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The Court of Comedy

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Published by The Ohio State University Press

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The Court of Comedy: Aristophanes, Rhetoric, and Democracy in Fifth-Century Athens.

The Ohio State University Press, 2013.

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Old Comedy and Proto-Rhetoric in Athens before 425 B.C.E.

The Age of Pericles

TOPICAL AND HISTORICAL SCOPE

The historical range for this study in general is the fifth century down to 404 B.C.E., the year of Athens' surrender to Sparta at the end of the Peloponnesian War and the year of the encore performance of Aristophanes' *Frogs*. The following year saw the reconstitution of the Athenian democracy, and subsequent comedy sees changes in form and topic; thus the fourth century merits a separate study utilizing criteria appropriate to the times and generic differences.¹ The aim of the current chapter is to survey and analyze evidence for comedy's reaction to proto-rhetorical and linguistic phenomena in Athens prior to 425 B.C.E. It is impossible to marshal all the relevant evidence and be absolutely strict about chronological borders. All evidence from comedy during this period is fragmentary, and while a number of fragments can be roughly assigned to the fifth century, it is frequently impossible to determine whether they originated before or after 425. By default this floating material will be cited in this chapter. In addition, several authors have careers that span both sides of the 425 divide, and again it is not always, or often, possible to place fragments within their career. Generally speaking,

1. See Ober (1989, 35–38) for the period 403–322 B.C.E. as suitable for synchronic study. On fourth-century comedy in general, see Arnott (2010).

however, Crates and Cratinus will be the focus of this chapter, even though Cratinus' career extends a few years beyond 425. On the other hand, Eupolis will appear in subsequent chapters for the most part, although his career begins a few years before 425.² Fragments of still lesser-attested playwrights of the time (most notably Hermippus, Pherecrates and Phrynichus), even if their careers spanned 425, are included in this chapter.³ In some cases, the main text discusses fragments on a topic, and a note will discuss parallels that must belong to later years, although there is no noticeable change because of the chronological difference. For the most part, references to historical individuals in the comic fragments tend to be linked to later periods, so there is little discussion of them here, aside from Pericles. Fragments utilizing specific terminology, which are especially likely to be difficult to date, find a home in this chapter by default. This placement should not meaningfully distort the analysis and conclusions here. The chapter does not argue that comedy's treatment of proto-rhetoric fundamentally changed in or around 425; the arrangement merely reflects the state of the evidence. Subsequent chapters will be able to capitalize and focus on Aristophanes' extant plays, although they will incorporate evidence from contemporaneous fragments where available and relevant.

Following these principles, this chapter proceeds through the evidence for comedy's reaction to burgeoning rhetoric roughly as follows: (1) the terminology in comedy referring to language and speakers, primarily in public political discourse, but also with reference to developments in intellectual pursuits; (2) references to groups and individual speakers characterized in some way by their language or their link to developments in language study; (3) references to the public institutions in Athens where oratory and public displays of language took place, namely, the Assembly, Council, and courts; (4) comedy's depiction of language and speakers in the "Age of Pericles," since some distinctive issues arise with regard to Pericles himself.⁴

TERMINOLOGY

Consistent with recent research into the development of early rhetorical theory, and as with Sicilian comedy, the fragments of Old Comedy do not

2. The career of the comic playwright Plato falls wholly later, however, so he will be discussed in Chapters 4–6, on the last two decades of the fifth century.

3. On Pherecrates' dates, see now Olson (2010b).

4. The Appendix has entries for most of these items but groups all the fifth-century evidence topically rather than chronologically.

include the word ῥητορική or any of the formal terms canonized in the curriculum of rhetoric from the late fourth century onward, such as names for parts of speech.⁵ The comic Phrynichus mentions τῆ διαθέσει τῶν ἐπῶν (“the arrangement of words,” fr. 58), but there is no context. Some words appear that in the next century and later have different connotations for rhetoric and so merit glossing for their usage in the fifth century. Chief among these is the term σοφιστής, which at this point refers broadly to performers and to those who have some prestige for their wisdom.⁶ In Old Comedy it never refers to the intellectuals now known as the Sophists.⁷ Cratinus calls a group of poets a swarm of sophists (σοφιστῶν, fr. 2). Eupolis applies the term to a rhapsode (fr. 483). A σοφιστής is addressed in Eupolis fr. 388, but given parallel usage, this is most likely someone who in modern terms would be identified as a poet or performer.⁸

Another key term associated with the sophistic movement in the fifth century is εἰκός, which carries the overlapping meanings of both “proper” and “probable.” Arguments based on the principle of probability were a hallmark of fifth-century thinkers and speakers engaging in the new, rational means for constructing arguments, examples being best preserved in the speeches of Antiphon.⁹ Consistent with Old Comedy’s antagonistic stance toward the new intellectuals and their distinct language, comic idiom never uses εἰκός in an argument built on probability. The term always carries the value-laden, more traditional sense of “proper.” Thus Pherecrates deploys the term in a fragment probably spoken by a young man to an elder, perhaps his father: “it is proper (εἰκός) for me to be in love but past your season” (fr. 77). Cratinus says the tragedian Acestor will get a beating unless he tidies

5. On the chronology of ῥητορική in particular, see Schiappa (1990a). Cf. the entries in the Appendix for προσίμιον and ἀντίθετον, and the Introduction, 13–14.

