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The Lyric of Insult and Abuse in Aristophanes

By Carroll Moulton, Emory University, Atlanta

Toward the end of several plays, we find brief lyrics of invective, with varying degrees of thematic relevance to the main action¹. This type of 'stasimon' is most fully developed, and most remarkable, in the *Birds*, but other examples exist in *Acharnians* and *Lysistrata*. The targets of insult and abuse may differ: in *Acharnians* the comic butt is the obscure Antimachus, in *Birds* there is a whole series of persons (Cleonymus, Socrates and Chaerephon, Peisander, Gorgias and Philip), in *Lysistrata* it is the audience that is mocked. Certain common motifs recur in these lyrics, and we shall have occasion to note them in the course of the analysis². Yet the chief impression is of diversity. Our purpose in examining the rich variations of this «type ode» in detail will be to gain further insight into the poetic technique of Aristophanes³.

A. The Misfortunes of Antimachus (*Ach.* 1150ff.)

The ode in *Acharnians* is the shortest. The previous scene in stichomythic dialogue has shown the departure of Lamachus and Dikaiopolis, the general for battle and the old man for his feast. After a 'kommation' in anapests emphasizing the disparity of the two characters' prospects (1143–1149), the chorus sings one strophic pair lampooning Antimachus, a man of obscure provenance who is mentioned only once elsewhere in Aristophanes⁴. The meter is choriambic⁵.

1 See the structural analyses of Aristophanic plays in F. M. Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*² (Cambridge 1934, repr. Garden City 1961). On the chorus in *Ach.* and *Av.* see G. M. Sifakis, *Parabasis and Animal Choruses* (London 1971) 26. 28.

2 For example, puns are common: cf. on Antimachus' name in section A below on *Ach.*, and note the puns on proper names in each of the four stanzas of the lyric in *Av.*: Kardias, Orestes, Peisander (which, like Pisthetairos, connotes persuasion), Phanai, Gorgias, and Philip. Orestes, the hooligan, figures in both *Ach.* and *Av.* The motif of free food is common to the lyrics in both *Ach.* and *Lys.* However, the differences revealed within the "genre" of the abuse lyric are perhaps more significant than the similarities.

3 Unlike Greek tragedy, Aristophanic comedy has been relatively neglected as "poiesis", as was pointed out as recently as 1964 by C. H. Whitman. Whitman's own book went some way toward filling the gap, although it was principally concerned with arguing a thesis of comic heroism: cf. *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero* (Cambridge, Mass. 1964).

4 Cf. *Nub.* 1022. For the identity of Antimachus and the suspicion that he served as the "choregos" of Cratinus the comic playwright, see the notes of van Leeuwen ad locc. The situation is not helped by the corrupt text at *Ach.* 1150, where Antimachus is introduced.

5 For an analysis, see C. Prato, *I Canti di Aristofane* (Rome 1962) 28f.

The chorus prays that Zeus may crush Antimachus for his stinginess in sending them away hungry from a recent Lenaian festival⁶. Two accidents are to befall him. The first, described in the strophe, involves his being defrauded of that great delicacy, the sizzling squid:

- 1150 Ἀντίμαχον τὸν Ψακάδος, τὸν ξυγγραφῆ, τὸν μελέων ποητήν,
 ὡς μὲν ἀπλῶ λόγῳ κακῶς ἐξολέσειεν ὁ Ζεὺς·
 ὃς γ' ἐμὲ τὸν τλήμονα Λήναια χορηγῶν ἀπέλυσ' ἄδειπνον.
 1156 Ὅν ἔτ' ἐπίδοιμι τευθίδος
 δεόμενον, ἢ δ' ὠπτημένη
 σίζουσα πάραλος ἐπὶ τραπέζῃ κειμένη
 ὀκέλλοι· κᾶτα μέλλοντος λαβεῖν
 1160 αὐτοῦ κύων ἀρπάσασα φεύγοι⁷.

The theft of food by a dog was to be elaborated by Aristophanes later in his career into a highly developed incident (cf. *Vesp.* 836ff.); the threat involving the squid, or cuttle-fish, is turned in a different way by the Sausage-Seller in the *Knights*, who hopes that Cleon may choke on the food in his haste to devour it (cf. *Equ.* 927ff.). In *Acharnians*, the emphasis is on the frustration of Antimachus, deprived of his food just as he reaches out to grasp it (μέλλοντος λαβεῖν 1159). His disappointment must be heightened by the contrasting ease with which the delicacy arrives at his table: in an imaginative personification, involving an absurd pun on the official Athenian state galley (Πάραλος 1158), Aristophanes has the fish draw up to its “anchorage” (ὀκέλλοι). A metrical pause, after the bacchius and before the change to the lekythion in 1159, emphasizes the arrival of the squid, roasted and sizzling, ready to eat. The juxtaposition of sudden good fortune and deuced bad luck is also stressed by the construction of the verse: the chiming optative verbs ὀκέλλοι and φεύγοι are placed in the final positions in their syntactic units, and in prominent positions in their rhythmical cola⁸.

So far Antimachus has incurred only disappointment. But the second strophe goes further. The next “accident” is actually a cumulative series of misfortunes and frustrations. At the beginning of the stanza, the chorus rather misleadingly refers to “another evil”, which is to occur by night:

6 On the provision of dinner by the “choregos”, see A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*² (Oxford 1968) 89, and K. J. Dover, *Notes on Aristophanes' 'Acharnians'*, *Maia* N.S. 15 (1963) 23.

7 The text printed here, as in all subsequent citations where no exception is noted, is the Budé edition of V. Coulon (originally published Paris, 1923–1930, and revised and corrected in subsequent editions).

8 For the emphasis and careful arrangement of the final “cola” in stanzas of the abuse lyric, where the joke reaches a climax, compare especially the four stanzas of the lyric in *Av.*, discussed below in section C.

Τοῦτο μὲν αὐτῷ κακὸν ἔν, κᾶθ' ἕτερον νυκτερινὸν γένοιτο.
 1165 Ἴπιαλῶν γὰρ οἴκαδ' ἐξ ἵππασίας βαδίζων,
 εἶτα πατάξειέ τις αὐτοῦ μεθύων τὴν κεφαλὴν Ὀρέστης
 μαινόμενος· ὁ δὲ λίθον λαβεῖν
 βουλόμενος ἐν σκότῳ λάβοι
 1170 τῇ χειρὶ πέλεθρον ἀρτίως κεχεσμένον·
 ἐπάξειεν δ' ἔχων τὸν μάρμαρον,
 κᾶπειθ' ἁμαρτῶν βάλοι Κρατῖνον.

In spite of the formal parallelism (τοῦτο ... κακὸν ἔν, κᾶθ' ἕτερον ...) indicated by the first line of the antistrophe, the lyric surprises us by detailing a sequence of disasters in an ascending order of absurdity. First, Antimachus is to be suffering from a chill (ἴπιαλῶν 1165). Then he is to meet the drunken mugger Orestes, who will bash him in the head⁹. He will grasp at a stone to throw in revenge, but instead his hand will alight upon a fresh turd (1168–1170). Rushing forward with this epic “boulder” (μάρμαρον 1171), Antimachus will hurl it at Orestes, but miss and hit Cratinus instead.

Just as the misfortunes of Antimachus suddenly gather momentum, so the poetry seems to run haywire half-way through the stanza. The transition point, at 1167, is cleverly integrated with the structure of the first stanza. Antimachus will stretch out his hand, eager to grasp a stone, as he was eager to grasp the cuttle-fish (cf. λαβεῖν at 1167 and 1159). But in the antistrophe, instead of the mere bathos of thin air, the lyric fancifully provides a substitution, the πέλεθρον. It is a perfectly credible absurdity; such things, after all, may happen in the darkness (ἐν σκότῳ 1169)! But Aristophanes is far from through. He heaps additional ridicule on Antimachus through the parodic usages of ἐπάξειεν and μάρμαρον, words that describe the movements and missiles of Homeric warriors¹⁰. And then the final “hamartia” is supplied: Antimachus cannot even strike the proper target, but hits Cratinus instead. The word order of the poem incongruously emphasizes parallelism, regularity, and rhyme even as the content becomes more unpredictable. This is particularly evident in the colometry of Coulon’s Budé edition: βουλόμενος parallels μαινόμενος in the previous line; λάβοι repeats λαβεῖν; ἁμαρτῶν parallels ἔχων; homoioteleuton accompanies the ridiculous effect of the last three lines.

