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## The Court of Comedy

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## The Years of Confidence, 421–414 B.C.E.

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ἀναγκαῖον δὲ καὶ πρὸς ταῦτα μὴ μόνον τοὺς οἰκείους πολέμους τεθεωρηκέναι ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς τῶν ἄλλων, πῶς ἀποβαίνουσιν· ἀπὸ γὰρ τῶν ὁμοίων τὰ ὅμοια γίγνεσθαι πέφυκεν.

And regarding this [war and peace], it is necessary to have watched not only how one's own wars have turned out, but also those of others, for similar results naturally come of similar causes.

—Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.4.9.1360a3–6

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### THE LOST YEARS, 420–415 B.C.E.

When Thucydides concludes his account of the ten years of war from 431 to 421 B.C.E. and embarks on the next stage of his narrative, he argues briefly that the period of the armistice, lasting nearly seven years, in retrospect was not a period of peace but of low-level hostilities leading to renewed conflict (5.26). His compressed survey of events between the Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian expedition (5.27–116) thus focuses on the political and military events that provide evidence of his thesis, that the period should be reckoned an intermediate phase of the war. Consequently, even with other sources available, our knowledge of the *Zeitgeist* of Athens from the summer of 421 to the winter of 415 is patchy at best when compared to the previous decade and the following years.

Thucydides acknowledges that he is looking back from the perspective of the end of the war.<sup>1</sup> Playwrights writing comedies for the seasons of 420–415 did not have the benefit of hindsight and so simply kept producing plays in the environment as they knew it. Unfortunately, no complete comedy survives from this period, and the next extant one, *Birds*, was produced while the Sicilian expedition was ongoing. Still, this period covers the later years of Eupolis' career and the early years of Plato Comicus, and Aristophanes was still active, along with a range of lesser-known playwrights, so it is worth charting the evolving commentary of the remains of comedy from this period on politics, rhetoric and the trajectory of the Athenians.

Aristophanes' plays of the 420s display a consistent interest in the problem of leadership in the democracy. While Aristophanes in *Peace* attempts to dismiss the importance of Hyperbolus and other popular leaders in the wake of the Peace of Nicias, other comic playwrights continued to find the topic one of recurring interest. Aristophanes himself complains a few years later, in his revised *parabasis* of *Clouds*, that his attack on Cleon in *Knights* inspired a string of imitators attacking Hyperbolus (551–59).<sup>2</sup> A. H. Sommerstein rightly points out the exaggeration of Aristophanes' complaint, but it is fair to say that anyone perceived as a leader of the Demos or a commanding presence in Athens was likely to be a person of interest for a comic playwright. At a minimum, Hyperbolus was a substantial target in Eupolis' *Marikas*, Hermippus' *Artopolides* and Plato Comicus' *Hyperbolus*, in addition to being at least cited in other plays. Plato Comicus would go on to produce at least two more plays named for such individuals, *Pisander* and *Cleophon*. Alcibiades was prominent in Eupolis' *Baptai* and in other plays, noted for his distinctive style of speaking.<sup>3</sup>

Fragments of these so-called demagogue comedies and similar plays confirm only that some motifs found in Aristophanes' political plays were also to be found in other plays. A passage in Eupolis' *Marikas* gave an ancient commentator reason to reference Cleon sputtering in *Knights* (fr. 192.135–36). An unplaced fragment ridicules Cleon himself for the public greeting χαῖρε, “Hello! Rejoice!” while he was actually hurting the city (Eupolis fr. 331 = Olson E17). A vivid and economical sketch of Syracosius as an orator appears in Eupolis (fr. 220, from *Cities*):

1. See Strauss (1997) on the issue of periodization of the Peloponnesian War.

2. On this phenomenon generally, see Sommerstein (2000) and Storey (2003, 342–44). Note that Aristophanes does not use the term “demagogue” in this passage.

3. Cf. the Appendix. This leaves aside the cottage industry in hunting for allusions to Alcibiades in other plays. See Dover (2004) for a criticism of this approach.

Συρακόσιος δ' ἔοικεν, ἠνίκ' ἂν λέγῃ,  
 τοῖς κυνιδίοισι τοῖσιν ἐπὶ τῶν τειχίων·  
 ἀναβάς γὰρ ἐπὶ τὸ βῆμ' ὕλακτεῖ περιτρέχων.

Whenever he speaks, Syracosius resembles  
 little dogs at the walls,  
 because he walks up to the *bema* and yaps as he runs around.

As is true of fifth-century comedy in general, terms for negative speech appear, but again none are technical terms, and no passage indicates or implies a formal system for instruction or rhetorical composition. More often, pejorative terms describe fancy or clever speaking. The harshest of these terms is ἀδολεσχεῖν, “blather,” and connected forms.<sup>4</sup> Eupolis has a line addressing a σοφιστής, probably sarcastically or ironically, to teach ἀδολεσχεῖν (fr. 388). Eupolis also applies ἀδολέσχην to Socrates (fr. 386; cf. *Clouds* 1480, of Socrates’ students when Strepsiades is attacking the Phrontisterion; on the term σοφιστής, see Chapter 2). Another fragment of Aristophanes (fr. 506) points to the corrupting influence of someone engaged in ἀδολεσχεῖν:

τοῦτον τὸν ἄνδρ' ἢ βιβλίον διέφθορεν  
 ἢ Πρόδικος ἢ τῶν ἀδολεσχῶν εἷς γέ τις.