6. Kerferd (1950).

7. Plato anachronistically retrofits the term to fifth-century intellectuals, most notably at *Prot.* 311e–12e, dramatically set in the 430s but composed ca. 380 B.C.E. In this passage he takes care to debate and define the term, since it is a contentious term in the mid-fourth century. This distinction can still be underappreciated, as shown by Tell (2009), who seems not to understand fifth-century usage. Tell (2011, 21–38) does subsequently recognize and explore the problem. Athenaeus records that the term was also commonly used to refer to comic performers (14.621d–e), but the source and dating for the reference is unclear.

8. Plato the comic playwright wrote a *Σοφισταί*, in which he identifies Bacchylides (a flute-player, not the choral poet) as a σοφιστής (fr. 149).

9. Whether or not the attribution to Antiphon is correct, the *Tetralogies* make considerable use of probability arguments and come closest to this time period; see Zuntz (1949). Antiphon 5 and 6, belonging to the 410s, also incorporate this manner of argumentation. The defense speech of Palamedes attributed to Gorgias also makes much use of this type of argumentation. See Schiappa (1999, 36) on this term in early rhetoric and some scholars’ speculative use of it. Cf. Tindale (2010, 69–82).

up his business, where εἰκός could yield either sense, but certainly there is some hint of propriety (“he deserves it,” fr. 92).¹⁰

In general, Old Comedy does not describe speeches with technical vocabulary, nor does it ever respect or praise a formal or ornate speech that would later be deemed “rhetorical.” Positive references to speech making do not involve formal or sophisticated rhetoric. Other qualities or purposes are required for a positive evaluation. Serving the public good is a laudable goal for a speech, so Cratinus fr. 52 wishes victory to whoever speaks best (λέγων τὸ λῶστον) for the city.¹¹

Any speech is likely to provoke a response. Debate and competition were long ingrained in Greek culture, and speakers paired in debate were enshrined in the legal and political system of democratic Athens. Whatever the reputation of sophistic debate, refusal to engage in dialogue is unhealthy in comedy. The standard term for responding in a debate is ἀντιλέγειν, and that for engaging in conversation is διαλέγεσθαι.¹² A participant should also “listen back” (ἀντακούειν), as the speaker in Crates fr. 45 commands someone to do.¹³ A fragment on a strip of papyrus seems to trace the contrast between the good old days and current decadence (adesp. 1095; note the arrival of cosmetics, symposia and dancing in lines 15–16). Near the end of the fragment, the speaker says someone does not (if the supplement to the damaged text is correct) reply, possibly in debate at a symposium. Two lines later a character emphasizes, and laments, a respondent’s complete silence (σιγᾶ κούδεν γρύζει).¹⁴ In Phrynichus fr. 19 (= Olson B21), the recluse is characterized in part by not engaging in conversation (ἀδιάλεκτον).¹⁵

10. Cf. the entry for εἰκός in the Appendix.

11. Similarly, Aristophanes describes a manner of speaking that avoids the extremes of urban decadence and slavish crudeness (fr. 706):

διάλεκτον ἔχοντα μέσην πόλεως,
οὔτ’ ἀστεῖαν ὑποθηλυτέραν
οὔτ’ ἀναλεύθεραν ὑπαγροικότεραν

He keeps his dialogue with the city moderate,
neither urbanly submasculine
nor too crude like those not freeborn.

Along analogous lines, the speaker of Eupolis fr. 108 promises to stop using circular talk (τοῦ κύκλω . . . λόγου). For an overview of the problematic phrase διὰ τῶν χωρίων in the next line, see Telò (2007, 606–8). “Talking around” is attested in Hermippus (fr. 89 περιλέγειν) and is potentially negative.

12. Cf. adesp. 572, where λεσχαίνειν is equated with διαλέγεσθαι.

13. Cf. similar commands in Euripides at *Supp.* 569 and *Hec.* 321.

14. Cf. *Wasps* 741, *Peace* 96–97, and Crates fr. 4 for similar phrases; however, they do not illuminate the current passage.