The lyric thus ends with an absurdly unexpected twist. Although the main focus of abuse (and the first word of the poem) has been Antimachus, we are suddenly presented with a new butt for the satire¹¹. Whether Cratinus is the

⁹ For Orestes, cf. *Av.* 712 and 1491, discussed below, and see notes 45 and 46.

¹⁰ For example, cf. *Iliad* 5, 584 and 12, 380.

¹¹ Van Leeuwen aptly compares the shift from Peisander to Chaerephon at the climax of the stanza at *Av.* 1564ff.

rakishly tonsured adulterer or the comic poet who was Aristophanes' rival matters as little at this point as it does at his previous mention in the play (cf. Ach. 848). Plainly Aristophanes' main purpose has been the frustration of Antimachus; he derives an additional, incongruous effect from distracting our attention at the last minute. Indeed, it may be argued that if the name Cratinus is left deliberately ambiguous, the poet maximizes his ridicule; he simultaneously achieves an absurd turn of events, the utter humiliation of the principal target, and two secondary "hits" on men who are both called Cratinus. It is this sparkling, climactic stroke – at once brilliantly right for the main subject and cleverly ambiguous – which is one of the best arguments for the lyric's imaginative compression.

What is the relation of this short poem to the play as a whole? Though scarcely profound, it is surely more than an "irrelevant little lampoon", in the words of one recent scholar¹². The echoes of motifs found elsewhere in *Acharnians* do not cohere with absolute consistency. Yet consistency is not always to be expected in comedy; once removed from the bonds of the real and the logical, a comic plot, and comic lyric, may seem to convey, even more than is usual in literature, an abundance of polyvalent, even contradictory meanings. We may be allowed the following observations:

a) Antimachus' name, like that of Lamachus, is a compound of the word for battle. Not only has the general's name been a subject for broad puns earlier in the play¹³, but the entire point of the scene preceding the abuse lyric has been his hard lot in contrast to Dikaiopolis, who casts virtually all his rejoinders to Lamachus in the form of comments on the *feast* that he is preparing. The soldier laments that his marching orders do not permit him to join the festival (1079), and when he does mention food it is only to order the miserable military rations of salt, onions, and some rotten fish (1099–1101). His exit without dinner at 1141 contains a parallel motif to the fate of Antimachus in the first strophe of the lyric.

b) The significance of food and cooking in Ach. as a whole is hinted at with the mention of the sizzling, roasted cuttle-fish at 1156–1158. As C. H. Whitman has shown, the coals of the *Acharnians* represent a "lyric image" that is gradually manipulated in the course of the play. At first, the coals smolder in the threatening context of pro-war zealotry in the "agon". They are then assimilated to the spark of the *Acharnian* Muse in the parabasis; this fire is used to fry the fish of feasts in peacetime (cf. 665ff.)¹⁴. Dikaiopolis' feast at the end of the play, with its fire for roasting delicacies (1102), brings the image to its culmination:

12 A. M. Dale, in: *Old Comedy: The 'Acharnians' of Aristophanes*, printed in *Collected Papers* (Cambridge 1969) 292.

13 See Ach. 269f. 1071. 1080.

14 See Whitman (note 3, above) 70f. One may also note that the charcoal-scuttle is linked with the cuttle-fish, σπηρία, in a simile at 350f.; cf. Whitman 71.

the fires emblematic of war have been transformed to domestic fires that roast the food for a banquet that celebrates peace.

Returning to Antimachus, it is poetic justice that, a skinflint with food, he be deprived of his delicacy at dinner. Within the larger context of the play, that deprivation has its equivalent: as Antimachus is obnoxious, so is Lamachus – they will both thus be denied the feast prepared with fire in its peacetime use.

c) On a broader level, the connections between politics and poetry that are so consistently exploited in *Ach.* receive a fillip in this poem. At the play's beginning, the meeting on the Pnyx suggests a "theatrical" experience. Dikaiopolis' opening monologue, for instance, conflates the outrage of the common citizen with that of the disappointed theater-goer (cf. 5ff.)¹⁵. The curious assimilations, effected by use of the first-person pronoun, of Dikaiopolis and the playwright are well known (cf. 502ff.). That Antimachus is a stingy "choregos" turns out to be particularly appropriate, since the first-person pronoun in the abuse lyric (ἐμέ 1152) has certain advantages: it may refer to a member of the chorus (or to the chorus collectively), or it may hint at Aristophanes himself. Though we know that the latter possibility is historically unlikely¹⁶, the poetic advantages of repeated identification of the playwright with the characters are more relevant here. Aristophanes' troubles with Cleon at a previous production are openly referred to earlier, as is the Lenaia itself (502ff.). What better ploy than to refer to the Lenaia again (at which we know *Ach.* to have been produced, cf. 504), with a paradeigmatic anecdote about the troubles befalling a man who does not treat the chorus (or the playwright) well? Thus, some members of the audience may be prompted by implication to recall Aristophanes' previous troubles in real life; others may reflect on awarding the current play first prize; still others may think of Antimachus and his treatment of Cratinus (if indeed the former served as Cratinus' "choregos"). No matter: the poet achieves his effect with any one, or any combination, of these responses, and incidentally succeeds in lightly calling attention to the importance of comic theater production¹⁷. The theatrical motif is surely accented by the sprightly ambiguity of the names in our lyric's second stanza: Orestes, a famous tragic hero (from whose name Aristophanes is to derive more fun in the *Birds*) as well as a well-known hooligan, or the stereotyped name for a hooligan, in Athens; Cratinus, the adulterer, as well as the elderly rival of the comic poet himself¹⁸.

15 Dikaiopolis seems equally displeased by the slovenly assembly and by the hack dramatists in his opening monologue: cf. especially 9–12. 17–27.

16 Cf. the remarks of Dover (note 6, above).

17 For the comic poet as political teacher in *Ach.* see the assertion of Dikaiopolis at 500 and those of the chorus at 628ff.

18 With regard to the suggestion that there may be some covert denigration of Aristophanes' rivals in the actual Lenaian competition of 425, and some implicit threat/plea for the first prize (such is common enough in other plays: cf. *Av.* 1101ff.), it is to be noted that Cratinus competed that year, and received second prize, with his *Cheimazomenoi*: cf. Hyp. 1 to *Achar-*

If the connection between poetry and politics is suggested by considering the abuse lyric in light of what has preceded, it is emphasized further by the entrance of the messenger at 1174. His speech, if all of it is genuine¹⁹, seems almost a displaced fulfilment of the chorus' prayer for bad luck in the lyric, in that it details in para-tragic language an absurd series of misfortunes that have befallen Lamachus. He has impaled himself on a vine-pole while leaping over a ditch, turned his ankle, and bashed his head on a stone²⁰. The collocation with the misfortunes of Antimachus once again draws our attention to the parallel in the play between the worlds of drama and politics: the bellicose general Lamachus comes to a fate that is appropriate for the obnoxious "choregos" Antimachus. The arrangement of scenes, verbal punning, parodies of epic and tragic diction, and slight coincidences of detail²¹ do no more than lightly underscore this point; nevertheless, such connections do establish a cogent thematic framework for the abuse lyric. The features of the poem to which I wish to draw primary attention, however, are those elements of the poetic technique responsible for the lyric's comic absurdity and skilful compression.

B. *The Spurious Invitation (Lys. 1043ff.)*

It might be argued that the first three quarters of *Lysistrata* consist largely of abuse, and the short strophe at 1043–1071, together with its responding antistrophe at 1189–1215, actually represent an intermission in the play-long "agon" between men and women, Athenians and Spartans. Indeed, the semi-choruses of men and women unite at 1043 for the first time in the comedy²², and the personification of "Diallage", introduced in the scene with the ambassadors which divides the two portions of the lyric, is anticipated as early as 1021ff., where the women clothe the men in the "himation" and pluck out the gnat from their eye²³. The women grumble that man is δύσκολος and πονηρός (1030,

nians. One may also note that there is a further reverberation to the name Orestes in the context of the play as a whole; in the *Telephus* parody (318ff.), the charcoal-scuttle is comically substituted for the hostage who was, in Euripides' tragedy, the infant Orestes. Given this absurd transposition, it is just possible that the pseudo-heroic aspect of Antimachus' battle with the hooligan Orestes in the abuse lyric may have seemed even more vividly amusing to the audience.

19 See the discussion of M. L. West, *Aristophanes, 'Acharnians' 1178–86*, *Class. Rev.* 21 (1971) 157f.

20 The authenticity of these details, and of the passage as a whole, is well defended by Whitman 74f.

21 Compare τῆς κεφαλῆς κατέαγε περί λίθον πεσών (1180) with κατάξειέ τις αὐτοῦ ... τῆς κεφαλῆς Ὀρέστης ... ὁ δὲ λίθον βαλεῖν βουλόμενος ... (1166–1169).

