

D.M. Pritchard 2011 (in press), 'Aristophanes and De Ste. Croix: The Value of Old Comedy as Evidence for Athenian Popular Culture', *Antichthon* 45.

**Aristophanes and De Ste. Croix:
The Value of Old Comedy as Evidence for Athenian Popular Culture**

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Abstract: De Ste. Croix famously argued that Aristophanes had a conservative political outlook and attempted to use his comedies to win over lower-class audiences to this minority point of view. The ongoing influence of his interpretation has meant that old comedy has been largely ignored in the historiography of Athenian popular culture. This article extends earlier critiques of de Ste. Croix by systematically comparing how Aristophanes and the indisputably popular genre of fourth-century oratory represented the social classes of the Athenians and political leaders. The striking parallels between the two suggest that Aristophanes, far from advocating a minority position, exploited the rich and, at times, contradictory views of lower-class citizens for comic and ultimately competitive ends. As a consequence his plays are valuable evidence for Athenian popular culture and help to correct the markedly fourth-century bias in the writing of Athenian cultural history.

Introduction

The cultural history of the classical Athenian democracy has been written largely on the basis of its so-called deliberative and forensic oratory. This body of over one hundred and thirty assembly and law-court speeches has served as the primary evidence for the study of topics as diverse as the religious and military attitude of the classical Athenians, their construction of masculinity, and popular views of morality, political leadership and social class.¹ Cultural historians have privileged these surviving speeches because of a particular dynamic of their performance: although the individuals who became embroiled in political debates or legal disputes belonged to the city's upper

¹ For the use of this oratory in the study of military attitudes, see, for example, Burckhardt (1996) 154-261; Ober (1978); Roisman (2003); (2005) 105-29; religious attitudes, Mikalson (1983); masculinity, Roisman (2005); morality, Dover (1974); and political leadership and social class, Ober (1989); (1994). Some cultural historians have gone against this trend: for example, Loraux (1986) and Mills (1997) 43-86 privilege the funeral oration as evidence of Athenian self-identity, while Just (1989) draws equally on oratory, comedy and tragedy to reconstruct prevailing male views of Attic women.

class, those adjudicating their *agōnes* or contests were predominantly lower-class citizens.² These assembly goers and jurors were notoriously difficult to win over (e.g. Aesch. *Supp.* 483; Ar. *Pax* 607; Pl. *Resp.* 492b-c): they had decidedly mixed views of upper-class morality, questioned the honesty and patriotism of politicians (e.g. Ar. *Ach.* 65-112, 136-51, 595-602; Lys. 18.16-17; 27.6-8), and could take perverse pleasure in the power which they wielded over wealthy contenders (e.g. Ar. *Lys.* 380; *Vesp* 258, 548-630).³ They were just as likely to heckle and interrupt a speaker (e.g. Aesch. *Ag.* 456-7, 883, 938, 1346-71, 1409, 1615-16; Dem. 19.113, 122; Lys. 12.73), as they were to lend him support through applause and cheering (e.g. Dem. 5.2; 10.44; 21.14).⁴ ‘Either way, though, the participation of the audience was an expression of their power and determination to exercise it, which undermined the speaker’s structural advantage and reminded him that his right to speak depended on his hearers’ forbearance and goodwill.’⁵ This dynamic of upper-class contenders and lower-class adjudicators compelled politicians and litigants to articulate and endorse the self-perceptions, norms and perceived interests of poor citizens (e.g. Arist. *Rh.* 1.9.30-1; 2.21.15-16; 2.22.3; Pl. *Resp.* 493d).⁶

Significantly political debates and legal trials were the main forums for developing and broadcasting the shared identities and culture of the classical Athenians, which have been called (among other terms) ‘civic ideology’, ‘the Athenian imaginary’ or ‘mainstream thought’.⁷ Because non-elite citizens clearly had the strongest influence on these cultural constructs, they might also be described as ‘popular thinking’ or ‘popular culture’ and the surviving speeches themselves as ‘popular literature’.⁸ As well suited as these orations are for writing cultural history, only a handful of them certainly date back to the later fifth century (Andoc. 2; Antiph. 1, 5, 6; Lys. 21).⁹ As a consequence, cultural historians of the classical Athenian democracy require other literary evidence to correct the markedly fourth-century bias in our historiography and to help resolve the outstanding question of the extent of cultural continuity between the two centuries of the classical Athenian democracy.¹⁰

² For the social background of public speakers, see Henderson (1990) 291-2; (1998) 258; Ober (1989) 104-26; Sinclair (1988) 44-5. For this use of *agōn*, see, for example, Antiph. 6.21; Lys. 7.2; Thuc. 3.38.3-4. For the background of assembly goers and jurors, see Hansen (1991) 183-6; Ober (1989) 141-7 respectively.

³ Henderson (1998) 407 n. 33; Sinclair (1988) 132.

⁴ For further testimonia, see Roisman (2005) 135-9.

⁵ Roisman (2005) 136.

⁶ Dover (1974) 5-6, 13-14; Mikalson (1983) 7-8; Ober (1978) 119, 129-30; (1989) 43, 184-5, 312; Pelling (2000) 5-9; Roisman (2005) 3-6.

⁷ By, respectively, Goldhill (e.g. (1986) 57, 70), Loraux ((1986)) and Mills ((1997) 48, 75, 83).

⁸ Pritchard (1999) 6; (2003) 308.

⁹ Three other fifth-century speeches of Antiphon were only models for teaching (2, 3, 4), while fifteen more orations are dated, sometimes very tentatively, within one or two years of the turn of the century (Andoc. 1; Isoc. 18, 19, 20, 21; [Lys.] 6; Lys. 12, 13, 23, 24, 25, 30, 31, 32, 43). Ehrenberg (1951) 374-7; Ober (1989) 341-9.

¹⁰ For this question, see Osborne (2007).

There appears to be a good *prima facie* case for using old comedy to help to achieve these ends. Contests for comic choruses were first staged at the City Dionysia of the 480s and were introduced into the state-sponsored festival of the Lenaea by 440 at the latest.¹¹ The eleven surviving plays of old comedy were all written by Aristophanes, whose early-fourth-century death is conventionally taken as the end of this genre. Nine of his comedies date back to the Peloponnesian War. The most common subject matter of his plays and (as far as we can tell from surviving fragments) those of his rivals was the politics and public discourse of the city.¹² Typically his protagonists were citizens outside of the liturgical class, or their wives, who developed fantastical schemes for solving contemporary problems or popular anxieties, such as an intractable war, economic hardship, the amorality of the sophists or the political capacity of the people.¹³ His surviving plays were nearly always set in Athens and hence featured its political and legal institutions (e.g. *Ar. Ach.* 19-23, 135-51; *Lys.* 808-9).

Aristophanes, like his rivals, ridiculed by name contemporary politicians, elite citizens serving as military or civilian magistrates, other poets, and many other conspicuous residents of Athens.¹⁴ In addition he clearly appropriated the oratory of his own day for his own dramaturgical ends.¹⁵ For example, the assemblies of *Assembly-Women* and *Women of the Thesmophoria* parody the procedures of the democracy and the commonplaces of its politicians.¹⁶ In *Knights* the accusations characters make against the parody of Cleon parallel the political invective of the fourth century (e.g. 847-59, 1044; *Dem.* 2.177; 3.23, 145, 220).¹⁷ Likewise, *Wasps* rehearses several commonplaces of surviving legal speeches (e.g. 283-5, 952-4, 957-9; *Lys.* 3.46; 12.38; 21.1-5; 25.11-13).¹⁸ All of this suggests that his comedies are indeed a 'guide to the realities of everyday life' and may even have reproduced 'audience attitudes and prejudices' (e.g. *Life of Aristophanes* 42-5 Kassel and Austin).¹⁹

This case for the reliability of Aristophanes as evidence for popular culture is strengthened by the performance-dynamic of which comedians and tragedians were part.²⁰ In the fifth century around the same number of Athenians watched the dramatic *agōnes* as attended the regular

¹¹ Pickard-Cambridge (1988) 40-2, 82-3. Comedies were also performed as part of the Rural Dionysia of several Attic demes (42-7).

¹² For his comic rivals, see Harvey and Wilkins (2000); Storey (2003).

¹³ The time which the writing of a comedy and the training of its chorus took up precluded more immediate topicality (Halliwell (1984) 9; (1993) 332-4).

¹⁴ Sommerstein (1996).

¹⁵ Heath (1997); Ober and Strauss (1990).

¹⁶ E.g. *Ar. Eccl.* 130; *Thesm.* 295-331; *Dem.* 19.70. Bowie (1993) 205-8; Pritchard (1999) 46-7.

¹⁷ Heath (1987) 232-4; Henderson (1998) 264 – both with primary sources.

¹⁸ Sommerstein (1983) 174, 191-2, 212.

¹⁹ Quotation from Pelling (2000) 123.

²⁰ Pritchard (1998) 40-2.

meetings of the assembly.²¹ Although the judging of the winners of these contests was formally in the hands of ten magistrates, their decision was greatly influenced by the vocal and physically active responses of the largely non-elite theatre goers.²² Indeed Aristophanes makes the *dēmos* of Hades clamour, when their championing of Euripides over Aeschylus is ignored, that only they are entitled to judge the best poet (*Ran.* 778-9). This dynamic is comparable, of course, to the one which politicians and litigants laboured under. As a consequence, comic poets, who were no less eager to win than other elite contenders (e.g. Ar. *Vesp.* 1043-50), needed to confirm the perceptions of as many audience members as possible, employ these as the ‘axis’ around which their fantasies operated, and be forever mindful of the expectations which the public had of their genre.²³ The success of Aristophanes, in his first years as a comic poet, and his ability to secure a state-sponsored chorus throughout his long career strongly suggest that he well understood these constraints.²⁴ Thus his surviving plays might also be described as ‘popular literature’.

The apparent strength of this case for old comedy as evidence for popular perceptions makes its neglect in the cultural turn of our own discipline particularly conspicuous. The cause of this underemployment has been an ongoing anxiety over the political outlook of Aristophanes. The latter had been a long neglected topic before Geoffrey de Sainte (Ste.) Croix argued systematically against the neutrality of Aristophanes as a witness to contemporary affairs in a long appendix of his 1972 book.²⁵ For him Aristophanes was a political conservative in the mould of Cimon: while no oligarch, he found the growing involvement of lower-class citizens in politics intolerable,

²¹ Archaeological research of the last forty years has shown that the theatre of fifth-century Athens was considerably less capacious than the stone theatre of the later fourth century, probably only accommodating between four and seven thousand spectators (Csapo (2007) 96-100, 116-21 with bibliography). The number of citizens at a regular assembly-meeting was probably close to six thousand (Hansen (1991) 130-1 with primary sources). Pace Sommerstein (1997) theatre and assembly goers probably came from the same social strata. Although the earliest evidence for the charging of admission to the theatre occurs in a speech of 346, in which Demosthenes refers to seats costing two obols (18.28), late sources assumed that it went back to the time of Pericles (Csapo (2007), 100-3; Pickard-Cambridge (1988) 265-8). The Athenians only introduced the *theōrikon*, which was a cash-payment to cover this admission charge, around 350 (Ruschenbusch (1979)). The cost of admission during the age of old comedy is unknown, but the mere requirement to pay, along with the holding of the *agōnes* in the city, presumably made it difficult for the poorest of the lower class and those from remoter demes without second houses in the *astu* or urban centre to attend (Lech (2010) 87-9). The same citizens, before the introduction of assembly pay in the 390s (Hansen (1991) 150), were no doubt underrepresented in the *ekklēsia*. As its meetings too were city-based and usually took half a day (136-7), assembly goers needed to be able to take time off work, especially if they had to walk in from remoter demes. Certainly classical Athenian writers assumed that the two audiences were one and the same (e.g. Ar. *Ran.* 778-9; Pl. *Leg.* 700c-1a; *Resp.* 492b-c; Sommerstein (1997) 64).