15. On the broader history of citizens not engaging in Athenian democracy, see L. B. Carter

When speakers do engage each other, in lieu of technical vocabulary, comedy opts to describe and characterize rhetorical speech with colorful metaphors. In Pherecrates fr. 56, an unidentified speaker is silent, until the verbal torrent has poured out (χαράδρα κατελήλυθεν). Another voice breaks out sharply and loudly (ὥστ' ἀνέρρωγεν τὸ φώνομ' εὐθύς ὀξύ καὶ μέγα, Pherecrates fr. 153). In Phrynichus fr. 3 (= Olson J14), an old man fears younger men who scratch up their elders with words, although they speak sweetly (τούτοις οἷς ἠδυλογοῦσι μεγάλας ἀμυχὰς καταμύξαντες). Other passages find something “hard to reckon” (adesp. fr. 587, δυσλογεῖν, or perhaps “to speak harshly of”). Cratinus fr. 476 has speakers “talk to the details” (μικρολογεῖσθαι).¹⁶ More common than getting lost in the details is sheer vapidness. Hermippus fr. 21 has λεπτολογία, “refined talk,” glossed as the equivalent of ἀδολεσχεῖν; and Cratinus fr. 342 has ὑπολεπτολόγος (here applied to Aristophanes for resembling Euripides), which covers similar territory.¹⁷

The tongue (γλῶττα), as the organ of speech and synecdoche for language, generates its own group of metaphors. In these metaphors, the tongue consistently implies negative or less than candid speech (which will be significant for its use with reference to Pericles; see below), in contrast to the mouth (στόμα).¹⁸

Comedy indulges in creating neologisms, even as it criticizes other speakers for using unorthodox language. The longest fragment from Aristophanes' first play, *Banqueters*, hinges on the issue of orthodox language. A delinquent son is using unusual terminology, and at each phrase the father angrily identifies contemporary individuals associated with the phrasing. The passage (fr. 205) begins with the son calling his father old-fashioned by using a unique diminutive of σόρος (any sort of container for the dead; this along with the other items means his father is material for a funeral):¹⁹

—ἀλλ' εἶ σορέλλη καὶ μύρον καὶ ταινίαι.
 —ἰδοῦ σορέλλη· τοῦτο παρὰ Λυσιστράτου.
 —ἦ μὴν ἴσως σὺ καταπλιγήση τῷ χρόνῳ.

(1985), Christ (2006) and, for Old Comedy in particular, Ceccarelli (2000). Storey (2011, 3: 399) wonders if this fragment belongs to Eupolis' *Kolakes*.

16. So also Eupolis fr. 469.

17. Eupolis uses κενολογήσω, “I will talk empty” (fr. 456). Cf. Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1393a17, where he is bringing subjects to a close and saying it would be pointless to say more.

18. See entry for γλῶττα in the Appendix for examples.

19. Cf. Bonanno (1983) for a detailed analysis of the rare words in this fragment. Adesp. fr. 932 records other compounds of σόρος used as insults to the elderly, both σορόπληκτος and σοροπλήξ meaning “coffin-striker.” Cf. Pollux 10.150.

—τὸ καταπλιγίση τοῦτο παρὰ τῶν ῥητόρων.
 —ἀποβήσεται σοι ταῦτά ποι τὰ ῥήματα.
 —παρ’ Ἀλκιβιάδου τοῦτο τὰποβήσεται.
 —τί ὑποτεκμαίρη καὶ κακῶς ἄνδρας λέγεις
 καλοκάγαθιαν ἀσκοῦντας; —οἴμ’ ὦ Θρασύμαξε,
 —τίς τοῦτο τῶν ξυνηγόρων τερατεύεται;

SON: You’re just a coffinette, sweet oil and wreaths.

FATHER: Look at that “coffinette”! That’s from Lysistratus!

SON: I bet you’ll be tripped down in time.

FATHER: “Tripped down”! That’s from those *rhetores* [see below for more on this term].

SON: These very speeches will get away on you.

FATHER: That “will get away on” is from Alcibiades!

SON: Why do you evidence against and disrespect men
 Cultivating gentlemanliness?

FATHER: Ahh! Thrasymachus,

Which of those legal types talks such hocus-pocus?

Another fragment (fr. 233) features part of the same debate, but about words in older authors such as Homer and Solon, still a type of discussion associated with the new intellectualism, since it hinges on the idea of analyzing language. Nonetheless Aristophanes and other comic playwrights themselves coin words and phrases to condemn the unusual language of speakers associated with the new intellectualism. Cratinus fr. 381 coins *λυπησιλόγος* for someone who causes pain with their words, and describes running down someone with words like running over them with a horse (fr. 389, *ἐπιππάσασθαι λόγοις*).²⁰ Such mouthings at a symposium might come from *στωμυλῆθραι δαιταλεῖς*, “mouthy banqueters” (adesp. fr. 115 dub.). Suetonius (adesp. fr. 930–31) collects several heavy compound creations used to characterize busybodies in the agora, some attested from Aristophanes’ extant plays but also others not known from other comic remains, including *πολυκαλινδήτους*, “lots of rolling.” It is important to keep in mind that these more isolated items could apply equally well to speakers or situations quite apart from those using formal rhetoric (e.g., to a lyric poet). It is also telling that such vocabulary tells us little about comedy’s characterization and evaluation of a speaker. Aeschylus, Cratinus and Cleon, accord-