22 As in Coulon's arrangement of the lyric, as opposed to that of van Leeuwen. The former is supported by κοινῇ at 1042, and by the lack of clear identification of gender in the content of the lyric: such identification has typically marked the choral lyrics up to this point in the play.

23 On the symbolic significance of this last act, see the discussion of Whitman, 213.

1035); the men reflect, a bit sourly, on the truth of the old proverb “You can’t live with women, or without them” (1039). But the two groups are substantially reconciled and, as the men say, a truce is on, and neither party will suffer or do anything φλαῦρον (1040–1041).

The choruses then join to sing a four-part lyric in trochaics. The strophe and antistrophe are each divided into two parts; since the second section of each stanza corresponds metrically with the first, one may better speak of four distinct stanzas comprising a monostrophic lyric. The first two stanzas are separated from the final two by over one hundred verses, devoted to the negotiations between Athenian and Spartan ambassadors, a meeting for which Lysistrata serves as the arbitrator. The lyric’s first lines echo the sentiments of the chorus of men at 1040:

Οὐ παρασκευαζόμεσθα
τῶν πολιτῶν οὐδέν’, ὄνδρες,
1045 φλαῦρον εἰπεῖν οὐδὲ ἕν,
ἀλλὰ πολὺ τοῦμπαλιν πάντ’ ἀγαθὰ καὶ λέγειν καὶ
δρᾶν· ἱκανὰ γὰρ τὰ κακὰ καὶ τὰ παρακείμενα.

In 1043 some critics have detected the voice of Aristophanes himself²⁴; it is not difficult to believe that Athenian troubles were ἱκανά by 411 B.C. The unity of man and woman continues to be stressed by the phrase πᾶς ἀνὴρ καὶ γυνή in the following lines, which develop an invitation to the audience to borrow money from the chorus:

Ἄλλ’ ἐπαγγελλέτω πᾶς ἀνὴρ καὶ γυνή,
1050 εἴ τις ἀργυρίδιον δεῖ-
ται λαβεῖν, μνᾶς ἢ δύο ἢ τρεῖς·
ὡς ἔσω ἴστιν
κᾶχομεν βαλλάντια.
Κᾶν ποτ’ εἰρήνη φανῆ,
1055 ὅστις ἂν νυνὶ δανείση-
ται παρ’ ἡμῶν,
ἢν λάβῃ μηκέτ’ ἀποδῶ.

So far, there is little in the poem’s content that will pass for abuse. But the structure of the whole, as it unfolds, indicates that the audience has been “set up”. For several other invitations will follow: to dinner, for example, although it turns out that the host’s door will be shut tight when the visitors arrive (1058–1071). In the second half of the poem, an offer of clothing is cut short with the remark that the putative beneficiaries will have keener eyes than the chorus if

24 Cf. van Leeuwen ad loc., who quotes the scholiast.

they can find any garments at all (1189–1202). Another tempting invitation to the poor to come to the house for food closes with the admonition to beware of the dog guarding the door (1203–1215). The equivocations are those of the Mad Hatter’s party (“Have some more tea ... There isn’t any!”), and are endemic to Aristophanic comedy, in which the audience is frequently abused. Here the tone is lightly, even playfully, insulting. (One may contrast the more scurrilous allegations at *Nub.* 1096ff.) In *Lys.* the audience is titillated with the prospects of money, food, clothing, and then again food in the four stanzas. In all but the first, they are flatly disappointed at the end of the stanza, and the invitation turns out to be spurious²⁵. The invitation to dinner, rescinded *παρὰ προσδοκίαν*, is varied at *Eccl.* 1144ff., where Blepyrus invites the audience to share in a feast – at their own houses!²⁶

In summary, we cannot describe the poem in *Lys.* as a lyric of abuse. Its playfulness suggests rather that the tone is intended to be teasingly insulting. As with Antimachus in *Ach.*, the chorus at first conjures up a benefit, which it then rudely snatches away. But whereas Antimachus must suffer painful humiliation in addition to being frustrated, the chorus in *Lys.* is content to leave the audience disappointed. Despite differences of substance and tone, however, the similarities of detail, structure, and placement in the comedy justify our brief consideration of the poem in *Lys.* together with the lyrics of *Ach.* and *Av.*

The division of the lyric in *Lys.* into four symmetrical portions is varied, with even greater structural ingenuity, at a comparable point in *Av.*: cf. the analysis in section C below. As in *Ach.* there is an implicit contrast in the play as a whole between characters who feast and those who do not; the audience must go hungry, whereas part of the celebration of the successful negotiations involves some sort of banquet at the end of *Lys.* (cf. 1223–1224). The chorus excludes the spectators from a free meal, after the initial promise to lend them money for the duration of the war. The importance of money, as well as of food, is clear in the main plot of *Lys.*: it is for the purpose of stopping the war that the women take over the treasury on the Acropolis. The renewed availability of money (with the exaggerated and fantastic condition that there will be no repayment necessary) is a metaphor for the success of their plan and the coming of peace.

The strongest connection between the lyric and the main body of the play is constituted by the series of vignettes of household life: the purses (1052f.), the food for the Carystians (1061ff.), the family bathing before going out to dinner

25 The conjecture of P. Mazon at 1055–1057, *ἀν λάβη γ’ οὐ μὴ ἀποδοῖ*, attempts to transform the joke so that it will be consistent with the form of the other three stanzas: the borrower is defied to return the money because there will be none, i.e. no loan will be made in the first place. See the comments in van Leeuwen’s note ad loc.

26 See the comment of R. G. Ussher ad loc. (ed. *Ecclesiazusae*, Oxford 1973), who compares Plautus *Rudens* 1418. For a genuine invitation to the audience, cf. *Pax* 1115.

(1065ff.)²⁷, the jewelry and clothing for the daughter who carries the basket in the festival procession (1189ff.), the sealed chests (1196ff.), the hunger of servants and small children (1202ff.), the watchdog (1212ff.). The ode exhibits a rich conspectus of domestic life, the province of the most fertile imagery in *Lys.*²⁸ In the later stanzas, something of the mixture of pathos and hard realism typical of the tone of the play as a whole emerges from the vignettes of the young daughter and her clothes, and of the poor trying to get something for nothing.

The tone also displays some dry irony. For example, the Carystians, called ἄνδρας καλοῦς τε κἀγαθοῦς at 1060, were anything but gentlemanly allies of Athens. Thucydides reports their complicity in the oligarchic revolution a few months after *Lys.* was performed, and the scholiast comments on their fondness for adultery²⁹. They are mentioned again in an unflattering context at *Lys.* 1181, and their name possibly affords Aristophanes the chance for a sexual 'double entendre'³⁰. In such circumstances the dinner invitation of the second stanza is suspect from the beginning, and the slamming of the door in the face of the audience has its subtle preparation. The repeated and insulting frustration of the audience is Aristophanes' main purpose in this poem: he has taken what was in all probability a stock motif in comedy, the imaginary dinner for the spectators, and interspersed the closing scenes of the play with four imaginative variations on a theme.

C. *The Wonders of the World* (*Av.* 1470ff.)

The most sophisticated version of the lyric of abuse or insult is found in the *Birds*. In this play the invective is focused on individual personalities, as in *Ach.* But in structure, inventiveness of imagery, placement of the stanzas, and the sheer number of persons abused, the lyric of the *Birds* succeeds as comic poetry that for its sheer brilliance far surpasses the *Antimachus* lyric. And the thematic connections with the comedy as a whole are far better established than in either *Ach.* or *Lys.*³¹

The first two stanzas occur after the second series of "alazones" at 1470ff. The Prometheus scene follows, and is capped by a third stanza (1553ff.). A longer scene, containing the embassy of the three gods to Pisthetairos, follows the third stanza, and is itself succeeded by the fourth and final section of the poem (1694ff.). This in turn leads directly to the messenger speech announcing

27 Compare the language of the imaginary invitation at *Av.* 130ff.

28 For some analysis of this imagery, cf. Whitman 205ff.

29 Cf. Thuc. 8, 69, 3.

30 Cf. van Leeuwen ad loc.

31 For the birds' "persona" and the integration of the chorus as a whole in this play, see H.-J. Newiger, *Metapher und Allegorie* (Munich 1957) 80ff., and the same author's essay *Die 'Vögel' und ihre Stellung im Gesamtwerk des Aristophanes*, in Newiger, ed. *Aristophanes und die alte Komödie* (Wege der Forschung CCLXV, Darmstadt 1975) 275.

the wedding of Pisthetairos, and to the triumphant finale (1706ff.). The lyric is composed predominantly in trochaics.

