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The Reception of Aristophanes in Britain during the Long-Nineteenth Century

Peter Swallow

King's College London

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Classics

Contents

List of Illustrations 3

Abstract 7

1. Introduction 9

2. Out of Exile: Thomas Mitchell and John Hookham Frere 35

3. Swine before Pearls: Aristophanes at Play in Shelley's *Swellfoot the Tyrant* 72

4. Aristophanes Burlesqued: Planché's *Birds* and Victorian Popular Theatre 110

5. W.S. Gilbert, The English Aristophanes 158

6. The Glory and the Shame: Debating the Aesthetics of Old Comedy 209

7. Aristophanes in the *Phrontisterion*: Old Comedy at Schools and Universities .. 273

8. Women's Aristophanes: Old Comedy and the Fight for Gender Equality 330

9. Towards a Modern Aristophanes 380

10. Conclusion 432

11. Bibliography 436

Appendix A: Classical References in the Savoy Operas 468

Appendix B: *Telephoniazousai* 482

Appendix C: *Titwillow* 483

List of Illustrations

Cover: Three chorus-members. Cambridge 1883 *Birds*. *Cambridge Greek Play* 2015a.

4.1: Graph showing the plays licensed by the Lord Chamberlain by genre.

4.2: Note attached to the MS of Planché's *The Birds of Aristophanes* (1846) sent to the Lord Chamberlain. *Lord Chamberlain's Plays* [Unpublished MS]. BL Add MS 42993: f.221.

4.3: A scene from Planché's *Birds*. 'Haymarket Theatre' (18 April 1846) *ILN*: 253.

5.1: Graph showing the distribution of classical references in Gilbert and Sullivan operettas.

5.2: Rutland Barrington as Ludwig as Agamemnon (via Louis XIV) in *The Grand Duke*. *Gilbert and Sullivan Archive* (2013) 'The Grand Duke: Illustrations of the Original Production' [Online]. Available at: https://gsarchive.net/grand_duke/html/pictures.html (Accessed 27 April 2019).

5.3: A scene from *The Happy Land* by D.H. Friston. *ILN* (22 March 1873) 273.

5.4: Character design for two Utopian men by Percy Anderson. Victoria & Albert Museum, Theatre and Performance Collection, S.3197-2015.

5.5: Photograph of two unidentified 'Utopian maidens' by Alfred Ellis. Morgan Library, Gilbert and Sullivan Collection, Record ID 200684.

6.1: *Bacchus* (1867) by Simeon Solomon. Watercolour with bodycolour. Private collection. Reproduced from *Sotheby's* (2019) [Online]. Available at: www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2018/victorian-pre-raphaelite-british-impressionist-art-l18132/lot.11.html (Accessed 5 September 2019).

6.2: *The Death of Chatterton* (1856) by Henry Wallis. Oil paint on canvas. Tate Britain.

6.3: *Lysistrata Shielding her Coynte* by Aubrey Beardsley. Pen and ink on paper. Beardsley and Smith 1896: Title Page.

6.4: *Lysistrata Defending the Acropolis* by Aubrey Beardsley. Pen and ink on paper. Beardsley and Smith 1896: 30.

6.5: *Cinesias Entreating Myrrhina to Coition* by Aubrey Beardsley. Pen and ink on paper. Beardsley and Smith 1896: 44.

6.6: *The Toilet of Lampito* by Aubrey Beardsley. Pen and ink on paper. Beardsley and Smith 1896: 4.

6.7: *The Lacedemonian* [sic] *Ambassadors* by Aubrey Beardsley. Pen and ink on paper. Beardsley and Smith 1896: 50.

6.8: *The Examination of the Herald* by Aubrey Beardsley. Pen and ink on paper. Beardsley and Smith 1896: 46.

7.1: The archaeologising staging and costume of the Mendelssohn *Antigone*. 'Covent Garden' (18 January 1845) *ILN*: 45.

7.2: Eton performs the Megarian scene from *Acharnians*, c.1850. Illustration by Sydney P. Hall; reproduced from Johnstone 1870: 292.

7.3: Harrow performs the *Brekekekex* chorus from *Frogs*, 1894. 'Speech Day at Harrow' (14 July 1894) *The Graphic*: 6.

7.4: 1876 Ordnance Survey map showing the location of King's College (a.), the Adelphi (b.), the Gaiety (c.) and the Royal Strand Theatre (d.) on the Strand. Scale 1:2500.

7.5: *The Frogs,* Dulwich College, 1898. Dulwich College Archive.

7.6: *The Clouds*, Dulwich College, 1909. Dulwich College Archive.

7.7: *The Acharnians*, Dulwich College, 1912. Dulwich College Archive.

7.8: *The Acharnians*, Blackheath Proprietary School, 1883. *Blackheath Society* 2015.

7.9: Programme cover for Henry Fleeming Jenkin's *Frogs* and *My Son-in-Law*, 3, 5 and 6 May 1873. National Library of Scotland No.AP.3.208.15.

7.10: The 1883 Cambridge *Birds*. The second messenger (F.R. Pryor), Iris (L.J. Maxse) and Peisetairos (M.R. James) in classical costume. Etching by Robert Farren, reproduced from Farren 1884.

7.11: The 1883 Cambridge *Birds*. The chorus. Etching by Robert Farren, reproduced from Farren 1884.

7.12: The 1883 Cambridge *Birds*. The orchestra and stage divided. Etching by Robert Farren, reproduced from Farren 1884.

7.13: The 1883 Cambridge *Birds*. The poet (J.D. Ouvry), the soothsayer (H.F.W. Tatham), the informer (L.N. Guillemard) and the parricide (A. Fleeming Jenkin). Etching by Robert Farren, reproduced from Farren 1884.

7.14: The set of the 1897 Cambridge *Wasps*. *Cambridge Greek Play* 2015b.

7.15-7.16: The 1897 Cambridge *Wasps*. Two actors in classical dress. *Cambridge Greek Play* 2015b.

7.17: The 1897 Cambridge *Wasps*. A chorus-member in costume. *Cambridge Greek Play* 2015b.

7.18: The 1897 Cambridge *Wasps*. Two dogs (H.R.L. Dyne and W.C. Mayne). *Cambridge Greek Play* 2015b.

7.19: The 1903 Cambridge *Birds*. J.T. Sheppard as Peithetairos. *Cambridge Greek Play* 2015c.

7.20: The chorus of the 1903 Cambridge *Birds*. '"The Birds" of Aristophanes at Cambridge' (5 December 1903) *ILN*: 11.

7.21: The set of the 1909 Cambridge *Wasps*. *Cambridge Greek Play* 2015d.

8.1: Janet Case as Athena, 1885 Cambridge *Eumenides*. *Cambridge Greek Play* 2015e.

8.2: A. Raleigh as Athene in *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Bedford College (1887). RHUL archive PH6/2/1a.

8.3: *Medea*, Bedford College and University College (1907). RHUL archive PH/6/2/4/13.

8.4: Cover of the *Bedford College Magazine* (June 1897) depicting Athene-Minerva and an owl.

8.5: Gertrude Kingston as Lysistrata (1910), reproduced from Housman 1911: 2.

Appendix B: Scan of a type-written parody preserved by Gilbert Murray, entitled *Telephoniazousai* and signed 'R.A.K', probably Ronald Arbuthnott Knox. Bodleian Library MS. Gilbert Murray 435 f.191.

Appendix C: Scan of a translation of 'Tit-Willow', from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado*, probably by Ronald Arbuthnott Knox. Preserved in Gilbert Murray's files. Bodleian Library MS. Gilbert Murray 435 f.192.

Abstract

This thesis explores the reception of Aristophanes in Britain over the course of the long-nineteenth century. It identifies two major strands of Aristophanic reception. From the start of the long-nineteenth century, the British reception of Aristophanes was tied up in contemporary political debate, as historians such as William Mitford (Chapter 1), translators and commentators like Thomas Mitchell and John Hookham Frere (Chapter 2), and even the burlesque writer J.R. Planché (Chapter 4) activated Aristophanes in support of their own political positions. Each asserted Aristophanes' relevance to contemporary political debates; each argued for Aristophanes to be read within the specific sphere of nineteenth-century Tory politics. But each writer's conceptualisation of Aristophanes was as different as their political outlooks (though they were all Tories). The reception of Aristophanes in the works of the playwright and librettist W.S. Gilbert (Chapter 5) was more subterranean and less directly political, but demonstrates the continued propensity to contemporise Aristophanic satire (often for a broadly conservative purpose) well into the second half of the century. Within this strand, a notable outlier is Percy Shelley, whose Aristophanic drama *Swellfoot the Tyrant* (Chapter 3) activated Old Comedy to argue for a left-wing political revolution.

The second strand of Aristophanic reception, developed around the middle of the nineteenth century, actively depoliticised Old Comedy and instead received it through an aesthetic lens (Chapter 6). John Addington Symonds valued Aristophanes for his poetry, and this appreciation was picked up by Oscar Wilde and Algernon Charles Swinburne. George Meredith, Robert Browning and Aubrey Beardsley meanwhile argued that Old Comedy was defined above all by its *ugliness* – but

nevertheless articulated an *aesthetic*, not political, valuation of Old Comedy. It is notable that all these voices were connected, in varying degrees, to the Aesthetic Movement. The aesthetics of Aristophanes – with an emphasis on the beautiful and the archaeological – also lay behind school and university productions of Old Comedy during this period (Chapter 7).

Both strands of nineteenth-century reception find synthesis in the final two chapters of this thesis. In Chapter 8, we return to political readings of Aristophanes through women's receptions of the playwright, exploring how activists used his plays to argue for equal educational opportunities and the right to vote. In the last chapter, we examine Gilbert Murray and George Bernard Shaw's receptions; they both saw the political *and* artistic potential of Aristophanes.

This thesis proves the surprising extent to which Aristophanes was received, across a wide array of mediums, in Victorian Britain. It also demonstrates that, over the course of the long-nineteenth century, Aristophanic reception was always a process of speaking to contemporary issues, whether political or aesthetic. Aristophanes was never read passively; his politics and aesthetics were constantly being reinterpreted and reactivated in line with the receiver's own position.

~1~

Introduction

In April 1884, a group of amateur actors from the provincial town of Sutton Coldfield, near Birmingham, were preparing to stage a performance of *Birds*. The script they adopted had been staged professionally forty years before; it was J.R. Planché's burlesque version of the play,[1] though the Sutton Coldfield actors had 'freshened [it] up with such modifications and additions as were necessary to adapt it to present-day fashions and politics.'[2] They had added new songs, including 'the popular trio from [Gilbert and Sullivan's] *Princess Ida*',[3] presumably 'Gently, Gently, Evidently'. This was an appropriate interpolation (whether they knew it or not), for both *Princess Ida* and its Tennysonian source, *The Princess*, betray a subterraneous reception of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*.[4] Tennyson was himself caricatured by the Sutton Coldfield players, another addition to the Planché.[5] Curiously enough, one of the reviews of the play indicates that the King of the Birds wore 'one of the Cambridge dresses'.[6] This must be a reference to the 1883 Cambridge production of *Birds*;[7] to

[1] See Ch.4.

[2] 'The Birds of Aristophanes' (15 April 1884) *Birmingham Daily Mail*: 2.

[3] '"The Birds" at Sutton' (25 April 1884) *The Dart: The Midland Figaro*: 11.

[4] See Ch.5.

[5] 'The Birds of Aristophanes' (15 April 1884) *Birmingham Daily Mail*: 2.

[6] '"The Birds" at Sutton' (25 April 1884) *The Dart: The Midland Figaro*: 11.

[7] See Ch.7.

cut down on production costs, the amateur performers borrowed the ready-made bird costumes made by Cambridge the year before for their own chorus.

This remarkable conflation of receptions – Aristophanes meets Planché meets Gilbert and Sullivan meets Tennyson meets the Cambridge Greek play – demonstrates in microcosm the two points I want to make with this dissertation. My 'weak' thesis is simply that Aristophanes was being received widely in Britain throughout the nineteenth century, in both high and low art forms, in translations and commentaries but also in performance, poetry, prose, art, music and theatre. Over the course of this thesis, we will explore the rich array of mediums and texts where Aristophanes either explicitly or subterraneously has had an influence.

My 'strong' thesis is that, over the course of the long-nineteenth century, Aristophanes was repeatedly used as a vehicle for addressing contemporary political and artistic concerns. These source-texts have constantly been reinterpreted and reactivated in line with the receiver's own position. I will argue that a clear trend-line can be traced. Early in the nineteenth century, Aristophanes was interpreted almost exclusively as a proto-Tory moralist scourge; we will see the birth of that inclination in this chapter, before turning to two Tory translators of Aristophanes in Chapter 2, as well as J.R. Planché's explicitly pro-oligarchic, moralising burlesque of *Birds* in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, we will see how W.S. Gilbert similarly receives Aristophanes and activates him for a satiric, political purpose, though with less explicit partisanship. The counterpoint is Percy Shelley, whose radical Aristophanic play *Swellfoot the Tyrant* provocatively activates Aristophanes as anti-monarchic.

As we look to the latter half of the century, receptions of Aristophanes shift away from politics towards aesthetic treatments of the poet (Chapter 6). The key influence here is John Addington Symonds, who writes an encomium for

Aristophanes as a poet rather than a political voice in his *Studies of the Greek Poets* (1873). Although Wilde, Swinburne, Robert Browning, George Meredith and Aubrey Beardsley would not all agree with this assessment of Aristophanes, their receptions of Old Comedy all engaged in this same aesthetic debate. The key question had become not what Aristophanes' politics were, but whether his plays were beautiful. This is the background against which we discuss aestheticising performances of Old Comedy at schools and universities in Chapter 7.

The final trend in Aristophanic reception traced is a shift back to politics. Aristophanes around the *fin de siècle* is no longer read as a proto-Tory scourge, but through the politics of socially liberal causes. Thus, versions of his plays advocate women's education and female suffrage (Chapter 8); in our final chapter, looking towards the twentieth century, we see how Gilbert Murray and George Bernard Shaw both used Aristophanes to discuss modern hopes and fears for a world on the brink of a devastating war, blending an aesthetic appreciation of Old Comedy with a willingness to read it politically. In long-nineteenth-century Britain, the question is not *whether* Aristophanes was being read, but *which* Aristophanes was being read, and *by whom*. The reception of Aristophanes provides the perfect case study for what can be done with a reception of an ancient work, because so many different things *have* been done with Aristophanes.

Methodology

Let me begin by briefly defining the scope of this dissertation. I am reluctant to set explicit parameters for what I mean by the long-nineteenth century, aware that I will transgress them, but roughly speaking I take it to run from the French Revolution in 1789 to the end of World War One in 1918. Over the course of these 130 years,

bookended by two major conflicts that reverberated across Europe and the world, there was an unprecedented amount of social and political change. But there is an internal consistency to the long-nineteenth century, at least within the British context. Many tensions still troubling Britain in 1918 were the same as those of 1789; the Woman Question, Irish Home Rule, the electoral franchise and expansion of suffrage, anxiety about industrialisation and modernisation, constitutional questions about the role of the monarchy, and so on. That said, the earliest receptions I examine in depth, Thomas Mitchell's translations and textual editions of Aristophanes and Shelley's Aristophanic play *Swellfoot the Tyrant*, are both dated to 1820 (and thereafter, in the case of Mitchell). I have tried to reserve the term 'Victorian' in this dissertation for anything or anyone that falls between 1837 and 1901, the years of Queen Victoria's reign.

I have been stricter with the geographical scope of this thesis; it deals exclusively with Britain. While I discuss the influence of Germany, France and North America wherever relevant, my interest is always in what is happening in Britain. I have not considered the British Empire, either,[8] to keep the size of my task manageable. One limitation of this thesis is its tendency to focus on London, Oxford and Cambridge, particularly in regards to theatrical performances. This is because it is easier to write about things which have been well-documented, as things that happen in London, Oxford and Cambridge tend to be, but I would have ideally liked to be more inclusive (an issue I also address in Chapter 8).

Undoubtedly the hardest term in my title to define is 'Aristophanes'. In a purely encyclopaedic sense, we can say that Aristophanes is the only playwright who wrote

[8] Strictly speaking, John Hookham Frere published his translations of Aristophanes in Malta, then part of the British Empire.

in the genre of Old Comedy for whom we have an extant work. Eleven of his plays survive, all performed in Athens between the middle of the fifth century BC and the early years of the fourth, as well as significant fragments. But beyond that, what we mean when we say Aristophanes, or, worse, the adjectival 'Aristophanic', is debatable. 'We ought to tread with some caution when we see his name invoked – especially when we see texts or writers of very different sorts being labeled "Aristophanic".'[9] The Aristophanes of Shelley was not the same Aristophanes of Mitchell, although both were writing at similar times. On balance, however, the most complex receptions of Aristophanes explored in this thesis are successful (or at least, interesting) because they understand the vital force of Old Comedy as a genre defined by its sociality and by humour. Receptions which attempt to co-opt Aristophanic politics, or cauterise Aristophanic humour in all its richness, do so to their own demerit. I do not mean to ascribe a particular political motive to Aristophanes, and I certainly do not want to suggest there is only one way to receive his texts – that would be to undermine one of the central precepts of reception studies, that 'meaning… is always realized at the point of reception'.[10] Attentive readers may identify my own politics in this thesis, but I do not relitigate the well-trodden scholarly debate over Aristophanes' political views, either. That would also have no part in a discussion about reception, and I would rather leave the debate to the receptions we will explore.

I have limited the scope of this thesis only to those texts which display a specific textual link to the works of Aristophanes, whether they are direct translations or adaptations, or because the authors of these receptions declare the

[9] Kinservik 2016: 109.

[10] Martindale 1993: 3.

link to Aristophanes openly, or in a few cases because that subterranean intertextual link quickly reveals itself on close examination.[11] For me, in this thesis, Aristophanes is a living being lying behind each case study; the Aristophanic, in this narrow sense, is an almost tangible, philological bridge between source and reception. As Leonard advises, 'the "trace" of the past should be celebrated rather than erased in the encounter between modern reader and classical text.'[12] This should not preclude a wider definition of the Aristophanic which would incorporate texts that share with Old Comedy a biting satire, an astute political consciousness and a tendency towards destructive playfulness without any specific textual link;[13] what we might call the 'Aristophanic spirit' certainly was alive and well in the Victorian period and can be felt in everything from political journals like *Punch* to popular entertainments and burlesques, even when it can't be reduced to a simple exchange.[14] Another thesis on this 'Aristophanic spirit' in long-nineteenth-century Britain could and should be written. Rather, my decision to narrow my definition of the philologically 'Aristophanic' is a purely practical one; there is more than enough to be said about texts that are close receptions of Aristophanes, so those are the ones I have chosen to focus on.

The scope of this thesis in terms of the mediums covered prevents me from outlining any monolithic methodology, other than to say in the broadest terms possible that I will be interrogating each text or set of texts in the way that seems most

[11] I here use 'text' in the broadest, Martindalean sense of the term as any work or medium that can be read and interpreted.

[12] Leonard 2006: 118.

[13] What Heine calls his *Weltvernichtungsidee* (1973: *Bäder* 597); see Ch.6.

[14] See esp. Ch.4.

productive for those in question. At times, for example when we consider school productions of Aristophanes in Chapter 7, this will take the form of a survey of the material more than detailed analysis. There are also close textual readings of specific key texts, like Shelley's *Swellfoot the Tyrant* in Chapter 3 and Shaw's *Major Barbara* in Chapter 9. In looking at translations and textual editions, I have brought in translation theory; I have used metrical analysis on poems by Wilde and Swinburne in Chapter 6; in that chapter I also owe a tacit debt to queer theory; and so on. In general, I have followed the recommendation of Hall and Harrop in the introduction to *Theorising Performance* and 'order[ed my] theory eclectically '*à la carte*'.'[15]

What persists is my use of reception theory (self-evidently) and the broader framework of social history. My interest is always in the people reading Aristophanes; how are they reading him, why, and how are they refracting him back out into the world to be read again, even at a distance? This thesis fully embraces Barthes' understanding of a text as 'a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.'[16] This blending and clashing of meanings is the life-blood of reception, and the competing re-writings of Aristophanes' plays have led to a varied reception of them in the long-nineteenth century. Reception is, as Martindale notes, an active process,[17] but in the case-studies chosen for this thesis, also a *doubly* active process; it both actively receives, and actively refracts the reception.[18] But Martindale, following Derrida,[19] incorrectly minimises the historicity of

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[15] Hall and Harrop 2010: 4.

[16] Barthes 1977: 146.

[17] Martindale 2006: 11.

[18] Jauss 1982: 19.

[19] Derrida 1988: 9f.

reception (Goldhill has robustly criticised him for this).[20] Readers do not read in a vacuum, so we must always consider the social and political context when examining any text; reception studies should not obfuscate the historical gap between source and reception. And if finding out how Old Comedy was being read in the long-nineteenth Century tells us anything new about the genre, it will tell us much more about the men and women doing the reading.

While I do occasionally make aesthetic evaluations, my methodology also rejects Martindale's fixation on texts which 'have been assigned positive aesthetic value';[21] as this thesis is concerned with social history, narrowing my scope to 'high art' would be to neglect many important sources. What is different for the reception of Aristophanes from, say, that of Aeschylus or Euripides is that he has only ever been semi-canonical; one only needs to look at his performance history in Britain as compared to that of Greek tragedy to see that Aristophanes is not a widely-known or much-loved 'classic', classical though he be. It has therefore proven particularly vital to consider my texts' audiences, both intended and actual; I am interested not only in receptions of Aristophanes, but also how and with what Jaussian 'horizon of expectation' these texts were consumed.[22]

This thesis follows a broadly chronological order, although my chapter on W.S. Gilbert (Chapter 5) in particular breaks the sequence. I have also paid attention to thematic and generic links between the chapters (so Chapter 5 directly follows my chapter on burlesque). My intention here is to provide a persuasive and comprehensible narrative indicating the shift in receptions of Aristophanes over time.

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[20] Martindale 2010; Goldhill 2010.

[21] Martindale 2010: 72.

[22] Jauss 1982.

Finally, a brief note about Greek names; I have generally adopted the spellings used by the authors I am discussing at any given time. There is therefore no consistency across chapters about how I spell, for instance, Peithetairos.

Doxography

Ever since Richard Jenkyns' (1980) and Frank M. Turner's (1981) seminal works on the subject, classical reception in the long-nineteenth century has been the focus of sustained scholarly attention. Simon Goldhill's *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity* (2011) focusses on artistic responses to the ancient world, saying little about more wide-spread, popular receptions of the classics that flourished in the nineteenth century; in *Classical Victorians* (2013), Edmund Richardson explores several interesting figures steeped in the ancient world, from murderers to drunken burlesque theatre-writers, even if their nature as outsiders makes them more interesting in themselves than as exemplars for what is happening with classics at the time. More specialised monographs have looked at classics in the Victorian popular theatre,[23] the nineteenth-century classical education system,[24] women's responses to antiquity,[25] the intersection between classics and queer identity,[26] and more. The

[23] Monrós-Gaspar 2015; Bryant Davies 2019.

[24] The undisputed expert here is Stray, who has written on Oxbridge extensively (1998, 2018, *inter alia*). Little has been done on classical education at other universities, though a forthcoming volume by Edith Hall and Arlene Holmes-Henderson as part of their 'Advocating Classics Education' project will hopefully provide a wider perspective.

[25] Hurst 2006; Olverson 2010; Hall and Wyles 2016; Prins 2017; Beard 2002.

[26] Dowling 1994.

forthcoming *A People's History of Classics* by Hall and Stead will fill in many gaps marring a field that has too often focussed on elite receptions of the ancient world, and I am grateful to have been given early access to it. Yet what has been almost entirely missing from these accounts of Victorian classics has been Old Comedy. Jenkyns asserts that 'of all the great Greek writers Aristophanes had the least influence in the last century. The Victorians did not greatly value the comic muse'.[27] Flip open the index of Goldhill or Richardson, and you won't find Aristophanes at all. If this dissertation does nothing else, it will show why such omission is unfortunate. Aristophanes deserves a place in the narrative we tell about Victorian classicisms.

The study of Aristophanic reception has been slower to bloom, but is now proving fruitful. Gonda Van Steen's excellent monograph on Aristophanes in modern Greece, *Venom in Verse* (2000), provided me with an early model of how to approach my subject. Likewise, I owe much to three essay collections: *Aristophanes in Performance* (2007), edited by Edith Hall and Amanda Wrigley; *Aristophanes and Reception* (2014), edited by S. Douglas Olson; and *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aristophanes* (2016), edited by Philip Walsh. I am extremely grateful to Romain Piana, who graciously shared with me a copy of his thesis on Aristophanic reception in eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century France. A study on the nineteenth-century reception of Aristophanes in Germany was produced by Martin Holtermann in 2004, and in 1997 Marina Kotzamani completed a thesis on late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century productions of *Lysistrata*. I should also mention here *Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre* (2005) by Edith Hall and Fiona Macintosh; although about tragedy, not comedy, it has been invaluable. Yet none of

[27] Jenkyns 1980: 79.

these focuses much on the specific intersection examined by this dissertation, the long-nineteenth-century British reception of Aristophanes.

Only two scholars have really approached this intersection before now. Philip Walsh wrote his doctoral thesis on *The Modern Reception of Aristophanes* (2008), specifically looking at Britain, although the work is short and only offers a survey of the material. Walsh has since published two papers drawn from this research, one on the scholarly debate over Aristophanes' politics (2009) and one (in his *Brill's Companion*, 2016) on Old Comedy's nineteenth-century translators. He virtually bypasses the performance history of Aristophanes during this period. Hall's *The English-Speaking Aristophanes, 1650-1914* (2007), published in *Aristophanes in Performance*, is also a survey of the ground, though with its greater scope and more attention paid to Aristophanic performance, it is even lighter on specific details. This is something she readily admits; at the time of publishing, 'the material ha[d] previously been so little researched that the major part of the exercise inevitably takes the form of excavation of evidence and narrative.'[28] This current study will therefore enhance the picture they have traced. Whilst Hall's and Walsh's studies have been insufficient, they have allowed me to move away from presenting another survey towards a more case-study-orientated approach.

The Early-Modern Aristophanes in Britain

In discussing the reception of Aristophanes from the end of the eighteenth century, I am not trying to resurrect 'the traditional model of the reception of Aristophanes', which supposed that 'Greek Old Comedy [was] almost unknown until a nineteenth-

[28] Hall 2007: 66.

century "rediscovery"'.[29] That model is wrong. Early-modern theatre practitioners and writers were not only aware of Aristophanic comedy but actively receiving it in their own works. Many scholars have noted the sustained influence of Old Comedy on Ben Jonson,[30] Aristophanes' 'truest early modern English descendent',[31] and we know he had read Aristophanes because his personal copy has survived.[32] 'The earliest English-language version of any Aristophanic play', *Ploutophthalmia Ploutogamia* (a version of *Wealth*), 'was written in the early 1630s' by a 'Son of Ben', Thomas Randolph.[33] *The Woman's Prize, or the Tamer Tamed*, John Fletcher's early-seventeenth-century sequel to Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, draws on *Lysistrata*. In the *Areopagitica* (1644), 'Aristophanes furnishes Milton with a test case for his opposition to censorship' and he (rather reluctantly) concludes that 'the price of freedom from censorship is the endurance of Aristophanes'.[34] The dramatist William Davenant actually put Aristophanes on stage in 1656.[35] Jonathan Swift also received Aristophanes.[36] The eighteenth-century satirical dramatists Samuel Foote and Henry Fielding were both routinely described as 'the English Aristophanes'[37] (a title later conferred on W.S. Gilbert, see Chapter 5), and in 1742 Fielding published a

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[29] Steggle 2007: 52.

[30] See ibid. 59-63; Miola 2014: 495-502 and esp. 498 n.20, for a summary and further doxography.

[31] Ibid. 501.

[32] Steggle 2007: 59.

[33] Hall 2007: 67; see Ch.7.

[34] Miola 2014: 492.

[35] Hall 2007: 68f.

[36] Ibid. 70.

[37] Kinservik 2016: 109.

translation of *Wealth* with William Young; though this is hardly the most caustic of Aristophanes' plays, the translators praise Aristophanes as a satirist who 'attacked and exposed [Athens'] enemies and betrayers with a boldness and integrity'.[38] At schools and universities, 'Aristophanes figures prominently in the educational curriculum of early modern Europe and England.'[39] This early-modern material demands more attention than it has so far received.

It is worth indicating here some of the key observations made by Miola, Steggle, Kinservik and Hall in their summaries of Aristophanes in the early-modern period, and how his reception at this time differs from his long-nineteenth-century reception. First, Aristophanic humour, particularly in the eighteenth century, was often used as a by-word for personalised satire; this in particular reflects why satirists such as Fielding and Foote were associated with him. Although Fielding was satirical *and* political, Foote's satire was 'apolitical… involving *ad hominem* jokes and mimicry at the expense of what we would call 'celebrities'.'[40] But by the start of the long-nineteenth century, Old Comedy's satirical scope is broader, and definitely political. I am not trying to suggest that long-nineteenth-century readers were completely blind to Aristophanes' ad hominem attacks, but their *emphasis* is more on the partisan lines advanced and less on the victims of his personalised satire. Shelley's *Swellfoot the Tyrant* is an exception, as it is to many of the general conclusions drawn in this thesis. W.S. Gilbert's brand of satire, though broadly less personalised, also offers echoes of this eighteenth-century reading of Old Comedy. By and large, though, the tendency we will see throughout is the comparison between Aristophanes and burlesque, not

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[38] Fielding and Young 1812 [1742]: 116.

[39] Miola 2014: 481. See Ch.7.

[40] Hall 2007: 74.

satire. Undoubtedly, this is because satirical theatre was no longer widely staged in the long-nineteenth century as a result of censorship.[41]

Second, and this is a connected point, the early-modern reception of Aristophanes was deeply concerned with the story, retold since Plato and subsequently used to rebuke Old Comedy, that Aristophanes' *Clouds* was responsible for Socrates' death.[42] By the long-nineteenth century, this story was usually ignored or treated as irrelevant or hyperbolic. In his *Studies of the Greek Poets*, Symonds asserted that 'the *Clouds* had not so much to do with the condemnation of Socrates as some of the later Greek gossips attempted to make out', and he could take it as read that most of his readers already knew this.[43]

Finally, there was a shift in the specific plays being received. As this dissertation will mention repeatedly, before the long-nineteenth century, the most popular Aristophanic play in the European tradition by far was *Wealth*. The play was 'the first to appear in Latin translation… It appeared on stage in Zwickau (1521), Zurich (1531) and Cambridge (1536 and 1588), and achieved two full-scale adaptations in English.'[44] Perceived as an innocent comedy sharing many generic features with New Comedy, *Wealth* was appealing to humorists and humanists alike, although it is notably lacking in the personal satire that otherwise defines Aristophanic comedy in the early-modern period. *Clouds* was also popular, or at least infamous for its connection to Socrates' death, and received its first English translation in 1655.[45]

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[41] See Ch.4.

[42] Kinservik 2016: 113-117.

[43] Symonds 1873: 236.

[44] Miola 2014: 492. These supposed performances of *Wealth* at Cambridge are dubious; see Ch.7.

[45] Hall 2007: 67.

But by the long-nineteenth century, *Wealth* was scarcely being received. *Birds* and *Frogs* occupied a much more significant position, and indeed the only professional performance of Aristophanes in adaptation in the nineteenth century was of *Birds*.[46] Although Aristophanes' 'women plays' were the least widely received plays in the Victorian period, we will see the inexorable rise of *Lysistrata* at the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, as it gradually took the position it occupies now, as the most widely received Aristophanes play.

So the early-modern reception of Aristophanes was active and variegated. Aristophanes did not suddenly and inexplicably arrive on British shores in 1789, ready to be received in the British tradition free from any diachronic echoes of a past tradition. That said, readings – translations, scholarly discussions, adaptations, appropriations and performances – of Aristophanes picked up exponentially in the long-nineteenth century. In a catalogue of translations (including selections and adaptations) up to 1920, Giannopoulou has recorded five British publications in the seventeenth century and eight in the eighteenth, but 67 in the nineteenth.[47]

Looking at the early-modern British reception of Aristophanes therefore offers necessary diachronic context for our discussion; let us now introduce some synchronic context by discussing, first, British historians' accounts of the genre during this period, and then the German reception of Old Comedy at the start of the long-nineteenth century.

[46] See Ch.4.

[47] Giannopoulou 2007.

The British Historians' Aristophanes, from Gillies to Grote

One of the defining characteristics of Old Comedy – at least, of the extant examples – is its setting in the contemporary world; Aristophanes' plays usually take place within Athens itself, or a parallel Athens where dung-beetles can fly and kitchen utensils can testify in a law-court. For this reason (and despite the dangers of reading comedy as an accurate source), historians have long used Aristophanes' plays as evidence for Greek society. British historians engaged with Old Comedy consistently in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and often used debates over Aristophanes' politics within wider narratives about democracy. It is therefore unsurprising that many early histories of Greece exerted a significant influence on the British reception of Aristophanes, particularly on the debate about his politics. I provide here a summary of four important historians and their interpretations of Aristophanes. This offers important context as we begin to look at texts more specifically focussed on Old Comedy, although, since Walsh has already examined this topic in depth,[48] I do not go into extensive detail.

John Gillies published his *History of Ancient Greece* in two volumes in 1786; it was later translated into both French and German. It left its readers in no doubt about Gillies' personal political views; the first volume opens with an address to the king, and these lines:

> The History of Greece exposes the dangerous turbulence of Democracy, and arraigns the despotism of Tyrants… It evinces the inestimable

[48] Walsh 2008 and 2009.

> benefits, resulting to Liberty itself, from the lawful dominion of hereditary Kings…[49]

Gillies argues that Old Comedy was a feature of democracy's 'dangerous turbulence', institutionalised by a populist Pericles, who thus 'cherished a serpent in his bosom'.[50] Although he notes Aristophanes wrote a harangue against the demagogue Cleon, there is strong disapproval in his assertion that 'the people of Athens permitted, and even approved, the licentious boldness' of the poet;[51] comedy 'was never carried to the same vicious excess in any other age or country.'[52]

William Mitford published the five volumes of his vast *History of Greece* between 1784 and 1818, in direct competition with Gillies even if the two men shared a similar political outlook.[53] He was a Tory MP, and 'throughout his history, he displays a consistent antipathy for democracy'.[54] In the second and third volumes, which covered the fifth century BC through to the King's Peace in 386, Mitford responds to Gillies' condemnation of Old Comedy by praising Aristophanes. He emphasises that Aristophanes was 'himself a man of rank, personally an enemy to Cleon, certain of support from all the first families of the republic, and trusting in his own powers to ingage [sic] the favor of the lower people'[55] – an oligarch writing with aristocratic and popular support. He 'almost alone, among the poets of the day, dared direct his satire

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[49] Gillies 1786: iii.

[50] Ibid. 487.

[51] Ibid. 592.

[52] Ibid. 483.

[53] Wroth 2004.

[54] Walsh 2008: 76.

[55] Mitford 1808a: 222.

on the public stage to restrain the folly and correct the profligacy of the tyrant multitude'.[56] And Aristophanes was a *successful* partisan; Mitford writes that *Knights* had an 'immediate effect' and directly led to Cleon being fined by the people.[57] He does not entirely dispute Gillies' moral aversion to Old Comedy; Aristophanes was 'a consummate politician and a consummate buffoon' who wrote 'gross ribaldry'.[58] But largely, Mitford rates Aristophanes far higher than Gillies, and sees him as a political ally. Mitford's reception of Aristophanes was influential, particularly on Thomas Mitchell, the translator and editor of Aristophanes (whom we discuss in Chapter 2).

The preponderance of turn-of-the-nineteenth-century right-wing historians instrumentalising ancient Greece as an expression of their own oligarchic, monarchist views led to a response by more liberal historians later in the century; their views on Aristophanes were, however, no less shaped by their political beliefs. Connop Thirlwall produced his *History of Greece* between 1835 and 1844. With careful analysis, he argues that Aristophanes was not anti-democratic as 'in his extant plays he nowhere intimates a wish for any change in the form of the Athenian institutions.'[59] Thirlwall's answer to oligarchic readings of Old Comedy is to deny its political effect; 'we have no reason to believe that it ever turned the course of public affairs', and did not even permanently affect Cleon's reputation.[60] Nevertheless, Aristophanes displayed a 'depth of patriotic feeling'.[61] Walsh argues that Thirlwall's readings of

[56] Mitford 1808b: 14.

[57] Mitford 1808a: 222.

[58] Mitford 1808b: 22.

[59] Thirlwall 1838: 253.

[60] Thirlwall 1836: 82. Walsh notes that he follows A.W. Schlegel in this (2008: 83; see below).

[61] Thirlwall 1838: 252.

Aristophanes are contradictory,[62] though this is a misinterpretation. Acknowledging Aristophanes' *attempts* to engage in political discourse, Thirlwall remains dubious about the poet's ultimate effectiveness.[63] The Anglican clergyman also defines Old Comedy as 'the grossest things [being] publicly spoken of in the grossest language',[64] although does not deny 'the sublimity… of its wit, humour, and fancy.'[65] On this latter point, he prefigures the scholarship of John Addington Symonds especially.[66]

Thirlwall was a broad-minded Anglican liberal; George Grote, a friend of John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham,[67] was far more radical. His *History of Greece* (12 volumes published 1846-1856) was specifically designed as a corrective to Mitford's Tory narrative,[68] although in a sense his reading of Aristophanes is similar to Mitford's. Grote uses Old Comedy as a source whenever it proves his point, but is generally careful to note that Aristophanes did 'not profess to write history';[69] he is an unreliable source, and invariably on the wrong side of politics. So Aristophanes lampooned what Grote saw as the great democratic institution of Athenian juries[70] – whose potency, we will see in Chapter 2, Mitchell and Mitford had associated with French revolutionaries. Grote's most radical innovation is his balanced assessment of Cleon,

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[62] Walsh 2008: 83.

[63] Thirlwall 1838: 252f.

[64] Thirlwall 1836: 81.

[65] Ibid.

[66] See Ch.6.

[67] Hamburger 2008.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Grote 1851a: 337.

[70] Grote 1849: 535.

despite the array of ancient sources and contemporary authors – Aristophanes especially – who criticised the politician as a dangerous demagogue. Again, Aristophanes is an inaccurate source here; although *Knights* is 'consummate and irresistible' and 'deserves the greatest possible admiration' as a dramatic work,[71] its 'unrivalled comic merit… is only one reason the more for distrusting the resemblance of its picture to the real Kleon.'[72] Like Mitford, Grote praises Aristophanes as an artist and avoids significant moral rebuke of Old Comedy as a genre. Both men argue that Aristophanes was an oligarch. The difference in their interpretations of Old Comedy lies in their personal politics, so that Mitford praises Aristophanes for this perceived partisanship while Grote notes that Athenian 'democracy was strong enough to tolerate unfriendly tongues',[73] a nuanced criticism of the genre. Grote's point here is not that Old Comedy was politically ineffective, but rather that democracy was strong enough to survive however powerful the criticisms against it were.

These attempts to read the historians' own political views into Aristophanes fit within a wider narrative of activating Old Comedy for partisan reasons, particularly in the first five chapters of this thesis. As we will see, for much of the early nineteenth century, the default interpretation of Aristophanes was as a partisan proto-Tory oligarch, as Mitford, Thirlwall and Grote all portrayed him.

[71] Grote 1851a: 661.

[72] Ibid. 663.

[73] Grote 1851b: 452.

The German Aristophanes

If the birth of Hellenism in Britain around the close of the eighteenth century was founded on German *Altertumswissenschaft*,[74] the growth of British academic interest in Aristophanes in the early nineteenth century was likewise predicated on an earlier movement to consider Old Comedy in Germany. We therefore should look to Germany to provide one final piece of synchronic context in this introduction.

The most significant figure in this German scholarly tradition was undoubtedly the poet and critic August Wilhelm von Schlegel, whose *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Litteratur*, a series of lectures originally delivered in Vienna in 1808, then published in German in 1809 and in English in 1815, will hang over almost every reception we look at in this thesis. The lectures cover much more than Aristophanes, although the first of the two volumes is dedicated to ancient theatre more broadly. Old Comedy is the subject of the sixth lecture. Schlegel interprets it as 'a species of an entirely opposite description' to tragedy, but also as distinctly different to modern and New Comedy.[75] It is a 'more democratic species of poetry' defined by its liberty and excess.[76] Schlegel offers a powerful defence of Aristophanic obscenity; 'Aristophanes was an immoral buffoon', yes,[77] but he was also a 'zealous patriot' defending the people,[78] and Old Comedy's licentiousness was permitted because of

[74] Stray 1998: 23-26.

[75] Schlegel 1815: 190. Trans. Black.

[76] Ibid. 195.

[77] Ibid. 204.

[78] Ibid. 203.

the specific festival context.[79] Schlegel defends Aristophanes against the charge that he was responsible for Socrates' death, asserting instead that both 'the sportive censure of Aristophanes was reduced to silence, and the graver animadversions of the incorruptible Socrates were punished with death' for the same reason, the fall of democracy.[80] He also praises Aristophanes as a poet.[81]

But it is to the fifth lecture, on Euripides, that we must look for Schlegel's most enduring contribution to Aristophanic criticism. Schlegel's criticisms of Euripides are extensive and damning; from the outset, he asserts that 'we are compelled to bestow severe censure on him on various accounts.'[82] Aristophanes is Schlegel's chief supporter in this assessment; he is introduced as a foil for Euripides, drawing on Aristophanes' own representations of Euripides in his comedies. So when, in the sixth lecture, Schlegel comments that there is 'no reason… to believe that we witness [Old Comedy's] decline in [Aristophanes], as in the case of the last tragedians',[83] it is clear whom this comparison implies. Aristophanes was 'one of [Old Comedy's] most perfect poets';[84] Euripides was the worst of the tragedians. Aristophanes did not destroy his genre, but Euripides killed off tragedy. In Chapters 6 and 9, we will see how Schlegel's dichotomy became significant in the writings of John Addington Symonds, Robert Browning and Gilbert Murray.

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[79] Ibid. 207; on this proto-Baktinian reading of Old Comedy, see Ch.6. This invocation of festival does not, for Schlegel, limit the genre's political nature.

[80] Ibid. 203.

[81] Ibid. 207f.; see Ch.6.

[82] Ibid. 138.

[83] Ibid. 201.

[84] Ibid.

A.W. Schlegel's brother, Friedrich von Schlegel, had also written an essay on Aristophanes in 1794, although I have found no evidence that it was read widely in Britain; it was not translated, which may explain its limited reach. The essay, however, influenced his brother; many of Friedrich's points would later be reiterated by August in the *Lectures.* Friedrich Schlegel emphasises aesthetic appreciation of Old Comedy as an inherently pleasurable genre; 'pain can be a highly effective medium for beauty, but joy [die Freude] is beautiful in itself. Beautiful joy is the highest objective of beautiful art.'[85] Aristophanes' plays are therefore 'divine'.[86] This contrast between comic pleasure and tragic pain may prefigure A.W. Schlegel's Aristophanes-Euripides dichotomy. This 'beautiful joy' is dependent on Old Comedy's license, which Friedrich also compares explicitly to a carnival.[87] Unlike in A.W. Schlegel, however, Friedrich Schlegel argues that Aristophanes' recourse to politics undermines his poetic quality.[88]

Both the Schlegels were Romantics, and their interest in Aristophanes speaks to a broader phenomenon in German Romanticism.[89] Goethe had already translated part of the *Birds* in 1780;[90] in the *Aesthetics*, Hegel praised Aristophanes for bringing 'to perfection' a genre which is 'truly comical and truly poetic'.[91] For whatever reason, however, the British Romantics, despite their engagement with Greek tragedy, did not

[85] Schlegel 1980: 4. Translations throughout this thesis are mine unless otherwise stated.

[86] Ibid. 6.

[87] Ibid. 5.

[88] Ibid. 10.

[89] See Holtermann 2004: 91-121.

[90] On Goethe's sustained interest in Aristophanes, see Atkins 1954.

[91] Hegel 1998: 1235f.

make the same use of Aristophanes. Despite its author, Shelley's Aristophanic play *Swellfoot the Tyrant* is not a Romantic drama, as we will see in Chapter 3. We must wait for the Aesthetic Movement (Chapter 6) to see a British appreciation of Aristophanes as an aesthetic poet.

But the brothers Schlegel and their fellow Romantics were hardly the only German scholars who wrote influentially on Aristophanes. In his *Historical Antiquities of the Greeks*, published in German 1826-1830, then in English in 1837,[92] Wilhelm Wachsmuth portrays Aristophanes as a political and personal satirist who lampooned a series of Athens' leading men. He agrees with A.W. Schlegel that Old Comedy was an inherently democratic genre, 'sprung from the wantonness and arrogance of the democracy of Megara'.[93] Old Comedy targeted its 'satire against the wealthier classes'.[94] Wachsmuth, who clearly allies himself with the oligarchs and Pericles, is not entirely approving, although he praises Aristophanes' attacks against 'the worthless Cleon' and other demagogues.[95] He therefore presents Aristophanes as an oligarch writing within a broadly democratic genre: 'comedy owed to him the proud height it thus attained as the vehicle of political censure' when used to attack Cleon.[96] This is a different and more nuanced reading than A.W. Schlegel's. On balance,

[92] His section on Aristophanes was also appended to C.A. Wheelwright's Aristophanes translations, likewise published in 1837.

[93] Wachsmuth 1837: 205. Trans. Woolrych.

[94] Ibid. 205.

[95] Ibid. 214.

[96] Ibid. 216.

however, Wachsmuth concludes that the politics of Old Comedy 'produced no serious impression whatever upon the minds of the spectators'.[97]

Karl Otfried Müller's *History of the Literature of Ancient Greece* first appeared in English translation in 1840, disseminated by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, before being published in German the following year. It devotes three chapters to Old Comedy. Like A.W. Schlegel, Müller emphasises the carnivalesque nature of Old Comedy, and indeed goes further by connecting its origins with the ritual komos.[98] He also agreed that it was an inherently democratic genre; 'comedy could not be brought to perfection save by republican freedom and equality.'[99] But for Müller, Aristophanes was not a serious playwright. Even the political *Acharnians* 'is nothing but a Bacchic revelry;… the author is, throughout the piece, utterly devoid of seriousness and sobriety'.[100]

Karl Ferdinand Ranke also published the Latin *De Aristophanis vita commentatio* in 1846. Finally, German scholarship was an important vehicle for the dissemination of Aristophanes' texts. In 1829, August Immanuel Bekker published the Aristophanic scholia; in 1840, Theodor Bergk released a collection of fragments. From 1839, August Meineke published a series of editions of Aristophanes' fragments, with the texts of his extant plays following in 1860.

British classicists did not refer to French sources often, despite the long history of Aristophanic scholarship in France dating back at least as far as Anne Dacier's

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[97] Ibid. 227.

[98] Müller 1840: 3-5. Trans. Donaldson.

[99] Ibid. 6.

[100] Ibid. 22.

translations of *Clouds* and *Wealth* in 1684.[101] In contrast, the *popular* reception of Aristophanes owes much to the French tradition.[102] But in terms of scholarly receptions, we must look to Germany as the greater influence. There is one significant exception to this; for much of the early nineteenth century, the definitive text of Aristophanes used by British scholars was that of the French philologist Richard François Philippe Brunck.[103] Brunck's edition was published in 1781 with accompanying Latin translation and notes. This allowed him to publish and comment on the text without expurgation; 'at the same time that Latin, as a scientific language or language of translation, generally disappears from the notes of translations of tragedy, it emerges as a language of substitution for… scholarly commentaries on obscene passages' in Aristophanes.[104] Brunck's influence on the German tradition presumably accounts for why German philologists focussed on Aristophanes' scholia and fragments.

We have explored the German scholarly reception of Aristophanes; in the next chapter, we turn to two early and significant British scholars whose readings of Aristophanes – while dissimilar – reinforced the British reading of Aristophanes as a staunch oligarch against the German tendency to emphasise the genre's connection to democracy.

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[101] See Wyles 2016.

[102] See esp. ch.5.

[103] This edition even gets mentioned in Planché's *Birds* (see Ch.4).

[104] Piana 2005: 195.

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Out of Exile: Thomas Mitchell and John Hookham Frere

Before the start of the nineteenth century, Aristophanes was hardly ever read in Britain. Few translations, and no commentaries, had been produced in English; scholars who revelled in so much Greek literature from Homer to Sophocles, balked at Old Comedy's oblique frames of reference. As Walton notes, 'the translator of Aristophanes is faced with a kind of dramatic piece for which we have no parallel', characterised by 'Aristophanes' fondness for anachronism, for absurdity, for the fantastic'.[1] Thus, it was only with the growth of Hellenism and in the wake of Greek tragedy's burgeoning reputation that Aristophanic plays in the 1800s 'were finally given sustained and sympathetic attention from translators' and editors.[2] Two of the most influential scholars to work on these texts were Thomas Mitchell and John Hookham Frere; each produced translations of several plays, with Mitchell also writing commentaries on five texts. Whether approaching Aristophanes in English or in Greek, the first reception of Greek comedy any reader experiences is necessarily

[1] Walton 2006: 157.

[2] Walsh 2016: 238. Not all Aristophanes' plays were received in the same way at the same point in time. *Clouds*, *Frogs*, *Peace* and above all *Wealth*, had a limited but not insignificant reception history dating back to the early-modern period (Walsh 2016: 221; Hall 2007: 67-75.). Conversely, Aristophanes' 'women plays' (*Lysistrata*, *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Ecclesiazusae*) were not received widely until well into the nineteenth century.

mediated through the translation or textual edition the reader chooses to use, and for many in the nineteenth century, that choice was Frere or Mitchell.[3] Therefore, for many, the nineteenth-century Aristophanes was constructed at least in part by Mitchell or Frere. Both authors were Tories, and both interpreted Aristophanes as a starkly political author reinforcing their own world-view, following German and British historians' interpretations of the Greek poet discussed in Chapter 1. Both were also keen to suppress Aristophanes' crudity. At the same time, Mitchell's Aristophanes and Frere's were subtly different beasts, and their texts were read and utilised by different audiences. Thus, their influence on the reception of Aristophanes was not always in chorus.

Nineteenth-Century Politics: Reform, Reaction and Radicalism

Before we venture further, a brief note on the state of British politics in the early-to-mid nineteenth century, particularly as it pertains to the Tory Party; this will provide contextualisation not only for the present chapter but for the thesis as a whole.

The early nineteenth century saw successive governments struggling to deal with, and inevitably being destroyed by, a host of political issues – male suffrage, constitutional reform, Irish home rule, the Corn Laws, Poor Laws, Factory Acts, the Woman Question, Catholic emancipation and other related concerns. The French Revolution of 1789 and subsequent political movements in Europe provided the

[3] Previous English translations of some plays predate Frere and Mitchell; *Wealth* had been translated as early as 1659. Of these, only Henry Francis Cary's translation of *Birds* (1824) can be said to have been as important. See Giannopoulou 2007.

backdrop for this turbulent period of British political history;[4] likewise, agitations at home, culminating in the 1819 Peterloo Massacre, were constant.[5]

Partisanship in British politics developed over the course of the early nineteenth century, leading to 'the existence by the end of the 1830s of a fairly clear-cut two-party alignment in the House of Commons' between the Whigs and the Tories.[6] As Jenkins argues, however, these party groupings were 'sufficiently flexible to ensure that party leaders could never presume upon the support of their back-benchers'.[7] Tory politicians by-and-large supported the Establishment – the monarchy, the government, the aristocratic and propertied classes and the Church of England; Tory 'Ultras' were therefore defined by their reactionary politics. Whigs were Reformists who valued above all personal freedoms and libertarianism.[8] Their greatest contribution to politics in a period when they were almost terminally locked out from power was to pass the Great Reform Act in 1832.[9]

This legislation was pushed through with difficulty, and under the threat of wide-scale violence, by the Whig Prime Minister Earl Grey. For the first time it extended the franchise to middle-class men with a property qualification whilst also making elections fairer and abolishing 'rotten boroughs'. However, the Reform Act failed to resolve class tensions because it did not address universal suffrage. By expanding the franchise, 'the Whigs believed that they could strengthen existing

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[4] Spence 1996: 1-12.

[5] See Ch.3.

[6] Jenkins 1996: 29.

[7] Ibid. 37.

[8] McCormack 2004: 26.

[9] Ramsden 1998: 42-44.

society, and giving the working classes the vote was never part of the political equation.'[10] For some within Parliament and without, Reformist Whiggism did not go far enough.[11]

The Radicals and the working classes they supported did not give up, and in May 1838 the People's Charter was published. This document called for annual parliaments, salaries for MPs, the introduction of a secret ballot, equal boundaries and most significantly, universal suffrage for men (women were still excluded). Chartism saw universal male suffrage as the solution to the many inequalities embedded in Victorian society. The movement, whilst undeniably Radical, sought change through legitimate means and Parliament, not violent revolution. 'This was a disciplined form of mass extra-parliamentary protest, its force essentially moral and its violence rhetorical.'[12] After a wave of strikes and a subsequent crackdown in 1842, 'the Chartist leadership completed that disintegration which had been threatening since 1839',[13] but Chartism was replaced by unions and trade organisations, which flourished from the 1840s. The unions were more concerned with economic security than suffrage, although they continued to offer a largely non-violent extra-parliamentary political voice to the disenfranchised.

These social issues came to entirely dominate the 1841-1846 ministry of Sir Robert Peel, a Tory politician who had opposed the Reform Act.[14] His party was more

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[10] Brown 2002: 14.

[11] The Great Reform Act was supported by Parliamentary Radicals but had only moderate effect on the franchise (McCormack 2004: 35).

[12] Brown 2002: 12.

[13] Royle 1996: 32.

[14] Evans 1991: 2.

closely aligned with Reactionary sentiment, but he found himself carrying out a significant programme of Reform. Early measures such as the reintroduction of an income tax and moderate reform of the Corn Laws were obvious and relatively uncontroversial, and in 1844 Peel forced through a law limiting factory working to twelve hours a day rather than the ten hours supported by a majority of the Commons;[15] but controversial measures to address Ireland and the Irish Catholics, as well as the full-scale repeal of the Corn Laws in response to the 1846 Potato Famine, ultimately led to the collapse of both his ministry and the Tory Party. From the ashes, Peel built the Conservative Party, which continues to be defined by his shift from economic protectionism towards liberal free trade policy.[16] The Whig coalition was also soon to break apart, into a new Liberal Party.

It is easier to define the politics of this period by the prevailing forces of Reaction, Reform and Radicalism than by party politics.[17] With that dialectical frame in mind, we can more easily compare the politics of Mitchell and Frere, both of whom were Tories but whose politics were different. Their different outlooks also shaped their distinct receptions of Aristophanes. The question of Reform is the same fundamental issue lying behind Shelley's, Mitchell's, Frere's and Planché's receptions of Aristophanes, discussed over the next three chapters – the Radical Shelley using Aristophanes to push for fundamental structural change, the Canningite Frere presenting a more measured Tory Reformist Aristophanes, and the Reactionaries Mitchell and Planché using Aristophanes to argue for conservatism. With that in mind, let us return to the matter at hand.

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[15] Adelman 1992: 41f.

[16] See Turner 2004.

[17] See Stead and Hall 2015.

Thomas Mitchell

Thomas Mitchell (1783-1845) was educated at Christ's Hospital, a public school in West Sussex, and Pembroke College, Cambridge. He graduated with a BA in 1806 and an MA in 1809 and became a fellow of Sidney Sussex College, but was forced to stand down in 1812 after refusing to be ordained. Although he would continue to work as a private tutor and publish academic works, Mitchell never taught at a university again.[18] He was working on his Aristophanes translations by 1813,[19] and eventually released them in two volumes. Volume one, published in 1820, contained *Acharnians* and *Knights*; volume two, published in 1822, contained *Wasps* and *Clouds*, the latter in a reprint of Cumberland's translation.[20] In the 1830s, he also released several critical editions – *Acharnians* and *Wasps* in 1835, *Knights* in 1836, *Clouds* in 1838 and *Frogs* in 1839. These texts were designed as teaching aids – each title page declared that the commentary was written for 'the use of schools and universities'. Mitchell was proud that his efforts meant 'the conductors of our great public schools were in possession of… a *safe text* of five of the most important of the

[18] Goodwin 2004.

[19] In an article written for the *Quarterly Review*, Mitchell includes translated extracts from *Wasps*, *Peace*, *Knights*, *Clouds*, *Ecclesiazusae* and *Thesmophoriazusae*. He did not publish full translations of most of these texts, and his published *Wasps* does not reuse the translation prepared for this article, but he does reuse the *Knights* extract (the play's prologue) in his later translation (Mitchell 1813: 139-161.).

[20] Cumberland's *Clouds* 'has been too much admired, and, generally speaking, it is too masterly a production… to render another version of it necessary' (Mitchell 1822: 3).

Aristophanic plays'.[21] Despite being immediately used by public schools, Mitchell's works were not reprinted.

Mitchell's translations are well-written and in charming verse, although his language is notably dated, something for which Frere criticised him; 'the main cause of the defect [in Mitchell's translations]... is to be attributed to the adoption of a particular style; the style of our ancient comedy in the beginning of the 16th century.'[22] This adoption of an archaic, heightened tone often leads him to over-translate – for example, for the single line Aris.*Ach.*11, 'ὁ δ' ἀνεῖπεν, εἴσαγ' ὦ Θέογνι τὸν χορόν', Mitchell provides four:

> Sudden a hasty summons shakes the roof:
>
> And – "Hoa, Theognis! please to introduce
>
> Your company of actors!" brazen-lung'd
>
> Exclaims the Herald…[23]

This sixteenth-century tone was deliberate; as early as 1777, Rev. Robert Potter's 'rightly admired' translations of Aeschylus, 'the first complete English translation' of the tragedian published,[24] had demonstrated the effectiveness of translating Greek tragedy into vernacular language. For comparison, take, for example his rendering of the *eisodos* of *Agamemnon*:

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[21] Mitchell 1841: 5.

[22] Hookham Frere 1820: 474.

[23] Mitchell 1820: *Acharnians* 1.1.17-21. For both Frere and Mitchell, the line numbers I give are their own, not those of Aristophanes.

[24] Hall and Macintosh 2005: 209.

The tenth slow year rolls on, since great in arms

The noble sons of Atreus, each exalted

To majesty and empire, royal brothers,

Led hence a thousand ships, the Argive fleet,

Big with the fate of Priam and of Troy…[25]

Whilst still poetic, it flows more naturally than Mitchell's hasty summonses and brazen lungs. If vernacular verse was adequate for *tragedy*, Mitchell might have felt entitled to translate *comedy* in a similar tone. In fact, he consciously adopted the archaising 'particular style' Frere criticises him for.

Mitchell breaks up each play into scenes and acts and provides ample notes, although he omits several sections, for which he only provides a summary. His commentaries are even more detailed, with footnotes offering interpretation and lengthy quotations from other authors. Each commentary has a long introduction and several appendices. Much of my discussion will focus on these metatextual sections, since they provide the best evidence for his reception of Old Comedy.

As Turner has demonstrated, Mitchell's interpretations are dependent on the Tory MP and Greek historian William Mitford, whom Mitchell refers to as simply 'the English historian of Greece'; Mitchell 'strongly perpetuated Mitford's image of Athens.'[26] But he is also familiar with German scholars. A.W. Schlegel is often referenced, and at the start of his *Acharnians* commentary Mitchell also cites 'Boeckh,

[25] Potter 1808 [1777]: 153 = Aesch. *Aga*.40-47.

[26] Turner 1981: 209.

Müller, Wachsmuth, Kruse, and others'.[27] Mitchell's own copies of the Frenchman Brunck's Aristophanes, heavily annotated, also survive in the British Library archives.[28] Much of Mitchell's commentary is speculative, however, drawing on his imagination more frequently than actual evidence. For example, he asserts that *Knights* concludes thus:

> Four-and-twenty bath-men, each armed with an enormous syringe or an arytaena, advance in slow procession; then come four men, bearing on their backs a huge chopping-block, and on that block sits Cleon… Four-and-twenty street-nymphs bring up the rear… The bath-men pour upon him deluges of dirty water, while the ladies salute him with specimens of that language, which is henceforth to be the only dialect he is to hear… The mock Cleon, wiping the foul bath from his face, throws forward with extended arm a silent, but expressive denunciation "from me to thee" upon [the real Cleon in the audience]. The pageant again moves on, and the theatre finally breaks up amid convulsions of laughter, mixed with cries of "No Cleon!" "Down with the tanner!" "Aristophanes for ever!"[29]

[27] Mitchell 1835a: iii.

[28] These notes are written interchangeably in English, German, Greek and Latin. Unfortunately, Mitchell did not have a neat hand, so they are largely illegible. They do indicate that Mitchell almost never referred to Brunck's Latin translation but used the Greek; there are only very occasional notes made on the Latin (BL cat. no.11705 dd 6).

[29] Mitchell 1836: l.1357n.

A complete fabrication, Mitchell nevertheless sets it down without evidence or qualification – not for academics who can dismiss it as an unsupported theory but for his more impressionable, intended audience, schoolboys.

Mitchell's passion for Aristophanes emerges from the many vivid ideas he expresses about how Old Comedy was staged and should be interpreted, and from all the years he dedicated to translating and editing these works. Yet, he views much of Aristophanes as uncomfortable, even immoral. As he writes in an 1813 article for the *Quarterly Review*, in these plays:

> The worst of things are called by the worst of names; and the meanest of our appetites and grossest of our necessities are perpetually called in to make sport for the audience, who, if we are to judge of them by those exhibitions, (and they certainly took a singular delight in them,) can have been little better than semibarbarians.[30]

This censure is omnipresent across his editions, and is invariably tinged with classism. It is for the lower members of society that Aristophanes debases himself – and 'if [the reader] has any knowledge of "the sovereign multitude" of Athens, he will not be surprized [sic] at the lowness of humour with which the poet artfully endeavours to cheat them into good sense.'[31] He asserts that:

> To the better part of his audience [Aristophanes'] admonitions might have the ludicrous appearance of a Bacchus preaching sobriety from a tub; but

[30] Mitchell 1813: 141f.

[31] Mitchell 1835a: p.10.

to the vicious no reproof comes so home as that which they hear from persons who appear to think as little of virtue as themselves.[32]

He argues that the upper-class Athenians would not tolerate Aristophanes' crassness if it weren't a necessary concession to the immoral masses.

Mitchell's translations utilise two methods for dealing with Aristophanes' dirty humour. Sometimes, he avoids translating either the specific joke or the entire section in which it is found. More commonly, however, he simply translates the passage but sanitises the crudity. For example, in the *Acharnians*, he translates Aristophanes' joke about the King of Persia having constipation:

ἀλλ᾽ εἰς ἀπόπατον ᾤχετο στρατιὰν λαβών,

κἄχεζεν ὀκτὼ μῆνας ἐπὶ χρυσῶν ὀρῶν.

Acharnians 81f.

As:

[He had] Physick'd his royal person on the mountains.

Eight months in that abode his highness purg'd him.[33]

Although he has lost the scatological humour, his translation is not wildly inaccurate, and the sense of 'κἄχεζεν' is not absent from 'purg'd'.

In his commentaries, however, Mitchell excises almost every dirty bit of Greek. He usually repairs any half-lines thus cut by stitching them together into new, complete lines; where this is not possible, he uses three asterisks to indicate the

[32] Mitchell 1813: 142.

[33] Mitchell 1820: *Acharnians* 1.3.25f.

missing word or phrase. Otherwise, he offers no hint that the Greek has been tampered with, utilising his own internal line numbering to cover up the Bowdlerisation. As he explains, 'on the fouler stains of antiquity, it will form no part of this publication to dilate.'[34] The few crudities he leaves in are either condemned as degenerate, or, occasionally, explained away as a necessary evil to convey a serious point. Perhaps it is unsurprising that an edition produced for schoolboys would be edited in this way, but the extent of Mitchell's censorship, coupled with his blatant attempts to cover up the process, is remarkable – certainly, Brunck had not felt the need to excise Aristophanes' filthiness from the Greek text Mitchell uses.

Throughout these texts – and despite his rejection of Anglicanism – Mitchell frequently identifies himself with Toryism, conservatism and the aristocracy, to such a degree that he heaps praise on Sparta. This was an old-fashioned view to take. In the previous two centuries, Sparta had been a model for many Whig politicians;[35] the Tory Mitford had praised Sparta in his History, however.[36] Mitchell concedes that Athens 'stands before us in the bodily frame and substance of a glorious literature, of which we have all more or less partaken, and which has entailed upon us a debt of gratitude and reverence'.[37] Yet Sparta, he asserts, was 'a nation of gentlemen',[38] and it is with them that our allegiances should lie. The Peloponnesian War 'was aristocracy against democracy, and the combination of free Greeks against the evil

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[34] Mitchell 1835a: l.79n.

[35] Rawson 1969.

[36] Ibid. 356f, 359.

[37] Mitchell 1835a: v.

[38] Ibid. viii.

ambition of one state.'[39] The issue was fundamentally constitutional. Sparta was ruled by the right sort of people, whereas Athens was not:

> However nations may sometimes be disposed to trifle with their own happiness or honour in the choice of those whom they please to place at the head of their affairs, the only safe guides in conferring such a distinction, can be substantially but four: clear and unencumbered property, – the more of birth and blood the better, – that general intelligence, which arises from the average developement [sic] of the intellectual powers, – and that integrity which results from a proper cultivation of the moral and religious feelings, – these constitute, as all experience has proved, the only elements out of which wise and prudent counsellors and the conductors of states, whether single or combined, can ever possibly be framed.[40]

Mitchell's language bears a striking similarity to [Xenophon]'s *Constitution of Athens*, which likewise criticises Athens for giving political control to the poor. But he is not talking specifically about Athens; he is describing the best form for *any* nation's government to take. In the nineteenth century, three of his criteria for membership of the ruling class were only practicably achievable by the aristocratic or sufficiently wealthy: property required money; nobility was unattainable except through marriage or preferment, which required money; and 'that general intelligence', by which one must surely read 'a classical education', could only be achieved by attending the right schools – which required money. Mitchell's first criterion is the most obviously significant for contemporary readers – the *Acharnians* was published in 1835, three

[39] Ibid. xvii.

[40] Ibid. vii.

years after the passing of the Great Reform Act, which for the first time extended suffrage beyond those who had 'clear and unencumbered property'. One can sense Mitchell's disapproval.

In support of these conservative sentiments, Mitchell reads Aristophanes as a political commentator who toed his party's line:

> The "Old Comedy" must have been to the political world of that time, what certain newspapers and journals are to the political world of the present day – the channels through which the leaders of party make known such parts of their own policy, or that of their opponents, as they wish or think necessary to go forth to the public. Aristophanes must in this point of view have been an invaluable addition to the aristocratical or peace party.[41]

Aristophanes' references to peace are interpreted as support for a theorised 'aristocratical or peace party' led by Nicias.[42] Following Mitford, Mitchell asserts that Aristophanes was 'a man of rank' himself, although the lack of evidence for this assumption is acknowledged.[43]

Knights and *Acharnians* both lend themselves to Mitchell's reading of Aristophanes; by emphasising the correct points the scholar is able to interpret both as pro-aristocratic texts. He reads *Acharnians* as an anti-war play presenting 'a series of satires upon the young statesmen of the day, who were impatient for the continuance of the war'.[44] Curiously, Mitchell titles his translation of *Knights* as

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[41] Ibid. I.473n.

[42] Mitchell 1820: p.139.

[43] Mitchell 1836: I.229n.

[44] Mitchell 1820: 4.

'*Knights; or the Demagogues*', arguing that the original title's meaning has been obfuscated.[45] Yet in his new title, 'demagogues' refers not to the chorus but to the two competing slaves, and it is a loaded term. Mitchell emphasises the play's references to the Battle of Sphacteria and interprets the plot as being an allegory against lower-class demagoguery:

> Whatever objections might be made to the former demagogues, still they belonged, or had belonged, to the aristocracy of wealth, and to wealth, as Nicias well knew, habitually belong caution and timidity, excellent guarantees for public security. But a sausage-seller, a washer of intestines, a fellow earning a base subsistence out of pig's blood, and whose only earthly property was a knife, a ladle, and a chopping-block! "Merciful heaven," as the uplifted hands and eyes of Nicias signify, "what is next to befall this unhappy state, and where will this accursed movement end!"[46]

It is characteristic that Mitchell highlights Cleon's and the sausage-seller's low birth as a disqualification, but his reading can be supported by the text.

Mitchell reads the transformation of Demus at the end of the play as genuine and uncomplicated. Demus is now 'the glorious representative of the days of Marathon and Plataea, in a mask borrowed from one of those younger divinities,... reaching to the utmost altitude of heroic grandeur.'[47] The sausage-seller has been reformed too: 'He is now Agoracritus, prime minister of Athens, and, what is much

[45] Ibid. 135. He is following Wieland.

[46] Mitchell 1836: l.142n.

[47] Ibid. l.1282n.

better, a model on which few prime ministers might be ashamed to form themselves… Bravo, Monsieur the new demagogue!'[48] Mitchell both legitimises his ideal demagogue and permits a didactic reading of the text. The ultimate relationship between Agoracritus and Demus is not merely historical but should be emulated in contemporary society; the play's new prime minister is a 'model' for the ages.

Frogs is less political than *Knights* or *Acharnians* as a text, but Mitchell's commentary is not without political interpretation here either. In the scene following the *parabasis* (738-813), Aristophanes presents an hilarious portrait of Xanthias and (presumably) Aeacus discussing their masters' many flaws and revelling in their own. But as Hall has shown,[49] Mitchell interprets this in such a way as to minimise criticism of the masters and emphasise revulsion towards the slaves (whom he euphemistically terms 'lacqueys' [sic]):

> And do our two lacqueys hold a *dry* colloquy? Forbid it every feast of Bacchus, of which we ever heard! forbid it all the bonds which have tied lacqueyism together, since the world of *man* and *master* first began! A dry colloquy? Whence then the peculiar adjuration in the text, and all those confidential communications, which we shall presently have to encounter, communications rarely made but *post pocula*, or *inter pocula*?... We can admit here but one huge common flask, and two separate cups; Xanthias, of course, drinking thrice to Aeacus's once, and in a goblet, which had its

[48] Ibid. l.1267n.

[49] Hall 2007: 76f.

> depth equalled its breadth, the lank, spare partner in his potations might absolutely have floated in it.[50]

Needless to say, there is nothing in the text to actually suggest Xanthias and Aeacus are drinking, but Mitchell's assumptions ignore this.

It is in his *Wasps* that Mitchell shows the greatest amount of politically-motivated interference. He interprets the play as a diatribe against property confiscations, which he claims attacked the noble elite and allowed the state to gather money for raucous festivals to appease the masses.[51] Although Mitchell is concerned about the power common Athenians wielded in their political institutions, it is the democratic nature of Athenian jurisprudence which alarms him the most:

> The real power of the Athenian Demus, as he himself well knew, lay in the courts of law. There was his throne, and there his sceptre: there he found compliment, court, and adulation rained upon him so thick, that his imagination began at last to believe what his flatterers assured him, that he was a god, and not a man. And a god in some sense he was; for property and fortune, honour and infamy, life and death, were in his hands...[52]

Mitchell is sure to draw parallels between Athenian property confiscation and the horrors of the French Revolution.[53] Bdelycleon, who stands up against his juryman father, is interpreted 'as a single representative of that class of Athenian society,

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[50] Mitchell 1839: l.702n.

[51] See [Xenophon], *Constitution of Athens* 3.2.

[52] Mitchell 1835b: vi.

[53] Mitchell 1822 165f. quoting Mitford 1808b: 9.

whom the Chorus of the Equites represents in its united form'[54] – although of course if the son is a noble *eques*, then the father would have to be as well.

Mitchell's interpretation quickly comes up against an even greater problem. Aristophanes' *Wasps* can be split into two halves. In the first part, the juror Philocleon is cured of his addiction by his son, Bdelycleon. This narrative easily conforms to Mitchell's reading – the juror redeemed through his noble son. But in the second part, after the *parabasis*, Philocleon takes advantage of his new-found leisure and becomes degenerate, worse even than when he was a juror. The perceived moral lesson, 'Don't be an Athenian juror', is lost. In Mitchell's translation of *Wasps*, therefore, the scholar splits the play into these two separate halves, naming the first section *Wasps* and the second *The Dicast Turned Gentleman*. He claims, 'it is clear that this comedy ought to have ended immediately with these addresses of the CHORUS, or even before them. The action was complete; and whatever else is added must be a mere superfetation.'[55] But Aristophanic plays are *never* characterised by a strong plot unity, and this is the only play Mitchell splits into two. The new title he coins for his second half is also misleading – if the dicast does indeed become a gentleman (and note the loaded term), he does so only briefly before relapsing.

Mitchell's intervention is even more drastic in his commentary; here, he cuts the entire second half of the play, ending the text with the *parabasis*. Characteristically, he does not signal this deletion with a footnote; the sole allusion to it is an oblique comment in the introduction: 'That the action of the play is too far extended for modern ears, there can be little doubt: and it is therefore hoped, that the

[54] Mitchell 1835b: l.63n.

[55] Mitchell 1822: p.281.

curtailments here made will be less objected to.'[56] Any reader who only has access to Mitchell's edition would not notice this extraordinary editorial decision. Whether through isolating it or simply deleting it, then, Mitchell acts to minimise the concluding section of *Wasps*, allowing him to emphasise the part which conforms most easily to his reading of Old Comedy.

For most of the nineteenth century, Mitchell's texts were the main vehicles through which the schoolboys and university students who would go on to run the country read Aristophanes – they also, conveniently enough, happened to be handbooks for social and political conservatism. As one contemporary reviewer asked, do 'Mitchell, and those with whom he sides,... not press their case a little too hard?'[57] Mitchell is perfectly conscious of what he was doing; 'That the political opinions advanced in these productions would be unacceptable to some, the editor was well aware', he writes.[58] At the same time, he is also aware of Aristophanes' huge potential to influence his readers:

> Could language like [Aristophanes'] sink deep into the ears of solitary scholars, and have no corresponding effect on the minds of those to whom the flower of our youth is entrusted – that youth, who at some future day must have, or ought to have, the guidance of those by whom such language is held?[59]

[56] Mitchell 1835b: iii.

[57] Sandford 1835: 326.

[58] Mitchell 1835b: xiii.

[59] Mitchell 1941: p.16.

His unforgivingly partisan scholarship is intended to teach Aristophanes, but only the Aristophanes Mitchell believes in.

John Hookham Frere

We know that John Hookham Frere was familiar with Mitchell's translations because he reviewed the first volume for the *Quarterly Review* in 1820. A letter in his memoirs indicates that he received the second volume in 1824, along with Cary's *Birds*,[60] which he noted 'is much better than Mitchell's translations'.[61] The introduction to Frere's *Knights* also cites Mitchell's earlier version.[62] It is impossible to be certain that Frere was familiar with Mitchell's commentaries. In turn, it isn't clear whether Mitchell had read Frere's translations, although he quoted Frere's *Quarterly Review* article in his *Acharnians* commentary.[63]

Hookham Frere (1769-1846) was the son of a Tory MP and went to Eton, where he formed a close friendship with the future prime minister George Canning.[64] He then moved to Caius College, Cambridge, earning a BA in 1792 and an MA in 1795. He won a number of prizes for classical compositions in verse and prose and

[60] Bartle Frere 1874: 193.

[61] Ibid. 195.

[62] Hookham Frere 1874a: *Knights* l.65.

[63] Mitchell 1835a: l.73n.

[64] Bartle Frere 1874: 13. As 'foreign secretary from 1822, [Canning] allowed [British philhellenes] to raise money privately' in support of the Greek War of Independence whilst Britain was still formally neutral (Hanink 2017: 143).

became a fellow.[65] In 1796 he was elected Tory MP for West Looe in Cornwall (a 'rotten borough') and began work in the Foreign Office.[66] His first major foray into the literary world was as a writer for the *Anti-Jacobin*, a satirical periodical designed to combat republican sentiment stirred up by the French Revolution and edited by Canning. It was so popular that it was shut down after only eight months' publication, possibly at Prime Minister Pitt's personal intervention[67] – despite a limited circulation, it had offered a little too much satire from writers a little too close to the establishment.

Frere was sent as ambassador to Portugal in 1800,[68] then to Spain in 1802.[69] He lost his post in 1804 after failing to stop Spain joining the Napoleonic War and falling out with the Spanish prime minister. In 1808, Spain revolted against Napoleonic rule and Frere was re-appointed ambassador,[70] this time lasting only eight months before being relieved of duty again for interfering in military matters.[71] Feeling betrayed, he resolved to withdraw from public life despite being offered a seat in the House of Lords or another appointment in St Petersburg.[72] After his wife Lady Erroll caught a 'severe cold' whilst visiting the Elgin Marbles, Frere left England permanently in 1820, settling in Malta.[73]

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[65] Bartle Frere 1874: 18.

[66] Ibid. 20.

[67] Ibid. 40f.

[68] Ibid. 52.

[69] Ibid. 54.

[70] Ibid. 82.

[71] Ibid. 97; House of Commons Debate: Historical Hansard 24 February 1809 series 1 vol. 12.

[72] Bartle Frere 1874: 98.

[73] Ibid. 180-182.

It was after this political embarrassment that Frere turned to Aristophanes. He started translating the plays in 1817,[74] and 'during 1818-1819... devoted much of his time to the translations, by which, probably, rather than his original works, his rank among the poets of the present century will be determined.'[75] Although it would not be published for almost 20 years, *The Frogs* had been completed and some copies printed by 1824, and *Acharnians* was almost finished as well.[76] Frere continued working on Aristophanes slowly over the course of the next two decades, eventually producing complete versions of *Frogs*, *Acharnians*, *Knights* and *Birds*. In 1837, two London publishers declined to publish his translations[77] but he was encouraged to print them at the Government Printing Office of Malta,[78] a project finally completed in 1839 over twenty years after the translations were started. Further imprints were completed in 1840 in London. Frere maintained that this was a private print run, though the truth is more complicated. He produced a full 500 copies. Many of these he sent to friends and intellectuals, but he also sent 250 copies to booksellers across five universities,[79] and 160 were sent to a bookseller in Chancery Lane.[80] Although this still speaks to a small circulation, Frere's texts were by no means kept private.

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[74] Ibid. 179f.

[75] Ibid. 177.

[76] Ibid. 192. Frere was not happy with this original print run due to poor punctuation, but a copy surviving in the British Library archives indicates nothing but stylistic changes between this edition and later reprints.

[77] Ibid. 279.

[78] Ibid. 276.

[79] Ibid. 296.

[80] Ibid. 314.

The dissemination of Frere's text really begins with its extensive reprinting history, however, and for this reason his influence is felt more strongly in the second half of the nineteenth century than earlier. Frere's translations, including previously unpublished extracts from *Peace* produced late in his life, were included in a collected edition of his works produced posthumously in 1872, then reprinted in 1874; this was the first time the translations had been widely available to the public. Then in 1886, his *Acharnians*, *Knights* and *Birds* were printed in Sir John Lubbock's Hundred Books series; these same plays were printed in Morley's Universal Library series in 1886, 1887, 1890 and 1895, as only the third classical text of the series after Dryden's Virgil and Chapman's Homer. The Everyman's Library printed all four of Frere's plays in 1909, 1911, 1917, 1924 and 1949; The World's Classics series printed him in 1907, 1912 and 1928. There was even a copy of Frere's *Knights* printed in California in 1992, no doubt by publishers grateful to find a translation out of copyright. Across versions, this indicates that the text, although designed as a private work, had a public afterlife stretching into the twentieth century. What's more, although Frere originally circulated it only amongst his educated friends and the universities where they received their education, his text was latterly published repeatedly by book series designed to bring classic works of literature to everyday readers without such advantages, who did not know Aristophanes in the original Greek.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Frere's texts had even come to be associated with the performance of Aristophanes. In 1873, the Scottish engineering professor Henry Charles Fleeming Jenkin privately produced *The Frogs* in Edinburgh, and used Frere's translation – this was Aristophanes' 'earliest known British performance in the English language' rather than adaptation.[81] Editions of Frere's

[81] Hall 2007: 85.

texts were also produced for several of the Oxford and Cambridge Greek plays;[82] whilst the actors were speaking Greek, much of the audience would read along with Frere's English text. There was probably little overlap between the audience of an Oxbridge Greek play and the readership of the Everyman's Library series, yet Frere was a vehicle through which both constituencies received Aristophanes.[83]

Frere's translations are remarkable for their adoption of vernacular language and for their verse form, which by-and-large replicates the metre used in the original Greek as it was understood at the time.[84] He describes his own translation style as that of the 'Faithful Translator' (whereas Mitchell is apparently a 'Spirited Translator').[85] The Faithful Translator will utilise neutral language to avoid jarring the reader, replacing any local reference with a generalisation, whereas the Spirited Translator will always try and replace idiom with idiom. Frere acknowledges the difficulty of translating Aristophanes, 'encumbered with local and individual allusions' as he is,[86] in a 'faithful' manner – indeed, his translations are never completely free from idiom and he makes no attempt to suppress Aristophanes' many obscure allusions to his contemporaries. But for the most part, Frere's translation theory is applied and makes his editions engaging, timeless and easily comprehensible. He doesn't always feel required to stay as close as possible to the original Greek. For example, he replaces the difficult-to-translate word game at the start of *The Knights*:

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[82] Ibid. 85.