²² For this influence of the audience, see, for example, [Andoc.] 4.20-1; Ar. *Av.* 444-7; Arist. *Poet.* 1453a; *Pol.* 1341b10-20; Pl. *Leg.* 659a-c, 700a-1b; Sommerstein (1997) 63. For their range of responses, including hissing, shouting, booing and clapping, see Csapo and Slater (1994) 301-5; Pickard-Cambridge (1988) 272-6; Wallace (1997) 98-106 – all with primary sources.

²³ Bowie (1993) 10-11, 14; Carey (1994) 76-7; Heath (1987) 24, 38. Pelling writes (2000) 126: ‘All fantasy, it is increasingly realised, is historically situated: not just in the sense that one cannot fantasise or dream about telephones or planes if one has never seen one, but much more substantially in terms of underlying thought-patterns and aspirations. These may form part of the ‘axis’ around which any upside-down turnings take place...’

²⁴ Dover (1993) 1-2.

²⁵ Gomme 1938 discredited relatively recent attempts to work out the political outlook of Aristophanes (e.g. Croiset (1909); G. Murray (1933); Neil (1909); Starkie (1909)). In so doing he was continuing a debate among British historians about the political outlook of Aristophanes which had begun in the late eighteenth century (Walsh (2009)).

questioned their political competency, despised the new breed of politicians whom they championed, and was favourably disposed towards the upper class.²⁶ De Ste. Croix argued that his plays both bore out this conservatism and were deliberately employed in the serious business of winning over lower-class theatre goers to his minority view.²⁷

This became the dominant interpretation of Aristophanes in our discipline and picked up new arguments in its defence surprisingly quickly.²⁸ Critiques of this orthodoxy only appeared in the late 1980s.²⁹ In particular, Malcolm Heath questioned whether old comedy had any impact on day-to-day politics, demonstrated de Ste. Croix's repeatedly misleading readings of Aristophanes and plausibly suggested that theatre goers would have taken his ridiculing of their political capacities good humouredly.³⁰ However, such critiques have had little discernible impact on the reception of de Ste. Croix.³¹ In the 1990s Paul Cartledge rehearsed his teacher's view of Aristophanes for a new generation of students, while Alan Sommerstein continued to address glitches in de Ste. Croix's interpretation, which he judged 'one of the most perceptive analyses of the political orientation of Aristophanic comedy'.³² In whole or part this reading of Aristophanes still continues to be widely endorsed.³³ Indeed Nick Lowe even believes it 'has not been substantially refuted'.³⁴ This impact of de Ste. Croix has extended well beyond his proponents: while they obviously do not believe Aristophanes is valuable evidence for popular perceptions, the wide currency of his interpretation has made those who are otherwise uncommitted in this debate reluctant to employ Aristophanes as a primary source for Athenian popular culture.

De Ste. Croix identified four features of the plays of Aristophanes as evidence of his political conservatism. Firstly, he appears to use 'political and social terminology' in very similar ways to his contemporary, Pseudo-Xenophon, who manifestly detested and ridiculed the democracy.³⁵ Secondly, there is an apparent bias in his ridiculing of politicians: while Aristophanes praises those of the past who came from well established upper-class families and avoids ridiculing politically active aristocrats of his own day, he does satirise contemporaries lacking such a pedigree.³⁶ 'One may remember', de Ste. Croix writes,

²⁶ De Ste. Croix (1972) 357-8.

²⁷ De Ste. Croix (1972) 355, 362, 366-7, 370-1.

²⁸ E.g. Donlan (1980) 173; Loraux (1986) 306-8, 458 n. 2 05; Markle (1985) 267, 267 n. 5; Sommerstein (1984) 314, 328 n. 8, 331 n. 89; Storey (1987) 3-6. Konstan (1985) explicitly mounts new arguments in its support.

²⁹ E.g. Edmunds (1987) especially 65-6. Storey (1992) 4 with bibliography.

³⁰ Heath (1987) 9-21, 29-41.

³¹ Walsh (2009) 56.

³² Cartledge (1990) 43-53, 82; Sommerstein (1984); (1996) 334-7; (1997) 64-72. Quotation from Sommerstein (1996) 337 n. 76.

³³ E.g. Arnott (1991) 21, 23 n. 21; Henderson (1990) 273; (1998) 270-1; (2007) 189; Pelling (2000) 163, 288 n. 73; Powell (2001) 375; Tacon (2001). *Contra* Bowie (1993) 9 n. 11.

³⁴ Lowe (2007) 58.

³⁵ De Ste. Croix (1972) 358.

³⁶ De Ste. Croix (1972) 359-61.

some of the gibes at the low birth and poor education of some working-class politicians of the Edwardian period and even the nineteen-twenties and thirties...; but when these sneers were fashionable, what they represented was the outlook of an upper class used to governing and irritated at having to admit some of its 'inferiors' to a position in which they might be able to exercise some political influence, even power – very much the attitude I am attributing to Aristophanes.

Thirdly, the generally positive treatment of the wealthy by Aristophanes points to political conservatism.³⁷ De Ste. Croix suggested that Aristophanes' criticisms of this class in *Wealth* were only required by the plot and hence were very insignificant, whereas the other surviving plays contained nothing which can be compared to the fierce attacks against the wealthy in tragedy and fourth-century oratory. The final feature of which de Ste. Croix made much is the poet's criticisms of the deliberative capacities of ordinary citizens, especially his attacks against lower-class jurors and the state pay which made their administration of justice possible.³⁸ For de Ste. Croix this barb about the *triobolon* could not have been

in the least funny, except of course to a member of the upper classes, who disapproved of [jury pay]...to the extent of thinking it a fit subject for satire. (It is not the working-class of this country who makes jokes about the 'dole' or about alleged scroungers who live like fighting-cocks on social security payments.)

This article addresses the lingering doubts about the reliability of Aristophanes as evidence for non-elite perceptions. It goes beyond earlier critiques of de Ste. Croix by comparing systematically how Aristophanes and surviving fourth-century speeches represented the social classes of the citizen-body and political leadership. 'One weakness of recent work on Aristophanes has been its neglect of fourth-century oratory.'³⁹ What emerges are striking parallels between the genres, which, in view of the proven evidentiary value of deliberative and forensic speeches, puts beyond doubt the case for Aristophanes as valuable evidence for popular Athenian attitudes: instead of broadcasting a minority view, the poet deftly exploited the rich and, at times, contradictory ideas of Athenian popular culture for dramatic and ultimately competitive ends. Part one of this article demonstrates de Ste. Croix's misreading of the representations of the upper class by Aristophanes and how this comic poet actually drew on the full gambit of popular perceptions of, and terms for, the upper and lower classes. Part two lays out how Aristophanes ridiculed by name politicians of a so-called aristocratic background as regularly as he did those who were not, and how the

³⁷ De Ste. Croix (1972) 359-60 with examples.

³⁸ De Ste. Croix (1972) 362.

³⁹ Heath (1997) 234.

unexpectedly varied assumptions which he made about political leadership were actually those of the majority of citizens. The final part of this article argues that non-elite citizens would not have taken offence at the poet's less than flattering treatment of their deliberative capacities. Such abuse was part and parcel of the worship of Dionysus and hence was an expectation which they had of the genre.

Before commencing this critique of de Ste. Croix, however, we should summarise at the outset the structure and character of the social classes under the classical Athenian democracy.⁴⁰ Classical Athenians are known to have divided up the citizen-body on the basis of military roles, the Solonian property classes, occupation or place of residence.⁴¹ But the distinction which they used much more often than others and which demarcated the most important social cleavage was between *hoi plousioi* ('the wealthy') and *hoi penetes* ('the poor'). Thus this chapter uses different terms for social differentiation, such as 'elite' and 'non-elite' Athenians, 'prosperous' and 'humble' citizens, and 'the upper class' and 'the lower class', strictly as synonyms for 'the rich' and 'the poor'. In the following analysis of old comedy and the oratory of the fourth century we will see that the wealthy were marked out primarily by their lives of *skholē* ('leisure') and hence lack of the necessity to work, distinctive clothing and footwear, exclusive pastimes, and particular but not-always-highly-regarded attitudes and actions. They were also expected to undertake expensive public services, paid the *eisphora* or extraordinary war tax and furnished the city's political and military leaders. Their lifestyle and significant contributions to public life made them conspicuous amongst the city's residents. They most probably numbered close to, but less than, five percent of the citizen-body.⁴² While it contrasts markedly with how contemporary societies habitually divide up their populations into gradations of upper, middle and lower classes, the classical Athenians classified the rest of their citizen-body – from the destitute to those sitting just below the elite – as 'the poor'. In old comedy and forensic and deliberative oratory what the varied members of this social class had in common was a lack of leisure and hence a need to work and a way of life that was frugal and moderate.

1. Wealthy and Poor Athenians

⁴⁰ The model of Athenian society employed here will be familiar to social historians of classical Athens and follows by and large Davies (1981) 21-8; Fisher (1998); Markle (1985) 266-71; Rosivach (1991); (2001); Sinclair (1988) 121-3; and especially Vartsov (1978).

⁴¹ For the lack of ancient evidence for a link between the Solonian *telē* or property classes and military roles, which is asserted *ad nauseum* in classical scholarship, see Pritchard (2010) 23-6 with bibliography.

⁴² This estimate is based on the percentage of Athenians who undertook liturgies and especially paid the *eisphora*. See Hansen (1991) 90-4, 109-15; Pritchard (1999) 56-8; Taylor (2007) 89; and Rhodes (1982) *pace* Davies (1981) 24-7.

