CHAPTER 20

Aristophanes

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In the previous volume of this series, I described the use of space in Aristophanes as 'labile',[1] and a similar quality is to be found in his treatment of character. Basically, consistency of characterization comes a distant second to its use for purposes of humour and, more importantly, analysis of the themes of the play. In the last two plays, things change dramatically.

Masks

This shifting characterization means that features such as masks, costume and naming can offer only the broadest hints about the main characters, marking them as old or young, man or woman, rich or poor, slave etc., though they may encapsulate better the minor players. Uncertainty about the precise nature of masks in the fifth century means we cannot go very far in our speculations about this matter.[2] Reference to the mask of a character is limited to *Knights* 229–232, about Paphlagon:[3]

> don't be afraid: they haven't given him his own appearance, because none of the property-makers (*skeuopoioi*) wanted to represent him—they're afraid. He'll be perfectly recognisable however: the audience aren't fools.

The passage could very reasonably be taken to suggest that historical figures would normally have had a portrait-mask,[4] which would have raised certain

1 *SAGN* 3: 359.
2 Though see Wiles 2008 for discussion of how we should conceive the role of masks in Old Comedy. For a collection of ancient evidence, see Stone 1981: 19–59; for discussion, Dover [1967] 1987c: 267–278 (Dover's idea that Cleon had no distinguishing features and so a mask could not be made is demolished by Cratinus, *PGC* 228, as noted on p. 278).
3 Cf. also *Ach.* 1069–1070, of a Messenger, 'with his eye-brows puckered up as one with a striking message'. When in *Birds* the two men comment abusively on each other's appearance after their transformation, they are doing little more than exchanging insults (805–806).
4 So the later tradition, e.g. Pollux 4.143; scholia on *Kn.* 230–233; Platonius, *Diff. Com.* 69–81; see further Stone 1981: 31–38; Dover [1967] 1987c: 267–278.

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expectations, though the case of Socrates[5] in *Clouds*, who has characteristics which did not belong to the real person, shows that no simple mimesis of character was to be expected. One might think that fixed masks would have sat awkwardly with the labile nature of Old-Comedy characters, were it not for the fact that personal experience and cognitive research show that the human brain can endow masks with varying facial expressions.[6] Paradoxically then, one could say that the expression on masks does not only partially determine an audience's view of a character but is also determined by the other stimuli offered by that character and the play as a whole.[7]

Costume

The texts tell us more about dress.[8] This can be used simply as a short-hand to characterize, say, a poorly dressed Poet (*Birds* 915) or a self-important Inspector ('who's this Sardanapallus?', *Birds* 1021). It cannot easily play a part in representing changes of character, so that radical changes of character are marked by actual changes of costume: Demus is boiled and dressed as an ancient Athenian, when he has been freed from the domination of Paphlagon and embarks on a more sensible political course (*Knights* 1316–1334); the new youthfulness of Philocleon, now liberated from the courts, is marked by his dropping of Athenian dress in favour of Persian and Spartan (*Wasps* 1122–1173); and Pisetaerus and Euelpides don bird-costumes (*Birds* 801–808) for their newfound control of their city.

Disguise by costume is used in varying ways. The character who spends longest in disguise is 'Mnesilochus' in *Thesmophoriazusae*, shaved and dressed like a woman to infiltrate the festival. This enables him to take on a character that does not represent any significant change in nature, but produces a figure who plays adequately the role of a woman at the festival, but also purveys a comic male view of women as rather less moral beings than they (or indeed Euripides) are prepared to admit (see his speech at 466–519 and 544–572). In

5 On the characterization of historical figures, cf. Stark 2004: 287–315; Ruffell 2011: 48–52.

6 Cf. Meineck 2011.

7 So e.g. Wiles 2008: 386, of the figure of Mnesilochus on the Würzburg Vase: 'this face is flexible enough to be read in relation to three interlocking identities, the woman at a sacrificial ritual, the shaven-headed in-law of Euripides, and the hero Telephus. The eyes and mouth bespeak fear and threat in equal measure'.

8 See Stone 1981: 267–397; also Robson 2005.

this case, the disguise is used more to generate comedy about women than to mark a change in the nature of Mnesilochus.

Similarly, Dicaeopolis adopts Telephus' rags in order to make himself even more pathetic and persuasive before the Chorus.[9] The ploy seems to work, in that he eventually wins the Chorus over and gets away with abusive treatment of Lamachus, but there is no great change in his nature when he is or is not 'disguised'. If Telephus is used here to generate sympathy for Dicaeopolis, then it is significant that at the end of the play it is Lamachus to whom Telephan features attach: like Telephus he is wounded by a vine-prop, but Dicaeopolis refuses to play the role of Telephus' healer Achilles. The change is again less about the character's nature as such and more about changing the audience's perception of the character's moral status.

For Agathon in *Thesmophoriazusae*, costume and character are inextricably linked. Asked why he is dressed as a woman, he replies: 'I wear clothes that suit my intention (*gnōmē*). A poet must align his character (*tropoi*) to the play he has to write, so if he's writing a women-play, his bodily form (*sōma*) must partake of their characteristics (*tropoi*)' (148–152). As we shall see, if we substitute 'dramatic character' for 'poet', this almost sums up the nature of Aristophanes' highly labile mode of characterization: the character will take on whatever guise is needed for the play and its thematic analysis.