[83] For university productions, see Ch.7.

[84] For a history of Aristophanic metre and text, see Parker 1997: 94-119.

[85] Hookham Frere 1820: 481.

[86] Ibid. 484.

NIC: Now say “Let’s run”, like you’re wanking, gently at first, then “away”, and then close the gap.

DEM: Let’s run. Away. Let’s run. Let’s run away.

Aristophanes *Knights* 24-26.

With a similar, but distinct, word game in English:

Nic. Say “Let us” first; put the first letter to it,

And then the last, and then put E, R, T.

“Let us Az ert.” I say, “Let us Azert.”

’Tis now your turn – take the next letter to it.

Put B for A.

Dem. “Let us Bezert” I say–

Nic. ‘Tis now my turn– “Let us Cezert,” I say;

‘Tis now your turn.

Dem. “Let us Dezert,” I say.[87]

His ‘translation’ performs the same role as the Greek passage – Nicias still leads Demosthenes to consider deserting through wordplay – while picking up on none of Aristophanes’ language specifically. Yet it is not jarring, as an attempt to translate the Greek literally might be. (He also removes the reference to masturbation.) In *The Acharnians*, he ingeniously translates Pseudartabas’ name as ‘Shamartabas’,[88] and

[87] Hookham Frere 1874a: *Knights* ll.27-38.

[88] Ibid. *Acharnians* l.115.

translates the Theban's dialogue into 'a regional accent, which approximates Scots'.[89] Frere's vernacular translations are defined throughout by this sheer readability. The title page of *The Birds* even notes that his translation was 'intended to convey some notion of [the comedy's] effect as an acted play',[90] which implies consideration of how Aristophanes might be *re*-performed – as it was later in the century. Mitchell is only interested in the plays' *original* performance contexts.

However, like Mitchell, Frere is uneasy about Aristophanes' crassness, and takes the greatest liberties when translating his humour. Rarely, he will simply not translate a passage. He notes that *Frogs* 416-430 is 'not capable of translation' because it lampoons 'some of the characters of the State', but adds that it was 'accompanied by a great license of abuse and ribaldry'.[91] As he translates similarly localised passages elsewhere without complaint, we may assume that the 'abuse and ribaldry' is the real reason he leaves the lines untranslated. Frere does not always signal when he has left out a section from his translation, but he does so far more often than Mitchell. More usually, though, Frere simply disguises the rudeness of a passage through his translation. For example, to return to *Acharnians* 81f., Frere translates the lines as:

> [He had] Gone with his army to the Golden Mountains,
>
> To take his ease, and purge his royal person;
>
> There he remain'd eight months.[92]

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[89] Eastman 2015: 97.

[90] Hookham Frere 1874a: *Birds* p.145.

[91] Ibid. *Frogs* p.259.

[92] Ibid. *Acharnians* ll.101-103.

Just like Mitchell, he renders the meaning of the lines and even suggests at the scatological humour, but refuses to embrace it. Indeed, both translators render the obscenity 'κᾰχεζεν' as the sanitised 'purge'. Yet whilst Frere also blames Aristophanes' inappropriateness on 'the lower class' for whom he was writing, following Mitchell,[93] he is not as passionate in his censure. Rather, Frere goes to extraordinary lengths to explain away both the passages' inclusion in Aristophanes' plays and his own refusal to translate them fully, claiming that Aristophanes would be pleased to be rid of them: 'In discarding such passages..., the translator is merely doing that for his author, which he would willingly have done for himself.'[94] The (supposedly aristocratic) Aristophanes was ashamed of his own appeals to the lower classes. Reading Mitchell, one is routinely reminded of Aristophanes' and the Athenians' irredeemable wickedness. Reading Frere, one finds a patient but embarrassed apologist for Aristophanic crudity.

As I have stressed, there is nothing altogether surprising in Frere's and Mitchell's careful editing; nineteenth-century sensibilities often led to editorial censorship. We might compare the 'Family Shakespeare', editions of the Bard's plays produced by Henrietta and Thomas Bowdler from 1807 (whence we get the word Bowdlerisation).[95] These editions were similarly diligent in expunging 'defects' from the text 'which are of such a nature as to raise a blush on the cheek of modesty'.[96] Far from diminishing the popularity of Shakespeare, 'the Bowdler text was enormously successful and ran through at least twenty editions over the course of the

[93] Hookham Frere 1820: 491.

[94] Ibid. 491.

[95] See Murphy 2003: 344-354.

[96] Bowdler 1818: x.

nineteenth century', encouraging a range of rival textual editions of expurgated Shakespeare.[97]

Like Mitchell, Frere sees Aristophanes' plays as didactic. However, he suggests their educational purpose is well-disguised, perhaps in acknowledgement of the controversy surrounding this point:

> The object of the poetic and dramatic art is to instruct without offence; to give men hints of their faults and errors… but so, that neither the author nor the actor shall appear in the character of an accuser, or even of a monitor, which, among equals, is always odious.[98]

Frere does not deny poetry's power, of course. In his youth, he had written some fiery poetry of his own in the satirical anti-republican newspaper *Anti-Jacobin*, with acknowledged didactic intent. In one poem, Frere uses classical imagery to describe his verses as warriors:

> Oh! Come [Muse], with taste and virtue at thy side,
>
> With ardent zeal inflamed, and patriot pride;
>
> With keen poetic glance direct the blow,
>
> And empty all thy quiver on the foe: –
>
> No pause – no rest – till weltering on the ground
>
> The poisonous hydra lies, and pierced with many a wound.[99]

[97] Murphy 2003: 171.

[98] Hookham Frere 1820: 478

[99] Hookham Frere 1874b: *New Morality* ll.37-42.

And the biting nature of his verses elsewhere justifies this metaphor:

> To *London*, "the rich, the defenceless", she comes –
>
> Hark! my boys, to the sound of the Jacobin drums!
>
> See Corruption, Prescription, and Privilege fly,
>
> Pierced through by the glance of her blood-darting eye.
>
> While patriots, from prison and prejudice freed,
>
> In soft accents shall lisp the Republican creed,
>
> And with tricolor'ed fillets and cravats of green,
>
> Shall crowd round the altar of *Saint Guillotine*.[100]

Yet this is not the proactive, firebrand sort of poetry Frere assigns to Aristophanes. His translations never reach the fever-pitch of his youthful writings. If Mitchell's Aristophanes was a Tory firebrand, Frere's was no less political, and still Tory – just more subtle.

Frere's *Knights* is presented in just this vein. His Cleon is, like Mitchell's, a rogue, 'a fawning, obsequious slave, insolent and arrogant to all except his master, the terror of his fellow-servants'.[101] But there is no sustained assault against the demagogue in the metatext. Frere's loyalties are clearly with Nicias and Demosthenes, and he praises 'the blunt heartiness and good fellowship of the one,

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[100] Ibid. *La Sainte Guillotine* ll.9-16, written with George Canning.

[101] Hookham Frere 1874a: *Knights* p.67.

and the timid scrupulous piety of the other'.[102] Yet no reference is made to Mitchell's war and peace parties, and he acknowledges that the play light-heartedly burlesques these two noble politicians.[103] At the outset, Demus is negatively described as 'the John Bull of Athens, a testy, selfish, suspicious old man, a tyrant to his slaves',[104] and his transformation is drawn out more than in the original Greek to seem grander. Take, for instance, the chorus' greeting to the transformed Demus:

> χαῖρ' ὦ βασιλεῦ τῶν Ἑλλήνων: καί σοι ξυγχαίρομεν ἡμεῖς.
>
> τῆς γὰρ πόλεως ἄξια πράττεις καὶ τοῦ 'ν Μαραθῶνι τροπαίου.
>
> Aristophanes *Knights* 1333f.

Frere translates the passage as:

> We salute you, and greet you, and bid you rejoice:
>
> With unanimous heart, with unanimous voice,
>
> Our Sovereign Lord, in glory restored,
>
> Returning amongst us in royal array,
>
> Worthy the trophies of Marathon's day![105]

Two lines of Greek have been extended to five. The Greek 'χαῖρ'' is translated twice in 'we salute you, and greet you'. The Greek 'σοι ξυγχαίρομεν ἡμεῖς' is expanded to 'bid you rejoice:/With unanimous heart, with unanimous voice', the latter verse picking

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[102] Ibid. p.68.

[103] Ibid. p.68.

[104] Ibid. p.66.

[105] Ibid. *Knights* ll.1819-1823.

up on the prefix ‘σύν-’.[106] There is no translation of the Greek ‘τῆς γὰρ πόλεως ἄξια’, but verses 1821f. are original, and overflow with monarchical language; ‘Our sovereign Lord’, ‘royal array’. Certainly, then, Frere emphasises the transformation of Demus, as Mitchell had. However, Frere always has a tendency to over-translate the Greek. Elsewhere in the scene, Aristophanes uses similar language to describe the transformed Demus. So overall, whether in translation or in metatext, Frere allows the message of Aristophanes' *Knights* speak for itself, with little overbearing interpretative force deriving from the translation. Undoubtedly, Frere reads the play as an attack on Cleon, a harangue against demagoguery, and as somewhat favourable to Nicias and Demosthenes. But this reading, whilst not the only interpretation possible, is well-founded in the actual source-text and could be reached by *any* nineteenth-century reader engaging with the play. It's not controversial, and it does not require an understanding of Frere's own particular political views to contextualise.

In the *Acharnians*, Frere highlights the ‘independent spirit’ of Dicaeopolis,[107] and notes that the protagonist ‘wishes for a speedy peace’.[108] In this, he is ‘the Poet's dramatic representative’.[109] Yet Dicaeopolis isn't an oligarch or a monarchist, but simply ‘a humourous shrewd countryman (a sort of Athenian Sancho)’.[110] He in fact

[106] Frere has apparently not translated ‘σοι ξυγχαίρομεν ἡμεῖς’ correctly – it should be rendered ‘*we* rejoice *with you*’.

[107] Hookham Frere 1874a: *Acharnians* 5.

[108] Ibid. p.3.

[109] Ibid. p.15.

[110] Ibid. p.3.

has a ‘rustic republican spleen’.[111] Frere’s metatext certainly offers criticism of the Athenian Empire:

> The progressive aggrandizement of Athens had been marked, from the beginning, by the extortion and oppression practised (with a few honorable exceptions) by her military commanders… In process of time, as the inferior allied states became gradually subject to the more immediate dominion of Athens, they became exposed to the additional pest of professional informers and venal demagogues, subsisting or enriching themselves by extortion and bribery.[112]

He suggests that Dicaeopolis is just in wanting the war to end. But Frere makes no significant effort to co-opt Dicaeopolis as a Tory oligarch. With *Acharnians* as with *Knights*, his reading is uncontroversial and consistent with the source-text, even if it is not the only interpretation possible. There is no underlying praise for Sparta either, unlike in Mitchell. Again, then, Frere’s interventions are definitely political, but they tend to be much less significant than Mitchell’s, less old-fashioned and less partisan.

Given his politics, we might expect Frere’s *Birds* to discuss the inherent flaws of the democratic Athenian Empire at length – but it barely mentions Athens. Rather, Frere’s metatext focuses predominantly on Peisthetairus, whom he praises excessively:

> He is represented as the essential man of business and ability, the true political adventurer; the man who directs every thing and every body; who is never in the wrong, never at a loss, never satisfied with what has been

[111] Ibid. p.5.

[112] Ibid. p.31.

> done by others, uniformally successful in his operations. He maintains a constant ascendancy, or if he loses it for a moment, recovers it immediately.[113]

Frere's Peisthetairus is thus the ultimate politician, running rings around his colleagues Euelpides and the hoopoe. Even the aristocratic Neptune finds himself 'opposed to a politician infinitely his superior in resources and address'.[114] Of course, if Peisthetairus is unquestionably the hero of the piece, then the monarchy he sets up is likewise positive, and simply by removing any doubt about the protagonist's virtue Frere guides his reader to an uncomplicated reading of the play's eulogies for Cloudcuckooland's new king:

> O fortunate! O triumphant! O beyond
>
> All power of speech or thought, supremely blest,
>
> Prosperous happy Birds! – Behold your King,
>
> Here in his glorious palace! – Mark his entrance,
>
> Dazzling all eyes, resplendent as a Star…[115]

Frere thus makes Aristophanes demonstrate the benefits of monarchy. Yet once again, the intervention is not blatant – Frere shifts his readers' attention onto Peisthetairus, encouraging them to come to their own conclusions.

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[113] Hookham Frere 1874a: *Birds* p.147.

[114] Ibid. p.223f.

[115] Ibid. ll.2227-2231.

Frere may personally have empathised with Peisthetairus. The protagonist is, in Frere's view, 'an Athenian citizen, but disgusted with his own country'[116] – essentially a self-proclaimed exile. Likewise, Frere was a British citizen but retreated to Malta after his native land, and its politicians, disgraced him.

Curiously, it is the least overtly political of Frere's plays, *The Frogs*, where his intervention is the strongest. As he notes, the play's *parabasis* is the most sustained and earnest of all Aristophanes' political intercessions, and the clearest evidence in support of a serious interpretation of Greek comedy:

> The unusually vehement and earnest political remonstrances in the address of the Chorus… [provide] abundant reason to conclude that some part of the action of the stage must have been intended to be understood in a political sense.[117]

In a long note before this *parabasis*, Frere argues that Aristophanes sought Alcibiades' return from exile – not only in the *parabasis* but throughout the drama. Alcibiades was 'living in exile upon his own estate in Thrace, while [the Athenians] were struggling with difficulties from which his genius and abilities might have relieved them'.[118] Those who favoured his repatriation believed it would lead to 'success abroad and a Government at home partly Democratic and partly Dictatorial'[119]– essentially, it would produce a mixed constitution. Like Peisthetairus, Alcibiades seems to embody Frere's own outlook and experiences. However, this message

[116] Ibid. p.147.

[117] Hookham Frere 1874a: *Frogs* p.270.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid. p.271.

cannot easily be identified in the text. It certainly pleads for clemency on behalf of disenfranchised Athenians, but as Frere's own translation makes clear, it is talking about the supporters of Phrynichus:

> First [we propose] that all that were inveigled into Phrynichus's treason,
>
> Should be suffer'd and received by rules of evidence and reason
>
> To clear their conduct – Secondly, that none of our Athenian race
>
> Should live suspected and subjected to loss of franchise and disgrace...[120]

Phrynichus and Alcibiades were rivals, and the repatriation of Phrynichus' supporters would do little to achieve Alcibiades' reinstatement. It is true that the second proposition, that 'none of our Athenian race' should be exiled, could refer to Alcibiades, but without Frere's metatextual interpretation, neither the Greek nor Frere's translation makes such a reading obvious. Moreover, Frere's analysis reaches beyond the *parabasis*; he also argues that 'in the preceding scenes in the infernal regions, Xanthias is the representative of Alcibiades, and Bacchus of the Athenian people, and that the changes of character represent the changes in their political relation to each other.'[121] Such an extraordinary interpretation of Xanthias' character opposes 'the continuator of Brumoy',[122] Raoul-Rochette, who had argued that Xanthias' final scene after the *parabasis* was intended 'to critique the admission of foreigners and slaves to the rank of citizens' after Arginousai.[123] Frere prefers to

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[120] Ibid. ll.870-873.

[121] Ibid. p.270.

[122] ibid. p.271.

[123] Brumoy and Raoul-Rochette 1823: 166. We have already discussed Mitchell's reading of Xanthias as a drunken buffoon.

see Xanthias as a model of mixed constitutionalism. This substantial metatextual intervention is uncharacteristic, but it demonstrates Frere's desire to see Aristophanes read in a politically motivated way.

It is easy to see why Aristophanes was able to grip Frere's imagination over such a long period; Frere saw in the ancient Greek a reflection of his own values. Like his friend Canning, Frere was a Tory Reformist. At the same time, he was a literary figure and renowned wit admired by both Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott.[124] He embodied the same blend of politics and literature he saw in Aristophanes. Mitchell was also an outsider, driven from university because of his religious convictions, who likewise saw a kindred spirit in Aristophanes – although his Aristophanes is more overt, more partisan, even more conservative and less radical; a true oligarch, not a mixed constitutionalist. Yet Mitchell carefully distances himself from those aspects of Aristophanes he disagrees with, criticising the Greek poet for his impropriety, whilst Frere routinely apologises for Aristophanes' crudity.

Both interpret Aristophanes according to their own political outlooks, and both worked on Aristophanes' most political plays – *Acharnians*, *Knights*, *Birds*, *Wasps*. Neither produced a commentary or translation of the more anodyne and apolitical *Wealth*, which was the most popular Aristophanic comedy before the nineteenth century. Contemporary events, including the struggle towards democratic reform and the lasting repercussions of the French Revolution, colour the interpretations made by both. Yet Mitchell is far more prepared than Frere to bend Aristophanes to his agenda, as demonstrated by his editions of *Wasps* in particular.

[124] Bartle Frere 1874: 163; 233.

Frere's vernacular editions demonstrate a commitment to readability whilst seeking to preserve the metrical form of the original; though designed for well-educated readers, they became a vehicle for Aristophanes' working-class reception. Mitchell's texts, particularly his commentaries, were designed as classroom aides for the nobility. The Aristophanes each created was different, despite their similar outlooks. Perhaps it is fitting that Aristophanes, whose reputation has always been so questionable, was to be redeemed by two exiles on the fringes of the establishment. Regardless, the legacy of these translations and commentaries was significant; Mitford's claim of the aristocratic pseudo-Tory Aristophanes was actualised by Mitchell and Frere and so much informed the Victorian British reception of the poet that, for half a century, it would be almost impossible to interpret him in any other way. Nor could he still be dismissed as too insignificant, or too crude to approach at all. Aristophanes had returned from exile.

~3~

Swine before Pearls: Aristophanes at Play in Percy Shelley's *Swellfoot the Tyrant*

In a note on her husband's satirical tragedy *Oedipus Tyrannus; or Swellfoot the Tyrant* (1820), Mary Shelley explains how it came to be composed:

> A friend came to visit us… Shelley read to us his *Ode to Liberty*; and was riotously accompanied by the grunting of a quantity of pigs brought for sale to the fair. He compared it to the "chorus of frogs" in the satiric drama of Aristophanes…[1]

According to the story, Percy Shelley thus set about writing a 'satiric drama' of his own, with a pig chorus. *Swellfoot* was not widely read, and is not a polished work of literature, but it is valuable as a rare example of Aristophanic reception in literature, not scholarship, before the mid-nineteenth century. Formally, it is 'more a pantomimic satyr play than a tragedy, comedy or farce',[2] but Shelley weaves in countless allusions to ancient comedy, and it shares with Old Comedy a biting, topical humour. 'Shelley immersed himself in the drama of Aristophanes during June and July of 1818', whilst

[1] Shelley 1919: *Swellfoot* p.404.

[2] Morton 2009: 279. Erkelens argues that *Swellfoot* follows the same functional structure as Old Comedy and is therefore a reception of both content and form (1996). However, he couples a misunderstanding of Aristophanes with a convoluted misreading of Shelley, and the result is not persuasive.

working on a translation of Plato's *Symposium*, and had also read A.W. Schlegel.[3]

Most importantly, *Swellfoot* is truly radical, and therefore represents a unique reception of Aristophanes in a liberal, class-sensitive voice at a time when he was invariably read as aristocratic. As we have seen, the early-nineteenth-century Aristophanes was read through the filter of Tory academics and translators such as Mitford, Frere and Mitchell; the latter published his first collection of Aristophanes plays in the same year as *Swellfoot the Tyrant*. Aristophanes would not be adopted so firmly again by anyone so far to the left for many decades. This chapter explores how Shelley utilises Aristophanes, along with other classical texts, to underline his political point. Scholarship on this play has heretofore tended to ignore or take for granted the Aristophanic receptions at work in this often marginalised text, and classicists have neglected the play almost entirely. Shelley's classical allusions have not yet been properly evaluated or contextualised.

Shelley was writing at a time of unprecedented social upheaval. The regency and later reign of George IV saw a series of measures being put in place by the Earl of Liverpool's Tory government, intended to prevent the French Revolution's seeds being sown on British soil. In actual fact, the Corn Laws, national debt, foreign wars and the subjugation of Irish Catholics merely created a powder-keg of dissatisfaction that would climax, but not resolve itself, in the Peterloo Massacre of 1819. Shelley believed that 'there was no escaping the struggle for reform, and no escaping the likelihood of an insurrection arising from such a struggle.'[4] His writings overflow with revolutionary sentiments:

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[3] Tetreault 1987: 161.

[4] Foot 1980: 190.

VIII

Last came Anarchy: he rode

On a white horse, splashed with blood;

He was pale even to the lips,

Like Death in the Apocalypse.

IX

And he wore a kingly crown;

And in his grasp a sceptre shone;

On his brow this mark I saw –

‘I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW!’

X

With a pace stately and fast,

Over English land he passed.

Trampling to a mire of blood

The adoring multitude.[5]

Or again, from the *Ode to Liberty* which, according to Mary Shelley, he was reading

[5] Shelley 1919: *Mask of Anarchy* 30-41. The poem was ‘*written on the occasion of the massacre at Manchester*’ (the Peterloo Massacre, p.335).

as inspiration for *Swellfoot* struck:

Oh, that the free would stamp the impious name

Of KING into the dust! or write it there,

So that this blot upon the page of fame

Were as a serpent's path, which the light air

Erases, and the flat sands close behind!

Ye the oracle have heard:

Lift the victory-flashing sword...[6]

These republican sentiments are unapologetic and violent. Shelley's rhetoric is never merely theoretical; he longed for the people to 'lift the victory-flashing sword' and fight for their liberty:

Rise like Lions after slumber

In unvanquishable number,

Shake your chains to earth like dew

Which in sleep had fallen on you –

Ye are many – they are few.[7]

Despite the complex language, Shelley's poetry was addressed to the working

[6] Ibid.: *Ode to Liberty* 211-217.

[7] Ibid.: *Mask of Anarchy* 151-155 = 368-372.

classes, offering a rallying call for reform through revolution.

Although Shelley has continued to be important for socialist thinkers,[8] Paul Foot does not ascribe his philosophy to any sort of proto-Marxism:

> Shelley was a socialist only in the broad sense that he advocated a co-operative society. In the specific sense in which socialism means anything at all – the ownership and planning of society's resources by its working people – Shelley was not a socialist. Shelley was a leveller.[9]

Nevertheless, the poet's radical philosophy went further than practically any other contemporary literary figure. This is all the more remarkable given his privileged upbringing as the son of a baronet and Whig MP, not to mention his lingering reputation as 'merely' a Romantic lyric poet.

Like other Romantics of the period, Shelley also drew on classics in his work. Greece held a particular fascination, although he never travelled past Italy.[10] He translated Homeric hymns, lyric and bucolic poetry, Plato and *The Cyclops*,[11] and the ancient world provided an aesthetic stimulus for his own lyricism:

> Within the circuit of this pendent orb
>
> There lies an antique region, on which fell

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[8] Jeremy Corbyn quoted *Mask of Anarchy* when he appeared at Glastonbury in June 2017 for example, and the 2017 Labour election slogan, 'For the many, not the few', is modernised Shelley.

[9] Foot 1980: 96.

[10] Webb 1977: 191.

[11] For a discussion of his curious translation choices, see Webb 1976: 51-89.

The dews of thought in the world's golden dawn

Earliest and most benign, and from it sprung

Temples and cities and immortal forms

And harmonies of wisdom and of song,

And thoughts, and deeds worthy of thoughts so far.

And when the winter of its glory came,

The winds that stripped it bare blew on and swept

That dew into the utmost wildernesses

In wandering clouds of sunny rain that thawed

The unmaternal bosom of the North.[12]

To him, then, Greece (the 'antique region') not only shone like the sun but subsequently 'thawed' Northern hearts, allowing them to experience and generate 'harmonies of wisdom and song' themselves from Greece's borrowed light. Yet his interest in Greece was not exclusively aesthetic; 'he also looked towards Greece as a political model, an intimation of the ideal society.'[13] *Prometheus Unbound*, perhaps his greatest work and a response to the Greek tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, is full of powerful Romantic imagery, but it is also a political call-to-arms. *Hellas*, this time an adaptation of Aeschylus' *Persians*, is a paean to liberty in response to the early stages

[12] Shelley 1919: *Prologue to Hellas* 31-43.

[13] Webb 1977: 196.

of the Greek War of Independence, the dream of liberty for modern Greece being expressly defined as a revival of ancient Greece:

The world's great age begins anew,
  The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew
  Her winter weeds outworn:
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam,
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.[14]

'Anew', 'return', 'renew'; all words highlighting Greece's renascence, all placed emphatically at line-end. In Shelley's *Ode to Liberty*, written in response to the 1820 revolution in Spain and published alongside *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley describes Liberty as passing from Athens to Rome, then lying asleep for a thousand years until awakened by Spain. ('England yet sleeps', he notes.[15]) Shelley's praise of Athens mixes aesthetics with political sentiment:

Athens arose: a city such as vision
  Builds from the purple crags and silver towers
Of battlemented cloud, as in derision

[14] Shelley 1919: *Hellas* 1060-1065.

[15] Ibid.: *Ode to Liberty* 181.

Of kingliest masonry...[16]

Athenian architecture is mystically beautiful, but it is also full of republican ‘derision’ of the masonry of mere kings. So Shelley saw Greece, and Athens particularly, as a beacon for liberty and republicanism. This is a class-conscious classicism determined to find inspiration for a more equal society in antiquity. Little wonder that he responded to Aristophanes, the most political Athenian poet.

Swellfoot the Tyrant was written in the autumn of 1820, then sent to London for publication. However, ‘on a threat of prosecution the publisher surrendered the whole impression, seven copies – the total number sold – excepted.’[17] The advertisement of the play describes it as being ‘translated from the original Doric’ – supposedly, it was written by ‘some *learned Theban*’.[18] This mock-serious claim of antiquity is not wholly positive, since (besides Pindar) the Thebans were not known for their literature. Indeed, Shelley states that his work lacks ‘*Attic salt*’ and is thus marked by ‘dulness’ [sic].[19] *Swellfoot* has a chorus of pigs, and Pindar cites the insult ‘Βοιωτίαν ὗν’ (‘Boeotian pig’, Pindar *O*.6.90) as an old rebuke. The play itself has indeed long been considered a failure. Mary Shelley asked that it ‘not be judged for more than was meant. It is a mere plaything of the imagination’.[20] More recent reception continues to find it a ‘rather repellent satire’, even whilst noting its

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[16] Ibid. 61-64.

[17] Ibid. *Swellfoot* p.384.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid. p.405.

significance as ‘another Shelleyan experiment in dramatic form’.[21] But the play is *supposed* to be unrelentingly repugnant, because it satirises a system that Shelley detested. If nothing else, *Swellfoot* demonstrates Shelley’s diversity.

The play lampoons the ‘Queen Caroline Affair’, the messy series of events surrounding George IV’s attempts to divorce his wife which culminated in her being barred from his coronation by soldiers and then tried for adultery in the House of Lords. Still reeling from the Peterloo Massacre, the public came overwhelmingly to their queen’s defence, although Shelley’s letters indicate that he was personally not enamoured of her:

> How can the English endure the mountains of cant which are cast upon them about this vulgar cook-maid they call a Queen? It is scarcely less disgusting than the tyranny of her husband, who, on his side, uses a battery of the same cant. It is really time for the English to wean themselves from this nonsense, for really their situation is too momentous to justify them in attending to Punch and his Wife.[22]

Shelley’s letters indicate his lack of interest in the scandal; he bemoaned ‘what silly stuff is this to employ a great nation about.’[23] But like many liberals, he seized the opportunity to mock and undermine George wherever oppressive laws and the censor would allow. ‘The queen gave the London radicals a cause which allowed them back on the streets with a dazzling display of pro-queen, anti-king political theater. She

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[21] Tetreault 1987: 159.

[22] Shelley to John and Maria Gisborne, 30 June 1820, Jones 1964: 207.

[23] Ibid. 220.

provided a shield behind which to defy and confront authority in relative safety'.[24] Satirical accounts of the Queen Caroline Affair in newspapers, pamphlets and cartoons in fact frequently adopted the metaphor of theatre, presenting parodic 'scenes' or imagining the House of Lords as a kind of stage;[25] Shelley's play makes use of this pre-existing iconography.

The play is most subversive because it lampoons real, contemporary politicians. Swellfoot is a transparent caricature of George IV; Iona Taurina stands for Queen Caroline. White notes that 'Purganax is Lord Castlereagh; Laoctonos, Wellington; and Dakry, Lord Eldon',[26] whilst 'there can be small doubt that Mammon is Liverpool.'[27] These were all leading political figures, Lord Liverpool being Prime Minister and Castlereagh being infamous for his heavy-handed suppression of dissent. White has also persuasively argued that the leech, gadfly and rat represent John Leach, William Cooke and Thomas Henry Browne, members of the 'Milan Commission', set up by George to collect evidence of his wife's adultery.[28] Each character thus represents the status quo and the suppression of the working class along with their unlikely champion-queen. Shelley's revolutionary liberalism stood in stark opposition to these men, and his politics are evident; he is determined to lampoon them as much as possible. 'Britain, Shelley felt, was on the verge of a violent revolution that could only be avoided if the government allowed the reform of

[24] Laqueur 1982: 421.

[25] Ibid. 448f.

[26] White 1921: 340.

[27] Ibid. 341.

[28] Ibid. 343f.

parliament.'[29] These were the people standing in his way.

This use of personal caricature is part of the play's specifically Aristophanic force; Old Comedy abounds with examples of real-life politicians and public figures travestied on-stage, whether directly named (Socrates in *Clouds*, Euripides in *Frogs* and *Thesmophoriazusae*) or thinly veiled (the Paphlagonian as Cleon in *Knights*). Of course, there was already a long history of personal satire in the British comic tradition. Although Shelley uses Aristophanes for a more radical political purpose than any previous author, we saw earlier how both Henry Fielding and Samuel Foote defined themselves as Aristophanic specifically because of their use of personalised satire.[30]

Swellfoot the Tyrant's name is an amusingly literal translation of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Oedipus was called 'swollen foot' because he was fettered by the ankles when exposed as a baby (Soph. *OT*. 1036), but translating his name into the bathetic English 'Swellfoot' robs him of his status as a classical figure whilst highlighting his physical imperfection. Mammon's name comes from the New Testament, which teaches that 'ye cannot serve God and mammon [wealth]' (Matthew 6:24 KJV) – the Greek word is 'μαμμωνᾶ'. This religious name is fitting for the 'Arch-Priest of Famine', emphasising Liverpool's perceived greed. Purganax means something like 'Lord of Towers' in Greek. The 'miles gloriosus' in Plautus' so-titled play has the rather grand name of Pyrgopolinices; this boastful soldier is the descendant of Aristophanes' caricatured Lamachus from *Acharnians*. The name thus captures Castlereagh's vainglory. Dakry's name is a transliteration of the Greek word 'δάκρυ', the poetic form

[29] Duffy 2005: 149.

[30] On the reception of Aristophanic personal satire, see Piana 2005: 29-39.

of ‘δάκρυον’, which means teardrop – fitting for a character who weeps so much. In the *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus advises Io that:

> To bemoan and bewail fate,
>
> Where you are likely to win a tear
>
> From those listening, is worth the effort.
>
> ([Aesch.] *PB*. 637-639)

In *Swellfoot*, Dakry has taken this rather mercantile advice to heart. And Laoctonos' name means ‘People-Slayer’. It is essentially the same as Laodamas, ‘People-Subduer’, who is one of the suitors in the *Odyssey*. Aeschylus uses it as an epithet for Ares at *Seven* 343f.:

> And raging people-subduer
>
> Ares storms, defiling reverence.

Wellington led the war against a revolutionary France Shelley largely supported, and in doing so killed many republicans, so this name is fitting as well.

Iona Taurina's name combines the mythological Io with a feminised form of *taurus*, the Latin word for bull. Zeus raped Io before transforming her into a cow to protect her from Hera. Greek mythology often dwelt on human-bovine mating – Europa was also raped by Zeus-as-bull, and Pasiphae had sex with a bull and conceived the Minotaur. Thus, Iona Taurina's name connects her with sexually transgressive women from Greek myth (although only Pasiphae is actively transgressive, even then under Poseidon's influence). There are references throughout the play to Iona riding bulls, recalling Europa's riding of Zeus across the

sea (in all that myth's euphemistic glory). Moreover, this bovine Caroline, the supposed champion of the people, is surrogate for the more typical John Bull, the emblematic representation of the 'ordinary' Englishman. Iona Taurina's name also recalls the eponymous heroine of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Taurica*, the heroine victimised by tyrannical kings in both Greece and Crimea. 'In the seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries... the ancient drama was incessantly adapted as a stage play, opera, or ballet',[31] most notably by Gluck (*Iphigénie en Tauride*, 1779) and Goethe (*Iphigenie auf Tauris*, 1779).

Swellfoot's chorus is made up of 'the swinish multitude';[32] they are pigs. As we have noted, Mary Shelley compared them to Aristophanes' '"chorus of frogs"', and they were apparently inspired 'by the grunting of a quantity of pigs' outside their Italian villa.[33] Yet there is an additional explanation for Shelley's choice of a porcine chorus. In his 1790 account of the French Revolution, Edmund Burke warns of the danger of educating the lower classes (and he is not just talking about France): 'Along with its natural protectors and guardians [the nobility and the clergy], learning will be cast into the mire, and trodden down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude.'[34] The phrase 'swinish multitude' 'had acquired an incredible notoriety among English radicals and reformers' by 1820, and was parodied in a number of left-wing pamphlets and articles from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[35] Campbell suggests one article in particular may have influenced Shelley – Richard Porson's satirical dialogue,

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[31] Hall 2013: 2.

[32] Shelley 1919: *Swellfoot* p.385.

[33] Ibid. p.404.

[34] Burke 1790: 117.

[35] Bartel 1969: 4.

‘A New Catechism’,[36] first published in 1792 two years after Burke penned his unfortunate phrase, but republished in *The Examiner* in 1818.[37] The dialogue stages an interview between a pig and an unnamed interlocutor; the pig vicariously represents the Burkean ‘swinish multitude’ of the working classes. *Swellfoot* and ‘A New Catechism’ share many themes – famine, poverty and the failure of the political classes; Campbell even picks up on some instances of parallel phrasing.[38] Shelley asked his friend Thomas Love Peacock to forward *The Examiner* to him in Italy only the month before ‘A New Catechism’ was republished.[39]

Pigs were emblematic of crassness in ancient Greece too. We have already discussed Pindar’s Boeotian swine; [Plutarch]’s *Gryllus*, in parody of a Socratic dialogue, sets up the wily Odysseus against Gryllus, one of Circe’s transformed pigs, the joke being that the swine is cultured, intelligent, and wants to remain an animal. This travesty works by inverting the usual expectation that pigs are, as it were, boorish; Porson’s ‘New Catechism’ shares its dialogue form with *Gryllus*, even if it corrects [Plutarch]’s topsyturvydom by making the lot of pigs unbearable once more.

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[36] Campbell 1915.

[37] Clarke 1937: 42; Porson 1818. Porson was a classical scholar and sometime humorist; ‘he had written indiscreet political articles for the *Morning Chronicle* during the latter years of his life’ (Campbell 1915: 163) and ‘at times alarmed his friends by expressing violent sentiments’ (Clarke 1937: 42). He died in 1808. Porson’s commentary on Aristophanes was published posthumously in 1820; see Stray 2018: 88, 94f.

[38] Campbell 1915: 163.

[39] Shelley to Peacock, 5 June 1818, Brett-Smith 1909: 129; see Shelley to Peacock, 21 September 1819, ibid. 200. In the same letter, he also asked Peacock to send him a book belonging to Hookham Frere! For Peacock’s reception of *Swellfoot*, see below.

In Old Comedy, Aristophanes attacks Cleon for his 'ὑομουσίας' ('pig-music') at *Knights* 986; *Peace* 928 swipes at 'Θεογένους ὑηνία' ('Theogenes' swinishness'). These pig words are both Aristophanic coinages. Burke's swinish multitude has a biblical pedigree, too. Matthew 7:6 advises not to give 'that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.' Thence the expression 'pearls before swine', used to mean wasting something precious on people too base to appreciate it. Like 'swinish multitude', the expression was instrumentalised by conservatives and classicists after Burke's polemic to argue against enfranchising and educating the working classes.[40]

Swellfoot's pig-chorus, meanwhile, specifically recalls Aristophanes' *Peace* 303-315, where the chorus of peasants briefly pretend to be metamorphosed by Circe into swine. Cario's role as Circe 'charming and defiling' the chorus (310) and calling them to 'follow mother, piggies' (315) mirrors Iona's role as the entrancing leader of pigs in *Swellfoot*.

Acharnians 729-835 provides another model. A starving Megarian dresses his two daughters up as piglets to sell them to Dicaeopolis. The Greek word for piglet, 'χοῖρος', was also a euphemism for the vagina, allowing Aristophanes to play with scarcely-disguised sexual innuendo. The Megarians are all starving, like the pig-chorus in *Swellfoot*, and their pig noises ('κοΐ κοΐ', 780, 800-803) mirror the sounds made by the chorus in Shelley's play (Eigh! Eigh! Eigh! Eigh!/.../Aigh! Aigh! Aigh!).[41] However, in *Swellfoot*, Shelley overlooks the sexual innuendo (which doesn't translate anyway) and carries the pig metaphor further. There is never any fear of

[40] Hall 2015.

[41] Shelley 1919: *Swellfoot* I.I.17, 19.

Dicaeopolis eating the Megarians, because 'the masquerade is not supposed to fool anybody…; its purpose is to introduce comic obscenity'.[42] The women *are* under threat, but of sexual abuse, not murder. Shelley's pigs are not travesties, but fully-metamorphosed pigs, who are constantly under threat of being eaten even as they starve. The theme of cannibalism is ever-present throughout *Swellfoot*.

As political, not sexual, swine, then, his chorus do not need to fear sexual abuse – they need to fear butchery. In this sense, there is a parallel between Swellfoot and Peisistratos from the *Birds*, who roasts and seasons 'some birds risen up against democratic birds' onstage (1583f.). Both men exert control over their subjects through threatened or actual cannibalism. As Komornicka implies, the animal characters of *Birds*, particularly those characters who are transformed from men into birds, fall somewhere between the travesty of *Acharnians* and *Swellfoot*'s full metamorphosis.[43] It is easier for Shelley to present his chorus as actual, fully-metamorphosed pigs, because he doesn't have to worry about staging and costume.

Swellfoot was never performed and was not intended for performance, yet some scholars have noted aspects which would make it suitable for staging. Mulhallen, for example, argues that 'the stage directions are detailed, the characters are written as impersonations offering great scope for comic performance, and the structure and style draw on plays oriented primarily on highly skilled and very successful performance'.[44] But it also includes abundant effects that would have been difficult to replicate on stage, including human-animal hybrid characters and several

[42] Komornicka 2013: 229.

[43] Ibid. 229f.

[44] Mulhallen 2010: 210.

transformations between different creatures. Early-nineteenth-century attitudes towards the theatre meant that unperformed drama was more highly valued than staged plays, and such an overtly political play would never have passed the theatre censor. This does not mean that the text is not in some sense performative; performances are merely limited to the readers' imagination.

The play opens with a parody of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Visually, the '*Boars, Sows, and Sucking-Pigs, crowned with thistle, shamrock, and oak, sitting on the steps, and clinging round the Altar of the Temple*'[45] mirror the suppliants onstage at the start of *OT*. Swellfoot enters in regalia and delivers a self-aggrandising speech, singing a hymn to the she-god Famine for his 'layers of fat'.[46] He then discusses the famine with the chorus, replicating Oedipus but showing far less concern. In *OT*, the chorus complain of the plague afflicting their 'grazing herds' (26), but in *Swellfoot*, the bulls have become pigs, the pigs the chorus itself. Thus, their laments are more personal. After the chorus has described their plight, however, the *OT* model is abandoned; instead of agreeing to help, Swellfoot interprets their laments as 'sedition, and rank blasphemy!'[47] He calls on some Jews to:

Kill them out of the way,

… and let me hear

Their everlasting grunts and whines no more![48]

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[45] Shelley 1919: *Swellfoot* I.I.1.

[46] Ibid. I.I.6.

[47] Ibid. I.I.67.

[48] Ibid. I.I.93-95.

His order's cruelty is underlined by the pigs' malnutrition – they can't even provide him with meat – and his abhorrent use of Jewish pork-butchers. Oedipus' attempts to cure the curse afflicting Thebes were ill-conceived and destructive, but at least he tried to help. Swellfoot would rather kill and eat his subjects for complaining.

Once Swellfoot has left the stage, '*driving in the SWINE*',[49] Mammon and Purganax enter. In an ancient drama, we would expect our focus to remain on a single protagonist – in Old Comedy an ordinary citizen rather than a king. Likewise, the chorus wouldn't usually leave the stage once they had entered. Shelley, however, disregards these conventions.

Purganax is pessimistic, bemoaning that 'the future looks as black as death, a cloud,/Dark as the frown of Hell, hangs over it'.[50] He declares that 'there's something rotten in us',[51] echoing the famous line from *Hamlet*, 'something is rotten in the state of Denmark'.[52] He has been terrified by an oracle, issued by Mammon, that declares:

> 'Boeotia, choose reform or civil war!
>
> When through the streets, instead of hare with dogs,
>
> A Consort Queen shall hunt a King with Hogs,
>
> Riding on the Ionian Minotaur.'[53]

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[49] Ibid. I.I.96.

[50] Ibid. I.I.96f.

[51] Ibid. I.I.99.

[52] *Hamlet* 1.4.90.

[53] Shelley 1919: *Swellfoot* I.I.113-116.

Although the preceding *OT* parody, with its paunchy king and starving citizens, was certainly relevant, this is Shelley's first overt reference to contemporary affairs. Queen Caroline is unmistakably meant to be the 'Consort Queen'; the sexual imagery of 'riding on the Ionian Minotaur' is unambiguous. At the turn of the nineteenth century, all Europe was facing the decision to 'choose reform or civil war'. Meanwhile, the discussion of oracles, held by two thinly-veiled parodies of contemporary politicians, recalls the two slaves from *Knights* who almost certainly represent Demosthenes and Nicias (*Hypothesis* to *Knights* II.21f.). Iona's unconventional steed may derive from Trygaeus' dung-beetle, on which he flies to Olympus in Aristophanes' *Peace* (80ff.). Although not a mythical creature like the minotaur, Trygaeus does refer to it as his 'Πηγάσειον', his 'little Pegasus' (76).

Mammon is concerned that Queen Iona, Swellfoot's wife, will follow after 'the chaste Pasiphae'[54] in consorting with a minotaur. 'It is Iona's transgressive [sexual] status that threatens the stability of Swellfoot's reign',[55] because it is popular with the working classes:

> And these dull Swine of Thebes boast their descent
>
> From the free Minotaur. You know they still
>
> Call themselves Bulls, though thus degenerate,
>
> And everything relating to a Bull

[54] Ibid. I.I.136.

[55] Gladden 2001: 11.

Is popular and respectable in Thebes.[56]

This is the first of many puns on John Bull, the quintessential Englishman, present in the play, and it sets up an ongoing tension. The chorus, who represent the working class, are common, 'degenerate' swine, but with the potential to be mighty bulls. John Bull had also appeared as a character in Francis Wrangham's *Reform: A Farce, Modernised from Aristophanes* written in 1792, though this Aristophanic satire parodically critiqued reform rather than advocating it.[57]

Purganax has employed 'a LEECH, a GADFLY, and a RAT' to prevent Iona's union with the minotaur.[58] The rat 'can crawl in and out/Of any narrow chink and filthy hole';[59] Purganax wants him to collect evidence, but Mammon is distressed by the double meaning of 'chink' and 'hole', both of which might imply the queen's vagina. The leech is to suck out the queen's blood. Continuing the bovine imagery, 'the Gadfly was the same which Juno sent/To agitate Io'[60] and is similarly to drive forth Iona. This gadfly is mentioned in [Aeschylus'] *Prometheus Bound*, and Shelley makes the reference clear with a footnote. In the *PB,* the gadfly is Hera's punishment for Io's sexual 'transgression', although Io's only fault is to be passively pursued by Zeus; in *Swellfoot*, Shelley reassigns the punishment to the actively transgressive Iona. The creatures' evidence proves important throughout the rest of the play. All the same, Mammon is not entirely settled, still fearing 'the Swinish multitude' and their calls for

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[56] Shelley 1919: *Swellfoot* I.I.139-143.

[57] Hall 2007: 75.

[58] Shelley 1919: *Swellfoot* I.I.151.

[59] Ibid. I.I.178f.

[60] Ibid. I.I.152f.

reform.[61]

At that moment, the gadfly, leech and rat enter, announcing that Iona 'is here in her car,/From afar, and afar'.[62] They have driven her around the world and back again. Their dialogue rhymes and has a sing-song quality:

> *Gadfly*: Hum! Hum! Hum!
>
> From the lakes of the Alps, and the cold gray scalps
>
> Of the mountains, I come![63]

Iona's return is hailed by the chorus of swine, from offstage. They happily predict that 'will be no longer Swine,/But Bulls'.[64] Swellfoot, however, enters and expresses his dismay at his wife's return, ordering Purganax to behead her.[65] The contemporary parallel to the events surrounding George's coronation is unmistakeable.

Purganax conceives a plan to get Caroline tried by a jury of pigs, a conceit recalling the trial at *Wasps* 805-1008, which involves a dog prosecutor and defendant, and a cheese-grater as chief witness. Bdelycleon fixes this trial, and similarly Purganax proposes that, by 'fattening some few in two separate sties',[66] he may buy the jury's loyalty with various tawdry items:

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[61] Ibid. I.I.194.

[62] Ibid. I.I.248f.

[63] Ibid. I.I.220-222.

[64] Ibid. I.I.273f.

[65] Ibid. I.I.294.

[66] Ibid. I.I.296.

… when

They are persuaded, that by the inherent virtue

Of these things, they are all imperial Pigs,

Good Lord! They'd rip each other's bellies up,

Not to say, help us in destroying [Iona].[67]

Caroline was tried by Parliament, so the 'two separate sties' referred to must be the Whig and Tory Parties; Purganax satirically criticises Britain's corrupt political classes, indicating that the Reformist Whigs are as bad as the patrician Tories. The general Laoctonos enters and informs the king that Iona has been carried off 'to the public sty';[68] Dakry meanwhile describes a speech he delivered to the swine:

Of delicacy, mercy, judgement, law

Morals, and precedents, and purity,

Adultery, destitution, and divorce,

Piety, faith, and state necessity,

And how I loved the Queen! – and then I wept

With the pathos of my own eloquence,

And every tear turned to a mill-stone, which

[67] Ibid. I.I.302-306.

[68] Ibid. I.I.319.

Brained many a gaping Pig, and there was made

A slough of blood and brains upon the place,

Greased with the pounded bacon…[69]

What starts as a speech which seems patronising and false, if intended to comfort, turns into a grotesque slaughter when Dakry's crocodile tears butcher the gathered masses. There is something particularly vile in a man led to weep 'with the pathos of [his] own eloquence.' Shelley uses the same metaphor of tears as millstones when attacking Eldon in *The Mask of Anarchy*:

Next came Fraud, and he had on,

Like Eldon, an ermined gown;

His big tears, for he wept well,

Turned to mill-stones as they fell.[70]

Mammon now enters, holding aloof a green bag – in it, he says:

The Gadfly's venom, fifty times distilled,

Is mingled with the vomit of the Leech,

In due proportion, and black ratsbane…[71]

Full of such evils, it is reminiscent of Pandora's jar. It is also another glaring

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[69] Ibid. I.I.328-337.

[70] Ibid. *Mask of Anarchy* 14-17.

[71] Ibid. *Swellfoot* I.I.352-354.

contemporary allusion. 'Evidence collected by spies who followed Caroline during her travels was brought before the committee [set up to try her] in a *green bag*, a commonly used container for legal documents.'[72] Laqueur notes that the green bag:

> became the symbol of all that was rotten about the whole case… The bag was used with great virtuosity in demonstrations and in print. Cartoons showed cabinet ministers scooping up John Bull's excrement from the field for the "green bag"; the bag was labelled "foul cloths" or "foul lies" in scores of popular prints; imps and devils and putrid vapors escaped from it and fluttered around the government's council. It was shown immersed in urinals with Italian witnesses popping out, or as bags of rotten grain with the witnesses inside and ministers as rats gnawing at the tatters...[73]

Shelley is again engaging with pre-established satirical iconography. Mammon explains that the poison inside can 'turn innocence to guilt, and gentlest looks/To savage, foul and fierce deformity'.[74] Despite this, Mammon proposes a deceit:

> We must entice
>
> Her Majesty from the sty, and make the Pigs
>
> Believe that the contents of the GREEN BAG
>
> Are the true test of guilt or innocence.

---

[72] Erkelens 1996: 508.

[73] Laqueur 1982: 436.

[74] Shelley 1919: *Swellfoot* I.I.363f.

…

If innocent, she will become transfigured

Into an angel...[75]

Iona's guilt or innocence is not to be decided by the bag at all. Despite Mammon's lie, she will be poisoned by the contents of the bag either way. This is a key point. Ultimately, Shelley isn't interested in whether Caroline was an adulteress, although he certainly implies that she was. He portrays her trial as fixed to criticise the very act of trying her in the first place. This position is developed further throughout the second act of the play.

The first act's setting is described as '*a magnificent Temple, built of thigh-bones and death's heads, and tiled with scalps.*' This recalls the altar to Artemis in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Tauris*, which was similarly decorated with 'τῶν κατθανόντων γ' ἀκροθίνια ξένων' ('offerings/scalps of dead strangers', *IT* 75). As we have noted, *IT* was popular at the time and is echoed in Iona's name. Shelley's heads and scalps seem to pick up on the double meaning of 'ἀκροθίνια'. Act II Scene 1 is set in '*the public sty*' with *'the BOARS in full Assembly*',[76] establishing a parody of Parliament; we are led into the heart of Iona's morality trial. Assembly scenes are a feature of several Aristophanes plays.

At the start of Act II, Purganax delivers a speech praising Boeotia's progress, rejoicing in raised taxes and brushing aside the country's lack of foreign trade:

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[75] Ibid. I.I.386-389; 392f.

[76] Ibid. II.I.1.

All the land's produce will be merged in taxes,

And the revenue will amount to – nothing!

The failure of a foreign market for

Sausages, bristles, and blood-puddings,

And such home manufactures, is but partial…[77]

The speech suggests gross mismanagement and a vicious, self-destructive pursuit of taxes, further underlying the sordid, capitalistic nature of Swellfoot's Boeotia. Purganax perversely rejoices in the idea that his economic policy 'will amount to – nothing', a reflection on protectionist trade policies exemplified by the Corn Laws. Abuse of the poor extends to suppression, and Purganax further boasts that:

Those impious Pigs,

Who, by frequent squeaks, have dared impugn

The settled Swellfoot system, or to make

Irreverent mockery of the genuflexions

Inculcated by the arch-priest, have been whipped

Into a loyal and an orthodox whine.[78]

Thus, we are again reminded that this state tyrannises and starves its citizens.

[77] Ibid. II.I.16-20.

[78] Ibid. II.I.25-30.

Purganax takes pride in it.

When he mentions Queen Iona, however, '*a loud cry from the* PIGS' arises.[79] As we are now in Parliament, we must take them as representing, not the working classes themselves, but the Whig Party which used their support for Queen Caroline to push their liberalising agenda (although the Whigs were hardly the champions of the working class). Purganax calls them 'the Lean-Pig faction'.[80] One of these pig-Whigs asks what Iona is accused of, to which Purganax replies:

Why, no one

Makes *any* positive accusation; – but

There were hints dropped, and so the privy wizards

Conceived that it became them to advise

His Majesty to investigate their truth; –

Not for his own sake; he could be content

To let his wife play any pranks she pleased,

If by that sufferance, *he* could please the Pigs;

But then he fears the morals of the Swine,

The Sows especially...[81]

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[79] Ibid. II.I.32.

[80] Ibid. II.I.40.

[81] Ibid. II.I.44-53.

This response drips with hypocrisy; George was a notorious adulterer himself. Nevertheless, Purganax continues his praeteritio and innuendo:

> Well, *I* say nothing; – but Europa rode
>
> On such a one from Asia into Crete,
>
> And the enamoured sea grew calm beneath
>
> His gliding beauty. And Pasiphae,
>
> Iona's grandmother – but *she* is innocent![82]

There is an obvious fallacy in the argument that Iona is guilty because other queens have copulated with bulls. There was better evidence of Caroline's guilt, of course, but Shelley highlights the corrupt nature of the trial. Purganax's declaration that '*she* is innocent', when he believes nothing of the sort, recalls Mark Antony's ironic defence of Brutus before the crowd at Julius Caesar's funeral ('Brutus is an honourable man!')[83] and is intended to be quite as transparent to the reader. Unfortunately, Purganax is no Mark Antony.

Purganax explains to the pigs that he wants to convert the innocent Iona into an angel with the green bag. They eagerly agree. At that moment, however, '*a great confusion is heard of the PIGS OUT OF DOORS… the doors of the Sty are staved in, and a number of exceedingly lean PIGS and SOWS and BOARS rush in.*'[84] Amidst the confusion, and in the text of the play, any division between the parliamentary

[82] Ibid. II.I.67-71.

[83] *Julius Caesar* 3.2.

[84] Shelley 1919: *Swellfoot* II.I.111.

Whig-pigs and the working-class pigs is lost. Confusion reigns. The chorus breaks down into semi-choruses and individual voices, all contradicting one another:

Semichorus I: No! Yes!

Semichorus II: Yes! No!

SC I: A law!

SC II: A flaw![85]

Only the need to defend the queen brings the chorus back together as it resolves to 'do whate'er we may,/That she shall not be arrested.'[86] They look forward keenly to the oracle's fulfilment.

Queen Iona now finally enters herself, the first time that she has been seen. She gracefully acknowledges the pigs' defence of her innocence but declares herself 'prepared/To stand the test, whatever it may be!'[87] Purganax announces that the trial will take place 'At the approaching feast/Of Famine',[88] which contents the pigs. In an aside, Iona comments that 'I, most content of all/Know that my foes even thus prepare their fall', looking forward to the play's conclusion with intriguing foreshadowing.[89] Iona's character is immediately established by her graceful speech and sly aside – she is clearly shrewd, but does not share the same grubbiness that characterises

[85] Ibid. II.I.111-114.

[86] Ibid. II.I.141f.

[87] Ibid. II.I.181f.

[88] Ibid. II.I.188f.

[89] Ibid. II.I.190f.

every other person in this play.

Act II Scene 2 is set in *'the interior of the Temple of Famine*'. The god's statue is '*a skeleton clothed in parti-coloured rags, seated upon a heap of skulls and loaves intermingled. A number of exceedingly fat Priests in black garments*' stand around *'with marrow-bones and cleavers in their hands.*'[90] This setting is sinister, and further adds to the imagery of feast and famine established throughout the play, as well as the recurring cannibalism motif. The priests recite a prayer that makes the god's dual nature clear:

> What though Cretans old called thee
>
> City-crested Cybele?
>
> We call thee FAMINE!
>
> Goddess of fasts and feasts, starving and cramming!
>
> Through thee, for emperors, kings, and priests and lords,
>
> Who rule by viziers, sceptres, bank-notes, words,
>
> The earth pours forth its plenteous fruits,
>
> Corn, wool, linen, flesh, and roots –
>
> Those who consume these fruits through thee grow fat,
>
> Those who produce these fruits through thee grow lean…[91]

[90] Ibid. II.II.1.

[91] Ibid. II.II.2-12.

Here, then, is the Cybele of the Industrial Revolution, transformed from a bountiful god into one that sits upon as many skulls as loaves, producing her wealth 'for emperors, kings, and priests and lords' – for the ruling class. Meanwhile, 'those who produce these fruits through thee grow lean', and thus are the workers suppressed. The priests applaud this class divide and pray for the maintenance of the status quo. To drive the division home, Shelley has Swellfoot and his entourage sit at a table and feast in front of their starving subjects.

Yet the pigs have their own prayer to Famine:

> When thou liftest thy skeleton form,
>
> When the loaves and the skulls roll about,
>
> We will greet thee – the voice of a storm
>
> Would be lost in our terrible shout!
>
> Then hail to thee, hail to thee, Famine!
>
> Hail to thee, Empress of Earth!
>
> When thou risest, dividing possessions;
>
> When thou risest, uprooting oppressions…[92]

For the working classes, then, Famine is not only the means of their suppression but also the impetus for them to engage in violent reform. And it is violent reform that the

[92] Ibid. II.II.48-55.

pigs imagine – they foresee a 'terrible shout' and the 'uprooting' of oppression. Specifically, the pigs are adopting the cause of economic equity espoused by the seventeenth-century radical Leveller movement – they want 'all [to] be made level again'.[93] Recall the prophecy that Boeotia must 'choose reform or civil war';[94] the pigs are preparing for and expecting the latter option. Mammon is able to foresee the danger and prophesies that 'mighty events are hastening to their doom';[95] the ignorant Swellfoot, however, can 'only hear the lean and mutinous Swine/grunting'.[96]

Famine is ever-present throughout *Swellfoot*, first as the famine affecting the pigs, but then as a concept solid enough to merit temples and prayer, and finally as a physically-present she-god. Partially, this is a response to Aristophanes' *Wealth*, in which Poverty appears as a character, looking like 'something mad and tragic' (424). She has long resided with Chremylus (437) and is aghast to be turned out in favour of Wealth. Poverty is rejected despite arguing that she is 'the sole cause of all good' (468f.); 'no living thing is more detested' than her (442f.). In contrast, there is no Wealth in *Swellfoot*, and Shelley's Famine has successfully convinced both rich and poor of what Aristophanes' god could not – that she alone deserves to be worshipped.

In *Metamorphoses* 8, Ovid also introduces Famine, describing her in the same way as Shelley (8.804-816). This Famine drives a tyrant, Erysichthon, to constant hunger until he commits autocannibalism, just as the tyrannical Swellfoot threatens his subjects with cannibalism because of his own insatiable appetite. However, Ovid

[93] Ibid. II.II.60.

[94] Ibid. I.I.113.

[95] Ibid. II.II.66.

[96] Ibid. II.II.67f.

asserts that his Famine 'is always the opposite of [Ceres] in deed' (8.817f.), and that 'the fates do not permit Ceres and Famine to come together' (8.788f.). In Shelley, Cybele and Famine not only 'come together' but are the same. In both cases, hunger and plenty are defined by their polarity, but this is made even more explicit in *Swellfoot* because the polarities are more unified.

Just as the trial is set to begin, the figure of Liberty enters. She is '*a graceful figure in a semi-transparent veil*'[97] – ghostly but beautiful. She kneels before the altar, and although '*almost drowned in the furious grunting of the PIGS, and the business of the trial*',[98] she calls for revolution:

> Of fasts and feasts! By the dread self, O Famine!
>
> I charge thee! When thou wake the multitude,
>
> Though lead them not upon the paths of blood.
>
> …
>
> In voice faint and low
>
> FREEDOM calls *Famine*, – her eternal foe,
>
> To brief alliance, hollow truce. – Rise now![99]

Here, belatedly, is the call for peaceful reform – the path by which no blood will be spilt. Liberty does not associate herself with civil war. She is ignored, however, by

[97] Ibid. II.II.84.

[98] Ibid. II.II.84.

[99] Ibid. II.II.89-91; 100-102.

both pigs and politicians. They continue to focus on Iona, and thus on the violent option.

Liberty and Famine play similar roles to the 'allegorical characters' which appear in several Aristophanes plays, such as *Lysistrata*'s Reconciliation or *Birds*' Basileia.[100] Aristophanes' personified abstractions are predominantly positive and largely female. About half are silent, like Famine, while half speak, like Liberty. Aristophanes' feminine abstractions, however, are always heeded, whereas Liberty remains unnoticed even while soliloquising. Women, whether representing abstractions or not, 'were routinely exposed, suggestively discussed, and roughly man-handled in Aristophanic comedy... The female body… was something which the poets of Old Comedy discovered was good to think with'.[101] When they are worshipped, it is for their physical characteristics and not for their divine power. Reconciliation, for example, is admired for her vagina and bottom (*Lysistrata* 1158, 1148). Shelley's allegorical characters are more tragic and more august – a sanitised, hyper-political reception of an Aristophanic topos.

Iona Taurina awaits her judgment '*with saint-like resignation*', but as Purganax is about to pour the Green Bag over her, '*the whole expression of her figure and countenance changes; she snatches it from his hand with a loud laugh of triumph, and empties it over SWELLFOOT and his whole Court*'.[102] Suddenly, the men are transformed into animals. Meanwhile:

The image of FAMINE then arises with a tremendous sound, the PIGS

[100] Komornicka 2013: 219.

[101] Hall 2006: 182.

[102] Shelley 1919: *Swellfoot* II.II.103.

> *begin scrambling for the loaves, and are tripped up by the skulls; all those who EAT the loaves are turned into BULLS, and arrange themselves quietly behind the altar. The image of FAMINE sinks through a chasm in the earth, and a MINOTAUR arises.*[103]

Circe seems to lie behind these transformations. Human-fauna metamorphosis is also a feature of *Birds*, although there, it is a positive feature; acquiring wings allows human to enter the pseudo-utopian Cloudcuckooland (1305f.). In *Swellfoot*, pig-transformation is undesirable; rather than symbolising the attainment of citizenship, it symbolises a shift in social class amongst people who are already citizens.

The Minotaur identifies himself as John Bull and invites the queen to mount him, which she eagerly does, dressing herself as a hunter and calling on the pigs to act as her beagles. The play concludes with a clichéd hunting song sung by Iona and her pigs:

> Tallyho! Tallyho!
>
> Through pond, ditch and slough,
>
> Wind them, and find them,
>
> Like the Devil behind them,
>
> Tallyho! Tallyho![104]

[103] Ibid. II.II.103.

[104] Ibid. II.II.134-138.

This triumphal hunting band recalls the processions which conclude Old Comedy.[105] More sinisterly, the furies are described as hunters in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*; so, when they first awake, they bemoan that 'the beast has slipped from the nets and gone./Overcome by sleep, I have lost my prey' (147f.). Despite this hunting song's uncertain tone, the prophecy is fulfilled, and the classes upheaved; Swellfoot and his cronies take the place of the pigs, and the bulls are restored to their position of strength. 'The food rises up against its consumer', as Morton puts it.[106]

But this conclusion is far from utopian. Iona Taurina is hardly exonerated from charges of dangerous sexuality through her bestiality with the Minotaur. The threat of cannibalism is only heightened by the hunting of Swellfoot. Although on the surface triumphal, Iona's actions are violent and fury-like – 'like the Devil'. The Minotaur is chthonic too, rising from a crack in the earth. Perhaps it is the same Minotaur that, in Dante's *Inferno*, guards tyrants in hell, 'as violent as the tyrants [it] keep[s] down in the river of blood'.[107] Virgil calls it 'l'infamïa di Creti' ('the infamy of Crete'), reminding us of its sexually transgressive origins.[108] There is no sign that the corrupt system has been truly overhauled; Swellfoot has merely taken the place of the pigs he repressed. The food rebels, but only to eat the consumer in turn, and it is ominous that the pigs who seize the bread '*are tripped up by the skulls*'. Hunting is an aristocratic pastime, again underlining that social hierarchy has been flipped, not destroyed. This is a civil war, not reform. The focus has always been on Iona Taurina and not on the starving citizen-pigs, left to snort and cry from offstage. Yet at the conclusion, it becomes clear

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[105] E.g. the wedding procession at *Birds* 1755ff.; Dionysus' procession from Hades at *Frogs* 1524ff.

[106] Morton 2009: 292.

[107] Tambling 2003: 888.

[108] Dante 1996: *Inferno* XII.12.

that Iona Taurina – Queen Caroline – cannot offer true reform after all. Liberty, ignored like the pigs, was their only hope. Alas, Shelley argues, the swine too eagerly focus on tawdry affairs to pay her any heed. It is curious that Shelley, who called for revolution in several of his works, would here portray violent revolution negatively. However, he is not so much arguing against violent class struggle as criticising the fixation on the affairs of the monarchy, cautioning against portraying the aristocratic Queen Caroline as the working classes' saviour. The message of *Swellfoot the Tyrant* is that any uprising – violent or peaceful – must come from the people, and be fought for their sake.

Swellfoot is obviously inspired by Aristophanes. Many aspects of the story derive from Old Comedy, from the animal chorus to the personification of Liberty, who is truly in the spirit of Aristophanes. The play's sexual innuendo easily matches anything written by Aristophanes, although Shelley retreats somewhat from Aristophanes' most overt sexuality; politically, Shelley's use of personal caricature fits into the Aristophanic tradition, whilst his message is more radical and transparent than anything found in Old Comedy. Yet, generically and formally speaking, *Swellfoot* is not Old Comedy. To create a stinging satire, Shelley weaves in inspiration from Greek tragedy, the wider classical canon, Shakespeare, contemporary theatre, political cartoons, and his own inventiveness. It is Aristophanic, yes, but not solely Aristophanic; like Old Comedy, it is richly intertextual. Nevertheless, it is remarkable insofar as it demonstrates a liberal, even proto-Marxist reading of Aristophanes at a time when Aristophanes was typically considered to be an aristocrat, thus challenging the presumptions of Tories such as Mitford and Mitchell. Shelley offers us something quite unique for the early nineteenth century – a class-conscious Aristophanes.

Despite its tiny circulation, the influence of *Swellfoot* can be detected in at

least one later work, the Victorian novelist Thomas Love Peacock's seventh and final novel *Gryll Grange*, first published in 1861. The novel follows the enigmatic gentleman Algernon Falconer as he courts Morgana, niece of the eponymous Gryll Grange. Her uncle is apparently 'lineally descended from the ancient and illustrious Gryllus',[109] turned into a pig by Circe; we have already discussed [Plutarch's] *Gryllus*. The characters determine to perform an Aristophanic comedy, the preparations for which provide the backdrop to much of the novel's action; in the play, Circe uses her metamorphosing sorcery to show Gryllus the flaws of the contemporary world. This unusual combination of pigs, Circean transformations and Aristophanes must immediately make us think of *Swellfoot*. Whether Peacock read one of the seven copies of *Swellfoot* published in 1820, or had to wait for it to be republished by Mary Shelley in 1840, is unclear. But the author was friends with Shelley and his executor; he himself described their 'very familiar intimacy'.[110] Yet *Gryll Grange* is a very different text; for all that it interrogates and satirises Victorian social mores, it is not directly political. There is no hint of a response to Burke's swinish multitude in Peacock's Gryllus. Again, we are reminded of the uniqueness of *Swellfoot*.

[109] Peacock 1861: 14.

[110] Peacock 1909: 2.

~4~

Aristophanes Burlesqued: J.R. Planché's *Birds* and Victorian Popular Theatre[1]

For about forty years from the start of the Victorian period, the British theatre was dominated by burlesque, a form of popular entertainment that incorporated parody, comedy, stagecraft and musical theatre. It frequently engaged with the classics as well; countless burlesques travestied Greek tragedy, classical epic, myth and history. Despite the genre's obvious similarity to Aristophanic humour, however, only one burlesque was performed which directly parodied Old Comedy – James Robinson Planché's *The Birds of Aristophanes* (1846). In this chapter, we explore the Victorian burlesque genre to discover why Planché decided to write his adaptation of Aristophanes and why the play was ultimately unsuccessful. We will also set the play into its diachronic context, to understand *The Birds of Aristophanes* as a reactionary piece of theatre written during a period of major political reform.

Burlesque has a long ancestry. Written travesties of classical works have been popular throughout the modern period, in particular those parodying Virgil; several comic versions of books from *The Aeneid* began appearing in England from 1664 onwards partially in response to the English Civil War, so that 'by the end of the

[1] This chapter, though much amended, has developed out of the dissertation submitted for my Master of Studies degree.

century, fully half of Virgil's text was travestied'.[2] Across Europe, puppet shows, fairground entertainments and operas have all travestied high art in dialogue with one another for centuries. The sensationally popular *Siege of Troy*, produced by Elkanah Settle, was a fairground show which ran from about 1698 to 1734, and was turned into both a semi-opera and a puppet show.[3] Popular classical entertainments 'persisted even during decades when Greek tragedy was absent from the stage'.[4] One summer bill at Sadler's Wells in 1792 included both *Queen Dido, or the Trojan Ramblers* (based on *Aeneid* 4), and the harlequinade *Medea's Kettle* 'which included a scene in which the sorceress aroused witches who ranged "abroad in the shape of animals".'[5] Classics was not exclusively for the well-educated – it had demotic potential.

Ballad opera had been popular since the early eighteenth century. These were comic plays with intermittent singing rather than formal opera, and were usually designed to be sung without orchestral accompaniment. 'The songs of ballad opera (folk tunes, urban popular ditties and famous refrains by composers like Handel), were known on the streets, and the audiences sang along.'[6] The best known is John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728); produced by John Rich, it was said that it 'made *Rich* very *Gay*, and probably will make *Gay* very *Rich*.'[7] Griffin praises the opera's

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[2] Hartle 1998: 139.

[3] Hall 2018a.

[4] Hall and Macintosh 2005: 54.

[5] Ibid. 55.

[6] Hall and Stead 2020: Ch.7.

[7] *Country Journal or, the Craftsman* (3 February 1728) 2.

‘fine Aristophanic tone’,[8] though I can detect no direct reception; Gay’s schooling had however involved reading Terence and Plautus,[9] and he also wrote on classical themes. *The Beggar’s Opera* stages thieves, prostitutes and highwaymen – the underclass. Also in 1728, John Mottley and Thomas Cooke produced *Penelope*, a ballad opera satirising Alexander Pope’s 1725-1726 translation of the *Odyssey*. Its striking ‘demotic tone’ offers a ‘proletarian Odysseus’ at odds with Pope’s grandiose style.[10] The play re-imagined Ithaca as a pub and Penelope as Pen, the landlady; at one point Minerva descends from Olympus, declaring that ‘Among the Gods I’ve often heard it spoke,/ We’ve no such Beer, as at the *Royal Oak*’.[11] Whilst Gay was friends with Pope, the classicist Cooke had long challenged his questionable scholarship.[12]

At the same time, the Italian school was producing comic operas called *opera buffa*, which flourished well into the nineteenth century with the operas of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868), Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) and others. By the late eighteenth century, the dialogue between these two traditions produced the English burletta, which then developed into the genre burlesque. The most significant burletta was Kane O’Hara’s *Midas*, which premiered in Dublin in 1762, then London two years later. It was still being staged into the 1830s. O’Hara was well-educated, gaining a Master’s from Trinity College, Dublin.[13] His play retold the story of Midas’ judgment of the music contest between Apollo and Pan, as

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[8] Griffin 1960: 92.

[9] Nokes 2009.

[10] Hall 2008: 134.

[11] Mottley and Cooke 1728: 3.4.

[12] Lee 2004.

[13] Dircks 2004.

related in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Stead has argued that ‘in the theatre the judgment of Midas stood for a victory of the bawdy over the refined, the ‘low-brow’ over the ‘high-brow’, but most importantly the long-suppressed Irish folk tradition over a style associated with the imperial overlords.’[14] Thus, it demonstrates the genre’s populist roots. O’Hara followed with *The Golden Pippin* (1773), which travestied the Judgment of Paris.

There was, therefore, a long-running British and European tradition of staging classical entertainments as part of popular culture; nowhere was classics more accessible to high and low alike than on the London stage. The Victorian burlesque genre developed out of several earlier forms of entertainment, but all had a long history of travestying the classics.

Theatre Reform

In 1737, Parliament passed the Licensing Act, which curtailed the rights of almost all theatres to stage plays. The act required plays to be licensed by the Lord Chamberlain (or, in reality, his appointed deputies, the examiner and the comptroller);[15] he assumed the power to block offensive or overtly political material by deleting lines or banning entire pieces. The act also limited performance to the pre-existing patented theatres; since there were only two such licensed theatres in London – Drury Lane

[14] Stead 2018: 462f.

[15] Shellard and Nicholson 2004: 15.

and Covent Garden – it effectively closed the many unlicensed theatres in the capital.[16]

The act was initiated by the Whig Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole at the height of dissatisfaction with his premiership, 'a rather desperate gesture of defiance by a man who had been in office rather too long and who sensed that enforced retirement was looming.'[17] Politicking and corruption had laid him open to satirical attack, most notably by Henry Fielding, whose plays at this time relentlessly satirised Walpole. In the 'Publik Dedication' to *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* and *Eurydice Hiss'd*, both political and both staged in 1737 just before the censor was introduced, Fielding acknowledged the pending legal threat, noting that he had 'with Concern observed some Steps lately taken, and others too justly apprehended, that may much endanger the Constitution of the *British* Theatre.'[18] He argued that the theatre belonged to the public, and labelled the Prime Minister criminally corrupt. 'Corruption', he argued, 'hath the same Influence on all Societies, all Bodies, which it hath on Corporeal Bodies… [Anyone who corrupts] ought to be treated in much the same manner with him who poisoneth a Fountain, in order to disperse a Contagion'.[19] But Walpole won the PR war, and the Licensing Act was passed by Parliament with wide support from legislators and theatre practitioners.

[16] The law was targeted at London's many small playhouses; regional theatres were theoretically covered, but largely overlooked. Later laws designed to clarify the situation only created more confusion. The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge were given unlimited authority to curtail theatre in their cities. On this complicated legal situation, see Thomas, Carlton and Etienne: 2007.

[17] Thomas, Carlton and Etienne 2007: 27.

[18] Fielding 1737: v. Original emphasis. See Hall and Stead 2020: Ch.7.

[19] Fielding 1737: vf.

Although he lasted only five years more as prime minister, Walpole's censorship law continued to curtail politicisation of the stage for an entire century – at the same time as the political *status quo* was challenged both externally and internally, and the threat of revolution hung over parliament and monarch. Amended in the nineteenth century, theatre censorship would persist in Britain until 1968, in part due to apathy; 'there was no groundswell of opposition to the principle of theatre censorship at any point during the eighteenth century: nor was there to be any during the nineteenth century.'[20] Seemingly, dramatists had little desire to write overtly political plays, so fell in line with the Lord Chamberlain. Indeed, many playwrights and theatre managers engaged in pre-censorship, which enabled the Lord Chamberlain 'to keep the number of prohibited plays to a minimum and forestall concerns about repression.'[21]

The 1737 Licensing Act (and subsequent legislation in 1752 and 1755) allowed scope for the performance of light 'entertainments' at unpatented theatres. It was in response to this that the English burletta developed. The line between musical entertainment and stage-play was mutable, and so was the definition of burletta; it came to mean 'nothing but a play which could with safety be given at a minor, or unpatented theatre.'[22] The Lord Chamberlain demanded that music be included to distinguish it from 'serious' spoken drama confined to the patent theatres, but the level of music included in performances was not always significant; a three-act play might only require five songs to pass the bar.[23] And financial pressures compelled the old

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[20] Thomas, Carlton and Etienne 2007: 46f.

[21] Shellard and Nicholson 2004: 4.

[22] Nicoll 1955: 137.

[23] Ibid. 139.

patent theatres to put on popular entertainments as well, so that there was little serious spoken drama available. 'The great mass of nineteenth century dramas are the melodramas, farces, spectacles and extravaganzas turned out in their hundreds by the Planchés and the Fitzballs.'[24]

In 1832, a parliamentary Select Committee was established to examine theatre censorship and the patent theatres' monopoly over serious drama. Not coincidentally, 1832 also saw the passing of the Great Reform Act; 'the demand for the reform of theatre legislation was clearly part of a far wider desire in the country for legislative reform.'[25] The report proposed conferring all licensing powers within London to the Lord Chamberlain's office and allowing more theatres to stage drama, arguing that the patent theatres' 'privileges have neither preserved the dignity of the Drama, nor, by the present Administration of the Laws, been of much advantage to the Proprietors of the Theatres.'[26] The legislation written to enact the Select Committee's recommendations failed, and theatre reform was postponed until 1843.

Finally, with the support of Sir Robert Peel's government, the 1843 Theatres Act was passed. The new law broke the patent theatres' monopoly; it also extended the Lord Chamberlain's authority over most of London whilst specifying for the first time that his censor should be used only to protect public decency. Now that all theatres could stage entertainments with spoken dialogue and as much or as little music as suited, whilst remaining clearly within the law, the genre of burlesque became remarkably popular. Burlesques predated the Theatres Act, and the generic shift from burlesque to burletta was small and largely semantic – Planché wrote his

[24] Ibid. 58. Planché would no doubt take umbrage at this slight; see below.

[25] Ibid. 55.

[26] *Report from the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature*, HC 1832: 5.

first specifically classical burlesque, *Olympic Revels*, in 1831, subtitling it ‘a mythological, allegorical burletta’,[27] and when Thomas Dibdin wrote a burlesque on the *Iliad* as early as 1819, he described it as a ‘Comic, Pathetic, Historic, Anachronasmatic, Ethic, Epic, MELANGE’, forgoing either title.[28] But as Planché reflected in 1879, the term burletta, adopted by theatres ‘as a general and conveniently vague description of every variety of piece’ performed at an unpatented theatre, ‘disappeared from the play-bills on the emancipation of the minor theatres from their legal fetters’;[29] it was no longer a necessary generic distinction to avoid the wrath of the Lord Chamberlain. As Fig. 4.1 shows, this change was quite dramatic; 43 burlettas were licensed in 1841 and 1842, but none by 1845 or 1846. By 1844, the term burlesque had overtaken burletta. Paradoxically, burlesque and its sister forms (travesty, extravaganza, revue, etc.) were at once allowed far greater freedom to experiment by the 1843 Act, and yet maintained far more generic uniformity than burletta ever had.

[27] Planché 1879a: 37.

[28] Dibdin 2019: Paratext 3.

[29] Planché 1879a: 13.

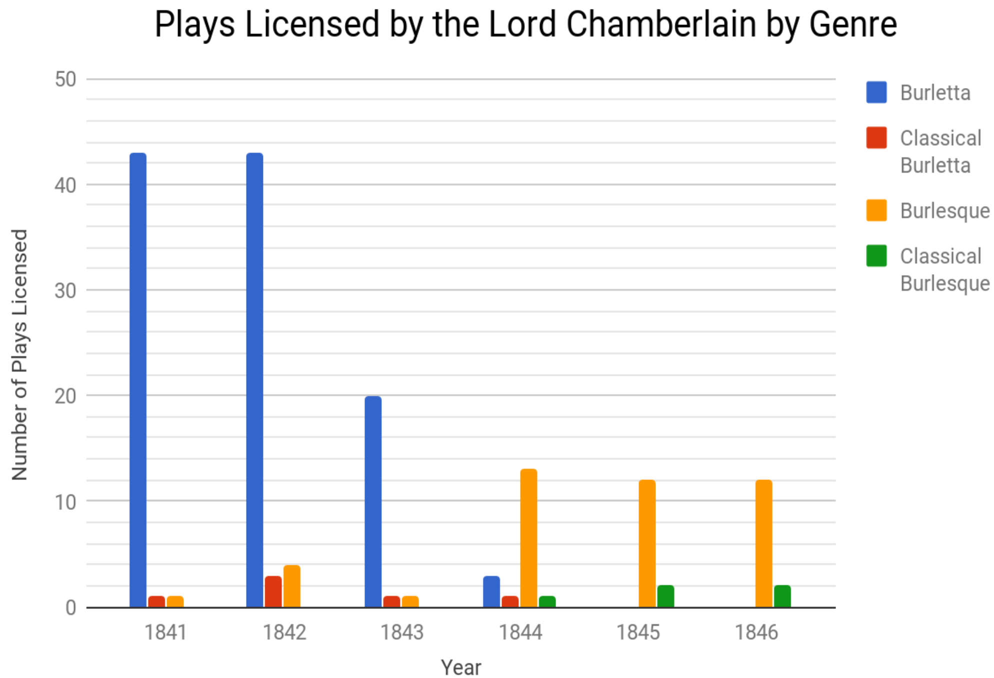

Fig. 4.1: Plays licensed by the Lord Chamberlain by genre.[30]

Planché was critical of the Lord Chamberlain's right to censor, not on the grounds of free speech and artistic expression but because governmental authority was so easily and frequently circumvented: 'No law is good and worthy of

[30] Data taken from the Chamberlain's Office Day Book 1824-1852 (BL Add MS 53702), which lists all licensed plays and notes their genre. To avoid doubt, I have confined my enquiries to the term burlesque, ignoring occurrences of synonymous terms such as extravaganza. This explains why fewer burlesques were licensed in 1845 and 1846 than burlettas in 1841 and 1842; the licensing reform also allowed for more variety in generic naming conventions, even if names were effectively synonymous. In two instances, plays are referred to as 'burlesque burletta' – these I have counted once each across both categories. I have designated classical burlesques and burlettas solely on their titles as they appear in the Lord Chamberlain's Day Book without reference to any play-text, so that number is not concrete.

preservation the open violation or ingenious evasion of which is, for any reason, constantly permitted to pass unpunished, or frequently feigned to be unobserved.'[31] But Planché's reluctance to see immoral or political theatre being staged made censorship more bearable. He wrote:

> At present there is a law that *can* be enforced in extreme cases. The objections to it are obvious enough; but, if it cannot be rendered more efficient and consistent, it may be better for us to 'bear the ills we have than fly to others that we know not of.' The results of our former attempts to improve the condition of our national drama by increased freedom of action have not been so satisfactory as to encourage a repetition of the experiment.[32]

As we have noted, because many nineteenth-century theatre practitioners shared this view, there was no serious attempt to abolish the censor.