De Ste. Croix's reading of references to the wealthy in Aristophanes as largely positive is 'almost completely misleading'.⁴³ Most obviously the playwright's two early-fourth-century works contain numerous scathing criticisms of the wealthy as a social class. In an attempt to preserve something of de Ste. Croix's reading of Aristophanes, Alan Sommerstein argues that the poet had spoken on behalf of the 'well-heeled' throughout the decades of the Peloponnesian War, but a number of factors persuaded him to support the cause of the 'barefoot' in these last two plays.⁴⁴ According to Sommerstein, Aristophanes may have begun to question the superiority of the elite, because of the outrageous crimes of the Thirty Tyrants, and to appreciate the plight of the poor, as he had no doubt fallen into decreased circumstances, when he lost his land on Aegina (*Eq.* 652-4), which the Athenians were forced to abandon at the end of the war.⁴⁵ However, even if these factors did not re-order the poet's outlook, Sommerstein suggests, he 'may have felt it wise to accommodate himself somewhat to the feeling of his audience' in a period of profound economic malaise and antipathy towards the wealthy.⁴⁶

This attempted defence founders on the fact that serious criticisms of the upper class can be found not only in the *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* but also in the surviving plays of Aristophanes from the later fifth century. All of his comedies accuse the upper class as a whole of specific misdemeanours, make fictional characters embody these faults or reprimand prominent individuals for such flaws, most often regardless of their actual past behaviour.⁴⁷ Significantly, these criticisms also figure in the indisputably popular literature of fourth-century oratory where upper-class speakers attempt to prove their personal avoidance of the stereotyped sins of the elite or to establish that their opponents revel in them. Admittedly, Aristophanic comedy does contain positive as well as negative assessments about wealth and the wealthy, and even admits that a life of poverty is a mixed blessing. Statements of this sort, however, cannot be employed, as proponents of de Ste. Croix may wish, as evidence of an upper-class bias, because they are also found in surviving oratory. Thus the popular culture of classical Athens appears to have entertained contradictory ideas about wealth and poverty just as it did about other social and political phenomena.⁴⁸

Aristophanes presents the possession or absence of wealth as the chief mark of differentiation among classical Athenians. Although he, at times, endows the upper echelons of Athenian society with a range of exclusive attributes, more often than not this group is simply defined alone by this characteristic: they are simply the holders of wealth (e.g. *Vesp.* 575) or the wealthy (e.g. *Vesp.*

⁴³ Heath (1987) 29.

⁴⁴ Sommerstein (1984) 314-15, 333.

⁴⁵ Sommerstein (1984) 332; (1996) 336 n. 73.

⁴⁶ Sommerstein (1984) 333.

⁴⁷ This stereotyping of known individuals is well illustrated by Halliwell (1984) 12-14.

⁴⁸ For the fractured or contradictory character of Athenian popular culture, see, for example, Ober (1989); Just (1989) 206; Mills (1997) 72; Ober (1989) 126, 224; Pelling (2000) 4-5; Pritchard (1998) 44; (1999) 12.

1168-71; *Pax* 838-41; *Thesm.* 289-90). In addition, the citizen body itself is frequently divided into two exclusive groups: *hoi plousioi* ('the wealthy') and *hoi penētes* ('the poor').⁴⁹ This first class have 'soft hands', as they are relieved of the necessity to work (*Vesp.* 552-7), and perform the liturgy of the trierarchy (*Ran.* 1066-7).⁵⁰ The poet intimates as well, in *Knights*, that they are liable to pay *eisphora*, as Paphlagon tells the Sausage Seller (923-6): 'you shall be well and truly punished by me when you are weighed down with extraordinary war taxes. I am going to ensure that you are registered among the rich men'. In his early-fourth-century *Wealth* Aristophanes inventively dramatises the poor's lack of affluence by making out that they have never been visited by the divinity Wealth.

In comedies by Aristophanes upper-class Athenians possess other qualities, affectations and interests which differentiate them from their poor fellow citizens. Such differences in lifestyle and appearance are the basis of the humour of the misunderstandings between a rich son and, quite surprisingly, a poor father in *Wasps*.⁵¹ Bdelycleon wants to keep his father in a manner that his wealth allows, that is, to provide him with extravagant meals (340-1), to ensure that he lives 'finely' and 'sweetly', and to take him to dinner parties and *sumposia*, which are elsewhere associated exclusively with the upper class (e.g. *Vesp.* 79-80; *Eq.* 92-4; *Av.* 285-6; *Ran.* 715; *Pax.* 838-41).⁵² Bdelycleon begins to ready his father for just such an engagement by dressing him in appropriate clothing. His father, however, parts only reluctantly with his *tribōn* or coarse cloak (1131) and *embades* or cheap slippers (1157), which are items elsewhere linked with poor citizens by Aristophanes.⁵³ Philocleon goes on to indicate his lack of intimacy with the upper-class clothing, when he is horrified at the exotic articles given to him by his son. The first is a *khlaina* or high-quality cloak, which has been imported and contains so much wool that Philocleon fears that he will

⁴⁹ E.g. *Ar. Eq.* 222-4; *Vesp.* 463-8; *Ran.* 1066-7; *Eccl.* 197-8; *Plut.* 29-30, 149-52, 500-3, 1003-5.

⁵⁰ With Sommerstein (1983) 191.

⁵¹ Many have recognised the centrality of class difference in this scene and attributed Philocleon's lack of familiarity with the drinking party to his lower-class status (e.g. Cooper and Morris (1990) 77-8; Davidson (1997) 53; Donlan (1980) 159-62; O. Murray (1990) 150; Pritchard (1999) 153; Slater (1997) 38). Explanations for the different class positions of father and son range from old comedy's inconsistency in characterisation (e.g. Pütz (2003) 125) to new social realities of the later fifth century. For example, Fisher plausibly suggests that Aristophanes might be portraying 'social mobility in a time of considerable change and generational conflict' ((2000) 357). In her useful and humorously written study of this scene and its disastrous aftermath (*Vesp.* 1292-1449) Babette Pütz oscillates between two explanations of Philocleon's performance as a symposiast ((2003) 111-33). Either Philocleon as a lower-class citizen is ignorant of such well heeled pursuits (e.g. 113-5, 118, 125) or he is deliberately feigning ignorance and behaving abominably in order to mock his son and upper-class citizens in general (e.g. 113-6, 124-5, 130-3). These surely are mutually exclusive explanations, while the second appears an implausible reading of the text. Certainly the closing scenes do disparage – like other passages of popular literature – the upper-class lifestyle and Pütz is right to see Philocleon as selfish, misanthropic and not completely stupid (114, 132-3). But does he have the symposiac knowledge and forethought to mock his son in the way she proposes? The play suggests otherwise: Philocleon never shows a proper understanding of what a symposiast should do (cf. 1299-1325) nor an awareness of the negative consequences of his actions (e.g. 1326-1449).

⁵² For discussion of the traditional aristocratic activity of the *sumposion*, see O. Murray (1990); (1993) 207-13.

⁵³ Aristophanes frequently associates the coarse coat and cheap slippers with poor citizens (*Vesp.* 33, 115-17; *Eccl.* 633, 847-50, 882; *Plut.* 842-3).

be roasted alive in its warmth (1132-56).⁵⁴ Undeterred by his father's protestations, Bdelycleon next gives his father a pair of shoes called 'Laconians' (1158), which were evidentially something of a luxury. Other Aristophanic passages highlight further articles and manners as uniquely upper class: members of this group wear signet rings (*Nub.* 332; *Eccl.* 632) and can generally afford warmer clothing (*Ran.* 1065-8). Further, the younger members of the group show a predilection for Spartan affectations: they wear clothes with tassels of wool, keep untrimmed beards (*Vesp.* 474-6) and have long hair (467-8; *Eq.* 579-80; *Nub.* 14, 545; *Thesm.* 561).⁵⁵ Now appropriately dressed, Bdelycleon tells his father to move 'like a rich man' (*Vesp.* 1168-9), but Philocleon's attempt at doing so ends up being no more than a parody (1170-3). This highlighting of the distinct dress and demeanour of the wealthy by Aristophanes strongly suggests that, in spite of the fact that a new ethos of equality in the fifth century encouraged leading Athenians to dress more modestly, they could still be identified visually as a distinct section of the community.⁵⁶

Now dressed and trying to walk in the manner of a gentleman, Philocleon is asked by his son whether he knows how to relate *logous semnous* or august stories in the presence of well educated (*polumathōn*) and so clever (*dexiōn*) and wise men (1174-5, 1196). The adjective *semnos* is usually employed in descriptions of the well born, and indeed other Aristophanic summaries of elite qualities explicitly place birth alongside wealth and education (*Eq.* 147-234; *Ran.* 718-30).⁵⁷ Bdelycleon quickly discovers that his father does not know how to discuss things 'befitting of a great man' (*megaloprepeis*) and therefore encourages him to speak of any embassy, in which he might have participated (1183-8). However, since wealthy citizens, with their foreign contacts, were the only ones able to be ambassadors (*Ach.* 607-11; *Av.* 1570-1), unsurprisingly the best this impoverished character can point to is serving as a rower on an expedition to Paros (*Vesp.* 1188-9).⁵⁸ Elsewhere, Aristophanes implies that wealthy Athenians hold other leading positions in addition to diplomatic posts. For example, in *Knights* they possess the *dēmagōgia* or leadership of the people (191-3), understood exclusively throughout this comedy as being a public speaker in the council and the assembly (e.g. 164-7), and, at other points, Aristophanes presents these so-called *hoi rhētores* or *hoi legontes* as a discreet group of politicians.⁵⁹

Despite his father's obvious lack of social graces, Bdelycleon persists in trying to make him *sumpotikos* (*Vesp.* 1207-8) by telling him to converse intelligently about boxing (1190-4, cf. 1212-3) and to speak of valiant deeds of his youth, such as how he may have had success in hunting or

⁵⁴ Cloaks of this period are discussed by Geddes (1987) 311-15; Miller (2010) 317-21.

⁵⁵ Sommerstein (1983) 185.

⁵⁶ *Pace* Geddes (1987)

⁵⁷ With Sommerstein (1982) 161.

⁵⁸ On the status and requirements of ambassadors, see Thomas (1989) 111-2.

⁵⁹ E.g. *Ach.* 39, 680; *Eq.* 60, 325, 425, 880, 1350; *Pax* 632-8; *Thesm* 292, 381-2, 567; *Eccl* 243-4; *Plut.* 30, 567-

running in a torch race (1202-4). But, again, Philocleon is unable to do any of these things, because athletics, hunting and running in a torch race, as Aristophanes implies in other passages (e.g. *Ach.* 708-12; *Ran.* 727-30; *Plut.* 156), were pursued only by upper-class Athenians.⁶⁰ Finally, Bdelycleon rehearses the singing of a so-called *skolion* with his father so that he will be able to take part appropriately in the activities of the *sumposion* proper to follow the meal, but, again, Philocleon shows up his lack of experience in the ways of the upper class by his complete inability to sing such a drinking song (1222-48).⁶¹

Admittedly, a contemporary writer who unambiguously had hostile views of democracy and lower-class citizens discusses the Athenian citizen-body in ways which appear very similar to Aristophanes.⁶² Pseudo-Xenophon regularly divides the citizens of Athens into *hoi plousioi* and *hoi penētes* (e.g. 1.2, 4) and suggests that the former perform the liturgies of the trierarchy, *gumnasiarkhia* ('athletic-training-sponsorship) and *chorēgia* ('chorus-sponsorship' – 1.3), while the latter class wear clothes no better than those of slaves (1.10). Pseudo-Xenophon holds that upper-class members have the highest level of education (1.5, 7-8, 13) and, several times, describes them with terms that resonate with Aristophanes: they are 'the cleverest men' and 'the most powerful or capable men' (1.3, 6, 9). These apparent similarities between Aristophanes and an unambiguous opponent of the Athenian democracy are taken by de Ste. Croix, of course, as proof of the comic poet's political and social conservatism. However, when it is appreciated that the view of the citizen-body held by Aristophanes agrees even more closely with that of surviving oratory, even this potential prop for de Ste. Croix's interpretation gives way and the playwright emerges as having worked with popular assumptions and terminology about social class.

