ancient comedies preserved—and of these five Demosthenes and Nicias are essentially protatic characters used for purposes of exposition. Even so, we may note incidentally, these two figures are very nicely characterized with their historically correct individualities, Demosthenes as bold and resourceful and fond of conviviality, Nicias as cautious—but personally courageous—devout, and a water-drinker. In production, the actor taking the role of Nicias obviously played that of Cleon also,³¹ while the actor of Demosthenes took the role of Demos.

Although the whole play is concerned with Cleon, his actual name occurs only once (976).

3. *CLOUDS (NEPHELAI, NUBES)

(City Dionysia, 423 B.C.)

Cratinus won first prize with his *Flask* (*Pytine*), Ameipsias second with his *Connus*, and Aristophanes third with the *Clouds*.³² This defeat very much galled Aristophanes, who in the *Knights* (526-36) had intimated that Cratinus was now practically dead and should be "buried" with the greatest respect. A revision of the *Clouds* was undertaken and published some time between 421 (production of Eupolis' *Maricas*; *Clouds* 553) and 417 (the ostracism of Hyperbolus). This revision

is carelessly thrown together and was never produced.³³ Both versions perhaps were current in later antiquity, and we are told that the changes made affected practically every part of the play. Cited as belonging specifically to the revised edition are the present parabasis, in which the Athenians are taken to task for not appreciating such a good play, the speech of the Just Argument against the Unjust, and the end of the play in which the school of Socrates is burned.³⁴

In all periods, the *Clouds* has been one of the most widely read comedies of Aristophanes. It has been highly esteemed by many critics—including Aristophanes himself! From the historical point of view it is certainly one of the most important ancient plays. In the development of comedy, also, it is extremely interesting, for it furnishes the first example of a well-developed plot and of a tendency toward higher comedy. Still, it is carelessly constructed. The judges were doubtless correct according to the standards of Old Comedy. It is lacking in low-comic effects—Aristophanes boasts of its higher plane (518-62). At times it is too intellectual for a comedy, but it is never intellectual enough for philosophical criticism.³⁵ The play ends, at least in our extant version, on a sour and moralizing note that is most inappropriate to the spirit of Old Comedy. Perhaps such a direct attack on the spirit of intellectual investigation, furthermore, was not likely to be popular with Athenians of the fifth century.

Socrates and the *Clouds*.—The relation of the true Socrates to the Socrates of the *Clouds* and to Aristophanes personally has been the subject of endless discussion.³⁶ It seems clear, however, that the Socrates of the *Clouds* is a composite figure made up from the various Sophists of the day. Thus the theory that the form of the universe resembles that of a half-spherical oven was held by Meton, as Aristophanes knew very well (*Birds* 1000-1001), and by various others; the theory of the supreme importance of air was that of Diogenes of Apollonia;³⁷ a keen interest in natural phenomena was characteristic of Anaxagoras; Prodicus and many others were greatly concerned with astronomy.³⁸ The practice of making extravagant claims to secure pupils at very high fees was characteristic of most of the Sophists but was entirely foreign to Socrates—as his poverty most eloquently testifies. Specifically, an ability to make the worse argument appear the better was the promise of Protagoras,³⁹ and this was the most offensive and immoral aspect of Sophistry.

The manner in which these characteristics of typical Sophists have been foisted upon Socrates is subtle and effective. Aristophanes has given him the physical peculiarities which everyone knew the true Socrates to possess: he wears no sandals (*Clouds* 103), he always needs

a haircut (836), and he is definitely opposed to hot baths (837). His habitual gait and manner are well described and doubtless were well imitated by the actor taking the role.⁴⁰ Since these known characteristics were faithfully reproduced, it was natural—but illogical and false—to assume that all his characteristics were faithfully reproduced. His intimate friends would recognize the falsity of the Aristophanic characterization; but *hoi polloi*, understanding little philosophy at best, would probably accept the portrait as painted.

Plato has represented Socrates on trial for his life in 399 B.C. as protesting the long-standing prejudice against him and as citing the play of Aristophanes in which "a character called Socrates is swung about saying that he is treading on air and ranting a great deal of other nonsense—things of which I understand nothing whatever."⁴¹ Socrates had been attacked by other comic poets, especially Eupolis, and he was probably a character in the *Connus* of Ameipsias. But only Aristophanes' attack is here specifically noticed, and the charges which Socrates here lists as the most important ones brought against him can all be found in the *Clouds*: he acts unjustly, he wastes his time investigating natural phenomena, he makes the worse cause seem the better, he teaches others to do these same things, he corrupts the youth (cf. *Clouds* 916–19), and he does not believe in the gods in which the city believes. Obviously Socrates as Plato portrays him felt that Aristophanes' play had been very influential and had done him great harm.⁴²

Theme.—Like the *Banqueters* (*Daitales*), the first production of Aristophanes, the *Clouds* is a satire of the new Sophistic education and of the scientific method. Its purveyors are attacked under the figure of Socrates, who was by no means a typical Sophist but who lent himself readily to comic caricature because of his personal peculiarities. There was an even more important reason, however, for singling out Socrates rather than any other individual. Just as Aristophanes considers the minor tragic poets almost beneath his contempt and attacks Euripides himself because Euripides was by far the most important writer of "New" tragedy, so he chooses Socrates because Socrates was by far the most profound of the new teachers. Aristophanes makes no attempt seriously to represent the true teachings of Socrates, just as he makes no attempt to do justice to the plays of Euripides. But we must again give the comic poet credit at least for unerringly perceiving the most significant forces in a confused and complex situation and for courageously attacking the most important personality.

Like the attack upon Euripides, the attack upon Socrates, though unfair and in a way mean and small, has a certain justification. Aristophanes, like many men in our own day, was profoundly disturbed

by the observation that the increase in learning and the advancement of science bring no real improvement in human relations, national or international. Indeed, they seem to bring corruption and chaos. In Aristophanes' day, as in our own, the bases of social morality were being undermined.⁴³ Sounder doctrine was actually being quarried out and substituted by Socrates and later by Plato, but this process was slow and esoteric; meanwhile the social structure was suffering undeniable harm. Aristophanes' plea in this situation was a foolish one: he advocated the restoration of the beliefs and customs of the past. In reality, these, once exposed to the light, had disintegrated forever. But Aristophanes was justified in insisting that the trends of his age were decadent and would lead to ruin.

Discussion.—The financial predicament of Strepsiades, which gives rise to all the action of the play, is dramatized most amusingly in the brilliant opening scenes. Here are mentioned the names of his creditors, who are to appear later in the play when the "twenties" of the month have come, and it is time to arrange for payment. Here too Strepsiades conceives the not so happy idea of sending his son to Socrates' university. But this idea is not subjected to formal debate. Father and son dispute it briefly until Pheidippides walks out in disgust.⁴⁴ This temporary frustration leads to Strepsiades' going himself to Socrates. Structurally, this part of the play has no consequence, but it furnishes an opportunity for much foolery—in a play where light comedy is scarce—and for some satire of Socrates. In the course of this scene the chorus of clouds is incidentally summoned by Socrates, but no choral break in the action occurs until Strepsiades retires with his teacher. Here the parabasis occurs (510–626); but it does not divide the play into two structural units. Like a stasimon in tragedy, its function is merely to provide an interlude while Strepsiades is being put to the test.

Strepsiades, after being rejected by Socrates as an utter moron, reverts to his original plan and persuades Pheidippides, who is still very reluctant, to take his place at the university. Father and son now hear the debate between the Just and the Unjust Argument (agon 949–1104).⁴⁵ This debate, also, is mere decoration from the structural point of view, for Strepsiades is already firmly convinced that he wants his son to learn the Unjust Argument, and his opinion is not in the least affected by the debate.

While Pheidippides is being taught, the chorus again fill the interval by delivering an address to the judges (usually called the second parabasis, 1115–30). Some days are now supposed to have elapsed. We are well along in the "twenties" of the month, the period to which

Strepsiades was looking forward with dread at the first of the play (17). Pheidippides is returned to his father, now such a master of sophistry that by the aid of a few points which he makes Strepsiades himself is able to rout his creditors for the time being, confident that his son can never be worsted in court. All this occurs in a sequence unbroken by choral lyrics (1131-1302.) A stasimon follows, constituting the third major break in the action. In mock-tragic fashion, the chorus foresee the downfall of Strepsiades.

These forebodings are immediately translated into action with the violent quarrel between father and son (second agon, 1345-1451). Pheidippides has not taken any part in the routing of the creditors, as we might have expected him to do; by a surprising turn of events such as Aristophanes employs so frequently, his new learning is all spent in abusing his father and in threatening to abuse his mother. Though Strepsiades realizes all too clearly that he is responsible for his fate (1338), his son and the chorus insist upon reminding him of this unpleasant fact (1403; 1454-55; cf. 865). All his machinations have gone awry, and he himself has become their victim. He bewails his immoral folly and decides to take a quick vengeance upon Socrates by burning down his "Think-Shop."⁴⁶

The plot of the *Clouds* is obviously modeled on tragedy and is poorly adapted to the usual formula of Old Comedy. The action does not fall into two parts separated by the parabasis, like that of the *Acharnians*, but into four sections separated by various types of choral interlude. By an irregular progression the action rises to a climax at the end of the third section and the main character suffers a reversal of fortune at the opening of the fourth and final section. The play is then brought quickly to a close. Except for marking the passage of time and covering vacant stages, the chorus is little more than an encumbrance. Indeed, a purely interlude performance by the chorus, according to the manuscripts, occurs before line 889.⁴⁷ In its form as well as in its dependence upon higher comedy, therefore, the *Clouds* foreshadows Middle and New Comedy. The seriousness of its purpose, however, is typically Aristophanic, and its characters are still the wooden puppets of Old Comedy.⁴⁸

4. WASPS (SPHEKES, VESPAE)

(Lenaea, 422 B.C.)