Whilst Planché agreed with Parliament that restricting spoken drama to patented theatres was debasing the quality of British theatre, he thought that the 'shortsighted legislation' passed in 1843 had done little to improve it:

> In amending laws no longer suited to the age, not the slightest prevision was exercised by the reformers, who simply yielded to the outcry justly raised against the absurd, incongruous and partial regulations that oppressed and degraded the profession, without providing for the security of its best interests and the encouragement of its noblest aspirations.[33]

[31] Planché 1901: 107.

[32] Ibid. 114.

[33] Ibid. 71f.

Theatres suddenly allowed to stage more varied forms of entertainment continued to favour the frivolous over the serious.

Planché wrote a revue expressing his views on the new law in 1844, the year after it was passed.[34] *The Drama at Home* takes Drama as its protagonist. She is homeless, exiled from the patent theatres in favour of frivolous entertainments but unable to turn to other, smaller theatres because of the 1737 Licensing Act. Thankfully, Portia (from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*) arrives to inform her that the patentees' monopoly has been broken: 'The Drama's free!... I say you're free to act where'er you please.'[35] Drama finds herself disappointed with the result: 'I see no rising drama worth the name,/And now the law is surely not to blame.'[36] The play concludes with grand musical spectacle – its finale consists of eight separate songs. Even in her own play, even after theatre reform, Drama is outstripped by vapid entertainments.

It may seem paradoxical that Planché, whose livelihood depended on writing burlesques, was concerned with the state of serious drama. But whilst he was writing in a popular medium, Planché was constantly striving to improve it. *The Birds of Aristophanes* is a clear example, and its production should be understood in terms of Planché's aspirations. On the one hand, it is – despite Planché's objections – clearly and unavoidably a burlesque, a genre which only flourished as he saw it at the expense of serious drama, and which owed its increasing popularity to the abolition

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[34] The Victorian revue, a genre apparently brought to Britain from France by Planché (ibid. 68), was a kind of burlesque which reviewed current productions being staged at other theatres. On the French revue and Aristophanes, see Piana 2005: Ch.4.

[35] Planché 1879b: 289.

[36] Ibid. 292.

of the patent law. Yet it is far more earnest than many other contemporary entertainments, including other burlesques written by Planché, and it concludes with a serious political message. *The Birds* is, in this way, a compromise between the populism of the genre and the perceived need for a higher strain of British drama; it is an attempt to lead the theatre-going masses to Planché's ideal. That it was produced at the Theatre Royal Haymarket, which had been granted a summer patent in 1766 under the management of Samuel Foote and was therefore nominally supposed to stage high theatre, can hardly be coincidence.

The Genre of Burlesque

Victorian burlesques aimed 'to make ridiculous by means of exaggeration, mimicry, parody, grotesque distortion, travesty, and caricature.'[37] They were by no means limited to the classics; parodical burlesque reworked Shakespeare, Arthurian legends, contemporary theatre, and more – 'burlesque playwrights and performers were nothing if not indiscriminate'.[38] Fig. 4.1 shows that the number of classical burlesques produced between 1841 and 1846 was limited. Yet over a longer period from the early 1830s to the early 1870s, a significant number of classical burlesques were produced, and they constitute an important example of populist classical

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[37] Burnard 1888: 164. Victorian playwrights used the terms burlesque, burletta, extravaganza and travesty without any practicable difference, sometimes labelling the same production with multiple overlapping generic labels, although 'extravaganza' might denote a more spectacular burlesque focussed on stagecraft and often produced around Christmas or Easter. I subsume all such plays under the general title 'burlesque'.

[38] Schoch 2003: xi.

reception.[39] 'Classical antiquity dominated the cultural and political landscapes and so it is unsurprising that many of these entertainments presented classical characters and stories'.[40]

The theatre in which a burlesque was performed and the playwright who wrote it affected the class of audience it would attract; Planché wrote for a more middle-class, respectable audience than many, but overall these entertainments attracted a mixed company. Dibdin's *Melodrama Mad!* was written for the Surrey Theatre south of the river in Lambeth – not a respectable location[41] – but the play's characters metatheatrically boast of its wide appeal; the theatre's 'lower circle is cramm'd with character, its middle tier uncommonly interesting, and every upper row full of tip top company'.[42] This burlesque 'was repeatedly requested by royalty for special "command performances"'.[43] Although the genre did not truly flourish until after theatre reform in 1843, its form was already fixed by the time of *Birds* in 1846. Before we turn to the play itself, therefore, let us briefly discuss the wider burlesque genre, and classical burlesques in particular, focussing on those which predate *Birds*.

Burlesques were written in rhyming couplets and revelled in puns (ranging from the elegantly crafted to the truly dreadful), such as this one from Planché's *Olympic Devils* (1831), set in the Underworld:

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[39] See Monrós-Gaspar 2015: 46-48 for a list of representative classical burlesques.

[40] Bryant Davies 2019: 3.

[41] Ibid. 10f.

[42] Dibdin 2019: 1.1.37f.

[43] Bryant Davies 2019: 1.

PROSERPINE: Do you take cream?

MINUS: A little cream of Tartarus.[44]

The genre took existing songs and set new words to the tunes, borrowing from contemporary popular melodies, traditional folk music and opera. Joseph Stirling Coyne's *Telemachus* (1844) included reworkings of the minstrel song *The Boatman's Dance*, the aria *Non Piu Andrai* from Mozart's comic opera *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and the Irish song *Kate Kearney*.[45] This diversity demonstrates burlesque's fusion of high and low culture. By using already-known music, burlesque writers avoided having to compose their own tunes, but familiarity also allowed them to focus the audience's attention on their words. Written and rehearsed in a short time, for a short run, the topical nature of burlesque required that it was constantly updated with new music, dances, jokes and references. Of course, every dramatic performance is transitory, no two nights ever being the same. For burlesque, this was not just a contingent characteristic, but a defining aspect.

Transvestism was another feature of burlesque, and both male and female characters could be cross-cast. Heroines were frequently played by men, and effeminate gods and heroes were played by women. In Planché's *Olympic Revels* (1831), Apollo, Cupid and Ganymede are all played by women. Antigone was played by a man in E.L. Blanchard's *Antigone Travestie* (1845). Transvestism has the capacity to be paradoxically radical and also disarming, because changing a character's gender within a comic context undermines the serious representation of that character. It is thus a natural tool for travesty.

[44] Planché 1879a: 68.

[45] Coyne 1844: ff.762, 783, 766.

With their fast pace, dancing, music, and large casts, burlesques were designed as spectacles (thus 'extravaganzas'), and therefore another important aspect was their scenery. *Melodrama Mad!* offered scenes such as Mount Olympus;[46] Helen's bedchamber, '*furnished with all the luxuriance of Classic elegance, &c. &c.*';[47] and '*a magnificent and spacious view in the city [of Troy]… seen on fire*',[48] as well as the Trojan Horse.[49] Overall, the play required about a dozen scene changes. In Planché's first classical burlesque, *Olympic Revels*, 'time and other circumstances prevented the scenery from being in accordance with the dresses',[50] but less than a year later, his *Olympic Devils* opened and much attention was paid to its aesthetic:

> We had a most infernal Tartarus, a very gloomy Styx, and a truly beautiful Greek landscape, with the portico of the Temple of Bacchus, the columns of which joined in the general dance when 'Orpheus with his lute made trees' stir their stumps, &c., to the great delight of the audience.[51]

Over time, burlesques relied ever more on multiple complex scene changes and stagecraft, and were often advertised on the virtue of their staging.

Burlesque also utilised anachronism. In Planché's *Olympic Revels*, past and present are blended from the outset, as the audience is presented with '*JUPITER,*

[46] Dibdin 2019: 1.2.1.

[47] Ibid. 2.2.1.

[48] Ibid. 2.8.1.

[49] Ibid. 2.4.1.

[50] Planché 1879a: 41.

[51] Ibid. 63.

NEPTUNE, HERCULES, and PLUTUS discovered at whisk'.[52] Burlesques made frequent reference to the railway, and in the play, Juno wants to build a railroad between heaven and earth.[53] In classical burlesques, these anachronisms play on juxtaposition with elements taken from the ancient world; Planché had made the decision to clothe his *Olympic Revels* in classical dress, and he notes that 'the effect of persons picturesquely attired speaking absurd doggerel, fortunately took the fancy of the fair lessee'.[54] Classical costumes henceforth became standard practice. This incongruity between classical elements and the commonplace is part of burlesque's parodic force.

Classical burlesques could focus on a myth without any particular version in mind, such as in Planché's *Olympic Revels*, which retells the myth of Pandora, or they could selectively adapt a specific classical text. *Antigone Travestie* adapts Sophocles' play closely, but Polynices is reimagined as a debtor, not an unburied corpse. Stirling Coyne's *Telemachus* acts as a sort of a sequel to *The Odyssey*, imagining Odysseus' son visiting Calypso's island. Its plot is based not on a classical text but on Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (1699); nevertheless it offers a detailed summary of the Calypso episode from *The Odyssey*:

> [Odysseus] a sort of wandering Jew,
>
> A King or prince –; (it makes me laugh the notion,)
>
> Of some small island in the German Ocean,

[52] Ibid. 45.

[53] Ibid. 52.

[54] Ibid. 40.

A place – not big enough – as I have heard

To raise a crop of groundsel for a bird –

He came one morning here to spend the day,

But for twelve months forgot to go away.[55]

The burlesque states Odysseus' captivity lasted only twelve months, not seven years; otherwise it displays significant knowledge of the ancient source, particularly in its account of Ithaca's ruggedness. At the conclusion, it is revealed that Mentor, who has been protecting Telemachus throughout, is actually Athena in disguise – as in both *Les Aventures* and *The Odyssey*. Planché wrote an earlier *Telemachus* in 1834 with the same plot and source-texts.[56]

Classical burlesques also parodied specific drama performances or renowned actors of the day. Planché's *The Golden Fleece* (1845) was inspired by the '*Antigone* after the Greek manner' staged at the Royal Opera House, which had opened in January the same year with music composed by Mendelssohn.[57] Blanchard's *Antigone* was also certainly inspired by this performance, but for Planché, it was the style of performance and not the subject that he chose to burlesque. At the same time, the bathetic faux-seriousness employed by burlesque performers always worked to parody the 'classical' style of acting associated with more serious drama, and in this sense, *all* burlesques are inter-theatrical.

[55] Coyne 1844: f.751.

[56] Bryant Davies 2019: 11.

[57] Planché 1879c: 7.

The less pleasant aspects of Greek myth were often repressed in these classical burlesques, which after all were designed as light entertainment. Thus, in *Golden Fleece*, Planché's Medea still murders Creon and Glauce, but Euripides' shockingly graphic messenger's speech and its memorable description of burning flesh is replaced with more light-hearted dialogue:

MEDEA: Tell me all, how do they fit her?

NURSE: Fit her! She's frying in them, like a fritter.

MEDEA: She stole my flame, and now in flames she lingers…[58]

The rhyming couplets, the pun on 'flame' and the over-the-top alliteration all help to undermine the seriousness of the murder. And Medea does not kill her children – she draws '*a rod from out the sheath of [a] dagger*' and threatens to 'whip 'em', but even this euphemism is quickly recanted: 'I didn't flog 'em – I but made believe'.[59] That burlesque can create a Medea who does not kill her children is evidence of the free rein the genre has over its classical sources. It only uses classicisms where it chooses.

James Robinson Planché (1796–1880)

One final bit of context before we turn to *The Birds*. Planché was born in 1796 to a watchmaker of French Huguenot descent. He trained as a painter, but soon started writing plays for minor London theatres; he became one of the leading dramatists of his day, writing almost 200 plays in every imaginable genre but specialising in

[58] Ibid. 39.

[59] Ibid. 39f.

classical and fairy burlesques. His attention to detail in costume and set led to his promotion within the College of Arms; he even became advisor to the Royal Court on costumes for period balls.[60] Planché was also a theatre historian, writing a significant volume, *The History of British Costume*. Despite his influence on classical burlesque, Planché '"knew little Latin and less Greek,", having, during [his] four years of common boarding-school tuition… barely mastered the Greek alphabet'.[61] He was nevertheless a keen amateur classicist who 'eagerly devoured the translations of all the great poets, dramatists, and historians of Greece and Italy that [he] could lay [his] hands on'.[62] In 1829, he was elected as a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries,[63] and later became 'a hearty and active supporter' of the British Archaeological Association.[64] His receptions of Greek drama, therefore, were dependent on an informed amateur interest in antiquity. Both his upbringing and his social circle reveal his position as a well-connected member of the upper-middle class.

Whilst his background was not unusual among the writers of burlesques, who for all their demotic output tended to be well-educated, Planché's ability to move amongst nobility and join organisations such as the College of Arms distinguishes him from some of his more colourful colleagues.[65] Planché's politics aligned with reactionary Toryism. Robert Peel's success in passing the Corn Law Repeal Bill only

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[60] Roy 2004.

[61] Planché 1879c: 81.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Planché 1901: 113.

[64] Ibid. 302.

[65] Compare the eventful life of Robert Brough, also a prolific playwright but distinctly less respectable (Richardson 2013: 112-125).

became certain 'after the successful second reading in March [1846]',[66] a month before Planché's *Birds* opened, and this contemporary event shapes the burlesque; as we shall see, *The Birds* champions the ruling classes against such political interventions. Peel would resign in June of that year. We have already encountered Planché's opposition to Peel's theatre reforms, and the tension between his passion for high art and his successful career writing low burlesque; Planché was a man looking socially upwards whilst other burlesque writers looked down.

'From Aristophanes She Takes Her Birth'

Greek Old Comedy and Victorian burlesque are distinct genres separated by thousands of years, yet their similarities are inescapable. Like burlesque, Old Comedy relies heavily on topicality, fluid theatrical conventions, musical comedy, the manipulation of language, and spectacle. *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Frogs* both demonstrate the propensity of Old Comedy to 'burlesque' Greek myth and tragedy. Aristophanes sets up incongruities between the mythical and the everyday in several plays, just as burlesque sets the classical against the commonplace. Ancient actors were always men,[67] so that Old Comedy and tragedy alike are filled with female characters being performed by male-bodied performers. But whilst there seems to have been no tension implicit in a man playing Antigone on the Greek stage as there was on the Victorian, the metatheatricality of Old Comedy allowed Aristophanes to create that tension where he chose. We might consider, for example, the amusing scene in *Ecclesiazusae* where male actors playing women put on knitted beards and

[66] Adelman 1992: 68.

[67] Or at least *almost* always – certainly those with speaking roles.

men's clothes so they can pass as male. Victorian burlesque is far more chaste than the bawdy humour of Aristophanes, but was never completely innocent. Although obviously different, then, Aristophanic comedies have much in common with the structure and tone of Victorian burlesque, and share many modes of humour. Aristophanes, it is true, wrote his plays for the state as part of an institutionalised, inherently political dramatic festival within a radical democracy, whereas Planché was writing for private audiences within a heavily unequal society which excluded the majority of citizens from power.[68] Whilst Old Comedy is therefore inherently political (whatever we might assert those politics to be), burlesque as a genre isn't, even if both genres are preoccupied with contemporary affairs. As we will see, however, individual burlesques could certainly be political. It is no accident that Planché's *Birds* has a strong political lesson at its heart.

The similarities between Old Comedy and burlesque were not lost on Victorian theatre critics and writers. In *The Almanack of the Month*, edited by burlesque writer Gilbert A. A'Beckett, it was noted that 'a glance at the past… has caused us to recognise the true parent of burlesques. From Aristophanes she takes her birth'.[69] Planché remarked as much himself in explaining why he had decided to burlesque *The Birds*:

> I determined to gratify a craving of long standing and endeavour so to adapt one of the extravaganzas of Aristophanes, the immortal inventor of that class of composition.[70]

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[68] Athens was obviously unequal too – we might compare the position of women in both societies.

[69] A'Beckett 1846: 360.

[70] Planché 1879c: 82.

Nevertheless, *Birds* was the only classical burlesque to engage significantly with Greek Old Comedy,[71] rather than the more usual sources of tragedy, epic and myth. It might seem odd that Planché chose a Greek comedy to make a serious burlesque, but Greek tragedy was already the reserve of low burlesque, whereas comedy remained unsoiled. Moreover, Planché's vision of a comedy which entertained but also elevated its audience fitted with the typical Victorian conception of Aristophanes as a moralist scourge – this conception was encountered in Chapters 1 and 2, and we will meet it several times more. Planché's *Birds* was written within the rigid generic form of classical burlesque, but with a deeper reverence for its classical source and a keener sense of its own morality.

Planché's *Birds* premiered on Easter Monday, 13 April 1846, at the Haymarket Theatre in the West End.[72] During the nineteenth century, East End theatres catered primarily for the working class, whereas 'for the middle-class Londoner the West End *was* the theatre, and not surprisingly the content of West End farce, comedy, drama, and burlesque is almost entirely middle-class in tone, setting, and point of view.'[73] The Haymarket, as we have noted, was granted a summer patent in 1766, further legitimising it as a venue even after the theatre reforms. Of course, people from all walks of life frequented the West End, as attested by the significant difference in price between the cheapest and the most expensive tickets during *The Birds*' run: 'Orchestra Stalls, 6s. each; Boxes, 5s.; Pit, 3s.; Gallery, 2s.; Upper Gallery, 1s.'.[74] But in general, when we speak of West End burlesque, we are talking about a slightly

[71] Although see discussions of Offenbach and W.S. Gilbert's *Thespis* in the next Chapter.

[72] Planché 1879c: 79.

[73] Booth 1977: 99.

[74] 'Theatre Royal, Haymarket' (5 April 1846) *Era*: 4.

more affluent audience. Planché therefore wrote *The Birds* for an audience not significantly lower in class than himself.

Planché suggests such an audience in the prologue, where his chorus notes that the play is presented:

> With sundry variations, I acknowledge,
>
> Which may astonish men just fresh from college,
>
> But to the million prove less caviare
>
> Than if we stuck to Bekker, Brunck, or Carey [sic]…[75]

Henry Francis Cary had translated the *Birds* into English in 1824, but the other two names cited were both textual critics; the German Bekker had edited the Aristophanic scholia, and Brunck, a Frenchman, had published the texts and Latin translations of the extant Aristophanic corpus.[76] *The Birds*, then, has been written for 'the million', not 'men just fresh from college' who could comprehend Aristophanes in Greek or Latin, with accompanying scholia. This 'million' will appreciate Planché's changing of Aristophanes to make it less high-brow and academic.

Planché claimed after the fact that *Birds* was never meant to be a burlesque but rather more high-brow, defending against the criticism that his play was not suitable to its audience:

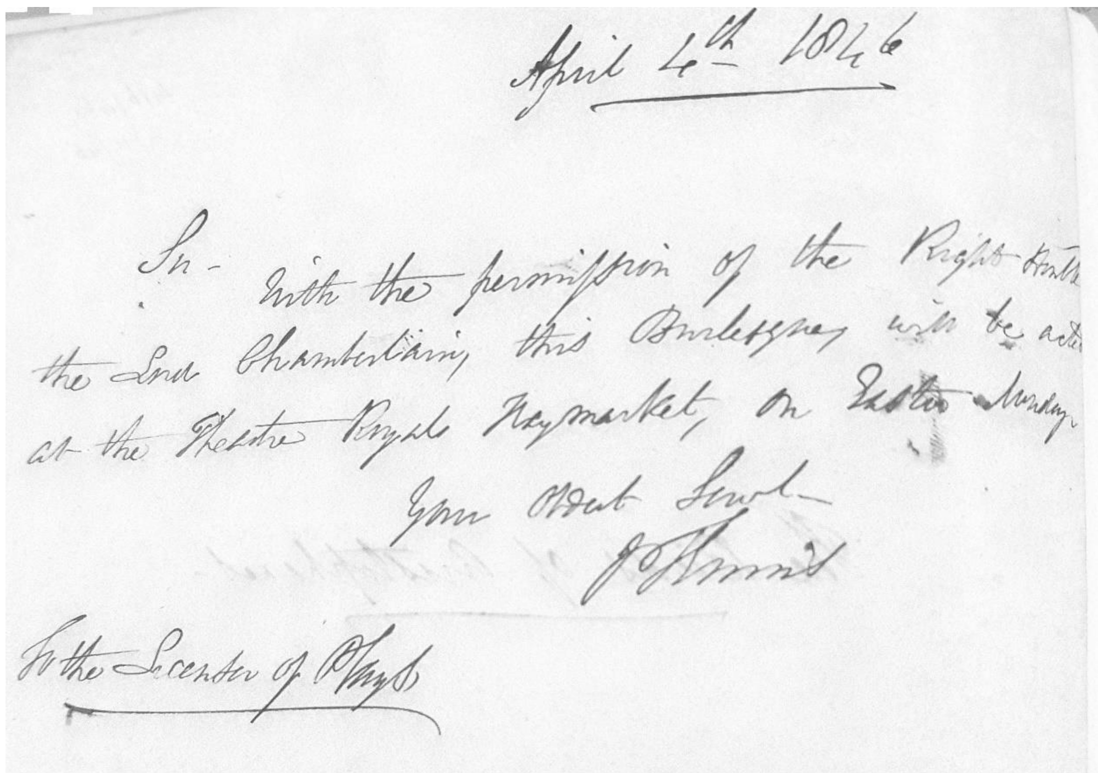
> My object was misunderstood, and consequently not appreciated… They were greatly mistaken who imagined I had no higher object in view than the amusement of holiday audiences… My ambition was to lay the

[75] Planché 1879c: 87.

[76] See Ch.1.

foundation for an Aristophanic drama, which the greatest minds would not consider it derogatory to contribute to… I never contemplated burlesque.[77]

In fact, the play was advertised as an extravaganza, in reality merely a form of burlesque which emphasised spectacle. The production acknowledged this, for when the script was sent to the Lord Chamberlain's Office for approval, a note was attached describing it as a 'burlesque' (Fig. 4.2). Planché's re-categorisation of Birds, clearly a burlesque, was an attempt to undermine his critics.



April 4th 1846

Sir - With the permission of the Right Honble the Lord Chamberlain this Burlesque will be acted at the Theatre Royal Haymarket on Easter Monday.

Your Obedt Servt

[illegible]

To the Licenser of Plays

Fig. 4.2: The Birds *is described as a burlesque. The note is not signed by Planché himself.*

All plays produced between 1737 and 1968 had to be given permission by the Lord Chamberlain's Office, who would then retain a copy of the script. The MS of *The*

[77] Planché 1901: 294.

Birds held in the British Library indicates that it passed the censor without alteration – hardly surprising given Planché's status and conservative views, as well as the tendency for 'pre-censorship' among Victorian playwrights.[78] Yet interestingly, when one compares the MS sent to the Lord Chamberlain with printed editions, one notices something quite striking.[79] Many lines are omitted from the MS, including whole speeches, the 'Gavotte de Vestris', and its reprise, 'Here's a Health to all Good Lasses'. 'O, think not, lewd Jove' is only offered in two verses.[80] There is also a song included after 'O, think not' that was later cut.[81] In places, the lines as given in the MS are jarring, and only make sense with additional lines found in the printed text. For example, in the MS' prologue, the nightingale states: 'I come as now, in *propria persona*' but the 'as now' does not refer to anything.[82] In the printed text, however, the nightingale states additionally:

When before your faces,

I venture out to speak the parabasis

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[78] Shellard and Nicholson 2004: 4f.

[79] The play-text was printed in the Lacy's Acting Edition series in 1846, including a preface written by Planché on 29 April, whilst *The Birds* was still being performed. It was later reprinted, alongside Planché's other burlesques, in a five-volume testimonial edition by the Somerset Herald in 1879, with the addition of some brief notes and an extended preface but no other alterations. There was also a printed songbook containing 'SONGS, DUETS, CHORUSSES, &c.' – although undated, it seems very likely that it was sold at performances (at the price of sixpence). Except here, I have referenced the 1879 edition throughout, it being the most complete and accessible.

[80] Planché 1846a: f.224.

[81] Ibid. f.222.

[82] Ibid.

I come as now, in *propria persona*[83]

Here, 'as now' refers to her current appearance, and 'I [will] come' to her later reappearance for the *parabasis*. Later, cut lines in the MS mean that 'a parrot' is made to call 'hear! hear!' out of metre;[84] the printed text later integrates it into the verse.[85] Planché, we must assume, realised there were holes in his text that needed filling with appropriate bits of verse, but, under pressure to get a working copy off to the censor, chose to gloss over that in the version submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's Office on 4 April. It was changed significantly by the time of the performance just eight days later as Planché filled the gaps.

Planché's adaptation of *The Birds* is sometimes remarkably close to the source-text – closer even than is typical for burlesques parodying tragedy. Not only is the overall plot retained (until the end), but many individual scenes are carefully replicated. The programmatic prologue, whilst original, stresses this connection to Aristophanes:

From ancient Athens, upon Fancy's wing,

To modern Babylon these scenes we bring;

Their import, merely guessed at in the Greek,

We venture in our vulgar tongue to speak,

With sundry variations…

[83] Planché 1879c: 87.

[84] Planché 1846a: f.224.

[85] Planché 1879c: 94.

...

In fine, we hope by mimic means, and choral,

To draw from ancient saws a modern moral…[86]

The emphasis is on transferral, translation. ‘We bring’ the text from Greece to London (or ‘modern Babylon’) as an ‘import’, claims the chorus. And it is not just a linguistic translation, but also a transferral of the play’s moral message, its ‘saw’. Yet translation is insufficient, for English is a ‘vulgar tongue’. ‘Mimic means’ suggests that Planché’s adaptation is merely imitation. At the close of the prologue, the nightingale-chorus sings:

Do not upbraid, kind friends, though I should fail

To sing as sweetly as the nightingale;

Critics be mute…

…

Say some must frown – I hope the mass will smile,

Nor, for foul play, our playful fowl revile.[87]

Planché feels compelled to apologise for his play, asking his audience not to ‘upbraid’ it. It will hopefully find approval among ‘the mass’ but ‘some’ will not like it – presumably those above ‘the mass’, those ‘men just fresh from college’ who can read Aristophanes in the original. So Aristophanes is revered in the prologue, and the entire burlesque is in a sense offered up as a dedication. This is odd. Classical

[86] Ibid. 87.

[87] Ibid. 88.

burlesque normally works by undermining the seriousness of its model, not unironically praising it. The title of the piece was of course *The Birds of Aristophanes*; by adding '*of Aristophanes*' Planché declares that his adaptation has remained significantly Aristophanic. We might contrast it with Frank Talfourd's *Alcestis*, which was billed as 'a most shameless misrepresentation of the Greek drama of Euripides'.[88] At the same time, Planché's 'Do not upbraid, kind friends' comes from Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*: 'Do not/Upbraid's with our distress'.[89] There is, perhaps, knowing irony here. How can Planché's play be base if it is quoting Shakespeare?

The characters of Peisetairos and Euelpides are translated into 'Jackanoxides' and 'Tomostyleseron' – pseudo-Greek names punning on Jack Noakes and Tom Styles, the proverbial names of common Englishmen. E.L. Blanchard had produced a burlesque of *Jack Noakes and Tom Styles* in 1842. They come from 'any town… you please', 'being discontented with their station,/As people may be found in every nation'.[90] Planché's King of the Birds is not called Tereus. In general, the burlesque removes overt references to Athens, Greece and Sophocles (expect for the Greek deities). In this sense, Planché makes his version more relevant to his contemporary audience. But although classical burlesque often blends the classical and the modern in an intentionally jarring way for comedic effect, that's not what Planché is doing; rather, he is making his story *universally* accessible, opening it up to those 'in every nation'. Contemporary references, including the mandatory

[88] Talfourd 2015: 89.

[89] *Coriolanus* 5.1.34f.

[90] Planché 1879c: 88.

reference to the railway, are included,[91] in some scenes significantly. But there are far fewer than is usually found in burlesque. Puns are also largely absent.

After the prologue, we see Jackanoxides and Tomostyleseron 'in search of the wise King of all the Birds',[92] singing a quartet with a magpie and raven. Just as Peisetairos and Euelpides seek an 'idle place', a place free from politics (Aristoph. *Birds* 44), Planché's protagonists are seeking 'some blest corner of the earth/.../Where there's no care'.[93] The King, however, is originally hostile: 'But ye are men, and therefore full of guile./Creatures that smile, and murder while they smile'.[94] In Aristophanes, Tereus' former humanity makes him an ally; it is the birds themselves who attack the visitors (Aristoph. *Birds* 310-365). As we must assume the King in Planché was always a bird, he shares their hostility. Described as a 'wonder', 'black as thunder' and as either an 'eagle or a condor',[95] the King is also more impressive than Tereus, who has a bent beak because Sophocles has abused him (Aristoph. *Birds* 100f.). Regardless, Jackanoxides quickly convinces the King to found a city in the clouds, like his Aristophanic counterpart.

Next, the King decides to call the birds to hear Jackanoxides' plan, and summons the nightingale to help him, as in Aristophanes. The nightingale was played by Priscilla Reed, *née* Horton, a famous actor, contralto, and mentor to the young W.S. Gilbert.[96] As in Aristophanes, the nightingale initially plays an instrument (a

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[91] Ibid. 110.

[92] Ibid. 88.

[93] Ibid. 89.

[94] Ibid. 90.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Stedman 2008.

flageolet rather than *auloi*,[97] although a flageolet is a good contemporary counterpart). This is a fascinating scene which we will return to later, but for now it is interesting to note just how Aristophanic it is. The birds even sing in Greek just before they arrive on-stage:

> Toro, toro, toro, tinx,
>
> Kickabau, kicabau,
>
> Toro, toro, toro, loli, lolink…[98]

This is a transliteration of Aristoph. *Birds* 260-262, the final lines of Tereus' summons.

At the arrival of the birds, we are effectively left with two choruses – the birds, and the nightingale. But their functions are different. The birds will sing accompaniment whilst the nightingale, who has already delivered the prologue, will later deliver the *parabasis*. She is in effect the chorus-leader, but is also a separate, independent character. The nightingale is the burlesque chorus, functioning in the same way as the single-person chorus presented by other classical burlesques, whereas the bird chorus is Aristophanic in function and form, as signalled by their intensely Aristophanic introduction.

Jackanoxides sets about persuading the birds to found a city, stressing the birds' former supremacy over men and their current, lowly position:

> Like slaves or madmen do the villains treat ye,
>
> Shoot ye, if on the open moors they meet ye;

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[97] Planché 1879c: 92.

[98] Ibid. 93.

Lime twigs, beat bushes, hunt through brakes and briers,

Lay snares, gins, meshes, traps, and traitorous wires,

Sell you in shops and markets, strung by scores;

Hawk you about in carts, at tavern doors;

Alive – in cages coop, on perches post you;

Dead – pluck and skewer, and lard, and stuff, and roast you![99]

This is a close adaptation of Aristoph. *Birds* 523-538. He describes the city he suggests they build in a parodic version of 'O, think not, lewd Jove', a song from Kane O'Hara's burletta, *Midas*; it contains an attempt to translate Peisetairos' instruction to 'to bar the gods from going through your land with a stiffy' (Aristoph. *Birds* 556f.), although in more delicate terms:

And if after some suburban beauty,

Sly Jove should come sneaking a permit without,

By Jove, he shall pay transit duty![100]

The language is innocuous, but references Zeus-Jupiter's reputation for womanising. This is as close as Planché ever comes to translating Aristophanes' racier moments; the verse was not included in the MS sent to the Lord Chamberlain.

His argument won, Jackanoxides makes the birds begin building Cloudcuckooland. The King, meanwhile, offers to make him and Tomostyleseron into birds; although Peisetairos was keen on this transformation (Aristoph. *Birds* 648-656),

[99] Ibid. 94.

[100] Ibid. 95.

Planché's heroes are reticent. Tomostyleseron resolves to turn into a cockatoo, but Jackanoxides hesitates: 'Before I settle, I'll at least think twice'.[101]

Next comes the promised *parabasis*, and here Planché begins to depart more significantly from Aristophanes. Aristophanes' *parabasis* presents a parodic theogony and eulogy of the birds, rooted in glorious absurdity (685-736), whereas Planché's nightingale-chorus argues that the fantastical plot of *The Birds* is actually not unbelievable at all:

> First look at home,
>
> Without going either to Greece or to Rome.
>
> Could not projects as airy, and visions as vain,
>
> Be proved to have sprung from an Englishman's brain?[102]

This passage is full of contemporary allusions, far more than are present in the rest of the play:

> Why should not the fowls in the air build a palace,
>
> When there's hope of a submarine railway to Calais?[103]

The effect is to draw a conscious connection between past and present. *The Birds* need not only exist in Greece or Rome; the plot, and by association all Aristophanes, may just have easily 'have sprung from an Englishman's brain'. Aristophanes is not

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[101] Ibid. 97.

[102] Ibid. 98.

[103] Ibid. A channel tunnel, eventually built in the late-twentieth century, was an obsession of Victorian burlesque writers.

only relevant, then; there is something inherently Victorian about him. Victorians defined themselves by their relationship to the past, but this is not a case of drawing similarities and differences and creating a parallel. It is a declaration that Aristophanes and Cloudcuckooland *are* Victorian. ‘Having seen what we’ve seen; seeing still what we see,/Who can venture to swear such things [as Cloudcuckooland] yet may not be?’[104]

After the *parabasis*, Jackanoxides meets various visitors to his new city, though fewer than in Aristophanes; a poet, an architect and a legislator. The most Greek of Peisetairos’ visitors – an oracle collector, a priest, an inspector – are not retained, and the architect is a modern adaptation of Aristophanes’ Meton. This scene is also full of contemporary references. Rather than Pindar and Homer, Planché’s poet quotes Shakespeare, following lines from *Macbeth* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* with ‘as Shakespeare has it’[105] instead of Aristophanes’ ‘κατὰ τὸν Ὅμηρον’ (Aristoph. *Bird* 910, 914). Planché follows this scene with criticism of the state of contemporary drama.[106] The architect, who offers dodgy building services, disparages the 1844 Metropolitan Buildings Act:

> My quarrel is with the new Building Act:
>
> I feel my genius cramp’d, sir, upon land.
>
> They stipulate that houses now should *stand!*[107]

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[104] Ibid. 99.

[105] Ibid. 101.

[106] Ibid. 102.

[107] Ibid. 103.

The scene also attacks high rent prices in London,[108] proving that not all contemporary references are lost to time. The final visitor is a legislator, and again, Planché makes the scene recognisably Victorian:

> JACK. What are your politics, my learned brother?
>
> Tory or Whig?
>
> LEGISLATOR. Sometimes one, sometimes 'tother…[109]

In Aristophanes, these scenes are followed by a second *parabasis*, the arrival of Iris, a second group of visitors and an envoy from the gods. The play climaxes in the wedding of Peisetairos and Basileia and the birds are praised as victorious. All this is excluded from Planché's version. This may be partially because of time (burlesques were designed to be short),[110] and Aristophanes' second group of visitors offer nothing new to the plot. But more significantly, Planché's cuts allow him to re-interpret the play's treatment of the gods and its conclusion.

Re-Interpreting *The Birds*

The political message of Planché's *Birds* becomes clear in the play's re-written conclusion. Instead of the victory presented in Aristophanes, Planché shows Cloudcuckooland collapsing as soon as it is built:

[108] Ibid. 104.

[109] Ibid.

[110] 'Most burlesques would take around 60-90 minutes to run' (Bryant Davies 2019: 3).

KING. Where's Jackanoxides? I come to tell,

The city's built –

JACK. 'Tis well!

KING. I would 'twere well –

JACK. Is't not well built?

KING. Yes.

JACK. Well, then, what's the matter?

KING. The rooks are making a confounded clatter…[111]

The rooks, it transpires, want a rookery, as they and the sparrows cannot afford to live in 'Peacock Square'.[112] Meanwhile, the exotic birds:

KING. Are all enraptured with the glories

Of their new palaces and public places,

Where little dirty birds daren't shew their faces…

…

You promised, if they went by your advice,

That it should be of birds the Paradise;

And if they find themselves deceived, I've fears

[111] Planché 1879c: 106.

[112] Ibid.

They'll pull the new built town about your ears.[113]

Planché's Cloudcuckooland, therefore, is doomed by its unsatisfactory handling of social inequality. The common birds, who allegorically represent the poor, are dissatisfied at being excluded from the city's wealth. The promise of 'Paradise' proves only true for the birds representing the upper class.

Yet if this sounds like a call for London's own inequality to be rectified lest it too collapse like Cloudcuckooland, that notion is swiftly disproven, as the true moral of the play is set out:

KING. Vain fool, know Jove, who gave them wings,

Put, in his wisdom, limits to their flight;

Marked out their food by day, their rest by night.

Think you he gave to man the power of reason

To stir inferior beings up to treason?

To snatch from out his hand the regal rod,

And make each goose believe itself a god?[114]

At this point, the King transforms into Jove, who adds to his lecture:

Let wild theorists a lesson take,

And see what monsters of themselves they'd make.

What dire confusion in the world 'twould breed,

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid. 107.

If fools could follow whither knaves would lead.

Ye mortals, fear the gods, and trust the wise…[115]

Part of Jove's authority comes from his divinity, which is represented as more Christian than classical. This is not Aristophanes' flawed, conquered and promiscuous Zeus but a perfect representation of divine authority. Planché's Jove also symbolises the monarchy. Thus, he holds 'the regal rod', and he and other '*principal DEITIES* [are] *enthroned*'.[116] The transformation of the King into Jove underlines this connection. His moral is religious ('Ye mortals, fear the gods') but also secular ('and trust the wise'). The issue as Planché sets it out, then, is not that wealth inequality exists, but that Jackanoxides foolishly thought he could fix the problem. The birds' social position cannot change because Jove has 'put… limits to their flight'. Nor should those below attempt to lead their fellows, for they are 'knaves' leading 'fools'. It is wrong to 'stir inferior beings up to treason'. Those who are inferior, whether upper-class parrots or common sparrows, should know their place and submit to royal authority (as ordained by the gods, or rather, by God).

Peisetairos' city is founded on the back of revolution against the gods, and his own personal violent actions. He threatens the she-god Iris with rape (1253-1256) and roasts disloyal bird-citizens (1583-1585). Jackanoxides, in contrast, does not use or threaten such violence. This is not a burlesque criticising Jacobin revolutionaries, because Jackanoxides is no revolutionary and Cloudcuckooland is founded through reform. Planché's criticism is remarkable because his protagonist's ambitions were humble and non-threatening.

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[115] Ibid. 107f.

[116] Ibid. 107.

Planché emphasises that this defence of the status quo is a moral lesson. Thus, Jove demands that ‘wild theorists a lesson take’; at the close, the chorus and Jackanoxides ask the audience to ‘approve/The moral here, to mortals read by Jove’.[117] At the beginning, he had promised such a lesson:

> In fine, we hope by mimic means, and choral,
>
> To draw from ancient saws a modern moral…[118]

The burlesque therefore ends with a serious political and moral lecture, quite unlike Aristophanes’ conclusion. Mostly middle-class and therefore largely excluded from power, the audience is told that they are excluded *because they are naturally inferior*. The authority of the ruling classes, hardly in any practicable doubt, is given moral and religious justification. Planché repeatedly stresses the didactic nature of his argument. If this is Aristophanes, it is the reactionary Aristophanes of the Victorian male elite speaking the worldview of the Victorian male elite to an audience who, for reasons of class, education and gender, were suppressed by that worldview. In a time of intense social and political upheaval, ‘Planché’s *Birds*, despite its aesthetic ambitions, perpetuated the reactionary tradition in which Aristophanes had found his [almost] exclusive home since the 1790s.’[119]

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[117] Ibid. 108.

[118] Ibid. 87.

[119] Hall 2007: 81.

Spectacle

If there is a difference between extravaganza and burlesque, it is that extravaganza relies more heavily on spectacle. Victorian theatre was obsessed with stagecraft, and 'throughout the century, technical innovations refined the theatre's ability to provide convincing representations of spectacular action and historically authentic settings and costumes.'[120] Planché was an 'expert in the technical aspects of production';[121] a year after *Birds* Madame Vestris employed him 'to "superintend" the decorative departments, painting rooms, and wardrobe' at the Lyceum.[122] *The Birds*, with its promise of elaborate bird costumes, Greek gods, and cities in the sky, was another opportunity for creating spectacle. Planché's production rose to the challenge.

The most spectacular scene the play is the birds' entrance. The various birds mentioned imply a large chorus:

JACK. Owls and widgeons,

My very noble and approved good pigeons,

Gulls, peacocks, parrots, pelicans, and plovers…[123]

Their entrance is built up terrifically. Before they arrive, the nightingale sings an adapted version of the Scottish ballad, 'The Chevalier's Muster-Roll':

[120] Jackson 2004: 58.

[121] Booth 1991: 195f.

[122] Finkel 1996: 14.

[123] Planché 1879c: 93.

All the birds are here coming!

All the birds are here coming!

All the birds are here coming!

Land and sea birds all coming.

Storks are coming, cranes are coming,

Crows are coming, finches coming,

Larks are coming, linnets coming,

Ruffs and reeves and all coming.

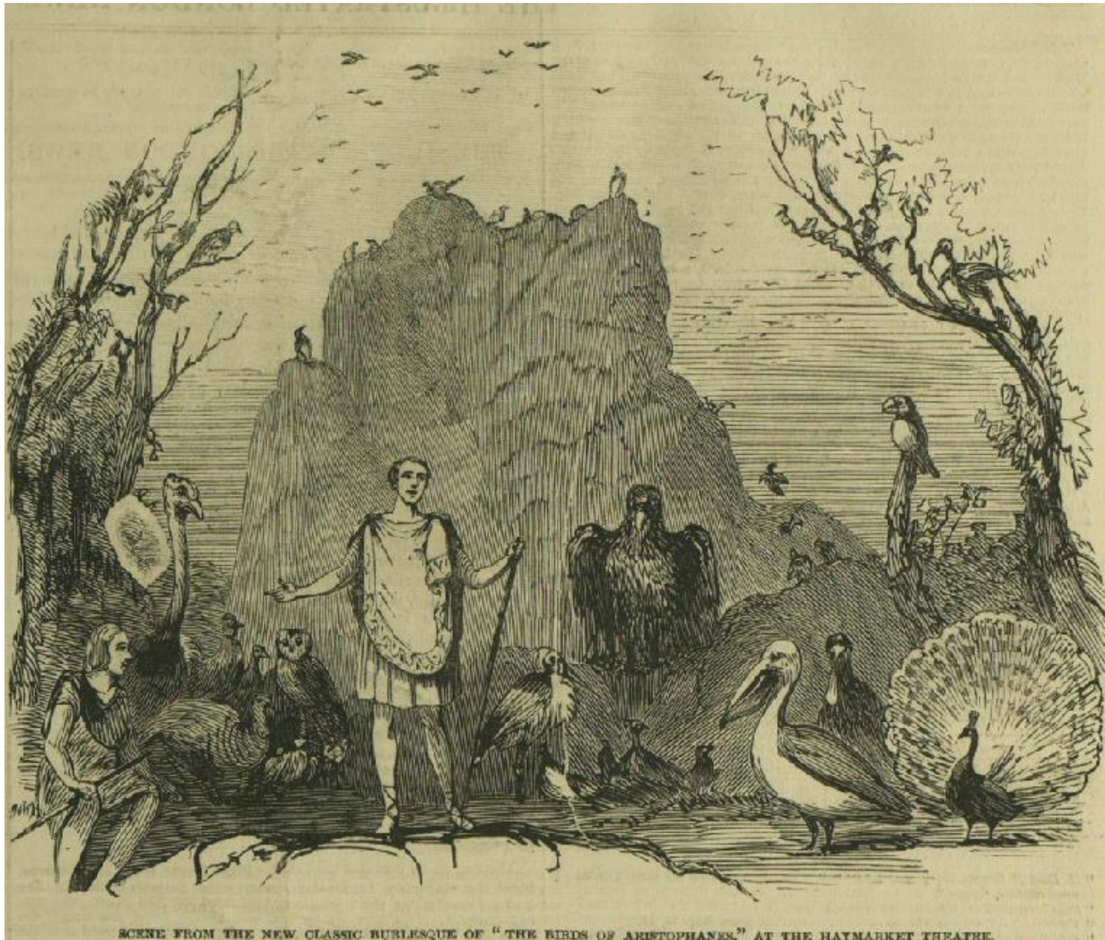
All the birds, &c.[124]

The stress is on the as-yet-unseen vastness of 'all the birds'. The song is three verses long, and still the birds do not appear. Next, we hear the chorus sing strange bird noises (transliterated from Aristophanes, see above) from offstage; now we can hear how many of them there are, but still not see them, and this effect only adds to the tension. Finally, '*all the* BIRDS *enter at a scream of the wind instruments*'.[125] In what

[124] Ibid. 92.

[125] Ibid. 93.

must have been a cacophony of sound, we finally encounter a large body of fantastically costumed chorus-members,[126] hit at once by both sight and sound.



SCENE FROM THE NEW CLASSIC BURLESQUE OF "THE BIRDS OF ARISTOPHANES," AT THE HAYMARKET THEATRE.

Fig. 4.3: A scene from Planché's Birds.

The Birds has three settings; most of the action is set atop the '*Apex of a Woody Mountain*', but at the play's conclusion, we change to a '*Bird's-eye view of the City of the Birds*' – before, only a few lines later, moving again to the 'HIGH COURT OF OLYMPUS'.[127] Both scene changes are unnecessary from a dramaturgical

[126] The birds' costumes were designed by a separate costumier to the classical costumes (ibid. 85).

[127] Ibid. 86.

perspective – the King could have announced the city's completion, and Jupiter could have revealed himself, without the need for transporting the scene. As Jackanoxides and the nightingale stay on stage for both transitions, the scene changes are artificial. But they allow Planché to show off two more elaborately painted backdrops.

An engraving of *The Birds*' *mise-en-scène* (Fig. 4.3) shows the beautifully painted backdrop used for most of the play, its centre occupied by an intimidating and majestic escarpment framed by birds, two parallel trees stretching in from either wing. In the illustration, several birds are shown on stage, and indeed the playbill jokingly comments that 'other Birds [are performed] by a Flock of Auxiliaries from the Zoological Gardens'.[128] What are we to make of this? The birds may have been painted onto the backdrop, but in the engraving, the pelican and peacock stand in the foreground. Were real birds used? More plausibly perhaps, the illustration may only give us an impression, and if so, the birds drawn may represent the Chorus. The large eagle opposite Jackanoxides must surely represent the King.

The final scene incorporates '*Poses Plastiques of the Principal Deities*'.[129] *Poses plastiques* were popular during the second half of the 1840s and appeared in several of Planché's burlesques from this period. They presented living, unmoving and untalking statues in a state of undress. This is probably the most risqué part of Planché's *Birds*; although *poses plastiques* did not 'arouse much moral indignation',[130] they were not without criticism. The *Athenaeum* commented that they 'have never adverted to the *tableau* mania – believing it to be a passion which would

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[128] Ibid. 85.

[129] Ibid. 86.

[130] Altick 1978: 348.

sink to its proper level, if not protected by persecution'.[131] The play also concluded 'with "red fire," and the usual scenic appurtenances – no doubt the better to impress its tenor upon the minds of the auditory.'[132]

It is curious to see such spectacle juxtaposed with Jupiter's serious moralising. Whilst these elements hardly detract from the god's message, Planché clearly attempted to balance this defence of the status quo with crowd-pleasing populist spectacle (as *The Standard* guessed). We have already noted that Planché was eager to improve 'the condition of our national drama',[133] but through the elevation of the low burlesque art-form. Such spectacle was a necessary part of his vision. Mitchell and Frere had both argued that Aristophanes used licentiousness to coax the Athenian rabble into watching an otherwise conservative Comedy – sugar to coat the moralistic pill. Planché puts that theory into practice, coating his reactionary, conservative burlesque in populist sugar.

Mixed Reviews

Planché's *Birds* was an experiment, but for many reviewers not a successful one. *The Era* considered Planché to be 'marvellously ahead of his rivals', but also declared that burlesque as a genre 'must speedily find an end.'[134] *The Almanack of the Month* felt that 'this experiment is in every way creditable', yet criticised 'the *smallness*' of the

[131] 'Our Weekly Gossip' (3 February 1849) *Athenaeum*: 118.

[132] 'Haymarket' (14 April 1846) *Standard*: 3.

[133] Planché 1901: 114

[134] 'The Burlesques' (19 April 1846) *Era*: 8.

adaptation.[135] *The Daily News* was even more critical: 'the piece, as a whole was long and laboured… People are getting tired of endless jokes about railways.'[136] The *Illustrated London News*, however, was more positive, arguing that 'the burlesque has but one fault… It is too good [refined]'.[137] *The Morning Post*, meanwhile, focussed on the play's moral lesson, and offered the most fascinating eulogy of Planché: 'All the productions of Planché's pen are creditable to the nation as well as the dramatist.'[138] He would have been happy with that.

The reviews failed to agree whether Planché's adaptation was sufficiently classical. Both *The Examiner* and *The Daily News* believed it was, and was unsuccessful for this reason.[139] *The Standard*, however, stated that Aristophanes was handled in such a way 'as would make an Athenian mob wild were they witnesses to the desecration'.[140] *ILN* agreed that it was not particularly classical, but conversely saw this as a merit: Planché 'has given to [*The Birds*] a plot and a meaning, which the original did not possess.'[141] *The Era*, meanwhile, offers a more nuanced criticism, noting that whilst Aristophanes' original 'was admired as an unearthly event', Planché 'makes the unearthly subservient to human failings', which it describes as 'a sad

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[135] A'Beckett 1846: 364, 362. Original emphasis.

[136] 'Easter Amusements' (14 April 1846) *Daily News*: 5.

[137] 'Haymarket Theatre' (18 April 1846) *ILN*: 253.

[138] 'Haymarket' (14 April 1846) *Morning Post*: 5.

[139] 'The Easter Pieces' (18 April 1846) *Examiner*: 245; 'Easter Amusements' (14 April 1846) *Daily News*: 5.

[140] 'Haymarket' (14 April 1846) *Standard*: 3.

[141] 'Haymarket Theatre' (18 April 1846) *ILN*: 253. The two plays' plots are very similar, so this is a strange criticism to make of Aristophanes.

mistake'.[142] It is unclear what this means, but it seems to refer to the changed ending, which re-characterises the creation of Cloudcuckooland as a human failing. Again, then, it criticises Planché for diverging from Aristophanes, but not solely out of deference for the Greek playwright.

The audience's reaction can only be glimpsed through the distorting lens of reviews and Planché's own recollections, but from these we can deduce that the piece won lukewarm praise. Planché 'does not fail to raise hearty and reiterated laughter from all parts of the house'[143]; 'there was a good deal of applause at the conclusion, and it was unmixed with disapprobation'.[144] However, the *ILN* states that it failed 'to elicit shouts of laughter from a general audience', and the more educated audience-members' 'appreciation was subdued and quiet'.[145] *The Almanack of the Month* meanwhile notes that 'though the audience looked puzzled at the didactic passages, they did not seem bored with them. There was little laughter, but evidently a good deal of pleasure'.[146] For his part, Planché notes 'the probable disappointment of the lovers of mere absurdity, and the natural mystification of a few good-humoured holiday spectators', concluding that he was 'partially disappointed'.[147] This all suggests it was received well enough, but failed to stand out, garnering polite appreciation but nothing more passionate.

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[142] 'The Burlesques' (19 April 1846) *Era*: 8.

[143] 'The Burlesques' (19 April 1846) *Era*: 8.

[144] 'Easter Amusements' (14 April 1846) *Daily News*: 5.

[145] 'Haymarket Theatre' (18 April 1846) *ILN*: 253.

[146] A'Beckett 1846: 363f.

[147] Planché 1879c: 83f.

The reviews and Planché's own account have their biases, reflecting interests that cannot have been shared universally by all audience members. I do not think the play failed either because of its dutifulness to, or liberties with, Aristophanes' original play. Most audience-goers would not have been able to consider this point even if it struck them as important, being unfamiliar with the original. But primary sources used carefully can still tell us much.

Perhaps the biggest limitation of Planché's *Birds* was that it wasn't sufficiently able to make people laugh. Planché not only failed to translate many of Aristophanes' jokes, but also suppressed the usual comedy of burlesque. There are few puns. Much of the play avoids topical humour, although contemporary references do appear. Instead, we are given a moral lecture by Jupiter. If the play's jokes do not make sufficient reference to the contemporary world, its politics – and particularly its original ending – are transparently reactionary. The audience are told to know their place. The result is neither fully Aristophanic nor fully burlesque. We find this criticism given voice in *The Almanack of the Month*:

> The satire which rends and scars in Aristophanes, nibbles and tickles in Planché… [His] experiment is not in the least Aristophanic. It is obvious that his inspiration is cold-drawn… He has not gone to the glorious Attic fountain-head.[148]

Classical burlesque worked by either taking a well-known classical story and manipulating it, or else by parodying the performance conventions adopted by Victorian theatre practitioners staging Greek tragedy or serious adaptations. In either case, this practice brings the high low. But by treating Aristophanes as high literature

[148] A'Beckett 1846: 362f.

and then refusing to subvert him out of reverence, Planché failed to burlesque anything. He in fact did the opposite; he brought a low artform high. The result was a rather flat play that offers, not humour, but moral preaching. *The Birds* offers plentiful spectacle, but insufficient to compensate for its incongruous tone.

It is possible, moreover, that a burlesqued Aristophanes would never have worked, even if Planché had allowed himself to be more genuinely Aristophanic. After all, Aristophanes was not well known, textually or in performance. As we have seen, English translations of Aristophanes at this time were predominantly being accessed by those with only the highest education. Old Comedy had never before been performed commercially on the British stage. We might, with *The Examiner*, 'question whether the subject is a very good one.'[149] *ILN* highlights the problem:

> Nothing can be more polished or witty than the writing; but in some instances the allusions were too esoteric. The author, however, may rest assured that not a point was missed by the more educated portion of the hearers…[150]

Planché's deference to Aristophanes therefore prevented him from being funny; *The Birds of Aristophanes* also suffered from the obscurity of its source, and the paradox of trying to burlesque what was burlesque already. A preoccupation with creating a heightened form of drama with a political message made *Birds* unsuccessful as the Easter entertainment it was supposed to be. Had it been successful, Planché's play could have created sufficient familiarity with Greek Old

[149] 'The Easter Pieces' (18 April 1846) *Examiner*: 245; 'Easter Amusements' (14 April 1846) *Daily News*: 5.

[150] 'Haymarket Theatre' (18 April 1846) *ILN*: 253.

Comedy to encourage other dramatists to adapt Aristophanes, and perhaps theatre managers to stage the Greek playwright in unadapted translation. The 1843 Theatres Act made all this possible – for the first time in over a hundred years, serious theatre could be staged outside the patent houses. But it was not to be, and the stage reception of Aristophanes in the Victorian period remained marginal. Aristophanes had a marked influence on the plays of Planché's heir, Sir William Schwenck Gilbert; schools and universities also successfully staged Old Comedy in the original Greek. But no other professional adaptation of Aristophanes appeared on the British stage throughout the nineteenth century.

~5~

W.S. Gilbert, The English Aristophanes

The works of W.S. Gilbert might seem out-of-place amongst my other case studies, all of which directly acknowledge their relationship to Aristophanes; unlike Planché, Gilbert never wrote an adaptation of Aristophanes and indeed barely mentions Greek Old Comedy in his works. If the relative obliqueness of Old Comedy, particularly in contrast to Greek tragedy, meant that receivers usually had to declare their indebtedness to Aristophanes for the similarities between text and source to be appreciated, Gilbert showed no such desire. Nevertheless it has long been assumed that Gilbertian topsyturvydom and satire parallels what we find in Aristophanes.[1] Both are, 'in whatever respects incomparable with each other, wholly incomparable with anyone else'.[2] This chapter will argue that Gilbert was not, however, the 'English Aristophanes' merely because of his similar genius, but because he subterraneously received and appropriated Aristophanes for the Victorian stage. In several of Gilbert's plays, he borrows story-elements from Aristophanes, particularly from *Birds* as mediated by Planché. This chapter explores this mediated reception in the plays *Thespis* (1871), *The Happy Land* (1873) and *Utopia Limited* (1893). And we will see how Gilbert's *The Princess* (1870) and *Princess Ida* (1884) share similarities with the plot of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*. No account of the long-nineteenth-century

[1] See esp. Goldberg 1935, Liebman 1971.

[2] Sichel 1970: 69.

British Aristophanes could be complete without discussing this most Aristophanic of Victorian writers.

Gilbert and the Classics

Sir William Schwenck Gilbert (1836-1911) was one of the leading playwrights and humorists of his day. His father was a novelist, his family comfortable and stolidly middle-class. Educated at Great Ealing School ('almost as good as Eton and Harrow'[3]), then King's College London, he intended to enlist as an officer in the Crimean War, but its sudden end forced him to take up an assistant clerkship in the Civil Service instead, and later to take the Bar exam.[4] He retained an interest in the army, later becoming a reservist and including soldiers' choruses in many operettas. In 1861, he began to write and illustrate for *Fun*, a periodical started by H.J. Byron. *Fun* was the original home of his *Bab Ballads*, poems which show the nascent topsyturvydom that characterises much of Gilbert's oeuvre. He sold his first play, *Uncle Baby*, in 1863.[5] Overall, Gilbert wrote almost 80 plays and libretti;[6] best known among them are his fourteen collaborations with Sir Arthur Sullivan. Despite the conflicts that came to define the latter years of their collaboration, Gilbert and Sullivan's long-running partnership was incredibly successful, making them and their producer Richard D'Oyly Carte famous and wealthy. These fourteen works are now collectively referred to as the Savoy Operas, after the Savoy Theatre which was built

[3] Stedman 1996: 3.

[4] Ibid. 5f.

[5] Ibid. 31.

[6] *Gilbert and Sullivan Archive* 2015.

specifically to perform them,[7] and are still regularly performed by professional and amateur companies across the world. Gilbert received a knighthood in 1907, the first person to receive this honour for services to drama.[8]

One of Gilbert's most popular and best-written plays, *Pygmalion and Galatea*, retells the Ovidian myth in a strikingly similar spirit to Bernard Shaw's later *Pygmalion*.[9] The play came after William Brough's 1867 burlesque on the same theme, and inspired its own burlesque, *Galatea, or Pygmalion Reversed* (1883), by Henry Pottinger Stephens and W. Webster.[10] But Gilbert's play was not light-hearted burlesque – it was a serious romantic comedy. Gilbert's influence on musical theatre is well-acknowledged, but his plays are now all but forgotten; they were nevertheless vital to the development of late-Victorian spoken drama. *Pygmalion and Galatea* is set in the classical world, unlike Shaw's *Pygmalion*, but it fervently avoids a classicising, pseudo-tragic style; as Gilbert explained in a personal letter to the theatre critic Clement Scott, 'the piece makes no pretence whatever to archaeological correctness. The piece is, & was always intended to be, modern in style & thought.'[11]

In general, few of Gilbert's poems and plays refer to the ancient world. This is not the case in the operettas he wrote with Sullivan. If no Savoy opera after *Thespis*

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[7] Stedman 1996: 187f. D'Oyly Carte also built the Savoy Hotel with his share of the profits.

[8] Ibid. 328.

[9] See Ch.9.

[10] Joshua 2001: 104; 114. The intervening years between Gilbert and Shaw also saw *Pygmalion* (1892, Thomas Sturge Moore) and *Pygmalion; Or the Worker and his Work* (1898, William E. Hurrell). Three other Pygmalion plays were written, but not performed (Joshua 2001: 131).

[11] Gilbert to Clement Scott, 12 December 1883, Morgan Library Gilbert and Sullivan Collection (ML-GSC) 106049.

was set in antiquity, each still contains overt classical references except *The Yeomen of the Guard* – an omission partially explained by this piece's Tudor setting. Whilst the number of references fell between *The Mikado* and *The Gondoliers*, the overall average number of references is high, with a median of 7 and a mean of 6. And these are only direct, unmistakable classical allusions; this data ignores Gilbert's many oblique references and appropriations (see Appendix A).

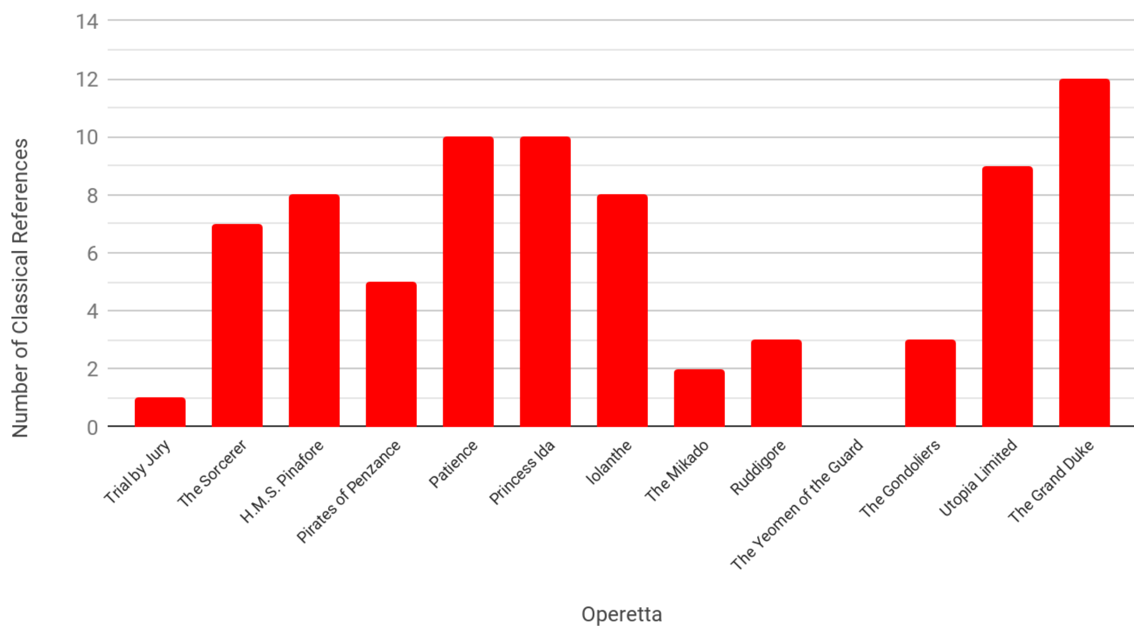

Fig. 5.1: The distribution of classical references in Gilbert and Sullivan operettas.[12]

The final Savoy operetta, *The Grand Duke*, features the most classical allusions; two songs extensively reference the ancient world. Whilst Aristophanes is not specifically mentioned, classical theatre is recalled, particularly in Act II. Ludwig, the leading comedian of a theatrical troupe, has taken over the Grand Duchy of Pfennig-Halbpfennig, and adorns his company in Grecian costumes prepared for a

[12] Deciding what counts as a direct reference is necessarily subjective but I hope this data is illustrative where it cannot be authoritative.

production of *Troilus and Cressida*. He sings of his intention to revive specific Greek performance traditions, within the realms of decency:

> We've a choir hyporchematic (that is, ballet-operatic)
>
> Who respond to the *choreutæ* of that cultivated age,
>
> And our clever chorus-master, all but captious criticaster
>
> Would accept as the *choregus* of the early Attic stage.
>
> …
>
> And perhaps I'd better mention,
>
> Lest alarming you I am,
>
> That it isn't our intention
>
> To perform a Dithyramb –
>
> It displays a lot of stocking,
>
> Which is always very shocking,
>
> And of course I'm only mocking
>
> At the prevalence of "cram"![13]

These cultured allusions perhaps display the librettist's 'cram' even more than the character's; dithyrambs are mentioned, but not the more expected Old Comedy or

[13] Gilbert 2016a: II.35-38; 65-72. Line numbers refer to Bradley's edition throughout.

tragedy. Ludwig was performed by Rutland Barrington dressed as ‘King Agamemnon, in a Louis Quatorze wig’ (Fig. 5.2).[14]

Fig. 5.2: Rutland Barrington as Ludwig as Agamemnon (via Louis XIV) in The Grand Duke.

In a letter to Clement Scott, Gilbert recalled that ‘in [his] school days [he] translated (under compulsion) some Greek Tragedies & one or two of Aristophanes’ burlesques’.[15] He was therefore familiar with Old Comedy, and even connects it to

[14] Gilbert 2016a: I.127f.

[15] Gilbert to Clement Scott, 12 December 1883, ML-GSC 106049.

contemporary theatre by describing it as ‘burlesque’. Goldberg in fact claims he won prizes for translating Aristophanes at school.[16] Gilbert visited Greece as a tourist sometime after 1893.[17] There, he noted an upcoming trip to ‘Olympia – where the Olympic games used to take place, but I don’t look forward to the expedition, which is an all-day affair, with any pleasure’.[18] His two days in Athens were more enjoyable.[19] He owned about 5,000 books,[20] though in the absence of a catalogue it is impossible to say how many, if any, were classical. Unlike with Shelley or Planché, then, there is no concrete evidence that Gilbert had a particular love for the classical world beyond that shared by all middle-class Victorian gentlemen of a certain education. I state this as a disclaimer. I now want to demonstrate why exactly his position as ‘the English Aristophanes’ is entirely fitting, by looking at five of his most Aristophanic plays.

***Thespis* (1871)**

The first collaboration between Gilbert and Sullivan was not an operetta but a burlesque. With Sullivan’s original score, *Thespis* ventured beyond the convention of

[16] Goldberg 1935: 17.

[17] The undated letters mention his ward Nancy McIntosh, who originated the part of Princess Zara in *Utopia Limited* (1893) and thereafter became Gilbert’s protégée and surrogate daughter.

[18] Gilbert to Lucy Gilbert (undated), BL Add MS 49345: 21.

[19] Gilbert to Lucy Gilbert (undated), BL Add MS 49345: 22.

[20] How 1891: 336.

including parodies of well-known musical numbers,[21] and its dialogue is written in prose – two significant modifications to a genre typically defined by its rigid form. But in all other respects it is a standard example of a genre that, by the 1870s, was well established and thoroughly worn out. *Thespis* opened on 26 December 1871 at the Gaiety Theatre, following a curtain-raiser written by Gilbert's old colleague H.J. Byron.[22] It was moderately successful, running for 63 performances.[23]

Thespis is the only Gilbert play here discussed actually set in ancient Greece; the action takes place in '*the ruins of The Temple of the Gods, on* [the] *summit of Mount Olympus*',[24] although, in the spirit of burlesque, contemporary references are made at will, confusing any exact temporality. It includes among its *dramatis personae* Jupiter, Apollo, Mars and Diana. There is a group of mortals whose names sound classical but are really vehicles for puns: Nicemis (Nice Miss); the drunkard Tipseion; the fools Preposteros and Stupidas; and so on. If nothing else, the variety of name endings Gilbert employs (*-is*, *-eion*, *-os*, *-as*) suggests he knew his way around Greek noun declensions. The titular Thespis, as we learn at the end of the burlesque, is the same mythological Thespis to whom the invention of tragedy is attributed. This *aition* is probably a later classical tradition, and not one mentioned by Aristotle, although if the *Minos* is by Plato then he felt the need to refute it, stating that 'tragedy is now ancient, not as people think invented by Thespis or Phrynichus' (321a). Horace also reiterates the myth, declaring in his *Ars Poetica* that 'Thespis is said to have invented

[21] The score is now lost, although one number, 'Climbing over Rocky Mountain', was reused in *The Pirates of Penzance*. 'Little Maid of Arcadee' and sections of a ballet also survive.

[22] Bradley 2016: 4.

[23] Ibid. 4.

[24] Gilbert 2016b: I.1.

the unknown genre of the tragic Muse' (275f.). Ancient sources on tragedy's founder do not abound, however. Likewise, although Thespis might seem like a natural metatheatrical subject for burlesque, there were to my knowledge no other burlesques written on the theme. Excepting this play, his reception seems to have been slight throughout the nineteenth century.

The burlesque's plot involves a theatrical troupe, of which Thespis is manager, ascending Mt. Olympus. There they discover the gods, who – outwith the ever-nimble Mercury – have all grown old. Jupiter asks Thespis how to restore the gods' status among mortals, and Thespis persuades him to visit earth 'incog, mingle with the world, hear and see what people think'.[25] In the meantime, Thespis' company take up the roles of the gods, with Mercury left to supervise. Difficulties immediately arise. Pretteia, who is playing the part of Venus, is upset to find Mars and Vulcan played by her father and grandfather; Nicemis-Diana insists Sparkeion-Apollo comes out with her at night to keep her company, messing up the cycle of night and day; Daphne-Calliope insists that Sparkeion is married to her and not Nicemis, because the expurgated family edition of Lemprière's Classical Dictionary asserts that 'Apollo was several times married, among others to… Calliope.'[26] 'Olympus is now in a terrible muddle', remarks Mercury, 'for Thespis as Jove is a terrible blunder'.[27] After a year, the Olympians return and punish Thespis for the chaos he has caused:

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[25] Ibid. I.489f.

[26] Ibid. II.263.

[27] Ibid. II.131; II.135.

Away to earth, contemptible comedians,

And hear our curse, before we set you free;

You shall all be eminent tragedians,

Whom no one ever goes to see.[28]

Thus is created the Thespis of myth who founded tragedy. As we saw in Chapter 4, there was nothing particularly original about writing a classical burlesque by 1871. But aspects of *Thespis* may reveal an Aristophanic inspiration.

Thespis' plot, at the most basic level, is similar to Aristophanes' *Birds*. A group of humans climb a mountain to escape the world below, meet the local inhabitants, then use their newfound position to take power from the gods. Obviously, the classical burlesque has Jupiter cede power to Thespis willingly and only temporarily, and there are no birds. But the central plot point, this transferral of power from the gods to humankind, is shared. Jupiter is even concerned about the dwindling of votive offerings,[29] a key issue in *Birds* after Peisetairos sets up a blockade – though in the burlesque this reduction in offerings comes from the gods' growing irrelevance and not Thespis' actions. Of course, if Thespis was heretofore the leader of a Greek comic theatre company, it is only fitting that he be familiar with this Aristophanes play. I am not trying to suggest any significant intertextuality. But, as we will see, *Birds* is the Aristophanic text Gilbert seems to come back to repeatedly. It is no coincidence that it is also the only Aristophanes play adapted into a burlesque, by J.R. Planché, as we discussed in the previous chapter.

[28] Ibid. II.543-546.

[29] Ibid. I.116f.

Another important intertext, and another connection with Aristophanes, is the French *ópera bouffe*, *Orphée aux Enfers*, the first opera composed by Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880). It opened at Offenbach's own *Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens* on 21 October 1858 and parodies the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. Far from their classical portrayal as devoted spouses, in the libretto written by Ludovic Halévy and Hector Crémieux, Orpheus and Eurydice loathe one another. When Eurydice is spirited away to Hades by Pluto, Orpheus is compelled to summit Olympus and ask Jupiter to return his wife. Jupiter agrees to arbitrate, in order to get close to the beautiful Eurydice himself. In Hades, Eurydice is bored of her new life of captivity and rejects Jupiter's advances. Finally, when Orpheus has been tricked into surrendering his wife to Hades permanently – a penalty he is happy to pay – Jupiter decides to transform Eurydice into a Bacchant, and she leads the gods in dance to honour Bacchus. This is *Le Galop Infernal*, now known as the music to the can-can. Behind this light-hearted opera lay a stinging satire on the Second Empire, and the lusts and hypocrisies of its ruling elite – specifically Napoleon III, who bore a striking resemblance to Jupiter.[30]

At one point in *Orphée*, Jupiter transforms himself into a fly (or rather, the performer dons an anthropomorphic fly costume) in a piece of stagecraft reminiscent of Aristophanes' animal choruses, especially *Wasps*. But most palpable is the influence of Aristophanes' *Frogs*. As the first truly comic *katabasis*, *Frogs* is an important intertext for any comedy involving descent into Hades. And *Orphée*'s Hades celebrates a Bacchanal, an unmistakingly Aristophanic element. Aristophanes' Dionysus himself witnesses Bacchic revelry in Hades:

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[30] Traubner 1984: 35f.

Much-honoured Iacchus, dwelling here in temples, Iacchus, o Iacchus, come and dance in this meadow, come to your reverent worshippers, shaking the fertile crown thick with myrtle around your head…

(Aris. *Frogs* 323-336)

The celebration is connected with Dionysus' role at Eleusis – the worshippers here are not Bacchants but Initiates of the Mysteries, and Iacchus is a cult-specific title. A similar scene appears in *Orphée*. It has been largely stripped of its religious context, although with the last word of the opera the celebrants are referred to as Bacchus' 'élus', 'chosen ones' or possibly Initiates. This time, Eurydice is leading the singing, with the chorus of Greek gods acting as the other revellers:

Evohe! Bacchus inspires me,

I feel inside me

His sacred delirium,

Evohe! Bacchus is king![31]

Bacchus,

My light soul

Which could not make itself

Happy on earth,

Yearns for you, divine Bacchus.

[31] Halévy and Crémieux 1869: 34.

Receive the priestess

Whose voice wants

To sing intoxication without ceasing

To your chosen ones [A tes élus].[32]

These latter lyrics are set to *Le Galop Infernal*. There is more emphasis on wine in Offenbach, but his revellers, particularly Eurydice, share a similar religious, ecstatic delirium. Offenbach does not allow Bacchus to watch his Bacchants as Dionysus watches the Initiates in *Frogs* (the god is not a character in Offenbach) but his presence is felt in the repeated use of 'Bacchus' and the classicising cry, 'evohe'. This heightened tone of emotional, Bacchic passion is a key feature of all Offenbach's works.[33]

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[32] Ibid. 37.

[33] A second Offenbach opera with a libretto by M. Jules Moinaux, *Les Géorgiennes* (1864), 'had a Lysistrata-ish plot' (Traubner 1984: 43). As in Aristophanes, the Georgian women seize control of the city; they may also withhold sex. Their leader Férosa is equally as impressive as Lysistrata as she calls them to arms:

No, no love, no weaknesses,

Come, wives, sisters or mistresses,

Let us rise without hesitation.

(Moinaux 1870: 7.)

Unlike *Lysistrata*, however, they do not seek peace – rather, they are exercised by their Orientalised husbands' effeminacy in war, crying 'if you want anyone to give you her heart and her hand, go get killed first' (ibid. 5). *Les Géorgiennes* also recalls *Ecclesiazusae* as Nani, Férosa's captain, declares, 'we have established a government of women, and there you go, we are all soldiers' (ibid. 13).

Offenbach's influence on the British tradition is impossible to overstate. His music turns up repackaged in countless burlesques. J.R. Planché staged *Orpheus in the Haymarket*, a much-sanitised version of *Orphée* rewritten as a burlesque, in 1865;[34] the opera also received London performances in the original French in 1869 and 1870.[35] A London version of *Les Géorgiennes* arrived in 1875, with Richard Temple, 'later Gilbert and Sullivan's principal bass-baritone', in the cast.[36] And *Thespis* shared the bill during its run with another Offenbach operetta, *Le Mariage aux Lanternes*.[37] This is without mentioning the countless comedies and burlesques that stole plots, situations and jokes from their cousin *óperas bouffes*. Aristophanes' influence on Offenbach therefore naturally had implications for British theatre.

Orphée particularly shares with *Thespis* its irreverent burlesquing of Greek gods, and specifically their *ennui*. Halévy and Crémieux's libretto portrays the gods as ever-young, but intensely bored:

> In short, the only happiness
>
> On our Olympus is to sleep.[38]

To recover their *joie de vivre*, these French Olympians descend to the Underworld to celebrate a Bacchanal. Gilbert's gods are worn out by age, not repetition; they are allowed only as far as the Earth for their recovery. But the concept is the same.

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[34] Planché 1879d: 233-235.

[35] Halévy and Crémieux 1869: i; 'Princess's Theatre' (23 June 1870) *Morning Post*: 6.

[36] Traubner 1984: 44.

[37] 'Gaiety Theatre: *Mariage aux Lanternes/Uncle Dick's Darling!/Thespis*' [Programme]. ML-GSC 1454.

[38] Halévy and Crémieux 1869: 10.

As already seen, many other burlesques before *Thespis* and *Orphée* had put the Graeco-Roman gods on stage to travesty them, including Planché's first classical burlesque, *Olympic Revels*. Planché also wrote *Mr Buckstone's Ascent of Mount Parnassus* (1853), a revue in which his friend, the theatre manager and actor John Baldwin Buckstone, played himself as he climbed Parnassus to receive inspiration from the Muses[39] – a similar plot device to *Thespis*, although *Mr Buckstone's Ascent* and *Thespis* are materially different plays. As in Old Comedy, the gods that populated Victorian burlesque were the subjects of ridicule, and no less so in *Thespis*. By way of contrast, Planché's *Birds* is a rare example of burlesque treating the Graeco-Roman pantheon seriously.

***The Happy Land* (1873)**

In January 1873, Gilbert's charming blank-verse comedy *The Wicked World* opened at the Haymarket Theatre. The piece, based on a story Gilbert wrote for *Tom Hood's Annual* Christmas 1871, presents a group of female fairies rejoicing in their own superiority over the wicked world of men. They decide to summon two medieval knights and a squire to Fairyland to show them the error of their ways. However, the fairies had heretofore never felt the power of love; falling immediately for their mortal guests, they quickly discover that love is the cause of all human jealousy, deviousness and sin. Only by returning the mortals to earth is Fairyland's tranquillity restored. Victorian burlesque was dominated by fairy plays, but Gilbert's comedy is not a burlesque. A review in *The Times* specifically praised *The Wicked World* for its morality in contrast to other entertainments at the time:

[39] Planché 1879e: 257-292.

> If we may congratulate the author on the unequivocal success of his play, we may also congratulate the London public that it can be represented by an audience at once so large and so intellectual as that of Saturday night. Mr. Gilbert no more courts the populace of modern England than did Coriolanus the mob of mythical Rome. Not a phrase drops from his pen that can be called clap-trap; a tinge of the *odi profanum vulgus* feeling permeates all his writing.[40]

The Times' point is somewhat overstated, but at this point in his career Gilbert was keen to write comedies transcending the rigid generic constraints of traditional Victorian popular theatre; the form of burlesque was becoming increasingly hackneyed. We might compare *The Palace of Truth* (1870) or *Pygmalion and Galatea* (1871), two plays *The Times* also identifies as successful dramatic experiments 'in the face of established usage'.[41] Even so, the moral of *The Wicked World* – that love is bad – shows that Gilbertian topsyturvydom always lies under the surface of even the most refined of Gilbert's comedies.[42]

Two months later, however, a burlesque of *The Wicked World* appeared that would blow this chaste comedy wide open. The central premise of *The Happy Land*,

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[40] 'Haymarket Theatre' (6 January 1873) *Times*: 8.

[41] Ibid.