For convenience of inspection and analysis, the poem follows as a whole:

- 1470 Πολλὰ δὴ καὶ καινὰ καὶ θαυ-
μάστ' ἐπεπτόμεσθα καὶ
δεινὰ πράγματ' εἶδομεν.
Ἔστι γὰρ δένδρον πεφυκὸς
ἔκτοπόν τι, Καρδίας ἀ-
1475 πωτέρω, Κλεώνυμος,
χρήσιμον μὲν οὐδέν, ἄλ-
λως δὲ δειλὸν καὶ μέγα.
Τοῦτο <τοῦ> μὲν ἦρος ἀεὶ
βλαστάνει καὶ συκοφαντεῖ,
1480 τοῦ δὲ χειμῶνος πάλιν τὰς
ἀσπίδας φυλλορροεῖ.
Ἔστι δ' αὖ χώρα πρὸς αὐτῷ
τῷ σκότῳ πόρρω τις ἐν
τῇ λύχνων ἐρημία,
1485 ἐνθα τοῖς ἦρωσιν ἄνθρω-
ποι ξυναριστῶσι καὶ ζύν-
εισι πλὴν τῆς ἑσπέρας.
Τηνικαῦτα δ' οὐκέτ' ἦν
ἀσφαλὲς ξυντυγχάνειν.
1490 Εἰ γὰρ ἐντύχοι τις ἦρω
τῶν βροτῶν νύκτωρ Ὀρέστη,
γυμνὸς ἦν πλαγεῖς ὑπ' αὐτοῦ
πάντα τὰπὶ δεξιά.

* * *

- Πρὸς δὲ τοῖς Σκιάποσιν λί-
μνη τις ἔστ', ἄλουτος οὗ
1555 ψυχαγωγεῖ Σωκράτης.
Ἐνθα καὶ Πείσανδρος ἦλθε
δεόμενος ψυχὴν ἰδεῖν ἢ
ζῶντ' ἐκεῖνον προὔλιπε,
σφάγι' ἔχων κάμηλον ἀ-
1560 μόνον τιν', ἧς λαιμοὺς τεμῶν
ὥσπερ Οὐδυσσεὺς ἀπῆλθε,
κᾶτ' ἀνῆλθ' αὐτῷ κάτωθεν
πρὸς τὸ λαιμᾶν τῆς καμήλου
Χαιρεφῶν ἢ νυκτερίς.

* * *

Ἔστι δ' ἐν Φαναῖσι πρὸς τῇ
 1695 Κλεψύδρα πανοῦργον ἐγ-
 γλωττογαστόρων γένος,
 οἱ θερίζουσιν τε καὶ σπεί-
 ρουσι καὶ τρυγῶσι ταῖς γλώτ-
 ταισι συκάζουσί τε·
 1700 βάρβαροι δ' εἰσὶν γένος,
 Γοργῖαι τε καὶ Φίλιπποι.
 Καπὸ τῶν ἐγγλωττογαστό-
 ρων ἐκείνων τῶν Φιλίππων
 πανταχοῦ τῆς Ἀττικῆς ἢ
 1705 γλώττα χωρὶς τέμνεται.

The parallelism of stanzas is explicit: note the four-fold ἔστι used to introduce each geographical oddity (cf. 1473, 1482, 1554, 1694). Although the third and fourth stanzas are separated by increasing intervals from the poem's beginning, it is clear that all four are meant as a unit. Indeed, I shall argue that the placement of the stanzas is an important technical feature in the over-all comic design. Before we examine the question of placement, and several other features which contribute to the unity of the lyric, let us analyze its sections separately in detail.

The Cleonymus Tree, as Whitman rightly remarks, is one of Aristophanes' finest comic images, at once "lyrical, grotesque, and satiric"³². The playwright harps frequently on Cleonymus' cowardice, and sometimes metamorphoses the character: in Ach. he is linked with a large bird, the φέναξ (88–89), in Nub. the clouds change into deer when they catch sight of him (353–354), in Vesp. he is the answer to the riddle, "What is the same animal that throws away its shield on the earth, in the sky, and on the sea?" (20ff.)³³. Here he is a tree, located far from the city of Kardia ("Fortitude") – the very idea of specifying a location as ἀπωτέρω (1474–1475) from somewhere else is slightly absurd – a tree that is big and good-for-nothing. Like almost everything else in the Birds, this wonder can be described as πεφυκὸς ἔκτοπον (1473–1474). For, although a strange, fantastical creation, the Cleonymus Tree is imagined to obey the laws of "physis": it blossoms (and battens) in the spring, and in the winter it sheds. The superbly humorous concision of the last line is caught elegantly by Whitman's translation: "It leaves – shields."³⁴

That the birds commence their strange survey with a description of an ἔκτοπον δένδρον is one more illustration of the careful, integrated treatment of the "persona" of the chorus in this play: they are almost always portrayed in

32 Whitman 195.

33 For a fuller list of Cleonymus' appearances, see Whitman 184f. He oddly omits the prior mention of Cleonymus at Av. 289f.: see below.

34 Whitman 185.

character³⁵. What other topographical feature of the earth would stand out for them more prominently in their fly-overs?³⁶ And the language of the stanzas links the choral abuse with the main plot of the comedy. The pun on συκοφαντεῖ (1479), suggesting figs on a tree and also the dastardly activities of Cleonymus, is related to a favorite verbal complex in Aristophanes, in which the evil doings of informers may be conjured up by a mere form of the verb φαίνω: cf. Phanai, the land of the Englottogasters in the fourth stanza of this poem (1694), and compare συκάζουσι at 1700. An actual scene with a συκοφάντης – the lengthiest of the “alazon” scenes in the play (1410–1469) – has immediately preceded the strophe itself. This cowardly interloper seeks to be provided with wings, and Pisthetairos ironically grants his wish twice, each time in a metaphorical sense. First he “wings” the informer with words (1437ff.), and then with a whip, which has the συκοφάντης “winging away” like a whirling top (1464ff.). The informer is good for nothing but στρεψοδικοπανουργία (1468); when asked by Pisthetairos why he follows such a dishonest trade, he replies that he knows no other. He cannot even dig; and, besides, informing is the family business!³⁷ All of which is neatly paralleled by the chorus’ remark about the Cleonymus Tree: χρήσιμον ... οὐδέν (1476)³⁸.

We should also note the precise pairing of gluttony (associated with batten- ing on the proceeds of sycophancy and the growth of the tree) and cowardice (associated with the deciduous leaving of shields) in the poem’s first stanza. The last two periods of the verse balance both elements perfectly. For example, τοῦ μὲν ἦρος (1478) is offset by τοῦ δὲ χειμῶνος (1480). The verbs βλαστάνει and φυλλορροεῖ are each of interest: βλαστάνει, an uncommon word in prose, had by this date a respectable history of metaphorical usages in serious poetry (cf. Pind. Ol. 7, 69, Nem. 8, 7; Soph. Ant. 296), and so may hint at the more explicit metaphors to come in our passage, whereas φυλλορροεῖ seems unparalleled in the fifth century, except in the comic poet Pherecrates³⁹. These words, ostensibly describing the life cycle of the tree, neatly frame συκοφαντεῖ and ἀσπίδας, terms which are more directly applicable to Cleonymus qua human being, while the pun in συκοφαντεῖ, hinting at figs sprouting on a tree, serves explicitly to emphasize what M. S. Silk has called the “interaction” of the poetic imagery⁴⁰. Gluttinous growth and cowardice are concisely combined, just

35 See note 31, above.

36 Indeed, a single tree is the only prominent feature of the stage setting in the prologue: cf. *Av.* 1.

37 Cf. *Av.* 1432. 1452.

38 For the verbal possibilities of connecting informing, the verb φαίνω, and a certain type of bird, compare *Ach.* 725f., and cf. *Nub.* 109 and *Av.* 68.