The data concerning the production of the *Wasps* are uncertain. Perhaps it was produced by Philonides and won second prize. Perhaps Philonides produced Aristophanes' *Preview* (*Proagon*), also, for first

prize.⁴⁹ It is certain that Leucon was third and last with his *Ambassadors* (*Presbeis*).

The *Wasps* is a very amusing play, but it deals with a contemporary political problem which has little interest for the modern reader. Consideration of this problem is practically confined to the earlier section of the play (1-1008). The episodes after the parabasis, low comedy at its uproarious best, illustrate Bdelycleon's contention that Athenian citizens might be indulging in one continuous round of pleasures if they once threw off the tyranny of the dishonest demagogues like Cleon (698-712).

Happy idea and theme.—Bdelycleon has perceived that the dicasts are not really the powerful figures which they think themselves to be but are pitiful slaves of an unworthy master. He is determined, therefore, to enlighten his father and cure him of his morbid fondness for the law courts.

Despite Aristophanes' disclaimer (62-63), the *Wasps* is essentially another attack upon Cleon. This time Cleon's main source of power—his virtual control of the jurors—is exposed and denounced. By increasing their pay, most scholars believe, Cleon had definitely won the staunch support of the six thousand jurors,⁵⁰ and such a large organized group went far toward controlling the popular assembly, especially in time of war when many of the younger citizens were off on campaigns. The support of the jurors in the courts, furthermore, was itself an inestimable service to a demagogue, especially since political prosecutions were extremely common at Athens.⁵¹ Bdelycleon loudly protests that Cleon is receiving credit for benefits which the Athenians have in reality themselves won by their own hard labors (682-95), and he insists that Cleon is profiting from human misery and wishes the Athenians to be paupers dependent upon the demagogues for public support (703-4). Athenian citizens, Bdelycleon contends, might be rolling in wealth and living a life of gay dissipation if it were not for the evil demagogues.

The unholy alliance between Cleon and the jurors is the main concern of the play. But Cleon is attacked on other scores. The cry of "thief," still echoing from its incessant repetition in the *Knights*, is heard in the prologue (*Wasps* 35) and recurs throughout the play. There is another cry: Cleon stays at home and talks while the other public leaders are doing their best—which in the immediate past has been very poor—with the Athenian forces in the field. This cry seems to be the serious point of the trial of "Labes." Aristophanes does not seem to attack Laches, and he certainly does not defend him from the charge of theft. In the *antepirrhema*, also, the drones who stay at home

and accomplish nothing are denounced. All this seems designed to shame Cleon into again taking the field, doubtless in the hope that he will have the good fortune of another Pylos or some catastrophe that will put an end to his popular favor. Either as a result of this subtle criticism or possibly by mere coincidence, Cleon was chosen general at the following annual elections and actually went to Thrace to take command of the Athenian forces there. He had apparently deceived even himself into thinking that he had some military ability. Soon afterward he died a coward's death in a defeat brought about by his own blunders.⁵²

Athenian litigiousness and legal processes, which were all too often vitiated by rhetoric and improper procedure, are severely satirized in the *Wasps*. Service upon the juries is specifically condemned (esp. 505). The shockingly raw prejudices of the jurors have been noticed in the *Knights* (1359-60), and they are here more specifically attacked. The propensity of the jurors to find treason everywhere and the severity of their judgments receive even more attention and furnish much of the banter in the *Wasps*.

The criticism of the jurymen themselves, however, is of a benign variety—advisedly so, for to attack the jurymen unconditionally would be to alienate the largest organized political body in Athens. The picture of the old men assembling with their lanterns and young sons as guides is a charming genre painting. Few passages in Aristophanes—or any other author—are more pathetic than that wherein the little boy, just chastised because he allowed the lamp to burn too prosperously, appeals for some figs. The old father's anger merely conceals his grief at being so poverty-stricken that he can hardly procure the barest necessities of existence. Aristophanes here is not indulging in idle sentimentality; with thorough understanding and sympathy he is explaining the basic economic problem which gave rise to the abuses which the *Wasps* is designed to correct. Incidentally he is suggesting the blessings of peace, for Attica produced an abundance of olive oil and figs under normal conditions. During the war Attica had repeatedly been invaded; the olive and fig trees had been cut by the enemy and the grapevines as well. Athenian citizens normally supported by the produce of their small farms must have suffered intensely, and now the very existence of many, no doubt, was dependent upon their small jury fees.

But the most winsome picture of all is Philocleon's description of his evening welcome, when his daughter lovingly wheedles away his three obols and his wife brings him his supper (605-15). Instead of being an additional burden to his family, the old man is its one bread-

winner and the darling of the household, for here Philocleon is the typical Athenian juror and not the father of the very affluent Bdelycleon.

The kindness of Aristophanes toward the jurors as individuals is shown also by the flattery of the parabasis. The final scenes of revelry, too, are designed to cast glory upon them; for the fantastic exuberance of Philocleon intimates that the men of Marathon, even in old age, are still far superior to the present gilded generation, superior—if they care to set their hands to the task—even in gilding themselves!

Structure.⁵³—The structure of the *Wasps* is typical of the Aristophanic formula. The exposition, as in the *Knights*, is frankly delivered to the audience by one of the slaves. The remainder of the first section is devoted to dramatizing this same expository material (prologos, 1-229). Incidentally, but significantly, Philocleon reveals that his life will be blasted if a defendant ever escapes him (158-60). The action proper begins with the entrance of the chorus (parodos, 230-315). The issue is defined at some length (scene with interlarded lyrics, 316-525), and the formal debate between Philocleon and Bdelycleon ensues (agon, 526-727). The chorus is thoroughly won over by Bdelycleon's arguments. Philocleon, too, is intellectually convinced; but in his heart he still longs to play judge and juror. A domestic trial, therefore, is devised for him—a dramatization of the procedures previously satirized and a further attack upon Cleon (scenes with interlarded lyrics, 728-1008). But, structurally, the result of this trial is to have Philocleon unintentionally acquit a defendant and so be cured of his malady. In the closing lines Bdelycleon foretells the action of the later sections of the play—that Philocleon will now accompany him in his continuous round of pleasures.

After the parabasis Philocleon is given his first lesson on behavior in polite society—a scene of foolery and mild satire (episode, 1122-1264). Philocleon's warning of the dangers of drinking foreshadows his own outrageous conduct as depicted in the final scenes. There follow the personal abuse and the reference to Aristophanes' feud with Cleon in the second parabasis (1265-91). During this, considerable time is supposed to elapse. In the next scene the drunken Philocleon returns and indulges in much very low and very amusing comedy (episode, 1292-1449). In the ensuing stasimon, the chorus enviously contemplate the change in Philocleon's character and compliment the wisdom of his son (1450-73). These sentiments are not, as many scholars have thought, out of place in the manuscripts; they are spoken with diabolical irony. In the exodos (1474-1537), Philocleon comes on to dance extravagantly in parody of Euripides' *Cyclops*, it seems, and of the rhythms which the sons of Carcinus used in their inferior tragedies.

5. PEACE (EIRENE, PAX)

(City Dionysia, 421 B.C.)

Eupolis won first prize with his *Toadies* (*Kolakes*), Aristophanes second, and Leucon third with his *Clansmen* (*Phratores*).⁵⁴ An actor named Apollodorus took the leading role in Aristophanes' play.

The *Peace* is characterized by several very spirited scenes; but it is seriously lacking in dramatic conflict. After the recovery of Peace in the opening scenes the play becomes a somewhat obvious encomium. An advance from the artlessness of the *Acharnians* may be observed; for the change of scene is here managed with care, and the final episodes are anticipated in the earlier part of the play.

Historical note.—The Athenians were unduly elated, as the Spartans were unduly discouraged, by the capture of Pylos and Sphacteria in 425 B.C. Other minor Athenian successes followed; but their expedition to Sicily, made by the naval force which began the whole affair at Pylos, was a total failure. At one time the Athenians seemed to have won a major success at Megara (424 B.C.), but this was nullified by the sudden appearance of the Spartan Brasidas with a large force. Later Brasidas proceeded to Chalcidice to protect and foster the movement of defection which was already under way there among the allies of Athens. He quickly made a reputation for justice and moderation, and under the cry of freedom for all Hellenes he met with very notable success. At about this time the main army of Athens suffered a serious defeat at the hands of the Boeotians (Delium, 424 B.C.), and a truce was made for one year (423 B.C.). This truce was violated by Brasidas—with some justification—and in 422 B.C. Cleon sailed to Chalcidice and took up a position before Amphipolis, which was held by Brasidas with small forces. When Cleon blundered in maneuvering, Brasidas attacked for a signal victory. But the rash personal bravery which had long distinguished Brasidas lured him to his death. His continued leadership might have won the war for Sparta. A second stroke of good fortune for the Athenians was the death of Cleon, who was cut down as he fled like the coward that Aristophanes had so long insisted him to be.⁵⁵

Thus both the Athenians and the Spartans were disappointed in their hopes and, now reaching a stalemate, they both desired peace. Indeed the Athenians now regretted not having made peace after Pylos. The Spartans were anxious to cease hostilities before their truce with Argos expired and to recover the men whom the Athenians had taken at Pylos. Negotiations were instituted, and the treaty was finally concluded immediately after the City Dionysia, 421 B.C.⁵⁶

Happy idea and theme.—Trygaeus has the happy idea of going directly to Zeus in order to secure peace and save all Hellas. There is not a drop of money with which to buy bread in his house; but if he succeeds in his mission, he tells the little daughters who plead with him not to make such a dangerous attempt, there will be plenty (114–23). In the final lines of the play, also, when Peace has been recovered and Trygaeus is taking Harvest-Home as his bride to the country, he promises that all who come with him will eat cake.