20. Such might be the goal of a politician engaged in knock-down politics (*πολιτικοκοπίαν* in Sannyrrio fr. 7 and *πολιτικοκοπεῖν* f glossed at Plato fr. 113 as *λοιδορεῖν* and *κωμιορεῖν*).

ing to comedy, all use torrential language, but this does not imply any more broadly what a comic poet says about the individual speakers.²¹

PRACTITIONERS

As it happens, of all the fragments securely dated before 425 B.C.E., aside from those connected to Pericles, only Aristophanes fr. 205 names speakers linked to unorthodox language.²² First is Lysistratus. There may be multiple men named Lysistratus referred to by Aristophanes in various plays and by Antiphon and Andocides in speeches, but there is no definitive way to separate them or establish them under a single identity.²³ None of the other references play on Lysistratus' manner of oratory or speaking. Fr. 205 also provides the earliest reference to Thrasymachus of Chalcedon, unless Ian Storey is correct that this Thrasymachus is not the famous Sophist.²⁴

The generic term for a speaker, ῥήτωρ, had a broader range than English "orator" (as a professional speaker or someone especially skilled in delivering speeches), often corresponding more to "politician" in the sense of someone publicly engaged in policy debate. The early sense of ῥῆσις as communal judgment or decree, going back to Homer but also in early comedy (Crates fr. 59), perhaps also contributes to the sense of ῥήτωρ as politician.²⁵ The early references to ῥήτορες in Old Comedy do not mention them in the act but refer to them more as a species. Crates wrote a play entitled Ῥήτορες, but the sole surviving line mentions only a simile about Cephisian turnips (fr. 30). The passage from Aristophanes' *Banqueters* quoted above (fr. 205) links them directly with strange, new phrasing.²⁶ Another fragment uses the

21. Note O'Sullivan (1992, 106–29) on this metaphor, but these passages do not imply, as O'Sullivan argues, a coherent, formal system of vocabulary for such metaphors. Cf. Scharffenberger (2007, 232–36) on the metaphors used of Aeschylus in *Frogs*, and see the Introduction, 14–16.

22. Alcibiades will be discussed in Chapter 4, in the context of his prominent role in the events of the 410s.

23. MacDowell (1971, 238).

24. Storey (1988). Cf. the entries for practitioners in the Appendix.

25. Connor (1971, 116 esp. n. 51).

26. Later, the comic playwright Plato uses the heads of the mythological Hydra to comment on their ever-growing numbers:

ἦν γὰρ ἀποθάνη
 εἷς τις πονηρός, δὴ' ἀνέφυσαν ῥήτορες·
 οὐδεῖς γὰρ ἡμῖν ἴολεως ἐν τῇ πόλει,
 ὅστις ἐπικαύσει τὰς κεφαλὰς τῶν ῥητόρων.
 κεκολλόπευκας· τοιγαροῦν ῥήτωρ ἔση.

metaphor of “knocking them out” (ἐκκροτεῖν, adesp. fr. 596) in the sense of crafting *rhetores* with tools, but no surviving reference describes them as the product of a school or particular training.²⁷

In addition, there is the strictly pejorative term ἀλαζών (“faker”), which in the fifth century is applied to a range of characters employing pretentious quackery, but all of whom use decidedly verbal trickery, whereas in later periods it is used of a wider range of braggarts and fools. Cratinus might, appropriately enough, pair it with κομπός, “noise” (fr. 375), while adesp. fr. 438 mentions a λόγων ἀλαζόνα (“faker in his words”).²⁸

INSTITUTIONS

While Aristophanes’ extant plays amply demonstrate that fifth-century comedy dramatized political and social institutions, the fragments of earlier times are too brief or too obscure to allow analysis of their broader depiction of intellectual and political life and the role of formal oratory within it. Nonetheless, the shards from such depictions at least confirm some of the general trends in Aristophanes’ complete plays. Aristophanes dramatizes directly or reports explicitly on the three main institutions of the Athenian democracy (the Assembly, the Council and the courts), and he projects an anxiety about the role of the new intellectual style of speech in each of them. The fragments of Old Comedy are too slight to assert definitively that other comedies dramatized these institutions and incorporated the role of rhetorical speech in their presentation. It seems likely, however, that when Thugenedes composed a play called Δικασταί (*Jurors*) and someone asks, τί, ὦγάθ’ ἀντιδικοῦμεν ἀλλήλοις ἔτι; “Sir, why do we keep suing each other?” (fr. 1; cf. Phrynichus fr. 89, which uses the same verb), it is quite reasonable to believe that the play staged issues in the court and addressed issues of how citizens spoke there, but no details are available. A more colorful version of the comment comes in Telecleides (ἀλλ’ ὦ πάντων ἀστῶν λῶστοι

If just a single rascal dies, two *rhetores* grew in their place,
because we don’t have an Iolauus in the city
to cauterize the *rhetores*’ heads.
You’ve been butt-fucked, so you’ll end up a *rhetor*. (fr. 202 = Olson E9)

Plato, *Euthydemus* 297c uses the image of the Hydra as a mistress of sophistry (σοφιστρία), whose κέφαλοι τοῦ λόγου (“heads of speech”) grow back.