A book has ruined this man,  
 or Prodicus, or some one of those blatherers.

Other common terms offer variations on this same theme. While in the next century λαλέω becomes an ordinary word for talking, in fifth-century comedy it retains its sense of empty chatter. Eupolis succinctly summarizes: λαλεῖν ἄριστος, ἀδυνώτατος λέγειν, “superb at chatter, incapable of speaking” (fr. 116, from *Demes*). A scholiast reports Aristophanes describing Gorgias and Philippus as λάλοι (fr. 118, but there is no certainty that the scholiast uses Aristophanes’ exact wording). Since Euripides receives as much criticism for being a sophist (in the modern sense) as anyone in Greek comedy (see Chapter 6), it is unsurprising that his tragedies are not just λάλοι but “chatter around” (περιλαλούσας Aristophanes fr. 392) and elsewhere need more salt and less chatter (Aristophanes fr. 595; cf. fr. 158 for the salt

4. Cf. the entry in the Appendix.

metaphor). Aristophanes' use of other words based on the λαλ- stem is also recorded (fr. 151, 684, 949).<sup>5</sup>

These fragments overlap with a continued interest in education. A phrase in Eupolis' *Marikas* is a metaphor of a class dismissed by a teacher (*grammatodidaskalon*, fr. 192.13–15). As in Aristophanes, teaching, of language or anything else, is the province of an individual instructor with an individual or group, but not an institution. Thus there is the teacher Prodamos in *Aiges* who teaches grammar and music (fr. 17). For Eupolis, Socrates is again more a charlatan than a philosopher or teacher (fr. 386 = Olson F1 and 395 = Olson B2), as is Protagoras (fr. 157–58 from *Kolakes*). Eupolis' *Kolakes* of 421 places Protagoras and other visiting intellectuals in the home of Callias. Decades later, Plato also dramatizes such a gathering at the house of Callias but implies a setting in the 430s, when Pericles and his sons are alive, and Alcibiades and the playwright Agathon are quite young. In this dialogue, Plato includes a debate between Socrates and Protagoras about whether *arētē* can be taught, and he has Protagoras cite the chorus in Pherecrates' *Savages* (*Ἄγριοι*) of 420, which might imply the play dealt with educational issues (*Prot.* 327c–d). At a minimum, the play had to deal with what constituted civil society.

The fragmentary remains of these and similar plays reveal some overlapping motifs with Aristophanes' plays, but not enough material for productive speculation about the broader ideological stand of Eupolis or other comic playwrights, either as congruent or in contrast with Aristophanes, as regards rhetorical language and democratic deliberation.<sup>6</sup> As the previous chapter has shown, much of what Aristophanes' comedies convey about public language and the democratic process unfolds over a number of episodes and requires context to discern the significance of translocation and revelations about characters' orientation on the ideological grid. No fragments of other fifth-century comedies permit analysis of these types of progressions or recovery of the necessary types of contexts.

The most important lost play of the 410s is undeniably Eupolis' *Demes*, although its famous fragments and papyrus remains raise more problems

5. Cf. the entry in the Appendix. For other instances of λαλέω where the context is unclear or at least there is no indication of political or philosophical content, see Pherecrates fr. 2, 70, 138; Strattis fr. 54; and adesp. 1005. Covering a similar semantic field is ληρέω, for which see Cratinus fr. 208 (= Olson B6) and adesp. fr. 174 dub. Pherecrates' Λῆροι seems to refer to women's accoutrements, not the verb of empty talk; cf. L. B. Carter (1985, 121).

6. Storey (2003, 338–48) is rightly cautious about characterizing Eupolis' political orientation, but he is a little eager to downplay Eupolis having an interest in political comedy at all, often trying to separate "satire," "personal attacks," or "military" jokes from political comedy, although it is not clear why there is a firm line between all these. Even Storey must admit at least four of Eupolis' plays engaged in "political comedy" (*Poleis*, *Marikas*, *Chrysoun Genos* and *Demes*).

than they solve in understanding the play. While the play has often been assigned to 412 B.C.E., Storey makes a compelling case for production ca. 417.<sup>7</sup> The date of 412 rests overwhelmingly on the idea that Eupolis composed the play subsequent to the disaster on Sicily and that the resurrection of the figures from Athens' past constituted a reflection, in a time of crisis, on what Athens had and now needed. In *Knights*, Aristophanes was already invoking the same figures Eupolis revives in *Demes* (Solon, Miltiades, Aristides) and was revivifying the Athens of the generation of Marathon, so there is no requirement that 412 be a necessary or distinct moment for such a play. The reference to controversy about the battle of Mantinea in 418 (fr. 99.30–32) and other *komoidoumenoi* fit a date ca. 417 far better than the date 412. Indeed, if comedy is still in part reeling off jokes about demagogues in the wake of Aristophanes' *Knights*, Eupolis' staging a play not with an individual representative of the Demos but with a whole chorus of "Demosi" is also a possibility.<sup>8</sup>