Produced at the very crucial time when Brasidas and Cleon, War's two pestles, had recently been slain and when a treaty was under negotiation, the play is a fervent appeal to the Athenians for peace. As in the *Acharnians*, the appeal is primarily a sensuous one. At times, especially in the second parabasis, this appeal becomes one of charming poetic beauty. Panhellenic harmony, also, is a major concern throughout the play (esp. 993–98). This theme was very appropriate to the City Dionysia, when many visitors, doubtless including the Spartan ambassadors, were present in the theater.

Structure.—The exposition of the *Peace* closely resembles that of the *Knights* and the *Wasps*. Action proper begins with Trygaeus' flying up to heaven—a parody of Euripides' *Bellerophon* and the use of machines in tragedy. Trygaeus discovers that Peace has been imprisoned and that War intends completely to destroy the cities of Greece (prologos, 1–300).

With the entrance of the chorus (parodos, 301–45) all hands set about to recover Peace.⁵⁷ These efforts lead to incidental satire of the various interests opposed to peace, especially the militarists and the makers of armament.⁵⁸ Various Greek states which would like to see the war continued also are satirized. When Peace has been recovered, the play becomes an encomium of her blessings (scenes with interlarded lyrics, 346–600). In a speech resembling that of an agon (601–56). Hermes offers a novel explanation of the origin of the war and then interprets the various grievances which Peace holds against the Athenians. But Peace and her interpreter are finally placated; Trygaeus is given Harvest-Home (Opora) to wife and asked to conduct Festival (Theoria) to the Athenian senate.⁵⁹ Finally, the beetle is not forgotten (scene, 657–728).

The parabasis sings the praises of Aristophanes. Repeated references have been made to Cleon in the earlier parts of the play, and now Aristophanes quotes several lines from the *Wasps* as if to remind the audience that he dared to use the severest language against Cleon when the monster was still alive and at the height of his power (parabasis, 729–818).⁶⁰

As Trygaeus returns to earth, the change of scene is clearly noted with an effective joke upon the audience. The disposition of the two beautiful maidens is accompanied with *double entente* suggestive of the joys of peaceful festivity. A second scene prepares for the sacrificial feast and contains a prayer for harmony among the Greeks (scenes with interlarded lyrics, 819-921, 922-1038). Both scenes end with praise of Trygaeus, who now has almost become Aristophanes himself.

A soothsayer interrupts the sacrifice and is beaten off (quasi-episode, 1039-1126).⁶¹ The second parabasis follows, beginning as a beautiful if homely idyll in praise of rural peace and plenty and ending by comparing this life with that of war (1127-90). The following scene contrasts the reaction of the makers of farm implements with those of the makers of armament—a theme anticipated earlier in the play (447, 545). A second contrast, also anticipated, is made between the son of Lamachus, the general, and the son of the coward Cleonymus (quasi-episode, 1191-1304). The exodos is a glorious revel celebrating Trygaeus' marriage to Harvest-Home.

6. *BIRDS (ORNITHES, AVES)

(City Dionysia, 414 B.C.)

The *Birds* was produced by Callistratus and won second prize. Ameipsias won first with his *Revelers* (*Komastai*), Phrynichus third with his *Hermit* (*Monotropos*).⁶²

The *Birds* contains some of the most charming of all Greek poetry; it is filled with winsome and capricious fantasy—a product of human imaginativeness at its most brilliant height. It is often considered Aristophanes' best comedy. The care with which the plot is worked out, the consistency of the characterization of the chorus, and the comparative absence of low comedy mark distinct advancements.

Happy idea and theme.—Pisthetaerus and Euelpides have become disgusted with the mad litigiousness (42) and the political officiousness of Athens (121, 147). Taking refuge in the land of the birds—a Utopia⁶³—Pisthetaerus conceives the happy idea of building a city and blockading the gods from all traffic with human beings in order to secure the sovereignty which, he claims, originally belonged to the birds.

Many critics consider the *Birds* a fantasy of escape in which references to contemporary persons or events are wholly incidental. This interpretation may be correct. Certain it is that much of the play is ob-

vious, innocent fantasy and will bear no allegorical interpretation of any kind. But a complete lack of serious purpose is hard to reconcile with the hitherto invariably serious intent of Aristophanes' comedies and with some apparently serious passages in the *Birds*.

Some critics think that Aristophanes is giving comic representation to the many high and ambitious schemes which were in the air at Athens when the Sicilian expedition was sent forth. But if we recall the bitter criticism of Hyperbolus' dream of an expedition against Carthage in the *Knights* (1300-1315), we shall hardly conclude that the gloriously successful Pisthetaerus is supposed to be the father of any such scheme.

An ancient commentator insists that Aristophanes is covertly advocating a change of government and, if need be, a change in the whole nature and scheme of things.⁶⁴ The idea of a serious political intent must not be dismissed too abruptly. Athens was in desperate straits in 414 B.C. She had dangerously weakened herself by sending out the huge Sicilian expedition; and, when Alcibiades had been forced to quit the leadership of this expedition and go into exile, Aristophanes with his keen political sagacity must have abandoned all real hope of the venture's success. His indirect references to the expedition suggest as much,⁶⁵ and his silences are even more eloquent (1369). Satire of oracle-mongers at this particular time, furthermore, almost amounted to denunciation of the expedition; for vast arrays of oracles had been brought forth in favor of it. To advocate anything resembling a revolution at such a time, however, would be worth a man's life.⁶⁶ If Aristophanes is doing so, he must of necessity conceal the fact from a very intelligent audience; indeed, he must advocate it so vaguely that if he should be called into court and accused, he could prove that he is not doing so. We may be sure, therefore, that even if the *Birds* advocates a change in government, no ancient sycophant or modern scholar could prove the point. This very fact makes any dogmatically certain interpretation of the *Birds* utterly hopeless.

At times in the *Birds* a seriously conceived Utopia seems to be developing, as when the absence of money is approved (157-58) and possibly the abolition of private property envisioned (995-1020). But the play as a whole does not put forward any Utopia. Pisthetaerus begins with a search for a quiet, peaceful city; but no sooner is his new foundation made than he institutes a blockade, breaks off diplomatic relations with gods and men, and ends with a policy of superimperialism.⁶⁷ Besides, Aristophanes' sense of humor was too keen to allow him to view any Utopia seriously, and yet Pisthetaerus and his ambitious schemes are sympathetically presented.

At times the city which Pisthetaerus has founded seems to represent

Athens, and the Olympian gods seem to be the Doric Greeks. The talk of blockade and embargoes suggests this, as does part of the scene where the embassy sues for peace (especially 1596-1602). But the demands which Pisthetaerus makes as a price for peace are far too ambitious to represent Aristophanes' suggestion for a settlement of the Peloponnesian War.

Again, it seems as if the Olympian gods may represent the popular leaders now in control of Athens. Prometheus' description of Basileia as the stewardess of all good things, including the juries' pay, though obviously humorous, seems an excellent description of the sovereign power at Athens. Pisthetaerus could easily be conceived to represent Aristophanes' ideal Athenian citizen. The restoration of sovereignty to its original possessors would then mean the restoration of the old limited democracy which was always Aristophanes' ideal. Such an interpretation, also, is consistent with Pisthetaerus' original purpose of finding a city free from sycophancy and officious politics. The figure of the Triballian fits very nicely into this picture; for he is openly likened to Laispodias, a popular leader of the day. The Triballian's costume, as the ancient commentator points out, and doubtless also his mask, are those of Laispodias, and the democracy is satirized for electing such a man to represent it (1567-71), as it has earlier been satirized for electing Dietrephes (798-800, cf. 1442). But the early sections of the play do not suggest any such interpretation, and even these final scenes have much in them that is inconsistent with or contradictory to such an interpretation—although we should never expect allegory to be consistently maintained in Aristophanes.

Still another interpretation is that recently presented by Van Daele.⁶⁸ After the departure of the Sicilian expedition, he points out, Athens became a very unpleasant place for honest men because of the reckless persecutions that followed certain acts of sacrilege.⁶⁹ These persecutions are doubtless being satirized in the *Birds* by the references to litigiousness and sycophants. If Athens were free of such processes, free of duped juries, corrupting Sophists, impostors, and sycophants, then Athens would present a picture of perfect felicity of which the Olympian gods themselves would be jealous! This interpretation is a very attractive one.

Structure.—The exposition is managed very much as in the *Knights* and similar plays, but here the speakers are the chief character of the play and his foil rather than unimportant protatic characters (prologos, 1-208). Such a foil, we may note incidentally, is here used more effectively and elaborately than in any previous extant comedy. For the usual entrance songs of the chorus Aristophanes has substituted the

charming lyrics of the Epops (parodos, 209-450?). The chorus excitedly clash with the old men, and Pisthetaerus' formal presentation of his case follows. He succeeds in convincing the chorus of their rights of sovereignty, and after they have heard his clever plan of campaign they turn over the direction of affairs to him and promise themselves to furnish the "man power" (agon, 451-638). A short scene at this point gracefully introduces the Nightingale and gives the actors plausible motivation for retiring (scene, 639-75).

The beautiful parabasis follows and is delivered wholly in character by the chorus of birds. It is as pertinent to the subject of the play as are many other speeches and lyrics. This is an advance in artistic formality over the first five plays (parabasis, 676-800).