39 See Liddell-Scott-Jones ad loc., which refers to Pherecrates 130, 10 (Kock).

40 See M. S. Silk, *Interaction in Poetic Imagery* (Cambridge 1974). Silk defines interaction as “any local cross-terminological relation between the tenor and vehicle of an image” (79). Unfortunately his perceptive analysis of Greek poetry in this book does not include the plays of Aristophanes.

before the elaborate working out of the principal image, in the phrase δειλὸν καὶ μέγα (1477). Van Leeuwen notes that we might well, like the author of the *Suda*, have expected δεινόν here (cf. δεινά at 1472), just as, two lines later, the predictable phrase would be σῦκα ... φύει, if we should be thinking of the tree⁴¹. But if we are thinking of Cleonymus, the substitutions are exactly right, and Aristophanes has taken care to insure that we have him in mind in a particular way. Earlier in the play, an especially remarkable bird has made its appearance (287–290):

Εὐ. ὦ Πόσειδον, ἕτερος αὖ τις βαπτὸς ὄρνις οὔτοσί,
τίς ὀνομάζεται ποθ' οὔτος; Ἐπ. οὔτοσί κατωφαγᾶς.

Εὐ. ἔστι γὰρ κατωφαγᾶς τις ἄλλος ἢ Κλεώνυμος;

290 Πι. πῶς ἂν οὖν Κλεώνυμος γ' ὦν οὐκ ἀπέβαλε τὸν λόφον;

Here the same combination of gluttony (κατωφαγᾶς) and cowardly behavior (ἀπέβαλε τὸν λόφον) is ascribed to Cleonymus. Having visualized him momentarily as a bird, we may be surprised to see him now as a tree; his distinctive traits, however, remain the same.

The earlier mention of Cleonymus and the long scene with the sycophant are important anticipations in the play of our poem's first stanza. A more indirect, but thematically significant, resonance of earlier material is also sounded in the first period sung by the chorus:

1470 πολλά δὴ καὶ καινὰ καὶ θαυ-
μάστ' ἐπεπτόμεσθα καὶ
δεινὰ πράγματ' εἶδομεν.

This can hardly help but recall the opening phrase of Sophocles' celebrated Ode on Man (*Ant.* 332f.):

πολλά τὰ δεινὰ κούδεν ἄν-
θρώπου δεινότερον πέλει.

Something of an ironic reversal of these lines, in turn, is contained in the skeptical lyric of the chorus of birds near the beginning of the "agon" (*Av.* 451f.)⁴²:

δολερὸν μὲν αἰεὶ κατὰ πάντα δὴ τρόπον
πέφυκεν ἄνθρωπος.

What is the purpose of this two-fold reminiscence by the chorus of the Sophoclean homage to human progress?

On one level, of course, the birds are getting their own back. Athenians who knew the poem from *Antigone* would have recalled that the first antistro-

41 See his note ad loc.

42 Oddly enough, van Leeuwen comments on the echo of Sophocles in the "agon", but is silent on the later passage, whose phrasing is much closer to the Sophoclean model.

the dealt with man's taming of the animal kingdom, and commenced with the lines (342f.):

κουφόνων τε φύλον ὀρ-
νίθων ἀμφιβαλῶν ἀγρεῖ ...

The subjugation of *men* by the *birds* is part of Pisthetairos' ostensible aim in establishing Cloudcuckooland. But in fact, the play ends with one *man's* triumph over the *birds*, just as Sophocles might have expected. This quizzical irony is confirmed by the substitution of *καινά* at Av. 1470 for *δεινά* in Sophocles' poem (although the phrase *δεινὰ πράγματ'* at 1472 is added by Aristophanes for good measure). The word *καινός* recurs throughout the play (only Nub. presents more occurrences in the Aristophanic corpus). In Av. the following passage seems particularly to sum up the new and strange qualities of the fantasy of Cloudcuckooland (255–257):

ἦκει γάρ τις δριμύς πρέσβυς
καινὸς γνώμην
καινῶν ἔργων τ' ἐγχειρητής

The birds are referred to twice, in close succession, as the *καινοῖς θεοῖς* (848, 862); and in a passage that might come right out of Nub. Kinesias tells Pisthetairos that he wants wings so that he may hang suspended in the air and pluck soaring, snow-clad preludes for his dithyrambs – so, they will be *καινάς* (1383–1385).

But the irony possesses a further, more acerbic dimension. Everyone knew that Sophocles' phrase had its own literary pedigree, since it was to some extent a re-casting of Aeschylus' more somber prelude in the *Choephoroe* (585f.):

πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ τρέφει
δεινὰ δειμάτων ἄχη ...

This stasimon, which compared the ferocity of earth's monsters with dangerous human pride, and proceeded to exemplify the latter with mythological "paradeigmata", may be recalled in a stroke of dark humor by the chorus when they sing of man's *δολερός τρόπος* at Av. 451ff. The tone is lighter toward the end of the play, where Aristophanes has chosen to open the abuse lyric with a phrase more blatantly reminiscent of Sophocles, only to deflate our expectations with a catalogue of human fakes, imposters, and masters of gab. If the Sophoclean echoes are taken half seriously, we are back to that Aristophanic stand-by, the abuse of the audience. For the birds, ostensibly declaiming the wonders of the world with a solemn literary allusion, manage by 'their' mythological "paradeigmata" to convince us more than ever that the world is full of warts.

The second stanza of the poem (1482ff.) is devoted to abusing another of

the poet's favorite targets, the ruffian Orestes⁴³. Like Cleonymus, he has been mentioned before in this play, in the parabasis, when the birds proclaim the useful skills they are able to teach mankind (Av. 712):

εἶτα δ' Ὀρέστη γλαῖναν ὑφαίνειν, ἵνα μὴ ῥιγῶν ἀποδύη.

Orestes, according to the scholiast, “feigned madness and robbed people of their clothes in the dark”⁴⁴. This provided Aristophanes with the opportunity for a joke on Orestes μαινόμενος in the second stanza of the abuse lyric in Ach. (1166ff.). Here the street ruffian is called ἥρωες; his nocturnal assaults, which apparently involved beating people up and stripping them, are playfully associated with a peculiar folk belief that it was dangerous to “encounter” a hero returned from the dead at night⁴⁵. A “hero” in this sense was a “revenant”, from whom brutality and perhaps even paralysis could be expected. The motif of the ghost will be more fully exploited in the third stanza of our poem, where the cowardly Peisander is cast in the role of the heroic Odysseus, attempting to summon his own spirit from the underworld (cf. 1553ff.). Here it is sufficient to note that the treatment of Orestes, though not as imaginatively conceived as that of Cleonymus, contains at least one similar motif. With Cleonymus there was an ironic contrast between the size of the impressive tree and its useless, deciduous nature; with Orestes a similar irony is evoked when the pleasant association with heroes by day (cf. 1485ff.) is shattered at night, when “Orestes” (probably a nickname or a stereotyped name for a hooligan) turns out to be a “hero” in a special sense⁴⁶.

The opening words of this stanza are parallel in structure to the introduction of the Cleonymus Tree in the strophe. First the “locus” of the satire is given: ἔστι γὰρ δένδρον ... τι for Cleonymus (1473), ἔστι δ' αὖ χώρα ... τις for Orestes (1482). In both instances, there follow more “specific” geographical indications: cf. Καρδίας ἀπωτέρω (1474f.) with πρὸς αὐτῷ τῷ σκοτῶ πόρρω ... ἐν τῇ λύχνων ἐρημίᾳ (1482–1484). From here on the two stanzas proceed rather differently, since the Cleonymus Tree serves as an immediately compressed image which can be manipulated from the start (and his name is therefore introduced com-

43 See the discussion above on Orestes at Ach. 1166ff.

44 On the scholia here, however, see the comments of H. Hofmann, *Mythos und Komödie: Untersuchungen zu den Vögeln des Aristophanes* (Spudasmata 33, Hildesheim 1976) 200ff.

45 See the discussion of this passage by J. Taillardat, *Les Images d'Aristophane*² (Paris 1965) 238f., with his citation of the scholion to Av. 1490 and later texts from Menander and Athenaeus. Hofmann (note 44, above) asserts that popular beliefs about the ἥρωες are parodied here; normally agents of good will, the heroes are contrasted with Orestes, the stereotype of a ruffian with a heroic name. Much of Hofmann's argument, however, depends on the attribution of a papyrus fragment to Aristophanes' lost play, *Heroes*: cf. *Mythos und Komödie* 200–206.