Political and legal speeches echo the sociology of Aristophanes from the most specific to the most general points. For example, the *tribōn* and *embades* are said to be items worn by poor men (*Isae.* 5.11); the clothing of the upper class is distinctive (*Lys.* 16.19); ambassadorships are confined to the wealthy (*Dem.* 24.112); politicians are presented as a discreet group called *hoi legontes* (e.g. *Lys.* 18.8; 28.9; 26.6), *hoi dēmagogoi* (e.g. 16.20; 27.10) or *hoi rhētores* (e.g. *Lys.* 31.27; *Andoc.* 3.1); members of the upper class are periodically called *hoi kaloi k'agathoi*;⁶³ and the basic division of society is between the rich and the poor (e.g. *Lys.* 24.16-17; 26.9-10; 28.1-2).

Litigants and public speakers speak of the possession of attributes other than wealth by members of the elite. Demosthenes, for instance, describes an individual as 'the first man in all

⁶⁰ For hunting as an upper-class pursuit, see Barringer (2001) 10-69. For athletics and torch-racing as the same, see Pritchard (2003) 313-30; 2009, 216-19.

⁶¹ A *sumposion* immediately follows a *deipnon* at the same venue (e.g. *Vesp.* 1216-7, 1219-22, 1250). Sommerstein (1983) 227-8;

⁶² For the date of Pseudo-Xenophon's treatise and his partisan outlook, see, Osborne (2004) 5-19 with bibliography.

⁶³ Bourriot (1995) is an exhausting study of the use of this term in classical Athenian literature.

Megara for wealth, birth and reputation' (19.295). Isocrates introduces other attributes of the upper class, when he has a litigant ask (19.36):

All the Siphnians would bear witness, however, that my ancestors were foremost of the citizens there in birth, in wealth, in good repute, and in all other matters. For who were thought worthy of higher officers, or made greater contributions of money, or served as chorus-sponsors more handsomely, or discharged the rest of the liturgies with greater magnificence (*megaloprepesteron*)?⁶⁴

Many features of the upper class of Aristophanes are apparent in this last passage: not only are they wealthy and well born, but they perform liturgies, provide financial contributions and occupy positions of leadership for the community. Further, the wealthy in extant deliberative and forensic oratory are not the leisured class *per se*, but are, as in Aristophanic comedy, those who are specifically able to undertake trierarchies and other liturgies (e.g. Dem. 21.151, 208) and to pay the *eisphora* or extraordinary war tax (e.g. Lys. 22.13; 27.9-10).⁶⁵

Throughout his comic career Aristophanes regularly linked prominent wealthy individuals, purely fictional representatives of the wealthy and this class as a whole with a range of behaviours and attitudes which were, as extant deliberative and forensic oratory confirms, judged highly objectionable by lower-class Athenians. Wealthy citizens were frequently presented by Aristophanes partaking to excess in dissolute activities.⁶⁶ The exasperated one-time peasant of *Clouds*, Strepsiades, complains that his aristocratic wife is oversexed (51-2), gluttonous (52) and extravagant (48-52).⁶⁷ This extravagance is manifest in the smell of 'perfume and saffron' that engulfs her (51), and her encouragement of the horsey passions of their son (59-70), which have bankrupted the poor Strepsiades (74). Male members of the elite also exhibit these and similar traits. As they alone of the citizen body were able to attend *sumposia*, it is understandable that wealthy citizens were thought to have a predilection for alcohol (e.g. *Eq.* 92-4; *Vesp.* 79-80; *Av.* 285-6; *Ran.* 715) and prostitutes (e.g. *Eccl.* 242-4), which were the staples of such gatherings.⁶⁸ Indeed the slave Xanthias from *Frogs* presents the sampling of these as the sole attribute of an upper-class male, when he agrees that his master is certainly a gentleman, as he only knows, to put it politely, how to soak and poke (739-40). The elite enjoy other luxuries, apart from prostitutes, like fish (*Vesp.* 493-5; *Ran.* 1068; cf. Dem. 19.229) and a range of other tasty morsels (*Nub.* 1072-73).

⁶⁴ Modified version of van Hook's translation.

⁶⁵ Davies (1981) 13; Sinclair (1988) 122 *pace* Ober (1989) 27-28, 195.

⁶⁶ Sommerstein (1997) 330.

⁶⁷ With Sommerstein (1982) 161-2.

⁶⁸ Brock (1991) 163; Heath (1987) 33.

In contradiction of the suggestion in *Assembly-Women* that members of the elite are exceedingly handsome (e.g. 628-9. 631-4), Aristophanes in his last extant play makes out that their overindulgence causes them to suffer from gout and to be pot bellied, fat legged, outrageously obese and so useless in battle (*Plut.* 558-61).⁶⁹ An example of another negative consequence of such behaviour also appears in this same play (242-4): a young man squanders his family's wealth on dicing and prostitutes. Aristophanes suggests that expenditure on such private luxuriousness came at the expense of public service and benefaction. For example, in *Frogs* the prominent citizen Callias is accused of shirking naval service for sexual romps (431-3); and a rich man prefers to buy fish rather than undertake a trierarchy (1065-8). Finally, in tune with the tendency of his genre 'to grumble and slander' rather than to praise, Aristophanes speaks not of the elite's performance of liturgies, which we have seen was a standard topic of forensic speeches, but reprimands the wealthy for their failure to undertake them in the first place (e.g. *Lys.* 652-4).⁷⁰

The Athenian orators portrayed the abovementioned pastimes of the wealthy as 'the most shameful of pleasures', and, like Aristophanes, attacked upper-class individuals for their profligate luxury and spending.⁷¹ For example, Timarchus is accused by Aeschines of being a slave to the exceedingly disgraceful joys of gastronomic delicacies, extravagant dinner parties, flute girls, courtesans, dice and other disreputable activities (1.42; cf. *Lys.* 19.11). Speakers constantly reprove those who squander their patrimony on these shameful activities rather than on public services (e.g. *Lys.* 14.23-9; 19.9-11; *Dem.* 36.39). Prosecutors fan the indignation of the jurors not simply, as Ober remarks, by highlighting the private luxury of their opponents, but by presenting this private expenditure as being at the direct expense of public benefactions (e.g. *Lys.* 28.13).⁷²

Two prosecution speeches by Demosthenes illustrate this point nicely. In the earlier of these the upper-class Phaenippus is charged with having sold his war horse, which is clearly an object useful in the defence of the city, in order to purchase a chariot that can only be of benefit to himself (42.24; cf. 22.75-7). Demosthenes exploits this opposition between public and private expenditure even more fully in his famous attack on Meidias, when he asks rhetorically (21.158-9):

In what, then, consist his splendour, his public services and his lordly expenditure? I cannot for the life of me see, unless one fixes one's attention on these facts. He has built at Eleusis a mansion huge enough to overshadow his neighbours; he drives his wife to the Mysteries, or anywhere else that he wishes, with a pair of greys from Sicyon; he swaggers about the market-place with three or four henchmen in attendance, describing beakers and drinking-horns and cups loud enough for the passers-by to hear. I do not see how

⁶⁹ Dover (1974) 111-12.

⁷⁰ Quotation from Dover (1972) 35.

⁷¹ Ober (1989) 205-8; Dover (1974) 179-80. This phrase comes from Aeschines 1.42.

⁷² Ober (1989) 206-7.

the mass of Athenians are benefited by all the wealth that Meidias retains for private luxury and superfluous display.⁷³

Surviving deliberative and forensic oratory, finally, not only contains the reprimands of elite individuals, so prominent in comedy, for their failure to perform liturgies (e.g. *Din.* 1.35-6), but also renders explicit the popular expectation behind this charge: rich citizens are duty bound to finance the community's public services (e.g. *Lys.* 27.10; *Dem.* 42.22).⁷⁴

Aristophanes also makes much of the potentially anti-social and unpatriotic behaviour of upper-class citizens and such criticisms are found again in fourth-century oratory. Aristophanes not only presents members of the elite as arrogant and haughty (e.g. *Nub.* 48; *Vesp.* 135),⁷⁵ but more disturbingly as prone to commit the crime of *hubris*, which, strictly speaking, entails verbal and/or physical assault of a fellow citizen with the intention to degrade.⁷⁶ This charge is explicitly laid against rich citizens by the goddess Poverty (*Plut.* 563-4): '...concerning moderation (*sōphrosunē*), I will teach you more carefully that propriety resides with me, but assault (*hubrisdein*) belongs to wealth.' This serious criticism of the rich is not limited, as Sommerstein asserts, to the two early-fourth-century comedies of Aristophanes, but figures in earlier surviving plays as well. For example, in *Wasps* the lower-class Philocleon recoils from his son's suggestion that they can now go and get drunk at a *sumposion* on the grounds that drinking results in the battering of others and legal charges for assault (1251-5). Bdelycleon does not deny that intoxicated gentlemen commit *hubris*, but assuages his father's anxiety by showing that they escape punishment for it by placating their victims through the begging of forgiveness or the telling of witty tales (1256-67).

The humour in the description, finally, of the subsequent banquet and *sumposion* rests on the assumption that it is elite citizens who are usually the drunk and violent. While the upper-class gentlemen at this drinking party were, of course, intoxicated and violent, the poet surprises his audience with the report that it was, in fact, the hitherto impoverished Philocleon that surpassed all others in this respect. As Bdelycleon's slave explains (1299-1303), 'The old man was absolutely the most insufferable abomination and very much the most intoxicated of the guests. Despite the fact that HIPPYLYS was present, along with Antiphon, Lycon, Lysistratus, Thuphrastus, and Phrynichus' group. Of all these men he was by far the most violent (*hubristotatos*).' Surviving oratory has many passages detailing the *hubris* of the wealthy (e.g. *Dem.* 21.98, 158),⁷⁷ and one of these from a

⁷³ Translated by Vince.

⁷⁴ Christ (2006) 171-84; Perlman (1963) 336; Pritchard (2004a) 218-19.

⁷⁵ With Sommerstein (1983) 164.

⁷⁶ This is the meaning of *hubris* apparent in *Ar. Vesp.* 1299-325; *Av.* 1259; *Dem.* 21.203-4. For *hubris* as typical of the upper class, see, for example, Roisman (2005) 92-4.