Pisthetaerus and Euelpides reappear with wings and proceed to the business of founding the city. Euelpides is sent out to see to the walls and does not reappear—his role as foil has been sufficiently exploited, and the actor is needed for other parts. In rapid succession the poet now satirizes the pretentious parasites who prey upon civilization for their own selfish ends: the priest, the popular poet, the oracle-monger, the civil engineer and expert in city planning, and—in a single scene—the commissioner of colonial affairs and the professional lawmaker (scenes with interlarded lyrics, 801-1057).

In charmingly sportive verses, the chorus sing of the benefits of birds and of their delights. An edict is issued against a birdcatcher, and the judges of the comedies are cajoled and threatened (second parabasis, 1058-1117).

The plot proper is now resumed with the entrance of a messenger, somewhat awkwardly introduced,⁷⁰ who announces the completion of the walls. The embargo against the gods is thus instituted, and Iris, the first offender, is threatened with dire consequences for having crossed the border without a visa! Finally, the imminent arrival of men who wish to acquire wings is announced (scenes with interlarded lyrics, 1118-1312).

Wings are made ready as the chorus praise their city for being the seat of Wisdom, Love, Culture, and gentle Ease (quasi-stasimon, 1313-34).

The various undesirables now appear and apply to Pisthetaerus (episode, 1335-1469). These scenes, like those with the previous series of individuals, are not pertinent to the contest for sovereignty, but they seem to grow rather naturally out of the action.

The chorus now begin an interrupted series of satirical verses. The first two stanzas attack the eternal butt, Cleonymus, and the contemporary gangster, Orestes (stasimon, 1470-93).

The plot is definitely resumed with the entrance of Prometheus, who sneaks in to inform Pisthetaerus of the plight of the gods and to advise his demanding Basileia as his wife—a new and exciting complication. On his departure the chorus continue their satire with a stanza on Socrates and the coward Peisander. The embassy, whose imminent arrival has been foretold by Prometheus, now appears. This scene constitutes the well-marked climax of the play. As with many an Athenian embassy, bribery is cleverly used and Pisthetaerus makes peace on his own terms. The chorus continue their satire with a bitter attack on sycophants and Sophists, specifically Gorgias (scenes with interlarded lyrics, 1494–1705). The play ends with the gay marriage of Pisthetaerus to Basileia.

7. **LYSISTRATA*

(411 B.C.)

The *Lysistrata* was produced by Callistratus, possibly at the Lenaeon festival, but detailed information is lacking.

The *Lysistrata* is excellently constructed and is crowded with scenes of uproarious low comedy and brilliant wit based with frank directness on perhaps the most amusing of all situations. It is the first extant comedy in which women play major roles. At times this comedy has been somewhat neglected because of its unusual frankness; but critics of the present day, free from the prejudice of both prudery and prurience, have come to regard it as one of Aristophanes' best plays. Though written for a day and an hour, it can be understood and appreciated by the modern audience more readily perhaps than any other play of Aristophanes, and it has been successfully reproduced by the commercial theater both in Europe and in America.⁷¹

Happy idea and theme.—*Lysistrata* has the happy idea of instituting a sex-strike among all Greek women in order to force the men to make peace. Despite the extravagance of this reversal of nature and the droll low comedy of much of the action, the play makes a powerful appeal for renovating the national texture and for establishing Panhellenic peace and unity. The author has been courageously fair to the Spartan point of view without in the least jeopardizing his loyalty to Athens. It is a tribute to his city, however, that fairness would be tolerated in the midst of a bitter war.

Structure.—The *Lysistrata* is more artistically constructed than any of the earlier comedies. As in the *Birds*, the happy idea involves an intrigue which becomes a well-defined dramatic plot. Various difficulties

arise to threaten its success and to heighten the general tension. By an interrupted progression, therefore, the action rises to a climax, after which the play is brought quickly to a close. The whole is very tightly constructed: even the low comedy seems inevitably to develop out of the dramatic situation, almost nothing impertinent is included, no motive is repeated, and the action moves with sustained dynamic rapidity.

The exposition is more naturally brought out in the *Lysistrata* than in any of the previous comedies. A minor climax is built up when *Lysistrata* thoroughly arouses the curiosity of her companions before revealing her happy idea—if it can be called such. Incidentally these first scenes furnish a splendid opportunity for satirizing the foibles of women, and extraordinary care has been taken to characterize the minor figures. While *Lysistrata* is trying to explain much more serious matters to her, Cleonice prattles on about what she will wear to detract the male from martial pursuits. Lampito is nicely characterized by her healthy Spartan figure and her broad dialect. Her first words refer to the gymnastic training of Spartan girls—always a scandal to the more cautious Athenians.⁷² Later Lampito makes references to Spartan geography (117) and mythology (155–56). Her realistic portrait is completed by an uncomplimentary reference to the Athenian democracy (170–71). These nicely drawn characterizations add color to the background of the action; but unfortunately they are not made to have some definite effect upon it. Perhaps a modern dramatist would at least have given Cleonice's picturesque role to Myrrhina, for Myrrhina does have some slight importance in the later scenes. *Lysistrata* herself, furthermore, is hardly more than the feminine counterpart of Dicaeopolis or Pisthetaerus. But we should expect most of the characters to be generalized, for they are designed as representatives of their class rather than as individuals.

The opening scenes conclude with the women's seizing the Acropolis (prologos, 1–253). This motivates the entrances of the two half-choruses of old men and old women. Their age nicely contrasts with the blossoming youthfulness of the main characters, and their clash symbolizes the dramatic struggle of the play. The division of the chorus, therefore, is eminently suited to the action, and their various antics furnish some of the best low comedy in Aristophanes (parodos, 254–386).

The Magistrate—one of the extraordinary officials appointed after the disaster in Sicily—is a typical conservative Athenian. His low opinion of women's place in life is amusingly ironic in view of his utter inability to master the present situation. Following his physical humiliation comes the formal debate of the play, in which *Lysistrata*'s

frank castigation of the Athenians is made palatable, as we should expect in Aristophanes, first by the obvious sanity of the criticisms, then by the interspersed comic foolery and by a dash of pathos. Lysistrata recites the hardships of women in wartime: the loss of their sons, their loneliness, and the sterile wasting away of the younger generation (scene, 387-466; agon, 467-613).

The homely advice of Lysistrata for fulling the state as the women full their wool has approached the revolutionary;⁷⁸ and, after the retirement of the actors, the old men of the chorus now raise the cry of "tyranny," while the old women defend their right to advise the ill-conducted state. Low comedy again characterizes the clash of the two choruses and adds to the unusual features of this unique parabasis (614-705).

After the supposed lapse of some days (cf. 881), Lysistrata appears and announces that their revolt is threatened with internal collapse. A short scene dramatizes this situation, and with some difficulty Lysistrata succeeds in repressing her weaker sisters (episode, 706-80).

The two half-choruses express their mutual hatred—and they do not limit themselves to mere words (stasimon, 781-828).

The distressing situation of the males, already suggested (763-65), is now dramatized with Cinesias and his wife Myrrhina in the main roles.⁷⁴ For the pit this scene must have been the high point not only of the play but of several seasons! When Cinesias makes his reluctant exit, the Herald of the Spartans enters to announce—and to illustrate—that the Spartans are suffering from the same malady.⁷⁵ A meeting of plenipotentiaries is quickly arranged (quasi-episode, 829-1013).

The hostile choruses now at last are reunited in a scene of touching sentiment (choral interlude, 1014-42). As if to celebrate their harmony, they sing a lyric outrageously teasing the audience. The climax of the play follows with the entrance of the plenipotentiaries of Sparta and Athens. Lysistrata as the center of a spectacular tableau now makes the most serious appeal of the play. For once Aristophanes writes a speech in tragic style that is almost too serious to be parody. Whole lines are taken from Euripides, especially from the *Erechtheus*, a splendidly patriotic tragedy which had appeared possibly some ten years before. This speech of Lysistrata is a noble appeal for Panhellenism: Spartans are reminded of their obligations to Athens and Athenians of their obligations to Sparta, and reconciliation is finally effected. With another lyric, the chorus continues teasing the audience (scene with interlarded lyrics, 1043-1246).

The play ends in revelry and in songs of great beauty which are reminiscent of Alcman, the great Spartan poet of days long past.⁷⁶

8. *THESMOPHORIAZUSAE*⁷⁷

(411 B.C.)⁷⁸

This play is a very amusing but basically serious attack upon Euripides and his satellite Agathon. Aristophanes' criticism of Euripides, seriously begun in the *Acharnians*, was continued in various lost plays both before and after this one, and given its final form in the *Frogs*.

Theme. Parody of tragedy.—The *Thesmophoriazusae* resembles the *Clouds* in that the "idea" turns out to be not very happy but furnishes much low comedy and becomes the framework for the serious theme of the play. This theme is more important than it might seem at first glance, for Aristophanes manages directly or indirectly to criticize almost every phase of Euripidean tragedy—most phases are criticized again and again.

The first lines of the play single out the characteristic for which Euripides was forever best known: the sophistic niceties of his language and his preoccupation with philosophical concepts—Euripides the Wise and Euripides the Philosopher of the Theater. The clever novelty of Euripides' ideas is illustrated by his plan to send a secret advocate to the women's assembly and later by his inexhaustible resourcefulness in thinking up devices to rescue this advocate. The criticism of Agathon—his use of stage machinery, his effeminacy, the affected prettiness of his language, and the seductiveness of his music—all this is something more than incidental fun, for in the end Euripides is made to confess that he was just such a one when he was young (173-74). In refusing Euripides' request, furthermore, Agathon, like Dionysus later (*Frogs* 1471), uses one of Euripides' own lines, implying that Euripides should run his own risks (194).