46 Orestes' real name may have been Diocles; cf. Isaeus 8, 3, and van Leeuwen's note to Ach. 1166ff.

paratively soon), whereas Aristophanes must lay more groundwork for the joke involving Orestes. Still, it is interesting that balanced periods of exactly the same length are used in the final four lines of each stanza to clinch the satirical joke (cf. 1478ff. with 1490ff.). The Orestes stanza contains more of a surprise, since it is only with the second mention of ἥρωες at 1490, the word νύκτωρ at 1491, and the mention of Orestes' name (1491) that the joke is fully under-way. Yet there is a sense of climactic (or anti-climactic) fun as well, since the silly geographical description at the start should signal us that some prankster is afoot in the darkness. The pleonasm πρὸς αὐτῷ τῷ σκότῳ ... ἐν τῇ λύχνων ἐρημίᾳ, in its second phrase, perhaps echoes the opening of Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound (1f.)⁴⁷:

χθονὸς μὲν εἰς τηλουρὸν ἤκομεν πέδον,
Σκύθην ἔς οἴμον, ἄβροτον εἰς ἐρημίαν.

Aristophanes had in fact used something like this phrase before at Ach. 704 (τῇ Σκυθῶν ἐρημίᾳ), and variations of it may have become proverbial to describe an utterly deserted locale⁴⁸. If an echo of Prometheus is present, it is not only generally appropriate to the mock-heroic motif in the stanza as a whole, but is consonant with the spoofing of Sophoclean poetry in the strophe, and with the amusing entrance of Prometheus, cowering under a σκιάδειον, immediately after the Orestes passage at 1494ff.⁴⁹

Whether or not we are reminded for a moment of a setting for Prometheus, the absurdly overblown metaphor of an exotic land located near darkness itself, far away, and in a country barren of lights (all this, as we shall soon realize, amounts to saying “the streets of Athens by night”) is hard to reconcile with the phrase πλὴν τῆς ἑσπέρας at 1487; by rights, it should be dark all the time in this country! That we are not in fact in a strange exotic land, but right at home in Athens, becomes rapidly clear, and the useful ambiguity of the name Orestes contributes to Aristophanes' satiric point: ordinary men may think they are enjoying the company of heroes, only to be robbed and paralyzed by the same “heroes” in the dark. If this sentiment is intended to apply to Athenians and their actual contemporaries, we may have something of a foreshadowing of the third stanza, where Peisander, a politician in real life, is absurdly imagined as a cowardly, mock-heroic Odysseus.

But this is to jump forward, and to interpret the abusive fun of the second stanza rather more in terms of what follows. For the moment, it remains a light-hearted spoof. In a country of perpetual gloom, a Hyperborean moment of

47 I have used the text of D. Page (Oxford 1972).

48 Cf. van Leeuwen's note to Ach. 704.

49 On the allusion to *Antigone*, see the discussion above; we will comment below on the mock-heroic content of the Prometheus scene, which is consistent with the tone of both of the stanzas which frame it.

happy concourse between men and heroes is disrupted by a common thief, bearing a heroic name, springing out of the darkness⁵⁰. Orestes, like Cleonymus, turns out to be no hero; as in the first stanza, our expectations are deflated, this time with the addition of the element of physical violence.

The scene between Pisthetairos and Prometheus now interrupts the abuse lyric, and in the course of it the altruistic Titan gives the hero of the play some important advice. Zeus is at his wit's end: all the gods are starving since the birds' blockade has deprived them of sacrifices from earth. A divine embassy is on its way to sue for peace; Pisthetairos is in a commanding position to acquire the ultimate power (*Basileia*). Once again, as Prometheus says himself, he is εὐνοῦς to men (1545), and has taken the risk of incurring Zeus' anger by visiting Pisthetairos. All this is superb parody, of course: Prometheus is portrayed as a rather rambling, pretentious sneak, and a bit of a coward as well. In fact he reminds us of the "alazones" earlier in the play. Although he is not ejected by force, there is a buffoonish quality to his exit as well as his entrance, as he hides under a parasol (σκιάδειον: 1508 and 1550) so that Zeus will not notice him. As he leaves he thinks he may pass for the maidservant of a κληφόρος in the festival procession (1551) and Pisthetairos offers him a δίφρος to make the act more realistic (1552). As in the second stanza of our poem, legendary "heroism" has turned out to be something very different from what we expected. The next scene will carry the debunking even further, since the embassy reveals the gods themselves as fools. But first the chorus intervenes to tell us of their third wonder of the world, the country of the Shadow-feet (1553ff.).

The introduction to this stanza displays a simple variation of the usual structure: geographical detail (πρὸς δὲ τοῖς Σκιάποσιν), given first this time, and then the actual "locus" (λίμνη τις). Once again, the setting is exotic and, as in the second stanza, dark. We are informed about the Shadow-feet by the scholiast and by Pliny: they were a remote tribe in Libya, who used one of their web-footed legs (according to Pliny, their only one) as a parasol to protect them from the burning sun⁵¹. If we may judge from references in Ktesias, Archippus, and Antiphon the Sophist, this exotic people had provoked considerable notice in Greece by the end of the fifth century, perhaps in the course of the growing interest in ethnography sparked by the sophists⁵². Their comic possibilities would not have been lost on Aristophanes' sense of fantasy, especially if he knew the report available to Pliny of unidexters employing their limb alternately as a leaping-pole or a sunshade. Perhaps the element of the parasol, common to all accounts of the Shadow-feet, is meant to remind us of Prometheus' absurd use of that item in the scene that has just preceded.

50 The suggestion that the locale of the second stanza may be the land of the Hyperboreans is put forward by Hofmann (note 44, above) 203.

51 Cf. Pliny *N.H.* 7, 2, 23.

52 See Antiphon *VS* 87 B 45, a one-word fragment; cf. Kranz' note ad loc.

But we have barely begun. For what we are shown in this remote land is a sand-storm of absurdities. The third stanza contains far more disparate material than either of the first two, but is to be compared with the Cleonymus image in the fertility of imagination and suppleness of technique that it displays. Socrates is balanced by Chaerephon, Peisander by Odysseus. A strange psychagogic rite links an unwashed philosopher and a cowardly politician, and it is set simultaneously in the ambiances of a) Odysseus' fabulous, heroic adventures and b) the equally exotic and semi-bestial "barbaroi" of Libya. The focus of abuse is plainly Peisander, but the lyric tails off to an absurd anti-climax with a slap at Socrates' hanger-on, Chaerephon⁵³.

The syntax helps to impose a desperate logic on this crazy "pot-pourri". As in the second stanza, ἔνθα fixes our attention on the locale after the three-line geographical description (cf. 1556 with 1485). The three main verbs that convey the chief actions in the vignette of Peisander/Odysseus are ἦλθε (1556), ἀπῆλθε (1561), ἀνῆλθ' (1562)⁵⁴. And a set of semi-logical associations is imposed on the account itself. The dim setting of the underworld is suggested by the lake, the "shadow" component in Σκιάποσιν, and the act of psychagogy (1553–1555). This fits well with the parody of the Nekyia of Odyssey 11, where Odysseus, after performing a sacrifice at a trench, is visited by the souls of the dead who ascend to him from Hades⁵⁵. Peisander, some may recall, is also the name of a fairly obscure suitor who is *sent* to the underworld in the epic's great battle⁵⁶. After the mention of Odysseus at 1561, the appearance of Chaerephon the bat in the last verse – anti-climactic in the extreme – has its own literary appropriateness, since a famous simile compared the souls of the slain suitors to squeaking νυκτερίδες at the beginning of Homer's second Nekyia⁵⁷. Chaerephon is also a 'logical' companion for Socrates, and his well-known pallid appearance had been spoofed in Nub. in terms that virtually linked him with the underworld (Nub. 501–504):

Στ. ἦν ἐπιμελής ὧ καὶ προθύμως μανθάνω,
 τῷ τῶν μαθητῶν ἐμπερήσ γενήσομαι;
 Σω. οὐδὲν διοίσεις Χαιρεφῶντος τὴν φύσιν.
 Στ. οἴμοι κακοδαίμων ἡμιθνήσ γενήσομαι.

But the logic I have described is rather flimsy, as it ought to be. Disturbing inconsistencies, all with an abusive or satiric purpose, continue to impinge on this shadowy world. Socrates is pictured as ψυχαγωγεῖν; the poem plays off the word's old meaning of 'conducting souls' against the rather more recent meta-

53 Compare the structure of the second stanza of the Antimachus lyric in *Ach.*

54 If the mss. are correct at 1561.

55 In the Homeric episode, darkness is emphasized at the beginning; cf. *Od.* 11, 12ff.

56 Cf. *Od.* 22, 243. 268.

57 *Od.* 24, 6ff.

phorical meaning in philosophy and rhetoric, ‘leading (charming) souls by persuasion’⁵⁸. The former sense is appropriate to the Homeric ethos, the latter to the efforts of the charlatans Socrates and Peisander. The philosopher stands by a lake, and yet is ἄλουτος (1554), a slap at the indifference to personal appearance that is relentlessly lampooned in *Nub.* Indeed, in the very expression Σκιάποσιν there may be a sly poke at Socrates’ lack of shoes (cf. *Nub.* 103, and compare 363 and 835ff.): *his* feet are shadowy because they are dirty⁵⁹.