The section of the lengthy papyrus fragment (99.23–34) attacking some prominent speaker and political leader indicates the nexus of motifs found in Aristophanes' plays were also found in *Demes*. While there remain many viable candidates for the exact individual vilified here, the specifics of the attack find easy parallels elsewhere in comedy. This is someone whose suitability to lead the Demos is in question (ἀξιοὶ δημηγορεῖν, fr. 99.23; once again, the term is not yet pejorative, and it makes more sense for it to be positive here, since it emphasizes the contrast between the individual and what he strives for). His manner of speech is an issue, not because he speaks formally but because he does not speak proper Attic (ἠττικίζεν, 25) and thunders like a god (τοῦ θεοῦ βροντῶντος, 31; reminiscent of attacks on Pericles). The issue of proper deliberation is embedded in the citation of the speaker threatening to lock up generals who object to some sort of motion to act at Mantinea (30–32). This action in the Assembly is the climactic example of why the individual should not be a leader (ἄρχειν, 33).

That Eupolis devoted part of a choral ode to criticizing the ambitions of a public, political speaker who was boisterous and advised the Demos badly does not mean he espouses a faith in the deliberative process and the sovereignty of the Demos that Aristophanes illustrates in his plays. The passage merely indicates that Eupolis engaged in some of the same issues of public language and leadership that Aristophanes does. Indeed, the plot and other

7. Storey (2003, 111–14). For support of a date as late as 410, see Telò (2007, 397–401).

8. Storey (2003, 391–94) makes a good case that *Demosi* refers to the outlying communities of Attica and that the chorus is made up of representatives from there. Even so, it is hard to imagine that Eupolis did not make some use of or play on the term corresponding to the Demos itself.

fragments of *Demes* suggest that Eupolis presented a significantly different view from Aristophanes of a crucial leader and speaker from Athens' past: Pericles.

The remains of *Demes* make clear Pericles was one of four figures from Athens' past (the others being Solon, Miltiades and Aristides) to reappear in some way. Plutarch says of Pericles' arrival in the play (Plut. *Per.* 3.7 = Eupolis fr. 115):

ὁ δ' Εὐπολις ἐν τοῖς Δήμοις πυνθανόμενος περὶ ἐκάστου τῶν ἀναβεβηκότων ἐξ Ἄιδου δημαγωγῶν, ὡς ὁ Περικλῆς ὠνομάσθη τελευταῖος:

“ὄ τι περ κεφάλαιον τῶν κάτωθεν ἤγαγες.”

Eupolis in *Demes* inquires about each of the demagogues once they have come up from Hades and says, when Pericles is called out last:

“What you have brought is the headmost of those below.”

The laudatory introduction of Pericles is probably undercut by yet another joke about Pericles' misshapen skull,<sup>9</sup> but Eupolis does seem to give pride of place to Pericles by putting him last among revered figures from the past. Thomas Braun has observed that this represents a shift in perspective on Pericles, since comic references during his lifetime and in Aristophanes' plays of the 420s are uniformly critical.<sup>10</sup> Braun further sets up a contrast with Themistocles, who would seem a logical candidate for resurrection but is absent. Braun argues that, in the case of Themistocles, his reputation remained tainted by charges of self-enrichment, and it would take until the fourth century for his name to be invoked in a consistently positive way. Pericles, by contrast, ultimately had a reputation for personal virtue and, once the war was seemingly concluded, became a viable candidate for lionization.

Braun's argument oversimplifies the situation and papers over testimony that does not favor his conclusion. For both Themistocles and Pericles, Braun does rightly acknowledge positive and negative testimony in the fifth century. Themistocles was undeniably a hero of the Persian Wars but his later reputation was hindered by his descendants in Asia Minor who were supporting the Persians. For Pericles, Braun acknowledges the criticisms leveled during his lifetime but, in analyzing the passages in *Acharnians*

9. Cf. fr. 325 from *Chrysoan Genos*, which says only that Eupolis referred to the Odeon in this play, but which might indicate a reference to Pericles (cf. Cratinus fr. 73, 118 for the image).

10. Braun (2000).

and *Peace* that fault Pericles posthumously for the war, Braun argues that Aristophanes was mostly finding an efficient way to lampoon and criticize the start of the war more than directing his attack against Pericles himself. Beyond that, Braun claims, fifth-century criticism of Pericles is consistent with Thucydides' praise in that all agree he was beyond personal corruption. Consequently, Pericles would be a good candidate for resurrection, while Themistocles remained a "hot potato."

Braun faces essentially the same bifurcated testimony about Pericles as Plutarch millennia earlier, with comic sources criticizing him, and Thucydides offering praise. And he reaches a conclusion much as Plutarch does, by preferring Thucydides' portrait of personal virtue over the derogatory claims of comic playwrights. To an extent, however, Braun simply misrepresents the comic critiques. Hermippus' characterization of Pericles as a do-nothing hypocrite does not imply agreement that Pericles was personally virtuous (fr. 47). Aristophanes is obviously satirizing the start of the war, but in the passages from both *Acharnians* and *Peace* he quite definitely says Pericles pursued war because of personal matters (whether his connection to Aspasia or Phidias), putting his tyrannical self above the needs of the Demos and Athens. These are not portraits that agree that Pericles was personally beyond corruption.