27. This is true even in *Clouds*, where training in the new philosophy and way of speaking is a major concern; *pace*, for example, Piltz (1934). Cf. Chapter 3.

28. MacDowell (1990), and cf. the entry in the Appendix.

σεῖσαι καὶ προσκαλέσασθαι, / παύσασθε δικῶν ἀλληλοφάγων, “You who are the best of all cities at shakedown and indictments, stop the cannibalistic lawsuits,” fr. 2), which probably represents the chorus addressing the spectators, but whether the issue was part of the fabric of the play or belonged only to an isolated passage is unrecoverable now. Cratinus punningly expresses concern for justice in the courts when someone worries ὥστε δίκας τ’ ἀδίκους νικᾶν ἐπὶ κέρδεσιν αἰσχροῖς, “that the result be unjust cases winning for shameful profits” (fr. 353).

Consequently this survey ends by noting a few isolated words that are suggestive of the broader issues comic playwrights adduced when addressing issues germane to the democracy, including what form the functional language of that democracy should be. The adespota include δικομήτρα glossed as “the mother and generator of cases and sycophants” (fr. 590), δικολύμης “pain-of-a-lawsuit” (fr. 591) and πυθμὴν δικῶν “root of lawsuits, i.e., a sycophant” (fr. 649).²⁹ We end at the beginning, where a character wonders how a speech will begin: ἄγε δὴ, τίς ἀρχὴ τῶν λόγων γενήσεται; “Come on, what will be the beginning of the speech?” (Cephsodoros fr. 13).

PLUTARCH, COMIC PLAYWRIGHTS AND PERICLES

καὶ οἷς ἡ διατριβὴ ἐπὶ ταῖς τῶν πέλας ἀμαρτίαις, οἷον χλευσταῖς καὶ κωμωδοποιοῖς· κακολόγοι γὰρ πῶς οὗτοι καὶ ἐξαγγελτικοί.

And [there are] those who spend their time on the faults of those around them, such as comedians and comic playwrights, since they are sort of gossips and muckrakers. Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.6.20.1384b9–11

So runs Aristotle’s only discussion of comic playwrights in his *Rhetoric*, as he is explaining the benefits of circumscribing the use of rhetoric, especially in a political environment.³⁰ This contempt for comic playwrights has a long history and is crucial for understanding the evidence for comedy’s treatment of Pericles. Ancient sources waver between the idea of Pericles as inspiring leader and imperious bully.³¹ Comedy, however, overwhelmingly fronts the

29. Cf. τριπτήρ δικῶν, “mortar for pounding lawsuits” (*Ach.* 937) of the sycophant Nicarchus; Christ (1998, 54).

30. On the political tensions in the *Rhetoric*, see Berlin (1992), Most (1994), Sprute (1994) and Jacob (1996).

31. Connor (1971, 119–28) and Stadter (1989, xxxviii–xliv).

latter image but is also nearly the only contemporary source referring to him.³² The bias in, and the necessity of, referring to these sources were evident to Plutarch, and thus sources of frustration for him. When discussing the scandals surrounding Phidias, he comments (13.15–16.160e):

[10] δεξάμενοι δὲ τὸν λόγον οἱ κωμικοὶ πολλὴν ἀσέλγειαν αὐτοῦ κατεσκεδάσαν, . . . καὶ τί ἂν τις ἀνθρώπους σατυρικοὺς τοῖς βίοις καὶ τὰς κατὰ τῶν κρειττόνων βλασφημίας ὡσπερ δαίμονι κακῷ τῷ φθόνῳ τῶν πολλῶν ἀποθύοντας ἐκάστοτε θαυμάσειεν . . . ; οὕτως ἔοικε πάντῃ χαλεπὸν εἶναι καὶ δυσθήρατον ἱστορίᾳ τάληθές, ὅταν οἱ μὲν ὕστερον γεγονότες τὸν χρόνον ἔχωσιν ἐπιπροσθοῦντα τῇ γνώσει τῶν πραγμάτων, ἡ δὲ τῶν πράξεων καὶ τῶν βίων ἡλικιωτὶς ἱστορία τὰ μὲν φθόνοις καὶ δυσμενείαις, τὰ δὲ χαριζομένη καὶ κολακεύουσα λυμαίνηται καὶ διαστρέφη τὴν ἀλήθειαν.