⁷⁷ Dover (1974) 110-11; Ober (1989) 208-12.

speech written a decade before *Wealth* presages the connection drawn by the goddess Penia between poverty and moderation and between wealth and violence (Lys. 24.16-17):

...it is not likely for those who work for their livelihood and are very poor to commit assaults (*hubrisdein*), but for those who possess far more than the necessities of life... The wealthy buy off trials with money, but the poor are compelled to be moderate (*sōphronein*) because of their ever-present poverty.

Aristophanic comedy also voiced concern about the patriotism of the upper class. For instance, the chorus of *Wasps* take up the language of their champion Cleon and accuse Bdelycleon of consorting with the enemy, hating the people and harbouring despotic designs (464-70); and in *Wealth* politicians, upon becoming wealthy, are said to conspire against the majority and make war on the *dēmos* (567-90). Oratory, again, expresses a comparable anxiety. Demosthenes, for example, alleges that Meidias harbours an innate hatred of the masses (21.203-4). Finally, a forensic speech by Lysias, produced in the same year as the last play of Aristophanes, again shadows a sentiment from this comedy (27.203-4): the prosecutor explains that when certain Athenian generals became rich, they began to hate the people, desired to rule rather than be ruled and schemed for the establishment of an oligarchy.

Certainly a reasonable expectation to be built up by this comic venting of popular prejudice against wealthy citizens is that, when Aristophanes turns to lower-class citizens, he should treat them in a glowing light. It is something of a surprise, then, to discover that this is not exactly the case, as the comic poet actually shows poverty to be a decidedly mixed blessing. Humble citizens do have a number of virtues in his comedies. They possess, in contrast to the wealthy, *sōphrosunē* (e.g. *Plut.* 563-4) and a disposition to hard work, which Aristophanes presents as a positive trait (*Vesp.* 611). Their thrifty and active lifestyle also ensures their physical preparedness for the defence of the city (*Plut.* 558-61), and they can acquit themselves as *agathoi andres* or courageous men on the battlefield (e.g. *Ach.* 697-8). Moreover, an average citizen who fights for the city might call himself *chrēstos politēs* or a good and useful citizen (e.g. *Ach.* 595-6), which is a title used elsewhere to describe leading citizens (e.g. *Eq.* 943-4). Poor citizens, finally, can be just and pious (e.g. *Plut.* 28-9).

Along with these positive appraisals, however, Aristophanes maintains that a number of vices and deprivations result from poverty. For example, in reply to the goddess Poverty's self-praise, Chremylus retorts that indigence not only means hunger and nakedness, but forces humble citizens to engage in burglary (*Plut.* 565; cf. *Eccl.* 565-7, 667-8) and even sacrilege (*Plut.* 594-7).⁷⁸ This comedy also illustrates that a poor man can be forced to behave in ways, while not strictly illegal,

⁷⁸ With Sommerstein (1990) 330.

which he would choose to avoid as a rich man (959-1094). Aristophanes suggests as well that poor citizens face ‘socio-political’ disadvantages.⁷⁹ In tune with the irreverence of comedy, this inequality of opportunity is sometimes understood in sexual terms. For example, the courtesans of Corinth are said to ignore poor clients, but to attend eagerly to the sexual appetites of rich men (*Plut.* 149-52), while women are assumed to prefer as lovers handsome gentlemen instead of poor and ugly men (*Eccl.* 626-9, 631-4, 701-8). This disadvantage even affects participation in religious rites: poor citizens may not be able to make offerings that the wealthy find easy to outlay (*Plut.* 594-7; cf. *Hdt.* 1.133.1; 2.47.3). More importantly, it is taken for granted in *Wealth* that only well resourced citizens are useful in contests with others; in reply to Wealth’s concern that the poor men willing to help him in a struggle with Zeus are *ponērous summakhous* or poor quality allies (218-20), Chremylus does not deny the poor’s lack of social and political power, but rather reassures him that they will be useful and capable supporters when they are wealthy (221). Such disadvantages surely explain the strong popular desire for wealth which Aristophanes seems to take for granted or articulate explicitly.⁸⁰ For example, the chorus-leader of *Birds* succinctly states that men dearly love wealth (592; cf. 593-600, 1105-8); in other plays poor people are shown to make sacrifices or prayers in order that they or their children might be wealthy (*Plut.* 133-4; *Thesm.* 289-90); and even though members of the elite are criticised for gluttony and dissipation of their patrimony through expenditure on private luxury, it is still assumed by Aristophanes that all citizens hanker after a life of banquets and delicacies (e.g. *Vesp.* 708-11).⁸¹

The recognition of the same disadvantages of poverty by fourth-century oratory strongly suggests that Aristophanes was simply articulating well established elements of Athenian popular culture.⁸² Speakers frequently maintained that poverty could compel people to commit crimes (e.g. *Lys.* 7.12-14; 31.11 *Dem.* 23.148; 21.182) or perform shameful things, such as hiring oneself out as a day labourer (e.g. *Dem.* 3.34; 18.257), and often argued that the involuntary nature of such misdemeanours should mean lower-class law-breakers be given sympathy and forgiveness by the jurors (e.g. *Lys.* 31.11; *Dem.* 45.67). Poverty might even cause desperate citizens to compromise their performance of civic duties. In one speech the audience is reminded of a group of jurors who accepted bribes largely because of poverty (*Aeschin.* 1.88); and in another Demosthenes recalls that want compelled a certain Pyrrus to be a juror, although he was debarred from such service because of a debt to the public treasury (21.182).

Fourth-century speakers also describe the poor as powerless and weak (e.g. *Dem.* 44.28; 21.123-124), and present poverty as a disability like old age or a physical impairment (e.g. *Lys.*

⁷⁹ Quotation from Rosivach (1991) 191; cf. Rosivach (2001).

⁸⁰ Den Boer (1979) 158.

⁸¹ With Sommerstein (1983) 201.

⁸² Den Boer (1979) 152; Dover (1974) 109-12; Fisher (1998); Rosivach (1991); (2001).

24.16-17; 31.11). Speakers appear most fond of discussing the legal dimension of the poor's societal incapacity. For example, Demosthenes suggests that earlier victims of Meidias did not seek legal redress on grounds well known to the audience (21.141-2; cf. 219): 'You all know reasons why a man shrinks from aiding himself. What is responsible is a lack of leisure, a desire for an untroubled life, an inability to speak in public, poverty and many other factors.' Notably, one of the inhibiting factors listed here by Demosthenes is poverty itself, and two of the others, namely the lack of leisure and of skill in public speaking, were direct consequences of it. In contrast, speakers often complained that wealthy citizens could escape punishment for their crimes through appropriate monetary outlays (e.g. Lys. 24.16-17; Dem. 21.123-4), and that if poor citizens actually began a legal action, rich opponents had an unfair advantage over them (e.g. Dem. 44.28).

2. Political Leaders and Leadership

One of de Ste. Croix's main arguments for Aristophanes being a political conservative is his supposed preference for ridiculing political leaders who were *nouveaux riches*, such as Cleon, Cleophon and Hyperbolus, instead of 'establishment' figures, such as Nicias and Alcibiades, whom he is said to have treated very favourably instead.⁸³ This argument of de Ste. Croix, however, happens to founder, once again, on the accuracy of his reading of Aristophanes, for, although it is true that he engaged in extensive and repeated satire of these three highly successful but less than aristocratic politicians, the ways in which he introduced and characterised Nicias, Alcibiades and other well born leaders were far more robust and critical than he suggests.⁸⁴ For example, Aristophanes makes an unflattering reference to a costly piece of indecision on the part of Nicias when serving as a general in Sicily (Thuc. 6.71, 97; Plut. *Nic.* 16.8-9) by coming up with the new comic disease of *mellonikian* or dilly-dallying like Nicias (*Av.* 638-40).⁸⁵ Further, in his fragmentary comedy *Farmers* Nicias is said to have paid a sizeable bribe to avoid magistracy (fragment 102 Kassel and Austin). Not only does this passage portray Nicias acting corruptly, but it would also have reminded all and sundry, as Plutarch well appreciates (*Nic.* 8.2), of this politician's considerable loss of face when he relinquished his generalship to Cleon only to have the latter carry off an improbable military victory (Thuc. 4.27-8, 39-40).

Aristophanes does sometimes treat Alcibiades rather gently. At one point he makes a friendly reference to this individual's speech impediment (*Vesp.* 42-5), while in another play he alludes in a

⁸³ De Ste. Croix (1972) 359-61; cf. Henderson (1998) 270-1.

⁸⁴ *Knights* is an extended satire of Cleon and other Aristophanic plays from the 420s also make satirical references to him (e.g. *Pax* 751-3). Slurs are repeatedly made against Cleophon (e.g. *Thesm.* 386-8; *Ran.* 706-15) and Hyperbolus (e.g. *Vesp.* 1304; *Nub.* 549-631, 1065-6; *Vesp.* 1003-7; *Pax* 681, 916; *Thesm.* 838-9). The poet's treatment of Nicias and Alcibiades has been well considered by Heath (1987) 34-5 and Moorton (1988) respectively.

⁸⁵ With Sommerstein (1987) 238.

neutral fashion to his flight from Athenian justice (*Av.* 145-7). However, Aristophanes in his first comedy *Banqueters* makes this young aristocrat exemplify some of the negative traits which were typically attributed to the wealthy and political leaders by the Athenian populace. In a fragment of this work (fragment 205 Kassel and Austin) a father singles out Alcibiades with disapproval as the source of his miscreant son's new sophisms, and later lexicographic references to this comedy indicate that Alcibiades was also characterised as sexually immoral.⁸⁶ Moreover, in *Acharnians* this figure is slandered as a passive homosexual (714-6). While old comedy levelled this charge against many politically active citizens, it was by no means an insubstantial slur, as a successful prosecution for male prostitution would end a political career.⁸⁷

In contrast to these allegations of impropriety, however, *Frogs* actually advocates the city's recall of Alcibiades from his second self-imposed exile (e.g. 1431-2).⁸⁸ But here it is important to realise that this was not an ambit claim on behalf of a fellow class warrior, but, in fact, resonated closely with the needs of the city. Athens, at the time, lacked sufficiently skilled and numerous military leaders.⁸⁹ The return of Alcibiades, which was indisputably one of the most formidable naval commanders of the Ionian War (e.g. Diod. Sic. 13.49-53; Plut. *Alc.* 28; Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.11-13), would have gone a long way to remedying this problem. Furthermore, the Athenian people had, several years earlier, expressed their confidence in his leadership abilities by voting him supreme commander (Diod. Sic. 13.69.3; Xen. *Hell.* 1.4.20).

Aristophanes also makes stereotyped criticisms of other wealthy citizens with impeccable aristocratic credentials. For example, he makes out that Pericles, a member of the Alcmaeonidae, proposed the Megarian decree, which, the poet suggests, was the cause of the Peloponnesian War, out of consideration, not of the interests of the Athenians, but of the Megarians' theft of two of his mistress's prostitutes (*Ach.* 496-556).⁹⁰ Although the audience presumably laughed at the exaggeration and vulgarity of this explanation for the war, Aristophanes was still accusing Pericles of having behaved in ways which clearly concerned the *dēmos*: he had manipulated public policy at great cost to the community for his own private ends and had been unduly influenced by a woman.⁹¹ Finally, in a series of comedies the prominent citizen Callias, who was a member of the *genos* of the Kerkyes, which furnished one of the two priests for the Eleusinian Mysteries, is ridiculed by Aristophanes for the stereotypical misdemeanours of sexual extravagance, spending on private luxury instead of the public good and dissipating his patrimony (*Av.* 284-6; *Ran.* 429-30; *Eccl.*

⁸⁶ Carey (1994) 72. These late sources are discussed by Moorton (1988) 345-6 with nn. 2, 3.