[42] On the day of *Wicked World*'s premiere, Gilbert sent a letter to his friend J.R. Planché expressing nervousness over his new piece and offering a Latinate pun: 'I send you a copy of my new piece before it is damned. It is a rather risky affair & will be either a big hit or a big failur[e]. "Laudatur ab hiss" perhaps!' (Gilbert to Planché, 4 January 1883, ML-GSC 106969.)

which premiered at the Royal Court Theatre on 3 March 1873, was not that fairies didn't know love; instead, they look jealously on mortals because:

> With all their wickedness, with all their sin,
>
> They have one great and ever-glorious gift
>
> That compensates for every ill. It's called
>
> A Popular Government...[43]

The Wicked World had thus been reshaped as satire against the Liberal government of William Gladstone, which lasted 1868-1874.[44] Gladstone, a classicist himself,[45] was a reformer. He cut army costs, abolished flogging and ended purchased commissions;[46] attempted to answer the 'Irish Question' by disestablishing the Anglican Church in Ireland and extending limited rights to tenant farmers;[47] introduced the secret ballot;[48] and passed the Forster Education Act, which ensured universal education up to the age of 13.[49] None of these reforms was particularly radical, but Victorian Britain always took a gradual approach to necessary change. Gladstone's programme was enough to excite resistance from the defenders of the status quo, but too conservative for many of the radicals and nonconformists who made up the

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[43] Gilbert and A'Beckett 1873a: 12.

[44] Parliaments lasted a maximum of seven years until the 1911 Parliament Act reduced this to five years.

[45] Wilson 2003: 348.

[46] Ibid. 356f.

[47] Ibid. 361.

[48] Ibid. 361.

[49] Ibid. 363.

Liberal coalition. In January 1874 Gladstone unexpectedly called a general election and, after a short and unsuccessful campaign, was defeated by Benjamin Disraeli. Although the play's stage manager claimed that '*The Happy Land* did much to turn out the Gladstonian government',[50] it was Gladstone's inability to hold his own party together that ensured his defeat.

Critics immediately saw Aristophanes lying behind *The Happy Land*. *The Times* reflected that 'Cleon was never more openly brought forward by Aristophanes than are the three "Right Honourables" by Messrs. [Gilbert] and À Beckett'.[51] The *Athenaeum* called for more, musing that:

> There is no reason why English burlesque should not be to English drama what the *Knights* or the *Birds* were to the plays of Euripides. A new life might be put into what is now the most imbecile and depraved portion of our literature, and a reaction of this kind might, and probably would, tell upon audiences and authors with strong effect.[52]

Even *Punch*, which habitually castigated Gilbert, saw the similarity. The magazine's critic did not enjoy the piece, declaring that 'ten minutes of this was enough. The satire was of the sledge-hammer order, and the slain were slewn [sic] over and over again, to weariness.'[53] Nevertheless, he compared it to 'Aristophanes, without a pinch of

[50] Righton 1896: 66.

[51] 'Court Theatre' (6 March 1873) *Times*: 10.

[52] 'The Week' (8 March 1873) *Athenaeum*: 351.

[53] 'Our Representative Man' (15 March 1873) *Punch*: 111

Attic salt, with a drayman's cart-whip' – Old Comedy without any of the original subtlety![54]

The Happy Land's plot essentially replicates *The Wicked World*. Three male fairies, sent as envoys to the wicked world below, rejoice in the Earth's baseness – they have even 'learnt to speak prose, and… prefer it'![55] They pretend to hate it, however, lest the women want to go too:

> Lutin: Oh, the wickedness of the world, its artfulness, its deceptions!
>
> Phyllon: The repulsiveness of its women!
>
> Ethais: The inferior quality of its champagne!
>
> Lutin: Its evening parties – its picnics – its Derby days – its flirtations – its theatricals – its Ritualistic services – its elopements – its marriages – and its divorces.[56]

The ambassadors to Persia suffer similar pleasantries at *Acharnians* 73-75:

> We were entertained and on compulsion drank sweet, unmixed wine from crystal and gold goblets.

As the women are also bored of utopia, however, they resolve to visit Earth and indulge in its sin themselves. To stop them, Lutin, Phyllon and Ethais promise to send up three mortal men for the ladies to examine. Although it is never explicitly sexual,

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[54] Whether the reviewer had ever actually read Aristophanes, who is certainly *not* known for his subtlety, is unclear.

[55] Gilbert and A'Beckett 1873a: 7.

[56] Ibid. 9.

the women's excitement resembles the passion expressed by the young women throughout *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*:

> Send us up from yonder wicked den,
>
> Three very wicked men –
>
> Or six, or eight, or ten.[57]

It is at this point that the fairy Selene reflects on the benefits of a Liberal government as a means of distinguishing England from the rest of the globe, in a close parody of a speech from *The Wicked World*, originally on the subject of love. She notes that the government's ministers:

> Are posted to such offices as they,
>
> By dint of long and arduous 'prenticeship,
>
> Have shown themselves to be most fitted for.[58]

The result must be that 'after all,/Great Britain is the type of Fairyland!'[59] It hardly seems necessary to note, that this is the butt of the play's central joke – ministers were no more qualified for the positions they held in 1873 than they are today, and the rest of the burlesque proves this point.

As Selene finishes her panegyric, the mortals ascend in a scene that, as soon as the audience realised what was happening, made them break into 'applause [that]

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[57] Ibid. 10.

[58] Ibid. 12.

[59] Ibid.

resembled the roaring of cannon or claps of thunder'.[60] In the libretto, the three men are called Mr. G., Mr. L. and Mr. A. On opening night, however, their costumes and make-up clarified instantly that they portrayed the Prime Minister William Gladstone, Chancellor of the Exchequer Robert Lowe, and First Commissioner of Works Acton Smee Ayrton. The iconography was taken from well-known cartoons in *Vanity Fair*, and the *Athenaeum* noted that 'so good is the make-up of the respective actors, that no doubt on the subject of the intended caricature is possible.'[61] The sheer audacity of putting government ministers – even the Prime Minister himself – on stage went beyond burlesque's normal licence, and marks *Happy Land* out as one of the most overtly political plays of the Victorian period. Although political cartoons were long-established in publications such as *Vanity Fair* and *Punch*, the theatrical censor was supposed to bar any representation of real people in the theatre. What Shelley had dared set down on the page in his Aristophanic *Swellfoot* – only to be censored – the authors of *Happy Land* put on the stage. It is notable that the burlesque presents three politicians, just as Aristophanes' *Knights* apparently travesties Cleon, Demosthenes and Nicias through the characters of three house-slaves.

Mssrs. G., L. and A. declare themselves to be 'three most popular men!' and dare anyone to 'turn [them] out' of office;[62] according to their own account, they are political geniuses. Of course, this being a burlesque, the opposite is the case, and they are shown to be shams. G. notes that 'once on a time, what I now think is wrong,/I thought was right'[63] (a line which seems to echo *Clouds*) – and faced with any difficulty

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[60] Righton 1896: 64.

[61] 'The Week' (8 March 1873) *Athenaeum*: 351.

[62] Gilbert and A'Beckett 1873a: 13.

[63] Ibid.

merely declares that 'there are three courses open to us.'[64] The ministers are obsessed with appeasement, to an unpatriotic extent:

> Mr. G.: Well, the King of Bonny has laid claim to Scotland – the question is, "What is to be done?" Now, it is quite clear that there are three courses open to us. Firstly, to give it up, unhesitatingly. Secondly, to implore him not to press his claim. Thirdly, to –
>
> Selene: To fight for it!
>
> All: Oh, dear, no! Oh, no – no – no!
>
> Mr. G.: Oh, dear, no – no! Thirdly, to refer the matter to arbitration.[65]

The political satire is unmistakeable and unusually acerbic.

Although G., L. and A. consider returning to earth, the chorus of beautiful fairies suggests a reason to stay. At the fairies' request, the ministers set about arbitrarily dividing everybody into a government and an opposition. Ministerial briefs are distributed – to whomever is least suited. Darine becomes First Lord of the Admiralty because she doesn't know what a ship is;[66] Locrine faints at the sight of blood so is given the War brief;[67] Selene is made Prime Minister because she suggests she will never, under any circumstances, resign;[68] and so on. As Mr. A. explains:

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[64] Ibid. 13, 14; see ibid. 17.

[65] Ibid. 15.

[66] Ibid. 18.

[67] Ibid. 19.

[68] Ibid. 17.

> It's one of the beautiful principles of our system of government never to appoint anybody to any post to which he is at all fitted. Our government offices are so many elementary schools for the instruction of ministers. To take a minister who knows his duties, and to send him to an elementary school to learn them, is an obvious waste of educational power.[69]

This absurdity is Gilbertian topsyturvydom arrived at through real-world observation and political satire.

Aristophanes' women plays are all interested in female assemblies, but *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae* see women claiming the right to lead precisely because they are more capable than the bungling men who have been holding power – not despite their ignorance, as with Selene and her sisters. The sausage-seller in *Knights* is a more direct prototype; he has been prophesied to rule Athens even though, or rather because, he is utterly unsuited to the position:

> Demosthenes: Oh! Why do you say you're not worthy? You seem to know yourself so well! Surely you're not from a fine, noble family?
>
> Sausage-seller: No, by the gods, I'm from an awful family.
>
> ...
>
> Demosthenes: The premiership is no longer attached to the values of a suitable and effective man but a stupid, loathsome one.
>
> (Aristoph. *Knights* 183-186; 191-193)

[69] Ibid. 18.

Political authority here goes not to the best suited but to the least able – exactly the same joke as in *Happy Land*.

The burlesque's second act is set in the same place as act I, but now everything is '*coloured a sober slate tint*.'[70] This refers to Ayrton's supposed focus on utility over aesthetics in his brief as First Commissioner of Works. Leila, Leader of the Opposition, complains about the mismanagement of Selene's Popular Government, and the fairy First Commissioner Zayda enters with her mentor, Mr. A. She is struggling to match his despicableness but is told she may not resign from her post; government ministers never resign.[71] The Opposition challenge Zayda and Mr. A. over the general slate colour, and Mr. A. extols the virtues of economy and utility. It becomes clear, however, that he does not understand beauty; 'Slate-colour?... Good useful colour, doesn't show the dirt; will wash: and it matches the sky where I come from.'[72] Prime Minister Selene then enters, at a loss because 'the Emperor of Gozo, overcome by conscientious scruples, has "been forced" to tear up our treaty to shreds'.[73] The mortal gentlemen explain that treaties are *supposed* to be broken. Thrift has led to the ruin of the fairy army and navy, and now the Chinese are threatening to invade; the Opposition are calling for a change in government.[74] But Messrs. G., L. and A. continue to assert, 'We never resign./…/We never apologise.'[75]

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[70] Ibid. 20.

[71] Ibid. 20-22.

[72] Ibid. 22.

[73] Ibid. 22f.

[74] Ibid. 23.

[75] Ibid. 24.

The fairies now see Lutin, Phyllon and Ethais returning from Earth, and Messrs. G., L. and A. prepare to depart. Selene and Zayda beg them to stay, in parody of *The Wicked World*, but to no avail. They take 'all their *virtues* with them to their happy land'[76] and their enchantment is broken. Lutin offers a gift to the fairies, but unfortunately and in true burlesque fashion it is the curse they have just dispelled:

> We bear the promise of a priceless gift,
>
> A source of new and endless happiness.
>
> Take every radiant blessing that adorns
>
> Our fairy-land, and all will pale before
>
> The lustre of this precious privilege.
>
> It is – now then – a popular government.[77]

The women react in horror, and Selene declares, 'We're quite contented to sit here and mope,/And leave such blessings to a HAPPY LAND.'[78] The play concludes with a rousing chorus of *Rule, Britannia!*, but with amended words to reflect the reality of the nation under Gladstone:

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[76] Ibid. 27.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

Poor Britannia,

Although she rules the waves,

Britons ever, ever, ever,

Shall be slaves.[79]

In the last chapter, we saw how Planché gave a new ending to Aristophanes' *Birds* by having Peisetairos' government crushed. The writers of *Happy Land* would seem to be familiar with the earlier burlesque, as their ending is remarkably similar. Indeed, the influence of Aristophanes' *Birds* can be felt throughout the burlesque, as the two stories are essentially the same – in both, travellers from a great democratic nation ascend to the clouds to educate a group of uninformed outsiders (with wings) on governance and end up taking over. Not coincidentally, the plot is also somewhat similar to *Thespis*. The difference is that in *Happy Land*, Fairyland adopts a democracy, whereas in *Birds* Peisetairos creates a monarchy – Peisetairos is a capable, if tyrannical, leader, whereas the ministers in *Happy Land* are wholly unsuited to their duties. Unlike Planché's *Birds*, *The Happy Land* is not actually anti-democratic but critical specifically of Gladstone's government. Pointedly, the three gentlemen introduce, and Lutin offers, a *Popular Liberal* government. But *The Happy Land* does activate Aristophanes for a similarly conservative cause.

It is easy to see why the critics of *Happy Land* immediately started talking about Aristophanes; the burlesque is so political, relies so much on direct personal attack, that it more closely resembles Old Comedy than contemporary plays. The burlesqued notion of female government, and even specific modes of humour, recall several of Aristophanes' comedies. The play is also structured like an Old Comedy,

[79] Ibid. 28.

with the topsyturvy concept – a government of fairies – introduced in the middle of the play, and the rest of the burlesque focussed on the various conflicts that arise from this new situation. And Aristophanes again comes in through the mediation of Planché's adapted *Birds*. Gilbert did not acknowledge the Aristophanic influences at work, but such was his character; when preparing the libretto of *Fallen Fairies*, a 1909 operetta reusing *The Wicked World*, he didn't even acknowledge borrowing from *himself*, presenting it as 'an entirely original 3 act play'.[80]

The Happy Land led to a mighty clash with the public censor. The issue was even raised in Parliament.[81] Although a licence was at first granted, the Lord Chamberlain retracted this on 6 March 1873. But Marie Litton, the Court's manager, played the piece for one more night all the same, 'having regard to her duty to the public, and to the fact that she had offered to make any alteration that the Lord Chamberlain might direct'.[82] The next day, Litton persuaded the censor to lift the ban on promise that Mssrs. L., A. and G. would stop making themselves up to resemble the government ministers they portrayed. On 10 March, a letter appeared in the papers explaining the Lord Chamberlain's reasoning:

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[80] Gilbert to Mr. Dawn, 17 March 1909, BL Add MS 49339: 100. Sir Arthur Sullivan had proposed reworking either *The Wicked World* or *Pygmalion and Galatea* into an operetta in 1884 (Letter from Sullivan to Gilbert, 7 April 1884, ML-GSC 108446).

[81] HC Deb. 10 March 1873 vol. 214 c1611.

[82] 'The "Happy Land" and the Lord Chamberlain' (8 March 1873) *Times*: 5. Litton was also an actor and briefly managed the out-of-London performance rights for *Happy Land* (Gilbert and A'Beckett 1873a: 3).

> On the 3d of February a manuscript piece, called *The Happy Land*, was submitted for licence from the Court Theatre to the Reader of Plays. It contained a good many political allusions, but as they were generalities, and not pointed to individuals, the MS. was sanctioned, and the licence for it granted on the 8th of February. On the 3d inst. a piece was produced at that theatre purporting to be the piece licensed by the Lord Chamberlain. It was not until late on the 5th that the Lord Chamberlain's attention was directed to the fact that the piece, as acted, abounded in personalities, and that three members of the Government were presented in person on the stage. On the evening of that day he himself visited the theatre, and finding on inquiry that these personalities were not in the MS. submitted, gave orders that the licence should be suspended… In the original MS., containing 28 pages, there was no indication whatever of the intention to point the allusions to individuals.[83]

Litton was not prepared to concede the point, however, and a letter from her appears in *The Times* the following day. She writes that if, by '18 quarto pages of additions':

> ...his Lordship means that 18 pages of the manuscript were more or less affected by the alterations, I am not in a position to deny the statement; but this is scarcely the impression conveyed by the sentence I have quoted…

[83] '"The Happy Land"' (10 March 1873) *Times*: 8.

> In the course of rehearsal certain additions and alterations were undoubtedly made as occasion arose, but a large proportion of them had no reference whatever to political topics.[84]

This is somewhat dishonest; the manuscript submitted to the Lord Chamberlain contains several significant omissions. It lacks songs, and retains the mortals' names from *The Wicked World* instead of naming them after government ministers' initials.[85] (It also credits the piece to A'Beckett and A.N. (as in Anonymous) Tomlin, rather than the later F. Latour Tomline.)[86] Without distinguishing names or make-up, the characters in *Happy Land* would lose much of their satiric potential. The intent was to deceive the censor, and it is remarkable that the Lord Chamberlain restored the licence after only one day, only fifty years after *Swellfoot* had been repressed. Gilbert, for his part, wrote a letter to the *Telegraph* (under his *nom de plume*) asserting that 'the doings of public men, from the very highest to the very lowest, are, I suppose, open to public comment.'[87] The manuscript of *Happy Land* was read by the censor on 3 February 1873, which is an unusually long amount of time between submission and the opening performance.[88] The original, hand-written copy of the manuscript is followed in the Lord Chamberlain's Plays collection by a printed copy of the libretto

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[84] 'The Happy Land' (11 March 1873) *Times*: 11.

[85] Gilbert and A'Beckett 1873b.

[86] Ibid. f.1.

[87] '"The Happy Land"' (7 March 1873) *Daily Telegraph*: 5.

[88] Ibid.

stamped by the Lord Chamberlain's Office on 26 May 1873; it was presumably resubmitted because of the textual changes.[89]

Fig. 5.3: A scene from The Happy Land*, illustrated after the censor had been lifted; Mssrs. L., A. and G. are notably not made up as Lowe, Ayrton and Gladstone.*

As already suggested, *The Happy Land* was attributed to Gilbert A'Beckett (the humorist who drew a connection between Aristophanes and Victorian burlesque)[90] and F. Latour Tomline, almost certainly a *nom de plume* for Gilbert.[91] The archives show that Gilbert was asked at the time whether he had written the

[89] Gilbert and A'Beckett 1873a.

[90] See Ch.4.

[91] There is no consistency on how to spell A'Beckett's surname; I have followed the spelling used in the published edition of *Happy Land*.

piece, and that, in reply, he composed two draft letters. The first, written on 7 March 1873 (so four days after the play opened), states:

> The general scheme of the piece occurred to me, but not wishing to be identified with a burlesque on my own work, I imparted it to à Beckett, who agreed to write the piece but having a delicacy about… authorship of a piece suggested by another person, he expressed a wish to have a second name joined with his own. Hence "Tomline"... I need not say that I wish my "anonymity" respected.[92]

The second, written a day later, says:

> The general scheme of the piece originated with me, but as I did not wish to be associated with a burlesque – above all, with a political burlesque – I presented the idea to Miss [Marie] Litton to deal with as she thought proper.
>
> I may add that I have no pecuniary interest whatever in the piece. Please respect my anonymity. I wrote this in confidence.[93]

The letters, despite both claiming Gilbert only wrote the plot outline and nothing more, are different. In the first, Gilbert shrinks from writing the play because it would be a burlesque on his own piece; in the second, because it is a political burlesque. The first letter has him handing it directly over to à Beckett; the second, to a third party. Both request anonymity, but the second adds the coda that Gilbert 'wrote this in confidence'. The first letter makes no mention of money, whereas the second asserts Gilbert made no money from it. In short, the later draft distances Gilbert even more

[92] Gilbert to 'Claydides' [Frederic Clay], 7 April 1873, BL Add MS 49330 ff.87f; emphasis Gilbert's.

[93] Gilbert to 'Claydides' [Frederic Clay], 8 April 1873, BL Add MS 49330 f.89.

from *The Happy Land*. We must assume that Gilbert sent the second draft. The letter dated 8 March is clearly unreliable; no doubt, the original draft likewise contains carefully manufactured falsehoods. Meanwhile, in an autobiographical note written in 1883, Gilbert states that 'Miss Litton gave the plot to Mr Gilbert à Beckett, who completed it, *with some slight assistance from me*.'[94] Indeed, an advertisement printed in multiple papers declared that 'the Burlesque of THE HAPPY LAND is produced with the special sanction of Mr. W. S. Gilbert, the Author of "The Wicked World"'.[95] This confesses more responsibility than either letter would allow. Finally, in his letter to the *Telegraph*, 'F. Latour Tomline' – so Gilbert – describes himself as 'one of the authors of "The Happy Land"'.[96]

Gilbert *did* retain a financial interest in *The Happy Land*, as his letters prove. On 27 June 1873, he wrote to the actor Tom Robertson reminding him that, 'as to the terms of "Happy Land" books, the following was agreed to between us – à Beckett & I were to have seven tenths of net proceeds & you three-tenths.'[97] The profits for these printed libretti were to be split evenly between the two named authors.[98] A letter from Litton on 18 October proves he was paid for the performance of the burlesque as well.[99] How was Gilbert able to secure an equal share if all he did was write the

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[94] Gilbert 1994: 8. Emphasis mine.

[95] 'Court' (8 March 1873) *Standard*: 5; 'Court' (6 March 1873) *Times*: 8. In the same issue, the *Times* reviewer remarks 'how very like Mr. Gilbert Messrs. Tomline and A'Beckett are!' ('Court Theatre' (6 March 1873) *Times*: 10).

[96] '"The Happy Land"' (7 March 1873) *Daily Telegraph*: 5.

[97] Gilbert to Tom Robertson, 27 June 1873, BL Add MS 49330 f.97.

[98] Ibid. f.99.

[99] Litton to Gilbert, 18 October 1873, BL Add MS 49330 ff.109f.

plot outline? It was not for the sake of his name – he was writing under a *nom de plume* and was not yet at the height of fame. Curiously, Edward Righton, who 'had the honour of stage managing the original production of *The Happy Land* at the Court Theatre' and also played Mr. A., indicates that Gilbert was 'the author of both *The Wicked World* and its burlesque, *The Happy Land*'. He makes no mention of A'Beckett at all![100] The truth will, perhaps, never be wholly discernible. But the evidence seems to imply that the play was a collaboration between Gilbert and A'Beckett, both contributing something like equal effort and deriving equal profit. Gilbert, meanwhile, had reason to underplay his own role in writing the piece, eager not to be blamed for its political heavy-handedness and not wishing to anger the censor. Thus he fibbed, and answered claims of his authorship like Phoebe in *Yeomen of the Guard*: 'Or more or less –/But rather less than more!'[101]

A'Beckett, for his part, also knew his classics. He was educated at Westminster School and graduated from Christ Church, Oxford with a BA in 1860.[102] His father Gilbert Abbott A'Beckett wrote the highly popular *The Comic History of Rome* (1851).[103]

So we are left with a play which Gilbert probably co-wrote, appearing to demonstrate significant, but unacknowledged, Aristophanic reception. Pen-name or no, Gilbert would never again be so controversial or overtly political. It is not true that 'Gilbert did not employ ad hominem political satire after *The Happy Land*';[104] in *H.M.S.*

[100] Righton 1896: 63.

[101] Gilbert 2016c: I.843f.

[102] Mullin 2009.

[103] Schlicke 2009.

[104] Lawrence 1971: 180.

Pinafore, for example, Sir Joseph Porter K.C.B. is a travesty of W.H. Smith, First Lord of the Admiralty 1877-1880 and son of the eponymous stationery store's founder – although the actor playing Sir Joseph was made up as Lord Nelson.[105] Smith 'became universally known as 'Pinafore Smith' and 'When I was a lad' [Sir Joseph's patter song] was even played by a Royal Marine band when he went down to launch a ship at Devonport'.[106] But Gilbertian satire is generally broad-brush. In 1874 he wrote *Topsyturvydom*, an extravaganza with a Conservative MP as its protagonist, but the character of Mr Satis (MP for Ballotville) is wholly fictive, and might as well have been a Liberal MP – he believes there is 'a good deal to be said on either side' and only stands as a Conservative after being bribed.[107] *Patience* probably satirises aesthetics generally, as much as the operetta's fans may try to make it about Oscar Wilde, and in *Iolanthe*, the setting is left purposefully vague – sometime 'between 1700 and 1882'[108] – to avoid making the political humour specific. This does not make the play any less radical; it essentially calls for the House of Lords to be abolished. But as is usual with Gilbert, the target is the institution, not the individual. This is where Gilbert's humour and Aristophanes' most diverge.

Incidentally, for all his later attrition, Gilbert followed *The Happy Land* with another controversial play written under the name of F. Latour Tomline, *The Realm of Joy* (adapted from Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy's farce *Le Roi Candaule*[109]). The play, which premiered on 18 October 1873, was set in a theatre where a

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[105] Gilbert 2016d: I.275-292n.

[106] Ibid. I.293-340n.

[107] Gilbert 1931: 6f.

[108] Gilbert 2016e: I.1n.

[109] Both French authors also wrote libretti for Offenbach; Halévy co-authored *Orphée*.

controversial political play is being performed – one very similar to *The Happy Land*. Gilbert's earlier victory over the censor ensured that *The Realm of Joy* was passed with only the recommendation that changes be made,[110] even as the play insulted the Lord Chamberlain, renaming him 'the Lord High Disinfectant'.[111]

Utopia Limited (1893)

Before I discuss my next Gilbert play, I want to acknowledge that, to modern tastes, *Utopia Limited* is unbearably racist. For all that it attempts to laugh at British colonialism, the implication that Britain knows best is always a little too sincere; there are jokes about how the native islanders, 'contrasted when/With Englishmen,/… [are] little better than half-clothed barbarians',[112] and passages of 'native-speech';[113] a septet, thankfully not in blackface, sings a song parodying the Christy Minstrels;[114] the capitalist character is called Mr Goldbury, an anti-Semitic stereotype.[115] The operetta is, in this regard, even worse than *The Mikado*, which would no doubt cause

[110] Shellard and Nicholson 2004: 12.

[111] Gilbert 1969: 11.

[112] Gilbert 2016f: I.1074-1076.

[113] Whenever the Public Exploder, Tarara, becomes 'over-mastered by an indignant sense of overwhelming wrong', he 'slip[s] into [his] native tongue without knowing it' (ibid. I.66-68); his first line is 'lalabalele talala! Callabale lalabalica falahle!' (ibid. I.51).

[114] Ibid. II.121-170; see ibid. II.132n., II.133-170n.

[115] Ibid. I.1142-1161. The Rothschilds, a Jewish banking family who have long been the victims of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, are referred to at ibid. I.1256 in relation to Goldbury.

more outrage today if it were not otherwise so good. Of course, none of this would have occurred to most Victorians. But we should recognise it.

Utopia Limited is essentially *The Happy Land* or Planché's *Birds* transported to a desert island. When the native Princess Zara returns home to Utopia after studying at Girton College, Cambridge, she brings with her six 'Flowers of Progress', British gentlemen who proceed to remodel the nation on British principles. (Here, Gilbert once again 'dared the examiner to intervene' and yield up his 'habit of indulgence' by putting the Lord Chamberlain onstage as one of the Flowers of Progress.[116]) The effect is transformative, and unlike in *Happy Land* the result is true utopia. Paradoxically, this leads the whole country to fall apart. Things are *too* perfect:

> Utopia, swamped by dull Prosperity,
>
> Demands that these detested Flowers of Progress
>
> Be sent about their business, and affairs
>
> Restored to their original complexion![117]

Thankfully, Zara has a solution:

> Government by Party! Introduce that great and glorious element – at once the bulwark and foundation of England's greatness – and all will be well! No political measures will endure, because one Party will assuredly undo all that the other Party has done… Then there will be sickness in plenty,

[116] Shellard and Nicholson 2004: 11.

[117] Gilbert 2016f: II.640-643.

> endless lawsuits, crowded jails, interminable confusion in the Army and Navy, and, in short, general and unexampled prosperity![118]

This ending is, of course, the reverse of *The Happy Land*. In Fairyland, Popular Government was introduced, destroyed utopia, then rejected – in Utopia, Government by Party is adopted as a remedy to perfection. Still, the satirical point is the same, though less directly partisan. This ending is another variation again on Planché's *Birds*.

Despite being set on a Pacific island, *Utopia* abounds in classical allusions; as noted, it contains the fourth highest number of classical references of all the Savoy operettas besides *Thespis*. The word utopia itself, though not classical, is classicising.[119] Its inhabitants all have Greek-sounding names; Paramount, Scaphio, Phantis, Calynx, Melene, Phylla and so forth. Phantis remarks that, in Britain, 'every youth is as a young Greek god';[120] the local paper is filled with articles ostensibly written by characters such as 'Junius Junior… Senex Senior… [and] Mercury Major' (these punning names recalling Gilbert's start as a burlesque writer).[121] The female chorus wish to learn 'All languages,/Alive and dead!'[122] One of the Flowers of Progress is a logician, whose efforts to demonstrate 'that 'yes' is but another and a neater form of 'no''[123] might remind us of Socrates' sophistries in *Clouds*. The Utopians' costumes were also informed by ancient Greek clothing, as the designs in

[118] Ibid. II.653-659.

[119] The word was coined by Thomas More in 1516.

[120] Gilbert 2016f: I.180f.

[121] Ibid. I.438f.

[122] Ibid. I.658f.

[123] Ibid. I.1101.

Figs. 5.4-5 show. Note, on the men, the tunics and boots that resemble *kothornoi*, the high-boots worn by Hellenistic tragic actors. The women's dresses equally appear Grecian in style.

Fig. 5.4: Character design for two Utopian men.

Fig. 5.5: Photograph of two unidentified 'Utopian maidens'.

There is even a reference to the myth of Tereus and Procne; in a duet with her beloved, Zara sings that, 'Soft [is] the song of Philomel.'[1] Philomela was Procne's sister, raped by her brother-in-law Tereus, and Procne and Tereus both appear prominently in *Birds.*

Indeed, the operetta includes several references to birds. Note the bird headpiece on the right-hand figure in Fig. 5.4. *Utopia*'s opening song praises:

[1] Ibid. II.89.

The song of birds

In ivied towers;

…

The languid loves

Of turtle doves.[2]

And in an Act II chorus, the Utopians sing about an ‘Eagle high in cloudland soaring –/Sparrow twittering on a reed’.[3] ‘Cloudland’ is so tantalisingly close to the translated name of Aristophanes’ Cloudcuckooland. The island natives consider themselves barbarians and speak gibberish, just like the barbarian birds in Aristophanes. Their King ‘has ordered that the Utopian language shall be banished from his court, and that all communications shall henceforward be made in the English tongue’[4] – Aristophanes’ Tereus meanwhile taught birds to speak Greek. Since Gilbert must have known Planché’s *Birds*, and probably Aristophanes’ too, I think it hard to write all this off as coincidence.

‘Thus, in *Utopia Limited*, Gilbert's political satire comes full circle; Utopia, transformed into a south sea Great Britain, becomes Fairyland revisited twenty years later’[5] – and equally becomes Planché’s and Aristophanes’ Cloudcuckooland revisited too. Aristophanes’ *Birds* is ultimately a play about colonisation and Empire, concerns which are addressed in *Utopia*. Its similar story, numerous classical

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[2] Ibid. I.17f.; I.23f.

[3] Ibid. II.208f.

[4] Ibid. I.56-58.

[5] Lawrence 1971: 183.

references and interest in birds all suggest Gilbert was consciously appropriating Aristophanes. It is tamer than *Happy Land* and shows none of the directed satire a much younger Gilbert, protected by a pen-name, dared employ.[6] Yet *Utopia Limited* 'might well have been in fact, very barbedly Aristophanic indeed.'[7]

The Princess* and *Princess Ida

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) published *The Princess* in 1847. In 1870, Gilbert turned the long narrative poem into a verse play he subtitled a 'respectful perversion'. In an autobiographical note for *Theatre*, he wrote:

> I had for some time determined to try the experiment of a blank verse burlesque in which a picturesque story should be told in a strain of mock-heroic seriousness… The story of Mr. Tennyson's "Princess" supplied the subject-matter of the parody, and I endeavoured so to treat it as to absolve myself from a charge of wilful irreverence.[8]

The play did not entirely eschew burlesque; in keeping with the genre's traditions, the hero, Cyril, Florian, and the princess' three brothers were all played by women. This was a conventional constraint Gilbert would later deplore as imparting 'an epicene character to their proceedings which rather interfered with the interest of the story'.[9]

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[6] One design sketch suggests Gilbert originally intended to include the Archbishop of Canterbury in the Flowers of Progress (Victoria & Albert Museum, Theatre and Performance Collection, S.3293-2015); this idea was evidently dropped.

[7] Granville-Barker 1932: 120.

[8] Gilbert 1994: 6.

[9] Ibid. 7.

By-and-large, however, Gilbert's semi-burlesque play avoided the worst excesses of the genre whilst still remaining charming, improvements the later *Thespis* failed to benefit from.[10]

Gilbert reused much of *Princess*' dialogue, but wrote new lyrics, for *Princess Ida* (1884). It is the only Gilbert and Sullivan with a verse libretto, and the only one that stretches to three acts. Both Gilbert's versions were still topical as 'the movement for women's education… had gained momentum in the 1870s with the founding of Girton and Newnham colleges at Cambridge and Somerville and Lady Margaret Hall at Oxford'.[11] The castle Princess Ida turns into her university in each version might remind us of Girton, whose gothic architecture looks uncannily like a medieval castle in Victorian red brick. Royal Holloway College would open in 1886; Britain's first higher education institution for women, Bedford College, dated back to 1849, two years after Tennyson published *The Princess*.[12] Tennyson had originally written his poem 'partly [as] a response to the opening of the pioneering Queen's College for girls, established by a group led by F.D. Maurice of King's College London, on Harley Street in 1847.'[13]

All three texts share almost identical stories. A prince was betrothed to Princess Ida when they were babies.[14] But on the day they are to be wed, Gama, Ida's father, informs Prince Hilarion that his daughter has run away to form a university for women, renouncing all men in the process. Hilarion resolves to go to

[10] This recalls Planché's attempts to elevate the burlesque genre.

[11] Bradley 2016: 523.

[12] Hall and Wyles 2016: 9; Royal Holloway subsumed Bedford in 1985.

[13] Ibid. 1.

[14] Tennyson leaves him unnamed; for clarity, unless I am talking specifically about Tennyson's poem I will use the name Gilbert gave him, Hilarion, throughout.

Ida and woo her, together with his friends Florian and Cyril. When the trio arrive at her castle, they decide to dress as lady undergraduates to infiltrate the university. Florian's sister Psyche is one of the professors, and they reveal themselves to her; by mistake, Melissa, the daughter of another professor, overhears. Fortunately, kinship silences Psyche, and infatuation with Florian silences Melissa. When Melissa's stern mother Blanche also learns who they are, ambition silences her; if Hilarion should successfully woo Ida, Blanche would naturally take over as head of the university. In Tennyson's poem, the next day the three men go riding with Ida so she can take some astronomical measurements;[15] Gilbert simplifies this to luncheon in the castle.[16] Regardless, in each version Cyril becomes tipsy and sings an inappropriate song (Tennyson rather tactfully elides the verses, Gilbert makes the most of the opportunity); furious, Hilarion strikes him, in Tennyson's version crying out, 'Forbear, Sir',[17] and in Gilbert's, leading Cyril to utter Hilarion's name.[18] Realising they are men, Ida calls for their capture, but in her excitement falls off a bridge into water. Hilarion dives in and saves her.[19]

Here, Gilbert's and Tennyson's versions somewhat diverge. In Tennyson's version, Ida captures the prince and Florian; Cyril and Psyche manage to escape. When Hilarion's father arrives to storm the castle, with Gama in captivity, the prince and Florian are freed to join the invaders. Psyche also has a baby, non-existent in

[15] Tennyson 1902: 3.153-157.

[16] Gilbert 1911: 154; 2016g: II.604f.

[17] Tennyson 1902: 4.162.

[18] Gilbert 1911: 156; 2016g: II.699.

[19] Although Ida is a considerable intellect in all three versions, she apparently never learnt to swim. Gilbert would later drown trying to save a woman from water.

Gilbert, whom Ida continues to hold hostage. Ida's three brothers fight the prince's cohort and overpower them. Ida, who owes the prince her life, nurses him back to health; she realises that woman needs man – likewise Florian and Melissa, and Cyril and Psyche, fall in love.

Gilbert simplifies this considerably. As Cyril, Florian and the prince are luncheoning within the castle, they are captured immediately upon discovery; the invaders turn up and besiege the castle; the prince and his two friends do battle with Ida's brothers. However, in this version they triumph, marking a quick conclusion to the story. Ida relents; Florian and Melissa, and Cyril and Psyche, unite; Blanche is left to lead the university.

I have provided this detail to draw out how similar the basic story elements in all three versions are to Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*. The Greek play likewise sees a man (without company this time) infiltrating a group of women who have secluded themselves from men, at his relative's behest; the man dressing in women's clothing, with plentiful comic effect; his revelation and capture; and finally, his rescue by the relative who sent him. *The Princess et al.* might be set up as a gothic fairytale, and some details altered or expanded, but the *fabula* is clearly classical in origin.

Hall sees not *Thesmophoriazusae* but *Lysistrata* behind the story; 'the influence of *Lysistrata* behind Gilbert's second portrayal of Tennyson's University for Women at Castle Adamant is palpable, especially in the humour when the women try to exert self-control in order to keep themselves away from men'.[20] In this, she agrees

[20] Hall 2007: 84. See also Liebman 140-145. Goldberg, meanwhile, argues that 'Princess Ida would have turned up her nose at Lysistrata and her army of true Amazons' (1929: 518), which seems to me a misreading of both texts.

with Sommerstein, who specifically connects the characters of Lysistrata and Ida.[21] The princess' sober intellect is certainly a match for Lysistrata's. But flirting between the sexes is perennial in the Savoy operas (compare, for example, *Iolanthe*, where the fairies' wavering self-control is deployed to much greater comic effect). Specific story elements suggest *Thesmophoriazusae*, not *Lysistrata*.

Aristophanes might also lie behind the Tennyson-Hilarion's philosophy of love. The prince conceives of man and woman as two halves who, in a perfect marriage, come together as a whole through mutual respect:

> Seeing either sex alone
>
> Is half itself, and in true marriage lies
>
> Nor equal, nor unequal; each fulfils
>
> Defect in each, and always thought in thought,
>
> Purpose in purpose, will in will, they grow,
>
> The single pure and perfect animal,
>
> The two-cell'd heart beating, with one full stroke,
>
> Life.[22]

Likewise, in Plato's *Symposium*, Aristophanes relates that humanity was once biformed, before the gods split us down the middle, and that the nature of love is to

[21] Sommerstein 1973: 149.

[22] Tennyson 1902: 7.283-290.

search out a corresponding half to complete oneself.[23] Socrates, 'him that died/Of hemlock', is taught at Ida's university.[24]

Another important classical intertext for Tennyson's *Princess* is Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*. In the tragedy, Orestes has been sent to Tauris to rescue his sister Iphigenia. After being captured, he and his sister plan their escape together. But Orestes is besieged by seizures brought on by the Furies as retribution for matricide. Tennyson's tragicomic prince suffers a similar affliction:

> Myself too had weird seizures, Heaven knows what:
>
> On a sudden in the midst of men and day,
>
> And while I walked and talked as heretofore,
>
> I seemed to move among a world of ghosts,
>
> And feel myself the shadow of a dream.[25]

The prince's description of 'a world of ghosts' might recall Orestes' vision of furies and his mother at *IT* 285-291. As noted in Chapter 3, *Iphigenia in Tauris* was well-known at this time. *The Princess'* plot is also similar insofar as it concerns a man entering hostile territory to retrieve/rescue a female relation (whether fiancée or sister). Gilbert does not give Hilarion seizures, so Euripides' influence is unfelt in his versions.

Even for a Victorian, Tennyson's classical education was more rigorous than most. 'The poet's father, George Clayton Tennyson, tutored his sons in Greek and Latin from an early age and insisted that they write out lengthy paraphrases of the

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[23] Plato's text, unlike Tennyson's, is not heteronormative.

[24] Tennyson 1902: 3.301f.

[25] Ibid. 1.14-18.

annotations in their classical texts, characteristically written in Latin…'[26] Tennyson went to Cambridge between 1827 and 1831, where he would also have studied classics,[27] and doubtless Aristophanes. His father owned Pieter Burman the Younger's 1760 edition of all eleven plays in Greek with facing Latin translation, which he may have used in tutoring his son.[28] Tennyson personally owned Mitchell's commentary on *Acharnians*[29] and Bekker's edition of *Birds*,[30] both of which contained the texts in Greek. He owned no English translations.

Of course, if Tennyson knew his Aristophanes and was able to receive it subterraneously within *The Princess*, that by no means proves Gilbert picked up on the appropriation. He knew some Aristophanes, as we have seen, though probably wasn't intimate with the Greek. Aristophanes' women plays were the least circulated for most of the nineteenth century because of their content. If so inclined, Gilbert could have found a translation, because although no stand-alone edition of *Thesmophoriazusae* had yet been published in English, C.A. Wheelwright had translated all the Aristophanic comedies in 1837; William James Hickie followed suit in 1853.[31]

I offer five (admittedly tentative) pieces of evidence to suggest he was aware of Tennyson's debt. Firstly, Gilbert's simplified plot is more similar to *Thesmophoriazusae* than Tennyson's. The kinsman in Aristophanes is captured, then

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[26] Markley 2004: 27.

[27] Ricks 2006.

[28] Campbell 1971: catalogue no.11.

[29] Ibid. no.436.

[30] Ibid. no.437.

[31] See Giannopoulou 2007.

rescued by Euripides when he bests the Scythian archer by dressing up as a procuress. But Tennyson has Hilarion being released and then bested himself; Gilbert restores the Aristophanic order of events, which has dramaturgical merits too, as it makes the conclusion more decisive and punctual.

Secondly, although Ida has three brothers in each version, in Tennyson's poem only Arac is named.[32] Gilbert calls the two other brothers Guron and Scynthius.[33] Scynthius' name is suggestive of Aristophanes' Scythian. A key distinction is that Aristophanes' Scythian acts as a *captor* in *Thesmophoriazusae*, whereas in Gilbert's versions, he is a *captive* of King Hildebrand. (Again, this is different in Tennyson's version.)

Next, as they put on women's clothes in *The Princess*, Hilarion, Florian and Cyril recall their amateur theatre productions:

Hilarion: Suppose we dress ourselves as girls, and claim

Admission to this University?

It is a thing we've often done at home

In amateur theatricals. You know

How well I play viragos in burlesque!

Florian: My Cleopatra, too – remember that!

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[32] Tennyson 1902: 1.152.

[33] Gilbert 1911: 134; 2016g: p.520.

Cyril: My Mrs. Bouncer, too, in “Box and Cox”![34]

This may recall the kinsman’s visit to Agathon for women’s clothes in *Thesmophoriazusae*, clothes Agathon has both because they are theatre costumes and because he is a transvestite. Of course, Gilbert was a writer of burlesque, so the connection between comic transvestism and the theatre would be apparent to him anyway. That Hilarion, Cyril and Florian were all played by women in this version only adds to the layers of travesty at work.

Gilbert may also have borrowed one of his jokes from Aristophanes’ *Clouds*. In a piece of exposition about Ida’s university, it is explained that:

Gobo: The ladies rise at cockcrow every morn

Hilarion: Oh, then they have male poultry!

Gobo: Not at all.

(*Confidentially*)The crowing’s done by an accomplished hen![35]

Socrates practises a similar bit of sophistry with the gender of a chicken at *Clouds* 658-664, asserting that the correctly gendered forms of ‘ὁ/ἡ ἀλεκτρυών’ are ‘ἀλεκτρύαιναν, τὸν δ’ ἕτερον ἀλέκτορα’.

Finally, and most convincingly I think, Aristophanes gets a direct mention in *Princess Ida*, when we are first introduced to the women’s university:

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[34] Gilbert 1911: 143. John Maddison Morton’s *Box and Cox* (1847) had been turned into the operetta *Cox and Box* by F.C. Burnand and Sir Arthur Sullivan in 1866, four years before Gilbert’s *Princess* and five years before Gilbert and Sullivan’s first collaboration on *Thespis*.

[35] Gilbert 1911: 143. These lines are given to Gama and Cyril in *Princess Ida* (Gilbert 2016g: I.318-320).

Psyche: If you'd climb the Helicon,

You should read Anacreon,

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*,

Likewise Aristophanes,

And the works of Juvenal:

These are worth attention, all;

But, if you will be advised,

You will get them Bowdlerized![36]

Aristophanes is only one of a list of classical authors Psyche mentions, in what is clearly a joke. She is proposing that, to achieve the best classical education, her women should read all the dirtiest classical authors – but, concerned about their maidenly virtue, she suggests they only read expurgated versions! Gilbert is travestying the women in Tennyson's poem, who read far more respectable classical authors. But as this is one of only two places in his works I have found that Gilbert ever mentions Aristophanes by name (the other being in *The Pirates of Penzance*),[37] I am tempted to see it as more than coincidence.

Regardless, whether Gilbert was consciously channelling Aristophanes or not, his two versions of *The Princess* are much more Aristophanic than Tennyson's if only because of their lighter tone. Tennyson's poem is caught between whimsical and

[36] Gilbert 2016g: II.14-21.

[37] Among Major-General Stanley's qualifications as 'the very model of a modern Major-General' is that he knows 'the croaking chorus from the *Frogs* of Aristophanes' (Gilbert 2016h: I.452-496).

semi-serious, as he concedes. At the poem's conclusion and within the framing narrative, the poetical Tennyson relates how his male companions wanted him to create a 'mock-heroic gigantesque', but the women 'seem'd to wrestle with burlesque,/And…/…wish'd for something real,/A gallant fight, a noble princess':[38]

> Then rose a little feud betwixt the two,
>
> Betwixt the mockers and the realists:
>
> And I, betwixt them both, to please them both,
>
> And yet to give the story as it rose,
>
> I moved as in a strange diagonal,
>
> And maybe neither pleased myself nor them.[39]

The poem's subtitle is 'a medley', giving some sense of this generic mixing, yet the serious always seems to dominate. Tennyson fills his fantasy world with philosophy and classics, long discussions about love, and a feel for the Gothic that would come to define his work. Thus Aristophanes is felt not only in the comedy, but also through Plato more seriously in the philosophy. Yet there is still that interest in contemporary affairs (as noted, *The Princess* was topical) that Gilbert and Aristophanes also share. Gilbert's two versions, meanwhile, are as light-hearted and whimsical as Gilbert comedies ever are. As his *Princess* was written to burlesque Tennyson's poem, and *Princess Ida* developed from that, it is unsurprising that he amplifies all that has comic potential in Tennyson, whilst suppressing its earnestness. His desire to make a

[38] Tennyson 1902: Conclusion 11, 16-19.

[39] Ibid. Conclusion 23-28.

burlesque touched by 'mock-heroic seriousness'[40] (note he is quoting Tennyson) resulted in fewer puns, and later one of the more serious Savoy operas, but both are still 'perversions' of Tennyson's original.

Godwin declared comparisons between Gilbert and Aristophanes to be 'fatuous and silly' – 'they belonged to two distinct civilisations and they had entirely different techniques.'[41] The arbitrary comparison by fans of Gilbert with Aristophanes is frustrating, and I have striven to avoid it. But I have presented concrete evidence that, in a few plays, Gilbert was actively receiving and appropriating Greek Old Comedy. He was Planché's heir, and in this most of all. Planché had written his *Birds* in a doomed attempt to revive Old Comedy on the British stage; 'Gilbert was the one man among his successors the nonsense mongers that had proved himself capable of coming out from the ruck' and succeeding in this.[42] Like Planché, Gilbert laboured to avoid offending his audience, and his most Aristophanic plays are not radical – including *The Happy Land*, despite its directed satire. He was 'an Aristophanes plentifully watered down, a steady and stolid-y, jolly Bank-holiday, every day Aristophanes, a mid-Victorian Aristophanes.'[43] Nevertheless, the themes and ideas of Old Comedy never achieved as wide an audience as when repackaged by Gilbert. For that alone, no other Victorian can be as worthy of the title, 'The English Aristophanes'.

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[40] Gilbert 1994: 6.

[41] Godwin 1927: 5.

[42] Granville-Barker 1932: 119f.

[43] Hamilton 1970: 133, parodying lyrics from *Patience*.

~6~

The Glory and the Shame: Debating the Aesthetics of Old Comedy

In the introduction and first chapter of this thesis, we explored a key battle-ground in the war to define the Victorian Aristophanes, as rival claims were made on the politics of Old Comedy. From there, we examined three artistic responses to that discourse, in Shelley, Planché and Gilbert. This chapter explores a new front in the Aristophanes war, which opened up after the 1873 publication of John Addington Symonds' influential *Studies of the Greek Poets*. Symonds largely sets aside the politics of Aristophanes to explore a different facet of his work. Now what is at stake is not ideology, but the aesthetic, artistic beauty of Aristophanes' verse. After discussing Symonds' consciously aesthetic approach, I examine the influence of his re-evaluation on the works of Oscar Wilde and Algernon Charles Swinburne. The counter-criticism of George Meredith, Robert Browning and Aubrey Beardsley, who each rejected Symonds' model of a beautiful and apolitical Aristophanes, will also feature. These men asked and answered differently the same fundamental question: Is Aristophanes beautiful? Today, the great debate in Aristophanic scholarship remains the nature of Aristophanes' politics; his aesthetics are little discussed. But as the remainder of this thesis will demonstrate, debates over Aristophanes' politics were largely left unresolved by late-Victorian commentators more concerned with defining his aesthetic quality.

This chapter may sometimes get confusing because definitions of 'aesthetic' overlap. Sometimes, I use that word to refer to the inherent qualities of a work of art

in a neutral sense, without implying it has any particular value; sometimes I use it synonymously with the sublime or beautiful. These usages will be familiar to literary theorists, though since I am interested in aesthetic *receptions* I have avoided offering an aesthetic theory of my own. Sometimes, again (usually when capitalising), I am referring to a particular movement – the Aesthetes – who dominated artistic criticism in the later nineteenth century; they themselves debated the overlapping meanings of the word as it defined them. From the 1860s on, the Aesthetic Movement, with its valuing of beauty above all else, of 'Art for Art's Sake', 'redeploy[ed] the language of Romantic Hellenism'[1] in aesthetic exploration. 'Aestheticism is a notoriously slippery category to define',[2] partly because it scarcely thought to define *itself*. Walter Hamilton's *The Aesthetic Movement in England* (1882), the earliest treatise on the movement as a movement, helped to shape its definition, but the satirical cartoons of *Punch* and the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta *Patience* arguably created a more compelling and enduring narrative. Oscar Wilde also represented an effective, if complicated, 'shorthand' for Aestheticism-as-movement.[3] In this chapter, Wilde and Swinburne stand alone in their uncontroversial categorisation as capital-A Aesthetics, although each person discussed was to varying degrees connected to the Movement. I hope that context will make my various usages clear.

I have preferred to use the term 'ugliness' rather than 'grotesque' when talking about the opposite of aesthetic beauty. Ugliness is a more useful term because it is wider in scope. Grotesqueness is principally a visual category and suggests a certain distorted physicality that unsettles the observer, but ugliness might also be defined

[1] Evangelista 2009: 12.

[2] Livesey 2013: 261.

[3] Ibid.

by the provocation of moral repulsion in the observer, or denote the object's shameful and abusive speech (*aischrologia*).[4] Thus, when Aristotle says that, in comedy, 'τοῦ αἰσχροῦ ἐστι τὸ γελοῖον μόριον' (*Poetics* 1449a33-34), it is not only the visual grotesqueness of the genre that 'the laughable is a portion of', but 'τοῦ αἰσχροῦ' – best translated here as 'ugliness'. I have therefore reserved the term 'grotesque' to denote a specific visual category of ugliness. Although they risk being imprecise, the aesthetic terms beautiful and ugly are key concepts for this chapter because they are also key to the aesthetic debate about Aristophanes in this period.

John Addington Symonds

John Addington Symonds (1840-1893) studied Classics at Balliol College, Oxford, and was briefly a Fellow of Magdalen.[5] He wrote widely on the Renaissance and Classics, though is best remembered for controversial treatises advocating male queer relationships, including pederastic relationships on a Platonic model.[6] In 1873, he released *Studies of the Greek Poets*, an overview of Greek literature; this contains his chapter on Aristophanes, 'first published in the *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review* (April 1871) before appearing unchanged in *Studies*.'[7] The second volume of *Studies* (1879) contained a chapter on the comic fragments. The Aristophanes essay is a passionate description of Old Comedy marked by – Symonds himself confesses

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[4] See Storey 2008. Symonds saw grotesqueness and obscenity as closely-related but distinct aesthetic categories (1890: 248f.).

[5] Norton 2013.

[6] For the connection between Symonds' sexuality, Aestheticism and Hellenism, see Dowling 1994.

[7] Walsh 2008: 92.

– ‘extravagances of style’.[8] It was widely read; ‘*Studies* was a bestseller in its time… [It] was the first handbook to make Greek literature accessible and interesting to a large, non-specialist public, and as such it was influential.’[9] Symonds was also connected to, though not necessarily a member of, the nascent Aesthetic Movement; we will shortly see Pater’s influence on his work.

Throughout his chapter on Aristophanes, Symonds references earlier scholars, both from the British tradition (John William Donaldson, Thomas Mitchell, George Grote)[10] and, more extensively, the German tradition (A.W. Schlegel, K.O. Müller, Karl Ferdinand Ranke, Theodor Bergk and August Meineke).[11] Müller argued that Old Comedy represents ‘the wild drollery of an ancient carnival’ rather than sustained, serious political discourse;[12] likewise, Schlegel wrote that:

> Several nations have set apart certain festivals, such as Saturnalia, Carnivals, &c. in which the people may give themselves altogether up to frolicsome follies, that when once the fit is over, they may remain quiet, and apply themselves to serious concerns during the rest of the year. The old comedy is a general masking of the world…[13]

[8] Symonds 1873: v.

[9] Nisbet 2018: 38f.

[10] Symonds 1873: 236f. Donaldson’s *Theatre of the Greeks* is explicitly referred to as an underlying source in Symonds’ preface (ibid. vi). Donaldson largely supported the argument that Aristophanes was a patriotic scourge (1836: 117). For Grote, see Ch.1; for Mitchell, see Ch.2.

[11] Symonds 1873: 236f.; 256.

[12] Müller 1840: 3.

[13] Schlegel 1815: 207.

Symonds largely adopts this opinion. Ranke, Bergk and Meineke are meanwhile cited as maintaining that Aristophanes was a 'profound philosopher and sober patriot' against which 'Grote has directed an able and conclusive argument in the notes to his eighth volume [of the *History of Greece*]'.[14] Symonds' reference to this ongoing debate demonstrates that he is up-to-date with the latest scholarship. It is nevertheless Schlegel's presence which is felt most keenly. Although chapters on Sophocles and Aeschylus were included in the second edition, the first edition of *Greek Poets* includes dedicated, adjacent chapters only on Euripides and Aristophanes; the informed reader is reminded of Schlegel's dichotomy between these two playwrights. However, Symonds criticises Schlegel, expressing a desire 'to do [Euripides] justice in the teeth of a malevolent generation of critics, led by Schlegel and Müller, who do not understand him'.[15] Where Schlegel used Aristophanes to criticise Euripides, Symonds asserts that the two poets are equals; 'Euripides, alone of the Greeks, with the exception of Aristophanes, entered the fairyland of dazzling fancy which Calderon and Shakspere [sic] and Fletcher trod.'[16] Ultimately, he rejects the Schlegelian dichotomy altogether, instead setting up a new comparison; Euripides is more like Menander:

> The Titanic jokes of Aristophanes taxed the imagination to its utmost stretch. But Euripides "the human, with his droppings of warm tears,", gently touched and soothed the heart. Menander with his facile wisdom

[14] Symonds 1873: 256. For a more detailed discussion of German receptions of Aristophanes, see Ch.1.

[15] Ibid. 211.

[16] Ibid. 231.

> flattered the intellect of worldly men. The sentences of both were quotable at large and fit for all occasions.[17]

Symonds' aestheticising reading of Old Comedy is also similar to Friedrich Schlegel's, although he does not refer to the second Schlegel brother directly in *Studies*; as we noted in Chapter 1, Friedrich Schlegel's scholarship reached Britain largely or entirely as mediated through A.W. Schlegel.

Another German praised in Symonds' discussion is the poet Heinrich Heine, himself a student (and later, critic) of Schlegel.[18] Symonds' chapter on Aristophanes starts with a modulation of Heine's own interpretation of Old Comedy:

> Of all poets, [Heine] was the one best fitted to appreciate the depth of Aristophanes, to pierce beneath his smiling comic mask, and to read the underlying *Weltvernichtungsidee* [world-destruction] with what he calls its "jubilee of death and fireworks of annihilation"... the criticism I have quoted seems to me to be the proper preface to all serious study of the greatest comic poet of the world.[19]

Heine was a poet and not an academic (insofar as that distinction is meaningful in the nineteenth century; Symonds himself was also a poet). Heine appreciated Aristophanes as a poet, and Symonds cites him as such. It is with *poetry* that Symonds chiefly concerns himself in this chapter, not academic discussions about the relative seriousness of Old Comedy. To come first to a *poet's* opinion of

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[17] Ibid. The quotation is from a description of Euripides in *Wine of Cyprus* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1914 [1844]: 89f.), and is also quoted by Robert Browning as the epigraph to *Balaustion's Adventure* (1871); Symonds refers to the *Adventure* above (1873: 231). For Browning's Aristophanes, see below.

[18] Sammons 1979: 57f.

[19] Symonds 1873: 233f.

Aristophanes, not to an academic's, and assert that it is the 'proper preface' to one's study, is programmatic.

Heine identified with Aristophanes and the genre of Old Comedy, as he establishes in *Deutschland, ein Wintermärchen*. Written 'quickly, in about six weeks at the beginning of 1844', the poem 'recounts a journey into Germany, commenting acerbically and with studied disrespect for the ruling institutions on conditions in the backward, tyrannized country.'[20] In the final section, Heine declares that Aristophanes is his father,[21] citing the poet's legacy in criticising the censorship of poetry, which he imagines would suppress Aristophanes if he were still living; 'Were the author still alive, I wouldn't advise him to go to Prussia personally'.[22] Aristophanes' influence is most apparent in the preceding stanza, where Hammonia, the deified representation of Hamburg, shows Heine a vision of Germany's future in the bottom of a stinking chamber-pot before forcing his head into her cleavage.[23] This is an intensely political image of Aristophanes, which doesn't come through in Symonds' reading of Heine. The source for Symonds' quotation is instead *Die Bäder von Lucca* (*The Baths of Lucca*, 1829), in which Heine discusses Aristophanes more obliquely. The book was written in part as a response to Count August von Platen-Hallermünde, a contemporary German poet who had written an Aristophanic comedy laced with anti-Semitic attacks on Heine.[24] Heine mentions Aristophanes to highlight Platen's poetic inferiority to his model, and in doing so he praises the *Weltvernichtungsidee* of

[20] Sammons 1979: 272.

[21] Heine 1978: *Deutschland* 27.22f.

[22] Ibid. 27.41-44.

[23] Ibid. 26.

[24] Sammons 1979: 144.

Aristophanes, comparing his comedy to ‘a fantastic, ironic magic tree [which] shoots with blooming ornaments of thought, singing nests of nightingales and climbing monkeys’.[25] Heine’s vivid imagery struck Symonds, who in *Studies* exclaims; ‘how miraculously beautiful are “the blooming ornament of thoughts,” “the nightingales and climbing apes”’ of Aristophanes – again quoting Heine’s *Bäder*. However, Heine’s more poetic, almost mystical appreciation of Aristophanes in *Bäder* belies his more conventional reception of Aristophanes as an intensely political poet, a master of invective and satire. To highlight that aspect of Old Comedy here would not help Heine, since Platen’s play *was* laden with invective – better to attack Platen for inferior poetic skill, thus highlighting these qualities in Aristophanes.

Unlike Heine, Symonds argues that there ‘is nothing sinister or even serious in Aristophanes.’[26] Rather, his plays are ‘transcendental travesties, enormous orgies of wild fancy and unbridled imagination, Dionysiac dances in which tears are mingled with laughter, and fire with wine’;[27] *Weltvernichtungsidee*, but of a raw, powerful, and consequently apolitical sort. They are (here he uses a word we have seen already in Müller and Schlegel) like ‘a Roman or Venetian carnival’.[28] This is a rejection of the political interpretation of Aristophanes which we have met in the British tradition so far. Shelley’s and Gilbert’s Aristophanes may have been fundamentally different from Mitchell’s, Frere’s, and Planché’s in the politics it espoused, but all were political. Grote’s argument that Aristophanes wrote ‘not with any expectation of serious or

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[25] Heine 1973: *Bäder* 597.

[26] Symonds 1873: 235.

[27] Ibid. 234.

[28] Ibid. 239.

reasonable impressions'[29] may be a factor here, although his analysis of Old Comedy is itself considerably more political than Symonds'.[30]

Aristophanic scholars today are familiar with the debate over carnivalist readings of Old Comedy intimately associated with the literary studies of Mikhail Bakhtin.[31] Obviously, Schlegel, Müller and Symonds predate Bakhtin (who wasn't writing specifically about Aristophanes anyway).[32] Yet they undeniably prefigure Bakhtinian carnivalism in their own interpretations of Old Comedy. Carnivalism is a way for Symonds to depoliticise Old Comedy, as it has been for modern scholars.[33] I emphasise this point because it is interesting, but also to defend myself against any suggestion of anachronism – when I say that Symonds interprets Old Comedy as a religious carnival, I am reading Symonds' text.

From this carnivalist interpretation, Symonds sets out a passionate defence of Old Comedy against charges of licentiousness. The religious nature of Aristophanes' crudity is difficult for a Christian society to understand, he argues, and 'this is the real reason why Aristophanes has been unfairly dealt with… Of all the Greeks, essentially

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[29] Grote 1851b: 457.

[30] See Ch.1.

[31] See Goldhill 1991: 176-188.

[32] Bakhtin was writing about Rabelais; coincidentally, Symonds directly compares Rabelais with Aristophanes, though he finds the former 'grotesque and homely' in comparison (1873: 245).

[33] So Halliwell argues from an interpretation of Old Comedy as a ritualistic carnival that the genre 'is not a functioning "organ" of democracy' but rather '*pre*democratic' and '*sub*democratic' (2008: 249). Goldhill in fact challenges the idea that carnival is inherently apolitical (1991: 188).

a nude nation, he is the most naked'.[34] To approach Aristophanes prudishly risks losing the real poet:

> The time has come at which any writer on Greek literature, if not content to pass by Aristophanes in silence, must view him as he is, and casting aside for a moment at least the veil of modern propriety, must be prepared to admit that this great comic genius was "far too naked to be shamed."[35]

This is a radical position for a Victorian commentator, challenging as it does religious and societal *mores*. Symonds, who notoriously wrote a book defending male queerness through classical precedent, was perhaps the man to do so. He also offers a caricature of critics 'winking and blinking, hesitating and condoning, omitting a passage here, attempting to soften an allusion there, until the real Aristophanes has almost disappeared.'[36] As we saw in Chapter 2, this description could apply to Mitchell and Frere, both of whom heavily edited and apologised for Aristophanes; no doubt both were in Symonds' mind as prime offenders. To be clear, Symonds does not litter his *Greek Poets* with translated Aristophanic lewdness; perhaps if he were preparing a translation or commentary of the poet his position would somewhat differ. Symonds' open-mindedness is also challenged by *Lysistrata*, which he says 'will not bear discussion'.[37] Nevertheless, *Studies* does demonstrate a new and open-minded approach in the Victorian tradition towards Aristophanic licentiousness.

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[34] Symonds 1873: 237.

[35] Ibid. 238. The quote is from Tennyson's *The Vision of Sin* (1958: *Vision* l.190), which actually expresses anxiety about the nakedness of sin.

[36] Ibid. 238.

[37] Ibid. 273.

Symonds' analysis of Aristophanes betrays another important but uncited intertext. Matthew Arnold set out a dichotomy between cultural 'Hellenism' and 'Hebraism' as humanity's two guiding influences in the evocatively titled *Culture and Anarchy* (1869).[38] Arnold equates Hellenism with an aesthetic truthfulness and a '*spontaneity of consciousness*':[39]

> To get rid of one's ignorance, to see things as they are, and by seeing them as they are to see them in their beauty, is the simple and attractive ideal which Hellenism holds out before human nature; and from the simplicity and charm of this ideal, Hellenism, and human life in the hands of Hellenism, is invested with a kind of aërial ease, clearness and radiancy: they are full of what we call sweetness and light.[40]

In contrast, Hebraism is an ethical ideal, a consciousness of sin and a controlling influence. Although they are described as equal forces both focussed on achieving 'man's perfection or salvation',[41] Hellenism is established as the higher virtue. It is specifically the idea of Hellenism as spontaneous and unrestricted by moralising which reappears in Symonds' account of Aristophanes. More widely, though, Arnold's appreciation of the truthfulness and (by this same truthfulness) the beauty of Hellenism looks forward to the philosophy of the Aesthetic Movement. Later in his book, Symonds cites Arnold's dichotomy more clearly when he asserts that 'the Hebraistic culture we receive in childhood' 'distorts our sense of beauty and prevents

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[38] Interestingly, Arnold held Heine up as a model of his (as-yet-unnamed) Hellenism in an earlier essay (Turner 1981: 23).

[39] Arnold 1869: 147; italics his.

[40] Ibid. 151.

[41] Ibid. 143.

our realizing an ideal of art'[42] – Hebraism getting in the way of Aesthetic Hellenism. Arnold's dichotomy, while it may strike us as overly simplistic and alarmingly racial,[43] was then a ground-breaking formulation to explain the perceived exceptionalism of Western classics, and 'many late-Victorian readers within and without the scholarly community were attracted to Greek civilization because of its alleged embodiment of the values that Arnold had championed.'[44] Even his use of aerial imagery to describe its attractiveness ('a kind of aërial ease', 'sweetness and light') will ripple through later invocations of Hellenic exceptionalism and Aristophanic poetics, as we shall see.

Symonds viewed the carnivalism of Old Comedy as a product of Dionysiac worship. Aristophanes' plays:

> Were offered as a sacrifice upon the… orchestral altar of that Bacchus who was sire by Aphrodité of Priapus… We may fairly accept them as visions, Dionysiac day-dreams, from which the nation woke and rose and went about its business soberly, until the Bacchic flutes were heard again another year.[45]

In this, Symonds prefigures Nietzsche's famous conceptualisation of the Dionysian force in *Birth of Tragedy*, published in 1872 a year after Symonds' original essay on Aristophanes and a year before its reprinting in *Studies*. But Symonds' aesthetics require no Apolline counter-force; Aristophanes can be beautiful through Dionysus

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[42] Symonds 1873: 422.

[43] As racial as it is, Goldhill has demonstrated 'how odd Arnold's European-influenced dichotomy… and his association of Hebraism with Protestantism seems' when compared to the virulently anti-Semitic traditions of the Victorian historical novel (2011: 242; see ibid. 231-244).

[44] Turner 1981: 18.

[45] Symonds 1873: 239.

alone.[46] Symonds is much closer to Pater, who in 1876 described Dionysus as caught 'between the ruder fancies of half-civilised people concerning life in flower or tree, and the dreamy after-fancies of the poet'.[47] As with Symonds' Aristophanes, Pater's Dionysus is artistic and beautiful because he is unrefined. The sexual language Symonds uses to describe his Aristophanic Dionysus (the 'sire by Aphrodité of Priapus') reflects a broader queer discourse on the god within the Aesthetic Movement, expressed by Pater and others. The queer artist Simeon Solomon painted two eroticised, youthful and ambiguously-gendered pictures of the god (Fig. 6.1).[48]

[46] On Nietzsche and Aristophanes, see Lecznar 2020. I am not suggesting Symonds and Nietzsche were familiar with each other's work.

[47] Pater 1876: 753f. On the parallels between Pater and Nietzsche, see Bridgwater 1972: 21-29.

[48] On Pater's and Solomon's queer Dionysus, see Evangelista 2008.

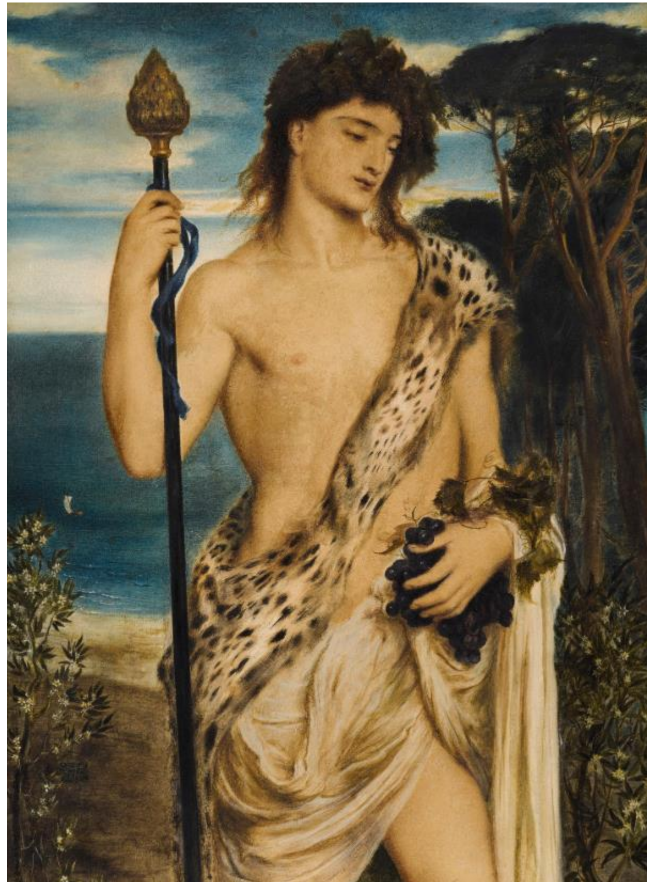

Fig. 6.1: Bacchus *(1867) by Simeon Solomon*

Unfortunately, even within a single chapter of his book, Symonds' apolitical and carnivalesque reading of Aristophanes is not consistently maintained. He occasionally reverts back to the familiar interpretation of Aristophanes as 'an Athenian Conservative' and 'a panegyrist of the old policy of Athens'.[49] At the same time (and not necessarily in contradiction), Symonds argues that Old Comedy was a unique product of Athenian democracy.[50] He seems to have developed this position over time; it is more consistently expressed in the second volume of *Greek Poets* released

[49] Symonds 1873: 253. Walsh inaccurately argues that this position dominates Symonds' discussion (2008: 94).

[50] Symonds 1873: 256.

in 1879. Here, he asserts that Greek comedy 'incarnated the freedom of democracy, caricaturing individuals, criticising constitutional changes, and, through all its extravagances of burlesque and fancy, maintaining a direct relation to politics.'[51] This undermines Symonds' own argument that Old Comedy was not seriously political.

Regardless of this confusion, Symonds' most significant argument does not address Aristophanes' political seriousness. His chapter aims at an aesthetic criticism of the poet 'as a *poet* transcendent for his splendour even among the most brilliant of Attic playwrights.'[52] Aristophanes was, according to Symonds:

> A poet in what we are apt to call the modern sense of the word – a poet, that is to say, endowed with original intuitions into nature, and with the faculty of presenting to our minds the most varied thoughts and feelings in language uniformly beautiful…[53]

'Language uniformly beautiful', 'original intuitions into nature', a 'modern' poet– Symonds is describing Aristophanes in language evocative of the Aesthetic Movement.[54] His aesthetic analysis lacks scholarly rigour, as he was aware; 'if we seek to define the peculiar qualities of his poetic power, we are led to results not easily

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[51] Symonds 1879: 333.

[52] Symonds 1873: 248. Italics his.

[53] Ibid. 249.

[54] In *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, a highly influential account of aesthetics also published in 1873, Pater asserts that 'the function of the aesthetic critic is to distinguish, analyse, and separate from its adjuncts, the virtue by which… [art] produces this special impression of beauty or pleasure' (1873: ix). He also argues that 'music and poetry have their fortune in the modern world… only in this varied literary form can art command that width, variety, delicacy of resources, which will enable it to deal with the conditions of modern life' (ibid. 205) – a claim Symonds seems to echo with his description of Aristophanes as a spiritually modern poet.

expressed'.[55] But such is the difficulty of talking about beauty and aesthetics. It is the ephemeral transcendence of Aristophanes which captivates Symonds; 'the epithets which continually rise to our lips in speaking of him – radiant, resplendent, swift, keen, changeful, flashing, magical – carry no real notion of the marvellous and subtle spirit that animates his comedy with life peculiar to itself.'[56]

Symonds highlights *Birds* and *Clouds* as Aristophanes' greatest masterpieces; 'no poet – not even Shelley – has exceeded the choruses of the *Birds* and *Clouds* in swiftness, radiance, and condensed imagination.'[57] Symonds' own analysis of the poet is layered with cloud, sky and bird imagery. We watch Aristophanes' poetry 'as we might watch the flight of a strong rapid bird, whose plumage glitters by moments in the light of the sun';[58] his lyrical episodes are 'refreshing strains of lark-like heaven aspiring melody' with language which fits 'the delicate thought like a veil of woven air';[59] Old Comedy exists in an 'enchanted land, where the air is purer and the skies are larger than in our world'.[60] This imagery, providing a parallel with Aristophanes' airy language in the *Clouds* and *Birds* choruses, is lyrical in its own right, far more so than conventional academic writing. Symonds is co-opting Aristophanes' supposed lyricism in order to demonstrate it – thus the comparison with Shelley, which occurs three times overall.[61] One wonders

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[55] Symonds 1873: 249.

[56] Ibid. 274.

[57] Ibid. 235.

[58] Ibid. 249.

[59] Ibid. 250f.

[60] Ibid. 235.

[61] Ibid. 235; 249; 267.

whether Symonds' argument could sustain prolonged consideration of all Aristophanes' plays; the choice to focus on *Birds* and *Clouds*, among the least obscene and least directly political of Aristophanes' plays, may have been ultimately determined by Symonds' argument.

John Ruskin (one of the leading figures in the Aesthetic Movement) had already admired the aesthetics of Aristophanes in the preface of his second edition of *Modern Painters*, albeit in a single footnote. Citing the entrance of the *Clouds* chorus, also discussed by Symonds in *Greek Poets*,[62] Ruskin praises the truth and beauty of nature captured by Aristophanes' poetry, 'burlesque though [it] be'.[63] He describes how Aristophanes' poetry 'is melting, drifting, evanescent, – full of air, and light, and dew.'[64] Ruskin asserts that Aristophanes 'knew and felt more of the noble landscape character of his country than any whose works have come down to us except Homer.'[65] This interpretation, particularly the metapoetic use of cloud imagery, is familiar from Symonds' *Studies*. Yet Ruskin's analysis is limited to a single footnote. While he refers to Aristophanes several more times in *Modern Painters*, he does not expand the argument further. Symonds' account of Old Comedy's aesthetics is much more developed.

Ruskin aside, earlier receptions of Old Comedy had pre-supposed an ugliness to the genre. We might best compare Shelley's Aristophanes. *Swellfoot the Tyrant* displays none of Shelley's typical lyricism; it is brutish and cruel poetry intended to generate revulsion. This is the same poet whom Symonds repeatedly compares with

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[62] Ibid. 265-267.

[63] Ruskin 1857: xxv. His use of 'burlesque' reflects on the generic similarities discussed in Ch.4.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

Aristophanes to underline the latter's beauty. Other commentators who had at least acknowledged the skilful poetics of Aristophanes (for example Frere, who admired his satire) had never asserted that Old Comedy was *aesthetically beautiful*. Perhaps it is only by arguing for an apolitical Aristophanes that Symonds can value him aesthetically. There is nothing more sordidly human than engaging in the cut-and-thrust of political debate, particularly through satire; by excluding Aristophanes from this sphere and having him seek Art for Art's Sake instead, Symonds renders him somewhat divine. The argument for an aesthetic Aristophanes became influential in late-nineteenth-century Britain, simultaneous with an increasing tendency to read Old Comedy apolitically.

Wilde's *Clouds* and Swinburne's *Birds*

After 1873, two fellow, well-known Aesthetics produced poetic treatments of Aristophanic choruses which suggest Symonds' influence. Oscar Wilde published the *eisodos* of *Clouds* in the November 1875 issue of the *Dublin University Magazine*; it is significant as his first published poem.[66] Algernon Charles Swinburne published a version of the *Birds parabasis* in the *Athenaeum* in October 1880, also including it in his *Studies in Song* published the same year. It is not coincidence that each poet chose one of Symonds' favourite Aristophanes plays as his source, and each tackled the Aristophanic chorus specifically. The resulting poems aren't precisely translations; they are 'from the Greek' but are fragmentary, and concerned more with poetics than the accurate rendering of meaning.

[66] Evangelista 2009: 125. Thomas Love Peacock's *Gryll Grange* also includes an adaptation of this chorus (1861: 282f.; see Ch.3).

Wilde wrote his *Chorus of Cloud Maidens* whilst a student at Magdalen College, Oxford; he had previously studied at Trinity College, Dublin, which explains the choice of publisher. In Dublin he had won the Berkeley Gold Medal for Greek in 1874, 'the special topic selected for that year being the Greek Comic Poets.'[67] His long association with the Aesthetic Movement first developed at university. The young Wilde developed his characteristic style of Aesthetic Hellenism by 'read[ing] both Pater and Symonds very closely and transcrib[ing] quotations from them in his notebooks side by side his notes on ancient Greek sources.'[68] Wilde liked to be seen around town carrying his copy of *Greek Poets* (faintly scandalous because of its discussion of male queerness)[69] – he was never one to pass up a chance to define his public persona. By 1879, he was acquainted with Symonds personally, as 'they were both on the Council of the newly founded Hellenic Society'.[70] Symonds talks about the *Clouds eisodos* at length in *Greek Poets*, highlighting the poetic force of Aristophanes' lyricism. Imagining the comic chorus singing offstage, 'vocally realizing the splendour of the coming Clouds before they strike the eyes of the spectators',[71] he writes:

> Its truth has been felt by all who have seen the rising of summer clouds from the waters of the Mediterranean. Indeed, this Chorus belongs to the

[67] Hamilton 1882: 98.

[68] Evangelista 2009: 130.

[69] Nisbet 2018: 40.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Symonds 1873: 266.

> highest order of poetry… It is in the deepest sense an intuition into the inmost life of nature.[72]

Here is that Aesthetic ideal of artistic sensuality. Symonds also quotes the *strophe* in a footnote. We can perhaps imagine Wilde reading his dog-eared copy of *Greek Poets* and feeling the same aesthetic attachment to the passage as Symonds. He describes the chorus in his commonplace book, which Smith II and Helfand tentatively date to his period at Oxford and shortly after,[73] as 'full of the mythopoe[t]ic and sculptural power of vivid realisation, as well as of accurate observation';[74] this suggests the same perception of an artistic, aesthetic truth. When he set about writing his own version, it was with Symonds' poetics firmly taken to heart; the poem strives to (re)create poetic beauty.

Wilde's aesthetic development at Oxford relied on other key figures in the Aesthetic Movement. Ruskin and Pater 'were both lecturing and tutoring in Oxford during Wilde's time there and Wilde's writings reflect the complicated nature of his debt to their thought.'[75] In his commonplace book, Wilde also indicates a close reading of Hegel.[76] He compares Aristophanes' *eisodos* with Shelley's *The Cloud* (1820), suggesting Shelley's influence on Wilde's version.[77] Bristow and Ross have both further argued for the influence of Swinburne on *Cloud Maidens*, and Wilde was

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[72] Ibid. 266f.

[73] Smith II and Helfand 1989: 4.

[74] Ibid. 138.

[75] Livesey 2013: 263.

[76] Smith II and Helfand 1989: 4; 22-27. See Ch.1 for Hegel's views on Aristophanes.

[77] Ibid. 138. Beyond the shared subject, I detect no direct reception of Aristophanes in Shelley's poem, although as noted in Ch.3 Shelley had read Aristophanes closely.

reading his 1866 collection of *Poems and Ballads* closely around this time. 'Wilde's translation is Swinburnian in vocabulary and metre', according to Ross;[78] certainly, *Chorus of Cloud Maidens* demonstrates Wilde's early and 'classically informed knowledge of… English Romanticism of the 1810s and Pre-Raphaelite poetry of the 1850s and 1860s.'[79]

Dover characterises Aristophanes' *Clouds eisodos* as metrically unusual, especially the overabundance of lyric dactyls which gives the verse a sober tone;[80] Parker assigns 'dignified associations' to the passage, noting that the dactyls 'would be compatible with contemporary tragedy' and that 'its closest metrical affinities are with Euripidean lyric'.[81] Wilde chooses anapaests (and the occasional resolved

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[78] Ross 2012: 85.

[79] Bristow 2013: 74.