The comic playwrights picked up the story and splattered Pericles with charges of great corruption, . . . and why should anyone be astonished that men who live like satyrs offer up sacrifices of slander of their betters, as if to the evil deity of jealousy . . . ? In this way, it seems the truth is entirely difficult and hard to capture by research, since later writers find that time covers over and blocks their knowledge of events; while contemporary research into the deeds and lives, both because of jealousy and hostility and through favoritism and flattery, damages and distorts the truth.

Rhetoric poses a fresh set of problems for Plutarch, though ones intertwined with comedy.³³ Pericles had a reputation for powerful oratory, among both supporters and detractors, but Plutarch wrestles with this component of Pericles' leadership, sensitive to the morally gray area involved in overwhelming a citizen audience with the power, rather than the substance, of a speech. The tension surfaces, for example, when Plutarch discusses Pericles being termed an Olympian god. Plutarch asserts that the reputation reflects a range of Pericles' accomplishments, but concedes that in comedy the epithet referred specifically to his oratory (8.2–3, partly cited as *adesp.* 701):

32. Podlecki (1998, 169–78) surveys the references in comedy to Pericles. Sidwell (2009, 147–53) and Bakola (2010, 181–208, 213–20) provide more extensive readings of Pericles in the fragments.

33. See Stadter (1989, xxxviii–xliv, lxiii–lxx) for Plutarch's rhetorical dilemma and his use of comic sources. Cf. Yunis (1991) for an analysis of how Thucydides puts a positive spin on Pericles' rhetoric.

διὸ καὶ τὴν ἐπὶ κλησὶν αὐτῶ γενέσθαι λέγουσι· καίτοι τινὲς ἀπὸ τῶν οἷς ἐκόσμησε τὴν πόλιν, οἱ δ' ἀπὸ τῆς ἐν τῇ πολιτείᾳ καὶ ταῖς στρατηγίαις δυνάμεως Ὀλύμπιον αὐτὸν οἶονται προσαγορευθῆναι· καὶ συνδραμεῖν οὐδὲν ἀπέοικεν ἀπὸ πολλῶν προσόντων τῶ ἀνδρὶ τὴν δόξαν. αἱ μὲντοι κωμωδίαι τῶν τότε διδασκάλων σπουδῆ τε πολλὰς καὶ μετὰ γέλωτος ἀφεικότων φωνὰς εἰς αὐτόν, ἐπὶ τῶ λόγῳ μάλιστα τὴν προσωνομίαν γενέσθαι δηλοῦσι, “βροντᾶν” μὲν αὐτόν καὶ “ἀστράπτειν,” ὅτε δημηγοροίη, “δεινὸν δὲ κεραυνὸν ἐν γλώσση φέρειν λεγόντων.”

So they say he had his surname: although some think it was from the means by which he beautified the city, and others from his ability as a statesman and a general, that he was called Olympian, it is not unlikely that his reputation resulted from many things associated with the man. But the comedies of the playwrights at the time who let loose lots of sounds, both seriously and to get a laugh, show that he got this surname primarily because of his speech: they spoke of him as “thundering” and “lightning” [*Ach.* 531] when he spoke to the people publicly, and as “carrying an awesome thunderbolt on his tongue.”

A little later Plutarch again addresses Pericles' success as an orator, this time in laudatory terms. To offset the association of his rhetoric with tyranny, and criticism from the comic playwrights, he cites new authorities and reframes Pericles' accomplishments (15.2–3):

ἔδειξε τὴν ῥητορικὴν κατὰ Πλάτωνα ψυχαγωγίαν οὔσαν καὶ μέγιστον ἔργον αὐτῆς τὴν περὶ τὰ ἤθη καὶ πάθη μέθοδον, ὥσπερ τινὰς τόνους καὶ φθόγγους ψυχῆς μάλ' ἐμμελοῦς ἀφῆς καὶ κρούσεως δεομένων. αἰτία δ' οὐχ ἡ τοῦ λόγου ψιλῶς δύναμις, ἀλλ', ὡς Θουκυδίδης φησὶν, ἡ περὶ τὸν βίον δόξα καὶ πίστις τοῦ ἀνδρός, ἀδωροτάτου περιφανῶς γενομένου καὶ χρημάτων κρείττονος.

He demonstrated that rhetoric is, to use Plato's words, “a leader of the soul” [*Phaedrus* 261a, 271c] and that its paramount task is pursuit of the character and emotions, as if they were the strings and sounds of the soul, in need of harmonious touch and fingering. The cause was not simply the power of his speech, but, as Thucydides says [2.65], the reputation of his life and the trust placed in the man as one who was utterly free of corruption and beyond bribes.