⁸⁷ Davidson (2007) 446-65.

⁸⁸ Moorton (1988) 349-9.

⁸⁹ Ostwald (1986) 443; Sealey (1976) 376.

⁹⁰ Konstan (2010) 190.

⁹¹ Carey (1994) 80. For proper place of Attic women in popular culture, see Pritchard (2004b).

810).⁹² It would seem, then, that Aristophanes, like the other poets of old comedy, did not pull his punches when it came to mocking or slandering named individuals: he targeted citizens from established families just as readily as he did those who were newly rich or did not belong to a *genos*.⁹³

Another feature of Aristophanic comedy that directly refutes de Ste. Croix's summary of its treatment of leaders is the comic poet's repeated broadcasting of a constant cynicism about all political leaders of the city.⁹⁴ For example, in his plays ambassadors are said to be *alazones* or con-men, who receive exorbitant pay and sumptuous entertainment, while overseas, and dupe the people, upon their return, when they give their reports to the assembly (*Ach.* 65-112, 136-51).⁹⁵ Likewise, while Aristophanes might laud the military leaders of the Persian Wars, he subjects contemporary commanders, either individually or as a class, to savage and often slanderous ridicule.⁹⁶ Such leaders demand high salaries, *sitēsis* or free public dining and front row seats at the theatre (*Ach.* 595-7; *Eq.* 573-6), but in battle they are actually cowards (*Pax* 1188-9), who leave the fighting to the farmers and the elderly (1177-8; *Ach.* 599-602).⁹⁷ Individual politicians as well as public speakers in their entirety are also characterised as self-serving and corrupt by Aristophanes. They too are said to be *alazones* (e.g. *Ach.* 373; *Eq.* 269). The satirical version of Cleon in *Knights* is accused of taking bribes from the allies, stealing state monies, and avoiding the scrutiny of the people by diverting their attention through a needless fanning of the war (716-18, 826-7, 779-80,

⁹² Dover (1993) 249; Sommerstein (1987) 216.

⁹³ Sommerstein puts this beyond doubt with his valuable catalogue of known *kōmodoumenoi* or targets of comic ridicule (1996). In spite of this he continues to defend de Ste. Croix's interpretation of Aristophanes (337 n. 76). As a group, Sommerstein argues, the comic poets still exhibited a clear 'right-wing bias' in those whom they targeted for ridicule (336), for 'while run-of-the-mill comic satire selected its victims fairly impartially, the few political figures singled out for vilification on a grand scale were all on what might be called the Left' (335). Dover, he acknowledges, did not think that the half a dozen politicians who were the subjects of comedies became so as a result of their political orientation, but because they were the most prominent *rhētores* of their day and hence, as public figures whom the audience know extremely well, could be satirised appropriately and much more effectively than others (e.g. Dover (1972) 33-6). But Sommerstein rejects this explanation on the grounds that it cannot account for the poets' selection, for favourable mention, of individuals who opposed the democratic main stream of Athenian politics ((1996) 334-6). The five living Athenians who were so selected were Archeptolemus, Nicias, Ulius, the son of Cimon, Sophocles and Thucydides, the son of Melesias (334). The grounds, however, which he gives for characterising these individuals as 'all opponents of the dominant radical democratic tradition' are unconvincing. Archeptolemus may have been an oligarch in 411, but it does not follow, as Sommerstein concedes with Pisander (335), that he was already one more than a decade earlier, when he was mentioned in passing by Aristophanes (*Eq.* 327, 794). Likewise, just because an individual was a rival of a very successful politician or the son of such a rival does not mean that he was a political conservative. Nicias and Sophocles, it is worth recalling, were repeatedly elected as generals and remained loyal to the *dēmos* to the end of their lives. It does not help Sommerstein's case, finally, that among the three dead Athenians whom the poets of old comedy mentioned favourably was Pericles ((1996) 334). As Sommerstein fails to establish that the comedians' selection of individuals for favourable mention was biased politically, by his own admission there is no reason to reject Dover's alternate explanation for why some politicians more than others were subjected to more sustained ridicule.

⁹⁴ Brock (1991) 160-2; Dover (1972) 34; (1989) 147-8.

⁹⁵ Sommerstein (1996) 328.

⁹⁶ Okál (1960) 109-16.

⁹⁷ For the upper-class background of military commanders and public speakers, see Hansen (1983).

801-4).⁹⁸ Bdelycleon of *Wasps* voices similar charges against politicians in general (650-724): they accept bribes from the allies, defraud the people of most of the imperial revenue and retain the support of the *dēmos* through manipulative rhetoric. Similar charges are also laid against public speakers in *Peace* (632-48, 668-9).

Several prominent scholars of Aristophanes maintain that this jaded depiction of the city's leaders was an articulation of a popular resentment which was not capable of being expressed outside of the theatre of Dionysus where ordinary citizens were supposedly obliged to respect, and to defer to, their superiors.⁹⁹ Comedy, it is certainly true, was exempt from a number of constraints concerning public speech and engaged in popular wish-fulfilment: it was able to disregard prohibitions about slander and conventions pertaining to decency of speech and presented average people overcoming otherwise intractable divine, social or political obstacles in pursuit of a solution to a serious problem affecting themselves or the community.¹⁰⁰ Significantly however, the genre's cynicism about the motives and behaviour of elite leaders does not fall into this category of the carnivalesque expression of otherwise repressed thoughts and desires, because concerns about, and attacks on, leaders, just like the comic poet's negative comments on rich and poor citizens, also happen to be stock topics of forensic and deliberative oratory. Comedy appears, then, simply to have represented, exaggerated and, ultimately, legitimised prevailing elements of Athenian popular culture about the democracy's leaders.

Litigants of the fourth century, like Aristophanes, readily assumed that their predominantly lower-class audience had an innate distrust of politicians and actively pandered to this sentiment.¹⁰¹ For example, one prosecutor urges the jurors to sentence to death a member of the elite who has been convicted of embezzlement and bribe taking to ensure the integrity of the remaining leaders, since this condemnation would make them far more orderly than they are now, whereas an acquittal would make them think that they can deceive and defraud the *dēmos* with impunity (Lys. 27.6-8). Another prosecutor exclaims that today the people support policies that politicians have formulated for their own benefit rather than for the city (18.16-17). Finally, others accuse upper-class leaders of embezzlement or bribe taking (e.g. 21.12-13; Aeschin. 3.259; Din. 1.41-3).

Nevertheless the only citizens with the necessary skills and resources to meet the onerous demands and high risks of political leadership were members of the upper class.¹⁰² It is indeed striking that, in spite of the deep cynicism about the city's leaders on the part of the Athenian *dēmos*

⁹⁸ Pritchard (2010) 42-3.

⁹⁹ E.g. Carey (1994) 72-3, 82; Dover (1972) 31-41; (1974) 299-301; Halliwell (1984) 8, 11-12; Henderson (1998) 260-7, 269; MacDowell (1995) 22; Robson (2009) 181-3.

¹⁰⁰ Old comedy's exemption from legal prohibitions and conventions about slander and obscenity is explored very thoroughly by Halliwell (1991); (1993); (2004); (2008) 215-63. *Contra* Sommerstein (2004).

¹⁰¹ Roisman (2005) 142-5.

¹⁰² Heath (1987) 37; Ober (1989) 112.

and its many prejudices against wealthy citizens, the orators of the fourth century readily assumed that it accepted the need for the city's leaders to be wealthy. We seem to have here another example of contradiction and fracture in Athenian popular culture. Politicians engaged in a broad range of complex activities. They had to develop internal and external policies, be knowledgeable of the administrative structures and financial affairs of the city, propose decrees and amendments to decrees, argue for their proposals in public forums, and fight further political battles in court.¹⁰³ These complex tasks could only be undertaken by the very well educated.¹⁰⁴ But education in classical Athens depended entirely on the resources of individual families.¹⁰⁵ As a consequence, it was only the sons of wealthy citizens who could take lessons in *mousikē*, undertake athletic training, and receive instruction in public speaking, which was obviously a critical skill for any aspirant Athenian politician.¹⁰⁶ The time-consuming nature of the tasks and the duties of political service also required participants to be leisured which was, as we have observed, something that was only open to upper-class citizens.

Fourth-century speakers took it for granted that an important task of the politician was to protect the *dēmos* through the instigation of legal proceedings against other political leaders for illegal proposals and treasonous or corrupt actions (e.g. Din. 1.100-1; Dem. 22.66-7; 24.173-4).¹⁰⁷ However, the legal timidity and weakness of poor Athenians meant that wealthy citizens again were the only ones able to meet this role. With the public expecting politicians to pursue each other through the courts, those following a political career faced the constant threat of prosecution, and conviction in such public trials could result in fines worth thousands of drachmas or even death. This danger made political activism unattractive to everyone except the extremely confident, the legally powerful and those able to withstand the imposition of heavy monetary penalties.¹⁰⁸ Again, it was members of the upper class alone who could brave such risks. That the Athenian populace understood these dangers is made clear by a rhetorical question of Demosthenes (10.70):

Tell me, Aristomedes, why indeed when you knew exactly that the life of private citizens was safe, easygoing and without danger, but that of the politically active was open to censure, perilous and full of daily contestations and misfortunes, why then did you choose not the quiet life but the one surrounded with dangers?

¹⁰³ Kallet-Marx (1994) especially 234-5.

¹⁰⁴ Ober (1989) 115, 182-91; Robb (1994) 125-56, 183.

¹⁰⁵ Pritchard (2003) 313-30; (2009) 216-19.

¹⁰⁶ Yunis (1998).

¹⁰⁷ Ober (1989) 238-9; Perlman (1963) 343.

¹⁰⁸ Sinclair (1988) 138; Winkler (1990) 191-7.