The assembly of the women is a brilliant device for furnishing a very amusing scene at the expense of Athenian women and also for airing one of the most characteristic features of Euripidean tragedy. It is part of the comedy that the women do not protest the truth of the revelations which Euripides has made; they merely deplore the harm done them and resolve to punish the person responsible. Here the serious concern is with Euripides' subject matter. This, as Aristophanes never tired of insisting, was far below the standard of dignity set by Aeschylus and Sophocles, a standard proper, in Aristophanes' opinion, to all tragedy. Euripides is here being indicted for his almost morbid interest in feminine psychology and for the intimate domesticity of his plots. He delights in exhibiting love-sick women and in portraying other indecent scenes on stage; adultery and deception, according to the charge, are stock-in-trade with him; so are girls with illegitimate

children and wives buying infants to conceal their sterility. A young wife is shown to be a tyrant over an old husband, and wives in general are proved wholly untrustworthy.

Aristophanes' indictment of Euripides is in general sound. Euripides was the first to present profound and intimate studies of women in the Athenian theater, studies which were not circumscribed as to subject matter and which were very frank. The implication that this type of subject matter is beneath the dignity of great tragedy also has some specious justification. At least, this is the very type of subject matter (with the exception of a woman's adultery) which became common in later comedy. The claim that Euripides exhibits Phaedras and Melanippe but no Penelope, however, is patently false (546-48). The heroine of the *Helen* herself is a model of fidelity, not to speak of the noble Alcestis or the daughters of Erechtheus.

Another woman adds to the charge that Euripides has convinced men that there are no gods—and so interfered with her trade in garlands!

In reply to these complaints, Mnesilochus insists that the women have been fortunate to be let off so easily, and he proceeds to list a vast array of feminine vices which are too sordid even for a Euripidean tragedy. From Aristophanes' point of view, this defense of Euripides has the double advantage of being most amusing and no real defense whatever.

The scenes in which Mnesilochus casts about for a device of escape are mainly clever parodies of scenes from Euripides' plays and further satire of Euripides' inexhaustible ingenuity. The first play called upon for a contribution is the *Telephus*. This was now a somewhat ancient production (438 B.C.); it had furnished much of the material for the *Acharnians*. There the "child" seized as hostage was a charcoal basket; here it turns out to be a wineskin disguised as a baby with little white slippers. The next play called upon is the *Palamedes* (415 B.C.), where in another very clever device is discovered. But this scene is mostly foolery—and a good excuse for Mnesilochus later to intimate that his device fails because Euripides was ashamed to acknowledge his frigid *Palamedes* (848).

Mnesilochus now shifts to the very latest plays of Euripides, first to the *Helen*. This procedure is effective, for these plays would be most vivid in the minds of the audience, and it obviously seems fairer to parody Euripides' latest plays rather than to select from a large number of previous ones. The melodramatic distress of Helen fits Mnesilochus' situation almost perfectly, and the parody is played at some length. Euripides doubtless enters as Menelaus dressed in rags and tatters—

another slap at realism and at appeals to sentiment through mechanical effects. Very amusing comedy is added to this scene by the interruptions of one of the women and also by occasional lapses in character.

The *Andromeda*, however, furnishes the best show of the play. If Aristophanes is repeating the motive of a maiden in distress, so did Euripides; for both the *Helen* and the *Andromeda* were presented at the same festival. The *Andromeda* was famous in ancient times as one of Euripides' most beautiful plays;⁷⁹ but it invited comic parody, for a maiden chained like Prometheus to a cliff is the extreme of romantic melodrama and Echo mocking the heroine's sad laments is the boldest theatrical novelty. All this, however, is not enough: the play opens beneath the starry night;⁸⁰ the hero enters, in all probability, gliding through the air on the "machine." The *Helen* and possibly the *Andromeda*, furthermore, dealt with a clever Greek's getting the better of a somewhat stupid barbarian, and the final scenes of the *Thesmophoriazusae* outrageously parody this melodramatic plot of intrigue and escape.

Such attacks as this may in part have caused Agathon and also Euripides to leave Athens and go to Macedonia. Agathon was the only young tragic poet of great promise in Athens; and Aristophanes lived to regret, or at least publicly to renounce, this bitter attack upon him.⁸¹

Structure.—Like the *Clouds*, the *Thesmophoriazusae* is a comedy of unsuccessful intrigue. The first attempt at instituting the "idea" is a total failure. A later attempt for a while seems successful, but it brings on various complications which lead to a climax near the end of the play. All the action is designed with a view to the satire which constitutes the poet's main interest. The *Thesmophoriazusae*, however, is much more neatly constructed than the *Clouds*. Indicative of Aristophanes' growing concern with minor technical details is the subtle preparation for the appearance of Cleisthenes by an earlier thrust at him (235). The "child" also is specifically noted some time before the scene in which it plays a major role (cf. 608-9). There are no irrelevant or loosely attached scenes. The basic action of the play, however, is very slight, and the ending is distinctly flat for an Old Comedy.

The exposition is deftly brought out in the opening dialogue along with various indirect criticisms of Euripides. The action proper begins when Mnesilochus decides himself to undertake Euripides' defense.⁸² Euripides is forced to swear that he will come to Mnesilochus' aid in case of distress, thus anticipating the later action (prologos, 1-294).

Some mechanical shift in the background, if we may believe a stage direction in the best manuscript, is now made (276). The women formally assemble and undertake the judgment of Euripides (parodos, 295-379). The indictments of the women and the response of Mne-

silochus follow (quasi-agon, 380-530). This leads to a heated clash between the women and Mnesilochus, whose identity is finally disclosed with the aid of Cleisthenes (scene, 531-654).

In lyric measure the chorus search about their council seat for other possible interlopers whom they threaten with dire punishment. Realizing his danger, Mnesilochus seizes a woman's "child" as hostage and flees to the altar. He demands his own release in exchange for the "child's" life, but the "child" turns out to be only a skin of wine. In despair, Mnesilochus now resorts to the device used in the *Palamedes* in order to inform Euripides of his predicament (scene with interlarded lyrics, 655-784).

While Mnesilochus is waiting patiently, the chorus deliver a lengthy defense of women. This parabasis, sharply curtailed in form, is unique in the extant comedies in that characters remain "on stage" during it. Nor does it constitute any sharp break in the action (785-845).

Finding himself still forsaken, Mnesilochus undertakes to play Helen in distress, and Euripides, true to his word, assumes the role of Menelaus the rescuer; but the entrance of a magistrate and Scythian policeman at the crucial point causes this intrigue to miscarry (episode, 846-946).

The chorus now sing a series of lyrics which reflect the dancing and singing characteristic of the true Thesmophoria.⁸⁸ These lyrics are of unusual interest because the dance movements which accompany them are described. First the twenty-four members of the chorus join hands to form a circle about the altar in the center of the orchestra and swing about rapidly as they sing three identical stanzas. Then perhaps they stop and break. Next they seem perhaps to come forward toward the audience with a strophe and to reverse this movement with the antistrophe. For the subsequent lyrics the choral figures are changed, but they cannot be followed in detail. As to content, all these songs are invocations to various Olympian deities (introduction and stasimon, 947-1000).

Euripides now assumes the role of Perseus, and Mnesilochus that of Andromeda chained to the cliff. This furnishes a nice opportunity to parody the lyrics of Euripides as those of Agathon have already been parodied. Before Euripides actually enters he plays the role of Echo to the maiden's complaints and to the low-comedy barbarisms of the Scythian. Euripides then attempts the rescue, but he finds that all his cleverness is wasted on the utterly stupid Scythian (episode, 1001-1135). The chorus now continue their invocations and dances (stasimon, 1136-59). The play ends with the rescue of Mnesilochus while the Scythian is being seduced and in the end confounded.

9. ***FROGS (BATRACHOI, RANAE)*

(Lenaia, 405 B.C.)

Aristophanes won first prize, Phrynichus⁸⁴ second with his *Muses* (which apparently dealt with Euripides and Sophocles), and Plato "Comicus" (not the philosopher) third with his *Cleophon*. The *Frogs* was produced by Philonides; it was so admired because of its parabasis, Dicaearchus an ancient critic records, that it was presented a second time, and Aristophanes was signally honored for his civic virtue by being given a wreath made from Athena's sacred olive tree on the Acropolis.⁸⁵

The *Frogs* has often been considered Aristophanes' most brilliant comedy, but any appreciation of it requires some knowledge of Aeschylus and Euripides.

The motive of going to the underworld for the advice of great men, found in the *Odyssey* (10. 492), had been used by Eupolis in his *Demes* after the death of Pericles, perhaps also in his *Generals (Taxiarchoi)*, and by other comic poets including Aristophanes himself. Dionysus the coward, furthermore, like Zeus the adulterer and Heracles the glutton and bully, was a stock figure in comedy.⁸⁶

Historical note.⁸⁷—Control of the government at Athens was seized by the Four Hundred Oligarchs in 411 B.C.; but the Athenian fleet based at Samos, among whom this revolutionary movement had started, remained faithful to the democracy and set itself up as the true Athenian government. Under the leadership of Thrasybulus they recalled Alcibiades, who had been in exile since 415 B.C., voted him full restoration of rights, and made him one of their generals. Alcibiades retained his position when the democracy was restored at Athens, but he did not dare return to Athens until 407 B.C. after various successes with the Athenian fleet. The populace was sharply divided over his return, but he won the day and was elected commander-in-chief. After four months and the collection of a considerably larger force, he sailed off again to the islands with Aristocrates and Adeimantus (*Frogs* 1513) as generals of his land forces.