In the broader picture, Braun may simply be trying to make a much simpler conclusion and narrative than are possible or desirable. It does seem fair to say that by some point in the fourth century both Themistocles and Pericles were widely recognized as heroes of Athens' past.<sup>11</sup> Their reputations in the last decades of the fifth century seem to have been messier, however. Herodotus offers a Themistocles who deserves credit for his accomplishments in the Persian Wars, without hiding his questionable actions later, and his history was likely in circulation in some form by the 420s. Aristophanes has two passing references to him in *Knights*, both invoking him in somewhat heroic terms. Themistocles is cited in *Demes* as clever but thieving (σοφὸς γὰρ ἀνὴρ, τῆς δὲ χειρὸς οὐ κρατῶν, fr. 126), so there was at least room for ambivalence. By contrast, all references to Pericles down to Aristophanes' *Peace* in 421 B.C.E. are negative. Thucydides is laudatory, but it is unclear when he puts forth his portrait. It is certainly after Pericles' death and could even be in the last years of the century. Eupolis' *Demes* offers the first and only positive comment in comedy, but, as it happens, no other reference in comedy to Pericles survives from the rest of the century, so

11. Isocrates, Aeschines and Lycurgus each cite them as model figures from the glorious past. See Braun (2000, 216) for specifics.

putting the play's fragmentary references in context is even more difficult.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the positive portrayal of Pericles was novel and influential. Perhaps in the continuing difference of opinion about Pericles, *Demes* was the first to portray him positively on the comic stage. Perhaps Eupolis was out of step with the times, and only later, when Pericles' stock rose, did the play gain approval.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps with the Peace of Nicias, or even earlier, despite Aristophanes' protests in *Peace*, Pericles' role in the war was being reevaluated and his role in *Demes* reflected his new popularity.

Whatever the cause and whatever Pericles' exact role, his oratory was a critical part of his characterization (fr. 102 = Olson E10):

(A.) κράτιστος οὔτος ἐγένετ' ἀνθρώπων λέγειν·  
 ὁπότε παρέλθοι δ,' ὥσπερ ἀγαθοὶ δρομῆς,  
 ἐκ δέκα ποδῶν ἤρει λέγων τοὺς ῥήτορας.  
 (B.) ταχὺν λέγεις γε.

(A.) πρὸς δέ γ' αὐτοῦ τῷ τάχει  
 πειθῶ τις ἐπεκάθειζεν ἐπὶ τοῖς χεῖλεσιν·  
 οὔτως ἐκήλει καὶ μόνος τῶν ῥητόρων  
 τὸ κέντρον ἐγκατέλειπε τοῖς ἀκροωμένοις.

A. This man was so powerful a person at speaking.  
 Whenever he stepped up, just like good runners,  
 he caught up with *rhetores* from ten feet back when he spoke.

B. You're talking about fast there!

A. As well as his speed,  
 a certain persuasiveness sat upon his lips.  
 He was charming that way and the only *rhetor*  
 who left a sting in those who heard him.

Other fragments of *Demes* testify that oratory was a concern not limited to this passage. The thundering speech of the demagogue (fr. 99.31), the effective but criticized speaker nicknamed “Bouzyges” (fr. 103),<sup>14</sup> the dismissal of Phaeax's speech (fr. 116), and someone's “circular talk” (fr. 108) point to an interest in public oratory. Again at this point we hit the limits of our evidence, for without contexts such as we have for Aristophanes' plays, the ultimate evaluation of such speakers and the role more generally of oratory

12. On the supposed allusion to Pericles in the character of Aeschylus in *Frogs*, see Chapter 6.

13. See Storey (2003, 111) on the reputation of *Demes*.

14. Although a scholiast identifies Bouzyges in Eupolis fr. 103 as Pericles, the point of the comment is the speaker's inferiority to Pericles; cf. Storey (2003, 134–36).

in the democracy are beyond recovery. In any case, nothing contradicts the broader picture that speakers and speech making did not conform to the formal precepts of classical rhetoric from the next century.