But the most imaginative, and devastating, incongruities concern Peisander. His sacrifice of a camel-kid is ludicrous, although perhaps appropriate in a remote, desert land. Best of all, he differs from both Socrates and Odysseus in that he is a very special type of psychagogue: he needs to catch sight of his *own* ψυχή, which has abandoned him while he is still alive (1557f.)! Here the range of meaning of ψυχή is doubly advantageous, since metaphorical interpretations of the scene can simultaneously convey that a) Peisander is a coward and b) he belongs to the realm of the ‘living dead’. He is indeed an exotic creature, a fitting personality for the birds’ catalogue of wonders, since the desertion by his soul seems to put him on earth and in Hades at the same time⁶⁰.

Peisander’s cowardice links him with Cleonymus, and the paradox of the third stanza – a man whose ψυχή has abandoned him – reminds us to some extent of the paradox of the first: a tree/man that abandons leaves/shields. The mock-heroic ethos derived from references to the *Odyssey* parallels the pseudo-heroic elements in the second stanza, which abused Orestes. Clearly, in addition to the parallels that emerge from meter, syntax, and general content of each section of the poem, there exist continuities in specific motifs as well⁶¹. Let us continue our analysis of the lyric, and consider its final segment, as well as the embassy scene which directly precedes it.

The Shadow-feet, an exotic, remote tribe, give way to the Englottogasters in the final stanza, an even more fabulous people who are all tongue, and who are specifically called βάρβαροι ... γένοϛ (1700). The stanza follows the embassy of the gods, in which Pisthetairos accomplishes his ultimate work of persuasion: heeding Prometheus’ advice, he prevails on Poseidon, Herakles, and the barbaric Triballian to agree to his marriage with Basileia (1565–1693). It is significant that the art of persuasion in this scene involves sophistry at two crucial

58 For the contrast, see Plato *Laws* 909b.

59 This is one of the two direct mentions of Socrates in Aristophanes outside *Nub.* The other is at *Ran.* 1491, where he is chattering. Earlier in *Av.* (1282), the poet coins the verb ἔσωκράτων, again in the context of shabbiness, to describe men in their new-found ‘ornithomania’.

60 A similar metaphor inspires a passage in an abuse lyric in *Ran.* some years later, when the chorus refers to “the corpses of the upper world”, i.e. the audience. Cf. *Ran.* 424: ἐν τοῖς ἄνω νεκροῖσι.

61 For example, the motif of sacrifice is shared by the third and fourth sections of the poem, the motif of shadowy darkness by the second and third. See further Hofmann (note 44, above) 214.

points. First, the tie-breaking vote is cast by the Triballian, whose nonsensical esperanto (1678f.) is rapidly converted by Herakles into a “yes” vote. Poseidon objects, but his sarcastic comment on swallows (1681) is turned around on him by Pisthetairos, who remarks that the Triballian doubtless meant to enjoin them to give Basileia to the swallows, i.e. to the birds (1682)⁶². Just before this, Pisthetairos has secured Herakles’ vote by some legal razzle-dazzle, in which he interprets for the god Solon’s law on inheritance, and tricks him into believing that he will never inherit anything from his father Zeus because he is a bastard (1649–1675): he may as well vote to surrender Basileia now.

Pisthetairos’ sophistic use of his tongue is significant as background for our lyric’s fourth stanza on the Englottogasters; but this feature of the embassy scene should also be interpreted in the context of the play as a whole, in which the manipulation of “logoi” and “nomoi” is a particularly important motif. We may remember the chorus’ assertion of the benefits of Cloudcuckooland in the parabasis (755f.):

ὄσα γὰρ ἐνθάδ’ ἐστὶν αἰσχρὰ τῷ νόμῳ κρατούμενα,
ταῦτα πάντ’ ἐστὶν παρ’ ἡμῖν τοῖσιν ὄρνισιν καλά.

And Pisthetairos has earlier commented on the uses of “logoi” to the incredulous informer (1446–1450):

Συ. λόγιοισι τᾶρα καὶ πτεροῦνται; Πι. φήμ’ ἐγώ.
ὕπὸ γὰρ λόγων ὁ νοῦς <τε> μετεωρίζεται
ἐπαίρεται τ’ ἄνθρωπος. οὕτω καὶ σ’ ἐγώ
ἀναπτερώσας βούλομαι χρηστοῖς λόγοις
τρέψαι πρὸς ἔργον νόμιμον.

That Pisthetairos’ practice in the embassy scene is less idealistic than his intentions for the informer matters not at all: in the self-aggrandizing world of Aristophanic heroes, Pisthetairos is simply the biggest “alazon” of all⁶³. What is important is his emphasis on the power of the “logos”: the panegyric above might come right out of Gorgias the sophist, who is mentioned by name in the final stanza of our lyric⁶⁴.

The Englottogasters are thus prepared for thematically by a striking example of the use of “logos” in the embassy scene, and their connection with the law-courts (directly conveyed by their location near the Klepsydra: cf. 1694f.) is foreshadowed by Pisthetairos’ insistence on “nomos” in the preceding scene (cf.

62 Unfortunately, Poseidon’s comment is not fully intelligible because of textual corruption.

63 Compare the general appreciations of Whitman and K. J. Dover of the Aristophanic hero; cf. the latter’s *Aristophanic Comedy* (London 1972) 30ff.

64 See W. Arrowsmith, *Aristophanes’ ‘Birds’: The Fantasy Politics of Eros*, *Arion* N.S. 1/1 (1973) 119–167. Arrowsmith well emphasizes the importance of “logoi” in his interpretation of the play as a whole.

1650, 1656, 1660ff.). There may be further echoes of the embassy scene in the overtones of gluttony involved in the name ἐγγλωττογαστόρων, and in the activities listed at 1697–1699, all having to do with the cultivation of food; during the embassy, Herakles' gluttony and stupidity so annoy Poseidon that he impatiently exclaims at 1604: ἠλίθιος καὶ γάστρις εἶ. In addition, the Englottogasters, at least ostensibly, are non-Greek-speakers (cf. βάρβαροι ... γένος at 1700); the Triballian in the embassy is one of the gods of the βάρβαροι, as Prometheus has informed us earlier (1525ff.), and we have just been exposed to his strange “language” (cf. 1615, 1628f., 1678f.).

The focus of the final stanza of the abuse lyric is the pair of sophists, Gorgias and his son (or disciple) Philip. Though little is known of the latter, he and his master, the famous rhetorician who had caused a sensation in Athens on his visit thirteen years before, are selected to typify the Englottogasters, who feed their stomachs by using their tongues, viz. grow rich by informing. The two sophists had already been mentioned together at Vesp. 421, where it appears that Philip had recently lost a legal case.

From the beginning of the stanza, we are made aware that the Englottogasters, ostensibly a barbarian tribe, are Athenian in spirit. The geographical details, Phanai and Klepsydra (1694f.), once again introduce this section of the poem. Phanai, a city on Chios, sets up the pun on informers which is clinched by συκάζουσι at 1699; this variation of a favorite Aristophanic joke may be compared with συκοφαντεῖ in the first stanza, of Cleonymus (cf. 1479). The technique is similar in both stanzas: Phanai, like the city Kardia at 1474, is part of a pun that is crucial for the satire. But unlike Kardia, which was in the Thracian Chersonese, Phanai may have had certain topical overtones: the Chians have already been mentioned at Av. 879f., and we know that they enjoyed special status as Athenian allies⁶⁵. The Klepsydra was an Athenian landmark whose very mention suggests the law-courts; at Vesp. 93, for instance, Philocleon's mind is said to fly to the Klepsydra by night. The word πανοῦργον (1695) shows us in advance what legal maneuvers to expect from the Englottogasters; they are “tongues” that manipulate the law for their own profit, chopping logic for criminal ends⁶⁶.

The compact structure of the verse insures that a rapid series of ‘double-entendres’ is appreciated. Repetition of words is prominent: cf. ἐγγλωττογαστόρων at 1695f. and 1702f., γένος at 1696 and 1700, γλώτταισι at 1698f. and γλῶττα at 1705, Φίλιπποι at 1701 and Φιλίππων at 1703. Alliteration is also an effective device to fix in our minds the very name of this wondrous race: πανοῦργον ἐγγλωττογαστόρων γένος (1695f.). Alliteration is combined with syntactical parallelism in the list of the tribe's ‘agricultural’ activities, culminating in the term which clinches their identity as a race of informers (1697–1699):

⁶⁵ See van Leeuwen's note to Av. 879ff., and Thuc. 6, 85, 2.