At about this time a remarkable man was sent out from Sparta to command the Peloponnesian fleet, Lysander, who shortly won a minor victory over the Athenian fleet while Alcibiades was absent. The engagement had been invited by the Athenians contrary to Alcibiades' express command. The Athenians at home, however, were furious with Alcibiades and replaced him—a fatal mistake, for only he was able to cope with the brilliant Lysander. Alcibiades returned to a private fortress on the Hellespont. Fortunately the Spartans, too, made a

mistake. They recalled Lysander. One of the new Athenian commanders with a considerable number of ships fell into extreme peril and was blockaded at Mytilene. Athens made a desperate effort and succeeded in assembling another expedition for rescue. On this, slaves were accepted with a promise of their freedom and slightly limited citizenship as a reward for fighting (*Frogs* 191). This new expedition met the body of the Spartan fleet at Arginusae. The result was a decisive Athenian victory, but the Athenian commanders did not pick up the survivors from their own wrecked ships because of a storm and possibly because of a desire to surprise the remaining Spartan ships at the siege of Mytilene.

Again the people at Athens were furious and deposed the responsible generals, replacing them with Adeimantus and Philocles. Two of the deposed generals foresaw trouble and went into voluntary exile. The other six involved returned, and in a chaos of dishonest political manipulation and unconstitutional procedure they were condemned and executed. One of the leaders in their prosecution was Archdemus (*Frogs* 417, 588), a popular leader in charge of the "two-obol fund" (*Frogs* 141) for the relief of distress.⁸⁸ Another prosecutor was Theramenes (*Frogs* 541, 967). According to the commanders he had been one of the officers placed in charge of picking up the survivors. Later the Athenians repented their unjust action and started prosecution of some of the underlings of Theramenes, but these escaped in the midst of a factional disturbance in which Cleophon (*Frogs* 679, 1504, 1532) lost his life. Cleophon had repeatedly prevented the Athenians from accepting the favorable terms which Sparta offered even as late as this time.

Lysander now returned to command the Spartan forces, and both fleets moved to the Hellespont, through which the Athenians imported much of their food supply. Alcibiades, living there in exile, came to the Athenian fleet and urged the commanders to choose a more favorable base than the very disadvantageous one which they had taken up; but they stupidly refused to listen, and within a few days Lysander by clever strategy attacked and practically annihilated their fleet (405 B.C.).

Facts only too eloquently prove that Aristophanes was right in saying that Athens was being ruled by its worst elements and that these worst were scoundrels of the blackest sort. It was not wholly without justice that Lysander soon tore down the walls of Athens to the tune of flutes. Perhaps no Greek or Roman state ever committed so many publicly deliberated atrocities as did the Athenians from 427 to 399 B.C. The history of Athens during the fifth century, like a tragedy of Aeschylus, is a fatal progression from prosperity (*koros*) to insolence (*hybris*) and finally to ruin (*ate*).

Happy idea and theme.—Dionysus, passing the time before the battle of Arginusae by reading the *Andromeda*,⁸⁹ has suddenly been struck with an irresistible longing for Euripides, and so he has decided to recall him from the underworld.

The recent deaths of both Euripides and Sophocles suggest a final appreciation of the three great tragic poets—Phrynichus, also, had the idea—and the recalling of a first-class poet symbolizes the urgent need of Athens to restore the rights of disfranchised citizens and to recall its political exiles, specifically Alcibiades. These literary and political motives are elaborately combined. Careful preparation for the serious political appeal begins in the parodos. The man who does nothing to banish civil strife but stirs it up for private gain is asked to withdraw from the sacred chorus.⁹⁰ The battle of Arginusae and the enfranchisement of the slaves who fought there have already been mentioned several times (33, 50, 191); Archdemus and Theramenes, the prosecutors of the commanders at that battle, have been fiercely attacked.⁹¹

One subtle connection between the action of the play and its political theme has sometimes been overlooked. The entrance songs of the chorus are closely modeled after the ritual celebration of the Eleusinian festival (end of September) when the statue of Iacchus (Dionysus) was carried from Athens to Eleusis with great pomp and festivity. During the latter part of the war, however, the Spartans controlled the land even this close to Athens, and the celebrants, therefore, had been forced to make the short trip from Athens to Eleusis by boat without much of the pomp and festivity and certain of the customary rites. But when Alcibiades had returned to Athens in 407 B.C. he had taken all his soldiers and conducted this procession again by land.⁹² This was some sixteen months before the *Frogs* appeared and doubtless stood out in sharp contrast with the succeeding dampened celebration four months before when Alcibiades was absent and again in disfavor. Just as the scene of phallic celebration in the *Acharnians* suggests the joys of peace, so this scene in the *Frogs* suggests the joys to be had if Alcibiades is again recalled and placed at the head of the Athenian forces.

The main political appeal of the *Frogs*, of course, is made in the parabasis. The epirrhema pleads for a general amnesty, contrasting the disfranchisement of many good citizens with the acceptance of slaves who fought in a single battle. The antepirrhema pleads for using the men of pristine virtue, who have been neglected in favor of the baser men just as the older and better coinage has been driven out by the newer and debased.

The literary debate itself is closely bound up with the political theme.

Significantly the criterion for judging the virtues of the two poets is their efficacy in improving the citizens (1009-10). It is here repeated that the present citizens are a very bad set, and Aeschylus spends much of his defense in describing the Athenians of "the good old days." Arginusae and Theramenes, furthermore, are not forgotten in the latter part of the play (967-70; 1195-96).

The serious political theme becomes even more obvious at the climax of the play, where Dionysus, unable to decide on artistic grounds, falls back on the criterion of civic usefulness. He has come, he now says, to carry back a poet in order that the city may be saved and have its choruses. Asked for civic advice, Aeschylus intimates that Alcibiades should be recalled; Euripides pleads for a change of administration and the use of those now neglected. This advice, heartily welcomed by Dionysus, repeats the exhortation of the antepirrhema of the parabasis, while the advice of Aeschylus has given a specific example of the general course advocated in the epirrhema. Most important of all, the choice of Aeschylus at the end of the play combines in an inoffensively allegorical manner the political theme with the literary contest: Aeschylus is the first and foremost of the old school which, if allowed to return to power, will restore Athens to her pristine glory.

Criticism of Euripides and Aeschylus.—Surprise is the device which Aristophanes most frequently uses for comic effect. The experienced spectator, therefore, might well conjecture, even at the beginning of the play, that in the end Dionysus will not bring Euripides back to Athens. The tenor of the opening remarks about the dead Euripides, furthermore, is unmistakably that which Aristophanes had long been maintaining about the living Euripides. Indeed, the phrases which Dionysus here cites contain the most serious indictments of Euripides—baseness of style, sophistry, and immorality. These indictments are repeated time and time again throughout the play; but their most elaborate presentation is in the agon (895-1098) and the series of scenes which follow, dealing first with the prologues, next with the lyrics, and finally with the weighing of the lines.

The charge that Euripides writes in a comparatively prosaic style, of course, has no little justification. But Euripides' style is not so bad as Aristophanes has tried to make it. "Ether, the apartment of Zeus" is not precisely Euripides' phrase, and no great fault is found in "the foot of time" (100); it may be bold, but Shakespeare seems to have liked it well enough. Aeschylus, too, made mistakes in these matters. His "thirsty dust, twin sister of mud," which Aristophanes is too prejudiced to cite, is ridiculous bombast (*Agamemnon* 494-95).

The weighing of the lines near the end of the play is mostly foolish-

ness, but here again Aristophanes has been unfair. Euripides' line about "throwing two aces and a four" is so atrocious that we are almost willing to agree with Aristophanes on all points. But, when a beautiful line of Aeschylus is cited from his description of Death and Persuasion, "For of all gods Death only loves not gifts," fairness would demand a few lines from the beautiful choral lyric in the *Alcestis* (962-82) on Necessity and Persuasion.⁹³ The poetry of Euripides here rivals that of Aeschylus.

The charge of immorality is introduced at the beginning of the play when Dionysus (101-2) refers to the famous line from the *Hippolytus* renouncing an oath exacted under false pretenses.⁹⁴ Heracles terms this line immoral sophistry. At the end of the play Dionysus again uses this same line from the *Hippolytus* in renouncing his intention to bring Euripides back to earth (1471). At the beginning of the play (80), Euripides is called a bold "stop-at-nothing" in contrast to Sophocles the "serene."⁹⁵ Later Aeschylus repeatedly attacks Euripides for his exhibition of immoral love affairs and for his psychological studies of passion. Finally he calls Euripides a "stop-at-nothing, a liar, and a coarse fellow" (1520-21). Impudent boldness, furthermore, is perhaps the outstanding characteristic of Euripides as he is dramatically portrayed in the *Frogs*. The charge of immorality, along with that of talkative sophistry, is the most insistent charge against Euripides; and these two counts damn him at the end of the play. Here, as long before in the original edition of the *Clouds*, it is intimated that Euripides has been too much under the influence of Socrates.⁹⁶ These are the charges, of course, which serve to equate Euripides with the wicked politicians whom Aristophanes is attacking and to unite the literary theme of the play with the political.

Euripides' plays are undeniably sophistic; debate is often dragged in to the detriment of proper balance between discussion and dramatic action. But the charge of immorality as here made is false, unless it is immoral to face any question frankly and to refuse to pass over in silence, as Aeschylus here advises (1053), certain serious human problems. Still, an essential justification, unfortunately, exists for Aristophanes' hatred of Euripides. Truth and enlightenment, the ideals which Euripides served so unflinchingly, do not feed the belly, clothe the back, or satisfy the groin; liberal education does not fit one to be a warrior. The older Athenian sailors, Aeschylus says (1070-73), did not know enough to argue and dispute, and doubtless their ignorance was an advantage. Pericles insisted that enlightenment did not dull Athenian courage or stifle Athenian competency for efficient action;⁹⁷ but, if he was mistaken, then Euripides, in part responsible for Athenian en-

lightenment, was in part responsible for the decadence and downfall of Athens.