Other potential factors in the production and reception of *Demes* are two areas of tension Thucydides discusses obliquely and cautiously: the fear of tyranny among the Demos and the growing influence of Alcibiades. Aristophanes highlights paranoia about tyrants and speakers' use of this bogeyman as far back as *Wasps* in 422, but Thucydides highlights it as productive in the interrogations into the scandal over the Mysteries (6.53.3 and 6.60). As modern scholars have noted, despite Thucydides' ridicule of the Demos' ignorance and paranoia, Alcibiades' influence was at least a legitimate concern for supporters of democracy, and the oligarchic coup four years later indicates that the specter of the overthrow of the democracy was not abstract fantasy. It is possible, and it would seem logical, that Eupolis incorporated these tensions into his *Baptai*, likely produced within a few years of *Demes*, but the confused and unreliable testimony about the play and Alcibiades' role in it do not allow for much sober discussion. One fragment involves reelection (fr. 98), and another mentions a proposal significant for the city (προβούλευμα βασταάζουσι τῆς πόλεως μέγα, fr. 76), but otherwise only Alcibiades' supposedly homicidally angry reaction to the play gives any hint of the stakes raised in the play.<sup>15</sup>

Aristophanes' output during these same years is even more vestigial. Of plays for which there is some reason to date around this period, *Seasons* reportedly put some unorthodox gods on trial and expelled them (Cic. *De leg.* 2.37) and contains some expression of cynicism about utopia (fr. 581), foreshadowing the debate about poverty in *Wealth* at the end of Aristophanes' career. *Heroes* mentions part of a *klepsydra* (fr. 328), so some reference to a trial may be involved. *Amphiareus* from the Lenaea of 414 used the proverb "Deliberation is sacred" (ἱερὸν συμβουλή, fr. 32), appropriate enough for Aristophanes, but by this year a complete play provides direct evidence for how Aristophanes portrayed the fears and ambitions of the Athenian Demos.

## **BIRDS: DELIBERATION AND UNIVERSAL EMPIRE**

The long, rollicking ride that is *Birds* incorporates a number of lines, passages and scenes similar to the isolated fragments of comedies from the

15. See Storey (2003, 101–10) and the entry for Alcibiades in the Appendix.

period. The obsession with tyrants of the distant past, harshly ridiculed by Thucydides, finds a quick gibe in the parody of public declamations, offering a substantial reward, “if anyone kills one of the dead tyrants” (ἦν τε τῶν τυράννων τίς τινα / τῶν τεθνηκότων ἀποκτείνῃ, 1074–75). If Storey is right that Eupolis’ *Demes* began with an episode in which the protagonist raises the legendary figures of Athens’ past glory from the dead, Aristophanes might be offering a deflated version of such a scene (1553–64):

πρὸς δὲ τοῖς Σκιάποσιν λίμνη  
 τις ἔστ’ ἄλουτος οὔ  
 ψυχαγωγεῖ Σωκράτης·  
 ἔνθα καὶ Πείσανδρος ἦλθε  
 δεόμενος ψυχὴν ἰδεῖν ἢ  
 ζῶντ’ ἐκεῖνον προὔλιπε,  
 σφάγι’ ἔχων κάμηλον ἀμνόν  
 τιν’, ἧς λαιμούς τεμῶν ὥσπερ  
 ποθ’ οὐδυσσεὺς ἀπῆλθε,  
 κἄτ’ ἀνῆλθ’ αὐτῷ κάτωθεν  
 πρὸς τὸ λαῖτμα τῆς καμήλου  
 Χαιρεφῶν ἢ νυκτερίς.

Near the Shade Feet there  
 is a lake, where unwashed  
 Socrates makes souls uplifted.  
 There came Pisander,  
 asking to see the soul  
 that abandoned him in life.  
 With a camel-lamb for a sacrifice,  
 he cut its throat and,  
 just like Odysseus, he ran away.  
 Then toward him from below  
 toward the gushing of the camel came  
 Chaerephon the bat!

Whether it is Odysseus interrogating the figures of the mythological past on his epic quest or the convention of resurrecting heroic Athenians, here the process is reduced to a bogus intellectual, a cowardly politician, and an eccentric local character. The responding ode also fills in an established heroic ritual with contemporary low-grade troublemakers (1694–1705):

ἔστι δ' ἐν Φάναισι πρὸς τῇ  
 Κλεψύδρα πανοὔργου  
 Ἑγγλωττογαστόρων γένος,  
 οἳ θερίζουσιν τε καὶ σπείρουσι  
 καὶ τρυγῶσι ταῖς γλώτταισι  
 σκάζουσι τε·  
 βάρβαροι δ' εἰσὶν γένος,  
 Γοργίαί τε καὶ Φίλιπποι.  
 κάπο τῶν Ἑγγλωττογαστόρων  
 ἐκείνων τῶν Φιλίππων  
 πανταχοῦ τῆς Ἀττικῆς ἢ  
 γλώττα χωρὶς τέμνεται.

There is in the Accusa-nation near the  
 court clock: the evil race of  
 Tongue Bellies!  
 Who sow and gather fruit and with their tongues  
 reap havoc.  
 They are barbarians by race,  
 like Gorgias and Philip.  
 And because of those Tongue Belly  
 Philippines,  
 everywhere in Attica,  
 the tongue is cut out separately.

As always in comedy, the tongue is the vocal tool of malfeasance (see Chapter 2 and the Appendix), here imported from outside Greece to feed bellies and be linked vaguely with the practice of cutting tongues out separately and prominently at sacrifices.