Athenian politicians had not only to be wealthy but also to highlight their affluence and privileged upbringing, for although the citizen masses believed that all politicians were potentially dishonest and corrupt, politicians appearing to be without fortunes, in line with popular sentiments about poverty (see part 1 above), were thought to be far more likely to accept bribes and embezzle state funds, while leaders with newly found fortunes were suspected of having gained their prosperity through such reprehensible means.¹⁰⁹ Finally, ancient historians have long recognised that Demosthenes' denigration of the impoverished background of his political opponent Aeschines in relation to his own affluent and educated childhood (18.256-67; cf. Lys. 16.20-1; 30.28) indicates irrefutably that the Athenian populace did not accept upper-class leaders grudgingly as an unfortunate necessity, but, in fact, hankered after politicians who were well educated and from a wealthy family.¹¹⁰

That the citizen masses of the later fifth century recognised the necessity of upper-class political leadership is strongly suggested by the first exchange between Demosthenes and the Sausage Seller in Aristophanes' *Knights* (147-224), because this humble retailer's incredulity at what Demosthenes proposes and the passage's overall humour are only intelligible, when it is understood that the comic poet is deliberately confounding popular expectations about the qualifications for political leadership.¹¹¹ The comedy begins with the slaves, Nicias and Demosthenes, explaining that a certain Paphlagon has won over their master, Demos of the Pnyx, and now is causing them to be badly treated by their aged owner (1-80). Therefore, when they learn, from an oracle, that the public leadership will pass from the hands of their current oppressor to, of all people, a lowly sausage seller (109-44) and, then, by chance come across such a person (145-7), they direct much effusive but incongruous praise towards him. To the complete amazement of the Sausage Seller (150, 157), Demosthenes hails him as if he were a rich man (150-1, 157).¹¹² He also asserts that this humblest of Athenians will be a 'saviour of the city' and a most powerful leader of the community (158-9). This is too much for the startled seller of small goods: he demands to know why Demosthenes is making fun of him and not allowing him to practise his trade (160-1). Demosthenes abuses him for thinking of such prosaic matters, when he will hold great power in the city and be *anēr megistos* or a very great man (162-78). The Sausage Seller, now more confused than angry, asks how he, as a humble retailer, can, in fact, become an *anēr* (178-9). Demosthenes assures him that he has the necessary qualifications for political leadership, because he is *ponēros*, from the marketplace and audacious (180-1).

¹⁰⁹ Ober (1989) 233-8 with references.

¹¹⁰ E.g. den Boer (1979) 155-7; Perlman (1963) 355.

¹¹¹ Adkins (1978) 155; Heath (1987) 37.

¹¹² With Dover (1974) 174-5.

No doubt shadowing the audience's own response to this reversal of the normal credentials for political leaders, the Sausage Seller bashfully states (182): 'I don't consider myself worthy to hold great power.' Demosthenes is alarmed that he, as the city's leaders are wont to be, might be born from gentlemanly stock (183-5), but the Sausage Seller responds reassuringly that he is sprung *ek ponērōn* (185-6; cf. 331), an origin that is later presented as a baseness of birth (217-18). Nonetheless, the Sausage Seller goes on to protest that he is not sufficiently educated to be a communal leader (188-9): he has not learned *mousikē*, nor knows his letters at all well. Implying that leaders once upon a time did need to be educated, Demosthenes responds that today politicians do not need to meet this criterion (191-3): 'The leadership of the people is no longer a job for an educated man or one of good qualities, but for one who's ignorant and foul.'¹¹³

De Ste. Croix asserts that the use of *ponēros* and *ek ponērōn* to describe the Sausage Seller reveals the political conservatism of Aristophanes on the grounds that such terminology is found in the description of poor citizens by the rabid anti-democrat Pseudo-Xenophon.¹¹⁴ In order to assess this assertion, it must be borne in mind that the adjective *ponēros* is usually employed to denote exclusively some kind of moral deficiency in a person and is far less often taken up to describe poor citizens in a politically partisan fashion where it means something such as 'the wicked masses' or 'the lesser sort'. As Pseudo-Xenophon makes his antipathy to working people and democracy very clear (e.g. 1.1, 6-8), it is to be expected that he repeatedly calls poor Athenians *ponēroi* (e.g. 1.4, 6, 9). Aristophanes, however, does not appear to be using the word in this politically loaded sense. The Sausage Seller is not called 'wicked' by the comic poet, because he is a member of the lower class, but because he is, as every Athenian would have agreed, a morally irredeemable character. Retailers, the group to which the Sausage Seller belongs, were despised for their willingness to cheat customers and were considered to be without moral scruples by the Athenian public.¹¹⁵ Further, this particular retailer could not even afford a stall in the regular market-place, but sold his wares from a tray in a far more disreputable locality: outside the city gates and surrounded by prostitutes and sellers of dog- and ass-meat (*Eq.* 1397-1401).¹¹⁶ If this was not objectionable enough, he readily admits that he steals, swears falsely and had prostituted himself, when a boy (296-7, 1242). Finally, since Athenians assumed that negative as well as positive traits could be inherited from an individual's parents, with the phrase *ek ponērōn* Aristophanes is simply suggesting that the Sausage Seller's immorality was a perverse family legacy.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Translated by Sommerstein.

¹¹⁴ De Ste. Croix (1972) 358; cf. Okál (1960) 104-5.

¹¹⁵ Ehrenberg (1951) 114-15; Mossé (1983).

¹¹⁶ With Sommerstein (1983) 208.

¹¹⁷ Dover (1974) 92-5; Ober (1989) 250-1.

De Ste. Croix maintains that the ‘political and social terminology’ of the famous *parabasis* of *Frogs* (718-35) also bears out the political conservatism of Aristophanes.¹¹⁸ Aristophanes here explicitly criticises the people’s choice of political leaders and seems to advise them seriously about what kind of politicians they should actually employ. The chorus draw an analogy between the city’s treatment of the *kaloi te k’agathoi* among the citizens and its coinage (718-20).¹¹⁹ Instead of using the finest of coins, they now work with *tois ponērois khalkiois* or wicked bronze coins (721-6), since they maltreat those citizens whom they know to be well born, moderate (*sōphronas*), just, gentlemanly and educated in wrestling schools, dancing and *mousikēn* (721-6). Instead, the chorus laments (730-3), ‘We use copper coins that are foreigners, red-haired Thracian slaves, wicked men sprung from men wicked in everything (*ponērois k’ak ponērōn eis apanta*), the latest arrivals, whom the city, in former times, would not even have taken as scapegoats.’ They advise the audience, finally, to change their ways and to employ ‘good and useful men’ as leaders (735).

Certainly, on first reading, this strident criticism of the people’s choice of leaders, and not just the passage’s terminology on which de Ste. Croix concentrates, do seem to evince a political conservatism on the part of Aristophanes. But three considerations speak again such an interpretation. Firstly, few in the audience would have disagreed with the poet’s explanation of who should and should not be the city’s politicians. As the passage just considered from *Knights* and fourth-century oratory demonstrate, the Athenian *dēmos* thought it essential for political leaders to be well educated and established members of the upper class. Furthermore, nobody would have denied that leaders should be *sōphrōn* and so free of the elite misdemeanours of *hubris* and extravagance, nor that politicians be just and upstanding. It was unthinkable, moreover, that Athenians would prefer a leader who was foreign, morally bankrupt, a slave and a ritually impure scapegoat. The uncontentious nature of these sentiments, not to mention the farcical characterisation of contemporary leaders, are not what is to be expected of a poet who is supposed to be a vocal political conservative. Secondly, criticisms of the citizen’s choice of leaders and the quality of contemporary politicians were, in fact, comic clichés, regularly made by many poets throughout the later fifth and early fourth centuries, and were eagerly expected by the audience. Aristophanes himself makes these complaints in several other plays. For example, in *Assembly-Women* Praxagora complains that the Athenians employ *ponēroi* (clearly used in an exclusively moral sense) as champions of the people (176-8) and shun men who actually want to serve them (180-2); in *Birds* Poseidon bemoans the standard of ambassadors chosen by the democracy of the gods (1570-1); and in *Knights* today’s generals are said to be inferior to those of yesteryear (573-6).

¹¹⁸ De Ste. Croix (1972) 358.

¹¹⁹ Ostwald (1986) 433.

These criticisms, finally, were not made by comedians alone; if we can make the reasonable assumption that the surviving forensic and deliberative speeches of the fourth century are a useful guide to the oratory of the previous century, they were, then, standard elements in the public discourse of the fifth-century democracy.¹²⁰ The leaders of ancient Athens, speakers asserted, were brave and patriotic, or prudent and self-controlled, but those of today, like their opponents whom they seek to discredit, are base and knavish (e.g. Din. 1.37-40; Dem. 58.62; Aeschin. 3.181-2). Speakers also explicitly reproached the people for choosing leaders who were so far below the standard of the past (e.g. Lys. 30.28; Dem. 18.138). Likewise, comedy's allegation that a politician was not a citizen was, in fact, a stock element of oratory (e.g. Dem. 18.21, 114; 22.68).¹²¹ Therefore, the critical comments on modern leaders and the people's choice of them in *Frogs* would not have been received by the audience as a serious and partisan criticism of democracy, but as the standard complaints of poets and public speakers alike. Indeed the humour of this passage rests on the fact that it both makes the absurd suggestion that the *dēmos* prefers Thracian slaves to gentleman as their champions and that it subjects commonplaces which were most frequently evoked by orators to comic parody and hyperbole.

3. That Exclusive British Quality

Nonetheless they do not allow anyone to ridicule the people in comedy and to speak ill of them, in order that they themselves are not spoken ill of. But they encourage anyone, if they want, to ridicule private individuals in comedy, since they well know that he who is ridiculed in comedy for the most part belongs not to the people nor the masses, but is rich, well born or powerful. Yet a few of the poor and the common men are ridiculed in comedy, and not even these unless it is because of their meddlesomeness and desire to have more than the people, so that they are not concerned that such men are ridiculed in comedy.

[Xen.] *Constitution of the Athenians* 2.18

Prominent scholars of old comedy have presumed there to be a measure of accuracy in this summary of comic ridicule and hence have employed it as evidence to support each of their own interpretations of the history of classical Athenian theatre.¹²² This presupposition, however, appears to be quite unsafe, as the Danish scholar Frisch incisively appreciated over half a century ago, in light of this author's patently confused and incorrect statements about several other important aspects of Athenian civic life and the highly polemical and politically partisan character of his

¹²⁰ Ober (1989) 288, 320.

¹²¹ Halliwell (1984) 16; (1997) 232-3; Ober (1989) 236.

¹²² E.g. Carey (1994) 74; Henderson (1990) 288, 301; (1998) 261, 265; Sommerstein (1996) 332.

treatise.¹²³ It is far safer to approach this author with a large measure of scepticism and to seek corroboration or refutation of his comments in other primary sources or in independent assessment of the issues at hand. The overall claim of this passage, moreover, that the Athenian *dēmos* allowed ridicule of elite individuals, but not of itself, instead of being corroborated, is largely refuted by the evidence of Aristophanic comedy. Aristophanes did not confine his ridicule to upper-class Athenians, but engaged as well in a robust treatment of the Athenian people, which ranged from fleeting and direct abuse of the spectators through to extended parody of the people in their judicial and deliberative capacities.