Other serious charges, however, are brought against Euripides. He is a beggar-maker and rag-stitcher (842); he introduces kings clothed in tatters for sentimental effects (1063-64). He is an atheist, it is implied, or at best an agnostic; his loyalty to Athenian democracy is brought into question (952-53). The charges against the realistic tendencies of Euripides' plays could be answered with some justification, but of course no serious attempt is made to answer them. The defense given Euripides is really an additional indictment. There is an answer also for the question of Euripides' loyalty to Athens. His *Orestes* (902-30) is usually cited in this connection, but here his praise of sturdy yeomanry is essentially the same as that of Aristophanes' himself in several of his comedies. Euripides had presumably fought in many Athenian battles; during the first fifteen years of the Peloponnesian War he had written enthusiastic and inspiring plays of patriotism in spite of Cleon and Hyperbolus and the gross blunders and cruel atrocities of the government. He saw the Athenians go from bad to worse—much worse in the final years of the war, when no honest and enlightened man could approve of their organized cruelty and folly. He saw Aristophanes and the other comic poets attack himself and attack Alcibiades, the one man who probably could have won the war for Athens. Athens was now only a mockery of the great city of Euripides' former days, and he went off to Macedonia. He was an honest man more than he was an Athenian.

Euripides is not given a fair defense, but Aeschylus is by no means allowed to escape all criticism. The long silences of his characters—essentially a lack of dramatic action—is satirized along with his interminable choral odes; when the characters did speak, it was in sesquipedalian crested words that the audience could not understand (930). This charge of using pompous and difficult compounds is repeated indirectly in the speeches of Aeschylus himself and in the comments of Dionysus and the chorus. Indeed, it is the most obvious feature of the style of the real Aeschylus. Euripides boasts that he took over this tragedy swollen with bombast and conceit and reduced "her" with his clever learning to his own neat model, where everything, beginning with the prologue, is plain and direct, and where everyone has a share in the action—the slave, and even the tender virgin (who, according to the more conservative Athenian conventions, should be neither seen nor heard). Euripides introduced nice arguments, subtle reasoning, and universal skepticism. He brought tragedy down to the level of ordinary domesticity.

To this point in the agon, Aristophanes is essentially accurate; but he now takes a tack which is eminently unfair, although it is pertinent to his serious political theme. Euripides is made to cite his "pupils" and to contrast them with the pupils of Aeschylus. Of course neither dramatist had such pupils. Aristophanes is merely saying indirectly that the Athenians should favor old-fashioned men and discard the too modern Cleitophon and Theramenes. The whole idea of pupils is false and impertinent, but it is brought in here as a graceful transition to the coming arguments of Aeschylus and the serious theme of the play. To aid the argument of Aeschylus, furthermore, Euripides is made to admit that the one criterion for poetry is improvement of its audience. This passage has frequently been cited to illustrate the naïveté of Greek literary criticism. In point of fact, this criterion is valid; it is also pertinent to the present discussion; but, like the other arguments of this play, it is used unfairly, and the prominence given it here is due to its connection with the serious theme of the play and not to any naïveté or distortion of Aristophanes' own literary theories. Later Dionysus himself tacitly admits the criterion of pleasure derived from literature as a prime consideration (1413; cf. 1468).

Aeschylus opens his defense by begging the question.⁹⁸ Citing his *Seven against Thebes* as a play of valor and manliness, he takes credit for making the Athenians of his own day what they were, when in point of fact, as chronology proves, he was the result and not the cause of the great deeds of his time. Euripides might in turn have been allowed to cite his *Heracleidae*, his lost *Erechtheus*, or his very recent *Phoenissae*; for all these plays breathe a spirit which, though somewhat more enlightened, is no less fervent and patriotic than that of the *Seven against Thebes*. Aristophanes, however, directs his argument not as fairness but as his purpose and prejudice demand.

For his lofty style Aeschylus is given a sound and irrefutable defense: it is justified because great deeds must be clothed in great language (1058-60). Euripides obviously should have been allowed to justify his own style with the corresponding defense: realistic deeds must be clothed in realistic language. The two poets were writing different sorts of drama, and each chose an appropriate style. Still, Aristophanes insists that the subject matter of Euripides is beneath the dignity of great tragedy.

The agon has been indecisive. The chorus, therefore, exhort the poets to greater effort, and an iambic scene ensues in which Aristophanes has great sport with Euripides' prologues. The examples are nicely arranged, starting with those in which the ridiculous tag, "lost his little bottle of oil," can be attached to the third line, proceeding to those

where it will fit the second, and ending with one example where it can be attached to both the first and the second lines. This last example, however, is unfairly chosen; for these lines were not, the ancient commentator informs us, the opening lines of the play. The main point of serious criticism here is that Euripides' prologues are monotonously formulaic. The only defense for this is the plea of simplicity and directness. A previous remark of Euripides, which nicely prepares for this scene, has already intimated that these are the guiding principles of his prologues (946). It must be admitted, however, that if such openings began all four plays of a series, they would surely seem stilted and artificial.⁹⁹ Little information concerning such series is available, but we do know that the prologue of the *Telephus* differed somewhat from that of the *Alcestis* and the prologue of the *Medea* from that of the *Philoctetes*. The anapestic opening of the *Andromeda*, also, stood out in sharp contrast to the typical prologue of the *Helen*.

Proceeding to Aeschylus' choral odes, Euripides finds the ring of the dactylic hexameter monotonously frequent.¹⁰⁰ But Aeschylus is at no loss to discover faults in Euripides' lyrics, especially his monodies. Aeschylus' first thrust is his most effective one. He calls for castanets, and indeed Euripides had actually presented Hypsipyle as singing to her infant ward with castanets—a scene recently discovered in papyrus fragments.¹⁰¹ Euripides is accused of prostituting the art of music for novel effects, which include the use of "immoral" meters,¹⁰² the holding of a syllable for more than one note (a musical shake, extremely common in modern music), repetition (gemination) of words, and triviality of content. Innovations in music have always been offensive to most contemporaries;¹⁰³ and, except for the charge of triviality, these criticisms only show the narrow-mindedness of their author.

Aristophanes, we must conclude, keenly appreciated the essential qualities of the great dramatists, though he was narrow and prejudiced in his judgments. There was no naïveté or serious lacuna in his literary theory. His presentation of the contest, however, has been distorted for various reasons. First of all, he was compelled to be amusing, and it was the natural bent of his genius to exaggerate and to distort and to scoff. Secondly, distortion served to emphasize his serious political purpose in writing the play. Finally, Aristophanes had always been the enemy of Euripides. He did not have the slightest intention or desire to be fair to Euripides, nor did he feel any moral obligation to be so. He accepted the ancient code of doing good to friends and evil to enemies; and, besides, his purpose of inspiring the Athenians would doubtless have seemed to him justification for any amount of such unfairness.

10. *ECCLESIAZUSAE*¹⁰⁴

(392 or 391 B.C.)

The *Ecclesiazusae* was apparently produced first among the comedies at this festival, since the chorus at the end of the play beseech the judges not to be like wicked courtesans and remember only the "latest." The other comedies and the results of the contest are unknown.

Produced perhaps thirty-five years after Aristophanes' first comedy (427 B.C.) and thirteen years after the *Frogs*, the *Ecclesiazusae* lacks the brilliance, vigor, and inexhaustible resourcefulness of the earlier plays. Aristophanes' life was not, like that of Sophocles or Euripides, one of eternal youth. Still, he has not forgotten the old formulae, and he can still run the gamut of comic devices.

Happy idea and theme.—Praxagora has conceived the happy idea of disguising the women as men and thus pre-empting the seats of the public assembly and voting the control of the state into their own hands. By a surprising development all this turns out to be only a preliminary to the establishment of communism.

Perhaps the basic theme of the play is its somewhat tame satire of the Athenian passion for ceaseless innovation.¹⁰⁵ The relation of Aristophanes' satire of communism to Plato's serious study in the *Republic* has long been a problem. Since this work of Plato presumably appeared some years after the play, it is now usually assumed that speculation on socialism, communism, and other political theory was rife during this whole period.¹⁰⁶ It is not especially remarkable, therefore, if Aristophanes seems to satirize or anticipate some of the doctrines of Plato on this subject.

Structure.—Essentially the *Ecclesiazusae* is still Old Comedy. Its plot is that of the extravagant idea put into practice; the leading politicians of the day, especially Agyrrhius, are satirized; and dishonesty of officials and misgovernment, especially political raiding of the treasury, are deprecated; gross indecency still plays a major role; the comedy is little concerned with plausibility; unmotivated entrances are too pat; the houses of the background are now those of Blepyrus and his neighbors, now those of courtesans; jokes are made upon the audience; and the action is loosely thrown together, for there is no inevitability in the progression of events, although each scene does have some connection with the whole. Worst of all, the leading role shifts with almost every scene.

Significant developments, however, may be discerned. Three-fourths of the play is written in iambic trimeter—a proportion similar to that of late tragedy. The chorus has no entrance song; they leave the scene

for a considerable interval, and after they re-enter their role is almost wholly limited, as in New Comedy, to furnishing interlude amusement. With the exception of what may be termed a half-agon the play externally is constructed on the episodic model of tragedy and falls into five "acts." Even the names of the characters are changing: Praxagora ("holder of an assembly") is a coined name of Old Comedy, but the everyday names Chremes and Parmeno, frequent in New Comedy, here make their first appearance in the extant work of Aristophanes. The background—a street with private houses—is the usual one for later comedy.