[80] Dover 1968: 275-90n.

[81] Parker 1997: 184, 187. She also suggests that this solemnity may be both parodic and serious (ibid. 188). For her metrical analysis of the *eisodos*, see ibid. 186f.

iamb).[82] Twelve lines out of thirty end on an extrametrical feminine ending,[83] giving the verse a light, airy rhythm. He reduces the *strophe* to twelve lines and increases the *antistrophe* to eighteen. The *strophe* is divided into two quintets with an a,a,b,b,b rhyme scheme and a rhyming couplet coda. The *antistrophe* has an irregular rhyming scheme (a,b,a,b,c,d,c,d,d,e,f,e,f,f,g,g,h,h), so that everything rhymes with something but without a defined structure. Rhymes also alternate between being masculine and feminine. The variety of stanza lengths and rhymes used suggests experimentation, but the ultimate result is careful and well-ordered. Overall, the structure of the poem is designed to replicate the nature of clouds – light, airy and nebulous.

Aristophanes' *antistrophe* is predominantly a list of positive religious features which define Athens, all dependant on 'ἵνα' (l.303) and an assumed 'ἐστί'. Wilde replicates this structure by repeating 'where' and 'where are' at the beginning of six lines;[84] English cannot sustain Aristophanes' loose syntax. He also repeats 'When' at

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[82] Anapaests are common in Old Comedy, and are used in Swinburne's Aristophanic chorus below. Bristow scans the first four lines of the poem as dactyls (2013: 73), but I take them as follows:

U – | U U – | U U – | U

Cloud-maidens that float on for ever,

U U – | U – | U U –

Dew sprinkled, fleet bodies, and fair,

U U – | U U – | U – | U

Let us rise from our Sire's loud river

U – | U U – | U U –

Of Ocean, and soar through the air

(Wilde 1875: 1-4.)

[83] Ibid. 1, 3, 6, 8, 13, 15, 17, 19, 22, 24, 27 and 28.

[84] Ibid. 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 24.

the beginning of lines 20 and 23; all in all, between ll.16-24, only one line starts without a ‘when’ or a ‘where’.[85] This repeated ‘whe-’ sound, both alliterative and assonant, augments the verse’s lyrical quality, creating an almost onomatopoeic sense of flowing like water.

Wilde’s translation of the Greek is accurate, although he tends to ‘over-translate’ phrases. What was tedious with Mitchell is invariably charming with Wilde. His rendering of ‘ὑψηλῶν ὀρέων κορυφὰς… /δενδροκόμους’ (Aris. *Clouds* 279f.), literally ‘tree-haired tops of high mountains’, translates the difficult word ‘δενδροκόμους’ twice; ‘the peaks of the pine-covered mountains where the pines hang as tresses of hair’.[86] Translating the sense, he renders the word as ‘pine-covered’, but to capture Aristophanes’ original metaphor he appends ‘where the pines hang as tresses of hair’ – the clause hangs onto the line like trees on the mountain. The resulting sense repetition only increases the lyrical feel of the line. Aristophanes’ ‘ποταμῶν ζαθέων κελαδήματα’ (283), literally ‘torrents of holy rivers’, become Wilde’s ‘murmurs of rivers nymph-haunted’.[87] ‘Murmurs’ has almost the opposite sense of ‘κελαδήματα’ and ‘nymph-haunted’ is a gross over-translation of ‘ζαθέων’, but Wilde’s line produces more mysticism and power. By translating this Aristophanic chorus, Wilde naturally invokes the language of sky and clouds used by both Ruskin and Symonds, but on two occasions he supplements the Greek to extend this imagery. His clouds ‘soar through the air’ to the mountain-peaks,[88] which translates a verb only

[85] ‘To the mysteries that none may declare’; ibid. 18.

[86] Ibid. 5.

[87] Ibid. 8.

[88] Ibid. 4.

implied in the Greek. They then sing, ‘to the Pallas-loved land let us wing’[89] instead of ‘ἔλθωμεν λιπαρὰν χθόνα Παλλάδος’ (‘let us go to the shining land of Pallas’, Aris. *Clouds* 300); here, the less resonant ‘ἔλθωμεν’ is translated more evocatively. Wilde does not include a translation of the dialogue between Strepsiades and Socrates, which in the original text (Aris. *Clouds* 291-297) interrupts the chorus and defuses the serious tone. Wilde’s poem is a more poetic, more elaborate version of the source-text.

Wilde’s use of the classics in his wider *oeuvre* and in his cultivation of a self-image as an Aesthetic and a queer man have been widely discussed in scholarship.[90] Unfortunately, after his university days reading Symonds and writing *Chorus of Cloud Maidens,* Wilde did not return to Aristophanes substantially again. Of course, among the best known of his works are several dazzlingly witty comedy plays. But if the spirit of Aristophanes inspired Wilde to write for the theatre, it did so obliquely. New Comedy and those Euripidean tragedies which prefigure New Comedy (such as *Ion*) are more obvious sources.[91] An Aristophanic play was written *about* Wilde – *Aristophanes at Oxford, O.W.*, written by three Oxford students in 1894 to attack Wilde’s aestheticism and queerness.[92] All the same, this Wilde poem offers a clear

[89] Ibid. 14.

[90] Riley, Blanshard and Manny (eds.) 2018 has been a particularly useful resource for this chapter.

[91] On New Comedy, see Witze 2018, who argues that Plautus’ *Menaechmi* is a source for *The Importance of Being Earnest*. On Euripides, see Hurst 2018: 133f. Wilde may have seen the Cambridge production of *Ion* in 1890 (Foster 2018: 122).

[92] See Prasch: 2012. His interpretation of Wilde as essentially on Euripides’ side against Aristophanes in a late-Victorian Schlegelian culture war between the two playwrights is undermined by *Chorus of Cloud Maidens* and Symonds’ passion for both.

aesthetic reading of Aristophanes on Symonds' terms, a demonstration of the ongoing influence of *Studies of the Greek Poets* within the Aesthetic Movement.

On, then, to Swinburne, a man like Wilde 'closely linked to the Oxford Aesthetic Movement'.[93] In 1880, he published his *Grand Chorus of Birds from Aristophanes* in the *Athenaeum*, a high-brow arts and literature journal, and in the same year in a poetry collection, *Studies in Song*. This bears a similar name to Symonds' *Studies of the Greek Poets* and Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. The poem was later reprinted alongside Frere's translation of *Birds* for the crib of the Cambridge production of that play in 1883 (discussed in Chapter 7).[94] It is a version of Aristophanes' *parabasis* from *Birds* – or more accurately, a section of it. Dunbar breaks Aristophanes' *parabasis* into seven sections:

1. The *kommation*, requesting the nightingale to accompany the chorus' singing (676-684)
2. The '*parabasis* proper', a theogony of the birds (685-722)
3. The *pnigos*, an 'anapaestic run' on the benefits of birds to humanity (723-736)
4. The ode for birdsong (737-752)
5. The *epirrhema* inviting the audience to Cloudcuckooland (753-768)
6. The *antode* for swansong (769-784)
7. The *antepirrhema* in praise of having wings (785-800)[95]

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[93] Goldhill 2011: 73.

[94] Swinburne to Norman MacColl, November 9th [1883], Meyers 2005: 354.

[95] Dunbar 1998: 676-800nn. See Parker 1997: 296 for a metrical summary of *Birds*, which however does not include Swinburne's section, as it is recitative (not, as he suggests, lyric).

Swinburne translates only the second section. In his preamble, he states that it is 'easy to detach [this section] from its dramatic setting, and even from its lyrical context'.[96] We might wonder whether Swinburne's readers are left with a misrepresentation of Aristophanes' original *parabasis*, the length and complex structure of which is integral to its dramatic and poetic force.

Swinburne evidently admired Aristophanes; asked by *Pall Mall Gazette* to supply a 'reading list' of important literature similar to Sir John Lubbock's, Swinburne placed Aristophanes sixth.[97] He was incensed by Browning's perceived slights against Aristophanes in the latter's 1875 narrative poem *Aristophanes' Apology* (discussed below), and threatened to write an Aristophanic play about Browning:

> Oh! If we were not now unhappily on friendly terms, *what* a Thesmophoriazusae I might, could should and *would* write on *him*!... I dare

[96] Swinburne 1880: 68.

[97] Swinburne to the Editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, [c. 22 January 1886], Lang 1962: 132. Swinburne was an upper-class man writing for an upper-class paper, so the exercise was far from Sir John Lubbock's list, which had been designed for the Working Men's College of which Lubbock was Principal (see Hall and Stead 2020: Ch.9). But the *Gazette* was apparently earnest in their desire to publish a series of similar lists; they also printed letters on the subject by, amongst others, John Ruskin, the Prince of Wales and William Gladstone ('The Best Hundred Books' (19 January 1886) *Pall Mall Gazette*: 1-2). Ruskin's reply saw him 'putting [his] pen… through the rubbish of poison of Sir John's list' and replacing Lubbock's recommendation of Aristophanes' *Knights* with *Clouds*, *Birds* and *Wealth* (Ibid. 2; Lubbock later added *Clouds* himself). The newspaper had also published Lubbock's list earlier in the month, and while it was critical of the content, it was not critical of the *concept* ('Sir John Lubbock's Liberal Education' (11 January 1886) *Pall Mall Gazette*: 4).

> not dwell on it, lest the suggestions of my fancy should become *too* Aristophanic.[98]

In a letter to Browning himself, Swinburne describes Browning as ‘the worst and assuredly the most dangerous enemy of Aristophanes’.[99] As Browning pointed out in his reply, this is a mischaracterisation of *Aristophanes' Apology*.[100] Regardless, it demonstrates Swinburne’s affection for Old Comedy.

Swinburne related the context of writing his *Grand Chorus* to his mother a few days after the poem’s composition:

> [Benjamin] Jowett came here to luncheon the other day… I read him a translation I have made of a very famous Greek poem – the ‘Grand Chorus of Birds’ in a play of Aristophanes called the ‘Birds’ – which a day or two before I had done into English word for word almost, and literally line for line, in exactly the same metre as the original, only adding rhymes throughout – which is considered no small feat. I read the poem just before leaving Eton – Mr. Joynes [his teacher] set it me to read out of school hours – and I always thought it what it is, one of the very finest things ever done in the world. And I have always fancied or dreamed how nice but how impossible it would be to give an idea or an echo of it in English… It is half sacred, half secular, half humorous, half imaginative, and all poetical in the highest degree of its kind…[101]

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98 Swinburne to Edwin Harrison, 7 July [1875], Lang 1960a: 40.

99 Swinburne to Robert Browning, 26 January 1881, Lang 1960b: 187.

100 Browning to Swinburne, 5 February 1881, Hood 1933: 193.

101 Swinburne to Lady Jane Henrietta Swinburne, October 25 [1880], Lang 1960b: 171. Swinburne dates the poem’s composition ‘October 19, 1880’ (Swinburne 1880: 74).

Swinburne's reverence for Aristophanes, according to this letter, dates back to his Eton school days, where even as a boy he developed an aesthetic appreciation for this 'poem' as 'one of the very finest things ever done'.[102] His poetic response therefore pre-dates Symonds' *Greek Poets*, even if it was influenced by Symonds' interpretation later on. His proclaimed reticence in translating so pure a piece (it would be 'nice but… impossible', it would only 'give an idea or an echo') is somewhat belied by the evident pride he feels in having done so (it is 'no small feat').

In the poem's preamble, Swinburne compares Aristophanes with Rabelais, Shakespeare and Shelley; this immediately recalls Symonds' own repeated comparisons between these four writers.[103] He shows the same interest in Aristophanes as a poet, although for Swinburne this means in the technical prosody of Aristophanic verse; he notes that Aristophanes' 'marvellous metrical invention of the anapaestic heptametre was almost exactly reproducible' in English, and boasts that 'in two metrical points only' does he stray from Aristophanes' original metre.[104] The choice of *Birds*, Symonds' favourite Aristophanes play, may also be telling, though of course Swinburne cites an earlier source for his interest. Wilde used anapaests for *Cloud Maidens*, but with much shorter lines.

Although both poets use anapaestic heptametre with a final extrametrical beat in the seventh foot, Swinburne's metre does not replicate Aristophanes' foot-by-foot:

U U – | – – | U U – | U U – | U U

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[102] We will meet Jowett again in the next chapter, reading Aristophanes as a school-boy at St Paul's.

[103] As mentioned, Symonds compares Aristophanes to Shelley three times; comparisons with Shakespeare are even more common. Symonds also declares that, 'if we are to seek for an approximation to Aristophanic humour, we shall find it perhaps in Rabelais' at Symonds 1873: 245.

[104] Swinburne 1880: 68.

Come on then, ye dwellers by nature in darkness, and

– | U U – | U U – U|

like to the leaves' generations,[105]

U U – | U U – | U U – | UU– | – – | UU– | U U – X

ἄγε δὴ φύσιν ἄνδρες ἀμαυρόβιοι, φύλλων γενεᾷ προσόμοιοι,

(Aristophanes, *Birds* 685)

In general, Aristophanes is much readier to resolve his anapaests into spondees, dactyls and even one tetrabrach at l.688. There is resolution in the English poem as well, such as in the highly spondaic l.11; 'First thing first-born of the black-plumed Night was a wind-egg hatched in her bosom'. Swinburne breaks his long lines into two, indenting the second half of each line as shown above. He also uses rhyming couplets (feminine rhymes because of the extrametrical final beat) and two sets of rhyming triplets.[106] Wilde also added rhymes to his poem, though with less order.

Given the metrical constraints he has placed on himself, Swinburne's translation is remarkably close to the Greek. A few Victorianisms appear, such as Eros entering into 'wedlock' with Chaos;[107] the Greek describes him as 'μιγείς' ('mixing') with her, with no suggestion of marriage (698). Aristophanes assigns the sexual completion of male pederastic relationships to birds; 'and [active] lovers have slipped through the thighs of many beautiful boys who have sworn not to before the

[105] Ibid. 1.

[106] Ibid. 21-23; 30-32.

[107] Ibid. 71

end of their youth, because of our power' (705f.).[108] This Swinburne carefully paraphrases as:

> And manifold fair young folk that forswore love once,
>
> ere the bloom of them ended,
>
> Have the men that pursued and desired them subdued,
>
> by the help of us only befriended[109]

The overt reference to sex is translated into the coyer notions of forsworn love and submission, though the sense is still transparent enough. All notions of a queer relationship are swiftly suppressed by translating 'παῖδας' as 'young folk', a gender-neutral term. Without an explicit reference to same-sex intercourse, the verse is effectively straight-washed. Any casual reader would assume Aristophanes is talking about pliant young women. Even an Aesthetic Movement which could foster the public queerness of Oscar Wilde and John Addington Symonds was still working within a highly conservative society. Yet by making the gender of his 'young folk' ambiguous, Swinburne does not *preclude* a queer reading, allowing readers who know the Greek to see past his censorship.

Unfortunately, for all its metrical intricacy, Swinburne's Aristophanic poem is heavy and tedious. English poetry written in anapaests can be effective, with the tripping waltz of its beat creating light, comical verse – it is, after all, the metre of the limerick. No doubt it sounded similar to Greek ears, which is why Aristophanes used it. But Swinburne's lines are too long to sustain a tripping beat. Breaking each line in two does not resolve the issue. And his resolutions rarely track with the tone of the poem. If we look again at that highly spondaic l.11 ('First thing first-born of the black-

[108] That is, *erastai* have given their desired partners gifts of birds and received sexual favours.

[109] Swinburne 1880: 72.

plumed Night was a wind-egg hatched in her bosom'), we may wonder why a description of the birth of Eros is made so heavy. The actual moment of his birth, described in the next line, is also spondaic; 'sweet Love burst out'. The metre is hardly erotic; indeed, the English ear is less attuned to spondees, which occur rarely in our verse. By sticking closely to the formal poetic qualities of the verse and focusing on the metre above the meaning, he has lost its abstract aesthetics – it is no longer Art for Art's Sake.

Yet Swinburne's version of Aristophanes demonstrates the same aesthetic appreciation of Aristophanes *as a poet* that we saw in Symonds and Wilde. He describes the passage to his mother as 'half sacred'; in his preamble Aristophanes is a 'divine humorist'.[110] Like Wilde, he must detach Aristophanes from the dramatic, political and cultural context of Old Comedy to permit such a reception – to some extent, we saw how Symonds does this too. Nevertheless, all three Aesthetics saw the same poetic quality in Aristophanes. The rest of this chapter focuses on three further receptions of Aristophanes by figures associated with the Aesthetic Movement – George Meredith, Robert Browning and Aubrey Beardsley – all of whom challenge Symonds' position, or at least modify it.

George Meredith

Meredith was never a member of the Aesthetic Movement as it self-identified itself. But he moved in Aesthetic circles; in the early 1860s, he even briefly lived with Swinburne and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.[111] The famous Pre-Raphaelite painting, *The*

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[110] Ibid. 68.

[111] Harris 2008.

Death of Chatterton by Henry Wallis (1856), used Meredith as a model.[112] His position as one of the leading novelists of the late nineteenth century places him within the artistic and critical *milieu* this chapter is interested in. We might, therefore, expect dialogue between Meredith's views on comedy and Aristophanes, and what we have hitherto outlined as the shared Aesthetic position of Symonds, Wilde and Swinburne. In fact, Meredith's dialogue is with Arnold, to the exclusion of Symonds.

Fig. 6.2: The Death of Chatterton *(1856) by Henry Wallis*

Meredith sets out a broad theory of comedy in his essay *On Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit*, first delivered to the London Institution in February 1877 and then published in the *New Quarterly Magazine* later that spring. In the essay, he denies that comedy can be defined solely as the generation of humour or laughter. Indeed, humour and comedy are scarcely related; rather, the genre's defining force

[112] Ibid.

is *wit*, defined as a sort of social awareness which observes and challenges the manners and foibles of humanity. 'The laughter of Comedy is impersonal and of unrivalled politeness… The test of true Comedy is that it shall awaken *thoughtful* laughter.'[113] Comedy, therefore, is moralistic and probative; 'there are questions, as well as persons, that only the Comic can fitly touch.'[114] As Hall has demonstrated, this same model of civilising comedy underpins Meredith's novels as well.[115] In this sense, comedy for Meredith is *always* broadly political and *never* the product of Bacchic fancy, as Symonds would have it.

Meredith's Aristophanes is largely made to fit this model. Whilst Meredith acknowledges that Aristophanic comedy was produced as part of 'a festival in a season of licence',[116] his Aristophanes is 'a Titanic pamphleteer, using laughter for his political weapon',[117] and the champion of 'a most natural conservatism'.[118] This is the conservative, moralistic Aristophanes conceived by a consensus of early-nineteenth-century British scholars. Meredith does display an aesthetic appreciation of Aristophanes, albeit not within the same parameters as Symonds. Embracing Arnold's conception of Hellenism as the perception of 'things as they really are',[119]

[113] Meredith 1897: 82; italics mine. He does not entirely preclude humour's potential for cruelty, but ascribes it exclusively to 'the laughter of satire' (ibid.).

[114] Ibid. 62.

[115] Hall 2007: 84.

[116] Meredith 1897: 6.

[117] Ibid. 67.

[118] Ibid. 66.

[119] Arnold 1869: 145.

and the same aerial imagery we saw Symonds borrow from Arnold, he yearns for Aristophanes' rebirth to correct the *mores* of his own age:

> If the Comic idea prevailed with us, and we had an Aristophanes to barb and wing it, we should be breathing [the] air of Athens… There would be a bright and positive, clear Hellenic perception of facts…[120]

This Arnoldian aesthetics of a 'clear Hellenic perception of facts' is readily grafted onto Meredith's own model of truthful comedy. It is similar to Arnold's own discussion of Aristophanes in his lecture *On the Modern Element in Literature*:

> The boldest creations of a riotous imagination are in Aristophanes, as has been justly said, based always upon the foundation of a serious thought: politics, education, social life, literature – all the great modes in which the human life of his day manifested itself – are the subjects of his thoughts, and of his penetrating comment.[121]

Both adopt the model of a political, philosophising Aristophanes explicitly rejected by Symonds; no space is left for Symonds' appreciation of Aristophanes' poetics. For Meredith, therefore, Aristophanes is Hellenic precisely because he is as Arnold describes him, and not as Symonds does.

Although Meredith never criticises the licentiousness of Old Comedy directly, Aristophanes is too Dionysiac to fit perfectly within Meredith's comic model. We may laugh at the 'stormy fun' of Aeacus beating Dionysus and Xanthias, but such ribaldry 'is not illuminating; it is not the laughter of the mind.'[122] And, as we have seen,

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[120] Ibid. 63.

[121] Arnold 1868: 310. This lecture was originally delivered in 1857 as his inaugural address as Professor of Poetry at Oxford.

[122] Ibid. 88f.

Meredith believes that 'true Comedy… shall awaken thoughtful laughter'. For this reason, Meredith ultimately prefers Menander to Aristophanes.

For this reason, too, Hall's case for the significant influence of Aristophanes on Meredith's wider *oeuvre* may be overstated. Aristophanes is certainly an influence in a narrative poem written by Meredith the year before his essay on comedy, and published in the *Fortnightly Review*. *A Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt* presents a band of women who have eschewed the company of any man unwilling to support their independence. Their constant refrain is, 'He who's for us, for him are we!'[123] The narrator of the poem belligerently debates the women, whilst his silent friend – a model of the ideal male feminist – gives them space to develop their argument without intervention. The friend then supports them and wins their favour. The obvious intertext here is Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, with Meredith presenting a chaste equivalent to the sex strike in his women's resistance to association with unsympathetic men. The language of war and treaties both feature early in the poem,[124] themes which are memorably employed in *Lysistrata*. Yet *Fair Ladies in Revolt* demonstrates no attempt at Aristophanic humour. It may be considered comic in Meredith's idiosyncratic definition of the term, but it is patently not *funny*. Its conception may owe something to Aristophanes, but its tone could not be more different.

[123] Meredith 1876: II.6; IV.6; VI.6; XXIV.6; XLVIII.6.

[124] Ibid. II.4, IV.1f.

Robert Browning[125]

Browning was also not quite an Aesthetic, although as Walter Hamilton points out he 'has some of the characteristics of Aestheticism in his writings'.[126] Wilde liked him and associated his poetry with Euripides,[127] and as we have seen he was friends with Swinburne – even when they disagreed over Aristophanes.

Browning's *Aristophanes' Apology Including a Transcript from Euripides Being the Last Adventure of Balaustion* was published in 1875 as the sequel to *Balaustion's Adventure*, published four years before. The poem offers a 'remarkable portrayal of Athenian life' which 'linger[s] long in the memory',[128] but it is also a breathtakingly complex work, spanning 5,711 lines, incorporating multiple framing narratives and countless obscure classical allusions, as well as an embedded translation of Euripides' *Herakles*. Tisdel notes that it is 'more like a doctor's dissertation than a poem'[129] (although my thesis is hopefully more comprehensible). This assessment is perhaps hyperbolic, but the underlying point holds true; Browning's poem is so learned, so complicated and so intertextual that it can be hard to absorb exactly what he is saying.

Both the *Apology* and the *Adventure* are based on stories in Plutarch (*Nic.* 29; *Lys.* 15). *Balaustion's Adventure* tells the story of Balaustion, a Rhodian who leaves home for Athens; on the way she is chased by pirates into Syracuse, and is about to

[125] This section is a much-amended version of an essay originally submitted for my Master of Studies degree.

[126] Hamilton 1882: 41.

[127] Hurst 2018: 129.

[128] Nitchie 1921: 108.

[129] Tisdel 1927: 1.

be turned over to them by the Sicilians when she recites Euripides' *Alkestis* (adapted by Browning). Spared, she completes the journey to Athens. *Aristophanes' Apology* conversely presents Balaustion and her husband leaving Athens after its fall to Sparta; as they sail, Balaustion recalls the evening she learnt of Euripides' death. They were mourning when a drunken Aristophanes burst in on them and challenged them for favouring Euripides and scorning comedy. As part of her retort, Balaustion reads Euripides' *Herakles* (here translated, not adapted). The *Apology* is structured into three narrative layers; the surrounding story, the debate between Aristophanes and Balaustion, and the inserted translation. Each of these layers is a tragedy in its own right, the centrepiece in the most literal sense, the debate because Browning's use of long dramatic monologues is formally reminiscent of a dramatic *agon*, and the outer frame because it has a 'tragic theme'.[130]

Aristophanes' Apology is rich with insight into Euripidean poetics[131] (Euripides was after all a favourite of the 'academic-aesthetic' circle and the Brownings in particular[132]), but that is not the focus of this chapter. Nor will I concern myself with

[130] Browning 1981a: *Apology* 159.

[131] It is however untrue that 'the personality of Euripides himself [and not Aristophanes] is the substance of the poem' (DeVane 1955: 376). Its very title would suggest otherwise, and Aristophanes is present and speaks at length within the poem, whereas Euripides is absent, being neither in Athens nor alive; he is only allowed to speak in an account given by Aristophanes. Most of Aristophanes' arguments have little to do directly with Euripides, nor does Balaustion limit her response to a defence of her poet, instead attacking Aristophanes for perceived poetic faults of his own. Though the debate's main focus is on which poet is better described as the 'Good Genius' (Browning 1981a: *Apology* 1351), and though Browning clearly has something to say about Euripides, he is also interested, and primarily so, in Aristophanes.

[132] Hurst 2018: 128.

parsing all of Browning's many classical references and quotations, and, unless they are particularly pertinent, will simply note that they are abundant and well-utilised. The poem has already been well glossed, and those interested should consult Jackson 1909, Hood 1922 and Tisdel 1927, as well as (for a discussion of Browning's sexual references) Roberts 1990-1991. My interest is in Browning's reception of Aristophanes and the contemporary scholarship on the Greek poet. Browning offers a character portrait of Aristophanes challenging the typical Victorian idea that he was a moralistic, patriotic scourge, the Aristophanes of Mitchell, Hookham Frere, Shelley and Planché; he also offers a response to the Schlegelian polarity between Euripides and Aristophanes. Browning crystallises A.W. Schlegel's discursive comparison between the two playwrights into his own imagined *agon*. Schlegel's dichotomy, however, is not inverted but dismantled; Aristophanes is not revealed to be inferior to Euripides any more than Euripides is inferior to Aristophanes.

Symonds' scholarship is also a significant influence; the first edition of his *Studies* was published in 1873, the year before Browning composed the bulk of *Aristophanes' Apology*.[133] However, Symonds' aesthetic Aristophanes is ultimately qualified by Browning. Browning's protagonist is not 'the Satan of the *Apology*'[134] – he is not ultimately wicked, or corrupt, or (worst fault of all) a bad poet – but he is flawed. The essay-poem sets forth a nuanced argument that Aristophanes, as person and as poet, is significant for poetic advancement, and also (like Symonds) asserts

[133] In the MS of *Aristophanes' Apology*, held in the Balliol College archives, Browning states that he wrote the poem between c.11 August and 7 November 1874; his *Herakles*, as well as the embedded song *Thamuris Marching*, were evidently composed earlier, then inserted into the poem. *Herakles* is dated 'June 17 '73' (Balliol College Archive 389 ff.1-199).

[134] Smalley 1940: 832.

Aristophanes was not an effective political poet. But the aesthetic character of Aristophanes and thus his poetry is ultimately ugly, not beautiful.

Browning challenges the idea of the didactic Aristophanes through his vivid character portrait, which represents the comic poet as superhuman but also as wild and frightening. The paradox between invective and praise is a defining feature of Aristophanes' characterisation. Here we can see the significance of Browning's medium; even though Symonds' Aristophanes is painted vividly and engagingly, the formal restraints of academic criticism limit the potential for characterisation, whereas Browning's narrative poetry facilitates the creation of a more tangible character. Appropriately for a comic poet, Aristophanes is introduced to the dialogue as being 'tolerably drunk'.[135] As his band of actors and fellow-revellers enter Balaustion's house, she reflects that, since they are now out of costume, their 'sole disguise was drink'.[136] Aristophanes connects the entire comic art with wine, arguing that its origins date back to vintage festivals, where it was discovered 'that wine unlocked the stiffest lip, and loosed/The tongue late dry and reticent of joke'.[137] He compares composing a better form of comedy to creating a fine wine, in a charming metaphor:

> What if I vary vintage-mode and mix
> Blossom with must, give nosegay to the brew,
> Fining, refining, gently, surely, till
> The educated taste turns unawares
> From customary dregs to draught divine?[138]

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[135] Browning 1981a: *Apology* 716.

[136] Ibid. 581.

[137] Ibid. 1796f.

[138] Ibid. 1034-1038.

To Aristophanes' mind, then, 'Drink's a god'.[139] This image is not wholly positive; many Victorians would find his drunkenness, and comedy's connection to wine, unappealing. But it is also an entertaining character detail that brings Aristophanes to life, making him a more realistic character. Moreover, it does not impair his debating skills, and his comic band is quickly dismissed without incident. Browning's source for Aristophanes' actions lie in Plato's *Symposium* where a band of revellers interrupt the philosophical debate and everyone is 'forced to drink an awful lot of wine' (223b). This too somewhat justifies Aristophanes' behaviour; although in both accounts drunken revellers barge into a house uninvited, in the Platonic narrative that debate is undermined, whereas in Browning's version, it *provokes* the debate. Browning's readers might infer that Aristophanes' drunkenness is disgraceful, but not as disgraceful as Plato's revellers.

Aristophanes is described with striking physical imagery, both alarming and somehow noble. 'The veins swelled, blue network, and there surged/A red from cheek to temple';[140] he has blazing eyes and a large forehead.[141] He seems, in fact, to share the grotesque features of the comic mask, which may have been Browning's source. Balaustion's description crescendos into this metaphor:

> These made a glory, of such insolence –
>
> I thought, – such domineering deity
>
> Hephaistos might have carved to cut the brine
>
> For his gay brother's prow, imbrue that path

[139] Ibid. 719.

[140] Ibid. 603f.

[141] Ibid. 606, 609.

Which, purpling, recognized the conqueror.[142]

Aristophanes’ dual nature is emphasised; he is both divine and domineering.

During the debate itself these characteristics give way to a more neutral character; Aristophanes is never gentle and unassuming, but he is not always drunken, terrible and proud either. He admits he enters the debate 'undisguised' by his comic persona,[143] and credits Balaustion for this:

Balaustion’s fixed regard

Can strip the proper Aristophanes

Of what our sophists, in their jargon, style

His accidents?[144]

Nevertheless, during the debate, Aristophanes’ language can sometimes become passionate:

I wield the Comic weapon rather – hate!

Hate! honest, earnest and directest hate –

Warfare wherein I close with enemy…[145]

His speech here sounds almost violent, because of the abundance of literary effects – alliteration ('Warfare wherein'), repetition ('hate!/Hate!... hate', a word significant enough in itself), and internal rhyme 'honest, earnest, and directest'). The militaristic imagery is notable, and Aristophanes returns to the idea of comedy as warfare (a familiar theme drawn from Old Comedy) throughout. The *Apology* ‘is in love with the

[142] Ibid. 612-616.

[143] Ibid. 776.

[144] Ibid. 763-766.

[145] Ibid. 2347-2349.

imagery of physical violence'.[146] These stylistic features enhance Aristophanes' characterisation. Aristophanes also peppers his speech with comic cries; for example, at 1208, he cries '*Babaiax!*'[147] and at 1461, he uses '*Threttanelo*'.[148] These cries 'indicate the half-drunken high spirits of the comic dramatist',[149] again suggesting wildness. Browning's Aristophanes speaks in a different voice from the lyricism of Wilde and Swinburne's.

It is not coincidental that Balaustion links Aristophanes to Hephaistos, the lame god.[150] Aristophanes is routinely characterised as imperfectly divine throughout Browning's poem. From the outset, Balaustion describes him as 'deity/And dung' and associates him with Amphitheos, the demi-god with remote divine ancestry at Aristophanes *Acharnians* 47.[151] Later, she compares him to Typhon, half-divine and half-monster.[152] Her praise is not always so tempered; she also calls him 'three-parts divine' without qualification.[153] But there is sense that Aristophanes is both godlike and terrible. In contrast, Euripides is unequivocally a god in the purest sense; Balaustion calls him 'Daimon',[154] her house becoming his shrine and she his priestess.[155]

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[146] Karlin 1993: 153.

[147] See e.g. Aristophanes *Birds* 272, *Lysistrata* 312, *Acharnians* 64.

[148] See *Wealth* 290.

[149] Dahl 1957: 272.

[150] Browning 1981a: *Apology* 614.

[151] Ibid. 227f.

[152] Ibid. 806-828.

[153] Ibid. 2907.

[154] Ibid. 1581.

[155] Ibid. 1580-1582.

Aristophanes also resembles another partial god, Herakles, who dominates (through the transcript of Euripides' tragedy) the final part of the *Apology*. Both are portrayed as simultaneously more-than- and less-than-human. Herakles is remembered as heroic, for example when the chorus narrate his labours.[156] Yet even before his madness he displays ferocity:

HERAKLES: Then, such of the Kadmeians as I find
Were craven though they owed me gratitude, –
Some I intend to handle with this club
Renowned for conquest; and with wingèd shafts
Scatt the others, fill Ismenos full
With bloody corpses…[157]

Amphitruon criticises him for such 'haste'.[158] When the madness sets in, Herakles becomes truly monstrous, slaughtering his own family. His father now asks:

Has not some murder-craze,
Bred of those corpses thou didst just dispatch,
Danced thee drunk?[159]

'Danced thee drunk' is a fairly accurate and vivid rendering of the Greek word 'ἐβάκχευσεν', but in the context of *Aristophanes' Apology*, where wine and dance are

[156] Ibid. *Herakles* 3936-4006 = Euripides *Herakles* 359-435.

[157] Ibid. *Herakles* 4160-4165 = Euripides *Herakles* 566-572. Of the three tragedies Browning translated or adapted in full, *Herakles* 'comes closest to achieving the impossible, namely the transmission of much of the linguistic power of the original text simultaneous with the creation of a highly readable work of English poetry which is seldom strained or inelegant' (Riley 2008: 199).

[158] Browning 1981a: *Herakles* 4180 = Euripides *Herakles* 586.

[159] Ibid. *Herakles* 4568-4570 = Euripides *Herakles* 966f.

associated with comedy, the words have particular resonance. Later, Amphitruon and Herakles converse thus:

> AMPHITRUON: If thou no more art Haides-drunk, – I tell!
>
> HERAKLES: I bring to mind no drunkenness of soul.[160]

The Greek is:

> AMPHITRUON: καί σ᾽ εἰ βεβαίως εὖ φρονεῖς ἤδη σκοπῶ.
>
> HERAKLES: οὐ γάρ τι βακχεύσας γε μέμνημαι φρένας.
>
> (Euripides *Herakles* 1121f.)

Here again, 'βακχεύσας' has been translated to 'drunkenness', although Amphitruon's original 'Haides-drunk' does not directly translate anything in the Greek. Herakles' madness is a kind of intoxication – and this intoxication might readily remind us of Browning's Aristophanes.

In Browning's adaptation of *Alkestis* which accompanied *Balaustion's Adventure*, we get an even more Aristophanic Herakles, who in drunken merriment invades the house of the bereaved Admetos:

> And in his hands
>
> Taking the ivied goblet, drinks and drinks
>
> The unmixed product of black mother-earth,
>
> Until the blaze o' the wine went round about
>
> And warmed him…[161]

The 'ivied goblet' and the Homeric description of 'black' wine suggest an allusion to the Cyclops, to whom Odysseus gave a 'cup of black wine' (Homer *Odyssey* 9.346), but Aristophanes' drunken invasion of the mourning Balaustion's house in the

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[160] Ibid. *Herakles* 4755f.

[161] Browning 1981b: *Adventure* 1654-1658.

Apology also provides a close parallel. Browning's Aristophanes even (albeit ironically) remarks that the Herakles from the *Alkestis* is a comic figure: 'There's quite fun enough,/Herakles drunk!'[162] *Alkestis* was of course performed in the fourth slot usually reserved for the comic satyr play. So again, we see a connection between Aristophanes and Herakles, and Aristophanes invites us to recall this intertextual connection. Herakles is a tragic character, but he also appears in comedy. *Wasps* 60 implies that his indefatigable hunger is a comic cliché; he appears in both *Frogs* and *Birds* as a glutton. It is fitting that Herakles and Aristophanes share characteristics, then, and each tragedy presented by Browning invites these comparisons.

With his wild Aristophanes, Browning effectively undermines the common Victorian representation of a didactic moralist, but without responding directly to this perspective. But the narrative poem also offers extensive quasi-scholarly argument through the debate between Balaustion and Aristophanes. Balaustion finds much to censure in Aristophanes' plays, more than can be adequately discussed here, but above all she discounts them as tools of moral and political didacticism:

Shake
Kleon a little from his arrogance
By cutting him to shoe-sole-shreds? I think,
He ruled his life long and, when time was ripe,
Died fighting for amusement, – good tough hide![163]

Symonds similarly underplays Aristophanes' politics in favour of a carnivalistic interpretation, but Balaustion's criticism is not that Aristophanes did not *wish* to be

[162] Browning 1981a: *Apology* 2402f.

[163] Ibid. 3140-3144. The leather imagery references Kleon's supposed tanner father, a frequent source of Aristophanes' invective.

political. Browning's Aristophanes states that poetry is the 'one last resource' left to right the world.[164] Her position is subtly different and new – that Aristophanes is ineffective *despite* his intention to be a moralist.

Balaustion's assault also points to Aristophanes' impropriety, such as in *Lysistrata*:

> Waves, said to wash pollution from the world,
> Take that plague-memory, cure that pustule caught
> As, past escape, I sat and saw the piece…[165]

She does not deign to describe the play's content, but refers to it abstractly, in the strongest language; note the plosives of 'pollution', 'plague-memory' and 'pustule' driving her barrage forward. Thereafter it is called 'bestiality', 'obscenity grotesqued' and 'loathesomeness'.[166] So hideous was the play that Balaustion refused to go to another comedy subsequently.[167] But she asserts that Euripides' plays are pure, and interestingly, defends his *Hippolytus*, arguing that Phaedra was innocent:

> The chaste,
> Whom, because chaste, the wicked goddess chained
> To that same serpent of unchastity
> She loathed most…[168]

[164] Ibid. 2099.

[165] Ibid. 417-419.

[166] Ibid. 435, 442, 454.

[167] Ibid. 388f.

[168] Ibid. 420-423.

This was not the usual interpretation of Phaedra, whom Symonds describes as diseased, her 'crime more detestable than Medea's',[169] and whom Aristophanes himself had criticised (*Frogs* 1043f.).[170] Even so, Browning's argument provides an answer to Symonds, who elsewhere in his *Studies* compares Aristophanes' and Euripides' portrayal of women, asking 'what are the crimes of Phaedra in comparison with the daily details of the habits of Athenian wives and daughters' as portrayed in Old Comedy.[171] But *Lysistrata* was an easy target, being particularly condemned in the nineteenth century. Schlegel says that '*Lysistrata* is in such bad repute, that we dare only mention it in a cursory manner, as we are treading on burning ashes.'[172] Even Symonds, Aristophanes' staunchest defender, remarks that '*Lysistrata* will not bear discussion'.[173] For Balaustion, even the name of the play is sufficient to challenge Aristophanes' decency, without any details of plot having to be mentioned.

In the *Life of Lysander*, Plutarch relates that, when Sparta had defeated Athens in the Peloponnesian War, the Spartans ordered Athens to tear down its walls. But 'a certain Phocian, singing the *parodos* from Euripides' *Electra*, moved them all to pity' (15.3). Lysander therefore summoned aulos-players from Athens, then 'tore down the walls to the sound of the aulos' (15.4). Browning tells the same story in *Aristophanes' Apology*, following Lysander's account closely but making the Phocian

[169] Symonds 1873: 221.

[170] In *Artemis Prologizes* (1842), a sort of epilogue to Euripides' *Hippolytus* in which Browning imagines Artemis tasking Asclepius with reviving the dead Hippolytus, the blame for Phaedra's lust is again put on Aphrodite (Browning 1981b: *Artemis* 19-23).

[171] Symonds 1873: 273.

[172] Schlegel 1815: 215.

[173] Symonds 1873: 273.

man, Euthukles, Balaustion's husband. In Plutarch's account, there is no connection between the wall's destruction and comedy – the aulos was used in both comedy and tragedy. Balaustion, however, makes the connection inescapable, mentioning at the start of the poem that 'the very flute-girls blew their laughing best,/In dance about the conqueror'[174] while Athens fell, before returning to the story at the end of the poem, making Lysander say:

> Athenai's self be saved then, thank the Lyre!
>
> If Tragedy withdraws her presence – quick,
>
> If Comedy replace her, – what more just?
>
> Let Comedy do service, frisk away,
>
> Dance off stage these indomitable stones,
>
> …
>
> Not to the Kommos – *elelelelеu*
>
> With breast bethumped, as Tragic lyre prefers,
>
> But Comedy shall sound the flute, and crow
>
> At kordax-end…[175]

Balaustion uses this story to criticise the genre in the strongest terms; for her, comic music was not merely the soundtrack to the Long Walls' destruction, but the cause and symptom of Athens' collapse, both morally and physically. This is its 'service', and Athens, 'saved by the [tragic] lyre', can only be destroyed when comedy and the kordax replace it.

Balaustion could be seen as vocalising Browning's own scholarship. Yet although we know that Browning shares many of Balaustion's views, and is as much

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[174] Browning 1981a: *Apology* 74f.

[175] Ibid. 5625-5629, 5632-5635.

in love with Euripides as she is, the narrator's and author's voices overlap awkwardly. We can never be sure whether everything Balaustion says, or just the general shape of her points, or, perhaps, only the Euripidean admiration, is Browning's opinion; after all, Browning is a Victorian man and she is a fictional Rhodian woman, so their outlooks are naturally different. Indeed, 'in her representation of herself she strikes us as too soulful and, possibly, too self-righteous'.[176] Many of her criticisms stem from innocent appeals to decency that sound appropriate only because they are offered by a woman created as a Victorian ideal. As Browning himself wrote in reply to Swinburne's letter, 'I am no enemy of that Aristophanes – all on fire with invention, – and such music!... But a friend of Euripides, – above all, a woman friend, – feels no such need of magnanimity'.[177] As Karlin argues, 'most critics of the poem have assumed that the [*agon*] goes in favour of Euripides, but there is no objective evidence of this in the poem itself, once the positions of Balaustion and Browning are seen to be distinct.'[178] This helps to reconcile the poem's fundamental paradox – the conflict inherent in Aristophanes' characterisation – since it tempers some of Balaustion's more critical opinions. There is no need both to condemn Aristophanes outright and somehow also admire him, because we do not need to condemn him *outright* at all.

Yet not every point Balaustion makes can be ignored as overzealous. She wins several of the arguments as Browning sets them out and is therefore designed in some sense to be authoritative. And if the narrator is not Robert Browning, she is certainly associated with Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Riley notes that *Balaustion's*

[176] Ryals 1975: 106.

[177] Browning to Swinburne, 5 February 1881, Hood 1933: 193.

[178] Karlin 1990-1991: 25.

Adventure 'was written primarily in tribute to [her] memory… and her love of the tragedian [Euripides]'.[179] A quote from Barrett Browning's *Wine of Cyprus* forms the epigraph to the *Adventure*:

> Our Euripides, the human,
> With his droppings of warm tears,
> And his touches of things common
> Till they rose to touch the spheres.[180]

At the end of the poem, Balaustion, looking across the gulf of time and space, remarks:

> I know the poetess who graved in gold,
> Among her glories that shall never fade,
> This style and title for Euripides,
> *The Human with his droppings of warm tears*.[181]

Balaustion is therefore imagined to be Barrett Browning's intellectual intimate.[182]

Ultimately, the *Apology* is discursive, not conclusive. In this sense, it is its own *agon*, encouraging the reader to engage in the same metapoetic discourse as Balaustion and Aristophanes do – part of reading the poem is a constant, active process of deciding which side of the argument one agrees with as it plays out. The conclusion of the poem favours the continuation of the dialogue between tragedy and comedy, not the subservience of comedy to Euripides. If Schlegel defined Euripides' flaws partially through his praise of Aristophanes, why not simply invert this polarity

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[179] Riley 2008: 184.

[180] Browning 1981b: *Adventure* Epigraph.

[181] Ibid. 2668-2671, italics Browning's.

[182] As noted above, Symonds also quotes this line in his discussion of Euripides (1873: 231).

and condemn the comic poet outright? Because the ultimate argument, as Aristophanes himself proposes, is that both comedy and tragedy are important:

> 'Both be praised' thanked I.
>
> You who have laughed with Aristophanes,
>
> You who wept rather with the Lord of Tears!
>
> Priest, do thou, president alike o'er each,
>
> Tragic and Comic function of the god,
>
> Help with libation to the blended twain![183]

The idea that both genres are a 'function' of the same god and form a 'blended twain' is developed throughout so that Balaustion later wishes that Aristophanes had:

> Made Comedy and Tragedy combine,
>
> Prove some new Both-yet-neither, all one bard,
>
> Euripides with Aristophanes
>
> Coöperant![184]

No consistent explanation is given as to what this hybrid genre would actually look like, but we might recall that the *Symposium*, which Browning uses as a model for the *Apology*, ends with Socrates forcing Aristophanes and Agathon to 'agree that the same man can know how to make comedy and tragedy' (223d). Browning's call for a new kind of poetry is of course also supported by the *Alkestis*, which blended comic and tragic elements and was written for performance in the space of a satyr play.

As for Aristophanes' own work, the *Apology* argues that *Wealth* blends the two genres. In Browning's poem, Aristophanes relates how Euripides himself praised the work as a step towards a time when:

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[183] Browning 1981a: *Apology* 1465-1470.

[184] Ibid. 3440-3443.

Tragic and Comic Poet prove one power,

And Aristophanes becomes our Fourth –

Nay, greatest![185]

Given Euripides' exalted position in *Balaustion's Adventure* and the *Apology*, his opinion is authoritative. Yet ultimately, Euripides argues, Aristophanes is too 'spent' to achieve this blending,[186] and both poets must leave 'the new adventure for the novel man'.[187] Finally, there is another sign of comic and tragic unity within the poem when Aristophanes responds to Balaustion's recitation of the *Herakles* with *Thamuris Marching*, a song composed by Browning but, within the *Apology*, attributed to Sophokles. In antiquity, Sophokles had indeed written a *Thamuris*, and later tradition even held that he performed in it (Athen. 1.20). Aristophanes, the comic poet, therefore takes on the mantle of the tragic poet, 'just as [if he] were Sophokles'.[188] In this final example of tragedy-*cum*-comedy, perhaps we see which 'novel man' the poem foresees – Browning may be claiming that such progress is captured in his own poetry, and may be using the *Apology* as 'an exposition and justification of [his] own poetic faith and practice'.[189]

This, then, explains why Aristophanes' characterisation is so paradoxical. As Browning rewrites Schlegelian poetics and critical theory in the *Apology*, he not only reinstates Euripides, but also affords Aristophanes equal position. The conclusion of

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[185] Ibid. 1302-1304.

[186] Ibid. 1315.

[187] Ibid. 1321.

[188] Ibid. 5185.

[189] Smalley 1940: 838.

his poem is that both poets contribute to the advancement of the poetic art. Only by combining comedy and tragedy can progress be made.

McCusker argues that the *Apology* is not really about 'the remote world of Aristophanes and Euripides' at all, functioning instead as 'a debate with Matthew Arnold about what constitutes the best poetry for the age.'[190] But as this thesis has argued, there was nothing 'remote' about discourse over Aristophanes in Victorian Britain. The same can be said, and to a greater extent, about Euripides. The *Apology* is fertile ground on which Browning can argue for his own modernising poetics, and may be part of an ongoing discourse with Arnold, but to equate Aristophanes simplistically with Arnold misses the point. Aristophanes does not lose the *agon* (although he doesn't win it either); he is instead incorporated into the solution just as much as Euripides. If McCusker is right to note an intertext with Arnold in the *Apology*, she is wrong to reduce such a complex work down to this alone.

If Browning's Euripides is perfect, Aristophanes is far from that. He is drunk, his appearance is frightening, his language violent and wild, his plays shameful and dangerous. Yet he is also lively, and at least half-divine. There is something exciting in the character that brings him to life. Nor is it coincidence that Aristophanes uses the language of comedy in his speech, nor that Browning characterises comedy in the same way as he characterises the comic poet. For Browning's Aristophanes is the living embodiment of his genre – *both* are wild, shameful, divine. Both might lead to civilisation's collapse, and dance on merrily all the same. This characterisation and Balaustion's arguments partially act as a response to the argument that Aristophanes was a moralist, and partially they respond to Symonds' aesthetic interpretation of Old Comedy set out in *Studies* the previous year. Browning demonstrates that not only

[190] McCusker 1984: 783.

was Aristophanes unsuccessful in bringing down his targets, he was also far too shameless. Yet comedy is ultimately reinstated here as tragedy's equal.

The *Apology* is no great *apologia* for Aristophanes. Unlike Symonds, Ruskin, Swinburne and Wilde, Browning offers us no aesthetic Old Comedy but the ugly, powerful, grotesque Aristophanes of Mitchell and Shelley. We must conclude, on reading the poem, that our worst fears about Aristophanes may well be true. Yet in making Aristophanes into a real and compelling character, Browning manages to capture his power better than Symonds and his fellow scholars ever could; and by arguing for comedy's poetic role, he makes Aristophanes essential. As Balaustion sums up, 'All was Aristophanes:/There blazed the glory, there shot black the shame'.[191]

Aubrey Beardsley

Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898) is notorious among classicists for his evocative illustrations of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. He took up illustrating after discovering the Pre-Raphaelite Dante Gabriel Rossetti,[192] and is perhaps best known for his striking illustrations for Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, produced in 1894. He was also Art Editor for the successful Aesthetic journal *The Yellow Book*.[193] Wilde, *The Yellow Book* and a remarkable coincidence were in fact to prove his downfall:

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[191] Browning 1981a: *Apology* 5394f.

[192] Sturgis 1998: 63f.

[193] Among contributors to *The Yellow Book* was Laurence Housman, whom we will meet in Ch.9 (Denisoff 2007: 43).

> On 5 April, even as Wilde was leaving the Cadogan Hotel [charged with sodomy] in the company of the two detectives, he had picked up the book he was reading: *Aphrodite* by Pierre Louÿs. An 'ordinary French novel', Beardsley might have called it; it was bound in yellow covers and to English eyes that hue proclaimed only one publication.[194]

Beardsley (not himself queer) was thus irrevocably implicated in the scandal; his publisher had no choice but to dismiss him from the journal.

Forced to fall in with less respectable publishers, Beardsley began to work with the sometime-pornographer Leonard Smithers, who published the former's 'pale purple'[195] illustrations of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* in 1896. (Later, Beardsley converted to Roman Catholicism, and, in the last letter he wrote before his death, he urged Smithers 'to destroy *all* copies of *Lysistrata* and bad drawings'.[196]) These 'bad drawings' were published alongside an anonymous prose translation (the title page implies Beardsley wrote the text as well), actually by Samuel Smith. Like the illustrations which accompany it, the text is remarkably liberal in its approach to translating Aristophanes' jokes, and even employs copious footnotes to explain the more obscure innuendos. Because of its explicit nature, only one hundred copies of the book were originally printed.[197] We cannot therefore look for the same reception of Beardsley's Aristophanes as we can for Symonds' in the long-nineteenth century. If it has been influential, that influence came later.[198]

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[194] Sturgis 1998: 238.

[195] Beardsley to André Raffalovich, 19 August 1896, Maas, Duncan and Good 1971: 153.

[196] Beardsley to Leonard Smithers, 7 March 1898, ibid. 439. Italics original.

[197] Beardsley and Smith 1896: Title page [anonymously written note in BL catalogue no. PC.31.L6].

[198] Walsh 2008: 148f.

A man tarnished by his connection to Wilde publishes sexually explicit illustrations of one of the most infamously sexual plays ever written – how can we interpret this as anything but a statement? Yet if Beardsley's *Salomé* illustrations share similar modes of expression with his *Lysistrata* prints, their tone is different. The *Salomé* images are often decadent and sweeping, and draw their aesthetic power from that; the *Lysistrata* images draw their power from their overwhelming sexuality. They may be conceived as a riposte both to a moralising Victorian society on the one hand, *and* to the Aesthetic Movement on the other. They are, in fact, a declaration of Beardsley's independence from the world at large. Beardsley's work on *Salomé* and *The Yellow Book* already had a strong vein of self-parody to them.[199]

Robert Ross, Beardsley's friend and biographer (also Wilde's confidant), later defended the illustrations in aesthetic terms borrowed from Symonds' account of Aristophanes:

> Privately issued, Beardsley was able to give full rein to a Rabelaisian fantasy, which he sometimes cultivated with too great persistence. Irritated by what he considered as over-niceness in some of his critics, he seemed determined to frighten his public. There is nothing unwholesome or suggestive about the "Lysistrata" designs: they are as frank, free, and outspoken as the text.[200]

Rabelais is one of the comedians Symonds repeatedly invoked in comparison to Aristophanes;[201] Symonds likewise criticised the 'over-niceness' of critics and

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[199] See Denisoff 2007.

[200] Ross 2011 [1909]: 47.

[201] The translator's preface also describes the play as a 'Rabelaisian protest' (Beardsley and Smith 1896: v).

described Aristophanes as '"far too naked to be shamed."'[202] Beardsley's illustrations are, as Symonds demanded, Aristophanes fully naked. Yet for Symonds, Aristophanes' sexual liberalism is part of his aesthetic pursuit of beauty; in Beardsley, sexuality is deliberately grotesque and ugly. When Ross talks about the illustrations not being 'unwholesome or suggestive', he doth protest too much. After all, the only image from *Lysistrata* Ross includes in his biography is tactfully cropped, so that nothing more indecent than a woman's breasts are on display.[203] It is, as far as I can see, the only Beardsley illustration Ross edits in this way.

Beardsley's illustrations are not always faithful to the play they are supposed to be depicting. His frontispiece image of Lysistrata 'shielding her coynte'[204] depicts the heroine leaning on a large, disembodied phallus, exposing one breast, wearing a see-through one-piece and resting two fingers on her vagina 'in what might be construed as a caress instead of an attempt to shield her genitals' (Fig. 6.3).[205] This hardly accords with Aristophanes' representation of Lysistrata, the only person in the play *not* driven by sexuality. Beardsley's illustration of the first choral interlude, which climaxes with the chorus of women pouring water over the chorus of men, does show a (rather young) woman showering a grouchy old man holding a torch (Fig. 6.4). But three of the four figures depicted are in various states of nudity. This conflates the scene with the following choral interlude, where the women 'strip with speed and assume the air of women furious enough to fight tooth and claw'.[206] The vessel used

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[202] Symonds 1873: 238.

[203] Ross 2011 [1909]: 50.

[204] Beardsley and Smith 1896: Title page.

[205] Zatlin 1997: 98.

[206] Beardsley and Smith 1896: 35 = Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 685f.

to douse the flames resembles a chamber-pot, implying that Beardsley's women aren't using water but urine. Additionally, a second woman next to the pot-wielder has bent over and is expelling gas from her bottom or vagina. There is no mention of this in the text. All in all, there is an abundance of added detail not explicitly suggested by the original Greek text or Smith's translation.[207] This is an attempt to out-Aristophanes Aristophanes by being even more vulgar and scatological. Beardsley's illustrations are often discussed in isolation from the text – understandably, because they are so compelling. But they were designed to be read together, so that Beardsley could be sure his additions and modifications would be noticed.

[207] Whether Beardsley could read Greek or was even working off of Smith's translation when he prepared his illustrations is somewhat beside the point, though Walsh suggests he may have been using B.B. Rogers' translation (2008: 182).

Fig. 6.3: Lysistrata Shielding her Coynte

Fig. 6.4: Lysistrata Defending the Acropolis[208]

The striking black-and-white figures in Beardsley's illustrations never look quite right. Proportions blur – particularly in relation to phalluses, which are either enormous or shrivelled depending on the character. This may be in part a reference to the stage costume of Old Comedy. In the frontispiece, Lysistrata's head is curiously squat as well; the chorus-woman with the chamber-pot has an impossibly long and curved back. Beardsley's chorus of old men are absurdly withered and decrepit. Connected to this distortion is a sense of Orientalism, captured through the fabrics,

[208] Despite the illustration's title, Lysistrata does not appear to be in the image – she is certainly not onstage at this point in the text. Walsh identifies her as the clothed woman in the background (2008: 184).

patterns, hairstyles and flowers. One of Beardsley's Spartan ambassadors is wearing a turban. This synthesis between distortion and Orientalism is reminiscent of Beardsley's larger *oeuvre*, particularly his illustrations for *Salomé*.[209] Overall, the *Lysistrata* illustrations demonstrate the significant reception of the Japanese stylised grotesque in Beardsley's work.[210] *Japonisme* was a key influence within the Aesthetic Movement.[211] Importantly, Beardsley's illustrations are *not* classical. Symonds', Pater's and Arnold's views on the aesthetics of Hellenism are doubly rejected because the illustrations – of a Greek text – are consciously neither aesthetic nor Hellenic.

Coupled with this is *Lysistrata*'s overt sexuality. Most of Beardsley's figures are at least partially naked, and, as we have seen, he includes phalluses, some oversized. But the drawings are not by any means sexually gratifying. Hall argues that the 'luxuriantly obscene drawings [were] designed to appeal to a male homosexual audience',[212] but this can hardly be right. Three of the illustrations contain only women, although the frontispiece does also include a disembodied phallus (Fig. 6.3). A fourth picture (Fig. 6.4) includes a haggard old man with a flaccid penis being covered in urine and flatulence. The man is not the focus of the illustration; he has been shrunk and relegated to the corner. There is nothing homoerotic about this plate. A fifth illustration presents Myrrhina being seized by Cinesias, an over-sized erect

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[209] Owens 2013: 112.

[210] Zatlin 1997: 98.

[211] The late Victorian fad for everything Japanese is satirised in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado*, and also referenced in *Patience*, wherein the sham Aesthetic Bunthorne admits that he does '*not* long for all one sees/That's Japanese' (Gilbert 2016i: 391f.).

[212] Hall 2007: 86.

phallus and testicles menacingly filling the space between them (Fig. 6.5). Again, though, Cinesias is not the focus of the image. Most of his body is cut out by the frame, so that all we see is his ridiculous headpiece, grinning, gruesome face and phallus. Myrrhina is much more appealing in the image, with her largely proportionate body, trimmed *mons pubis* and bare breasts being exposed by Cinesias as he rips off her cloak. Her tilted head and facial expression, along with our understanding of the scene, suggests a feigned reluctance. A plate depicting Lampito demonstrating her bottom contains a small Eros powdering her cheeks and masturbating his erect penis (Fig. 6.6). If he is a source of erotic (pederastic) pleasure, then the erotic force is rather undone by Lampito's graceless display in the background. Finally, two illustrations in *Lysistrata* show only men. One is of three Spartan ambassadors (Fig. 6.7). While the central figure *could* be described as appealing, the left-hand figure is a grotesque dwarf and the right-hand figure is horribly disproportioned and troll-like. The dwarf's oversized phallus is the same size as he is. In a letter to his publisher discussing this illustration, Beardsley expressed teasing regret that 'there are no cunts in the picture'.[213] The other illustration (Fig. 6.8) shows a handsome lad clothed in a tunic, but again an excessively large penis erupts from his groin. A disturbing old man with a much smaller flaccid penis strokes the priapus in obvious but disturbing approval. Erect phalluses, especially alarmingly big ones, are not in themselves sexually arousing. In fact, the power of Beardsley's sexually and physically

[213] Beardsley to Leonard Smithers, c.30 June 1896, Maas, Duncan and Good 1971: 139. Beardsley's letter describes the pictured men as Athenians but the list of plates describes them as 'Lacedemonian [sic] ambassadors'. As this is the only exclusive group of 'rampant' men Beardsley illustrates, however, and there is nothing explicitly Spartan or Athenian about them, this must be the illustration Beardsley is referring to.

grotesqued illustrations is precisely that they are *not* appealing, to queer men or to anybody. Yes, there is sexual tension, but the overwhelming force of each image is that it is ugly. The sexuality of the illustrations is supposed to be repulsive and challenging, as indeed they would have been to a Victorian audience. This is in keeping with the tone of the source-text; *Lysistrata* is likewise sexualised, but not sexy.

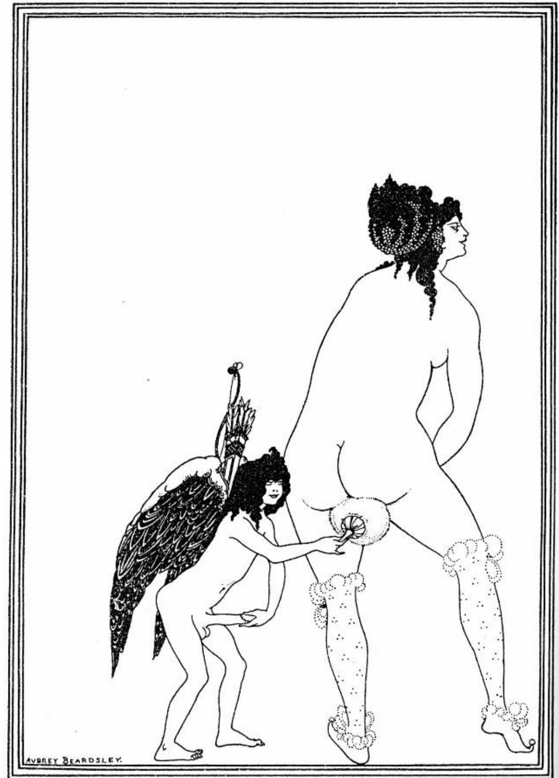

Fig. 6.5: Cinesias Entreating Myrrhina to Coition

Fig. 6.6: The Toilet of Lampito

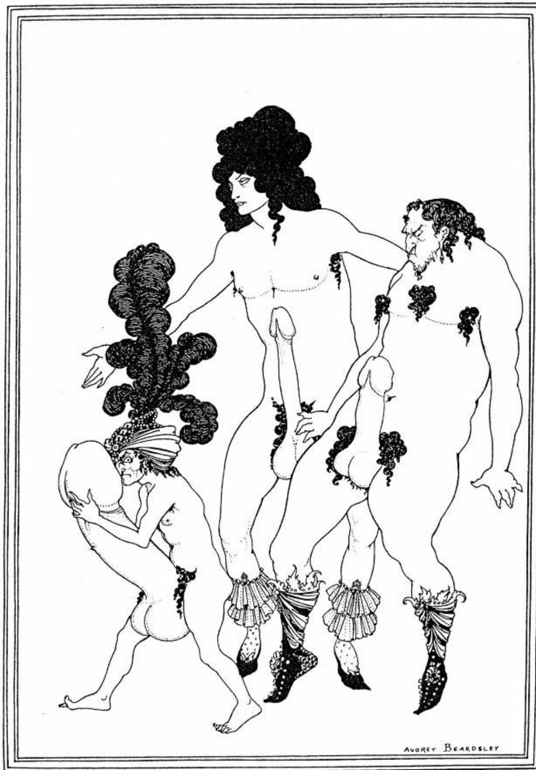

Fig. 6.7: The Lacedemonian [sic] *Ambassadors*

Fig. 6.8: The Examination of the Herald

In this sense, and despite their antipodean differences in tone, Beardsley offers a similar reading of Aristophanes to Browning. Both attempt to capture the ugliness of Aristophanes. Looking at one of Beardsley's drawings, one feels the glory and the shame Browning ascribes as Aristophanes' defining qualities. This is also true of Shelley's much earlier reading of Old Comedy. Nevertheless –indeed, perhaps as a result – their Aristophanes is quite as compelling as Symond's, Wilde's and Swinburne's. That is the aesthetic force of grotesque. If Aristophanes ever achieves the sublime (and I believe he does), it is precisely *because* he is ugly.

But as we have mentioned, Beardsley's compelling reception of Aristophanes was not influential in the nineteenth century. As the next chapter will demonstrate, it was Symonds' beautiful Aristophanes which dominated. School and university

productions of Old Comedy throughout the Victorian period (but especially after 1880) presented an idealised, aesthetically pleasing interpretation of Aristophanes which activated Symonds' reading. This idea of a beautiful Aristophanes will linger during the rest of this dissertation. We will see it resurface in Chapter 8, for instance, in Laurence Housman's version of *Lysistrata* (1910); Housman was also connected with the Aesthetic Movement, and manages to apply Symonds' reading of Old Comedy to a play even Symonds believed transgressive. Outwith Beardsley and Browning's attempts to rebel, the force of Aesthetic Hellenism could not support dissenting voices; classics, and tragedy in particular, was beautiful, and therefore so was Old Comedy.

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Aristophanes in the *Phrontisterion*: Performances of Old Comedy at Schools and Universities

By far the widest reception of Aristophanes in performance during the Victorian period was at schools and universities, where extracts and whole plays were staged regularly by students, to varying degrees of external audience. The influence of these productions is unquantifiable and the information we have about them is undetailed, but their prevalence demonstrates a significant knowledge base of the Aristophanes plays produced, at least amongst upper-class men. This chapter focusses on the tone and styles employed by these performances. A contest developed in school and university productions between the burlesque tradition and a more archaeological, didactic approach to performing Comedy which I refer to as archaeologising.[1] By 'archaeologising' I mean the practice of appealing to classical archaeology and material culture without scientific accuracy; archaeologised performances strive for legitimacy but reflect late-nineteenth-century perceptions of Greek life and dramatic techniques rather than the reality. They are an appeal to the aesthetic ideal of Greek Comedy as conceptualised by Symonds and others. The process gives a didactic aura to the performance and creates an earnest tone.

As previously mentioned, the performance of plays in Oxford and Cambridge had been curtailed by the 1737 Licensing Act and subsequent regulations established

[1] Hall and Macintosh used this word before me, once and without elucidation (2005: 453).

by the universities. An influential production of *Agamemnon* at Oxford in 1880 challenged this restriction by demonstrating that a higher class of theatrical entertainment – Greek theatre staged in its original language – could be performed. It was successful, becoming 'the first production of a Greek tragedy in the original language to receive serious critical consideration since the Renaissance'.[2] Cambridge followed with *Ajax* in 1882, then *Birds* the following year. The Vice Chancellor of Oxford initially only allowed performances of Greek tragedy and Shakespeare,[3] but in 1892 the University Dramatic Society was permitted to stage *Frogs*. *Agamemnon* both revitalised Greek drama performance and established the archaeologising style, already adopted to some extent in school performances and influenced by aesthetic poetics, as the default style for subsequent productions.[4] It is no coincidence that the Aesthetic Oscar Wilde claimed credit for the performance (rightly or not).[5] Three other factors contributed to the predominance of this performance style: the growth of archaeology from the 1870s; the style of earlier, professional productions of Greek tragedy; and (paradoxically as it may seem) the legacy of burlesque.

Classical burlesques were 'at the forefront of the movement towards historical accuracy in scenic and costume design'.[6] Even if they travestied rather than revered the classics – even if their *chitons* were designed to reveal the flash of a woman's shapely leg – burlesques normalised the iconography. It was Planché who

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Beard 2002: 49.

[4] Hall and Macintosh 2005: 453f.

[5] Macintosh 2005: 157.

[6] Hall and Macintosh 2005: 477.

popularised burlesque's use of classical costume and set.[7] Yet the tone of burlesque is at complete odds with that of an archaeologising, academical production in Greek; in burlesque, humour is of central importance, but archaeologising university productions did not value the comedic element of Old Comedy.

Classical archaeology provides a simpler context. Archaeology was 'first brought to Cambridge as an academic subject by Sidney Colvin, who was Director of the Fitzwilliam from 1876 to 1883'.[8] Colvin's successor, Charles Waldstein, was long involved with the Cambridge Greek play and was largely responsible for its drive towards archaeologising.[9] The relative importance of archaeology to the Cambridge curriculum may explain why Cambridge Aristophanes performances were more archaeological than Oxford's.[10] The growth of classical archaeology, material-culture studies and New Philhellenism at the end of the nineteenth century is also demonstrated by the founding of the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies in 1879,[11] the opening of the British School at Athens in 1886,[12] and the phenomenal growth in archaeological discoveries around the *fin de siècle*. In this context, archaeologising plays were well-placed to offer 'the aesthetic attraction of classical drapery and tableaux at a time when Hellenism in art, as represented by Leighton,

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[7] See Ch.4.

[8] Easterling 1999: 28. Archaeology was first examined on the Cambridge tripos in 1882 (Stray 1998: 141-146).

[9] Easterling 1999: 31.

[10] On cultural and curricular differences between Oxford and Cambridge, see Stray 2018: 31-52.

[11] *Pall Mall Gazette* (17 June 1879) 8.

[12] Macintosh 2005: 157; see Stray 2018: 232f.

Alma Tadema and Poynter, had powerful imaginative appeal.'[13] Robert Browning joined the Cambridge Greek Play Committee in 1885.[14] Significant performances of Aristophanes in academic institutions began in the 1880s alongside the growth of this New Philhellenism.

Greek tragedy in an aesthetic, archaeologising style had been produced on the professional stage earlier in the century, notably Sophocles' *Antigone*, performed in 1845 in translation and with music by Felix Mendelssohn,[15] and an Italian-language performance of the Frenchman Ernest Legouvé's adaptation of *Medea* in 1856-1857.[16] The Mendelssohn *Antigone* particularly strove for 'conscious antiquarian correctness' in costume and staging (though again, classical burlesque had been doing this for years). These earlier performances therefore stand as both pre-configurations of the archaeologising style discussed in this chapter, and the necessary source of travesty for classical burlesque.

[13] Easterling 1999: 30.

[14] Ibid. 32.

[15] Hall and Macintosh 2005: 317-325.

[16] Ibid. 402-404.

Fig. 7.1: The archaeologising staging and costume of the Mendelssohn Antigone.

In an archaeologised performance, costumes and set are meticulously, aesthetically Hellenised; performances are invariably produced in ancient Greek. They are accompanied by 'a strong sense of positivism, implicitly arguing that this gesture towards authenticity… would enhance the appeal'[17] – authentic, that is, to the original performance context of ancient theatre. 'Classical scholars, relying on their knowledge of the scripts and their ideas about the impact of the original productions,

[17] Marshall 2016: 266.

often idealise, explicitly or implicitly, the 'original form' of ancient drama, and find contemporary productions wanting.'[18] Authenticity of this sort is in fact unachievable. There is nothing authentic about performing Comedy in Greek to a post-classical audience, because whilst the language of original performance was understood by those who sat in the theatre, familiarity with spoken Greek would now escape the most learned audience. Performing Greek Comedy in English is not authentic either. A production replicating aspects of ancient Greek performance may have aesthetic appeal, but it can never be truly 'authentic'. Nevertheless, this was the ideal that many long-nineteenth-century productions of Greek drama sought. In contrast, the classical burlesque tradition also utilised Greek iconography, most notably in its adoption of Greek costumes, but with a different intent and with far greater licence for self-travesty.

Archaeologising, however, navigates more than merely an appeal to authenticity. It combines apparently authentic elements with modern performance techniques. H.J. Edwards, a long-standing organiser of the Cambridge Greek Play, described 'combining the necessary elements of archaeological accuracy and of a modern *mise-en-scène*';[19] one feels the weight of the word *necessary*. Compromises between practical concerns and the material evidence invariably fall on the side of practicality – none of the performances discussed here used masks or replicated ancient music conventions. Most significantly, an archaeologised performance makes little attempt to draw parallels between the themes and moral of the play and contemporary events; burlesque, by contrast, functioned as an effective fusion of ancient aesthetics and the contemporary world, even if not always engaging with

[18] Gamel 2010: 155.

[19] Edwards 1909: 542.

serious social, artistic and political debate. As Gamel notes, addressing Aristophanes' socio-political themes is another way to create authenticity, because Old Comedy was intimately political in its original performance context – whatever that politics may be and however seriously its political dialogue may have been taken. 'The political dimension of ancient plays offers a way to create inductive authenticity, to avoid censorship or to refer to contemporary political situations.'[20] Yet even burlesquing performances of Old Comedy at Victorian schools and universities avoided contemporary political and social comment. Archaeologising performances did so despite claims to authenticity. The depoliticisation of Aristophanes was a conscious choice, and, since it was a choice, it was a paradoxically political one. What is left out of these productions can be just as important as what was included or added.

Aristophanes at University before the Nineteenth Century

Aristophanes' plays had appeared on school and university curricula from the early-modern period, and were recommended by Erasmus;[21] there is a scattered performance history at English universities dating back to the sixteenth century. *Wealth* was apparently performed as early as Christmas 1536 at St John's College, Cambridge by Sir John Cheke and Sir Thomas Smith, to demonstrate a new style of Greek pronunciation. However, the earliest I can find mention of it is 1698, in John Strype's *The Life of the Learned Sir Thomas Smith*:

[20] Gamel 2010: 160.

[21] Steggle 2007: 54-56; Miola 2014: 483-486.

> The following winter in St. John's college was acted the Greek play of Aristophanes called *Plutus*, in this pronunciation, and one or two more of his comedies; when among those that professed Greek, and were esteemed men, it was observed there was not so much as one that signified any dislike, or shewed [sic] any opposition.[22]

Strype doesn't offer his source, and the phrase 'and one or two more of his comedies' is alarmingly vague. Meanwhile Strype's *Life of the Learned Sir Thomas Cheke* only mentions how the pair came up with their new pronunciation 'by consulting with Greek authors, Aristophanes and others'.[23] Cheke's contemporary letters on Greek pronunciation don't mention the experiment, either. Whether this performance actually happened, then, is uncertain. If it did, it may have been only a recitation of scenes from *Wealth* and 'one or two more' plays, which would sufficiently demonstrate the new pronunciation.

Peace was certainly staged at Christmas 1547 in Cambridge**.** The scholar John Dee offers a first-hand account of this performance, which involved spectacular stagecraft:

> I was out of St. John's College chosen to be Fellow of Trinity College, at the first erection thereof by King Henry the Eight [sic]. I was also assigned there to be the Under-Reader of the Greek tongue… Hereupon I did sett forth (and it was seen of the University) a Greek comedy of Aristophanes, named in Greek Εἰρήνη, in Latin, *Pax*; with the performance of the *Scarabaeus* his flying up to Jupiter's palace, with a man and his basket of

[22] Strype 1820 [1698]: 12f.

[23] Strype 1821 [1705]: 14.

> victuals on her back: whereat was great wondring [sic], and many vain reports spread abroad of the means how that was effected.[24]

This performance was presumably in Greek too, though it was probably intended to show off Dee's stagecraft rather than his students' pronunciation. Dee was an academic, but he was also infamous for his magic tricks; many feared him 'as a sorcerer and a necromancer, a black magician left over from the medieval past.'[25] He was even briefly imprisoned for conjuring.[26]

Another *Wealth* may have been performed in 1588, but I can find even less evidence of it than for the 1536 *Wealth*. Finally, an 'adventurous transposition'[27] of *Wealth* retitled *Ploutophthalmia Ploutogamia* was written by Thomas Randolph and possibly performed in Cambridge 'sometime between 1616 and 1628'.[28] Randolph became a significant playwright, and Hall detects some Aristophanic influence in two other of his plays, *Aristippus* and *The Drinking Academy*; 'had Randolph survived to the Restoration, rather than dying young in 1635, the picture of Aristophanes in England would have looked fuller and different.'[29] Randolph's *Wealth* adaptation was later printed, and survives, as *Hey for Honesty, Down with Knavery* in 1651. This second text 'has been "augmented" by a mysterious "F.J.," who provides Royalist jabs at Roundhead absurdities in the form of added speeches, interpolated scenes, an

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[24] Dee 1726 [1592]: 501.

[25] French 1972: 4.

[26] Ibid. 6.

[27] Hall 2007: 67

[28] Smith 1988: 168.

[29] Hall 2007: 68.

induction, an epilogue, and possibly some new characters',[30] though Randolph, who stylised himself 'one of the "Sons of Ben" (Jonson)', probably laid the satirical foundations.[31] 'With the exception of the lone 1593 Greek text of *Knights* produced by the OUP… *Hey for Honesty* is also apparently the first printing of Aristophanes in England in any form.'[32] The significant reception of *Wealth* (in performance or not) during the early-modern period reflects humanists' interest in this play.

What is telling from Strype's circumspect account of a 1536 *Wealth* is the performance's connection to spoken Greek. Whenever classical theatre was performed in a didactic setting in the original language, the purpose was invariably to practise pronunciation. This was certainly true of Latin, which continued to be spoken widely by schoolboys until the eighteenth century.[33] For centuries, a 'gentlemanly pronunciation' of Latin, in the correct English manner, was a key aspect of the upper-class identity.[34] Consequently far more Latin plays were performed; Seneca, Terence and (less often) Plautus, as well as new plays written in Latin. Westminster School performed a Latin Play every year by decree of Elizabeth I, who attended several productions.[35] Greek was never widely spoken, partly because there was no uniform

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[30] Smith 1988: 171.

[31] Hall 2007: 67.

[32] Steggle 2007: 56.

[33] Clarke 1959: 47.

[34] Stray 1998: 127.

[35] Goodrick-Green and Mirza (no date). The tradition 'continued to be observed (with occasional interruptions) until 1980', although it has been occasionally revived since (Brown 2008: 16).

pronunciation, so productions of Greek plays were rarer.[36] Thomas Randolph's *Wealth* is here the exception. Even accepting that much of its political force was added by a later editor, the university performance of Aristophanes in English adaptation suggests entertainment was the aim, not pronunciation practice.

The Victorian Aristophanes in Schools

By the Victorian period, the main academic setting for Aristophanic performance was the annual Speech Days of boys' independent schools, to demonstrate to visitors the students' grasp of ancient languages. Aristophanic speeches, chosen alongside extracts from works in other languages, were apparently popular on these occasions because they gave the performers an opportunity for comic stage business, aiding the audience's comprehension. No translations were provided, but accounts of the performances invariably mentioned the ease with which audiences were able to understand texts because of the acting. It is impossible to say how common Aristophanes was, because for the accounts of selected speeches we must rely on archived newspapers, which may not record every Speech Day or selected recitation; they prioritised more prestigious (and therefore more exclusionary) schools. Nevertheless, a cursory glance across various digitised newspaper archives and other resources indicates that Old Comedy was popular. In 1836, a young Benjamin Jowett, destined to become a great theologian and classicist, performed an extract from *Frogs* at St Paul's, playing Dionysus terrified by Empusa (*Frogs* 272ff.). 'The

[36] Greek tragedies were occasionally performed. In early eighteenth-century Dublin, the schoolmaster Thomas Sheridan's 'most senior class used to perform plays publicly before leaving for university', including 'at least three Greek plays' (Hall and Macintosh 2005: 245).

comic distress of [Jowett] excited much laughter, even amongst that portion of the audience customarily presumed to be ignorant of the learned languages.'[37] Around 1850, the Megarian scene in *Acharnians* was given at Eton (Fig. 7.2). 'Here the learned could appreciate the jokes, while the general crowd could not, at all events, be insensible to the gestures and expressions of countenance which the two speakers displayed.'[38] Both these episodes are obscene, the latter broadly sexual and the former climaxing in Dionysus defecating on himself. One assumes tactful edits to the script were made, but they remain curious choices. A recitation from *Frogs* was performed by Bury School in 1853;[39] St. Paul's offered a recitation from *Birds* in 1857;[40] Shrewsbury School again offered *Birds* in 1896.[41] In 1873 alone, at least three schools – Grantham Grammar School, Abingdon School and Tonbridge School – all selected speeches from *Frogs*, the latter using a specially-painted backdrop.[42] The Prince and Princess of Wales were in attendance at Harrow Speech Day in 1894 (although they arrived late), where they were treated to a scene from *Frogs*, evidently the famous *Brekekekex* chorus (Fig. 7.3).[43] Many other examples could be offered. In one sense, these recitations were demonstrations of the boys' ability to speak

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[37] 'St Paul's School' (6 May 1836) *Times*: 3. The 'ignorant' audience referred to are presumably women.

[38] Johnstone 1870: 290.

[39] 'THE SONG OF THE NATTERJACKS' (13 July 1853) *Bury and Norwich Post, and Suffolk Herald*: 2.

[40] 'St. Paul's School' (18 December 1857) *Morning Post*: 5.

[41] 'Speech Day at Shrewsbury School' (11 July 1896) *Wrexham Advertiser, and North Wales News*: 7.

[42] 'Grantham Grammar School' (21 June 1873) *Grantham Journal*: 4; 'Abingdon School' (16 August 1873) *Oxford Times*: 2; 'Skinner's Day at Tonbridge School' (1 August 1873) *Kent and Sussex Courier*: 3.