⁶⁶ Compare στρεψοδικοπανουργία of the informer at 1468.

οἱ θερίζουσίν τε καὶ σπεί-
ρουσι καὶ τρυγῶσι ταῖς γλῶτ-
ταισι συκάζουσί τε·

Line 1700 further specifies that they are a race of βάρβαροι, an ingenious touch, since the word primarily signifies ‘non-Greek-speaking’, a nice detail for a tribe that uses the tongue so much. With the punning mention of Γοργῖαι τε καὶ Φίλιπποι (which may suggest γεωργοί τε καὶ φίλιπποι, perfectly logical epithets for an agricultural people), we are back in Athens again. Although Gorgias came from Sicily, he could scarcely be called “non-Greek-speaking”; the other, less neutral sense of βάρβαροι surfaces by implication. As in the first two stanzas, the “coup-de-grâce” is administered, almost literally, in the last four lines of the lyric, forming a complete sentence divided into two equal periods, and further emphasized by alliteration (1702–1705):

κἀπὸ τῶν ἐγγλωττογαστό-
ρων ἐκείνων τῶν Φιλίππων
πανταχοῦ τῆς Ἀττικῆς ἢ
γλῶττα χωρίς τέμνεται.

A double meaning lingers even here, since the words can be taken as a metaphor (“the tongue of Attica is everywhere cut out”, i.e. because of the Englotto-gasters/informers/sophists, Athens is reduced to a stunned silence, and must suffer the fate of a sacrificial animal), or as a humorous reference to the ritual practice of dedicating the tongue of sacrificial victims to either the priest or to a deity⁶⁷. Furthermore, even if we adopt the second interpretation and consider the lines a humorous, aetiological absurdity, whose principal effect is bathos, there may lurk a further, less frivolous hint. The audience will have known that Philip lost his law-suit, and Aristophanes’ repetition of his name (1703) as well as his emphasis on γλῶττα in the stanza as a whole may lead some in the audience to understand the conclusion thus: “The sophists have given rise to the Attic custom of cutting out the tongue, because it is what they themselves deserve”⁶⁸.

The mention of Attica in the penultimate line fulfills the earlier hints of a topical concern with Athenian politics, and it is significant that in this stanza of the abuse lyric we come closest to an explicit denunciation of contemporary Athenians. The earlier stanzas treated Cleonymus, Orestes, and Peisander under the humorous mask of exotic wonders, located far away; despite the presence of an absurdly named “tribe”, the climactic stanza, at both its beginning

67 Cf. the priest’s remark at *Pax* 1060: ἡ γλῶττα χωρὶς τέμνεται.

68 The hint is essentially proleptic: if the sophists deserve this punishment, they may receive it. Such an interpretation is fully reconcilable, in comedy at least, with the more obvious “aetiology” of the passage.

(Κλεψύδρα) and its conclusion (Ἀττικῆς) virtually drops the mythological mask and directly abuses contemporary personalities⁶⁹. It may be no accident that certain sections of the embassy scene, which has directly preceded this stanza, resemble nothing so much as the sophistic debates of Thucydides' "History", in which real states bargain for alliance in their pursuit of power during the Peloponnesian War⁷⁰.

The hint of punishment for the Englottogasters at the conclusion of the abuse lyric is not to be taken very seriously, however. The greatest tongue-wagger of the play, Pisthetairos, is permitted his triumphal apotheosis in the exodos which follows: he may even say ἄγαμαι δὲ λόγων (1744) as he thanks the chorus for their wedding-hymn. The thematic relevance of the lyric, in so far as we may detect irony and acerbity in its content, is complemented by the general good fun of abuse. This 'complementarity' may strike some as illogical. But such illogic permeates Aristophanic comedy. It permits, for example, bigger "alazones" to punish smaller ones, as in the long series of imposter scenes in this play.

The Birds as a whole, in company with *Lysistrata* and other Aristophanic comedies, displays a mixture of topical satire and unadulterated fantasy, elements which can co-exist fully and constructively. The abuse lyric we have analyzed is an especially good illustration of this feature of Aristophanic comic poetry. The poem shows us a climactic movement from relatively harmless cowardice (Cleonymus), through random, private violence (Orestes), to the insidious aspects of public life (the cowardly Peisander and the sophists/informers)⁷¹. Clearly the abuse lyric contains an element of serious satire, and the ominous note in one interpretation of the close underlines it for us. But even the conclusion, as we have seen, is a "double-entendre". Just as clearly, the lyric is also meant as a "jeu d'esprit", a fabulous recital of 'wonders' fully appropriate to the bird-chorus that utters it⁷².

The climactic sense we derive from the stanzas' content may be compared, too, with the comic effect achieved by the placement of the poem's separate parts. Here, as well, there is a sense of climax, but of a humorous sort. Two stanzas establish the groundwork, and insure that those parallels which are

69 On the probable effects of the "decree of Syrakosios" on the poet's freedom of speech in 414 B.C., see the contrasting opinions of W. W. Merry, ed. *Birds*⁴ (Oxford 1904) 3ff., and H.-J. Newiger, in his *Wege der Forschung* essay (note 31, above) 277. I incline toward Newiger's view, i.e. that the decree has little relevance for the thematic interpretation of the *Birds*.

70 See particularly Pisthetairos' statements on the origins of the war and on τὸ δίκαιον at 1596ff.

71 There is, of course, no evidence whatever that Gorgias, at least, was an informer; and we know a considerable amount about him, thanks to Plato. This sort of inaccuracy, as any reader of *Nub.* should know, would have been the last thing to bother Aristophanes. It suffices that the connection between courts, informers, and sophists be established as credible: "logoi" are important for all three.

72 Cf. Whitman 194.

essential for appreciating the entire poem as a unit will be understood upon their recurrence. After a comparatively short scene (Prometheus), the chorus plunges back in with a third stanza. Will they never give up? The longer embassy scene intervenes, and we hear the chorus once again – now like Henri Bergson's "Jack-in-the-box" – reasserting itself for the conclusion of the catalogue⁷³. The splitting of the stanzas, a technique we noted above in the discussion of the lyric from Lys., is here employed to maximum advantage for comic effect.

In the end, our assessment of the poem's tone, and of its relation to the main action, need not proceed from a forced choice between serious satire and comic absurdity: such a choice has led too many critics of the *Birds* badly astray, and has hampered such analysis as there has been of Aristophanic poetry. Aristophanes' peculiar gift is to have wedded the two elements so indissolubly that they are synergetic. It is the very fusion of topical reference and mythological travesty, achieved through a riot of puns and through the poet's metaphorical imagination, that gives the lyric in the *Birds* its distinct power and charm.

D. Conclusion

This essay has analyzed Aristophanes' poetic technique in one particular section of three plays: the lyric of insult and abuse placed near the comedies' conclusion. We have tried to explicate in detail the features of each poem that render the lyrics especially illustrative paradigms of the playwright's technique, and so have emphasized the poems' structure and imagery in the analysis. Our conclusions about the thematic relevance of the lyric in the *Birds* are especially important for a balanced assessment of Aristophanic comedy, although they must of necessity remain preliminary, since we have not attempted to offer a full-scale interpretation of that play. Rather, the focus has been on a group of relatively short texts from several plays, which seemed to merit consideration together. We have reviewed evidence which clearly establishes that the poems are carefully composed and structured, and that they contain a variety of motifs and details which link them to the main action of their respective plays. In addition, the analysis has demonstrated the artistry with which the poems, and their separate parts, are arranged to lead to a comic climax, or to anti-climactic bathos. The unity and compression of the poems have been examined and appraised. And we have seen how, through several techniques, Aristophanes is able to re-use his own material, and imaginatively to vary the tone and content of abuse, some form of which was probably an ancient constituent of comedy.

Because Aristophanic comedies were composed in verse, and contain "poiesis" of the highest order, the literary criticism of the plays urgently requires that we consider the texts as poetry as well as drama. The analysis in

73 See H. Bergson, *Le Rire*.

this essay of a small group of lyrics can hardly aspire to being anything but a “prolegomenon”. But it is to be hoped that this relatively neglected area of Aristophanic studies will benefit from further analyses in the future, since fuller understanding of the playwright’s poetic technique stands to contribute much to interpretation of the plays as a whole.