The play opens with Praxagora's addressing the lamp in a monologue that mildly parodies a tragic prologue addressed to the sun and, perhaps, a lover's elegiac apostrophe to the lamp. The information here revealed is very slight—merely the plan of the women to disguise themselves and seize control of the assembly. In the ensuing scene, which is reminiscent of the *Lysistrata*, the women practice parliamentary conduct. This gives a good opportunity for satirizing Athenian democracy and various individual demagogues. Praxagora's speeches here are the most serious appeals of the play, but compared to the appeals of the earlier plays they are the weak and hopeless protests of a discouraged old man. Worthy of the former Aristophanes, however, is the inconsistency with which women's conservatism is praised and then communism is instituted by them.¹⁰⁷ The women who have gathered as individuals and small groups for the most part constitute the chorus, but their first lyric is not sung until they hasten off to the assembly (prologos, 1-284; introduction and stasimon, 285-310).

After the withdrawal of the chorus—a unique event in the extant comedies—Blepyrus appears for an episode of very low comedy. Only now is it clearly revealed, at least to the modern reader, by what device the women have made sure that their husbands would never get to the assembly. Later Chremes appears and gives a report of the assembly—a report markedly unlike the messenger speech of a tragedy. Blepyrus' first reaction to the news of feminine domination is the revolting thought that he may now be forced to make love to his wife. This erotic motif, touched upon in the prologue, is to come to the fore in the later action (episode, 311-477).

The chorus of women now return, anxious to get back and doff their disguises before they are discovered. Praxagora, having taken command of the situation, faces her husband in an amusing little scene which is more domestic than anything hitherto found in Aristophanes. For a moment we feel as if we were witnessing a comedy of a later period; but we are suddenly brought back to Aristophanes with Prax-

agora's declaring that unlimited blessings will come from the system of government to be instituted by the women (epiparodos, 478-503; preliminary to the agon, 504-70). After receiving encouragement from the chorus, Praxagora briefly propounds communism to Blepyrus, whose queries and objections for the most part merely facilitate her exposition and furnish comic effect. As if by accident, this discussion of community of all property swings around to the community of wives and children. This leads to the Platonic contention that if children did not know their parents all the younger generation would respect all the older (641-43). The discussion ends with Praxagora's description of the gay banqueting and amorous dalliance which will characterize her communistic state (half-agon, 571-729).

After an interlude of choral dancing—no choral song is given in the manuscripts—we are shown a scene in which the difficulties of instituting the community of property are illustrated. The optimistic Chremes marshals his petty belongings; but a more skeptical neighbor has no intention of giving over his property, though he is ready enough to do his share of receiving when the banquet is announced (episode, 730-876).

After another interlude by the chorus, a scene dramatizes the difficulties involved in the community of women and in Praxagora's novel ideas for controlling supply and demand in this unstable field where quality and personal taste play so disturbingly important a role (scene, 877-1111).¹⁰⁸

The comedy ends in festivity and song as Blepyrus¹⁰⁹ and his children are called to the state banquet (exodos, 1112-83).

11. *PLUTUS*¹¹⁰

(388 B.C.)

The festival at which this play was produced and the prize awarded are unknown. At the same time, however, Nicochares produced the *Laconians*, Aristomenes an *Admetus*, Nicophon an *Adonis*, and Alcaeus a *Pasiphae*. Five comedies, it will be noted, were now produced at each festival. The preoccupation of these poets with mythological travesty, obvious from the titles here given, is characteristic of Middle Comedy.

This was the last play which Aristophanes produced under his own name. He wrote two later comedies, however, to be brought out by his son Araros. One of these, entitled *Cocalus* (Cocalus was a Sicilian prince to whom Daedalus fled), was a mythological travesty which is said to have been the forerunner of New Comedy, for it contained "se-

duction and recognition and all those other things which Menander affected."¹¹¹

No play of Aristophanes was so widely read in late antiquity, mediæval times, and the Renaissance as the *Plutus*. This popularity was no doubt due to the comparative simplicity of its language, the rarity of topical allusion in it, and the universal application which its satire suggests.

Happy idea and theme.—Chremylus has the happy idea of restoring the eyesight of Plutus, who then, he is convinced, will become the most powerful of all deities.

Like the *Ecclesiazusae* and various earlier plays, the *Plutus* is a fantasy which dreams of a better and more prosperous life, especially for the old-fashioned Athenian whose honesty in the turbulent age of Aristophanes seemed only a handicap. Aristophanes wished to satirize the Athenians for their injustices and sycophancy, says an unknown commentator,¹¹² and for becoming rich by these means. But the case is so generalized that the commentator might almost have said not "the Athenians" but "mankind in general."

In the *Plutus*, political and temporary elements have almost disappeared, and the satire itself, compared to that of the earlier plays, is benign and innocent.

Structure.—Like the *Ecclesiazusae*, the *Plutus*, though essentially an Old Comedy, shows various developments significant of later comedy. The *Plutus* is the first extant comedy in which a slave plays a major role, and this slave is the impudent confidential Athenian servant introduced to us in the *Frogs* and destined to become one of the most important figures in New Comedy. Owing in part to this character, most of the action of the play has that household intimacy and triviality which is typical of later comedy. The importance of the chorus, also, has been still further reduced. Only one choral song occurs in the manuscripts, and the coryphaeus with the exception of introducing the agon (487-88) is allowed to take part in the conversation only as a last resort when a single actor is on stage and a monologue would otherwise result.¹¹³ Even so, one monologue very similar to the monologues of New Comedy is employed.¹¹⁴ The function of the chorus has been reduced almost wholly to interlude dancing. Perhaps six such interludes occur, thus dividing the play like a tragedy into episodes. Finally, the frequency of extended conversations of three characters is noteworthy, and the language itself reminds one of the language of Plautus.¹¹⁵

The *Plutus* opens with a monologue-prologue; but other speaking characters are already on stage and, after a few important facts have been made known, a dialogue is developed in which the remainder of

the exposition is brought out and the action proper is started. The discovery of the identity of the blind man leads to Chremylus' immediate resolve to restore his sight. At the end of the scene, Cario is sent off to summon the fellow farmers of Chremylus, and Plutus is taken into the house (prologos, 1-252).

Cario now enters with the chorus in extravagantly sportive mood (parodos, 253-321). After their verses, Cario retires on a weak excuse (in order that his actor may assume the role of Blepsidemus). There follows a very amusing scene in which Blepsidemus, an old friend, tries to discover by what dishonest method Chremylus has suddenly acquired his wealth. In order that he may keep it without risking his life, Blepsidemus offers to undertake the commission of buying off the politicians. The truth is finally revealed, and the two men are about to take Plutus to the sanitarium of Asclepius when Poverty suddenly and dramatically appears to assert her rights. A debate follows over the relative merits of Poverty and Wealth, but Chremylus absolutely refuses to be convinced that Poverty is superior no matter what the arguments may be (600). Poverty is finally driven off,¹¹⁶ and Plutus is taken to Asclepius (first episode, including quasi-agon, 322-626).

After a choral interlude during which a night is supposed to have elapsed, Cario appears, and like a messenger in tragedy—except that his mood is more sportive than ever—he relates to Chremylus' wife that "the operation has been a success." Very amusing is his description of Dr. Asclepius making his rounds with two feminine assistants, Iaso (Healing) and Panacea (Cure-all). Finally Cario goes off to meet his returning master and Plutus—so he says—but this, perhaps, is merely an excuse for his exit in order that his actor may now take the role of Plutus (second episode, 627-770).

Another choral interlude follows, and the restored Plutus is joyously welcomed to the house of Chremylus (third episode, 771-801).

A later comedy might have ended at this point, for the plot is now really complete—or, more properly, no later comedy would have attempted to manage with such an extremely simple plot. Aristophanes, however, in his usual fashion fills out his play by adding a series of scenes in which the effects of the happy idea in practice are observed. Such a procedure had real point in a play like the *Acharnians*, where the author's main purpose was to drive home his thesis with as powerful an emotional appeal as possible. But here the formula does not really fit the subject; the scenes are amusing and add to the satire; but they are obviously inorganic, and the ending is flat.

Cario and Chremylus alternately take the leading role in these scenes. After another interlude, Cario is the first to appear, describing the new

luxuries of the house in a long monologue. A Just Man is welcomed. He and Cario disconcert and finally drive off a sycophant who has come to protest at the loss of his livelihood (fourth episode, 802-958).

Another interlude follows, and Chremylus faces a faded lady whose wealth has formerly been the source of her satisfaction in life. But now, with the new order, she has lost her admirer, who himself comes on to pay his respects to Plutus (fifth episode, 959-1096).

The chorus dance again. The god Hermes, patron of thieves, now appears. He is half-starved and begs Cario for a bit to eat—a scene reminiscent of the *Birds*. Being refused, the god asks that he be adopted as a fellow slave; but, since he is primarily the patron of thievery and deceit, his usefulness in the new order is a matter of grave doubt to Cario until the god, in telling off his various attributes, finally recalls that he is also the patron of sports. He is hereupon accepted, and he and Cario go into the house. A priest of Zeus now appears and is handled in much the same fashion by Chremylus, who reports that Zeus himself, as predicted at the first of the play (123-26; compare the *Birds*), has found his importance greatly reduced and has now actually joined the court of the mighty god of wealth. As a finale, Plutus is conducted to the state treasury—which no doubt was badly in need of him (sixth episode and exodos, 1097-1209).