[43] 'Speech Day at Harrow' (14 July 1894) *Graphic*: 6.

ancient Greek, just as Cheke and Smith apparently used Aristophanes to demonstrate a new style of pronunciation. But despite the academic setting, these performances were designed to entertain as well as elucidate, and some frivolity was allowed. The Shrewsbury *Birds* involved 'bird costumes';[44] an engraving of the Harrow *Frogs* indicates that, whilst the performers were still in school uniform, they used a boat for set (Fig. 7.3). The schoolboys' energetic bounding as frogs must have injected liveliness into the recitation; *The Graphic* reported that 'although [the performance was] delivered in a language few of us in later life even pretend to remember, [it] was conducted with so much humour and contained so much illustrative action that it became the success of the afternoon'.[45] It is probably no coincidence that schools drew their Aristophanes from *Birds* and *Frogs*; the animal choruses of these two plays lend themselves to lively performance in any language, and as we have seen a lively performance was key to comprehensibility. These performances were not an opportunity to engage with the politics or the obscenity of Aristophanes, however. We can see from the extracts chosen that political commentary was not valued as highly as performability. Any obscene jokes in the chosen scenes may have been cut from the Greek text (as they were from Mitchell's textual editions designed for school-boys, see Chapter 2), or simply hidden behind the Greek. No newspaper account gives the suggestion that the performances were in any way indecorous.

[44] 'Speech Day at Shrewsbury School' (11 July 1896) *Wrexham Advertiser, and North Wales News*: 7.

[45] 'Speech Day at Harrow' (14 July 1894) *Graphic*: 6.

Fig. 7.2: Eton performs the Megarian scene from Acharnians*, c.1850.*

Fig. 7.3: Harrow performs the Brekekekex *chorus from* Frogs*, 1894.*

One performance at King's College School in July 1874 demonstrates that a political Aristophanes was possible even at a school Speech Day.[46] It included costumes, props and, most remarkably, contemporary references woven into the performance, as related by the clergyman and spiritualist Charles Maurice Davies:

> Then a bit of a Greek play, at which – *mirabile dictu*! – everybody laughed, and with which everybody was pleased. And why? Because the adjuncts of costume and properties added to the correct enunciation of the text, prevented even those, who knew little Latin and less Greek, from being one moment in the dark as to what was going on. The passage was one from the *Birds* of Aristophanes; and the fact of a treaty being concluded between the Olympians and terrestrials, led to the introduction of some interpolations as to the Washington Treaty, which, when interpreted by the production of the American flag and English Union Jack, brought down thunders of applause. The final chorus was sung to "Yankee Doodle," and accompanied by a fiddle.[47]

The scene comes from the end of the play (*Birds* 1565ff.), and involves Poseidon, Heracles and a Triballian god seeking peace with Peisetairos, who has blockaded their path to Earth. Heracles' stomach and the barbarian's stupidity allow Peisetairos to cut a favourable deal, winning him Zeus' daughter Basileia in marriage. The play ends with a victorious wedding hymn. If this performance set Peisetairos' wedding hymn to the merry tune of the American 'Yankee Doodle Dandy', we must take it that Peisetairos was portrayed as American, overcoming the foolish British Olympians in

[46] KCS was founded in 1829 and lived, until the end of the century, in the basement of King's College London's Strand Campus.

[47] Davies 1875: 226.

the treaty negotiations. America and Britain signed the Treaty of Washington in 1871 resulting in Britain paying $15.5 million in compensation to the States for their support of the Confederacy during the American Civil War; this performance implies that Britain had got a bad deal.[48] Davies again intimates that many spectators would not have understood the text; students were only taught Aristophanes at KCS in their final year of school.[49] Nevertheless, contemporary allusions, the use of familiar music and clearly identifiable props – the flags – allowed the performers to make the scene both comprehensible and amusing.

The setting of new (or else very old) words to a familiar tune, and the blending of contemporary allusions with classics, were of course both staples of the burlesque genre, with the same goal of creating familiarity and humour. Despite the Greek text, then, this Aristophanic performance provided a commentary on political events and borrowed from popular theatrical traditions. KCS was located on the Strand, a street notorious for producing burlesque; only a few doors down from the entrance to King's College was the Royal Strand Theatre and close by were the Adelphi and the Gaiety. Several other theatres less closely associated with burlesque also surrounded King's

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[48] The Treaty was 'so imaginatively fair-minded' that it submitted the dispute to an arbitration panel; 'its ratification ushered in a new era of closer relations between the United States and Great Britain while offering a precedent for settling disputes peacefully among leading nations' (Chernow 2017: 723). However, the British, in particular the Tories, did not see it in this light (ibid. 725f.).

[49] *The Calendar of King's College, London for 1872-1873* p.347; *Calendar 1873-1874* p.352; *Calendar 1874-1875* p.356, etc. (King's College London Archive: Calendar Collection).

College, and eight years later, Gilbert and Sullivan's Savoy Theatre would open on the Strand as well.

Fig. 7.4: 1876 Ordnance Survey map showing the location of King's College (a.), the Adelphi (b.), the Gaiety (c.) and the Royal Strand Theatre (d.) on the Strand. Scale 1:2500.

Davies was the right person to appreciate KCS' burlesqued recitation because he saw the potential of Aristophanes' humour to translate to contemporary situations. In his historical review of comedy, *Fun, Ancient and Modern*, he described Aristophanes as analogous with 'the position occupied by [satirical magazine] *Punch* at the present day, that chartered libertine, in whose big cartoons it is almost an honour to be represented under whatever conditions of broad caricature.'[50] Referring

[50] Davies 1878: 19.

to Planché's *Birds*, Davies argues in favour of updated versions of ancient texts; 'Surely the true classical spirit consists rather in the power to transpose the spirit of the old drama thus into modern words'.[51] This is broadly speaking what Gamel calls inductive authenticity.[52] Yet Davies' desire for academic institutions to produce political Aristophanes was not to be realised.

Some indication of the relative popularity of Old Comedy at school Speech Days may be given by Dulwich College, an independent school in South London with a long tradition of performing Aristophanes at its Founder's Day celebrations. From 1873-1914, Aristophanes was performed every year except five or six,[53] and only on one occasion (1885) was a non-Aristophanic Greek speech presented (Ajax's suicide speech from Sophocles). In fact, only seven of the extant Aristophanes plays were ever presented, with the women plays and *Wealth* being neglected. We have routinely encountered the problematic reception of the women plays in the nineteenth century, and despite its pre-nineteenth-century dominance over Aristophanic reception, *Wealth*'s Victorian reception was slight. *Peace* and *Wasps* were performed only once each, and, surprisingly, *Birds* only received four performances. *Knights* and *Acharnians* were both offered six times each and *Clouds* was performed seven times. By far the most popular, however, was *Frogs*, which was performed 11 times.

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[51] Ibid. 49.

[52] Gamel 2010.

[53] It is unclear whether speeches were presented in 1910, or what they were.

Greek Speeches Performed at Dulwich College Founder's Day, 1873-1914[54]

Year	Greek Speech
1873	*Knights*
1874	*Wasps*
1875	*Clouds*
1876	*Frogs*
1877	**No Speech Day**
1878	*Peace*
1879	*Clouds*
1880	*Knights*
1881	*Frogs*
1882	*Frogs*
1883	*Frogs*
1884	*Acharnians*
1885	**Sophocles' *Ajax***
1886	*Knights*
1887	**No Greek Speech**

Year	Greek Speech
1894	*Clouds*
1895	*Frogs*
1896	*Acharnians*
1897	*Birds*
1898	*Frogs*
1899	*Clouds*
1900	*Knights*
1901	*Birds*
1902	*Acharnians*
1903	*Clouds*
1904	*Frogs*
1905	*Knights*
1906	*Birds*
1907	*Acharnians*
1908	*Frogs*

[54] This information is taken from the school newspaper, *The Alleynian*, which began publication in 1873. The tradition therefore probably predates this. Aristophanes was still performed after 1914, but this falls outside the thesis' scope.

1888	*Frogs*
1889	*Acharnians*
1890	**No Greek Speech**
1891	*Frogs*
1892	**No Greek Speech**
1893	*Knights*

1909	*Clouds*
1910	**No Record**
1911	*Birds*
1912	*Acharnians*
1913	*Frogs*
1914	*Clouds*

For many years, Dulwich's Founder's Day followed a familiar format to other Speech Days, as accounts in the school newspaper make clear; a scene chosen from a Greek play was recited in Greek by pupils, without significant props, costume or staging but with some performativity – gesture, movement and as much modulation as the boys could master whilst speaking ancient Greek. Too much acting was criticised. This performance sat amongst a programme of other speeches selected from significant works across the languages taught at the school. Over time, however, Dulwich's Greek recitation became more ambitious, and in 1895 substantial costumes were introduced.[55] Thereafter, the performances were even more elaborate. Multiple scenes were performed – in the case of *Frogs*, apparently the entire play up until Dionysus enters Hades' palace was staged. The school music teacher composed original orchestrations, except for the 1901 *Birds* which used Hubert Parry's celebrated music composed for Cambridge's 1883 production.[56] The costumes were elaborate, as Figs. 7.5-7 show. Note the frog and pig masks in Figs. 7.5 and 7.7;

[55] 'Founder's Day' (July 1895) *Alleynian*, Vol.23 No.164: 148-150.

[56] 'Founder's Day' (July 1901) *Alleynian*, Vol.29 No.212: 227; see below for Cambridge's *Birds*.

Heracles' elaborate lionskin costume with club in Fig. 7.5; and Lamachus' remarkable armour in Fig. 7.7. In *Clouds*, Socrates flew through the air in a hammock, as described by *The Alleynian* in 1899:

> Socrates was equipped with... a hammock, in which he soared to giddy heights, raised by the sturdy hands of certain O.A.'s, who kindly volunteered for this service; the hearts of the spectators were in their mouths, or might have been, until the happy moment when he gracefully alighted on the stage none the worse for his trip.[57]

The small number of shows staged (now only *Acharnians*, *Knights*, *Clouds*, *Birds* and *Frogs* placed in rotation) meant that costumes, props, music and even blocking could be reused.

P.G. Wodehouse, the author and librettist famous for his characters Jeeves and Wooster, appeared in the chorus during Dulwich's 1898 production of *Frogs* (Fig. 7.5). Wodehouse's humour is more Menandrian in tone than Aristophanic, focussing on absurdity in character rather than situation, and I have found no clear reception of Aristophanes in any of his numerous works. Nevertheless, it is tempting to imagine how the great English comic genius Wodehouse responded to the comic genius of Aristophanes, and it provides a useful reminder that many of the boys and men we meet in this chapter, gifted with the privileges of elite education and the chance to engage with Aristophanes in Greek, would go on to notable careers.

[57] 'Founder's Day' (July 1899) *Alleynian*, Vol.27 No.196: 197.

Another such notable Old Alleynian was the classicist J.T. Sheppard, who in 1900 appeared as Demos in *Knights*[58] and won acclaim:

> As regards the individual parts that of Demos was undoubtedly the hardest. Sheppard hit the exact mean in acting it. Never in the very least allowing it to flag for a moment, he nevertheless avoided altogether the danger of over-acting… His management of an assumed querulous voice, and a surprising variety of facial expressions wonderfully suited to his part made his performance a most artistic one.[59]

Sheppard studied and lectured at Cambridge, where his involvement with the Cambridge Greek Play lasted until 1950, half a century after he first engaged with performed Greek drama at Dulwich. More of him later.

The expansion beyond simple recitation into more extensive performance demonstrates Dulwich's commitment to entertainment, even in an academic setting. As contemporary commentators routinely observed, performance aided audience comprehension of the Greek. Despite this, however, these were not modernised productions that attempted to comment on the present day; no topical allusions are mentioned in the school paper reviews. Privately educated, privileged boys were presented with comedies full of working-class protagonists and class tension, but the performances were devoid of this. The critical response to Sheppard's performance, hitting as it apparently did 'the exact mean' between over-acting and dullness, is typical; any performer deemed too heavily comical is chastised. The use of ancient

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[58] 'Founder's Day' (July 1900) *Alleynian,* Vol.28 No.204: 214. He also coincidentally appeared as Claudius in W.S. Gilbert's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* (ibid. 210).

[59] Ibid. 215.

Greek and archaising costumes, as well as the academic nature of the occasion, also indicates a more conservative, archaeologising performance tradition. Unlike at KCS, then, the influence of burlesque is not felt.

Fig. 7.5: The Frogs*, Dulwich College, 1898. P.G. Wodehouse is centre far-right.*

Fig. 7.6: The Clouds, *Dulwich College, 1909*.

Fig. 7.7: The Acharnians*, Dulwich College, 1912.*

Although Dulwich College never performed a complete Aristophanes play, other schools did. In May 1883, a few months before Cambridge staged *Birds*, Blackheath Proprietary School performed *Acharnians*. The school's headmaster, E. Wilton South, described it in his annual report:

> After Easter, we ventured on the difficult performance of a Greek play in the original language, with scenery and Greek dresses; and here too the talent of the School was equal to its bold project. The performance, witnessed by a number of scholastic and literary guests from all parts of London, was pronounced highly successful; and certainly it did come near one's idea of Aristophanes' humour.[60]

[60] South (1883) 'Head Master's Report' in *Blackheath Proprietary School Annual Report*. Lewisham Local History and Archives Centre. 95.

The *Journal of Education* for June 1883 noted:

> The performance of *Acharnians* on May 18th and 19th was a decided success… The costumes were very effective and had evidently been the subject of much careful study. Euripides looked altogether too youthful and lackadaisical and had more the air of a lovesick maiden from [Gilbert and Sullivan's] "Patience" [1881] than of the great tragic poet. If the interest flagged a little towards the end of the play, the poet is to blame rather than the performers.[61]

This review suggests a mostly archaeologising performance – the costumes were the result of 'much careful study' – although it criticises burlesquing by comparing the representation of Euripides to a Gilbert and Sullivan chorus-woman. Gilbert and Sullivan's works were the successor to the Victorian burlesque, so the allusion reprimands the performance for coming too close in style to popular theatre. Of course, Aristophanes' Euripides *is* lackadaisical, and it seems unfair to criticise a schoolboy for being youthful. A photograph of the cast demonstrates the archaeologising costumes, although the two Megarian pigs – dressed in full face-masks and on all fours – suggests some burlesquing humour. Euripides is sprawled on a chaise-longue. The headmaster's account also acknowledges the importance of humour. We might assume Blackheath's approach was similar to Dulwich's; performance and comicality were important, as was comprehension, but there was a

[61] 'Blackheath Proprietary School' (1 June 1883) *Journal of Education*: 217.

reticence to engage with contemporary allusions or burlesque. M.A. North, Blackheath's Dicaeopolis, later 'acted in the *Eumenides* at Cambridge'.[62]

Fig. 7.8: The Acharnians*, Blackheath Proprietary School, 1883.*

Birds was performed at Leeds Girls' Grammar School in 1906.[63] This production stands out for two reasons; it was performed by women, and in English. Yet it seems to have been traditionally archaeologising, with accounts suggesting a 'classical atmosphere'; 'the artistic element of the old Greek comedy appealed to the minds of the amateur actresses.'[64] Praise was given to the costumes, 'made at home by the girls themselves', and to the movement and sounds of the bird chorus, which

[62] Kirby 1933: 117.

[63] There was also a performance of Aristophanes at Leeds University in the same year, see below.

[64] 'Leeds Grammar School Girls in a Greek Play' (5 February 1906) *Leeds Mercury*: 2.

had 'evidently been studied from nature'.[65] In short, these reviews describe the production in the same terms as one of Dulwich's archaeologised, de-politicised Old Comedies. There is no sense here that the performance of Aristophanes, even in English, even by women, is inherently political. Other more radical receptions of Aristophanes by women will be discussed in the next chapter.

Aristophanes at University

The first production of Aristophanes connected to a university in the nineteenth century also happens to be idiosyncratic, in that it was performed in English. It appears to be Britain's oldest production of unadapted Aristophanes in translation. In May 1873, the Edinburgh engineering professor Henry Fleeming Jenkin staged a private performance of *Frogs* at his home using the Hookham Frere translation, which we saw in Chapter 2 was well-suited for performance because of its use of vernacular English. Even with Frere's careful editing, however, Fleeming Jenkin found that his translation 'contains much that is not suitable for the general reader'; 'in order to adapt the Play to a Private Stage, it has been necessary to omit many Scenes, and those represented have also been much curtailed'.[66] This may have been partly about decorum, but as the Frere text was already Bowdlerised, Fleeming Jenkin's selectiveness may have primarily come down to dramaturgy. Curiously, the famous frog chorus was amongst the cut scenes.[67] *Frogs* appeared in a double bill with *My Son-in-Law*, 'translated expressly for this occasion from *Le Gendre de M. Poirier*' by

[65] 'The Greek Play' (Summer 1906) *Leeds Girls' High School Magazine*: 7f.

[66] 'May 3rd, 5th & 6th, 1873' [Programme] p.3. National Library of Scotland No. AP.3.208.15.

[67] Ibid.

Émile Augier and Jules Sandeau.[68] It had an all-star cast; the author Robert Louis Stevenson played Aeschylus, the artist William Hole appeared as Bacchus, Fleeming Jenkin himself played Euripides and his wife took the part of the (second, initiate) Chorus.[69] There were five performances over three days, 'two to audiences made up of artisans, servants, and dependents, and three to friends and social acquaintances';[70] as such, this private production had a far more diverse audience than could be expected to attend the Speech Day of an independent boys' school. The production 'had been costumed by the professional costumier, with unforgettable results of comicality and indecorum'.[71] Whilst no doubt classical, they may have resembled the suggestive outfits of classical burlesque more than the demure classical gowns of Dulwich's plays; the illustration on the front of the programme (Fig. 7.9) probably demonstrates Jenkin's vision of classical dress but not the costumier's, as it resembles the illustrations in his essay 'On the Antique Dress for Women', published a year after the performance.[72] Because the play was not organised by Edinburgh University, we might assume less emphasis was placed on academic aspects and more on entertainment. Certainly, the setting made it justifiable to perform the piece in English.

[68] Ibid. 2.

[69] Ibid. 3.

[70] Ewing 1922: 116.

[71] Stevenson 1887: cxxvii.

[72] Jenkin 1887 [1874].

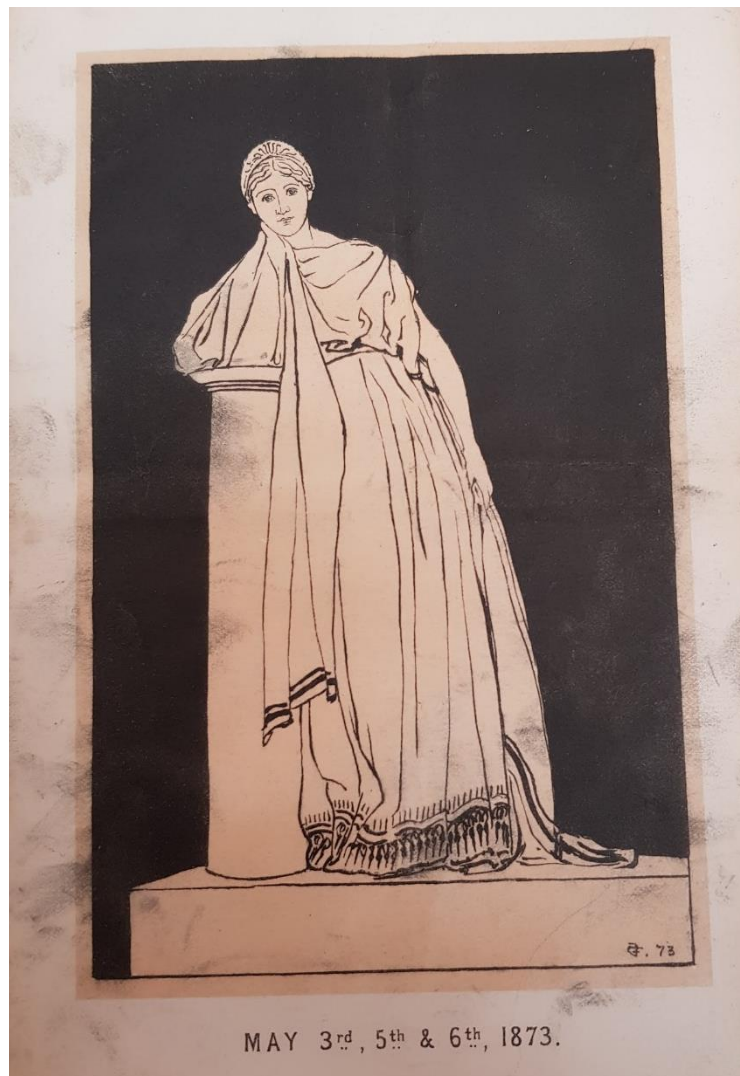

Fig. 7.9: Programme cover for Henry Fleeming Jenkin's Frogs *and* My Son-in-Law*,*

3, 5 and 6 May 1873.

By far the most influential productions, however, were performed at the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford. Between 1883 and 1909, Cambridge performed four productions of Aristophanes plays; *Birds* in 1883 and 1903, *Wasps* in 1897 and 1909. Oxford meanwhile produced *Frogs* in 1892 and 1909, *Knights* in 1897, *Clouds* in 1905 and *Acharnians* in 1914. This is besides two important

productions performed at Girton College, Cambridge and Somerville College, Oxford discussed in Chapters 8 and 9 respectively.

The 1883 *Birds* was a cultural phenomenon. Tickets sold out weeks in advance.[73] 'Time after time, morning and evening, the theatre [was] crowded'[74] and an extra performance was put on to meet demand.[75] Critics praised the production for proving 'that there are elements of humour in a comedy of the fifth century, B.C., which can appeal to a modern audience',[76] and for the quality of the music composed by Dr Hubert Parry.[77] The music was always an important part of the Cambridge (and Oxford) Greek Plays' success; as H.J. Edwards noted in his 1909 review of the plays, 'the composer is an interpreter of the first importance for a considerable part of a not-too-Greek audience, which may be helped by his music to realise the dramatic unities at the time, and filled with abiding memories for days to come.'[78] The cast was packed with future men of note, seven of whom appear in the Oxford Dictionary of National

[73] 'The Greek Play at Cambridge' (1 December 1883) *Era*: 7.

[74] 'Aristophanes' "Birds" at Cambridge' (8 December 1883) *Graphic*: 567.

[75] Easterling 1999: 37.

[76] 'The "Birds" at Cambridge' (8 December 1883) *ILN*: 11.

[77] 'The Greek Play at Cambridge' (3 December 1883) *Morning Post*: 2. Parry's 'Bridal March' from *Birds* has twice been used for the procession of the Queen at royal weddings – at her own wedding in 1947, and at the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge in 2011 (O'Donnell 2011). It was written for a *basileia*, after all.

[78] Edwards 1909: 546.

Biography with careers in academia, politics and journalism;[79] interestingly, the role of parricide was played by Henry Fleeming Jenkin's son, Austin Fleeming.[80]

Before *Birds* was produced, *The Times* wrote a lengthy column in anticipation, preparing its readers for the production. Their journalist wrote:

> Attic comedy… cannot fail to have the advantage over tragedy for purposes of representation before a modern audience. Attic comedy is in reality a burlesque; not, it is true, like modern burlesques, depending for its effect mainly upon the accessories of costume, buffoonery and horseplay, but still indulging sufficiently in such extravagances to awake plenty of humour in those who have no opportunity of following the elegances of the language and appreciating the topical satire of the play-writer.[81]

Like Planché, this author saw a natural affinity between the well-worn genre of Victorian burlesque and Greek Old Comedy. This is despite the reliance of Victorian burlesque on language and topicality, something unavailable in an unadapted performance in the original Greek, and despite Victorian burlesque's preference for

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[79] M.R. James (Peisetairos) was later director of the Fitzwilliam and provost of King's College, Cambridge and Eton, also writing ghost stories (Pfaff 2004); A.C. Benson (the priest) wrote, and taught at Eton and Cambridge (Hyam 2009); E.A. Gardner (Basileia and law-seller) was an archaeologist (Toynbee and Major 2004); L.J. Maxse (Iris) became a journalist (Thompson 2008); H.J.C. Cust (Prometheus) was a Conservative MP and journalist (Atkinson 2011); R. Threlfall (Heracles) became a scientist (Home 2013); and S.M. Leathes (chorus-leader) was a historian and civil servant (Dampier 2004).

[80] *Cambridge Greek Play* 2015a.

[81] 'The "Birds" of Aristophanes' (23 November 1883) *Times*: 4.

adapting Greek tragedy over comedy. Nevertheless – and again like Planché – the writer sees Greek Old Comedy as a better, higher form of the burlesque genre. Burlesque's familiarity offers a way into understanding an ancient genre.

But Cambridge's *Birds* was not a burlesque. The main purpose of the production was, according to the director, 'an academical one. If it had given pleasure, so much the better'[82] – but enjoyment was secondary to an archaeological performance of a Greek play. As one critic remarked, 'it is first and essentially an academic undertaking – a study of Aristophanes – and that from this point of view it might justly be considered a complete success, even though its dramatic force were proved inadequate for modern times'.[83] The Cambridge archaeologist Percy Gardner wrote in *The Academy* that 'in future no one can doubt that acted plays of Aristophanes can be made peculiarly attractive to classical scholars and interesting to all educated spectators' before discussing at length the archaeological evidence around animal costumes in Old Comedy.[84] Classical costumes were routinely adopted in burlesque, so *Birds*' use of classical dress (Figs. 7.10-13) may come as no surprise; but as shown in Fig. 7.12, the production took further steps to replicate ancient performance techniques by separating the chorus and the actors. A note in the *Times* from B.H. Kennedy, who was Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge and translated the play-text for the audience's (no doubt substantial) benefit, even set homework:

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[82] 'Aristophanes at Cambridge' (28 November 1883) *Times*: 6.

[83] 'Greek Play at Cambridge' (28 November 1883) *Standard*: 5.

[84] Gardner (1883) 381f. His younger brother, E.A. Gardner, played Basileia.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

> Sir, – will you allow me to suggest to those among your readers who may intend to see at Cambridge the revived presentation of the *Birds*… that they may probably appreciate with more zest the plot and humour of this comedy if… they read beforehand chapters 57 and 58, part II., of “Grote’s History of Greece?”[85]

Contemporary performance conventions were also adopted; the play was divided into three acts, accompanied by Parry’s music and performed without masks. None of these elements added to the lively humour of the piece, however. Any interpolations were made in Greek.[86] Burlesque elements were noticeably *not* added, and where humour was produced it was apparently the chaste humour of Aristophanes being performed in the same register as Greek tragedy. The comedy, the politics, the distinctiveness of Aristophanes were all displaced in favour of an aestheticising, archaeologising event. Cambridge’s *Birds* was closer to the

[85] ‘The “Birds” of Aristophanes’ (10 November 1883) *Times*: 12.

[86] ‘Greek Play at Cambridge’ (28 November 1883) *Standard*: 5.

performances offered at independent schools' Speech Days than even Planché's stilted Aristophanic burlesque.

Fig. 7.10: The 1883 Cambridge Birds*. The second messenger (F.R. Pryor), Iris (L.J. Maxse) and Peisetairos (M.R. James) in classical costume.*

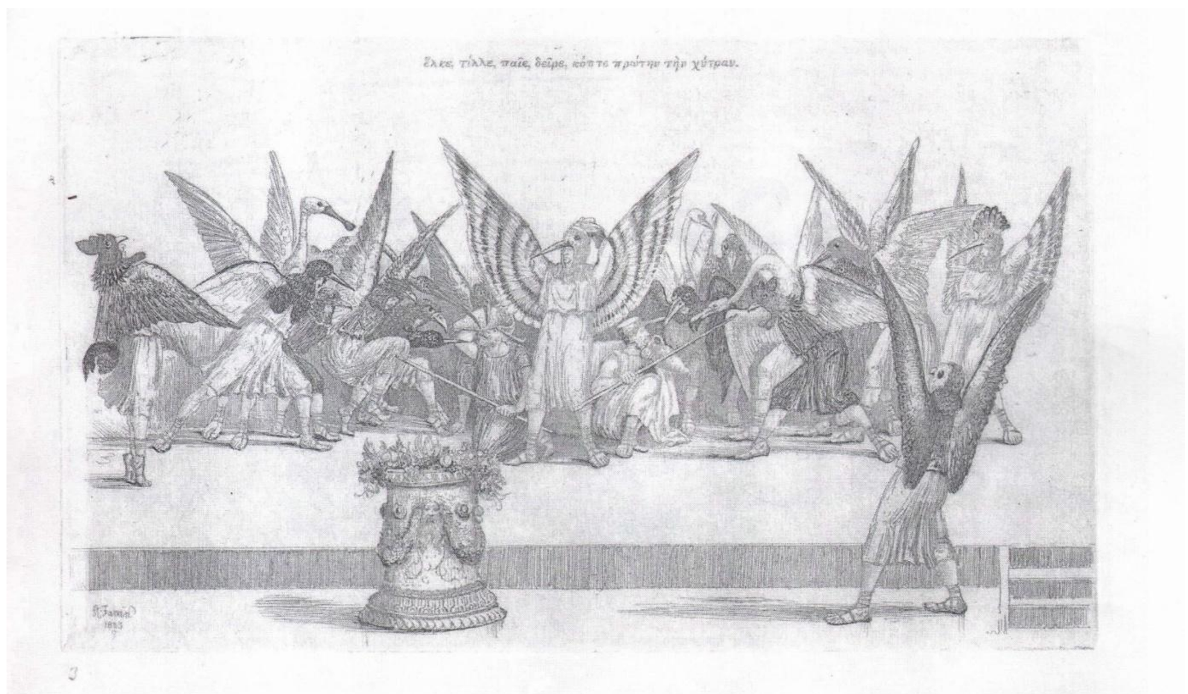

Fig. 7.11: The chorus.

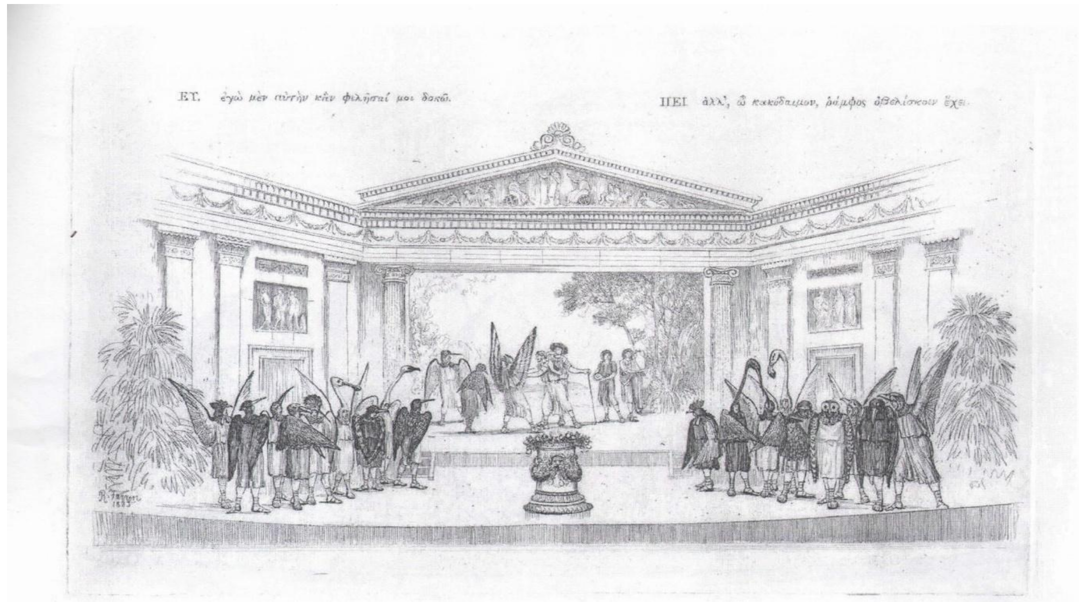

Fig. 7.12: The orchestra and stage divided.

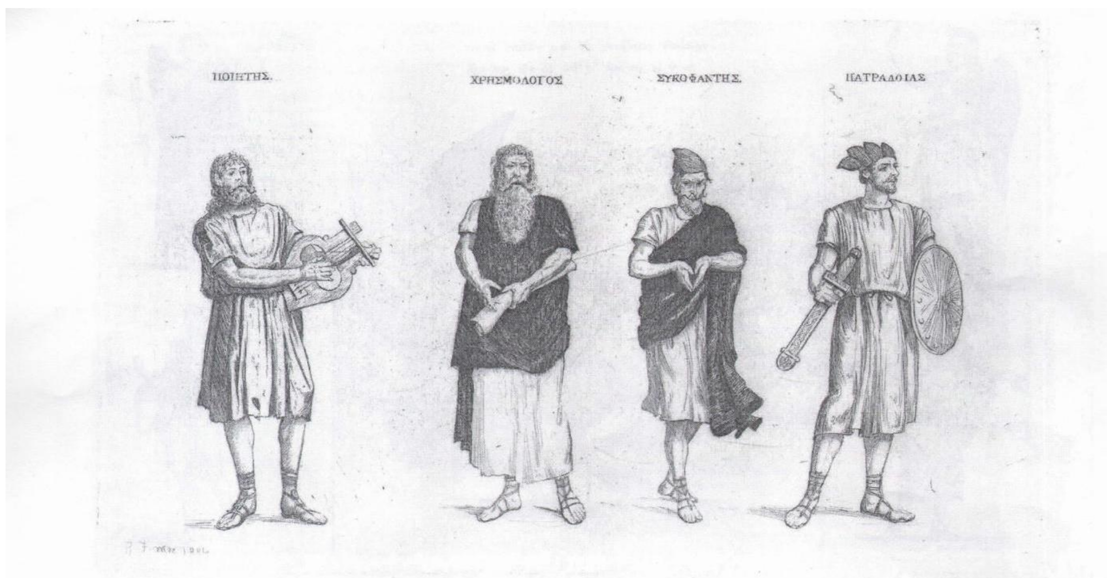

Fig. 7.13: The poet (J.D. Ouvry), the soothsayer (H.F.W. Tatham), the informer (L.N. Guillemard) and the parricide (A. Fleeming Jenkin).

Cambridge's decision to produce *Wasps* as their second comedy in 1897 is curious because, for the most part, this play was not widely received in the Victorian era. Dulwich only produced extracts from *Wasps* once in the period we examined. The play satirises Athenian jurisprudence, the intricacies of which are unfamiliar to nineteenth- (and twenty-first-) century audiences; it is more tightly entwined in its original performance context than plays with less technical themes such as war or poetics. Nevertheless, the business of the piece, involving an anthropomorphic wasp chorus, drunken dancing and the trial of a cheese-stealing dog, allows for abundant humour. Cambridge's production was apparently successful in drawing out this comic potential, and it sold 3519 tickets.[87] The music was composed by T. Tertius Noble.

In many ways, *Wasps* followed the archaeological production style of the 1883 *Birds*. The set reflected archaeologising perceptions of ancient Athens, complete with columns, an urn and the Acropolis on the backdrop (Fig. 7.14). Figs. 7.15-16 demonstrate the classical costumes worn by the actors (a *chiton* and Greek sandals) and even the chorus-leader wasp wears adapted classical dress (Fig. 7.17).[88] But the full-body dog costumes in Fig. 7.18 suggest more of an emphasis on the humour of the trial scene, and contemporary reviews highlighted the vividness of the performance. The *Daily News* specifically compared *Wasps* with popular entertainment and Music Hall, remarking on the play's final dance which was apparently lively:

[87] *Cambridge Greek Play* 2015b.

[88] He also resembles a fly more than a wasp.

> The final scene is a Drury Lane ballet, with three beautiful beings [playing the sons of Carcinus] in pink and white doing step dances, and Philocleon as Dan Leno [a music hall performer]. The audience cheer again and again…[89]

The dancing caused the *Times* reviewer to describe the conclusion of the play as 'a trifle vulgar', and he added that 'the proper motive of the play ends with the parabasis'[90] – this is the same argument Mitchell made against the second half of *Wasps* in his editions of the play. The critic nevertheless praised the music as 'worthy of a Sullivan',[91] we must assume in his light operatic strain. Twelve years later, a *Times* critic remembered that Tertius Noble's music 'would not have been out of place on the boards of [Gilbert and Sullivan's] Savoy Theatre'.[92] *Wasps* was also the first Cambridge Greek Play to abandon use of a separate *orchestra* for the chorus in front of the stage, though this may have been because it was performed in a different venue, the New Theatre.[93] Whilst still an archaeologising, pedagogical performance in ancient Greek, then, the 1897 *Wasps* was more ambitious and brazen than *Birds* had been fourteen years earlier, and appears to have partially embraced the comic potential of the burlesquing performance style. Yet there is no indication that it alluded to contemporary affairs. Again, the decision was taken to isolate the play's politics from any modernisation.

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[89] '"The Wasps" of Aristophanes' (20 November 1897) *Daily News*: 3.

[90] 'The "Wasps" at Cambridge' (20 November 1897) *Times*: 12.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Edwards 1909: 544.

Fig. 7.14: The set of the 1897 Cambridge Wasps*.*

Figs. 7.15-7.16: Two actors in classical dress.

Fig. 7.17: A chorus-member in costume.

Fig. 7.18: Two dogs (H.R.L. Dyne and W.C. Mayne).

In 1903, twenty years after its original run, Cambridge performed *Birds* again. The 1883 libretto and accompanying translation were reused alongside a slightly modified score. Backdrops and costumes were apparently remade. This production saw two significant developments: first, public lectures were offered before performances for the first time, an important public engagement tool but also a reminder that the Greek Play was at its heart an educational project;[94] and second, the casting of J.T. Sheppard as Peithetairos (Fig. 7.19) marked the beginning of his long relationship with the productions. We have already met Sheppard as Dulwich College's Demos in their 1900 *Knights*; he joined the Classical Play committee in time for the 1909 production of *Wasps* and 'would go to dominate the Greek Play from 1921 to 1950…[,] a period of amazing growth for the Greek Play'[95] in which a full forty percent of productions were Aristophanic comedies. Upon his retirement from the institution, Gilbert Murray praised him for 'running these Greek plays in such a way as to get these thousands of young people interested and impressed. It will keep alive a desire for Greek'.[96] Sheppard's 1903 performance as Peithetairos was widely praised.

In general, this production followed the careful conservatism of the 1883 performance, though with interpolations. Parry rewrote the music to the *parabasis* 'as a sort of patter-song', a style of music intimately associated with Gilbert and Sullivan.[97] Marshall has detected the presence of closing night gags, a perennial of

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[94] Easterling 1999: 41.

[95] Marshall 2016: 263.

[96] Letter from Murray to Sheppard, 19 February 1950, King's College Cambridge Archive PP/JTS/2/147.

[97] Edwards 1909: 546.

amateur dramatic performances.[98] But most reviews emphasised the picturesque quality of costumes and set, reflecting the performance's materiality. For example, *The Standard* concludes its review by stating that the performance was 'at once scholarly, artistic, and replete with every grace of charm and colour'[99] – it barely mentions whether it was funny. H.J. Edwards, the co-director, 'prepared [himself] for a revival of the *Birds* by a visit, brief but brimful of interest, to Athens and Epidaurus.'[100] *The Standard*'s review pointedly suggested that Aristophanic humour was different to Gilbert and Sullivan.[101] And far from embracing Aristophanes' politics, J.T. Sheppard later wrote against a political reading of the play, arguing that 'the greatest merit of the imagination of the *Birds* is that it is imaginative: the sole and sufficient excuse for this poetry and this fun is that it is poetic and eminently amusing.'[102]

Yet despite the overall conservatism, a *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer criticised the lack of 'accurate' archaeologising:

> It is tempting to fancy what would be the feelings of Aristophanes if he could visit the *Nephelococcygia* into which the New Theatre at Cambridge has been transformed… He would at first be annoyed, no doubt, to find no special stage allotted to the chorus [as in the ancient *orchestra*]; the scenery might possibly appeal to his eye, although he would be the first to point out that, in consideration of the strong objection to the sea

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[98] Marshall 2016: 276.

[99] '"The Birds" at Cambridge' (25 November 1903) *Standard*: 4.

[100] Edwards 1909: 549.

[101] '"The Birds" at Cambridge' (25 November 1903) *Standard*: 4.

[102] Sheppard 1909: 529.

> announced by the two chief characters in *The Birds*, the beautiful representation of a coast-line is hardly in place;... he would probably be puzzled by the pronunciation of his lines, though he can scarcely have heard them spoken with less hesitation…[103]

The critic expresses horror that the audience enjoyed moments of pantomime more than ancient Greek wordplay. Such reviews may go some way to explaining why archaeologising performances were so resilient – whether or not they were actually funny, they continued to be expected, and perceived as the only proper way to receive ancient theatre in a pedagogical context.

Sheppard was not the only notable member of the cast. The role of Prometheus was played by R.H.A. Storrs, who became governor of Jerusalem, Cyprus and Northern Rhodesia, and a friend of T.E. Lawrence.[104] One wonders how Storrs was shaped by the play's colonialist themes, even if the production avoided bringing them out. F.C.S. Carey was well chosen as leader of the chorus; he later became an opera singer.[105]

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[103] 'Cloud-Cuckoo-Town' (27 November 1903) *TLS*: 345.

[104] Ovendale 2011.

[105] Bearman 2004.

Fig. 7.19: The 1903 Cambridge Birds*. J.T. Sheppard as Peithetairos.*

Fig. 7.20: The chorus of birds.

As with the reprise of *Birds*, Cambridge's 1909 *Wasps* was materially similar to the previous production of this play. The same translation was sold, the dog and wasp/fly costumes were apparently brought out of storage, and the set was rebuilt, so that it resembled the 1897 production. It was not identical, as can be seen in Fig. 7.21 – the building stage-right has different dimensions, the pillared porch stage-left has been replaced with a simple stone wall, and the Acropolis in the backdrop is more prominent[106] – but the intention to replicate the 1897 production is clear.

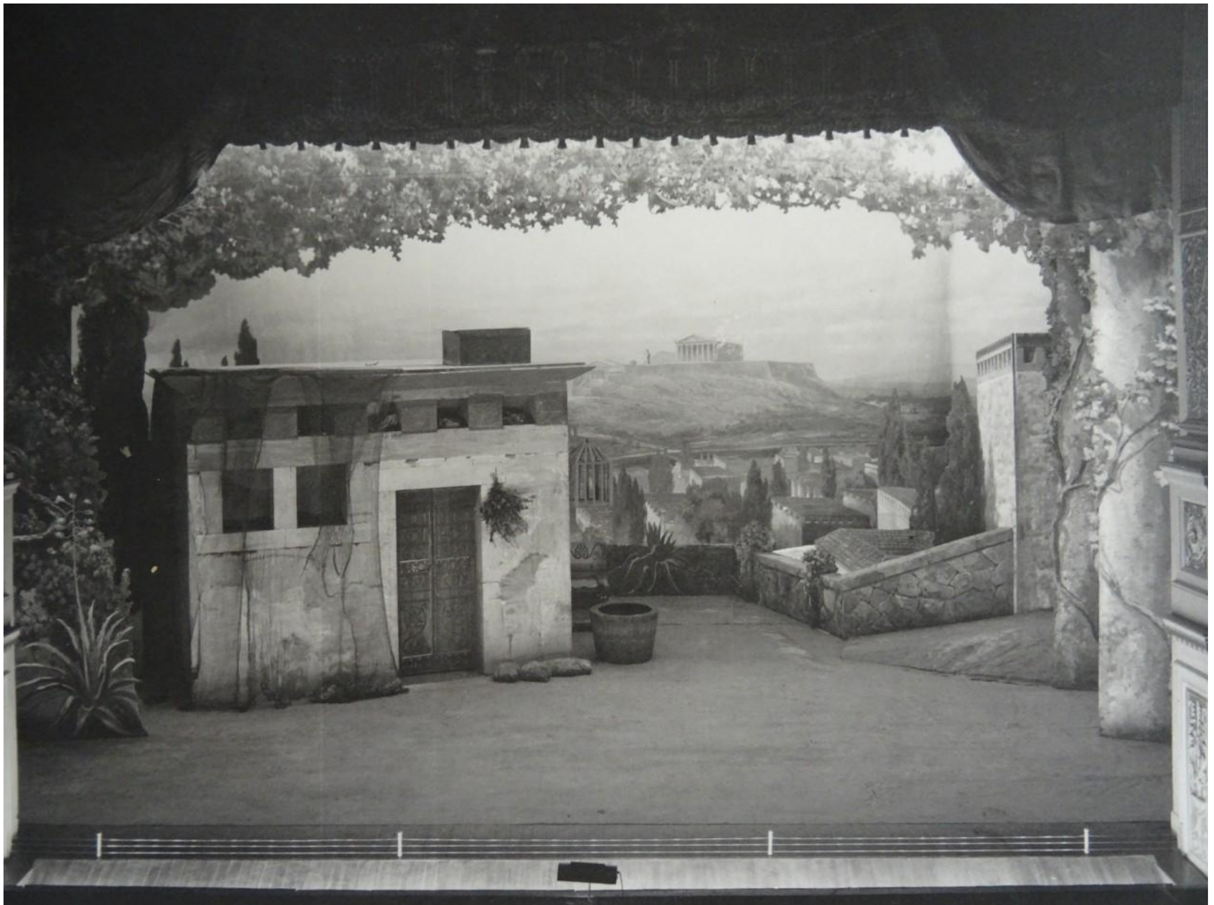

Fig. 7.21: The set of the 1909 Cambridge Wasps*.*

[106] The programme clarifies that the backdrop was 'originally painted… for the Prologue to the *Eumenides* [1906]' (*Cambridge Greek Play* 2015d).

The 1909 *Wasps* had a vast cast, with 19 chorus-members, 26 actors and 24 people in the band. Two chorus-members subsequently enjoyed significant music careers;[107] D.H. Robertson (Philocleon) and J.R.M. Butler (Bdelycleon) both became academics.[108] W.M. Malleson (Sosias) had a future career in theatre.[109] Most significantly, the incidental music for this production was composed by Ralph Vaughan Williams, at this time still an unknown composer but with a doctorate in music from Cambridge, the protégé of Hubert Parry. His composition is equal parts lively and sentimental, incorporating strains of English folk music characteristic of Vaughan Williams' wider *oeuvre* within a contemporary classical style. It is not stylistically reminiscent of Gilbert and Sullivan or Edwardian musical theatre. The *Cambridge Independent Press* considered the work 'wonderfully fine'[110] and *The Standard* commented that 'the success of the piece was very notably furthered by the sympathetic incidental music'.[111] *The Times*, however, expressed reservations.[112] Williams later repackaged the music into an 'Aristophanic Suite' still performed today. This is in contrast to Hubert Parry, whose music was no less praised at the time but is now forgotten. Vaughan Williams expressed interest in composing another Aristophanes play for J.T. Sheppard in 1949, but this never materialised.[113]

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[107] Glasgow and MacPhail 2008; Davies 2004.

[108] Fletcher 2004; *ODNB* 2004.

[109] Darlington 2004.

[110] 'The "Wasps" at Cambridge' (3 December 1909) *Cambridge Independent Press*: 8.

[111] 'Aristophanes' "Wasps" at Cambridge' (27 November 1909) *Standard*: 8.

[112] '"The Wasps" at Cambridge' (27 November 1909) *Times*: 12.

[113] Letter from Vaughan Williams to Sheppard, 25 November 1949, King's College Cambridge Archive PP/JTS/2/211.

Cambridge's second *Wasps* again demonstrated moments of burlesque, particularly associated with the dogs. 'The accusing black cur brought down the house, jumping about the stage, biting at the legs of the slaves who held him, and showing his delight, as he thought the case was going against his rival, by rolling in ecstasies upon his back.'[114] Finished with their legal duties, the dogs 'climb[ed] the roof of the house and [were] watchful spectators of what goes on below' for the rest of the play.[115] So the acting in both the 1897 and 1909 *Wasps* productions was more broadly comical than the more archaeologised performances of *Birds* in 1883 and 1903. It may have been necessary to enliven *Wasps* more because of the nature of the play. Nevertheless, the 1909 performance still relied on traditional costumes and scenery, an ancient Greek performance text and Vaughan Williams' music, which eschewed the influences of popular comic opera and music hall more than previous productions. And, again, the production seems to have been depoliticised, maintaining the same archaeologising tendency.

Oxford's first Aristophanes production was the 1892 *Frogs*. In a detailed account, Amanda Wrigley describes how:

> The tremendously successful production... marked a significant step in the realization that Greek *comedy* [not only tragedy] could be 'revitalized' in its own way too, via the long-established British tradition of comic and musical drama (especially burlesque)…[116]

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[114] 'Aristophanes' "Wasps" at Cambridge' (27 November 1909) *Standard*: 8.

[115] 'The "Wasps" at Cambridge' (3 December 1909) *Cambridge Independent Press*: 8.

[116] Wrigley 2007: 137.

The music was composed by Hubert Parry, who had composed for Cambridge's 1883 *Birds* (and its reprise). His *Frogs* was more light-hearted, sharing the diverse influences of burlesque and taking from both music hall and opera. The supplied translation was 'substantially that of John Hookham Frere', whom we saw in Chapter 2 used vernacular language in his lively translation, though with puns added and amendments made 'in order, it seems, to make it read more like burlesque'.[117] *The Oxford Magazine* directly compared the performance to Gilbert and Sullivan,[118] whilst *The Standard* commented more critically that 'the acting narrowly risked degenerating into a farce.'[119] Yet although less pronounced, the production still showed deference to archaeologising, particularly in costume and set. A common feature of burlesque had been transvestitism, but anything so risqué was carefully avoided by this production. The Oxford and Cambridge Greek plays both excluded women from performing until well into the twentieth century (with the notable exception of Janet Case, who played Athena in the 1885 Cambridge *Eumenides*; see Fig. 8.1), and the Oxford *Frogs* avoided the problem entirely by cutting the only scene involving women.[120] Reviews of the performance commend the decision to excise any problematic dialogue. Even if the production did include contemporary allusions, they were not substantive or in any way political. And crucially, the play was still performed in ancient Greek, a language sufficiently understood by few audience-members. Although Wrigley is correct to acknowledge the difference in approach between

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117 Ibid. 142.

118 'At *The Frogs*' (2 March 1892) *Oxford Magazine*: 217. As burlesque was no longer popular by 1892, the connection to comic opera may at any rate be more apt.

119 'The Greek Play at Oxford' (25 February 1892) *Standard*: 3.

120 '"The Frogs" of Aristophanes at Oxford' (25 February 1892) *Daily News*: 6.

Oxford's *Frogs* and the 1883 Cambridge *Birds*, the difference was not so great as all that. A play performed in ancient Greek and not in English inherently owed more to the independent school tradition of recitation than to burlesque.

When the Oxford University Dramatic Society staged *Knights* in 1897, they were even bolder, and according to *The Standard* avoided 'any attempt at a realistic representation of the staging of a Greek play of the fifth century B.C.'[121] The production's modernisation was shown:

> By the grouping of the chorus, which behaved less in the manner of the votaries of Dionysus than of the members of a comic opera company, while the acting was nearer to that of the modern farce than to the possibly excessive buffooneries of the Lenaean festival.[122]

Rev. F.W. Bussell composed for the *Knights* a score 'of a modern character, pointed by reminiscences of topical songs, and even of the National Anthem, in order to emphasise the topics bits in the old Attic play.'[123] The entry of the chorus – on hobby horses – was 'grotesque and undignified, though comic… A "rough and tumble" scene, in which Cleon is severely beaten with bladders, followed'.[124] *The Standard* critic's antipathy towards what he saw as a burlesqued performance is obvious. *The Era* provides a more balanced appraisal reflecting on the beautiful scenery – 'the set in the last act depicting the Pnyx being a most effective and chaste bit of work, the

[121] 'Aristophanes at Oxford' (25 February 1897) *Standard*: 5.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid.

bema being capitally erected'[125] – and the costumes, which were 'very simple but correct.'[126] This suggests that, for all the burlesque stage action, archaeological accuracy was still a concern. Nevertheless, the *Era* reviewer describes the original play as 'a very violent political burlesque',[127] a telling description. *Knights* is an intensely political play – far more so than *Frogs* – and for once a university production of Aristophanes seems to have engaged with politics. The inclusion of the National Anthem in the score indicates contemporisation. Unfortunately, our limited data set reveals little about the extent and nature of the politicisation.

The 1905 Oxford production of *Clouds* saw a return to archaeologising, perhaps necessitated by the university's increased interest. The play-text was, remarkably, edited by the Vice Chancellor, and the music once more composed by the now knighted Sir Hubert Parry. *Clouds* made use of an entirely new English translation by Oxford classicists Alfred Denis Godley and Cyril Bailey for its accompanying crib; previous Oxford and Cambridge plays had amended and reprinted existing translations. The opening lines demonstrate how stilted and artificial it was:

> Oh Zeus in heaven! These awful endless nights!
>
> Is there no hope? Will daylight never come?
>
> It's ages since I heard the first cock crow,

[125] 'Greek Play at Oxford' (27 February 1897) *Era*: 13.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Ibid.

And still the slaves are snoring in their beds.[128]

As usual, there was more emphasis on the aesthetics of Hellenism than on humour, as picked up by the reviews. The *Morning Post* noted that the costumes 'were archaeologically correct and in admirable taste';[129] the *Globe* emphasised the scenic accomplishments, describing:

> A fine panoramic view of Athens – a really splendid piece of painting – with the Acropolis clearly outlined against the bluest of blue skies. The clever scenic effects by which the clouds appear and fade away, and by which a gorgeous tableau is at length revealed, called forth loud and continuous expressions of approval from the audience.[130]

In contrast to the boisterous entrance of the chorus in *Knights*, *Clouds*' chorus entrance was 'beautifully managed, the flickering lights playing on the misty background till gradually the Clouds take shape and stand revealed true goddesses.'[131] This was a modern theatrical effect but the result is aesthetic, not comical. The *Times Literary Supplement* imagined Aristophanes' reaction, had he been in the audience; they concluded that, despite modern interpolations, 'he would recognise himself' and 'a good deal would be hailed by the poet as, in the strictest sense, congenial.'[132] The reviewer defends modern alterations as still being appropriately archaeological:

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[128] Godley and Bailey 1905: ll.1-7.

[129] '"The Clouds" of Aristophanes' (2 March 1905) *Morning Post*: 5.

[130] '"The Clouds" of Aristophanes' (2 March 1905) *Globe*: 8.

[131] '"The Clouds" of Aristophanes' (4 March 1905) Oxford Times: 12.

[132] 'Aristophanes Redivivus' (3 March 1905) *TLS*: 6.

> It may seem a paradox to the straighter sect of archaeologists, but in point of fact the modern music is, or may be, the most Aristophanic part of a modern revival of Aristophanes. Aristophanes was, as was said above, always quoting… There will always be some carping criticism of these pseudo-classical performances. Let us admit the hard work "pseudo-classical" at once, if it gives any one any satisfaction.[133]

This view may seem contradictory, but it is the paradox that lies at the heart of archaeologised performances, which only pursue archaeological accuracy as far as is dramatically feasible. Oxford's *Clouds* and its archaeologised performance complicates the narrative that Oxford always produced burlesqued Aristophanes whilst Cambridge archaeologised.

The production's Strepsiades, C.W. Mercer, later became an author;[134] out of those credited as students and slaves, one cast member became principal of Brasenose and two found positions in colonial administration.[135] We are again reminded that the men dressing up in tunics to perform Old Comedy at Oxbridge would subsequently run the Empire.

In 1909, Oxford revived *Frogs*, with Hubert Parry's original music. The 1892 Hookham Frere libretto was put on sale alongside the translation of Gilbert Murray, now a committee member.[136] It is, unfortunately, the least-well documented of the plays falling under our scope, but two reviews imply that O.U.D.S returned to their

[133] Ibid.

[134] Derry 2008.

[135] Hanbury 2010; Gould 2007; Grenfell 2006.

[136] Goad 2018: 190. For Murray's Aristophanes, see Ch.9.

burlesquing tradition. The *Guardian* describes how ‘at one moment it recalls Mr. Syme’s humorous drawings of infernal life, at another Don Juan in Hades or Mr. Shaw on Shakespeare’[137] – frustratingly without telling us *how* these contemporary allusions were drawn. Both the *Guardian* and the *Times* imply that Euripides’ performance parodied the dramatist George Bernard Shaw, though ‘having resisted an obvious temptation to make up as’ him.[138] Aeschylus performed on stilts; the *Times* meanwhile criticised Dionysus for ‘trying to express comedy by the occasional adoption of a slight cockney accent’.[139] Overall, the production was successful and comical. In the archaeologised Cambridge productions, the humour of a piece barely enters into the reviewers’ consideration, but for the Oxford Aristophanes plays it is the measure on which success or failure is chiefly pinned.

Leeds University also staged Aristophanes on two occasions before the First World War; *Clouds* in 1906 and *Frogs* in 1911. As a northern, non-denominational institution with a largely middle-class studentship, Leeds offers us a different perspective on the reception and performance of Greek Old Comedy. The university also displayed a different approach to staging Old Comedy, in that it produced the plays in English translation. Unlike Fleeming Jenkin’s private performances of Greek drama, these productions were staged by university students in the Literary and Historical Society for a wide audience; the choice to perform in English, then, is significant. Leeds followed Oxford and Cambridge’s tradition of casting only men.

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[137] ‘The “Frogs” of Aristophanes at Oxford’ (18 February 1909) *Manchester Guardian*: 10. ‘Mr. Syme’ is presumably a misspelled reference to the artist Sidney Sime.

[138] Ibid.; ‘The “Frogs” at Oxford’ (18 February 1909) *Times*: 15. For Shaw’s Aristophanes, see Ch.9. The Stephen Sondheim musical adaptation of *Frogs* replaces Euripides with Shaw.

[139] ‘The “Frogs” at Oxford’ (18 February 1909) *Times*: 15.

The 1906 *Clouds*, coming a year after Oxford's production of that same play, was evidently chosen for practical reasons. It used Hubert Parry's recent composition, and 'all the costumes and the best of the scenery used at Oxford [were] secured' by Leeds as well.[140] Godley and Bailey's translation was used as the play-text, despite its stiltedness. The *Yorkshire Post* in fact (ungenerously, one assumes) ascribed the entire production to Oxford.[141] The performance was apparently 'brought very much up to date in some respects',[142] but the reviews imply a broadly archaeologising performance similar to the Oxford production. The *Yorkshire Post* was content with the use of English, noting that 'for stage purposes in England English is the best'.[143] However, it criticised Socrates' make up:

> It is not, indeed, a quite accurate portrait of Socrates as he is generally imagined, nor yet precisely a comic rendering of those features so apparently inappropriate to the deep thinker and keen dialectician. The snub nose, for example, was not so noticeable as, according to popular report, it was in life.[144]

This is reminiscent of the criticism levelled against the 1903 Cambridge *Birds* for perceived archaeological inaccuracy.

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[140] 'The "Clouds" of Aristophanes' (12 October 1906) *Leeds Mercury*: 4. Perhaps William Rhys Roberts, Leeds Professor of Greek and a very influential classicist, was responsible for this loan.

[141] 'The "Clouds" in Leeds' (30 November 1906) *Yorkshire Post*: 6.

[142] '"The Clouds" in Leeds' (30 November 1906) *Leeds Mercury*: 6.

[143] 'The "Clouds" in Leeds' (30 November 1906) *Yorkshire Post*: 6.

[144] Ibid.

Leeds' 1911 *Frogs* again followed Oxford's 1909 production in using Parry's music and Murray's translation.[145] The *Yorkshire Post* indicates that the set and costumes were also procured from O.U.D.S again.[146] The play was presented as a double bill alongside Theocritus' Fifteenth Idyll, which, for all its theatricality and broad Aristophanic humour, is not a play. Nor does it naturally pair with *Frogs*. Nevertheless, this performance did see two women (still apparently barred from Aristophanes) take the stage and carry the piece.[147] A production of this Idyll had earlier been produced at Bedford College, London in 1897.[148] The Aristophanes performance 'satisfied both the scholar and the onlooker who, not being a specialist, has only the knowledge of the general reader.'[149] No attempt was made, however, to modernise the dramatic contest, which must remain esoteric to anyone not intimate with Greek tragedy; the *Times* noted that 'the Leeds performers have taken some care, and rightly, that the setting shall be as antique as possible'.[150] The entrance of the chorus of initiates, far from the drunken revelry suggested by the text, was conducted 'in the dark of [a] torch-procession' (perhaps similar to the 1905 Oxford *Clouds eisodos*), creating 'an effect of unexpected and romantic beauty'.[151] The *Times* review is also critical of the use of English.

[145] 'Comedy at the University' (20 October 1911) *Leeds Mercury*: 3.

[146] 'A Night with Aristophanes' (1 December 1911) *Yorkshire Post*: 6.

[147] '"The Frogs"' (1 December 1911) *Leeds Mercury*: 5.

[148] 'Performance of the Fifteenth Idyll of Theocritus' (June 1897) *Bedford College Magazine*: 21-27.

[149] 'Comedy 2,300 Years Old' (1 December 1911) *Yorkshire Evening Post*: 6.

[150] 'The "Frogs" At Leeds University' (1 December 1911) *Times*: 11.

[151] Ibid.

These two Leeds productions demonstrate the influence of Oxford and Cambridge's classical performances. In aspects of the production, both Aristophanes plays borrowed heavily from Oxford, down to the choice of play. In style, however, Leeds followed Cambridge. Despite choosing to perform in English, Leeds' Aristophanes was archaeologised, and no attempt was made to contemporise the comedies' themes.

University College Cardiff apparently produced *Acharnians* in December 1911, although the only evidence of this I can find is the libretto, translated by classicist Gilbert Norwood 'for the use of those who will witness [the] performance of the play'.[152] Norwood's verse translation is sluggish and heavy, as a few lines from the *parabasis* will show:

> Come, doff your cloaks; the audience next must hear our just petition.
>
> Though long ago as comic bard our poet was indentured,
>
> To come before the house and brag he never yet has ventured.[153]

Greek is printed on the facing page, so it is likely that the performance was in the original language. It would be wrong to draw any further conclusions about the production from such limited evidence. Indeed, given the newspapers' silence, it is possible that Cardiff's production never actually saw the stage.

I have demonstrated here that two strong, independent traditions of performing Aristophanes developed at British schools and universities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One tradition saw Aristophanes as

[152] Norwood 1911: iii.

[153] Ibid. 35.

burlesque, and performed it as such; this tradition was most prevalent at Oxford, where the Oxford University Dramatic Society became known for their burlesquing performances of Old Comedy. The larger tradition, by contrast, consciously eschewed burlesquing elements for a tone more appropriate to pedagogical performances, and combined modern stagecraft with as much pseudo-archaeological detail as possible. Most school recital performances, focussing on the pronunciation of Greek, were archaeologising; Cambridge University also archaeologised Aristophanes, and even the English-language performances of Leeds followed this practice. One feature of Aristophanes performed in academic contexts is consistent, however. Neither Oxford's burlesquing performances nor Cambridge and Leeds' archaeologising ones were in any way political. Cambridge and Leeds eschewed the politics of Old Comedy precisely by treating their performances as detached, historical studies in material culture, so that the only politics relevant were those of fifth-century Athens; Oxford, whilst embracing the comic potential of the plays and even introducing contemporary allusions, avoided anything too weighty or contentious which might affect the productions' light tone. With the notable exception of King's College School's 1874 *Birds*, which updated their recitation to refer to contemporary politics, school recitations and performances similarly avoided current affairs whether archaeologising or burlesquing. This contrasts with Planché's 1846 *Birds*, and even the academic tradition exemplified by Hookham Frere and Mitchell; these receptions all drew connections between Aristophanes and contemporary politics.

The avoidance of politics reflects a shift in British academic perceptions of Aristophanes; as we saw in the last chapter, accounts of Aristophanes during this time period focus more on the (relative) aesthetics of his lyricism. But the avoidance is a paradoxically political act in itself. The overwhelming majority of the boys and men performing in these Aristophanes productions came from great privilege, and

many would go on to significant careers in academia, the arts and politics. They were the products of the institutionalised status quo. And thus so too was their Aristophanes. Deprived of its political force as well as any humorous, sexual transgressiveness, it did not even champion the politics of the elite but voiced no opinion on the contemporary world at all. Thus, the dangerous power of Old Comedy was rendered safe. The politics of this *fin-de-siècle* Aristophanes was not to challenge politics at all.

None of this is to say that political interpretations of Aristophanes did not persist. In fact, several productions overseen by women – almost absent from this chapter – embraced Aristophanes to protest against their disenfranchisement. This important but neglected narrative will be discussed in the next chapter. And the final pre-War production of Aristophanes performed by O.U.D.S, *Acharnians* in 1914, embraced politics at a time of intense political volatility to rally for peace. It was overseen by the renowned classicist and internationalist Gilbert Murray. Discussion of this performance must wait until Chapter 9. For all that Dulwich College, Oxford and Cambridge dominated the production of Old Comedy around the *fin de siècle*, we must remember that less elite institutions such as Leeds, as well as women's colleges at both Oxford and Cambridge, also produced Aristophanes plays, in English. Classics and classical reception often focusses on the privileged, for many complicated structural reasons, as this PhD has heretofore tended to do. In the next chapter, we will finally hear from those less institutionally enfranchised, as we consider Victorian women's Aristophanes.

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Women's Aristophanes: Old Comedy and the Fight for Gender Equality

The vast majority of this thesis has so far focussed on the receptions of privileged men, many of whom were able to graduate from university with a long-trained knowledge of ancient languages. Women have been left to the margins, represented only by dragged-up comic women actors or naïve Tennysonian heroines. But the story of the long-nineteenth-century reception of classics is just as much the story of women – heroic thinkers, scholars and writers such as George Eliot, Sara Coleridge, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Virginia Woolf, H.D., Jane Harrison and Anna Swanwick amongst many others.[1]

In this chapter, I address three powerful receptions of Aristophanes created and performed by women, sometimes with the support of sympathetic men. In 1904 at Girton College, Cambridge, women students produced *Bees*, an adaptation of Aristophanes' *Birds*, to agitate for the right to graduate with degrees; in 1910, the activist-actor Gertrude Kingston commissioned Laurence Housman to translate

[1] Several lesser-known stories are told in Wyles and Hall 2016. In her essay *On Not Knowing Greek* (1925), Woolf highlights an issue with reading comedy in translation; 'humour is the first of the gifts to perish in a foreign tongue' (Woolf 1948: 57). But 'Aristophanes may supply us with an exception' to this rule (ibid. 56). Aristophanes' laughter certainly echoes across the centuries in women's adaptations of his plays.

Lysistrata, which she then produced and starred in – this was the first ever performance of *Lysistrata* on the British stage; two years earlier, *Lysistrata* probably also influenced the plot of *How the Vote was Won*, another suffrage play written by Cicely Hamilton and Christopher St. John. I hope it will quickly become apparent that I do not isolate women and relegate them to a solitary chapter of my thesis arbitrarily. Rather, I believe these three Aristophanic plays, all produced within 6 years of one another, show a shared approach to receiving Aristophanes as a vehicle of protest. These receptions are fundamentally different to the Aristophanes of Leeds Girls' Grammar School, who produced an archaeologising, apolitical production of *Birds* in 1906 discussed in the previous chapter; indeed, they mark a significant divergence from the aesthetic receptions of Aristophanes which had predominated since Symonds' *Studies of the Greek Poets* in 1873. Unlike many late-nineteenth-century receptions of Aristophanes, these three readings locate the politics of Old Comedy, embrace it, and reshape it into a powerful weapon.

***Bees* (1904)**

The Victorian male elite routinely used classics and a classical education to set themselves apart from those lower in status, and knowledge of ancient Greek was carefully guarded. The 'gendering of Hellenism and classical scholarship as unequivocally 'masculine' discourses' barred many even privileged women from an education including ancient Greek.[2] With the notable exception of Janet Case, who played Athena in the 1885 production of *Eumenides* at Cambridge, women were not allowed to appear in the Oxford or Cambridge Greek plays until well into the twentieth

[2] Olverson 2010: 12.

century. Nevertheless, reviews of the Greek plays comment on the number of engaged young women filling the audience.[3] *The Girton Review* indicates special lectures were put on at the women's college before trips to the Cambridge Greek play.[4] The famous Girtonian Agnata Ramsay, who came top of her year in the classical tripos in 1887, met Montagu Butler, the Master of Trinity and her future husband, at the play.[5] And the suffragist leader Millicent Fawcett may well have attended the 1883 Cambridge production of *The Birds* alongside her husband Henry, the Postmaster General, whose attendance was well documented.[6] Oxbridge ladies obviously held a strong interest in ancient Greek drama then, in the original language as well as in English.

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[3] In its review of the 1883 Cambridge *Birds*, for example, *The Graphic* noted that 'there were a number of evidently appreciative ladies [in the audience]. Girton, of course, is equal to anything in Greek.' ('Aristophanes' "Birds" at Cambridge' (8 December 1883) 567).

[4] 'College Notes' (October Term 1903) *Girton Review*: 4; 'The Greek Play' (Michaelmas Term 1906) *Girton Review*: 2.

[5] Stray 2013: 260.

[6] 'Aristophanes at Cambridge' (28 November 1883) *Times*: 6. Millicent Fawcett often acted as her blind husband's assistant.

Fig. 8.1: Janet Case as Athena, 1885 Cambridge Eumenides

Women's colleges, founded throughout the Victorian period from 1849 when Bedford College became the first higher education institute for women in Britain, offered a limited opportunity for classical self-enfranchisement. Although not all women students studied ancient languages, and those that did often struggled to catch up with men whose schooling had focussed overwhelmingly on Latin and Greek grammar, a classical education was nonetheless held up as the ideal. These educational institutions also offered an environment for producing women-led performances of Greek drama. Girton College, Cambridge produced Sophocles'

Electra as early as 1883, with Janet Case playing the title role. Perhaps in challenge to the Cambridge Greek Play, it was staged in ancient Greek. The music was adapted from Mendelssohn's *Antigone*.[7] Whilst largely archaeologising, the performance was nonetheless radical by its existence. It was a declaration by Girton women of an equal right to classical drama and the language of ancient Greek as that enjoyed by Cambridge men. 'The chorus included Margaret Llewelyn Davis, who later joined the Women's Cooperative Guild and the National Union of Suffrage Societies, and Janet Case also became a strong supporter of women's rights.'[8] One spectator from the other women's college, Newnham, wrote in her diary of the powerful effect Case's performance had on her:

> Electra was very tall & slight & dark with a small head, & an expressive mobile face – she wore a long black robe & over it another flowing garment of white edged with black – her long slender arms looking very white indeed among all this ombre array. I have never heard anything more beautiful than the Greek as uttered by her – it gushed forth – not gabbled for every word was distinct – or drawled for there was no hesitation – but it just seemed the natural vehicle for her… Mr Jackson, a classical lecturer of great authority, pronounced that there was no actor in the [1883 Cambridge] 'Birds' [as good as] Electra.[9]

An even earlier performance of *Electra*, planned for performance at Newnham in 1877, was cancelled 'at the last minute, through the intervention of the college Principal; she objected to the bare flesh that was to be on view, not to mention the

[7] Prins 2017: 126.

[8] Ibid. 137.

[9] Eva Knatchbull Hugesson [Diary] Girton College Archive GCRF 4/2/1.

dubious morality of young ladies playing male parts.'[10] As it was, the 1883 *Electra* paved the way for many other women-led productions of Greek drama,[11] and Janet Case became an inspirational figure. She would later teach Virginia Woolf her Greek.[12] Similarly, a young Jane Harrison played the role of Persephone in the entertainment *The Tale of Troy* (1883), produced in support of the Ladies' Department of KCL.[13] Whilst a visiting lecturer at Oxford, Harrison played Alcestis there in 1887 (to mixed reviews).[14] *Alcestis* was also performed at Queen's College in 1886.[15]

Bedford College had a longer legacy of staging Greek tragedy in the original language. Their first production was of *Iphigenia in Tauris* in Greek in 1887.[16] Even the crib was produced by a woman; although no translation was offered, 'a scholarly condensation and explanation of the play in English was distributed in the hall, drawn up by Lady Lingen'.[17] The aesthetic artist Lawrence Alma-Tadema also lent the production support, presumably in set or costume design.[18] In 1890, it was enquired 'whether the Committee might rely on Miss Case for help' to stage another play.[19] She declined, and the next performance we have definitive evidence of is an 1897

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[10] Beard 2002: 47.

[11] Hall 1999: 291-297.

[12] Ibid. 296.

[13] Hurst 2006: 93.

[14] Hall and Macintosh 2005: 458.

[15] Ibid. 457.

[16] Hall 2013: 233f.

[17] 'The Stage' (18 June 1887) *Academy*: 439.

[18] 'The Greek Play' (June 1887) *Bedford College Magazine*: 15.

[19] 'Greek Play Committee Minute Book', RHUL Archives No. BC/GB 200/1.

production of the Fifteenth Idyll of Theocritus, which pre-empted Leeds' Theocritus by fourteen years. In 1902, it was *Antigone* with Mendelssohn's music; in 1907, a mixed-gender performance of *Medea* with University College used Gilbert Murray's translation alongside the Greek as crib.[20] Sophocles' *Electra* was performed in 1909 'in celebration of the sixtieth year of the College'.[21] This one-off performance was staged in the Aldwych Theatre, a full-scale West End theatre. A mixed-gender *Alcestis* was performed in 1910, in English. The last production before the War was *Trachiniae* in 1911, in Greek but again with a mixed cast and again at a West End theatre, this time the Royal Court.[22] The performance was reviewed by Emily Wilding Davison for the Suffragette newspaper *Votes for Women*; inspired by the sublime suffering of tragic women, she wrote that 'the play left us with the feeling that the hopes of the present are higher than the fatalism of [the] past.'[23] Bedford College's long and storied metropolitan history of teaching classics and performing Greek drama has been almost forgotten in favour of the Greek performances of Oxford and Cambridge (with their casts of men).

[20] Hall and Macintosh 2005: 514. 'It may well have been the success of the Bedford experiment' with *Medea* that led the play to be staged in Murray's translation at the Savoy (ibid.); see below, and Ch.9.

[21] 'Sophocles' "Electra"' [Programme]. RHUL Archive No. PP7/8/3/3.

[22] 'The "Trachiniae"' (December 1911) *Bedford College Magazine*: 22.

[23] Davison 1911: 675.

Fig. 8.2: A. Raleigh as Athene in Iphigenia in Tauris*, Bedford College (1887).*

Fig. 8.3: Medea*, Bedford College and University College (1907).*

The plays chosen for performance by Bedford College reveal a concern for strong roles for women. The 1902 *Antigone* replaced the tragedy's original chorus of old men with a chorus of women.[24] This may explain why Bedford College did not stage Aristophanes during the long-nineteenth century. Apart from the three 'women plays', extant Old Comedy does not abound in women characters, and *Thesmophoriazusae*, *Ecclesiazusae* and *Lysistrata* were all perceived as immodest.[25]

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[24] 'The Greek Play' (March 1903) *Bedford College Magazine*: 24.

[25] The reaction to Gertrude Kingston's *Lysistrata* demonstrates this readily enough, see below. The point is legitimate. According to Wit-Tak, there are 95 sexual obscenities and 6 scatological obscenities in *Lysistrata*; 42 and 9 respectively in *Thesmophoriazusae*; and 34 and 28 respectively in *Ecclesiazusae*

There may have been a broader reticence to perform *any* Old Comedy at a women's university because of this crudity. Nevertheless, the college newspaper shows that Aristophanes was on the Bedford syllabus, and his plays were twice read by the Greek Reading Society.[26] The Classical Club (a separate society) attended the Oxford *Clouds* in 1905.[27]

Yet in February 1904, four months after Cambridge University had revived their 1883 *Birds*, a production of Aristophanes *was* performed at a women's college. The second-year students of Girton presented *The Bees, with Humblest Apologies to the Shade of Aristophanes*. This was a new adaptation, co-authored by six second-year students and printed for private circulation.[28] It was written in verse, with an irregular rhyming pattern and songs. It is therefore generically reminiscent of burlesque, although by the early twentieth century this was a dead genre. As with Planché's adaptation of *Birds* half a century earlier, the play stuck close to the original source-text, cutting out a few scenes but largely maintaining the plot, until the conclusion. And as with Planché's *Birds*, the *Bees* had a blatant political message. As the college newspaper noted, the previous term's performance of *Birds* was 'fresh

(1968: 365). But vitally, Edwardian women were given even less license for obscenity than men, so criticism of the women plays' indecency is also *gendered* criticism.

[26] 'Societies and Clubs' (March 1905) *Bedford College Magazine*: 5.

[27] 'Societies and Clubs' (June 1905) *Bedford College Magazine*: 9.

[28] 'The play itself was a joint production, A.V. Rickards and E. Buckley being the authors of the main part, while M.V. Dunlop and M. Newman made certain contributions, and E.H. Oliphant wrote the prologue… B. Smythe… adapted the Greek choruses, and [wrote] the Queen-Bee's song' ('College Notes' (Lent Term 1904) *Girton Review*: 4).

in the minds of the audience, and so enabled them to appreciate the better the cleverness of the skit.'[29]

After a brief prologue parodying Mark Antony's funeral speech from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, *Bees* begins like *Birds* with the entrance of two travellers, transformed from Peitheteirus and Euelpides into their feminine forms, Peitheteira and Euelpide.[30] Instead of a jackdaw and a crow the ladies hold a butterfly and an owl – the symbol of Athene-Minerva and therefore of womanly intellect. Peitheteira explains why they are travelling, thus revealing the motivation for the play:

> Know gentles, ye that come to hear our plot,
>
> We're stricken with a certain malady,
>
> Quite different from the one which Aberystwyth's got,
>
> Who grants degrees alike to men and girls;
>
> Whilst we, denied the use of cap and gown,
>
> Non-graduate mid the graduate throng,
>
> Revolting 'neath the stern injustice of our lot,
>
> Have fled as fast as both our feet could waft us,

[29] Ibid. 2.

[30] There are several ways to correct and transliterate the name of Aristophanes' protagonist, which is principally rendered in MMS as Πεισθέταιρος, 'a linguistically impossible form' (Dunbar 1998: *Dramatis Personae* 2n.); see Hall 2019. Peitheteirus, with its feminine form therefore being Peitheteira, is not a possible correction. I nevertheless follow the spelling used by *Bees* in this chapter.

And left the mud of Cambridge streets behind us.[31]

Although Girton women paid fees and could sit exams from 1881, Cambridge did not grant women degrees equal to men until 1948.[32] In May 1897, a vote by the Cambridge University Senate which would have permitted women to graduate was defeated by almost three to one; gloating undergraduates 'marched to Newnham College loudly cheering'.[33] This is in contrast to other institutions. Mary Louisa Carter was the first woman to graduate from Aberystwyth in 1888;[34] the University of London allowed women to graduate alongside men from 1882, leading *Punch* to joke that 'they realise/Our TENNYSON'S old fancies'.[35] The sense of injustice felt at being 'denied the use of cap and gown', at being 'non-graduate mid the graduate throng', is apparent throughout *Bees*. Later, Peitheteira complains that Cambridge women 'have been trodden down/Beneath the heel of man's superiority'.[36] As will become increasingly apparent, this is not delicate, respectable ladies' classics; this is activist women using Aristophanes to argue loudly against an unfair system.

Euelpide and Peitheteira explain how they have left Cambridge 'to reach the Queen Bee's Court',[37] to ask whether there are any colleges where they can

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[31] Rickards et al. 1904: 6.

[32] Mayer 2016: 244.

[33] 'Women Degrees at Cambridge' (22 May 1897) *Daily News*: 7.

[34] *Senate House Library* 2018. Students from Aberystwyth and other universities graduated via the University of London.

[35] '"Girl Graduates"' (3 June 1882) *Punch*: 257. For Tennyson, see Ch.5 and below.

[36] Rickards et al. 1904: 7.

[37] Ibid. 6.

graduate.[38] In *Birds*, the protagonists sought the king of the birds to find a city without jurors. The exchange of Tereus for a Queen Bee was presumably made to emphasise the new monarch's gender; as a bee ruler, it is only natural that she should be a woman. Euelpide explains to her that 'we knew that in the Queen Bee's hive/Our sex alone did reign predominant'.[39] According to Semonides, women made from bees are also the only virtuous women; he describes them as 'the best and wisest by far' (fr.7.93).