These motifs offer little but consistency with other such terms and images in comedy. The broader context of *Birds* has catapulted the play to the first tier of disputation among scholars. The leading issue has been what to make of parallels between the fundamental plot (and then how details square with these broader parallels) and the grand undertaking of the expedition against Sicily.<sup>16</sup> Broadly speaking, critics have attempted to map some sort of allegory between the characters in the plot and the historical actors in

16. Konstan (1998, 3–6) offers a helpful survey of scholarly trends regarding this problem; see also note 19 below on other contributions in the same volume.

the real-life drama of the Sicilian expedition and/or to map the new Cloudcuckooland onto Athens. Allegorists have generally struggled because Aristophanes simply does not seem to employ prolonged and detailed allegories. A character may have an allegorical dream (e.g., *Wasps* 13–53), and Aristophanes is not subtle about pointing out thinly veiled allegorical attacks on historical figures, but systematic understated allegories either fail to hold up at all or are so vague as to command little independent assent. Furthermore, allegorists most often seek a narrative parallel to that found in Thucydides, which would also require the awareness of *hybris* and the expectation of failure, but such dark tones are difficult to lay claim to in a play that is the most joyous of Aristophanes' extant plays, perhaps excluding *Peace*. The requirement, or at least preference, for a sense of impending doom will be an issue revisited later. Allegorizing the bird *polis* onto historical Athens fares little better. The new world is neither consistently a utopia nor consistently a dystopia. It parallels, inverts, subverts and emulates Athens without a coherent sense of purpose and little more than suits the dynamic of a scene or even a one-off joke.

At the risk of oversimplifying a profoundly ramshackle play, I would like to suggest that once again tracing the dynamic of deliberation and translocation provides a more coherent and productive focus both for analyzing the unfolding of the plot against its historical backdrop and for mental peregrinations through Cloudcuckooland. Such a focus will allow for the generally aggressive and victorious trajectory of events in the play, along with the loose and discursive panorama of the birds' *polis*, but it will raise a potentially disturbing conclusion about Aristophanes' depictions of Athens and the Demos' imperial ambitions.

No deliberative process in any of Aristophanes' fifth-century plays proceeds without conflict, but the process in *Birds* proceeds smoothly in one remarkable way. Whereas in *Acharnians*, *Knights* and *Wasps* the process utterly fails in its proper civic location and must translocate to become successful, in *Birds* a speaker meets initial hostility, but the deliberative process is quickly successful, so prosperity and victory results for all parties involved.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, the resistance Peisetaerus meets initially from the birds (310–405) is no more than Dicaeopolis must overcome to persuade the Acharnian chorus of his position. In both cases, prosperity ensues, but Dicaeopolis has to endure a failed Assembly before demonstrating the benefits of deliberation. In *Birds*, when the arriving birds attack the visiting

17. Peisetaerus and Euelpides do leave Athens, and thus the deliberative process is translocated, but they do not flee a failed site of deliberation, as protagonists do in *Acharnians*, *Knights* and *Wasps*.

humans for what they perceive as betrayal to their enemy, Tereus is able to reason with them about the principles of deliberation. Of the human intruders, he poses the question (371–72):

εἰ δὲ τὴν φύσιν μὲν ἐχθροί, τὸν δὲ νοῦν εἰσιν φίλοι,  
καὶ διδάξοντές τι δεῦρ' ἤκουσιν ὑμᾶς χρήσιμον;

What if they are enemies by nature but friendly by intention,  
and have come here to teach us something useful?

The chorus of birds is skeptical, yet they do not cut off the prospect of a productive assembly but inquire further (373–74):

πῶς δ' ἂν οἶδ' ἡμᾶς τι χρήσιμον διδάξειάν ποτε  
ἢ φράσειαν, ὄντες ἐχθροὶ τοῖσι πάπποις τοῖς ἑμοῖς;

How could they ever teach or tell us anything useful,  
when they are enemies of our ancestors?

Tereus now sounds a note about the value of open discussion (375–80):

ἀλλ' ἀπ' ἐχθρῶν δὴ τὰ πολλὰ μανθάνουσιν οἱ σοφοί.  
ἢ γὰρ εὐλάβεια σώζει πάντα. παρὰ μὲν οὖν φίλου  
οὐ μάθοις ἂν τοῦθ', ὁ δ' ἐχθρὸς εὐθύς ἐξηνάγκασεν.  
αὐτίχ' αἱ πόλεις παρ' ἀνδρῶν γ' ἔμαθον ἐχθρῶν κού φίλων  
ἐκπονεῖν θ' ὑψηλὰ τεῖχη ναῦς τε κεκτῆσθαι μακράς·  
τὸ δὲ μάθημα τοῦτο σώζει παῖδας, οἶκον, χρήματα.

But the wise actually learn a lot from their enemies,  
for caution keeps everything safe, and from a friend  
you wouldn't learn that, but your enemy immediately makes it necessary.  
For example, cities learn from enemy men and not from friends  
to build high walls and acquire long ships,  
a lesson that keeps children, home and property safe.

It is neither the first nor the last time Aristophanes promotes the idea that Athenians should heed advice from those outside the traditional deliberative process. The chorus responds in an approving and open-minded way (381–82):

ἔστι μὲν λόγων ἀκοῦσαι πρῶτον, ὡς ἡμῖν δοκεῖ,  
χρήσιμον: μάθοι γὰρ ἄν τις κάπο τῶν ἐχθρῶν σοφός.