The strategy Plutarch employs here typifies much reception of the interplay between comedy and rhetoric. Where comic playwrights of the time linked Pericles' speech to power and imperiousness, Plutarch reconstructs the effectiveness quite differently. By citing Plato (albeit from a passage, and using a term, that was not necessarily laudatory), Plutarch enlists an important ally, because Plato was such a critic of rhetoric. If Plutarch can find a way to harmonize Pericles' rhetoric with something Plato approves, then clearly Pericles' oratory is to the good and not of a sophistic variety. Plutarch follows this by invoking Thucydides and concluding that Pericles led in fact by his individual moral authority, not by the techniques of his speech making. In the process, Plutarch nullifies the criticism of comedy. The comic authors were jealous entertainers who did not appreciate the noble superiority of Pericles and thus did not recognize the true cause of the success of his oratory. Plutarch accomplishes this reinterpretation by invoking Plato and Thucydides as canonical authorities, and also the tradition from the fourth century onward of subjecting rhetoric to higher pursuits such as philosophy. In this way, Plutarch belongs to the long tradition of dismissing fifth-century accomplishments in language and oratory, along with comedy's voice in the debate, by invoking fourth-century critiques.

Nearly all of comedy's extant reaction to Pericles derives from Plutarch's biography, but it is still possible to make discerning observations despite this filtering. Modern scholars have especially seized on the statement in the hypothesis for Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* that κωμωδεῖται δ' ἐν τῷ δράματι Περικλῆς μάλα πιθανῶς δι' ἐμφάσεως ὡς ἐπαγροχῶς τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις τὸν πόλεμον, "In the play, Pericles is satirized very felicitously by innuendo as having brought the war upon the Athenians" (44–48, trans. Bakola).³⁴ E. Bakola soberly reviews the history of allegorical readings of Pericles that have flowed from this statement, although, after solid criticism of such efforts, he offers an overly confident reading of the play's remains.³⁵ Stimulating as many interpretations of the *Dionysalexandros* have been, Bakola's careful study of how limited an application such statements in ancient hypotheses generally have to comic plots and content in general indicates that many of these readings are primarily speculative.

34. McGlew (2002, 25–56) uses this statement to, in a sense, invert Plutarch's criticism of comedy's criticism. McGlew sets Cratinus' satire of Pericles against the ideals for the citizen in Thucydides' version of Pericles in the Funeral Oration. Where Thucydides' Pericles has citizens subordinate their individual desires to Athens and to the state's goals, comedy celebrates and promotes the individual citizen's desire in a way that becomes paradigmatic for the comic protagonist. Cf. Davidson (1997) and Farenga (2006, 424–70).

35. Bakola (2010, 180–208).

When it comes to Cratinus' and other comedians' characterization of Pericles' rhetoric, a limited but substantive conclusion emerges. The evidence consists of only a handful of lines, but they are consistent, as Plutarch admitted was broadly true, in reckoning Pericles' oratory as the embodiment of him as an imperious, superhuman tyrant. Two fragments containing images similar to that of oratory as thunder and lightning (Telecleides fr. 48 and adesp. 288) might refer to Pericles' oratory, but their context has not been preserved. Fragments of Cratinus confirm that he employed the characterization of Pericles as Zeus (fr. 73, 118 and 258 = Olson E12). For speech, Cratinus draws on the metaphor of the tongue as an instrument of troublesome speech when he calls Pericles "the greatest tongue of the Greeks" (μεγίστη . . . γλωττα τῶν Ἑλληνίδων, fr. 324).³⁶ Another fragment of Cratinus might elaborate on what Pericles can do with his tongue (from *Dionysalexandros*, possibly Athena's offer in the parody of the judgment of Paris):

γλωττάν τε σοι
 δίδωσιν ἐν δήμῳ φορεῖν
 καλῶν λόγων ἀείνων,
 ἧ πάντα κινήσεις λέγων.

. . . gives you a tongue of beautiful eternally flowing words to bring to the Demos with which you will move them all when you speak. (fr. 327 = Olson B16)

Cratinus likewise has Pericles lead with words (λόγοισι προάγει, about building the Long Walls) but move nothing in fact (fr. 326). Another fragment criticizes him as "king of the satyrs," for Pericles does not raise a spear himself but nonetheless provides bold speeches about the war (ἀλλὰ λόγους μὲν/περὶ τοῦ πολέμου δεινοῦς περέχῃ, Hermippus fr. 47 = Olson E14).³⁷

For Plutarch and modern historians, it is a source of frustration that events from the comic stage infiltrated the historical record, but it can be illuminating for understanding comic practice. Anecdotes about Pericles' companion Aspasia, of dubious historical value, might have their origins in depictions of the couple on the comic stage. Plutarch reports that the comic poet Hermippus prosecuted Aspasia for impiety and operating a brothel, but