The Queen Bee promises to support their cause and sings her summons to the chorus of bees. Her lyrics, whilst broadly replicating the shape of Tereus' song, are entirely new and fitted to a bee chorus. They are also quite attractive:

> Come all ye too
>
> Who in gardens do
>
> A harmless pillage on the flower bed,
>
> And unforbidden drink
>
> Nectar from the scented pink,
>
> And gather honey from the lilies and the roses red.[40]

[38] They have already seemingly forgotten Aberystwyth, which they just mentioned.

[39] Ibid. 7.

[40] Ibid. 10.

This was sung offstage by a separate performer, E.H. Sandford,[41] who 'admirably rendered' the solo.[42]

With the arrival of the bee chorus, and after preventing them from attacking the humans, the Queen Bee rather than Peitheteira explains the plan to build a new college. This agency makes her a more effective leader than Aristophanes' Tereus, who is easily manipulated by his visitors. The building of a new and idyllic women's college was also the plot of Tennyson's comic *Princess* and the two plays Gilbert adapted from it, discussed in Chapter 5; since Tennyson's original satire foreshadowed the founding of Girton, a Tennysonian or Gilbertian influence may be at work in *Bees*. The Queen Bee's explanation of the plan and the chorus' approval is reduced to a single speech and response, thus cutting out about 350 lines of source-text including the first *parabasis* and the character of the nightingale. Representing a woman academic, the Queen Bee does not need a spouse but acts as her own nightingale, embodying the stereotype of the unmarried Victorian woman scholar.[43] The second act recommences with the emergence of the now-winged Peitheteira and Euelpide, equivalent to l.801 in the source-text. The college is already built, so that the second act takes place on the '*site of the new College*';[44] by eliding the building of the university, *Bees* also cuts *Birds* ll.1118-1169, which describes the construction process. Euelpide is never sent off to the building site, allowing her to remain on-stage alongside Peitheteira for the rest of the play, another divergence from *Birds*.

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[41] Ibid. 3.

[42] 'College Notes' (Lent Term 1904) *Girton Review*: 4.

[43] Gloyn 2016: 172. As she points out, this stereotype was not always accurate.

[44] Rickards et al. 1904: 13.

As their new college needs a name, Peitheteira first suggests Queen's in honour of the Queen Bee, but this is rejected because colleges with that name have 'been done before, at Oxford, Cambridge,/London'.[45] Euelpide's proposal is Beebuzzborough College;[46] the absurdity of this name mirrors Aristophanes' *Nephelokokkygia* whilst also possibly recalling Aristophanes' interest in animal noises, such as his famous chorus of *brekekekek koax* (*Frogs* 209ff.). In *Birds*, the men next discuss who will be the city's patron deity. Euelpides suggests Athene, Athens' patron, but Peitheteirus takes exception at the thought of a woman protector:

> And how could a city be well-ordered when a god who's a woman stands there in full armour?
>
> (*Birds* 829-831)

A bird patron is chosen instead. *Bees* knowingly rejects this misogynistic argument and restores Athene to her proper place:

> A wisely ordered state 't will surely be
>
> Where stands in highest shrine a deity
>
> Female of sex…[47]

Euelpide explicitly picks up on the Greek word 'εὔτακτος' in arguing that Athene will lead to a 'wisely ordered' university; her use of 'state' also betrays a dialogue with the source-text, as this word would more accurately describe the country of Cloudcuckooland than the university of Beebuzzborough College. This careful

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[45] Ibid. 14.

[46] Ibid. 14.

[47] Rickards et al. 1904: 14.

reading of Aristophanes, acknowledging the original whilst firmly correcting its gender narrative, demonstrates *Bees*' close relationship to the source-text as well as the production's sustained approach to feminist activism. We have already seen how *Bees* invokes Athene as a symbol of women's learning from the start of the play; she was totemic for many women classicists and educational institutions.[48]

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[48] A plaque of Minerva hung in the assembly hall of Nottingham Girls' High School, founded in 1875 (Hall and Wyles 2016: 2). Blanche Athena Clough, 'known as Thena', was the niece of Anne Jemima Clough, the first Principal of Newnham (Gloyn 2016: 156), and later became Principal herself (Sutherland 2004). In Gilbert and Sullivan's Princess Ida (a parody to be sure), the eponymous heroine evokes Minerva's help in educating the women of her college:

> Minerva! Minerva! Oh, hear me!
> Oh, goddess wise
> That lovest light
> Endow with sight
> Their unillumined eyes…

(Gilbert 2016g: II.79-83). Athena was also heavily appropriated by Bedford College (Fig. 8.4).

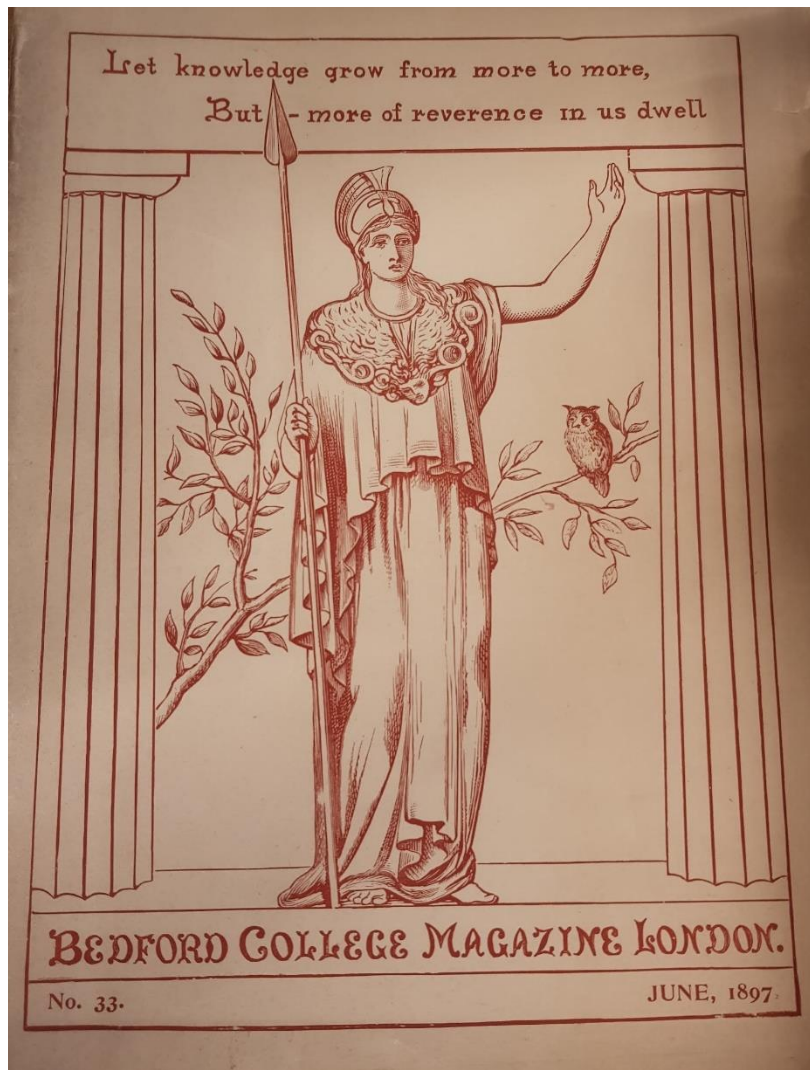

Fig. 8.4: Cover of the Bedford College Magazine *(June 1897) depicting Athene-Minerva and an owl.*

The second half of *Birds* sees a series of visitors come to Cloudcuckooland; in the first group, a priest, a poet, an oracle collector, Meton the astronomer, an inspector and a law-vendor. Most of these visitors are cut from *Bees* in favour of more localised characters; a chaperone arrives to offer her services, before being told by Peitheteira that 'No longer/we intend to bow our necks beneath the yoke/Of custom

due to man's proximity'.[49] A cabman from the local Cox's cab company appears and is dismissed. These visitors have no direct parallel in the Greek text but both were obviously important, if tedious, adjuncts to a respectable women's college two miles outside of the city centre. Aristophanes' priest meanwhile becomes the college's senior student, a localised modification but not a complete rewriting. Aristophanes' Homer-quoting poet is also retained. He now offers songs in honour of the college's Fire Brigade Club and hockey team, latterly 'in slow and stately fashion to the tune of the "Three Blind Mice" (*tempo adagio e largo*)'.[50] He is ultimately accepted into Beebuzzborough College and given 'pension and reward',[51] a much warmer response than Aristophanes' poet receives. The implication seems to be that a woman's college can value poetry more highly than a man's city.

Bees now skips over several scenes, cutting the second *parabasis* (*Birds* 1058-1117), the messenger's description of how Cloudcuckooland was built (1118-1169), the Iris scene (1170-1263) and the second group of visitors (1264-1493). These latter two scenes may have been cut for propriety as much as for brevity; the Iris scene is sexually violent, and the second group of visitors are all low-lives. The play jumps straight to the entrance of Prometheus, reimagined as a sympathetic undergraduate student from a men's college, hiding 'beneath a wide-spreading Japanese umbrella'.[52] Prometheus symbolises the advancement of humanity, so it is entirely fitting that he is a feminist. The role was of course performed by a woman. *Prometheus Bound* was repeatedly translated by nineteenth-century women;

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[49] Rickards et al. 1904: 18.

[50] 'College Notes' (Lent Term 1904) *Girton Review*: 3.

[51] Rickards et al. 1904: 17.

[52] 'College Notes' (Lent Term 1904) *Girton Review*: 4.

Hardwick remarks that *PB* 'shaped their responses to the issues of obligation, community, freedom, tyranny and oppression of women, all of which were raised by the play.'[53] As we saw in Chapter 3, the revolutionary Percy Shelley also wrote a sequel, being similarly attracted to these themes.

As in *Birds*, Prometheus reports that Beebuzzborough's enemies have been starved by their new enterprise – instead of withholding sacrifices, the absent women students have starved Cambridge of their fees, 'which were wont to fill/The impoverished coffers of the 'Varsity.'[54] This underlines the play's central point, that it is unjust for women to pay tuition without the right to graduate. Left with only men students, the Cambridge lecturers have also been 'bowed/Beneath the weight of *dull* prosaic answers'.[55] This point challenges another misogynist stereotype, that women are less academically gifted than men; rather, the play asserts, they merely have a different style of academic writing with charms of its own. This is another gendered correction. Just as Prometheus advises Peitheteirus in *Birds* not to surrender to negotiation, so does he tell Peitheteira here not to 'conclude on any terms but these –/That full degrees are granted to you all.'[56]

In the final scene, *Bees* transforms the negotiation between the gods and Peitheteirus into a negotiation between Peitheteira and three university officials. Poseidon is replaced by Cambridge's Chancellor, Heracles by the Examiner and the Triballian by a barbarian graduate from the University of London. Putting aside the snobbishness of this last modification (funny no doubt to Cantabrigians, but not to a

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[53] Hardwick 1999: 3.

[54] Rickards et al. 1904: 20.

[55] Ibid. 20.

[56] Ibid. 20.

proud King's student!), setting a travesty of the University Chancellor and Examiner onstage in order to mock and undermine them is quite radical. It is unclear whether make-up and costume were used to suggest the current holders of those offices.[57]

Peitheteira's demands are by this point familiar, yet now her justification for women graduates does not depend only on an appeal to equality:

> We will not bandy terms. 'Tis yes or no,
>
> 'Tis all or nothing. Never will we yield.
>
> We wish degrees, and if you grant them us
>
> We will return to Cambridge as you wish.
>
> …
>
> Ourselves would be content to study on.
>
> Without the gown, or letters to our name;
>
> But we must think for your enlightenment
>
> That women's influence may at last pervade
>
> Your academic halls, and finally expel
>
> The narrowness that binds your University...[58]

Women are needed, she argues, to enlighten men – only by elevating women can academia escape 'narrowness'. It is a powerful, unapologetic, feminist argument entirely fitting the conclusion's triumphal tone.

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[57] In 1904 the eighth Duke of Devonshire was Chancellor; the identity of the Examiner eludes me.

[58] Rickards et al. 1904: 22.

As in *Birds*, Peitheteira uses the Examiner/Heracles' hunger and the Triballian's stupidity to win over the embassy and secure her terms. Some scholars have noted an uncomfortable tension in the *Birds* negotiation scene, as it appears that the tyrannical Peitheteirus, by roasting treasonous birds to tempt Heracles, is committing a form of cannibalism.[59] *Bees* happily replaces the sizzling birds with a harmless tea-tray.

With Peitheteira's terms readily accepted, *Bees* presents a different ending to *Birds*. There is obviously no Basileia for Peitheteira to marry. And instead of remaining in Beebuzzborough College as Peitheteirus remains in Cloudcuckooland, Peitheteira and Euelpide decide to return to Cambridge to complete their degrees:

Now we can return!

How I have longed to see the walls again[.]

Dear Girton! Every day and every hour

My thoughts have turned to thee. And now we've gained

The *one* thing lacking, no need to linger

Here.[60]

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[59] Arguing that Peitheteirus is a ruthless tyrant, Hall describes how 'the corpses of dissident birds, in the most sinister fashion, are roasted and eaten by their own species' (2019); Ambler is more ambivalent towards Pietheteirus' tyranny, but describes the cooking as 'outrageous' (2012: 185). Dunbar however considers the roasting 'a passing joke against the Athenians' and not indicative of Peitheteirus' nature (1998: 1583-5n.).

[60] Rickards et al. 1904: 23.

Thus, the play concludes with affection for the University and College. Ultimately, the protagonists will not abandon Girton; their anger is genuine, but so is their loyalty.

Bees carefully removes the bawdy humour of Aristophanes' text and replaces it with an earnest call for educational equality for women. In Aristophanes' play, Euelpides wants to find a city where a family friend and father of a handsome youth would chastise him because 'you didn't kiss him, didn't go up to him, didn't give him a hug, didn't cup his balls' (*Birds* 141f.); this erotic wishlist is transformed in *Bees* into Euelpide's desire for a friend to wake her up and bring her to lectures.[61] *Birds*' violently sexual confrontation between Peitheteirus and Iris is entirely cut from the adaptation.[62] As a result of careful adapting, *Bees* is not particularly funny, although there are moments of humour – the intended audience no doubt found the arrival of a chaperone and cabbie particularly amusing because of the localised satire. I do not say this to take anything away from *Bees*, however; the primary intention of the performance is to agitate for women graduates, not to amuse, and as a vehicle for the women's activist message it makes its argument effectively.

The cast-list in the printed script is confusing, because several characters appear on the list but not within the actual play; Heniochos, Iris, a Slave, and a Soothsayer. Likewise, some characters appear in the play but not on the cast-list; the chaperone, the cabman and a 'GYP.', who turns up only to hand Euelpide a note on p.19 without saying a word. The *Girton Review*'s account of the production clears up the confusion. *Heniochos* is the Greek word for charioteer, as well as the subject of a renowned classical Greek bronze, so this character became the cabman; the soothsayer, one of Aristophanes' original visitors, is now the chaperone, 'to give her

[61] Ibid. 8.

[62] Iris does appear in the cast list; see below.

the name by which [Girtonians] know her best'.[63] Gyp is Cambridge slang for a college servant,[64] so fittingly takes the part of Iris, left with only a non-speaking cameo after her scene is cut. A slave may well have appeared in the background of the performance without being noted in the script.

Besides the cuts, *Bees* is a close adaptation of *Birds*. It is also strikingly political, repeating throughout the call for women to be allowed to graduate from Cambridge with full degrees. This message is all the more powerful because of the close intertext between adaptation and classical source, which in many places allows the authors to offer a gendered correction or realignment of the Aristophanes; Euelpide and Peitheteira instead of their masculine forms, Athene as the patron god, Beebuzzborough College instead of Cloudcuckooland, and so on. Through small changes set within the context of an otherwise close adaptation, the authors make these changes more noticeable, and thereby make the feminist discourse lying behind them more noticeable too. This explains why it was so important that *Bees* was produced only four months after the revived Cambridge production of *Birds*; many of the Girton performance's audience will have seen the men-only production, and thus could contrast the two performances side-by-side. Whilst Cambridge men's Aristophanes was consciously apolitical and archaeologising, the Girton women who staged the *Bees* were offering something far more powerful, exciting and feminist – an activist Aristophanes championing the rights of women.

A similar parody, entitled *Newmenides, with all due apologies to Aeschylus*, was performed at Girton three years later, on 7 February 1907. *Eumenides* had been performed the previous term as the Cambridge Greek play; it 'was largely attended

[63] 'College Notes' (Lent Term 1904) *Girton Review*: 3.

[64] *OED* s.v. 'gyp' 1a.

from Girton and caused much enthusiasm'.[65] Like *Bees*, the *Newmenides* had a feminist message – Orestes, having wasted his time at university playing games, seeks the help of a learned Girtonian she-god and superior scholar Mathema (taking the place of Athena) to pass the mathematical tripos.[66] This is not the same *Newmenides* as was performed at the Cambridge Amateur Dramatic Club on 7 December 1906,[67] which was decidedly less feminist, instead parodying the suffrage movement.[68]

Girton women were not united in their support for the franchise; whilst a Suffrage Club was founded in 1907,[69] an Anti-Suffrage Club was established the following year.[70] At a Debating Club event discussing a pro-suffrage motion in 1903, 'when the votes were taken, thirty-five were in favour of the motion and seventeen against it'.[71] It is to women's suffrage that we now turn.

Lysistrata (1910)

In his *Fun, Ancient and Modern*, discussed in the previous chapter, Charles Maurice Davies introduces *Ecclesiazusae* with an astonishing comparison:

65 'The Greek Play' (Michaelmas Term 1906) *Girton Review*: 2.

66 Scott et al. 1907.

67 King's College Cambridge Archive PP/FCSC/2/2.

68 For a more detailed discussion of both parodies, see Murphy and Porcheddu 2017.

69 'Women's Suffrage Club' (Michaelmas Term 1907) *Girton Review*: 4.

70 'Women's National Anti-Suffrage League' (Michaelmas Term 1908) *Girton Review*: 5.

71 'College Notes' (1903) *Girton Review*: 3.

> Some short time ago a remarkable meeting took place in London. It was convened by what are technically termed strong-minded ladies, to protest against the failure of the Female Franchise Bill. The great feature of the meeting, and that which makes it curious as an historic parallel, was that it revived to a certain extent the license of the old Attic Comedy… What the ladies could not yet – by the law of the land – do from the benches of St. Stephen's [the House of Commons], they did from the stage of St. George's Hall; feeling, no doubt, that they were only rehearsing their parts for future "maiden" efforts on the floor of the House. Perhaps the mere mention of the Attic Comedy and a rehearsal, will serve to suggest the intended parallel to those who have not quite allowed their classics to grow rusty. Two thousand two hundred and odd years ago (let the philosophers of history make what use they can of the figures) there was placed on the stage at Athens a comedy of Aristophanes, called "The Ecclesiazusae," the nearest translation of which somewhat portentous title is, "The Female Members of Parliament." Its object was to burlesque those ideal polities of the philosophers, in which there was to be a community of goods and women… The comedy of the spouting Athenian ladies, and what some persons still regard as the farce of the franchise-seeking English maids and matrons, are absolutely identical.[72]

For all its derision, Davies' comparison is gripping – late-Victorian women, fighting for the right to vote, trigger in the imaginations of Victorian classicists the fervour of Aristophanes' women, who in *Ecclesiazusae* and *Lysistrata* decide to seize control of the State. It is a connection Julia Ward Howe, the American poet and campaigner,

[72] Davies 1878: 51-53.

also seemed to feel as she suggested to the 1893 Congress of Women in Chicago that Aristophanes' women, 'quick witted, public spirited, as far as opportunity will allow, devoutly attached to married life', were excellent models for modern female activists.[73] Lysistrata, Praxagora, Millicent Fawcett and Emmeline Pankhurst all fought for the same right to decide their own fate and resist oppression by men. If that is the sort of thing one feels compelled to laugh at, what does it matter that Aristophanes' women were fictional characters in two-thousand-year-old comedies?

Some thirty years after Davies' account the same comparison was employed again, this time in a production of *Lysistrata* translated by Laurence Housman, produced by and starring Gertrude Kingston. This first performance of *Lysistrata* ever on the British stage offered a largely conservative translation and staging set within the ancient world.[74] There was little explicit reference to or direct dialogue with the suffrage movement. Yet reviewers picked up on the message. *The Era* proclaimed that the play:

> Is an argument in favour of the peace desired by the large body of militant suffragettes, for it ends on a decisive note of victory for women. It advocates the policy of equal political rights for the sexes, and may certainly be called "up to date."[75]

The *ILN* felt that:

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[73] Howe 1894: 102.

[74] Max Reinhardt had previously staged *Lysistrata* in Germany in 1908 (Kotzamani 1997: 90). Maurice Donnay's vaudeville-esque production of the play opened in Paris in 1892 and saw a 'major revival' in 1909 (ibid. 11).

[75] '"Lysistrata"' (15 October 1910) *Era*: 17.

> This was the right time to stage a version of the "Lysistrata" of Aristophanes. Here we are in the midst of a women's movement for an extension of the franchise, and the Greek poet pictures for us a crisis in his city's history – purely imaginary, of course – in which the women took politics into their own hands…[76]

Rather less supportively, the *Daily Mail* called it 'a Votes-for-Women play which suggests a production by sixth-form high-school girls at their breaking up.'[77]

The play's activist force was not in the performance itself, but the context – the radical choice of *Lysistrata*, performed at the height of the suffrage movement. 1910 was a key year for suffrage; the Conciliation Bill, which would have granted some women the vote but was 'sufficiently limited in its provisions to be palatable to Conservatives, had passed its second reading with a large majority' in the Commons in July, before being shelved by Prime Minister H.H. Asquith.[78] The response to this betrayal was swift and fierce, culminating in the infamous Census boycott the following year.[79] *Lysistrata* was staged only three months after the failure of the Conciliation Bill. Davies employed *Ecclesiazusae* to mock the suffragists; Kingston and Housman employed *Lysistrata* to argue for their cause.

Gertrude Kingston (1862-1937) became an actor out of necessity, working to support her husband. She was variously the *protégée* of both W.S. Gilbert and George Bernard Shaw. Shaw addressed her affectionately as 'Little Mother' in

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[76] '"Lysistrata" at the Little Theatre (15 October 1910) *ILN*: 2.

[77] E.B. 1910: 8.

[78] Liddington 2014: 84f.

[79] Ibid. 85, and see below.

personal letters;[80] Gilbert wrote on 4 September 1910 'wishing [her] all possible success' with *Lysistrata*.[81] Kingston's conversion to the suffragist cause came when in 'about 1903 [her] attention was forcibly directed towards [her] anomalous position of being an employer of labour paying income-tax without a political vote',[82] and thereafter she became a stalwart of the movement. Laurence Housman (1865-1959) was the brother of A.E. Housman, and thus the less famous of two queer classicist, poet brothers; his sister Clemence was a suffragette, a cause Housman fiercely supported. Housman was a founding member of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage and the United Suffragists,[83] and published his *Articles of Faith in the Freedom of Women* in the same year as he wrote *Lysistrata*. This was a powerful assertion of the suffragist cause and of the equality of woman 'to adventure, to experiment, and to develop her furthest faculties, without veto, without rebuke, or the imposition from outside of any artificial restraint.'[84] Whilst discussing women's roles as mothers, he alludes to the plot of *Lysistrata* by indicating the effect a sex strike, or rather a conception strike, would have on the State; 'were motherhood to rise in revolt against the pressure of unequal laws, then "all the king's horses and hall the king's men" would be powerless against it.'[85]

[80] Letters from Shaw to Kingston (various dates), King's College Cambridge Archive PP/GAK/1/1/1. Kingston was short, to wit 'little'.

[81] Gilbert to Kingston, King's College Cambridge Archive PP/GAK/1/2/1.

[82] Kingston 1937: 187.

[83] Cockin 2004a.

[84] Housman 1910: 11.

[85] Ibid. 31f.

Kingston became manager of a new theatre, the Little Theatre at the Adelphi, for a year in 1910. Women managers were not unheard of but still rare. In want of a play to open the new theatre, she asked Laurence Housman, who initially offered her *Pains and Penalties*, a piece about George IV. Before rehearsals even began, however, it was blocked by the censor.[86] Kingston next asked George Bernard Shaw to write her a play. Shaw joked that they should 'collaborate in a play called Dear Old Charlotte, and shew them what a really wicked play is like.'[87] This is a reference to Housman's blocked play, Princess Charlotte having been the daughter of George IV. Ultimately, however, Shaw demurred, citing other commitments. She returned to Housman and settled on a Greek comedy. As Housman explains in his autobiography:

> Miss Kingston had no other play ready to hand; and the Little Theatre was waiting to be opened. She asked me if I would do a free (but not too 'free') translation of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*.
>
> I jumped at the opportunity; the Women's Suffrage agitation was then in full blast, and here was a play of feminist propaganda which offered lurid possibilities. Even if this also was censored (as well it might be) it would still be good material for publication as an aid to the women's cause.[88]

Lysistrata therefore came about as a happy coincidence, although also out of conscious activism. Housman's professed concern that *Lysistrata* would be censored

[86] Housman 1937: 244f.

[87] Shaw to Kingston, 29 August 1909, King's College Cambridge Archive PP/GAK/1/1/1.

[88] Housman 1937: 246f.

is feigned; the text of the play is carefully prepared to avoid any impropriety so that it was probably never at risk of being banned. Nevertheless, the choice to send such an infamously scandalous play to the censor as a *second attempt* is provocative. As the *ILN* noted, 'the author of the banned George IV. drama has had a pretty revenge on the Censor, in getting passed a comedy which in its Greek form is notoriously outspoken'.[89] For this reason, perhaps, Housman did not reveal his hand in the translation until after the play had opened.

The Little Theatre was, as its name suggests, smaller than most theatres, and designed to be select – the Almeida Theatre of its day. Choosing a classical play, even an Aristophanes, to open the theatre helped to set this reputation. The audience on opening night lived up to the theatre's desired standards; it was, according to the *Times*, 'of the sort which demands the stereotyped epithet "distinguished." It contained both the Prime Minister [H.H. Asquith] and the Leader of the Opposition [Arthur Balfour]'.[90] Kingston and Housman's suffragist message was directed specifically at this elite audience whose chief interest was presumably not the politics of the play, but its antiquity. It would be fascinating to know what the Prime Minister thought of the performance given his role in blocking the 1910 Conciliation Bill.

The decision to stage *Lysistrata* was also likely a response to a series of earlier productions of Euripides, performed in London in the translations of Gilbert Murray: *Hippolytus* in two productions in 1904; *Trojan Women* in 1905; *Electra* in 1906; *Medea* in 1907; and *Bacchae* in 1908.[91] These productions were chiefly performed at the Court Theatre under the direction of Harley Granville-Barker,

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89 '"Lysistrata" at the Little Theatre (15 October 1910) *ILN*: 2.

90 'The Little Theatre' (12 October 1910) *Times*: 10.

91 See Hall and Macintosh 2005: 495-520.

although *Bacchae* was directed by William Poel and *Medea* was elevated to the stage of the Savoy, Gilbert and Sullivan's old theatre.[92] These Euripidean plays were both *avant-garde* and boldly political; *Trojan Women* provided a thinly-veiled criticism of British policy towards the Boers,[93] and *Medea* 'was deliberately performed against the upsurge of public interest in the movement for women's suffrage'.[94] More generally, the plays discussed the concept of the New Woman, so much part of the discourse of Ibsen, Shaw and now, apparently, Euripides as well.[95] Murray was always socially conscious, and 'his reading of Euripides is in tune at a very deep level with his notion of how a person of conscience in a modern society might construe the possibilities of action open to [them]'.[96] The Euripides plays performed all feature a significant female role except *Bacchae*, for which Lillah McCarthy, the wife of Granville-Barker, nevertheless performed as Dionysus.[97] McCarthy took over the management of the Little Theatre from Kingston in 1911.[98] Kingston had played Helen in the 1905 *Trojan Women*; she was suggested for the role by Bernard Shaw, who wrote of his delight at her performance in a personal letter:

> I have to thank you for the greatest triumph of my life as an inspired caster of plays – for your Helen. It shews, I think, that Barker and Murray are both

[92] Ibid. 498; 511. Coincidentally, Planché had worked for the Court and Gilbert's most Aristophanic play, *Happy Land*, was performed there.

[93] Ibid. 508-511.

[94] Ibid. 511.

[95] 'Like Ibsen, Euripides refuses to idealise any man, and does idealise women' (Murray 1897: 263).

[96] Easterling 1997: 120.

[97] Hall and Macintosh 2005: 498.

[98] Kennedy 2008.

> real poets because, after the first violent shock – the first outcry of their souls against your modern and mundane associations – they came under the spell; but I – I – I – I was the discoverer… Helen is magnificent: nothing else in the whole affair is really classical.[99]

Shaw's connection to the Euripidean plays was through his friendships with Murray and Granville-Barker (see Chapter 9).

In the context of these Euripidean plays, Kingston's decision to stage *Lysistrata* can be seen as less radical, since it was following a precedent; the 1907 suffrage *Medea* in particular demonstrated what could be done with feminist Greek theatre. But *Lysistrata* was also a break from this precedent; unlike the tragedies that went before, Kingston chose to stage a *comedy* – not in some *avant-garde* new style but in a conservative, archaeologising style. The Euripides series was put together by 'a motley collection of Fabians, feminists, and avant-garde theatre practitioners';[100] Kingston was an outspoken woman and a suffragist, yes, but she was also a Tory, and in fact later tried to stand for Parliament as a Conservative.[101] The Granville-Barker Euripides series was therefore an influence, but not quite a model.

Although Housman describes the play-text as a 'modern paraphrase from the Greek' and asserts himself as the sole author,[102] it is remarkably close to the Greek. The English does not offer a line-by-line translation, but the *sense* is maintained. The sexual content of *Lysistrata* in the original Greek would have shocked an Edwardian

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[99] Shaw to Kingston, 14 April 1905, King's College Cambridge Archive PP/GAK/1/1/1.

[100] Hall and Macintosh 2005: 496.

[101] Kingston 1937: 235-240.

[102] Housman 1911: 3.

audience, however, so the translation/adaptation deradicalises this feature of the play through careful paraphrase. Here is Lysistrata's oath in the Greek:

> οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεὶς οὔτε μοιχὸς οὔτ᾽ ἀνήρ…
>
> ὅστις πρὸς ἐμὲ πρόσεισιν ἐστυκώς…
>
> οἴκοι δ᾽ ἀταυρώτη διάξω τὸν βίον…
>
> κροκωτοφοροῦσα καὶ κεκαλλωπισμένη…
>
> ὅπως ἂν ἀνὴρ ἐπιτυφῇ μάλιστά μου…
>
> κοὐδέποθ᾽ ἑκοῦσα τἀνδρὶ τὠμῷ πείσομαι…
>
> ἐὰν δέ μ᾽ ἄκουσαν βιάζηται βίᾳ…
>
> κακῶς παρέξω κοὐχὶ προσκινήσομαι…
>
> οὐ πρὸς τὸν ὄροφον ἀνατενῶ τὼ Περσικά…
>
> οὐ στήσομαι λέαιν᾽ ἐπὶ τυροκνήστιδος.

> There is no-one, neither [extramarital] lover nor husband, who will approach me with a boner. I will spend my life at home, chaste, wearing a saffron robe and in make-up, so that my man will be utterly inflamed by me. And I will never willingly be persuaded by my husband, and if he should force me violently against my will, I will perform badly and not grind. I will not raise my Persian slippers to the ceiling, or stand doing the lioness on the cheesegrater.
>
> (*Lysistrata* 213-231)

There is no doubt Aristophanes is talking about sex, including some tantalising sexual positions. There may be an amusingly incongruous euphemism in the ‘λέαιν’ ἐπὶ τυροκνήστιδος’ position, whatever that is supposed to mean, but not in the more on-the-nose reference to raising one’s legs to the ceiling. Here is how Housman renders it:

> I swear there is no man, lover or spouse…
>
> Whom I will meet to mate with or yield vows…
>
> Of love…
>
> But I will lead a life chaste and austere…
>
> Decked in a saffron robe, and in such gear…
>
> That he who loves me needs must love me more…
>
> And for the kiss denied feel hunger sore…
>
> I will provide cold lips for him to taste…
>
> His arm shall not be wound about my waist![103]

Parts of the original Greek text are retained; the opening line ‘I swear there is no man, lover or spouse’, and the promise to live a chaste life ‘decked in a saffron robe, and in such gear…/That he who loves me needs must love me more’ are more or less translated directly from the Greek. However, despite careful hints of sexual activity – ’Whom I will meet to mate with’ especially – Housman adapts Aristophanes’ explicit sexual imagery into the less charged acts of kissing and embracing. The audience would still be able to see past the paraphrase, but decency is maintained. A similar

[103] Ibid. 19f.

delicacy is employed in the Myrrhine-Cinesias seduction scene; whereas in Aristophanes, Cinesias wants to have sex with his wife, in Housman, he is content to pursue a kiss. Unfortunately, cleaning up *Lysistrata* is wont to rob it of its comedic force, as the *Sunday Times*' theatre critic noted:

> It was a mistake on the part of Miss Kingston to allow a native poet to practise on the play what the great Baron Haussmann [the Parisian urban planner] practised on the rookeries of Paris, with the result that where there was dirt and grime there are now boulevards. Unfortunately, in the hands of the English Haussmanniser, the cleansing and widening process has had negative results. Instead of what was truly pornographic in Greek, we have English innuendo…[104]

English innuendo can never compensate for Greek pornography. Grien is making his own joke here; the translator's identity was still supposedly unknown, but is revealed when he is labelled 'the English Haussmanniser', a pun on Housman's own name. Nevertheless, Housman's text does not undermine the women characters' militancy and outspokenness on subjects unrelated to sex; by deradicalising the sexuality of *Lysistrata*, he is able to activate other radical features of the play.

The performance was also carefully managed to avoid indecency. As Housman explains, the play had to pass the censor and also be financially viable given the Little Theatre's intended audience (prime ministers and opposition leaders included). Thus, the acting could not replace what was left out of the text:

> Miss Kingston decided that '*épater les bourgeois*' was not good policy for a newly-opened theatre; and though great expectations were raised at

[104] Grien 1910: 6.

> rehearsal, where certain episodes threatened to become 'dangerous' if given free play, in the end prudent counsels prevailed.[105]

Kingston adopted an archaeologising style, reminiscent of the university and school Greek plays we have explored, emphasising aesthetics over comedy – 'beautiful ladies in beautiful poses and groupings'.[106] Housman was himself connected with the Aesthetic Movement. *The Era* saw this as the play's strength, noting that 'there is very little action in the play and the characterisation is shadowy, but there is much poetic language, and the colour effects of the dresses against the exquisite background of grey marble and sky are extremely beautiful.'[107]

This archaeologising style was still the least contentious way of staging ancient Greek drama because it was perceived as being the most 'authentic', but this 'authenticity' continued to be selective; none of the men appeared on stage with a leather phallus, for instance. Dual concerns of the censor and economy restrained the extent to which *Lysistrata* could be truly radical in text and performance. Nevertheless, it was the act of staging *Lysistrata* at all, with its powerful women cast agitating for a political voice during the national suffrage debate, which was the play's radical force – not the performance itself.

I do not intend to offer a close reading of the play because, to reiterate, its force was not in the Bowdlerised translation or the performance, but in the

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[105] Housman 1937: 247.

[106] 'The Little Theatre' (12 October 1910) *Times*: 10.

[107] '"Lysistrata"' (15 October 1910) *Era*: 17.

performance *context*.[108] There are, however, several interesting interpolations within the play-text that do not come from Aristophanes' play, occasions where the lines are consciously blurred between ancient Greek Comedy and performative suffragist activism. Housman and Kingston did allow moments of radicalism to creep in wherever possible.

An original interlude is included between the first and second acts, which replicates the *parabasis* of Old Comedy by presenting a direct address from the comic chorus to the audience. Here, the true purpose of the play is most explicitly expressed, although still nominally set within the context of the Peloponnesian War. The chorus of women sing, 'Pallas Athene, hear! Bend from thy throne,/And make with lifted spear our cause thy own.'[109] We have already seen how women's rights activists looked to Athene as an emblem of their cause. The chorus leader calls the women to war:

> So now in the chances
>
> Of war let your speed be as then,
>
> And as daring your deed as the glances
>
> Ye cast upon men!
>
> …
>
> For here is a Cause to your hand

[108] See Kotzamani 1997: Ch 5, though by focussing on the play-text she marginalises the importance of Gertrude Kingston in the play's aesthetic and radical conception.

[109] Housman 1911: 43.

More holy than any before…[110]

Note the repeated use of Cause, this time capitalised – the language of the suffrage movement creeping into the play.[111] During her speech the stage is filled with women '*bearing shields, spears, and helmets, which they distribute*'.[112] This interlude acts internally within the play as a rallying cry for the Greek women against their warring men, picking up on the juxtaposed imagery of war and peace central to Aristophanes' play. Outwith the play, however, it also provides a rallying cry to contemporary British women. How could it not? Every moment was read through the lens of the suffrage movement. The chorus-leader then sets the conflict in historical context:

Nay, surely the mothers who bore you,

The silent mothers of yore,

They also were made of this metal,

And out of the bed of the nettle,

Wherein they bred you of old,

They, too, who spake not a word,

They, too, brave hearts, could have told

Their tale of the wrongs unheard.[113]

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[110] Ibid. 44.

[111] The suffragist newspaper was called *The Common Cause*.

[112] Housman 1911: 44.

[113] Ibid. 44.

We are asked to imagine historical women, denied the right to public speech but nevertheless 'made out of this metal' of protest, as the mothers of contemporary activists. A suffragist imagining her past might see it on the stage in front of her; Greek women, equally suppressed by men and not usually given a voice by classical literature, telling 'their tale of the wrongs unheard'. Historical lines blur. The chorus perform the acts of Greek women *and* contemporary suffragists. We are left to wonder which 'Cause' Athene is being called on to support – Lysistrata's or Kingston's. Although the imagery is violent – women are arming themselves to war – this is not necessarily a literal call to arms. Whilst Housman was involved with the radical suffragette group Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU),[114] neither he nor Kingston condoned the use of violence.[115]

Sometimes the women on stage cry out with Bacchic frenzy. When Lysistrata tells the women about her plan to seize the Acropolis, they respond, 'Evoe! Evoe! Evoe!'[116] Later, after the Acropolis has been seized, the women chorus shout 'Now for the Women's War!', and the other women reply with the same shout of 'Evoe! Evoe!'.[117] A third cry is raised at the end, as the women declare, 'Evoe! Evoe! The victory is ours.'[118] In the context of the play, 'evoe' thus stands as the women's victory salute. The phrase is of course Greek, and helps to situate the performance within its ancient Athenian setting, although none of the exclamations come directly from Aristophanes' text. But the interpolations' Bacchic significance was surely not lost on

[114] Liddington 2014: 44.

[115] Ibid. 45; Kingston 1937: 189.

[116] Housman 1911: 17.

[117] Ibid. 21.

[118] Ibid. 76.

the audience. Performative maenadism had long acquired a specific meaning amongst radical women classicists both through and beyond the text of Euripides' *Bacchae*. 'Maenads served as metaphors for the revolutionary gender politics of first-wave feminism and, by the end of the [nineteenth] century, sexual anarchy.'[119] We may recall Lillah McCarthy's *Bacchae* was staged only two years before, although Murray's translation contains no evoes.[120] When Lysistrata and her sisters cry 'evoe' on stage, they are not merely performing codified ancient Greek, but also the codified language of feminist rebellion.

Housman translates the *proboulos* of Aristophanes into a committee-man, which despite the ancient setting of the play suggests a parliamentary select committee member – perhaps a member of the Conciliation Committee set up to oversee the Conciliation Bill. His opening speech in the Greek text is a misogynistic rant against women interfering in the political affairs of men, culminating in an anecdote about a worshipper of Adonis crying out during a meeting of the Assembly. Although the effect of the woman's cry is political – it disrupts the meeting – the cry in itself is not. She is merely wrapped up in the festival. In Housman's text, the festival-goer has been rendered as 'a voice [squeaking] through the door [of a public meeting] –/"What about women?"'[121] It is a subtle shift, from the apolitical interference of a reveller, to a political request for women to be heard. The interfering woman's question was of course also the cry of the suffrage movement, and heckling public

[119] Prins 2017: 207.

[120] Murray 1902.

[121] Housman 1911: 32.

meetings was an established suffragette tactic.[122] Housman's chorus, '*opening and shutting* [the] *door of Acropolis*', then cry '"What about women?"' in imitation, thus performing this same suffragist act.[123] Their interjection does not appear in the Greek source-text. These actors are again performing staged suffragist activism.

Housman makes another subtle shift when translating a passage of women's chorus, at 648-657 in the Greek. Here, the women's chorus-leader sets out a clear argument that women should be given a say in the city's affairs:

> τοὐράνου γάρ μοι μέτεστι: καὶ γὰρ ἄνδρας ἐσφέρω,
>
> τοῖς δὲ δυστήνοις γέρουσιν οὐ μέτεσθ᾽ ὑμῖν, ἐπεὶ
>
> τὸν ἔρανον τὸν λεγόμενον παππῷον ἐκ τῶν Μηδικῶν
>
> εἶτ᾽ ἀναλώσαντες οὐκ ἀντεσφέρετε τὰς ἐσφοράς…
>
> For I too have a share in the pot; I produce sons, and you wretched old men have no share, since you've used up the pot your forefathers collected from the Medes and don't produce taxes in return…
>
> (*Lysistrata* 651-654)

Women, she says, produce sons ('καὶ γὰρ ἄνδρας ἐσφέρω'), whilst the old men she is addressing produce no taxes in return ('οὐκ ἀντεσφέρετε τὰς ἐσφοράς'). The repetition of the verb 'ἐσφέρω' – the second time with the prefix 'ἀντ-' to underline the

[122] 'Mr. Lloyd George and Woman Suffrage' (17 October 1911) *Times*: 6; Hamilton and St John 2014: 59f.

[123] Housman 1911: 32.

contrast – highlights the equal roles the genders should play. Women should produce sons, men taxes. Her criticism is that the men have failed in their role. Housman translates:

> I, too, pay taxes: from my flesh there runs
>
> Rich tribute; ye bear arms, but I bear sons
>
> And daughters…[124]

The two discursive hooks, tax and childbirth, are still there, but there has been a shift from an accusation that old men pay no tax, to an assertion that women *do* pay tax whilst still fulfilling their role as child-bearers. They are doubly beneficial to society. This is important because it was a key argument of the suffrage movement that it is unjust to charge women tax without also giving them the vote.[125] Kingston claimed it was the argument which made her a suffragist.[126] Again, this is a subtle change, but one through which Housman achieves a complete recodification of the source-text to incorporate a suffragist message. Housman's text also values women for producing 'sons/And daughters' whereas the Greek only mentions 'ἄνδρας'.

The most powerful character in *Lysistrata* is, of course, the eponymous protagonist herself, and Gertrude Kingston apparently played the role with great success. Here is how the *Era* described her performance:

[124] Ibid. 46.

[125] Liddington 2004: 45f.

[126] See above.

> Kingston played Lysistrata with a tremendous undercurrent of strength and a fine reserve power that were immensely effective. Her Lysistrata was the woman whose reason dominates her actions, able to foresee the logical result of her deeds, yet with enough of her sex's instincts in her to understand and sympathise with her more emotional and less intelligent companions. Miss Kingston made a wonderfully commanding figure in her flowing Grecian draperies, and the final scene, in which – the reunited couples having danced gaily off to their homes – the lonely figure of Lysistrata is left standing on the city walls outlined against the dark, star-spangled sky, is a stage picture which will not be easily forgotten or surpassed.[127]

The play-text's stage directions describe this closing scene as follows:

> LYSISTRATA *comes down slowly to the centre of the upper stage. She stands and looks after the revellers. The light of the torches fades away; only moonlight remains…* LYSISTRATA *turns and descends, going out in the opposite direction, away from the sounds of revelry.*[128]

This solitary ending for Lysistrata, alone without a man, alone eschewing revelry, is appropriately aesthetic for an archaeologising production. But it also underlines the strength of Lysistrata as a character, a force Kingston's performance was able to capture. Lysistrata is above all others the chief activist of the sex strike, extremely articulate, and the only woman never to suffer temptation throughout the play. Kingston's performance of the role, therefore, culminating in this powerful and

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[127] '"Lysistrata"' (15 October 1910) *Era*: 17.

[128] Housman 1911: 77.

memorable ending, was key to the success of the play as a piece of activist theatre. A weak Lysistrata makes for an ambivalent *Lysistrata*; Kingston's 'wonderfully commanding' performance, on the other hand, helped to activate the play's politics.

Fig. 8.5: Gertrude Kingston as Lysistrata

Kingston and Housman did not stage *Lysistrata* with a chorus dressed in the colours of the WSPU, or adapt the play to be about a fight for suffrage in ancient Athens. Housman's translation is, by and large, conservative and desexualised, and the performance style replicated the archaeologising aestheticism familiar from

university and school productions of ancient Greek drama. The censor and the box office both had to be appeased, although some reviewers criticised *Lysistrata* for being too tame. Yet the very act of staging this particular Greek Comedy, with its representation of politicised, activist women, in 1910, was truly radical. Carefully, almost surreptitiously, Housman included the language of the suffrage movement within the text, and wrote a powerful interlude-*cum-parabasis* to draw a further parallel between Lysistrata's followers and contemporary women activists. Kingston's performance activated this message. Like the ladies of Girton College, then, Kingston and Housman used Aristophanes as a powerful voice for their gendered activism. The result was, as a review in the newspaper *Votes for Women* concluded, 'a play that every suffragist should see'.[129]

How the Vote was Won (1908)

The year before *Lysistrata* was staged, another suffrage play was produced demonstrating a more subtle appropriation of Aristophanes. *How the Vote was Won* was first staged at the Royal Theatre, London in 1909 and thereafter published by the Woman's Press.[130] As with many plays written for the Actresses' Franchise League (AFL) it went on to be performed 'all over the country with many different casts… It

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[129] Lawrence 1910: 6.

[130] The story of *How the Vote was Won* was first published by the Women Writers' Suffrage League as an illustrated book, presumably designed for children, in 1908; it was written by Cicely Hamilton alone, and illustrated by C. Hedley Charlton. The children's book has the same plot as the play, but is set up as an imagined extract from a history book written in 2008 to explain how the vote was indeed won.

subsequently became popular with American suffragists'.[131] Although this is (as far as I can see) unremarked upon in any contemporary account of the play, *How the Vote was Won* borrows significantly from the plot of *Lysistrata*, and its comedic structure also mirrors Old Comedy more broadly.

Christopher St John (1871-1960, *née* Christabel Gertrude Marshall) was born in Exeter and studied Modern History at Somerville College, Oxford.[132] She was involved with the Actresses' Franchise League (AFL), Women Writers' Suffrage League (WWSL) and the WSPU; she was arrested in 1909 for vandalising a post-box.[133] She wrote many plays and books, including another suffrage play with Hamilton, *The Pot and the Kettle* (1909). Cicely Hamilton (1872-1952) was educated in Germany[134] and became a founding member of the WWSL and a member of the AFL; she was in the WSPU, but only 'for a few months'.[135] For all her activism for women's suffrage, including writing two of the most popular suffrage plays, *How the Vote was Won* and *A Pageant of Great Women* (1909), she later recalled how idiosyncratic her ideology was:

[131] Paxton 2014: xf.

[132] Modern History was 'an attractive alternative to Classics' for women students because it did not require sitting a preliminary exam, and because women were not as penalised for inadequate schooling (Stray 2013: 255).

[133] Cockin 2004b.

[134] Hamilton 1935: 19.

[135] Ibid. 66; 89.

> I never attempted to disguise the fact that I wasn't wildly interested in votes for anyone… My personal revolt was feminist rather than suffragist; what I rebelled at chiefly was the dependence implied in the idea of 'destined' marriage, 'destined' motherhood…[136]

Hamilton also worked as an actor; her first London performance was alongside Lillah McCarthy in Bernard Shaw's *Fanny's First Play* (1911), directed by Granville-Barker at the Little Theatre.[137]

How the Vote was Won's central conceit is a strike of working women, who, tired of being told that they do not need the vote because their whole gender is supported by men, resolve 'to demand support and the necessities of life from their nearest male relatives, however distant the nearest relative may be.'[138] Meanwhile, 'all those women who have no male relatives, or are refused help by those they have, have instructions to go to the relieving officer', to thus overwhelm the nation's workhouses.[139] We are shown the strike's effect on the middle-class home of Horace and Ethel Cole; their cook and maid both quit, and their house is invaded by a sister, an aunt, a niece, a disowned first cousin and a second cousin they have never met. Horace is persuaded to agitate for women's suffrage, and the play ends with him joining a crowd of men marching for the Cause. In the last line of the play, he ironically cries, 'when you want a thing done, get a man to do it! Votes for Women!'[140]

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[136] Ibid. 65.

[137] Ibid. 83.

[138] Hamilton and St John 1909: 6f.

[139] Ibid. 5.

[140] Ibid. 29.

Lysistrata's influence on *How the Vote was Won* is palpable. Both plays stage women striking as a political act. Instead of sexual disruptions, *How the Vote was Won* presents domestic upheaval; what Aristophanes imagined as a woman's highest duty – sex – is transformed for the Edwardian era into the chaste duties of cleaning and governessing. *How the Vote was Won* gives the job of besieging the workhouses to an imagined mass of women without families to support them, as *Lysistrata* sets older women to take over the state treasury on the Acropolis. The Edwardian women's refusal to work, 'a fantasy of female solidarity in line with early trade unionism',[141] is also economically motivated, thus capturing both aspects of Lysistrata's plan (sexual and economic dominance through abstinence *and* the seizing of the treasury) into a single, unified action (gendered, but certainly not sexual, economic dominance through abstinence from women's economic output). More broadly, the arrival of Horace's relatives, who appear one after the other, each more intrusive than the last, recalls a comic structure used repeatedly in Old Comedy; we might compare the catalogue of underworld denizens who arrive to irritate Dionysus and Xanthias in *Frogs* (503ff.) for example.

Although the obvious parallels with *Lysistrata* remain tantalising, we cannot determine for certain that Greek comedy was a source, much less that anyone else noticed the appropriation. I am content to assert both are possible. As St John and Hamilton were (to different extents) educated women, either or both may have been familiar with Aristophanes. The Actresses' Franchise League banner was decorated with masks representing Greek comedy and tragedy,[142] and the classical women Hypatia, Sappho, Zenobia and Boadicea all appear in Hamilton's *Pageant of Great*

[141] Hill 2018: 146.

[142] Hall and Macintosh 2005: 516f.

Women. It is unclear whether either knew Greek, but by 1909 multiple translations of *Lysistrata* had been published.[143] Although the play was little received in the long-nineteenth century, its appeal for two suffragists is obvious. Later performances of *How the Vote was Won* were perhaps received differently because of Kingston's 1910 *Lysistrata*.

It would be remiss not to mention another, much earlier semi-Aristophanic suffrage adaptation, though one far less concerned with *women*'s suffrage than we might expect from its apparent source-text. Sir George Trevelyan, a radical Liberal MP and strong advocate of expanding the franchise to working-class men,[144] wrote *The Ladies in Parliament* in 1866 'during the great agitation which followed the rejection of Mr. Gladstone's Reform Bill'.[145] It was 'intended to be a modern and decent *Ecclesiazusae*'.[146] In fact the play bears little resemblance to its proclaimed source except that it dramatises a women's assembly in its first scene. They do not seize power, as in Aristophanes. The second and final scene of the play takes the form of a *parabasis* delivered by a chorus of owls; this naturally recalls the *parabases* of *Birds*, although as a footnote makes clear,[147] Trevelyan is recalling *The Owl*, a Tory satirical periodical to which he was a contributor.[148] As we have said, the play has

[143] See Giannopoulou 2007.

[144] Jackson 2008. Whilst at university in 1858, Trevelyan also wrote *The Cambridge Dionysia*, 'an updated version of *Wasps*, full of in-group jokes and references to alcohol' (Hall 2007: 81).

[145] Trevelyan 1888: 1. The collapse of the bill triggered a general election and a new Conservative government, which passed the more radical Reform Act in 1867.

[146] Ibid. 1. It was not written for performance.

[147] Ibid. 16 n1.

[148] Trevelyan 1932: 67.

nothing to do with *women's* suffrage; the women are more concerned that their husbands aren't paying them enough attention due to preoccupation with passing the Reform Bill.

Whether adapted, translated or appropriated more subterraneously, the Edwardian performance of Aristophanic plays was evidently capable of sustaining a powerful feminist discourse. The three productions discussed here all used Aristophanes in different ways to advance the cause of women within academia and in support of the franchise. (A fourth play, *The Ladies in Parliament*, demonstrates an earlier, less feminist example of the latter.) This is in marked contrast with the reception of Aristophanes in the school and university productions discussed in Chapter 7, defined as they were by their aesthetic, *apolitical* reception of Aristophanes. A political reading of Old Comedy was more typical in the first half of the nineteenth century, though even here it was more usual to assert Aristophanes' inherent Toryness and thus read him as a social conservative. Only Shelley provides an indirect model for the sort of social activism through Aristophanes achieved by the Girton, Kingston and St John-Hamilton productions. So this new and consciously feminist Aristophanes marks a break from previous receptions. As we move into our final chapter, we will see how this socially conscious Aristophanes developed in the works of two of the early twentieth century's most powerful thinkers, George Bernard Shaw and Gilbert Murray, and through them how a modern, modernist Aristophanes was established.

~9~

Towards a Modern Aristophanes

In Michaelmas 1911, Somerville College, Oxford (another women's college) staged a production of *Frogs* in the English translation of Gilbert Murray. We know almost nothing about this production, although Murray apparently 'allowed himself to be smuggled in to direct and stage-manage' it personally,[1] and was also present at the performance:

> He entered fully into the amateurish spirit of the thing, and when, on the night, he rose from his seat beside the Principal to express his thanks with the words "It was so good that we all felt we really were in Hell" (the scene of the last act), he brought down the house…[2]

It had been two years since the Oxford men last staged *Frogs*, so not many of the second-year students performing the Somerville version will have seen it. This was not like the Girton *Bees* a parody of the more serious men's Greek play. We do know, thanks to a limited contemporary account, that the performance contained topical

[1] Adams 1996: 118. He also attended Somerville's 1946 production of the same play (ibid. 119).

[2] 'Reminiscences of Alice Cameron' [Personal Account], Somerville College Archive SC/AO/RG/RC/Cameron.

allusions – presumably with Murray's blessing – including to 'the Registration Fee, which had penetrated to Hades under the guidance of Miss [Annie] Rogers.'[3]

The Somerville *Frogs* demonstrates something of Murray's engagement with Aristophanes, which was never entirely academic. In a 1933 monograph on Aristophanes (briefly discussed below), Murray claimed that he 'only late in life… learnt to care for Aristophanes';[4] a survey of Murray's Aristophanes up to 1918 will demonstrate that this is an over-simplification. Over the course of his long career, he used Old Comedy to argue for his brand of international politics, to discuss feminism, as a foil for his own favourite poet Euripides, and as a tool of outreach. Murray's friend George Bernard Shaw was influenced by Aristophanes as well, not only as Aesthetic poets and playwrights had been, for his artistic quality, but also for his political voice; Shaw's play *Major Barbara* has been studied for its connection to Euripides via Murray, but little appreciated for its reception of Aristophanes. Murray and Shaw's early receptions demonstrate the final shift in the long-nineteenth-century reception of Aristophanes back towards politics, already observed in the previous chapter, thus providing a useful backdrop as we move towards the conclusion of this thesis.

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[3] Walton 1912: 28. Annie Rogers was a champion of women's education in Oxford and a talented classicist (Howarth 2004). She writes in her memoir that women were first permitted to take Oxford University exams in 1910, when a Delegacy for Women Students was set up. This Delegacy 'had power to charge fees to registered women students and were required to charge the same fees for examinations as those which were paid by men' but ended up with substantially more income than expenditure – a 'ludicrous situation' no doubt well mocked by the Somerville students forced to pay unnecessary fees (Rogers 1938: 85.)

[4] Murray 1933: vii.

Gilbert Murray (1866-1957)

Gilbert Murray was not British but born into a wealthy Australian family in Sydney;[5] he moved with his widowed mother to London in 1877.[6] This Australian childhood later became a key part of his personal narrative, helping him to tell a compelling (and not altogether accurate) story about 'how a ragged little boy from the Australian bush came to be a great man in his British present'.[7] In an unlikely twist, he was the great-nephew of W.S. Gilbert, and was in fact named Gilbert after the playwright's father.[8] Some of Gilbert's flavour can be felt in Murray's own translations of Old Comedy, and a type-written and undated copy of 'Tit-Willow' from *The Mikado* translated into ancient Greek has been preserved in Murray's personal archive, unnamed but probably sent to him by the classicist Ronald Arbuthnott Knox.[9] Knox did put his name to an Aristophanic parody filed next to the 'Tit-Willow' translation, entitled 'Telephoniazousai' and using the *Brekekekek* refrain from *Frogs* to parody the difficulty of making oneself heard over the phone.[10] Neither piece is dated. They evidently amused Murray, or he would not have kept them; although not altogether relevant, I have included both in my appendices as matters of interest (Appendices B and C). If nothing else, they demonstrate the self-conscious nature of educated, elite men's private discourse and the ways in which classics, and Aristophanes specifically, provided an appropriate register for their shared humour.

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[5] Wilson 1987: 1.

[6] Ibid. 3f.

[7] West 2007: 35.

[8] Ibid. 4. Stray disputes this (2008).

[9] Bodleian Library MS. Gilbert Murray 435 f.192.

[10] Ibid. f.191.

But Murray is not remembered as a humorist, of course. He was a prodigious classicist, elected to his first Chair at Glasgow in 1889 at the tender age of twenty-three;[11] appointed Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford in 1908;[12] and intimately connected with the Cambridge Ritualists.[13] He was also a liberal politician (though never elected to office); 'by 1902 Murray had met Bernard Shaw' and through their friendship 'became better acquainted with Fabian ideas'.[14] Murray was an early advocate for the League of Nations, became Chair of the League of Nations Union a few days before the Armistice, and continued working for the organisation thereafter.[15] And he was intimately connected with the theatre scene around the turn of the century. As we have seen, Murray's translations of Euripides were produced by Harley Granville-Barker, and his 'involvement in the Court Theatre from 1904 to 1907 enabled him to play a significant role in the shaping of modern British theatre.'[16] He was also a (fairly unsuccessful) playwright himself.[17] One of his plays, *Waste*, was blocked by the censor because it included socially liberal references to abortion.[18] This diverse life as a public intellectual across disciplines is reflected in his multifarious receptions of Aristophanes, but the great unifying force – and the reason,

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[11] Stray 2008.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Beard 2002: 110-128, though note her scepticism over the homogeneity of any such group as the 'Cambridge Ritualists'.

[14] Wilson 1987: 75.

[15] Ibid. 254.

[16] Macintosh 2007: 145.

[17] Stray 2008.

[18] Hall and Macintosh 2005: 512.

I think, why classicists still hold Gilbert Murray in such reverence long after his scholarship has become out-of-date – is his intense humanity. Murray read Aristophanes as political, but not as some Tory scourge correcting the mores of an immoral age. Aristophanes offered him hope for a better world.

Glasgow Critical Texts (1893)

Gilbert Murray first proposed working with the Aristophanic corpus as part of an unrealised series of classical texts to be published under the auspices of the University of Glasgow in 1893. These Glasgow Critical Texts would 'contain, in the first place, a carefully revised text of each author, with the briefest possible critical notes at the foot of each page',[19] but their defining characteristic would be the inclusion of relevant scholia, in ancient Greek and without accompanying translation, embedded into the footnotes; there was to be no additional English or even Latin commentary.[20] Notably, Murray proposed '3 or 2 vols.' of Euripides and '2 or 3 vols.' of Aristophanes compared to only '1 vol.' each of Aeschylus and Sophocles.[21] The two sample pages he prepared were taken from Sophocles' *Ajax* and Aristophanes' *Clouds*.[22] There is nothing overly illuminating in Murray's commentary on *Clouds*; the lines annotated are 15-51, and the scholia selected mostly discuss horse-racing.[23]

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[19] Murray 1893a: f.84.

[20] Ibid.; Murray 1893b.

[21] Murray 1893a: f.85.

[22] Murray 1893b: ff.120-125. 'To Wilamowitz at least he sent also a typed sample of the first part of the lyric passage *Phoenissae* 288-354' (Collard 2007: 107).

[23] Murray 1893b: f.123.

We might be surprised to see Murray of all people proposing such an old-fashioned style of commentary – in ancient Greek no less. Perhaps it was an attempt, early on in his career, to prove his philological chops. Regardless, the responses to the prospectus he sent to a wide array of colleagues were not overwhelmingly positive. Arthur Sidgwick put it succinctly; 'I am not at all sure it will pay, if that is what you want to know: the British schoolmaster is so very adhesive to old methods.'[24] There were also problems securing an interested publisher.[25] Murray did not pursue the project and 'within eighteen months or so he had agreed to edit Euripides for the Oxford Classical Texts'.[26]

A History of Ancient Greek Literature (1897)

Four years after his abortive attempts to set up a Glasgow series of texts, Murray published a monograph surveying the breadth of classical literature, much in the vein of Symonds' *Studies*.[27] *A History of Ancient Greek Literature* was reprinted several times over the next few decades. In the preface, he admits less familiarity with Old Comedy and prose than he would like, and confesses he has done little substantive research on these topics[28] – he would make a similar claim in his monographic study

[24] Letter from Sidgwick to Murray, 15 December 1893, Bodleian Library MS. Gilbert Murray 168 f.13. Emphasis his.

[25] Wilson 1987: 56.

[26] Collard 2007: 108.

[27] See Ch.6.

[28] Murray 1897: xi.

of Aristophanes published three decades later, there also expressing dissatisfaction with his previous handling of Old Comedy in *Greek Literature*.[29]

Murray does not value Old Comedy as highly as tragedy in *Greek Literature*. He argues that the former genre 'followed in the steps of tragedy.'[30] And 'tragedy springs from the artistic and professional choir-song; comedy, from the mumming of rustics at vintage and harvest feasts.'[31] The contrast here between the lofty origins of one genre and the bumbling 'rustic' origins of the other is striking. This is hardly surprising; as he demonstrates vividly in a later work, *Euripides and His Age* (1913), Murray's classicism is consumed by his interest in Greek tragedy, and in Euripides in particular.[32] Yet Murray is able to value both the profanity and the poetics of Aristophanes in similar terms to Symonds.[33] As Symonds had found Aristophanes 'too naked to be shamed', so Murray justifies the 'natural impulses' of Old Comedy being given 'free play in such ways and on such occasions as will do the least damage' – namely, within a ritualistic, festival context.[34] And Murray also appreciates Symonds' favourite Aristophanes play, *Birds*, as an 'unquestioned masterpiece'

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[29] Murray 1933: vii; see below.

[30] Murray 1897: 276.

[31] Ibid. 210.

[32] At the outset of *Euripides and His Age*, Murray boldly asserts that he is 'moved by the belief that, quite apart from his disputed greatness as a poet and thinker, apart from his amazing and perhaps unparalleled success as a practical playwright, Euripides is a figure of high significance in the history of humanity and of special interest to our own generation' (1913: 7).

[33] See Ch.6.

[34] Murray 1897: 211.

containing 'more exquisite imagination and lyric beauty, than any of his other works'.[35] I am not implying Symonds' direct influence here – Murray does not cite Symonds as a source – but the parallels are interesting, and it is hard to imagine Murray was ignorant of such an important work.

But Murray's greatest appreciation for Old Comedy emerged in terms of its politics (which Symonds side-lined). He attributes to Eupolis and Aristophanes the formulation of a truly political comic genre arising around the start of the Peloponnesian War.[36] Murray resists the simplistic tendency to see Old Comedy as either right- or left-wing. Rather, he sees it as caught in an intriguing paradox. 'Comedy was an ultra-democratic institution… yet all the comic writers have an aristocratic bias.'[37] This bias is, according to Murray, especially true of Aristophanes. Murray's own bias towards left-leaning political discourse is felt in his account of Aristophanes' politics, but does not prevent him from enjoying it:

> Admitting that he often opposed what was best in his age, or advocated it on the lowest grounds; admitting that his slanders are beyond description, and that as a rule he only attacks the poor, and the leaders of the poor – nevertheless he does it all with such exuberant high spirits…[38]

Although Murray cannot escape the Aristophanes-as-oligarch assumption so prevalent in Aristophanic criticism since at least the end of the eighteenth century, he places a (re-)emphasis on politics after the aesthetic turn of the late nineteenth

[35] Ibid. 286.

[36] Ibid. 212f.

[37] Ibid. 279.

[38] Ibid. 292.

century, and can appreciate Aristophanes without co-opting the politics for his own means. This is not to say that Murray's own political views are suppressed; on the contrary, they are explicit in his reading.

Murray finds himself agreeing with the politics of *Lysistrata*. Even Symonds had turned away from this play; the year before *Greek Literature* was published, Beardsley's scandalous illustrations reduced it to an almost exclusively sexualised work. But Murray, for the first time in British criticism as far as I can see, embraces the play for its political message without feeling the need to defend, excuse or disapprove of its sexual themes. True, as Lippman notes, 'Murray is extremely uncomfortable even describing critical plot elements' of the play;[39] but he gives it a go, something scholars had hitherto largely avoided. Lippman does Murray's boldness a disservice. Indeed, Murray's reading of *Lysistrata* is explicitly feminist; he values the play because of the qualities displayed by its capable female protagonist. *Lysistrata* 'might be a very fine play; the heroine is a real character'.[40] Aristophanes makes the women characters 'on the whole, perceptibly more sensible and more 'sympathetic' than his men.'[41] This is an interpretation of the characters as distinctively Ibsenian or Shavian; Murray's Lysistrata conforms to the archetype of the New Woman.[42] A hint of disapproval lurks in Murray's use of the subjunctive – *Lysistrata* 'might be a very fine play'. We are not given the protasis to this clause, so

[39] Lippman 2016: 289.

[40] Murray 1897: 287.

[41] Ibid. 288.

[42] On Murray's (and Shaw's and Euripides') view of the Ibsenist New Woman, see Hall and Macintosh 2005: 488-490.

we do not know under what circumstances. Perhaps the reader is expected to supply *if only it weren't so dirty*.

Many of Murray's suppositions about Old Comedy in *Greek Literature* are wrong and misunderstand even late-nineteenth-century scholarly debates – as he warns in his preface. Nevertheless, he anticipates a reaction against the apolitical readings of Aristophanes still dominating the British reception of Old Comedy, and places politics back at the centre of the genre. His reading of *Lysistrata* must strike us as particularly modern, and as particularly typical of his own views and politics. As we continue to look at Murray's Aristophanes, we will see how these ideas continued to develop.

***The Frogs* (1902)**

Murray translated *Frogs* in 1902 as part of a volume on Euripides. This was the third volume in a series on Athenian Drama published by George Allen.[43] The inclusion of Aristophanes in a book of Euripides translations seems odd – it did to Allen, who initially rejected the idea:

> [I] am glad to find that my own idea is precisely the one which you have in mind; but about the insertion of a play of Aristophanes in this volume I am, I fear, in disagreement. There seems to be no reason why you should not use as much of the *Frogs* as you require for editorial purposes, without interfering with our Aristophanes vol. Prof. [C.W.] Warr [the first volume's

[43] The first two volumes were Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (1900) translated by C.W. Warr, and Sophocles' Theban plays, translated by J.S. Phillimore also in 1902.

> translator] seems uncertain about the desirability of a separate volume of Aristophanes at all…[44]

This letter was sent in 1900, presumably just after Murray was commissioned for the translation, suggesting that *Frogs* was always part of Murray's plan for this volume. Evidently, Murray won the argument, though Aristophanes is not mentioned on the book's title page.[45] The year after publication, Allen invited Murray to translate the debated fourth volume of Aristophanes plays for the series,[46] but perhaps due to the slow sales of his Euripides volume,[47] Murray declined and no such volume was produced. The *Frogs* translation, however, was subsequently republished many times on its own.[48]

George Bernard Shaw may have been influential in encouraging Murray to send his works off to the printer. 'Murray read a selection of his translations in 1901 at a Fabian Society meeting' and impressed Shaw greatly.[49] Afterwards, with Murray late in sending his translations to his publisher, Shaw sent him a curt but amusing letter:

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[44] George Allen to Murray, 20 April 1900, Bodleian Library MS. Gilbert Murray 400 f.2.

[45] Murray 1902: iii.

[46] Allen to Murray, 11 November 1903, Bodleian Library MS. Gilbert Murray 400 f.32.

[47] Wilson 1987: 90.

[48] Giannopoulou 2007: 334.

[49] Macintosh 2007: 150. As mentioned, Murray had already been commissioned to publish the translations.

I have for a long time been much concerned about those translations which you are nursing to perfection in the manner characteristic of university professors. Now let me tell you that every university professor is an ass, and that you, like any common man, are subject to this inexorable law… Euripidean poesy is not the sort of thing that a man can alter for the better as he becomes more middleaged.

Further I have to observe that one Benjamin Bickley Rogers M.A., of Lincoln's Inn, Barrister-at-law, and sometime fellow of Wadham College, Oxford, is publishing a translation of the Comedies of Aristophanes, such in the style of your respected uncle [W.S. Gilbert]. Now Benjamin Bickley is thereby doing a public service. I daresay if he were to hatch his translation until a few days before his funeral, he might improve it by, say, .00001%, and impart a choice senile flavor to it which would otherwise be lacking. Would you advise him to take this course?

The moral is obvious, Send Euripides by next post to the printer.[50]

Rogers had been publishing Aristophanes translations since his *Clouds* in 1852; Shaw is specifically referring to his publication of *Ecclesiazusae* and *Frogs*, both in 1902.[51] The comparison is therefore between rival editions of the same play, *Frogs*, and Shaw seems to be encouraging his ass of a friend to get a move on before Rogers

[50] Shaw to Murray, 23 March 1902, Bodleian Library MS. Gilbert Murray 168. f.35.

[51] Giannopoulou 2007: 323, 334.

gets one over on him.[52] Shaw later wrote to Murray to draw an explicit comparison between Rogers' and his translations of the famous 'ληκύθιον' scene from *Frogs*, remarking that 'what [Rogers] translates as a bottle of oil you translate as an umbrella. No doubt you learnt Greek at different universities.'[53] Shaw's diligent reading of Aristophanes will become important shortly.

At any rate, Murray published *Frogs* alongside his Euripides volume in 1902. It is a fine verse translation in conversational vernacular, even more 'in the style of' W.S. Gilbert than Rogers' version – in this, it is reminiscent of Frere's *Frogs*, though obviously with the benefit of seventy years so that, to the twenty-first century reader, it must seem even more natural. Murray's Euripides is, in contrast, rendered in high diction; as he explains, 'Greek being a very simple and austere language and modern English an ornate one, a direct translation produced an effect of baldness which was quite unlike the original.'[54] Murray tries to capture the '"spirit" of Euripides',[55] and even adds rhymes to his verse. He makes no such claims for the 'spirit' of Aristophanes. His *Frogs* only gets rhymes in choral interludes and when it is parodying tragedy – although Murray's comic choruses, particularly his rendering of the famous *brekekekek* chorus, are charming, the highlight of the translation.

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[52] For a brief discussion of B.B. Rogers' translations, see Walsh 2016: 223-225. Although Walsh significantly overemphasises the importance of these translations, they do merit closer inspection than can be afforded here. See also Eastman 2015: 97f.

[53] Letter from George Bernard Shaw to Gilbert Murray, 4 December 1902. Bodleian Library MS. Gilbert Murray 168 f.37. Of course, Rogers' translation is closer to the Greek, as Shaw presumably knew (and as Murray's notes freely admit, see below).

[54] Murray 1902: x.

[55] Ibid. ix.

Murray's translation retains Aristophanes' topical references, with explanatory details either in the endnotes or, sometimes, embedded into stage directions. The notable exception is Shaw's umbrella; Murray translates 'ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν' ('lost his little oil-flask', 1208 *et al.*) as 'found his umbrella gone!'.[56] As he explains in the endnotes, he could think of 'no object which both ancient Greeks and modern Englishmen would habitually use and lose except an umbrella.'[57] This is a unique update, however. He also cuts much of Aristophanes' obscenity (which, by now, should hardly come as a surprise, though Murray had broadly defended it in *Greek Literature*). This includes straight-washing the text:

HERACLES.

Who was the lady?

DIONYSOS.

Lady?

HERACLES.

Well, the girl?

DIONYSOS.

Great Heaven, there wasn't one![58]

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[56] Ibid. *Frogs* 265 *et al*.

[57] Ibid. *Frogs* 306 l.1200n.

[58] Ibid. *Frogs* 184.

In the original, Heracles asks whether Dionysos has been longing for a woman, a boy or a man (56f.); Murray deletes the two queer options, and thus the force of the joke. The scatological humour of the opening scene is translated into jokes about sneezing:

> DIONYSOS.
>
> Don't shift your luggage pole
>
> Across, and say, "I want to blow my nose."
>
> XANTHIAS (*greatly disappointed*).
>
> Nor, that I've got such a weight upon my back
>
> That unless some one helps me quickly I shall sneeze?
>
> DIONYSOS.
>
> Oh, please, no. Keep it till I need emetics.[59]

This more or less loses the scatological humour – although Dionysos still quips about emetics. (A few lines earlier, he mentions a purgative, 'wormwood'.[60]) All in all, whilst it is *readable*, Murray's *Frogs* was evidently not written as a performable translation. Murray's *Hippolytus* and *Bacchae* soon found their way to the West End stage, in performances by Harley Granville-Barker's company,[61] whilst *Frogs* had to settle with the (no doubt enthusiastic) actors of Somerville College and Leeds University.

[59] Ibid. *Frogs* 180.

[60] Ibid. *Frogs* 179.

[61] See Ch.8.

Between the deadened jokes and the topical references, Murray clearly does not value the 'spirit' of Aristophanes as highly as he does the 'spirit' of Euripides.[62]

Whilst Murray is deeply concerned with the aesthetics of the tragedies he is translating, with *Frogs*, he is only concerned with Aristophanes' aesthetic *response* to tragedy. As he explains in his preface, *Frogs* is included because it is 'the chief ancient criticism of Euripides'.[63] He even expresses regret 'for the necessity of inserting the irrelevant and rather poor fooling of the first few scenes of *The Frogs*'[64] – irrelevant only to Euripidean poetics, of course. For the same reason, whilst *Hippolytus* and *Bacchae* are prefaced with a long introduction, there is none to Murray's Aristophanes.

Yet Murray engages sympathetically and intelligently with Aristophanes' criticisms. If we return to our umbrella, we may recall that in the original text Aeschylus uses the phrase 'ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν' to demonstrate the inferiority of Euripides' prologues by repeatedly inserting it into the line as Euripides tries to recite from his plays. Here is how Murray explains the scene in his commentary:

> The point of this famous bit of fooling is, I think, first, that Euripides' tragic style is so little elevated that umbrellas and clothes-bags are quite at home in it; secondly, that there is a certain monotony of grammatical structure in Euripides' prologues, so that you can constantly finish a sentence by a half-line with a verb in it.

[62] Murray's conception of an author's 'spirit' does not marry with Frere's model of the 'spirited translator' discussed in Ch.2.

[63] Murray 1902: v.

[64] Ibid. vi.

> The first point, though burlesquely exaggerated, is true and important… [Euripides' tragic diction] is very wide in its range, and uses very colloquial words by the side of very romantic or archaic ones…
>
> As to the second point… all three tragedians have such passages in the opening of about half their extant plays, and the "monotony," if such it be, belongs rather to the style of the tragic prologue than to Euripides.[65]

Murray, the great apologist of Euripides, agrees with Aristophanes that 'Euripides' tragic style is so little elevated' and monotonous! Well, not quite – but this is a charitable response to Aristophanes' 'burlesquely exaggerated' criticism. Instead of arguing that Aristophanes is dangerously wrong – Browning's, or rather Balaustion's, response[66] – he modifies Aristophanes' humour and engages with it constructively to demonstrate the truth of Euripides', and tragedy's, poetics.

Murray also has an interesting view of Aeschylus, rejecting the notion that he was a traditional poet challenged by the radical innovations of Euripides. In fact, he suggests the opposite may have been true:

> In the dramatic treatment of female character Aeschylus was really the pioneer who opened the road for Euripides. The Clytaemnestra of the *Agamemnon* probably differs from the women of earlier poets in just the same way as Phaedra differs from her, and to a far greater degree.[67]

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[65] Ibid. *Frogs* 306 l.1200n.

[66] See Ch.6.

[67] Murray 1902: *Frogs* 304 l.1044n.

This is a modern way of looking at Aeschylus, completely rejecting both the nineteenth-century consensus and the characterisation presented by Aristophanes, of Aeschylus as old-fashioned. As a counterpoint, Murray later argued in *Euripides and His Age* that Euripides was, formally at least, 'intensely traditional';[68] again, this was a contrarian position. Interestingly, Murray has nothing to say about Aristophanes' preference for Aeschylus at the end of *Frogs*.

Aristophanes includes many passages in *Frogs* either directly quoting Greek tragedy or parodying its diction, and Murray's translations of these lines are good:

> CHORUS
>
> Eftsoons shall dire anger interne be the Thunderer's portion
>
> When his foe's glib tusk fresh whetted for blood he descries;
>
> Then fell shall his heart be, and mad; and a pallid distortion
>
> Descend as a cloud on his eyes.[69]

The diction used to translate Aristophanes' parody of Aeschylus is reminiscent of heavily stylised and archaising Victorian translations of Greek drama such as Robert Browning's *Agamemnon*. But it is also only slightly exaggerated from the diction used to render Euripides into English earlier on in the volume – note the rhyming. Not only do Murray's translations capture Aristophanes' parody of tragedy, but they also work as *self-parody*, mocking Murray's *own* tragic tone. If Murray only appreciates *Frogs* because of its commentary on Euripides, he does at least appreciate it for that, both in seriousness and in jest.

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[68] Murray 1913: 19.

[69] Murray 1902: *Frogs* 238.

If by 1902 Murray had already learned to appreciate Aristophanes' poetics, however, he still did not value the playwright's politics outright. *Frogs* is not an especially political play, and Murray's reading of it does not inject politics where none exists (as Mitchell's commentary does).[70] But Murray is also uninterested in the politics that *does* come up in *Frogs*. The *parabasis*' mention of the oligarch Phrynichus is explained with the briefest of notes.[71] Many other political asides aren't discussed at all. One interesting note, though brief, does suggest a Fabian's reading of Athenian history; referring to l.569, 'Run, you, and fetch me my protector, Cleon',[72] Murray comments that Cleon 'fought the causes of the oppressed'.[73] This interesting view of the Athenian democrat/demagogue will come up again.

All in all, Murray's translation of the *Frogs* demonstrates that some of the issues Murray expresses with Aristophanes in his 1897 chapter still bother him, with no way through the thicket just yet. But in terms of Aristophanes' politics, the next two receptions of Old Comedy we will look at demonstrate a significant shift in Murray's reading.

The 1914 Oxford *Acharnians*

In Chapter 7, we saw that the Oxford Greek Play as an institution dates back to a performance of *Agamemnon* in 1880; four Aristophanes plays had been produced by 1909. In 1914, a few months before World War One broke out, *Acharnians* was

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[70] See Ch.2.

[71] Murray 1902: *Frogs* 295 l.688n.

[72] Ibid. 221.

[73] Ibid. 293, l.569n.

produced. This must strike us as a startling choice. Neither Oxford nor Cambridge had performed the play before[74] (although the University of Pennsylvania did stage it in 1886[75]). Given the political and military tensions building up at the time of production, we must wonder at its anti-war theme; the programme describes the conclusion of *Acharnians* as an 'unmistakeable vindication of peace'.[76] Importantly for us here, the programme gives us another interesting piece of information – Murray was now a member of the Greek Play organising committee.[77]

The overwhelming tendency to archaeologise performances of Greek plays at Oxford (less so than at Cambridge) was not overturned in this production. There was the same careful focus on aesthetic stage design and costume:

> The scene was charming. The Acropolis was seen from the north-west with the Propylaea and northern bastions showing. In the background was Lycabettus, so prominent in reality, so little recorded in Greek literature…

[74] As noted, Blackheath Propriety School had performed the play in 1883, Dulwich College had given extracts of it six times, and Cardiff *may* have staged the play in 1911. E.F. Clarke, the first messenger in the Oxford play, appeared first in the chorus of the 1912 Dulwich *Acharnians* (*The Acharnians* [Photograph] Dulwich College, 1912. Dulwich College Archive; 'O.U.D.S. The Acharnians of Aristophanes' [Programme] APGRD Archive 4524).