The most sustained satire of the *dēmos* by Aristophanes unfolds in *Knights*, for which the playwright received the first prize in the comic competition at the Lenaea of 424. In this play the people are personified as the character Demos from the fantastic deme of the Pnyx, that is, the hill upon which the assembly met, and two of his slaves outline his most unbecoming personal traits (40-3): he is a grumpy, hard-of-hearing, little old man, who is uncouth and irritable when angry. This representation of the *dēmos* might, in fact, be a take on a prevailing popular personification of the people as a mature citizen.¹²⁴ However, whereas the city probably chose such a representation to highlight the people's possession of wisdom, which was a trait typically linked with maturity, Aristophanes attributes his Demos with a very different bed fellow of old age, namely senility (e.g. *Eq.* 752-5, 1099, 1349). The decrepit state of the old man's deliberative capacities is clearly exposed in the final oratorical contest on the Pnyx between Paphlagon and the Sausage Seller (763-1203), in which the former's total hold over Demos can only be broken by the latter when he takes over his opponent's *alazoneia* or con-man ways (888-9, 903). Demos is not swayed by rational debate, but by wildly inappropriate and ever-increasing protestations of love, gifts of trinkets, clothes and food, unrealistic promises of the expansion of his dominion, patently trivial accusations of conspiracy, and oracles that laud him in overblown epic language. This debate also confirms the allegations which have been laid against Paphlagon throughout the play, namely that he has been deceiving the *dēmos* through flattery and bombastic denunciations of others, while all the time stealing from him and receiving bribes from the allies (e.g. 1195-7, 1224-6).

¹²³ For his misleading comments about, for example, the extent of lower-class participation in athletics and choral contests, see Pritchard (2003) 324-5; (2004a). Frisch is exasperated at earlier commentators imprudently embracing this passage from Pseudo-Xenophon ((1942) 279): 'The whole treatise teems with exaggerated assertions of the very kind known from the political platform. But then why interpret this passage as if it was a piece of the history of the Attic theatre, whereas it is a sneering derision of the lauded liberty of speech?' Ceccarelli questions the objectivity of his treatise on the grounds that it is a text which is strongly coloured politically and suggests that it is necessary to establish historical reality with the help of other sources ((1993) 446). Similarly Harding judges Pseudo-Xenophon a 'tormented outsider', whose 'distorted viewpoint' must be rejected ((1981) 41). His reliability decreases further if we accept the argument of Hornblower that his treatise is 'a fourth-century work about the fifth-century Athenian democracy and empire, which the author pretends are still in existence; that it is in fact a clever (if clumsily written), ludic work of imaginative fiction which perhaps belongs to the genre of literature associated with the symposion or ritualized drinking session' ((2000) 361). Osborne (2004) 13-14, however, casts doubt on this reading of Hornblower.

¹²⁴ Cartledge (1990) 47-48; cf. Brock (1991) 34-5.

The cutting nature of this satire makes it tempting to agree with de Ste. Croix that such barbs would not have been ‘the least funny, except of course to a member of the upper class.’¹²⁵ Finally, it seems, we may have proof of the conservatism of the poet and an actual attempt on his part to undermine the confidence and power of the *dēmos* through political satire. Again, however, such a reading founders on a crucial aspect of dramatic production at Athens: the victors of theatrical competitions were chosen in the main by the way in which the mass of the audience responded to their plays. Athenian playwrights, therefore, were compelled to bear in mind the values of their demotic audience and the expectations which it held for the content of the genre in which they worked. Consequently, if Aristophanes satirises the *dēmos*, this does not evince the poet’s upper-class hauteur, as de Ste. Croix suggests, but instead that the citizens of imperial Athens, as Forrest quaintly suggests, ‘shared the supposedly exclusive British quality of being able to laugh at themselves’.¹²⁶ This satire of the Athenians as a whole can also be understood as another example, by no means unexpected, of the combative contrariness of comedy. The comedians of the fifth century, after all, attacked the gods, magistrates, politicians, and all other poets of the city.¹²⁷ The people, then, were simply another target against which the comic poets could rage.

The appreciation by the spectators of Aristophanic mockery of themselves is demonstrated in the repetition of satirical motifs evident in *Knights* throughout the poet’s corpus, and in the variety of the types of abuse directed towards the audience.¹²⁸ This highly successful comic poet would not have repeated these wisecracks, nor engaged in ridicule on such a broad front, if such efforts were greeted with a stony silence from the serried ranks of the auditorium. Aristophanes turns to the ideas of the *dēmos* being deceived by self-seeking orators, and of it displaying stupidity in legal or political matters, not only in *Knights*, but, as we have seen, in *Acharnians*, *Wasps* and *Peace* as well (see part 2 above). In addition to these ideas, most plays by Aristophanes are built on the less than flattering ‘comic stereotype’ that the citizens, through mismanagement of the city’s affairs, have created a predicament that can only be solved by extraordinary measures.¹²⁹ Thus in *Acharnians*, *Wasps* and *Birds* the situation is so bad that individuals must withdraw from the public realm or escape from Athens; in *Lysistrata* and *Assembly-Women* Attic women are forced to take over the city and solve the mess left by their husbands; and in *Knights*, *Wealth* and *Frogs* still more far-fetched solutions are needed.

Aristophanes also catered to his audience’s penchant for being ridiculed by having participants of his plays abuse the spectators directly. The choruses of many *parabaseis* explicitly

¹²⁵ De Ste. Croix (1972) 362.

¹²⁶ Forrest (1986) 233; cf. Dover (1993) 71; Heath (1987) 21-4; Revermann (2006) 102.

¹²⁷ Sommerstein (1996).

¹²⁸ Bowie (1993) 14-15.

¹²⁹ Heath (1987) 22.

censure the audience for misdemeanours of a ridiculous nature. For example, in *Acharnians* the old men blame the city for their ill treatment in the law-courts (676-8); and in *Clouds* the chorus of clouds reprimand the audience for not honouring them sufficiently (575-94; cf. *Vesp.* 1015-50). Another commonplace of the poet's abusive relationship with the audience is for characters of a play to focus momentarily on the spectators and to discover that they are all retrogrades: in *Clouds*, for instance, Stronger Argument is startled to discover that there are many passive homosexuals in the audience (1098-9); in *Frogs* Dionysus recognises perjurers and father-beaters among the crowd (274-6); and in *Assembly-Women* Blepyrus and Chremes turn to the spectators and agree that they are indeed rogues, thieves and sycophants (434-40; cf. *Pax* 54-5, 821-3).

Comedy's ridicule of the massed audience both took up, and confounded, several established elements of Athenian popular culture. This genre's repeated representation of a *dēmos* which is deceived by cheating upper-class leaders was, as we seen, an exaggerated dramatisation of the Athenian public's worst fears about the loyalty and honesty of upper-class politicians. Indeed this constant presentation of leaders on the take in one sense helped to undergird the *kratos* or power of the people, for it encouraged thousands of ordinary citizens, after they had left the theatre, to scrutinise the performance of upper-class leaders and magistrates even more closely.¹³⁰ However, contrary to the suggestion of several contemporary scholars, comedy was not the main conduit for this forewarning of possible elite misbehaviour.¹³¹ This popular anxiety was evoked and substantiated on a far more regular and frequent basis in the forensic and deliberative speeches of private and public citizens who sought to blacken the character of their opponents in the eyes of the mass audience. Athenian citizens, then, encountered articulations and elaborations of this cynicism far more regularly in the assembly, council and law-courts than in the theatre of Dionysus.

In confirmation of the assertion of Isocrates (8.14), finally, that comedians tended to treat their audience far more roughly than public speakers, the presentation by Aristophanes of the people as stupid and gullible and as having completely hashed up the affairs of the city directly contradicts two fundamental assumptions of Athenian popular culture, namely that collective decision making is superior to that of individuals and that the *dēmos* usually make the correct decisions about public affairs.¹³² The humour of this unbecoming representation of the Athenian populace, along with that of the suggestion that the audience was no more than a bunch of criminals, derived from the fact that the massed spectators knew these claims to be completely baseless and slanderous. And since obscenity, mockery, abuse and release from societal constraints were hallmarks of the other forms of classical Athenian worship of Dionysus, such as the procession, revel and satyr play, this

¹³⁰ Zumbrunnen (2004).

¹³¹ E.g. Henderson (1990) 312-13; Redfield (1990) 331.

¹³² For these assumptions, see Hansen (1991) 207; Ober (1989) 156-7 – both with references.

aiskhrologia ('shameful speech') on the part of the comic poets was no doubt considered by the Athenian spectators to be entirely fitting for performances which were themselves an integral part of festivals in honour of this bibulous god of otherness.¹³³

4. Conclusion

This article has systematically reviewed and found wanting each of the four considerations which de Ste. Croix brought forward to evidence the supposed political conservatism of Aristophanes. Firstly, this comedian did not, as de Ste. Croix asserts, use 'political and social terminology' in the same manner as unambiguous critic of the Athenian democracy, Pseudo-Xenophon, but drew instead on a sociological model and a vocabulary for morality, class and politics which were actually accepted by the citizen masses. Secondly, it has emerged, on closer analysis, that Aristophanes was not biased in favour of any one group of political leaders, but subjected every type of leading citizen to slander and abuse, and repeatedly articulated and reinforced the popular cynicism about leaders in their entirety. Thirdly, de Ste. Croix's assertion that Aristophanes only ever presents wealthy citizens in a positive light has been shown to be almost completely inaccurate, as the comic poet's treatment of this social class was not only overwhelmingly negative but also perfectly in tune with Athenian popular culture. Finally, it has been demonstrated that the mockery, abuse and satire of the demotic audience by Aristophanes was, contrary to what de Ste. Croix claims, greatly enjoyed by the vast majority of theatre goers, and considered by them to be entirely appropriate for a genre of popular literature which was heavily implicated in the city's worship of Dionysus.

Clearly this surprisingly influential reading of Aristophanes lacks evidence in its support. Hence it does not prevent us from deducing from this comic poet's constant representations of political discourse and the performance-dynamic which he faced that his surviving plays are valuable evidence for Athenian popular culture. Admittedly, Aristophanes did more than employ perceptions, prejudices and anxieties of the lower class as the axes of his jokes and fantasies. For the sake of sustaining laughter he regularly created scenarios in which they were wildly exaggerated or manifestly confounded. Thus as a source for cultural history he must be read judiciously and, if

¹³³ Halliwell (2008) 215-63. For *aiskhrologia* and the other social inversions which were the standard forms of worshipping Dionysus, see Easterling (1997); Parker (2005) 290-326.

there is doubt, compared to the oratory, which treated popular assumptions in a more straightforward manner. As long as we do so, however, his surviving comedies clearly help us to correct the fourth-century bias in the historiography of Athenian popular culture and to answer the important question of the extent to which there was cultural continuity in the decades during and after the Peloponnesian War.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Versions of this article were delivered as papers to a range of audiences at Macquarie University, The University of Queensland and the University of Texas at Austin. I thank the audiences for their feedback and Tom Hubbard for kindly facilitating my visit to the University of Texas at Austin in 2008. For their comments on earlier drafts or discussion with me of the challenges of using old comedy as evidence I remain deeply indebted to David Konstan, Marcel L. Lech, the late Kevin Lee, David J. Phillips and Kurt A. Raaflaub. I acknowledge, finally, the helpful suggestions of this journal's two anonymous referees and the outstanding research assistance of Murray Kane. The translations of the Greek are my own, unless it is indicated otherwise.

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