Listening to arguments first, it seems to us,  
is useful, because someone wise can learn from their enemies.

And when everyone is ready for Peisetaerus' speech, the birds indicate that they will negotiate in good faith (460–61):

ἀλλ' ἐφ' ὅτῳ περ πράγματι τὴν σὴν ἤκεις γνώμην ἀναπέισων,  
λέγε θαρρήσας· ὡς τὰς σπονδὰς οὐ μὴ πρότεροι παραβῶμεν.

But of the affair about which you have come to persuade us of your view,  
speak confidently: We won't break the treaty first.

Confidence is hardly Peisetaerus' problem, for he is in fact eager to impress the birds (465–66):

μὰ Δί', ἀλλὰ λέγειν ζητῶ τι πάλαι, μέγα καὶ λαρινὸν ἔπος τι,  
ὅ τι τὴν τούτων θραύσει ψυχὴν.

By God, I've been ready so long to deliver a long speech with some fat  
verbiage,  
that will shatter their souls.

As with the speeches in *Wasps*, scholars have at this point summarized Peisetaerus' persuasion of the birds as a formal rhetorical speech, but the specifics bely the characterization. Murphy's *prooimion* (467–70), for example, consists of three rapid-fire claims by Peisetaurus, each interrupted by the chorus leader. The structure is no different from the "proofs" that follow (471–521), except that Euelpides now adds his own asides. The *epilogos* consists mostly of Peisetaerus' *pnigos*, as he rounds out his presentation with a flourish. Murphy does not even attempt to analyze the remainder of the speech (550–626). His description in fact makes the scene seem less like a formally organized rhetorical specimen than debate at an assembly, which in fact it better resembles.<sup>18</sup>

18. Murphy (1938, 107) shows his scheme for the passage, and Sousa e Silva (1987–88, 86–87) supports it. Murphy concludes: "What follows is a series of concrete proposals (550–570), and a group of refutations. The chorus and Hoopoe offer objections, which Peisthetaerus [*sic*] answers (571–585), and the speech ends with a list of the various advantages which men will enjoy if they accept

More than seeing a political assembly, however, scholars have noted the echoes of the thought and reasoning of the Sophists in the arguments to the birds, used by Tereus and Peisetaerus himself. Employment of such ideas can seem paradoxical, sinister or at a minimum satirical given Aristophanes' hostility to such thinking elsewhere in his plays. Once again, however, location and purpose are the ultimate criteria. Tereus calls an open assembly of the birds, and Peisetaerus makes his case. In terms of cause and effect, the closest parallel to Peisetaerus' accomplishments as far as the deliberative process is concerned is Diceapolis' venture in *Acharnians*. Both meet parties hostile to them at first sight, but once they make their arguments, their opponents concede the superiority of the speakers. Wild success and prosperity ensue. The biggest difference is that Diceapolis had already failed in the Assembly even to air his ideas, so the benefits of his plan accrue to him almost alone. In *Birds*, since the Assembly allows Peisetaerus to air his ideas, and he implements them, the benefits accrue to them all, including the Athenian spectators of the play.

Scholars have explored in detail various ways that Cloudecuckooland reconfigures Athens, but the key point here is that, in contrast to Diceapolis' individual success, in *Birds* prosperity extends to the Athenian Demos. On top of the various intruders Peisetaerus deals with, scenes that redesign the *polis* physically and politically, some passages make the inclusiveness explicit. Peisetaerus receives a crown for the benefits he has brought, a rite of recognition in Athens done in the name of the Demos. A herald describes part of the change (1280–84):

πρὶν μὲν γὰρ οἰκίσαι σε τήνδε τὴν πόλιν,  
 ἔλακωνομάνουν ἅπαντες ἄνθρωποι τότε,  
 ἐκόμων ἐπείνων ἐρρύπων ἐσωκράτου  
 σκυτάλι' ἐφόρου, νυνὶ δ' ὑποστρέψαντες αὖ  
 ὀρνιθομανοῦσι, . . .

Before you founded this *polis*,  
 all the humans were going Spartan,  
 with long hair, hungry, dirty, going Socrates,  
 and carrying little clubs. But now they've completely turned around  
 and gone *bird!*

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the birds as gods (586–626). A more precise division than this need not be given." He concedes: "The many interruptions during Peisethaerus' argument in some measure destroy the rhetorical nature of the speech."

If the Athenians, and other Greeks, had been looking elsewhere to find themselves, the new *polis* of *Birds* has everyone flocking, literally, back to Athens. The extent of this accomplishment reaches its climax when the gods send an embassy to negotiate terms. In this sequence, Aristophanes makes explicit that the new *polis* is a victory for democracy over tyranny. The most recalcitrant of the divine ambassadors, Poseidon, complains about his Triballian companion and makes a sideswipe at democracy in the process (1570–71):

ὦ δημοκρατία, ποῖ προβιβᾶς ἡμᾶς ποτε,  
εἰ τουτουί γ' κεχειροτονήκασ' οἱ θεοί;

O Democracy, where are you taking us now,  
if the gods elected *this!*

When the embassy meets Peisetaerus, he makes explicit that the new *polis* is a democracy, when he explains what he is cooking (1583–85):

ὄρνιθές τινες  
ἐπανιστάμενοι τοῖς δημοτικοῖσιν ὀρνέοις  
ἔδοξαν ἀδικεῖν.