[75] This archaeologising production was possibly influenced by Oxford and Cambridge, though Pearcy refutes a strong influence (2003: 308). He also notes that W.S. Gilbert's comedy *Engaged* was being performed in Philadelphia concurrently with *Acharnians* (ibid. 299) – Gilbert just keeps popping up.

[76] 'O.U.D.S. The Acharnians of Aristophanes' [Programme] APGRD Archive 4524.

[77] Ibid.

> The costumes would need the pen of an expert, for the programme showed that their superintendence had been in very expert hands…[78]

Euripides was to be found 'seated high on a well-contrived ἐκκύκλημα';[79] this careful observation by the reviewer of an aspect of ancient Greek theatre replicated in performance recalls the enduring pedagogical element of the Greek Play. Yet there were innovative touches. The *Times* reviewer noted that 'in the manoeuvres of the chorus there [was] plenty of comic significance and "business."'[80] The Megarian and Boeotian visitors were both rendered slightly Scottish, with the former (played by E.O. Coote) wearing a 'Tartan chiton' and the latter (D. Colbourne) apparently speaking his Greek with a Scottish accent![81] These comedic touches are broadly in line with the pattern discerned in the Oxford Greek Plays in general, which were generally more burlesqued than their Cambridge cousins.

The most significant contemporary reference, however, was to the state of European politics as they stood in early 1914. Though nothing was said *explicitly*, a series of political allusions were made through the musical score, composed (as so many Oxford and Cambridge Greek plays had been) by Sir Hubert Parry. The overture was 'a tale of war alarms', mixing several musical numbers and styles from opera to the music hall.[82] The Spartans, the programme tells us, were 'typified… by

[78] O.N. 1914: 229.

[79] Ibid.

[80] '"The Acharnians" at Oxford' (19 February 1914) *Times*: 9.

[81] O.N. (26 February 1914) 'O.U.D.S. *The Acharnians*', *Oxford Magazine*, 229. The idea of having a Scottish Boeotian may have come from Frere's translation, which renders his dialogue in a Scottish accent; see Ch.2 and Eastman 2015: 97.

[82] '"The Acharnians" at Oxford' (19 February 1914) *Times*: 9.

the “Wacht am Rhein”', a German patriotic song.[83] As no Spartan actually appears in the play, Parry presumably brought in the *leitmotif* of ‘Wacht am Rhein’ when they were mentioned. Athenian allies were denoted by the ‘Marseillaise’, brought into ‘an *entente cordiale*’ with ‘God Save the Queen’;[84] naturally, the chorus of Acharnians were typified by ‘The British Grenadiers’ and ‘Rule, Britannia!’.[85] Lamachus too found himself satirised by ‘a parody of some patriotic [music] effusions’.[86] The popular music-hall song ‘MacDermott’s War Song’ (named after its original performer, G.H. MacDermott) represented ‘the pugnacious Athenians’; this tune was first written in 1877 at the time of the Russo-Turkish War, a conflict Britain flirted with entering to check Russian expansion,[87] and no doubt its original chorus was recalled by many of the audience; ‘we don’t want to fight, but by Jingo if we do,/We’ve got the ships, we’ve got the men, and got the money too’.[88] The original song was so popular for its semi-satirical patriotic militarism that it gave the English language the word ‘jingoism’.[89] Belgium is not, as far as I can see, associated with the Megarian or the Boeotian, possibly because there was no commonly-known piece of music that Parry could have chosen to make the audience think instantly of Belgium. Otherwise, he evidently ‘made use of all the tunes bearing on the subject [of war] that he could think of’, and

[83] ‘O.U.D.S. The Acharnians of Aristophanes’ [Programme] APGRD Archive 4524.

[84] ‘“The Acharnians” at Oxford’ (19 February 1914) *Times*: 9.

[85] ‘O.U.D.S. The Acharnians of Aristophanes’ [Programme] APGRD Archive 4524.

[86] ‘“The Acharnians” at Oxford’ (19 February 1914) *Times*: 9.

[87] Wilson 2003: 399-401.

[88] Hunt c.1875.

[89] *OED* s.v. ‘jingo’.

the result was apparently hilarious.[90] But it was also a starkly political choice. If Athens is equated to Britain, and Sparta to Germany, by the score, then how do we translate *Acharnians*' message that Athens should make peace with Sparta? If Parry is mocking jingoistic music, what is he saying about European jingoism in 1914? As Hall has noted, 'this was not just topicalization; it was topicalization with at least a half-hearted agenda.'[91]

Only a fortnight before the production of the Greek Play, Murray set up a War and Peace Society in Oxford to argue the case of pacifism;[92] he assigned this same project to the *Acharnians* in *Ancient Greek Literature*, underlining that it advocates peace. The *Acharnians* 'is political in its main purpose, and is directed against Cleon and Lamachus, as representing the war party'.[93] This might seem like an obvious observation, but given the tendency at this time to avoid reading Aristophanes politically, it is worth noting. When it came to it, Murray did ultimately, if lukewarmly, accept the need for the specific conflict at hand, and began to argue for it publicly as well[94] – but he was certainly no Lamachus singing 'Rule, Britannia!'.

So the 1914 Oxford Greek Play, for all that it retained many of the distinctive features discussed in Chapter 7, nevertheless marked a turning point away from depoliticised Aristophanic performance. It is impossible to say the extent to which Murray influenced this. Aside from his committee position, he had no formal role – the play was directed by C. Bailey, the chorus was trained by H.P. Allen and the

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[90] 'Sir Hubert Parry's Joke' (19 February 1914) *Pall Mall Gazette*: 7.

[91] Hall 2007: 86.

[92] Ceadel 2007: 223.

[93] Murray 1897: 281f.

[94] Wilson 1987: 219.

translation used for the crib was by R.Y. Tyrrell.[95] We do know that 'as Professor of Greek he gave a lecture on *Acharnians* at Somerville College in connection with the production'[96] (where, we will remember, he also directed his translation of *Frogs* some years previously). But if it is coincidence that, only on Murray's appointment to the Committee, Oxford finally produced an Aristophanes play with politics at its heart – explicitly the anti-war, internationalist politics espoused by Murray personally and later specifically read by him into *Acharnians* – then it is some coincidence.

The performance history of *Trojan Women* in Murray's translation can offer us a productive parallel for how Murray used ancient drama in performance to address modern concerns; this play was used repeatedly throughout the early twentieth century to advocate peace. It was first staged by Granville-Barker in 1905 but critics found it 'too harrowing' because of its obvious allusions to the treatment of the Boers by the British in the Second Boer War (1899-1902);[97] Granville-Barker later toured his production, alongside *Iphigenia in Tauris*, around North American universities in 1915, during the First World War.[98] The play was again staged in Britain in 1919 to

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[95] 'O.U.D.S. The Acharnians of Aristophanes' [Programme] APGRD Archive 4524. Presumably this is his 1883 translation of the play. If so, we should not look for any contemporisation there; Tyrell notes in his preface and introduction that the translation is 'a metrical version of the *Acharnians* which shall be practically as literal as a prose version' (1883: 3) before asserting that Old Comedies have no relation to burlesques; 'indeed, the farcical element in the plays of Aristophanes is, to us at least, their weakest part' (ibid. 9).

[96] Wrigley 2007: 150.

[97] Hall and Macintosh 2005: 509f.

[98] Hall 2013: 241.

raise funds for the League of Nations.[99] (The Society of Oxford Home-Students also performed the play in Murray's translation in 1912.[100]) Murray interpreted the play explicitly as a protest against imperialism and war in *Euripides and his Age*.[101] His earnest belief in the power of Greek tragedy to convey atrocity is captured in Tony Harrison's *Fram*, in which Murray appears as a character; faced with criticism for trying to address the horrors of the Russian Famine (1921-1922) with yet another *Trojan Women*, he asserts that 'it's this that poetry was invented for/to give focus to our suffering and our pain'.[102] The 1914 *Acharnians* perhaps gave him another, and very different, ancient play to give focus to these same themes.

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[99] Hall 2018b: 129.

[100] APGRD Archive 8691.

[101] *Trojan Women* 'is a picture of the inner side of a great conquest, a thing which then [in 415 BC, during the Peloponnesian War], even more than now, formed probably the very heart of the dreams of the average unregenerate man', but it is a 'conquest not embodied in those who achieved it… but in those who have experienced it most fully, the conquered women' (Murray 1913: 137). Note the 'even more than now'; with this slightest nod towards the contemporary, Murray invites the reader to consider *Trojan Women*'s anti-imperialist message as relevant for the modern world – in 1913, a world on the brink of a devastating war.

[102] Harrison 2008: 55. *Fram* isn't just a reception of (Murray's reception of) Greek tragedy (for which, see Hall 2018b). The play begins where Aristophanes' *Frogs* ends – with Gilbert Murray, curiously connected to Aeschylus and not Euripides, brought up from Hades to save the world with a new play ('Aeschylus! Aeschylus! O Aeschylus, I knew/the light that woke my spirit could only come from you', Murray cries, 'I beg you to assist/my humblest of efforts to become a dramatist' (Harrison 2008: 4)). As such, Murray-Aeschylus – not Murray-Euripides – seeks to fulfil the instruction Aeschylus is given

Aristophanes and the War Party (1918)

Murray's most unambiguous use of Aristophanes for political purposes came on 7 November 1918 when, just a few days before the end of the First World War, he gave the annual Creighton History Lecture on the Peloponnesian War and its similarities with the contemporary conflict. Although the speech was not specifically about Aristophanes (despite its title), Murray uses Old Comedy to demonstrate the effects of the War on the private citizens of Athens. This socio-historical approach allows Murray to offer a stark warning about his own times, in light of the upcoming Armistice. By November 1918, he had been engaged in the plans for the founding of the League of Nations for several months.[103]

Murray is conscious of the danger of reading the present into the past, 'and so twist[ing] the cold and unconscious record into the burning service of controversial politics.'[104] Greek history – as this thesis has demonstrated extensively – is at particular risk of being misappropriated. 'Cleon in particular, the most vivid figure of the Peloponnesian War' – and, we may add, Aristophanes' favourite target – 'plays in the history books many varied parts.'[105]

With that note of self-aware caution set aside, however, Murray sets up his comparison. The Peloponnesian War:

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by Pluto at the end of *Frogs*; 'save our city with good judgments' (1501f.). Harrison was without a doubt aware that Murray had translated *Frogs*, a play to which he now provides a sequel.

[103] Wilson 1987: 251.

[104] Murray 1919: 5.

[105] Ibid. 6.

> Was in many respects curiously similar to the present war. It was, as far as the Hellenic peoples were concerned, a world-war. No part of the Greek race was unaffected. It was the greatest war there had ever been. Arising suddenly among civilized nations, accustomed to comparatively decent and half-hearted wars, it startled the world by its uncompromising ferocity. Again, it was a struggle between Sea-power and Land-power… It was a struggle between the principles of democracy and military monarchy…[106]

He is equating Athens with Britain and the Allied Powers, and Sparta with Germany and the Central Powers. Although both sides are 'civilised nations', we are to understand whose side we should be on – the side of culture, democracy, Athens and Britain. Murray even laments that 'there was no America to make sure that the right side won!'[107] There are many points we might quibble with in this over-simplified and partisan account of both conflicts. But the rhetorical point is persuasive enough. And what emerges most is Murray's description of the 'uncompromising ferocity' of both conflicts.

The largest part of Murray's thesis develops the idea that Greece, Athens in particular, became unavoidably degraded and weakened by the war. Not at first – Aristophanes' free speech against Cleon in particular was a sign that Athenian values did not fail as soon as the war began[108] – but soon the city was engaging in 'harsh and unscrupulous exploitation of subject-allies, which at times amounted to absolute

[106] Ibid. 7f.

[107] Ibid. 9. Punctuation his. Murray knew the War was all but over when he delivered this speech.

[108] Ibid. 20.

tyranny and extortion'.[109] Slaves were deserting in huge numbers; 'they were a class without rights, without interests, without preference for one country or one set of masters over another. In modern Europe it seems as a rule to take an extraordinary amount of prolonged misery before an oppressed class loses its national feeling.'[110] One can feel Murray's own concern for the subdued proletariat, whether in Europe or in the colonies. Indeed, such comparisons between ancient and modern peoples feature throughout the speech.

Moral failings led to the sufferings of war, and here the relevance to contemporary Britain is felt most keenly. The scene from the *Acharnians* in which Dicaeopolis 'threatens to murder a sack of charcoal, and the Chorus of charcoal-burners are broken-hearted at the thought, is perhaps more intelligible to us this winter than it was before the war.'[111] There is power in this simple reflection on shared human misery. I struggle to appreciate the full force of Murray's sentiment on a personal level, I have to say, because I have never been in a similar position. That is of course Murray's point; in 1918, historians and classicists were better able to understand the horrors of the Peloponnesian War than they ever had been before. Murray powerfully argues against a detached, scholarly approach to historical warfare. 'One is tempted in a case like this to pass no judgement on men or policies, but merely record the actual course of history and try to understand the conflicting policies and ideals', he acknowledges.[112] But we must reject that idea, because the

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[109] Ibid. 21.

[110] Ibid. 17.

[111] Ibid. 13.

[112] Ibid. 45.

history of warfare is also the history of humanity, wasted. To drive home this appeal to his audience's emotions, he uses a vignette:

> When the soldiers of Nicias in Sicily, mad with thirst, pressed on to drink the water, thick with blood and mire, of the little stream where the enemy archers shot them down at leisure, it was not only an army that perished but a nation, and a nation that held the hopes of the world.[113]

This description evokes the horrors of trench warfare, a modern iteration of the same 'blood and mire'. Casting aside the inevitable appeal to Athens specifically as 'a nation that held the hopes of the world', Murray's message is clear. War degrades morality and destroys hope.

At first glance, a narrative of decline over the course of the Peloponnesian War strikes us as an entirely traditional view of Greek history; this tendency to blur moral degradation with political and militaristic defeat is so utterly nineteenth-century. Mitford had commented that the Athenian democracy 'was unable to avert the ruin which such a [democratic] government hath an eternal tendency to bring upon itself'.[114] Even if he does not blame democracy for it, Murray's decline is just as moral as Mitford's. But his great innovation is virtually to separate his moralising view of history from class snobbery and anti-democratic ire:

> Our witnesses are unanimous in saying that from the time of Pericles onward there was a rapid and progressive deterioration in the class of man who acquired ascendancy in Athens. In part no doubt this alleged deterioration merely represented a change in social class… But I hardly

[113] Ibid. 45f.

[114] Mitford 1808b: 6; see Ch.1.

> see how we can doubt that there really was a moral and spiritual degradation as well…[115]

For Murray, it matters less that Pericles was an aristocrat and oligarch whilst Cleon was the demagogic son of a tanner, and more how they each led the city. This is not just a break from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historical tradition, but also from the ancient sources, and from Aristophanes in particular. As Murray says, ‘our witnesses are unanimous’ in their classism. On the surface, Aristophanes’ plays *do* imply that Cleon was a bad ruler at least in part *because* he was a commoner. As we have seen, this is how he was characterised by the conservative majority of scholars for much of the nineteenth century, and attacks on Cleon only grew in intensity after the Russian Revolution of 1917.[116] Murray’s point is presented as uncontroversial, but it is actually radical.[117]

Ultimately, the plays of Aristophanes serve as a stark warning:

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[115] Murray 1919: 33.

[116] ‘Perhaps the most extended and virulent denunciation of Cleon ever published was the sixty-four-page diatribe published under the name “Eupolis” in 1918. This work is a thinly disguised attack on contemporary communists, socialists, and economic levellers the world over, which quotes extensively from both Thucydides and Aristophanes to support its reactionary arguments’ (Hall 2018c: 356f.).

[117] We can compare this nuanced reading of Cleon with that of *Athenian Women*, a play written by the Communist George Cram Cook (with significant support from his wife Susan Glaspell) and performed in New York earlier in the year. *Athenian Women* was heavily dependent on Aristophanes’ women plays. Cook’s characterisation of Cleon ‘is taken over uncritically from Thucydides’ without any reflection on its grounding in classism (Hall 2018d: 18f.).

> The more the cities of Greece were ruined by the havoc of war, the more the lives of men and women were poisoned by the fear and hate and suspicion which it engendered, the more was Athens haunted by shining dreams of the future reconstruction of human life. Not only in the speculations of philosophers… but in comedy after comedy of Aristophanes and his compeers…[118]

He refers here to the utopian plays Aristophanes wrote mid-career, in which themes of peace, equality and prosperity abound; *Birds*, *Lysistrata*, *Ecclesiazusae* and so on. This is not the place to challenge Murray's utopian reading of Old Comedy. What is interesting is his concern about indulging in 'shining dreams of the future reconstruction of human life'. Why should this be a bad thing? For Murray, because they remained *unfulfilled* 'shining dreams'. Athens would never restore the civilisation it lost over the course of the war. It would remain degraded.

Here, then, is the *dénouement* of Murray's argument. It turns out we have not been talking about Aristophanes or the Peloponnesian War at all. Murray's real message is one of peace, a rallying cry to rebuild humanity and thus distinguish ourselves from the mistakes of Athens and the past:

> In spite of the vast material destruction, in spite of the blotting out from the book of life of practically one whole generation of men, in spite of the unmeasured misery which has reigned and reigns still over the greater part of Europe, in spite of the gigantic difficulties of the task before us; in spite of the great war-harvest of evil and the exhaustion of brain and spirit in most of the victorious nations as well as in the vanquished, our war has

[118] Murray 1919: 10

> ended right; and we have such an opportunity as no generation of mankind has ever had of building out of these ruins a better international life and concomitantly a better life within each nation.[119]

It is a weighty task, he acknowledges, but vital 'if we are not to make that sacrifice a crime and a mockery.'[120]

The politics of Murray's paper are social-democratic and internationalist, in keeping with the politics of the man who wrote it. One wonders if the organisers of the Creighton Lecture were entirely prepared for the sort of address Murray was going to give them. He makes unapologetic use of Aristophanes and ancient Greek history to discuss these contemporary political questions. How different it is from the apolitical, historicising performances of Aristophanes at Oxford and (especially) Cambridge! There is no attempt to re-write Aristophanes as an aesthetic poet here, either. He is a political commentator, and one with as much to say about twentieth-century Britain as about fifth-century BC Athens. Indeed, Murray finishes his lecture by borrowing a vision from Aristophanes' utopian plays, especially *Birds*, mixed with the language of *Galatians* 3:28:

> "A City where rich and poor, man and woman, Athenian and Spartan, are all equal and all free; where there are no false accusers and where men" – or at least the souls of men – "have wings." That was the old dream that failed. Is it to fail always and for ever?[121]

[119] Ibid. 46f.

[120] Ibid. 47.

[121] Ibid. 48.

Aristophanes' hopes for and criticisms of Athens did not save it and the Greek world from ruin. In fact, they were destructive because Athens was unable to fulfil them. Perhaps, Murray hopes, they can save the new world.

Of course, they have not saved us yet.

Gilbert Murray's Aristophanes after the War

Strictly speaking the next section of this chapter falls outside the scope of this thesis, which must perforce stop at 1918 or become overweight. But it might prove helpful to survey, briefly, Murray's later workings with Aristophanes, to explore how the themes we have already drawn out developed and flourished.

Murray's work with the League of Nations did not prevent him from seeing the funny side of international diplomacy, as characterised by an amusing farce entitled *Saved Again, or The Assembly*. The Bodleian Library Murray archive contains several annotated copies of the script, suggesting that it was written by Murray himself, though we cannot say this for certain. Although not dated, a reference in the script to the Russian Famine implies it was written in 1921-1922.[122] The plot is a simple comedic farce; after a French supplementary delegate to the League of Nations steals a tip jar from the cloakroom attendant to pay his gambling debts, chaos ensues as each delegate interprets the act in line with his own nation's priorities, derailing debate. The British delegate turns up late and unbriefed (something contemporary British diplomats engaged in complex negotiations would of course never do), but sets everything right through clever diplomacy. Although no direct influence from Old Comedy can be felt, the tone is politely Aristophanic. Not only is it highly parodic and

[122] Murray [1921-1922]: f.18.

self-evidently about politics (though not necessarily *political*), *Saved Again* also makes ample use of ethnographic stereotypes. Aristophanes enjoyed staging assembly scenes, and in *Acharnians* populated a regular Athenian assembly meeting with exotic foreign ambassadors. The play's conclusion, which suggests that only Britain can restore order to a chaotic international stage, might seem oddly nationalistic coming from the internationalist Australian Gilbert Murray, but as we have seen he did have this tendency.

One archived copy of the script includes names pencilled next to the *dramatis personae*.[123] If these are the names of actors, the piece must have been performed. The 'South African Delegate' has Robert Cecil written next to it, presumably the politician and son of a former Prime Minister who had campaigned for the League of Nations;[124] Sir James Rennell Rodd, a British ambassador to the League and sometime classicist,[125] was assigned the role of League President. Scrawled at the bottom is the name of the Romanian-French writer Hélène Vacaresco, for two decades a Romanian delegate to the League of Nations (and the only woman permanent delegate).[126] No role is assigned to her – she is labelled 'the poetess' – but she possibly played the cloakroom attendant, which does not have a name written next to it. Perhaps she played another of the delegates – certainly more fitting for her stature. Alternatively, 'poetess' may indicate she was the playwright and not Murray – although I find this unlikely, given the role of the British delegate as the hero of the piece, and that it was written in English prose. The other names are either surnames,

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[123] Ibid. f.2.

[124] Ceadel 2011.

[125] Loraine 2008.

[126] Iordan 2010: 287.

initials or illegible, making it hard to work out to whom they refer. Nevertheless, this list suggests a star cast of diplomats all intimately associated with the League of Nations. Was *Saved Again* perhaps performed at the League itself, potentially as a fundraiser for the Russian Famine relief effort? If so, Murray contributed more than just a *Hecuba* to the cause.

In 1933, Murray published a monograph on *Aristophanes*: *A Study*, dedicated to his 'old friend' Shaw 'who has filled many lands with laughter'.[127] In the preface, he makes many of the same apologies as in the preface of *Greek Literature*'; 'there is little or no research in this book', he says.[128] He explicitly highlights the mistakes he made in *Greek Literature* as a motivation for writing the new monograph.[129] And it is here that he claims he has 'only late in life… learnt to care for Aristophanes',[130] a statement we have already questioned. We should in fact treat this entire preface with caution. Further reading of his *Study* demonstrates a careful synthesis of the ideas already expressed in *Greek Literature* with points developed in *Aristophanes and the War Party*, slightly modified. Murray summarises his overall argument into three points: Aristophanes was not, as often depicted, a proto-Tory pamphleteer; his poetry, properly contextualised, is not defined by immoral licentiousness; and his satire is not cruelly personal against those whom it attacks. I will briefly treat these three points.

In *Greek Literature*, Murray had asserted that Aristophanes' licentiousness was justified by the specific festival context of the performances. This reading of Greek Comedy – as mentioned, probably taken from Symonds – is broadly replicated

[127] Murray 1933: v.

[128] Ibid. vii.

[129] Ibid. vii.

[130] Ibid. vii.

in *Study*, although now Murray rejects a carnivalesque reading of the genre and instead emphasises the ritualistic origins of phallocentric Old Comedy in fertility cults.[131] Although he makes much out of the difference between carnival and ritual, the two arguments largely amount to the same thing – that the performance of Old Comedy takes place within a specific context and thus the usual rules of propriety do not stand. Murray's shift of focus towards ritual reflects his intellectual development between 1897 and 1933, and the interest he developed in ritualism more broadly. We can read it as a Murrayesque correction of Symonds, though another important intertext is Francis Cornford's *The Origin of Attic Comedy* (1914). Cornford, another of the 'Cambridge Ritualists', dedicated his monograph to Murray and speaks extensively of his debt to Murray in the preface.[132]

As a consequence of its ritualistic, and thus non-threatening, character, Murray can assert that Aristophanes' Comedy is, broadly speaking, non-personal. His two cases in point here are Aristophanes' representations of Sophocles in *Clouds*, and Euripides throughout the canon. In *Clouds*, he asserts, 'the joke of the play, so to speak, is not any suggested roguery of Socrates' but of Strepsiades.[133] This is a tacit rebuttal to the theory that *Clouds* was a factor in Socrates' state-sponsored suicide. Likewise, Murray argues, 'there is no attack on the personal character or honour of Euripides' in any play.[134] We may wonder how Murray has read, for example, the scene at the end of *Thesmophoriazusae* in which Euripides dresses as an elderly procuress, or the many passages of the *Frogs* which accuse Euripides of

[131] Ibid. 4.

[132] Cornford 1914: vii f.

[133] Ibid. 95.

[134] Ibid. 108.

debasing the Athenian character, and come to this conclusion. But such is Murray's interpretation. His personal attachment to the tragedian explains why he is keen to preserve his reputation. Even Cleon is not entirely debased. Murray notes that 'to be a friend of the injured poor' – as Aristophanes certainly does represent him – 'is a thing of which Cleon might justly be proud, even if it does not constitute a defence against other charges' made by Aristophanes.[135]

Finally, Murray emphasises that Aristophanes should not be viewed as a proto-Tory scourge. Aristophanes' politics were more complicated than that; if he 'disliked the ascendancy of the mob as heartily as the *Morning Post* [a right-wing newspaper], he hated militarism and cruelty as much as the *Manchester Guardian* [on the left]'.[136] For Murray, Aristophanes' one major political opinion is that he is anti-war. Even his conflict with Cleon should be seen as a disagreement, not over broader politics, but over the conflict.[137] As already set out in *Greek Literature*, Murray interprets *Lysistrata*'s eponymous heroine as a feminist champion, and the play's ultimate appeal is 'not to laughter alone but also to deeper things than laughter.'[138] This is a refinement of the paradox developed in *Greek Literature* between the democratic genre of Old Comedy and Aristophanes' own seemingly oligarchic views.

It also places Aristophanes' supposed political beliefs directly in line with Murray's. This shift in interpretation of Aristophanes' politics may explain why Murray embraced him more fully in 1933 than he did in 1897. In 1933, the horrors of World War One had been displaced by new European tensions and the sense that a second

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[135] Ibid. 45.

[136] Ibid. viii.

[137] Ibid. 56.

[138] Ibid. 180.

war was close at hand. As Murray had imagined Aristophanes providing hope in the light of the Great War in his 1918 *Aristophanes and the War-Party*, so did he re-conjure the spirit of the comedian to face down new, darker threats in 1933:

> For many years I have wished quite particularly for Aristophanes, and wondered whether, like the great men who rise from the dead in two of his own comedies, he could bring us later generations some help. Could he fight against our European war-fevers and nationalisms as he fought against those of his own country, facing unpopularity – facing death, if it must be – yet always ready with his gallant laughter and never collapsing into spitefulness or mere self-pity? He might do it, if only the Fascisti and Nazis and Ogpus could refrain from killing him, and the British authorities from forbidding him to land in England. The world badly needs a man of genius who could make whole nations listen to him…[139]

There is something touchingly naïve about this sentiment. Aristophanes had no power to end the Peloponnesian War; he would obviously not be any more effective against Mussolini, Hitler or Stalin (or, dare we say it, the British government). But despite it all, Murray believed in the power of diplomacy and poetry. And curiously, it is Aristophanic, not Euripidean poetry he yearns for here. Note the careful balance of Italian, Russian and German oppression of free speech with British assaults on liberty (allowing that the British would only threaten to exclude, not assassinate, the reborn poet) similar to his lukewarm attempts at balance between Britain and Germany in *Aristophanes and the War-Party*.

[139] Ibid. viif.

Over the course of the twentieth century, Gilbert Murray collaborated with the BBC to produce radio programmes, including several audio versions of his Greek drama translations in the 1940s and 1950s. Of the five classical plays performed in this way, the three Euripides plays – *Hippolytus* (1945), *Trojan Women* (1946) and *Electra* (1948) had all been performed by Harley Granville-Barker's company four decades before. Only *Frogs* and Menander's *Rape of the Locks* were getting their professional performance debuts on the radio.[140] These readings could attract huge audiences 'which sometimes ran into millions',[141] and *Frogs* proved so popular that it was broadcast four times between 1947 and 1951.[142] This BBC recording was therefore potentially the most significant performance of Aristophanes to date in terms of sheer outreach. 'Murray himself became very involved in these productions, advising, attending rehearsals, and often appearing in front of the microphone, as in the case of *Frogs*, to provide a brief introduction to the play.'[143]

Murray returned to Aristophanes again in the last years of his life to produce new translations of *Birds* in 1950 and *Knights* in 1956. We have already seen the admiration he felt for the poetry of *Birds*; similarly, his decision to translate *Knights* was presumably connected with the admiration he felt towards the play's political intensity.

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[140] *Rape of the Locks*, 'Murray's unpublished translation and reconstruction of Menander's *Perikeiromene*', was 'the first recorded broadcast of Greek comedy on air' when it was broadcast in 1942 (Wrigley 2014: 856f.).

[141] Ibid. 850f.

[142] Morris 2007: 311.

[143] Ibid. 304.

Of all case studies covered in this dissertation, our brief foray into Murray's Aristophanes has been the most condensed, and a fine candidate for further extended research. Over the course of Murray's career, he returned to Aristophanes several times; it is incorrect to suggest he suddenly discovered the comic playwright at the end of his life. Aristophanes meant different things to him at different times and in different contexts – he could be a source of satire, a reflection on Murray's beloved Euripides, a champion for peace, a merely didactic exercise in textual commentary – but always the interpretation of Aristophanes was filtered through Murray's own views on classical literature, society and politics. There is, of course, nothing new here; as far back as Chapter 2, we saw how Hookham Frere and Mitchell each created images of Aristophanes which they could relate to. In that sense, Murray's Aristophanes conforms well to the long line of receptions we have been tracing. But there is also something exciting, new, dare I say *modern* about Murray's Aristophanes, as well. Even if we must confess Old Comedy does not have the answer to the horrors of war and the lasting scars of twentieth century world politics, even if we question his scholarly detachment or accuracy, Murray's attempt to turn Aristophanes into an exemplar for political discourse must leave us more fulfilled than any other explanation of why Aristophanes hated democracy ever could.

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) and *Major Barbara* (1905)

George Bernard Shaw was born into a middle-class Protestant family in Dublin in 1856, but suffered a hard upbringing under the weight of an alcoholic father and the enduring presence of his mother's lover.[144] After moving to London and working as a

[144] Peters 1998: 5.

critic, he joined the Fabian Society in 1884 and lent them his powers as pamphleteer.[145] The Fabians' vision of democratic socialism significantly influenced Shaw's development as an artist. His first play, *Widowers' Houses*, was produced in 1892;[146] over the next sixty years of his life, he went on to produce 'some five dozen plays,… five completed novels, a number of short stories, lengthy treatises on politics and economics, four volumes of theatre criticism, three volumes of music criticism, and a volume of art criticism.'[147] Shaw is 'the only Nobel laureate [in Literature] also to win an Academy Award (for the screenplay of *Pygmalion*)'.[148]

I cannot find the same humanity in Shaw as in Murray; he is too cynical, and far too cruel. The conclusion of his preface to *Major Barbara* is that we should place criminals and beggars 'in the lethal chamber and get rid of them',[149] a rhetorical flourish which, if we are supposed to be shocked by it but not take it too seriously, succeeds on at least one account. With precisely how much Swiftian satire does it echo the *Modest Proposal*? Along with some noble causes, Shaw championed the anti-vax movement[150] and eugenics.[151] The Aristophanic reception Shaw develops over the course of *Major Barbara* shares the raw, unnerving energy of Shelley's, Browning's and Beardsley's receptions, whereas Murray's Aristophanes was more in tune, at least in its vital spirit, with Symonds'.

[145] Ibid. 8.

[146] Ibid. 14.

[147] Ibid. 3.

[148] Ibid. 3.

[149] Shaw 1926: *MB* 187.

[150] Peters 1998: 10f.

[151] Ibid. 17.

As noted, Shaw and Murray were friends and collaborators. Although several of Murray's Euripides translations were successfully staged at the Court Theatre from 1904, it was Shaw's plays that 'accounted for 70 percent of the Royal Court performances' from 1904 to 1907.[152] *Major Barbara* was staged there from November 1905, the same year as *Hippolytus*, directed by and starring Granville-Barker, who also directed most of Murray's productions. But Shaw's indebtedness to Murray in *Major Barbara* goes beyond sharing a director and a theatre. 'It has long been common knowledge that Shaw selected his friend Gilbert Murray, Murray's wife, Lady Mary, and her mother, Rosalind Howard, Countess of Carlisle, as models for *Major Barbara*'s Adolphus Cusins, Barbara Undershaft, and Lady Britomart Undershaft, respectively.'[153] Barbara and Lady Britomart may have born only passing similarities to their models,[154] but Cusins' connection with Murray was explicit. Like Murray, he is an Australian-born classicist who loathes war.[155] A story he relates at the *dénouement* of the play, about giving one of his students a revolver as he headed off to war, in fact happened to Murray.[156] Granville-Barker played the role, and he even appears to have borrowed Murray's glasses for the performance.[157]

Yet Murray's most significant influence on *Major Barbara* was to provide a model for the *play*, via his (not yet staged) translation of the *Bacchae* but also through

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[152] Ibid. 20.

[153] Albert 2002: 21. Undershaft may have been modelled on the successful arms manufacturer William George Armstrong (Pearce and Durham 2015: 152).

[154] See Albert 1968 and 2002.

[155] Shaw 1926: *MB* I 192; III 278.

[156] Albert 1968: 137.

[157] Albert 2002: 50.

his *Frogs*.[158] Throughout *Major Barbara*, both the Salvation Army and Undershaft are described in startlingly Dionysian terms. *Major Barbara* evidently owes much to the *Bacchae*'s exploration of ritualistic intoxication; specifically, it borrows Murray's own ritualist reading of the play. And in a note preceding the printed text of the play, Shaw writes that:

> The Euripidean verses in the second act of *Major Barbara* are not by me, or even directly by Euripides. They are by Professor Gilbert Murray, whose English version of *The Bacchae* came into our dramatic literature with all the impulsive power of an original work shortly before *Major Barbara* was begun. The play, indeed, stands indebted to him in more ways than one.[159]

So the importance of *Bacchae* to *Major Barbara*, if only hinted at rather than declared, is unmistakeable. Shaw's reception of *Frogs* is less clearly signposted – his preceding note remains silent on the *Frogs*' impulsive power, although it was published alongside *Bacchae* – but is no less significant and complex. Let us first try to unpick *Major Barbara*'s reception of *Bacchae*, before we return to Aristophanes.

In the first act and much of the second, Barbara seems to play the role of Dionysos, gripping the souls of the poor with her religious fervour and winning over her fiancé Adolphus Cusins more personally. We witness her enchantment of Bill Walker in the second act; although he is ultimately released from her 'spell',[160] the Dionysiac force of her enchantment is undeniable. Cusins explicitly equates the

[158] See Macintosh 2007; Hall and Macintosh 2005: 497-508.

[159] Shaw 1926: *MB* 146.

[160] Ibid. II 229.

Salvation Army, and therefore Barbara, with Dionysos, declaring that 'the business of the Salvation Army is to save, not to wrangle about the name of the pathfinder. Dionysos or another: what does it matter?'.[161] The maenads on Mount Cithaeron in the *Bacchae* are another army, the messenger describing how 'they burst/Destroying, as a foeman's army comes';[162] in *Major Barbara*, the Salvation Army is an explicitly feminine organisation represented by Mrs Baines, Jenny Hill, Barbara and Cusins as the only man. But Barbara's powers are ultimately shown to be insufficient, and she is forced to accept that salvation cannot come on an empty stomach. Her triumphant cry at the end of the play, as she contemplates converting the well-fed souls of Perivale St Andrews, is that she has 'got rid of the bribe of bread'[163] – only on that condition can she take up the colours of the Salvation Army Dionysos again.

During the second act, the Dionysian mantle is passed from Barbara to her father. Undershaft is not a religious man, but he does return to a family who have rejected him, mirroring Dionysos' own return to Thebes in *Bacchae*. Undershaft declares that he is 'quite interested in the Salvation Army. Its motto might be [his] own: Blood and Fire.'[164] Likewise, it might be Dionysos', at least as he appears in the *Bacchae*. Although Undershaft does not drink himself, he gets Cusins drunk; the scholar notes that 'he only provided the wine. I think it was Dionysos who made me drunk.'[165] Cusins even explicitly refers to him as 'Dionysos Undershaft'.[166] Cusins'

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[161] Ibid. II 234.

[162] Murray 1902: *Bacchae* 117.

[163] Shaw 1926: *MB* III 291.

[164] Ibid. I 207.

[165] Ibid. III 255.

[166] Ibid. II 248.

symbolic shift from Barbara to her father is signalled at the end of Act 2, as he beats his drum and 'carries the crowd (and the audience) forward to the new religion of Andrew Undershaft',[167] leaving Barbara behind. The Dionysian spell of Barbara broken, Dionysos Undershaft weaves his own.

Undershaft is, as Macintosh puts it, 'the true modern counterpart to Dionysus', a god who 'embodied Shaw's concept of the Life-force: energy without morality'.[168] But in one sense, he makes for an unappealing god. His name implies 'the underminer, the mineshaft',[169] and also the shaft of the penis – a *double entendre* suggestive of the character's morality, appropriate for an industrialist, but also quietly Aristophanic in its sexual suggestiveness. Each potential meaning of the name is, in its own way, unnerving. But the character is nonetheless undeniably gripping. In the preface to the play, Shaw writes that Undershaft 'is simply a man who, having grasped the fact that poverty is a crime, knows that when society offered him the alternative of poverty or a lucrative trade in death and destruction, it offered him, not a choice between opulent villainy and humble virtue, but between energetic enterprise and cowardly infamy.'[170] In this sense, he is the parallel of Alfred Doolittle in *Pygmalion*, who, when Higgins suggests he is either 'an honest man, or… a rogue', replies that he is 'a little of both,… like the rest of us: a little of both.'[171] This trait is what Shaw calls in the *Pygmalion* epilogue 'his Nietzschean transcendence of good and evil'.[172]

[167] Williams 2006: 151.

[168] Macintosh 2007: 154.

[169] Ibid.

[170] Shaw 1926: *MB* 157.

[171] Shaw 1928: 175.

[172] Ibid. 196.

Barbara, Undershaft and Cusins are set against each other as three points in a dramatic triangle;[173] if father and daughter are both, at different times, Dionysos, therefore, whom does that make Cusins? In his prologue, Shaw describes him as a 'romantic hero mocked by reality. From the plays of Aristophanes to the tales of Stevenson that mockery has been made familiar to all who are properly saturated with letters.'[174] To Aristophanes and Stevenson, we might add Euripides – this is an apt description of Pentheus' fate in *Bacchae*. Like Pentheus, Cusins is intoxicated by the wild energies of his two Dionysoses. But over the course of the play, he is also associated, metatheatrically, with the playwright of the *Bacchae*, with Euripides. Cusins quotes Murray's translation of *Bacchae* and calls it his own (as in a sense it is).[175] And in Act III, he is repeatedly nicknamed Euripides by Undershaft.[176] This is fitting, as Murray was himself a great Euripidean scholar. The connection between Cusins and Murray underlines the connection between Cusins and Euripides. As Macintosh argues, Cusins 'is no Pentheus', to be intoxicated and destroyed by one Dionysos or the other[177] – at least, that is not the only role he is playing.

I have largely kept my reading of this play to the first two acts, demonstrating how *Major Barbara* reperforms Euripides' *Bacchae* mediated through Murray. I now want to turn to the third act, to explore how Shaw brings resolution to this complex web of characterisations through a reception of Aristophanes' *Frogs*. In this final act, the Undershaft family are taken on a tour of Andrew Undershaft's weapons facility

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[173] See Berg 1998: 144f.; 155-159.

[174] Shaw 1926: *MB* 148.

[175] Ibid. II 233.

[176] Ibid. III 264, 275, 277, 279, 285 (twice), 286.

[177] Macintosh 2007: 155.

and attached model village of Perivale St Andrews. Cusins is offered the chance to inherit all he surveys, if he only signs up to the Undershaft creed of selling arms indiscriminately. The area visited is described as the 'Works Department of Hell'[178] and as 'the factory of death';[179] even the name Perivale, with its echoes of 'perish' and the Valley of the Shadow of Death, rings with morbidity. The irony is that Perivale St Andrews is idyllic. As Cusins notes, 'it only needs a cathedral to be a heavenly city instead of a hellish one.'[180] Of course, when Shaw tells us that a figure connected to Euripides and two figures connected to Dionysos are undergoing a *katabasis*, we may sense that we are in a version of *Frogs*.

In a sense, *Major Barbara* incorporates *Frogs* only by flipping it. Rather than Dionysos deciding between Euripides and Aeschylus, Euripides-Murray-Cusins is forced to decide between two versions of Dionysos. This is, at least, the narrative of the first two acts. But in Act 3 – with Barbara now largely sidelined – Cusins is reconfigured as Dionysos; his choice is what we witness. This decision is dictated by Undershaft, who in his role as Lord of Hell – that is, the owner of Perivale St Andrews and business partner of Mr Lazarus – is now associated with Hades. The contest is the same as in *Frogs*, between Euripides – poetry, morality, Cusins' own self – or the bombastic world of Perivale St Andrews. If there is an Aeschylus in the world of *Major Barbara*, it only exists in a metaphysical sense as the Undershaft family business, as war-like and heavy as in Aristophanes. Cusins does indeed select Aeschylus, reperforming *Frogs* faithfully. He declares that the democratic world he wants to create cannot be made through poetry:

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[178] Shaw 1926: *MB* III 265.

[179] Ibid. III 267.

[180] Ibid. III 269.

> I have tried to make spiritual power by teaching Greek. But the world can never be really touched by a dead language and a dead civilization. The people must have power; and the people cannot have Greek.[181]

Only by ending poverty, and thus subduing oneself to the brutal immorality of capitalism, can he hope to reshape the world. This is a rejection of his own identity. For Cusins, there is no Euripidean *bon mot* to justify his choice – he does not choose to become Andrew Undershaft because only his 'tongue hath sworn' he will not.[182] Rather, we must find the play's resolution unnerving.

Major Barbara opened in November 1905 to the backdrop of a harsh winter, acute unemployment and poverty, and an unresponsive government reliant on charity to care for the poor.[183] The Prime Minister, Arthur James Balfour, 'attended the first performance of *Major Barbara* [then] resigned as prime minister six days later on 4 December.'[184] The theme of poverty underpins the play, as Shaw launches a blistering attack on what, to him, was the greatest social evil – he undoubtedly has a contemporary political, as well as an artistic, agenda. In *Pygmalion*'s preface, Shaw asserts that the play 'is so intensely and deliberately didactic… it goes to prove my contention that art should never be anything else'.[185] *Major Barbara* prefigures this view; as Barbara aptly puts it, 'there must be some truth or other behind all this frightful irony.'[186] Aristophanes asserted that his comedies were didactic as well, most

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[181] Ibid. III 289.

[182] Murray 1902: *Frogs* 280.

[183] Albert 2013: 20.

[184] Ibid.

[185] Shaw 1928: 102.

[186] Shaw 1926: *MB* III 267.

memorably in the *Frogs* (686f.). Given his close reading of the text, Shaw surely knew the chorus' famous assertion that 'it behoves this sacred Chorus, in its wisdom and its bliss,/To assist the state with council'.[187]

Major Barbara intends to assist the state with council. But what wisdom does this sacred Chorus have to impart? The play has 'an ambiguity of ending that makes easy interpretation unsatisfactory',[188] but Shaw's point seems to be that no salvation – through Euripides or through the Salvation Army – can exist alongside poverty. In a letter to Murray written after sharing the first draft of the play, Shaw summarises Cusins' choice as lying 'not between going with Undershaft or not going with him, but between standing on the footplate at work, and merely sitting in a first class carriage reading Ruskin & explaining what a low dog the driver is and how steam is ruining the country.'[189] Capitalism is an immoral system, but better be a capitalist than a cog in capitalism's machine. Only when fed on immorally-earnt bread are the citizens of Perivale St Andrews open to salvation. Cusins suggests he will use his new-found power to 'make war on war', although there is 'no strong note of hope that [he] will succeed';[190] his arguments 'are so convoluted and based on such unreliable grounds… that they appear to be rationalizations.'[191] The conclusion of the play is fundamentally pessimistic.

Although full of warmth for the play, and especially the second act, Murray disagreed with this pessimistic conclusion. He felt that Cusins should win the moral

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[187] Murray 1902: *Frogs* 230.

[188] Williams 2006: 145.

[189] Shaw to Murray, 7 October 1905, quoted in Albert 1968: 128.

[190] Nutter 1979: 91.

[191] Ibid.

argument (naturally enough), whereas Shaw was ‘in the mind that Undershaft is in the right’.[192] Murray suggested revisions to the first draft to increase the ambiguity of Shaw’s dystopian moral, so that by the time the play was staged Shaw had given Cusins additional dialogue:

> As a teacher of Greek I gave the intellectual man weapons against the common man. I now want to give the common man weapons against the intellectual man. I love the common people. I want to arm them against the lawyer, the doctor, the priest, the literary man, the professor, the artist, and the politician, who, once in authority, are the most dangerous, disastrous and tyrannical of all the fools, rascals and impostors. I want a democratic power strong enough to force the intellectual oligarchy to use its genius for the general good or else perish.[193]

Here, and despite the violence of the language, Cusins speaks in the voice of a Fabian, advocating radical, structural change through a gradual, democratic process. This was a belief Murray and Shaw shared; despite the message of *Major Barbara*, ‘at heart Shaw knew that neither he nor we would really want to take so radical a step’ as to blow up the world to start again, anew.[194] The issue then becomes whether Cusins’ ambition to reform Undershaft’s worldview has any hope of succeeding.

Undershaft’s assertion that money is the truest source of power is hardly novel, and has an Aristophanic precedent; in *Wealth*, the eponymous god is more powerful than even Zeus and, as Chremylus points out, is ‘the most singular cause of

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[192] Letter from Shaw to Murray, 7 October 1905, quoted in Albert 1968: 128.

[193] Shaw 1926: *MB* III 289. See Albert 1968: 134-136.

[194] Berg 1998: 159.

all things both good and bad' (182f.). Another subtler reference to Aristophanes may lie in Lady Britomart's moralising assertion that her husband 'can't change wrong into right.'[195] *Major Barbara* is constantly engaged in agonistic discussions of morality, and Undershaft invariably defends the profitably immoral position against Lady Britomart's naïve righteousness. In this, they resemble the Right and Wrong Arguments from *Clouds*. It is also worth noting that the *dénouement* of *Major Barbara* is pinned on the revelation that the unique circumstances of Cusins' birth render him a technical, if not genuine, foundling.[196] As Undershaft will only leave his business to a foundling out of tradition, this solves the central conflict of the play.[197] A last-minute revelation about a character's birth is a trope of comic theatre, most notably in Gilbert and Sullivan.[198] We might be surprised to see such a device used here, in an otherwise serious (but humorous) play. I mention this only to underline something already discussed in Chapter 5; the influence of W.S. Gilbert on the dramatic development of Shaw is significant and wildly under-appreciated.[199]

In short, *Major Barbara* demonstrates not only a complex reception of Euripides, but also of Aristophanes, both mediated through the translations of Gilbert Murray. If the first two acts of the play are a retelling, or possibly two retellings, of

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[195] Shaw 1926: *MB* III 260.

[196] Ibid. III 274.

[197] I mean central to the plot – thematically, it is all but irrelevant.

[198] In all, five out of fourteen of the Savoy operas use a variation of this device; *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *Pirates of Penzance*, *Iolanthe*, *Mikado* and *Gondoliers*. In a sixth opera, *Ruddigore*, it is revealed that the ghost Sir Roderic Murgatroyd is not actually dead.

[199] Hall and Macintosh rightly highlight Gilbert's influence on Shaw's use of burlesque (2005: 491), but not his importance for Shaw's dramatic technique.

Bacchae, the third act reperforms *Frogs*, down to the rejection of Euripides. Curiously, as far as I can see from Albert's extensive accounts of Murray's personal reaction to the development of the play,[200] Murray himself did not pick up on this classical pedigree. Regardless, the play activates its classical sources for a specifically political purpose. Murray's Aristophanes was also routinely activated for political, and specifically democratic-socialist, purposes, although his outlook was far more positive than Shaw's. Whilst Oxford and Cambridge were still staging their archaeologising Greek plays and pretending that Old Comedy had nothing to do with the contemporary world, Murray and Shaw were demonstrating the sheer potential of a modern, twentieth-century, political Aristophanes.

[200] Albert 1968; 2002.

~10~

Conclusion

In the introduction to this dissertation, I set out two theses; that Aristophanes was received widely and across a diverse range of mediums in long-nineteenth-century Britain, and that his reception was often used as a vehicle to discuss contemporary political and artistic issues. I think it fair to say that the first thesis has been proven. Scholarship on Aristophanes thrived throughout the long-nineteenth century, from the translations and textual editions of John Hookham Frere and Thomas Mitchell in the 1820s and 1830s to John Addington Symonds' encomium for Old Comedy and Gilbert Murray's life-long academic interest in the genre. We explored how poets such as Oscar Wilde, Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning responded to the aesthetic stimulus of Old Comedy. Although Aristophanes' plays were only performed in adaptation twice on the professional stage during this period, his influence on the leading playwrights W.S. Gilbert and George Bernard Shaw ensured his subterranean reception had significant impact, and at schools and universities performances of Aristophanes in Greek were equally as popular as stagings of tragedy, if not more so. Aristophanes was also used to engage in political debates, on women's suffrage and education and more personal satire against the profligacies of George IV. And Aristophanes was a stimulus for Aubrey Beardsley's visual art as well. The breadth of these receptions – scholarly, theatrical, poetic – and the range they fill from high art down to the most popular, public-facing mediums, indicates the significance of Aristophanes in the long-nineteenth century as well as the diversity he inspired in his receptions.

My second thesis was that Aristophanes was invariably read in line with the receiver's own personal political or aesthetic views as a proxy in contemporary debates. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Aristophanes was being read as a proto-Tory oligarch, before being read apolitically as an aesthetic model later in the century. Finally, at the turn of the twentieth century, a synthesis developed between these aesthetic and political readings of Aristophanes – except now, Aristophanes was being activated to argue for liberal causes.

We saw in Chapter 2 how Thomas Mitchell and John Hookham Frere activated Aristophanes in their translations and textual editions as a proto-Tory, in line with their own personal political outlooks and following the tradition of British historians such as William Mitford. However, Mitchell and Frere's own personal brands of Toryism were different, and so, consequently, were their interpretations of Aristophanes. As we saw in the works of J.R. Planché (Chapter 4) and W.S. Gilbert (Chapter 5), this Tory political reading of Aristophanes was not limited to scholars; it was also being activated on the popular theatrical stage, though again in line with the receiver's own personal views. As Mitchell's Aristophanes was more right-wing than Frere's, so Planché's Aristophanes was more overtly oligarchic than Gilbert's gentler satire. This interpretation of Aristophanes' politics was in opposition to a more liberal German tradition, and was likewise opposed by Percy Shelley's Aristophanic play *Swellfoot the Tyrant* (Chapter 3), which provocatively activated Old Comedy to espouse radical, left-wing politics.

In Chapter 6, we saw how John Addington Symonds, who downplayed the politics of Aristophanes and recast him as chiefly a poet, shifted the narrative towards an aesthetic valuing of Old Comedy. By no means did everybody agree with Symonds' aesthetic judgement of the genre. While Swinburne and Wilde did treat Aristophanes as an aesthetic poet, critics such as Aubrey Beardsley and Robert

Browning saw Aristophanic aesthetics as defined not by beauty but by ugliness. Yet they were at least debating on the same aesthetic terms. Symonds' model of an aestheticising, apolitical Aristophanes was adopted, with slight deviations, by school and university performances of Aristophanes (Chapter 7). Although a burlesquing tradition was more noticeable in Oxford's performances of Old Comedy than in Cambridge's, both universities, along with Leeds, tended towards archaeologising performances.

Only at the close of the nineteenth century have we seen a synthesis of aesthetic and political readings of Aristophanes, although with a tendency to emphasise the political aspects of the genre. Curiously, however, Aristophanes was now being activated to argue for socially progressive causes, especially by women (Chapter 8). The women of Girton College, Cambridge used Aristophanes to argue for their right to equal education; suffragists used Aristophanes' plays to argue for their cause on the stage. Gilbert Murray saw Aristophanes as a voice for the future, hope and peace, as well as a fine poet; George Bernard Shaw activated him (albeit idiosyncratically) to discuss the issue of poverty (Chapter 9). Because of these shifting perspectives on Old Comedy, Aristophanic reception in long-nineteenth-century Britain becomes an excellent proxy for exploring political and artistic debates in this period. The ways in which Aristophanes' humour, politics and poetics were read, the ways in which readers approached and embraced, overlooked or railed against Aristophanes' crudity, can ultimately tell us far more about these readers than they can about Old Comedy.

Let us close with the words of Robert Browning, for a truer summary of Old Comedy and its reception in long-nineteenth-century Britain I do not think we shall find:

All was Aristophanes:

There blazed the glory, there shot black the shame.[1]

[1] Browning 1981a: *Apology* 5394f.

~11~

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Appendix A: Classical References in the Savoy Operas

All references taken from Bradley 2016. I have not included *Thespis* because it is the only Gilbert and Sullivan set in the ancient world.

Trial by Jury

Definite: 1

329f.: Counsel: 'Camberwell became a bower,/Peckham an Arcadian Vale…'

Partial/Debatable: 0

The Sorcerer

Definite: 7

Character – Hercules[1]

I.149f.: Dr. Daly: 'Sir, you shall have a fairly-written copy/Ere Sol has sunk into his western slumbers!'

I.157-160: Sir Marmaduke: 'Aline is rich, and she comes of a sufficiently old family, for she is the seven thousand and thirty seventh in direct descent from Helen of Troy. True, there was a blot on the escutcheon of that lady – that affair with Paris – but

[1] Not a very Herculean character – he is a page and has three lines.

where is the family, other than my own, in which there is no flaw? You are a lucky fellow, sir – a very lucky fellow!'

I.235f.: Sir Marmaduke: 'Welcome joy, adieu to sadness!/As Aurora gilds the day…'

I.443: J.W. Wells: 'Tetrapods tragical…'

II.62: Constance: 'My cup is not of nectar'

II.101f.: Aline: 'The blind young boy/Obeys the spell'[2]

Partial/Debatable: 5

J.W. Wells makes a number of references to Eastern mythologies – djinns, Abudah chests, etc. Ahrimanes also appears to have Eastern influence.

I.427: J.W. Wells: 'With effects that are comic or tragic…'

I.560: Aline: 'On the wings of Love we'll fly…'

II.30: J.W. Wells: 'I would suggest that we retire/While Love, the Housemaid, lights her kitchen fire!'[3]

II.336: Dr. Daly: 'What a rogue young hearts to pillage;/What a worker on Love's tillage!'

[2] The 'blind young boy' is Cupid, although his blindness is a post-classical tradition.

[3] Wells' conceptualisation of Love as a domestic servant fits with his lower-class, tradesman character.

H.M.S. Pinafore

Definite: 8

Character – Hebe[4]

I.469-472: Ralph: 'Wafted one moment into blazing day, by mocking hope – plunged the next into the Cimmerian darkness of tangible despair, I am but a living ganglion of irreconcilable antagonisms.

I.478f.: Ralph: 'Even though Jove's armoury were launched at the head of the audacious mortal…'

I.568-570: Josephine, Hebe and Ralph: 'The god of day – the orb of love –/Has hung his ensign high above,/The sky is all ablaze.'

SONG: 'Things Are Seldom What They Seem'[5]

II.49: Buttercup: 'Jackdaws strut in peacock's feathers.'

II.54: Buttercup: 'Storks turn out to be but logs…'

II.55: Buttercup: 'Bulls are but inflated frogs.'

II.81: Corcoran: 'Thirsty lambs run foxy dangers…'

II.82: Corcoran: 'Dogs are found in many mangers.'

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[4] Like Hercules, Hebe's name displays more classical influence than her character.

[5] As Bradley notes (2016: *Pinafore* II.49n.; 54n.; 55n.; 81n.; 82n.), many of Buttercup's and Corcoran's proverbs – those listed here – derive from Aesop's fables. Aesop's Fables, whilst classical, are not high literature, which explains how the distinctly working-class Little Buttercup can quote them. In this song, she and the Captain similarly cite maxims taken from the Bible, literature, folk sayings and, it would appear, Gilbert's imagination.

II.235f.: Corcoran: ‘My only daughter is to be the bride of a Cabinet Minister. The prospect is Elysian.’

II.285f.: Chorus: ‘Pull ashore, in fashion steady,/Hymen will defray the fare…’

II.445-448: Buttercup: ‘Two tender babes I nussed:/One was of low condition,/The other, upper crust,/A regular patrician.’

Partial/Debatable: 1

Corcoran: II.4f.: ‘Fair moon, to thee I sing,/Bright regent of the heavens...’

The Pirates of Penzance

Definite: 5[6]

I.454f.: Major-General: ‘I know the kings of England, and I quote the fights historical,/From Marathon to Waterloo, in order categorical…’

I.469: Major-General: ‘I quote in elegiacs all the crimes of Heliogabalus...’

I.471: Major-General: ‘I know the croaking chorus from the *Frogs* of Aristophanes…’

I.476: Major-General: ‘Then I can write a washing bill in Babylonic cuneiform…’

I.477: Major-General: ‘And tell you every detail of Caractacus’s uniform...’

[6] Notably, all these references appear in a single song, the Major-General’s famous patter song. I have counted them as distinct references because the song is not itself about a classical subject and the references made are diverse.

Partial/Debatable: 1

I.588: All: ‘Hail, Poetry, thou heaven-born maid!’

Patience

Definite: 10

I.162: Colonel: ‘The genius strategic of Caesar or Hannibal…’

I.297: Bunthorne: ‘Quivering on amaranthine asphodel…’

I.336f.: Colonel: ‘A uniform that has been as successful in the courts of Venus as on the fields of Mars!’

I.414: Bunthorne: ‘An attachment *à la* Plato for a bashful young potato…’

I.443-445: Bunthorne: ‘What’s the use of yearning for Elysian Fields when you know you can’t get ‘em, and would only let ‘em out on building leases if you had ‘em?’

I.476: Angela: ‘Oh, forgive her, Eros!’

I.509: Angela: ‘Ah, old, old tale of Cupid’s touch!’

I.557: Grosvenor: ‘Oh, Chronos, Chronos, this is too bad of you!’

I.629-632: Chorus: ‘Let the merry cymbals sound,/Gaily pipe Pandaean pleasure,/With a Daphnephoric bound/Tread a gay but classic measure…’

II.409: Grosvenor: ‘Ah, I am a very Narcissus!’

Partial/Debatable: 3

I.37f.: Saphir: ‘While he, the very cynosure of our eyes and hears, remains icy insensible…’

I.720f.: Chorus: 'Oh, Fortune, to my aching heart be blind!/Like us, thou art blindfolded, but not blind!'

II.475-477: Bunthorne: 'And 'High diddle diddle'/Will rank as an Idyll,/If I pronounce it chaste!'

Iolanthe

<u>Definite:</u> 10

Act I Scene: 'An Arcadian Landscape'

Character: Phyllis[7]

I.118: Iolanthe: 'He's an Arcadian shepherd…'[8]

I.146f.: Strephon: 'At first he seemed amused, so did the Bar; but quickly wearying of my song and pipe, bade me get out.'[9]

I.577: Lord Chancellor: 'As the ancient Romans said, *festina lente*.'

I.686: Lord Chancellor: 'Of a sudden (which is English for '*repente*')...'

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[7] Here we have our first classically-named character whose nomenclature is appropriate – Phyllis is 'an Arcadian Shepherdess', although rather more mundanely also a 'Ward in Chancery'.

[8] This is the last reference to Arcadia that I shall count. There are many, but all references hereafter can only re-enforce what the *mise-en-scène*, Phyllis' name, Strephon's description here, their occupations as shepherds, and Strephon's accomplishments on the pipes all pointedly assert – that Strephon and Phyllis are pastoral, bucolic characters.

[9] Again, I shall not persist in documenting every reference to Strephon's (pan-?)pipes, classical though they be.

I.692-694: Mountarat: ‘Now, listen, play, to me,/For this paradox will be/Carried, nobody at all *contradicente*...’[10]

I.851-854: Peers: Distinction ebbs/Before a herd/Of vulgar *plebs*![11]

Fairies: (A Latin word.)

I.855-860: Peers: ‘Twould fill with joy,/And madness stark/The οἱ πολλοι!

Fairies: (A Greek remark.)

Peers: One Latin word, one Greek remark,/And one that’s French.

II.184f.: Fairy Queen: ‘Oh, amorous dove!/Type of Ovidius Naso!’

Partial/Debatable: 1

II.600: Lord Chancellor: ‘We will arrange/Happy exchange –/House of Peers for House of Peris!’[12]

[10] *Contradicente* also appears at *Gondoliers* I.55, but there the setting of the operetta implies the Italian, and not the Latin, language.

[11] This lyric demonstrates Gilbert’s playfulness with words. ‘Vulgar’ comes from the Latin *vulgus*, which essentially means a herd, or group of plebs – herd, vulgar and plebs are all near synonyms of each other, and two are Latinate! ‘A Latin word’ indeed. Both this and the peers’ Greek remark are repeated by the fairies, but have only been counted once.

[12] Peris are Eastern spirits Gilbert here connects to fairies (for the sake of a fairly weak pun).

Princess Ida

Definite: 8

Characters: Hilarion, Guron, Scynthius, Ida, Psyche, Melissa, Sacharissa, Chloe[13]

I.170f.: Arac: 'We are warriors three,/Sons of Gama, Rex.'

II.12-21: Melissa: 'Pray, what authors should she read

Who in Classics would succeed?

Psyche: If you'd climb the Helicon,

You should read Anacreon,

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*,

Likewise Aristophanes,

And the works of Juvenal:

These are worth attention, all;

But, if you will be advised,

You will get them Bowdlerized!

II.79: Ida: 'Minerva! Minerva, oh, hear me!'

II.229-232: Hilarion: 'Then they learn to make silk purses/With their rigs – with their rigs,/From the ears of Lady Circe's/Piggy-wigs – piggy-wigs'.

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[13] *Ida* has the most classically-sounding character names of all the Savoy operas (apart from *Thespis*), although some are more overtly classical than others. Again, there is little connection between the characters' names and personalities.

II.280-284: Hilarion: Three lovely lady undergraduates/…/

All: Seek sanctuary in these classic shades!

II.419-421: Hilarion: '"You don't know/Who first determined longitude – I do – /Hipparchus 'twas – B.C. one sixty-three!"'

II.609f.: Chorus: 'Here in meadow of asphodel,/Feast we body and mind as well…'

Partial/Debatable: 1

II.666f.: 'Don't you remember that old kissing-song/He'd sing to blushing Mistress Lalage?'

The Mikado

Definite: 2

I.485f.: Nanki-Poo: 'My father, the Lucius Junius Brutus of his race, ordered me to marry her within a week, or perish ignominiously on the scaffold.'

II.568-570: Pitti-Sing, Katisha, Ko-Ko, Pooh-Bah and Mikado: 'Laughing, Ha! Ha!/Chaffing, Ha! Ha!/Nectar quaffing, Ha! Ha! Ha!'

Partial/Debatable: 0

Ruddigore

Definite: 3

I.399-403: Robin: 'As a poet, I'm tender and quaint –/I've passion and fervour and grace –/From Ovid and Horace/To Swinburne and Morris,/They all of them take a back place.'

I.627-629: Margaret: 'Never doubting/That for Cytherean posies/He would gather aught but roses!'

I.703-709: Chorus of Bucks and Blades: 'From charms intramural/To prettiness rural/The sudden transition/Is simply Elysian,/Come, Amaryllis,/Come, Chloe and Phyllis,/Your slaves, for the moment, are we!'

Partial/Debatable: 1

Despard: II.467: 'My existence would have made a rather interesting idyll…'

The Yeomen of the Guard

Definite: 0

Partial/Debatable: 1

I.536f.: Jack: 'I know all the jests – ancient and modern – past, present, and to come…'

The Gondoliers

Definite: 3

I.259f.: Casilda: ‘I’ve no patience with the presumption of persons in his plebeian position!’

II.145f.: Marco: ‘Having passed the Rubicon,/Take a pair of rosy lips…’

II.454f.: Gianetta: ‘I, a victim, too, of Cupid,/Marco married – that is clear.’

Partial/Debatable: 3

I.55: Antonio: ‘With pleasure, nobody *contradicente*!’

I.590: Duke, Duchess, Casilda, Luiz and Grand Inquisitor: ‘String the lyre and fill the cup…’

II.437: Tess: ‘O Mount Vesuvius, here we are in arithmetic!’

Utopia Limited

Definite: 9

Characters: Scaphio, Phantis, Tarara, Calynx, Salata, Melene, Phylla

I.90f.: Tarara: ‘His Majesty is one of the most Heliogabalian profligates that ever disgraced an autocratic throne!’

I.180f.: Phantis: ‘Scaphio, remember she returns from a land where every youth is as a young Greek god…’

I.250: Chorus: ‘Quaff the nectar – cull the roses –’

I.437-439: Paramount: '"Another Royal Scandal", by Junius Junior. "How long is this to last?" by Senex Senior. "Ribald Royalty", by Mercury Major.'

I.633: Paramount and Sophy: 'O royal Rex…'

I.655-659: Chorus of Girls: 'And teach us, please,/To speak with ease/All languages,/Alive and dead!'

II.89: Zara: 'Soft the song of Philomel.'

II.593f.: Paramount: 'For that *asinorum pons*/I have crossed without assistance…'

<u>Partial/Debatable:</u> 3

I.12f.: Chorus: 'With lyre and lute/And silver flute…'

I.104f.: Chorus: 'Cornucopia/Is each in his mental fertility.'

Setting: Utopia[14]

The Grand Duke

<u>Definite:</u> 12

I.80f.: Lisa: 'As we produce our magnificent classical revival of *Troilus and Cressida* tonight at seven…'

I.126-133: Ludwig: 'It is confidently predicted that my appearance as King Agamemnon, in a Louis Quatorze wig, will mark an epoch in the theatrical annals of Pfennig Halbpfennig. I endeavoured to persuade Ernest Dummkopf, our manager, to lend us the classical dresses for our marriage. It would have been tremendous!'

[14] Actually a word that dates to the sixteenth century, but from classical roots.

Notary: And he declined?

Ludwig: He did, on the prosaic ground that it might rain, and the ancient Greeks didn't carry umbrellas!'

I.876: Rudolf: 'This plebeian man of shoddy –'

I.919f.: Notary: 'You mean, of course, by duel (*verbum sat.*),/A Statutory Duel.'

I.1052f.: Julia: 'Our duty, if we're wise, we never shun./This Spartan rule applies to every one.'

I.1099f.: Lisa: 'The die is cast,/My hopes have perished!'

I.1136-1145: Ludwig: 'Old Athens we'll exhume!

The necessary dresses,

Correct and true

And all brand-new,

The company possesses:

Henceforth our Court costume

Shall live in song and story,

For we'll upraise

The dead old days

Of Athens in her glory!'

II.3-5: Costumes: The theatrical company 'now dressed in the costumes of *Troilus and Cressida*… carrying garlands, playing on pipes, citharae, and cymbals…'

II.7-26: SONG: 'As before you we defile' – the opening song of Act II is full of classical allusions and pseudo-Greek words.

II.31-96: SONG: 'At the outset I may mention' – this patter song contains many more classical allusions.

II.305: Ludwig: 'No, no – it isn't Greek. Be a violet, I beg.'

II.314f.: Baroness: 'Let festive epithalamia resound through these ancient halls!'

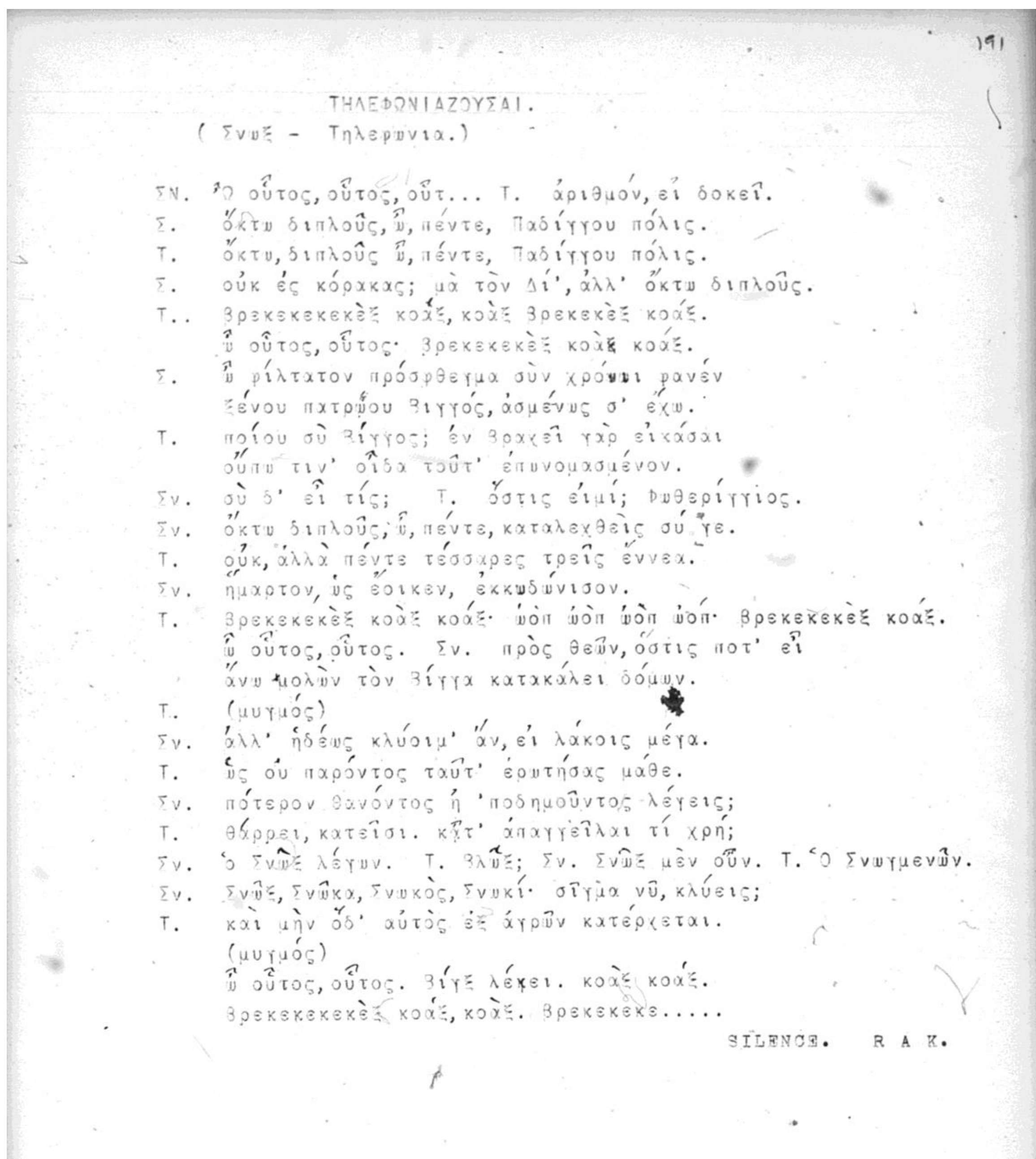
Partial/Debatable: 2

I.480: Ernest: 'By Jove, what a couple of fire-eaters we are!'

II.473f.: Baroness: 'Old wine is a true panacea/For every conceivable ill…'

Operetta	**Definite References**	**Partial References**
Trial by Jury	1	0
The Sorcerer	7	5
H.M.S. Pinafore	12	1
Pirates of Penzance	5	1
Patience	10	3
Princess Ida	10	1
Iolanthe	8	1
The Mikado	2	0
Ruddigore	3	1
The Yeomen of the Guard	0	1
The Gondoliers	3	3
Utopia Limited	9	3
The Grand Duke	12	2

Appendix B: *Telephoniazousai*



191

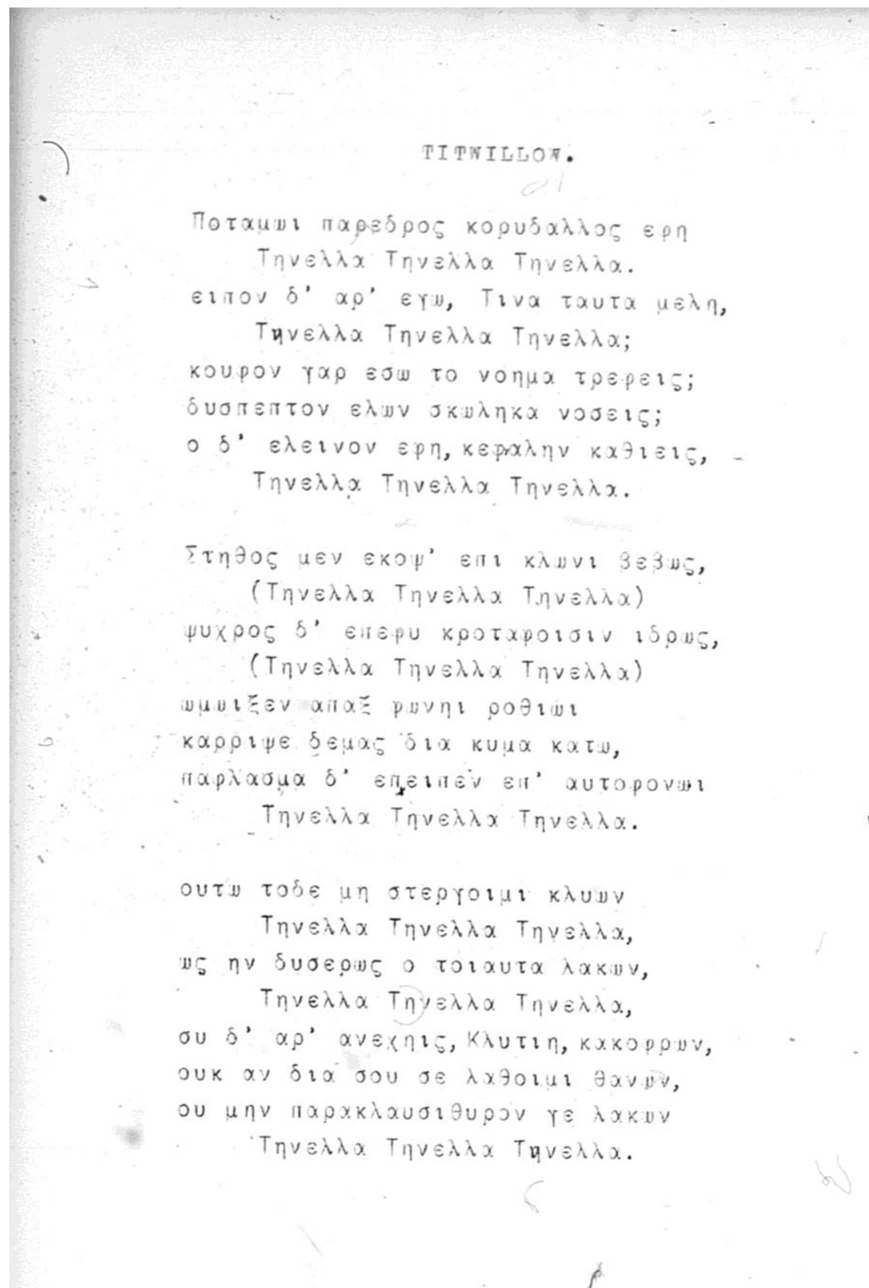
ΤΗΛΕΦΩΝΙΑΖΟΥΣΑΙ.
(Σνωξ - Τηλεφωνια.)

ΣΝ. Ὦ οὗτος, οὗτος, οὗτ... Τ. ἀριθμόν, εἰ δοκεῖ.
Σ. ὄκτω διπλοῦς, ὦ, πέντε, Παδίγγου πόλις.
Τ. ὄκτω, διπλοῦς ὦ, πέντε, Παδίγγου πόλις.
Σ. οὐκ ἐς κόρακας; μὰ τὸν Δί', ἀλλ' ὄκτω διπλοῦς.
Τ.. βρεκεκεκεκὲξ κοάξ, κοὰξ βρεκεκὲξ κοάξ.
ὦ οὗτος, οὗτος· βρεκεκεκὲξ κοὰξ κοάξ.
Σ. ὦ φίλτατον πρόσφθεγμα σὺν χρόνωι φανέν
ξένου πατρῴου Βιγγός, ἀσμένως σ' ἔχω.
Τ. ποίου σὺ Βίγγος; ἐν βραχεῖ γὰρ εἰκάσαι
οὔπω τιν' οἶδα τοῦτ' ἐπωνομασμένον.
Σν. σὺ δ' εἶ τίς; Τ. ὅστις εἰμί; Φωθερίγγιος.
Σν. ὄκτω διπλοῦς, ὦ, πέντε, καταλεχθεὶς σύ γε.
Τ. οὐκ, ἀλλὰ πέντε τέσσαρες τρεῖς ἔννεα.
Σν. ἥμαρτον, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἐκκωδώνισον.
Τ. βρεκεκεκὲξ κοὰξ κοάξ· ὠὸπ ὠὸπ ὠὸπ ὠόπ· βρεκεκεκὲξ κοάξ.
ὦ οὗτος, οὗτος. Σν. πρὸς θεῶν, ὅστις ποτ' εἶ
ἄνω μολὼν τὸν Βίγγα κατακάλει δόμων.
Τ. (μυγμός)
Σν. ἀλλ' ἡδέως κλύοιμ' ἄν, εἰ λάκοις μέγα.
Τ. ὡς οὐ παρόντος ταῦτ' ἐρωτήσας μάθε.
Σν. πότερον θανόντος ἢ 'ποδημοῦντος λέγεις;
Τ. θάρρει, κατεῖσι. κᾆτ' ἀπαγγεῖλαι τί χρή;
Σν. ὁ Σνῶξ λέγων. Τ. Βλῶξ; Σν. Σνῶξ μὲν οὖν. Τ. Ὁ Σνωγμενῶν.
Σν. Σνῶξ, Σνῶκα, Σνωκὸς, Σνωκί· σῖγμα νῦ, κλύεις;
Τ. καὶ μὴν ὅδ' αὐτὸς ἐξ ἀγρῶν κατέρχεται.
(μυγμός)
ὦ οὗτος, οὗτος. Βίγξ λέγει. κοὰξ κοάξ.
βρεκεκεκεκὲξ κοάξ, κοὰξ. βρεκεκεκε.....

SILENCE. R A K.

Scan of a type-written parody preserved by Gilbert Murray, entitled *Telephoniazousai* and signed 'R.A.K', probably Ronald Arbuthnott Knox. Bodleian Library MS. Gilbert Murray 435 f.191.

Appendix C: *Titwillow*



TITWILLOW.

Ποταμωι παρεδρος κορυδαλλος εφη
    Τηνελλα Τηνελλα Τηνελλα.
ειπον δ' αρ' εγω, Τινα ταυτα μελη,
    Τηνελλα Τηνελλα Τηνελλα;
κουφον γαρ εσω το νοημα τρεφεις;
δυσπεπτον ελων σκωληκα νοσεις;
ο δ' ελεινον εφη, κεφαλην καθιεις,
    Τηνελλα Τηνελλα Τηνελλα.

Στηθος μεν εκοψ' επι κλωνι βεβως,
    (Τηνελλα Τηνελλα Τηνελλα)
ψυχρος δ' επεφυ κροταφοισιν ιδρως,
    (Τηνελλα Τηνελλα Τηνελλα)
ωμωιξεν απαξ φωνηι ροθιωι
καρριψε δεμας δια κυμα κατω,
παφλασμα δ' επειπεν επ' αυτοφονωι
    Τηνελλα Τηνελλα Τηνελλα.

ουτω τοδε μη στεργοιμι κλυων
    Τηνελλα Τηνελλα Τηνελλα,
ως ην δυσερως ο τοιαυτα λακων,
    Τηνελλα Τηνελλα Τηνελλα,
συ δ' αρ' ανεχηις, Κλυτιη, κακοφρων,
ουκ αν δια σου σε λαθοιμι θανων,
ου μην παρακλαυσιθυρον γε λακων
    Τηνελλα Τηνελλα Τηνελλα.

Scan of a translation of 'Tit-Willow', from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado*, probably by Ronald Arbuthnott Knox. Preserved in Gilbert Murray's files. Bodleian Library MS. Gilbert Murray 435 f.192.