36. Cf. entry for γλωττα in the Appendix and above.

37. "King of the satyrs" can refer to the perennially cowardly Silenus who regularly graces the stage in satyr plays. On satyrs in Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros*, see Bakola (2010, 81–117, esp. 84 n. 8).

that Pericles' weepy appeal in court saved her (*Pericles* 32, partly quoted as Hermippus T2 in PCG). Depending on how garbled this report is, it could mean at least that in a play of Hermippus, he had the chorus or a character relate a satirical trial and acquittal of Aspasia. If Hermippus actually included a scene or more of such a trial, including actors portraying Pericles and Aspasia, it would be the earliest known example of the staging of an Athenian political institution at work, the earliest staging of public figures in this way, and possibly of staging speeches and oratory. Another report has Aspasia assist Pericles in composing his orations (Callias fr. 21; cf. Cratinus fr. 259 [= Olson E13]), which again reads like stage satire, though there is no indication whether it was more than a passing comment.³⁸ When discussing Aspasia's trial, Plutarch adds that a certain Diopieithes brought a bill in support of public prosecution of atheists (32.1). Whether this brief reference recalls history, comedy, or a blend of the two, Diopieithes was a known name on the comic stage.³⁹

Plutarch was well aware that appraisal of Pericles changed over time and that he had a reputation in retrospect that turned many of his negatives, such as his penchant for imperiousness, into virtues, such as integrity in leadership (39.4–5).⁴⁰ Plutarch does not apply this perspective to the comic sources he cites, but his observation holds true for them. All the comic fragments from Pericles' lifetime are negative. Only a decade or more after his death comes the famous laudatory description of the power of his speaking, from Eupolis' *Demes*, where Pericles was one of four figures from Athens' past to reappear.⁴¹ If the passages in *Acharnians* (524–33) and *Peace* (603–28), where Pericles even after death is an imperious Olympian bully responsible for the war, are any indication, however, it did take some years for Pericles' stock to rise.

CONCLUSION: COMEDY AND RHETORIC BEFORE 425 B.C.E.

The above surveys lead to two generalizations. First, as is consistent with the revised history of early rhetoric, comedy does not reflect the use of the technical vocabulary or techniques documented from the fourth century

38. On the depiction of Aspasia in Greek comedy, see Henry (1995, 19–28).

39. See the entry in the Appendix.

40. Cf. *Gorgias* 518e1–19d5 for Plato's more cynical take on the idealizing of leaders of the past, including Pericles.

41. See Chapter 4 for discussion.

onward. The terminology found in early Athenian comedy for “rhetorical” language, speaking and its practitioners is not technical vocabulary, the core of which was canonized a century later and subsequently expanded and elaborated, nor is it even a direct forerunner of such terminology. Rather the fragments of Old Comedy, like Aristophanes’ complete extant plays, employ comic and satirical terms, highly evaluative, almost exclusively pejorative, and often also drawing on comedy’s own tradition of colorful, creative metaphors and neologisms to attack sophistic language.⁴² Instead, comic criticism addresses unusual language and oratory deployed for negative purposes, but does so by creating comic neologisms to identify critical issues. As such, it is a comic playwright’s means for asserting the superiority of the comic stage’s own language, backed by comedy’s distinct cultural authority, as superior to the emerging prose rhythms that will, nonetheless, come to dominate the discourse of the democracy in the coming generations.⁴³ Once again, the source of comic vocabulary resides not in a formal system of criticism, but in a tradition opposed to such systems.⁴⁴

Second, comedy’s aggressive stance toward speakers and their speeches appears in a political context. The sharp attacks on Pericles, including a substantial portion aimed at his oratory, establish that comedy was in the business of policing politics and the beat included oratory, comprising its manner, technique and purpose, for improper use of oratory was embedded in tyranny and was *a fortiori* antidemocratic. Unfortunately, the fragments prior to 425 B.C.E. provide almost no coherent sense of how scenes and actions in the lost comedies dramatized the workings of this activity in the mechanisms of the democracy to supplement what we have in Aristophanes’ extant plays. Only the garbled testimony about Hermippus’ prosecution of Aspasia might provide a glimpse of a more extended report or scene devoted to a dysfunctional political institution. In this sense, the fragments of Aristophanes’ *Banqueters* that deal with language use (frr. 205 and 233) are not so novel, except that the debate transpires between a father and son, with no indication that their dialogue takes place in a public, political space. Translocation out of appropriate public space will be a crucial device in the complete plays for cornering and exploring issues involved with public oratory and language exploration in general, however, beginning in 425 B.C.E., in *Acharnians*, in the next chapter.

42. Müller (1974).

43. Ober (1989).

44. See the Introduction, 12–16 on how this contradicts the positions of O’Sullivan (1992) and Hubbard (2007); cf. Bakola (2010, 24–29).