Some birds  
were rebelling against the birds' democracy  
and have been convicted.

Critics have often found this a satirical or sinister image, but in its historical context it should have been reassuring.<sup>19</sup> Poseidon has just disparaged democracy, but Peisetaerus, who has been keeping out troublemakers, who has been crowned for the benefits he has showered on everyone, makes clear that this new city is a democracy safe from elements who would overthrow it. Finding anything sinister here requires speculating that the conviction of the birds in question somehow was not the product of due process or that Peisetaerus in cooking them is somehow suppressing dissent tyrannically, but there is absolutely nothing in the play from any character to support such fears. Rather, he is safeguarding the democracy at a time that the Demos

19. Hubbard (1998) finds this scene and the play in general a reflection of popular outrage against mounting tyranny. For a perspective diametrically opposed to Hubbard, and closer to what I propose here, see Dunbar (1997). Romer (1998) leans toward a dark reading but is more sensitive to the problems of interpretation.

was worried about insurrection. It is the power of the gods, meanwhile, that resides with Zeus that takes the form of τυραννίς (1605, 1643). The dispute between Poseidon and Heracles' inheritance only reinforces the closed, elite nature of the gods' power.

After Peisetaerus secures power from the gods, the play closes with a celebration of his marriage and status as τύραννος (1708). The title can seem jarring and has again led critics to spy sinister, underhanded commentary on Peisetaerus' achievement. In more charitable moments, interpretations suggest a Periclean democracy, where an elite citizen guides the Demos, but such a model is without parallel in Aristophanes. Inevitably, however, scholars have had to acknowledge there is nothing in Aristophanes that remotely allows reading this final celebration, a scene that has no hint of irony or criticism in an author never shy about either, as cynical. A more coherent and consistent interpretation is simply that Peisetaerus is now fully identified with the Demos. He has been crowned in a way that reflects the prerogative of the Demos, he protects the democracy and has brought success and prosperity to all. The scene in this way reenacts the rejuvenation of Demos from *Knights* ten years earlier. Peisetaerus can thus be τύραννος and marry Βασίλεια, and rule all the Greeks, just as the titles of *tyrannos*, *basileus* and *monarchos* are positive when applied to Demos in *Knights* (τύραννον, 1114; τὸν τῆς Ἑλλάδος ὑμῖν καὶ τῆς γῆς τῆσδε μόναρχον, 1330; ὦ βασιλεῦ τῶν Ἑλλήνων, 1333).

There are, of course, major reasons critics and scholars have been reluctant to make an equation between Peisetaerus' imperial success and the imperial ambitions of the Athenian Demos at the time. One is the persistent idea that Aristophanes is fundamentally a critic of the democracy, and so any model he holds up must somehow reflect that fundamental criticism. Nevertheless, I hope I have made a case so far that Aristophanes consistently dramatizes a faith in the core processes of the Athenian democracy, even as he sharply attacks its institutions when they fail to function properly. A more serious problem is the implication for Aristophanes' treatment of these imperial ambitions in the concrete form of the Sicilian expedition. Thucydides narrates the deliberations about the expedition as a process of lunacy compounded by ignorance and incompetence. Euripides had used a harsh trilogy to rail against the Athenians for their inhumanity the year before *Birds*.<sup>20</sup> It is natural to want to see this awareness reflected in Aristophanes. Even Jeffrey Henderson, who promotes Aristophanes as voice of

20. Cf. Chapter 6, but note that Erp Taalman Kip (1987) argues against this reading of the tetralogy of 415.

the deliberative Demos and who comes closest to acknowledging the cheer-leading for the Demos in this play, prefers to see some caution here.<sup>21</sup> But the Sicilian venture was approved with enthusiasm by its supporters, however foolish and disastrous it became in hindsight, and as problematic as it seemed even to some parties at the time. It is an unpalatable idea to say that Aristophanes, at least as far as what he projects in *Birds*, belonged to the uncritical supporters and was thus on the wrong side of history. But that it is unpalatable does not make it less true, on the best evidence available.

Three years later, Aristophanes has his protagonist obliquely begin to address the staggering losses that did in fact ensue. “Shut up. Don’t bring up past trouble” (σίγα, μὴ μνησικακῆσης, *Lys.* 590), says the official in response, a man charged with bringing better guidance to the Demos. And indeed, by the spring of 411 Aristophanes had many other problems he wanted to address about the health of the democracy.

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21. Henderson (1998a, 145): “It seems to me that *Birds* is at once critical and hopeful, with the emphasis on hopeful. . . . *Birds* would certainly chide the spectators about their shortcomings, including their errors of 415, while still anticipating victory in the West.” Slater (1998), wittily, but in parallel, feels obligated to eye fledgling criticisms of the costs of war and democracy.