Finally, in *Frogs*, Dionysus is dressed in a mixture of Heracles and himself, as shown by Heracles' words, 'I can't suppress my laughter, when I see a lion-skin put on over a saffron robe!' (45–46). In part, of course, this bizarre combination has the practical purpose of allowing him to imitate Heracles' journey to Hades, but the contradictory nature of his garb also prepares for the way that in the play there is uncertainty about his identity: he changes clothes with Xanthias when he thinks it will advance his cause, and Aeacus has to conduct a trial to see which of the two is the god;[10] though he is several times surrounded by aspects of Dionysiac cult, most notably the Eleusinian Initiates (316–459),[11] he shows no recognition of the fact. It is not said if or when Dionysus doffs his lion-skin, but the parabasis seems a likely time; in any case, it is not wanted when, at the end of the play, he makes (if somewhat serendipitously) the 'right' choice and takes Aeschylus back to save the city.[12] The simplifying of his dress marks his return to the status of god of drama.

9 Interestingly, they make no comment at all about this change.

10 Cf. Goldhill 1991: 201–222.

11 Cf. Segal 1961; Bowie 1993: 237–238.

12 For this change in Dionysus, see Lada-Richards 1998; also Habash 2002.

Names

Though many of Aristophanes' names[13] are 'speaking' names,[14] they too can give only a basic sense of what a character may be like. Some indeed are not especially significant: in *Birds*, Euelpides ('Goodhope') is not notably more hopeful than Pisetaerus ('Trustyfriend'). Philocleon ('Cleon-lover') and Bdelycleon ('Cleon-hater') are transparent enough, as is Strepsiades ('Twister'). The nature of the Paphlagonian is immediately suggested by the echo of the verb *paphlazō* 'boil, seethe', recalling Homer's *kumata paphlazonta* 'boiling waves'; the tricksiness of Pseudartabas ('False Measure') is immediately announced by his name; and Praxagora indeed 'gets things done in the Agora'. Some names may carry special freight. Lysistrata does indeed 'disband armies' but, if Athena's priestess Lysimache lurks behind her name,[15] this reinforces the idea of a character who will be the city's benefactress. If Pisetaerus, 'persuader of his *hetairoi*', has echoes of the tyrant Pisistratus, it acts as an early indication of his final rise to tyranny, even if he is far from such a figure at the start.[16] There is, however, one case where a real person seems to get his character from his name rather than reality, Lamachus in *Acharnians*. He was a successful general, but his career and his involvement in the signing of the peace treaty in 421 suggest his characterization as the embodiment of war has less to do with any real character and more with the fact that his name is comically analysable as a compound of the rare intensive suffice *la-*, as found in 664 *lakatapugōn* 'a total pathic', and *makhomai* 'fight', so 'one much given to fighting'.[17]

The moment of revelation of a name can introduce a key facet of the play: Lysistrata is named in *Lysistrata* 6 with her peace plan soon following, and Paphlagon is marked as the cause of the trouble at the start of Demosthenes' narrative in *Knights* 44.[18] It may also mark a significant moment in the development of the plot, as when Strepsiades reveals to the Student his name and

13 See especially Olson 1992.

14 See generally Kanavou 2010.

15 See Lewis 1955; against, Henderson 1987: xxxviii–xl. For the fame of Lysimache, see Frazer on Paus. 1.27.5.

16 See Kanavou 2010: 105–107 for discussion of the name and meaning.

17 Cf. 1071 *makhai kai Lamakhoi*, 1080 *polemolamakhaïkon*; the boy who can sing only war-songs is son of Lamachus (*Peace* 1272–1294).

18 His 'real' identity as Cleon is then revealed by the references to leather (*burs*-words at 44, 47, 59, 104, 136, 139, 197, 203, 209, 369, 740, 852, and 892), and theft of the bread-cake at Pylos (54–57). This identity is acknowledged very late in the play, at 976.

rustic origins on entering the Phrontisterion (*Clouds* 134, 138), or Trygaeus at *Peace* 190 reveals to Hermes his name and the reason for his journey.

However, that names are not so significant as indicators of character is corroborated by the fact they can be revealed in some cases not only after the salient characteristics of a figure have been made clear, but even quite late in the play. Philocleon and Bdelycleon are named in *Wasps* 133–134, as the action is about to begin, but by then we have a very clear account at least of the former's character, and 'Philocleon' does not prepare us for his kaleidoscopic nature. For Dicaeopolis's name we have to wait until *Acharnians* 406, when he visits Euripides, by which time his early character is well established, and for Pisetaerus' and Euelpides' even longer, until *Birds* 644–645, when Tereus welcomes them into his home.[19] The Sausage-seller's actual name is revealed to be 'Agoracritus' only at *Knights* 1257, at the very moment of his triumph and accession as Demus' protector. This case, and the fact that Euripides' relative can spend the whole of *Thesmophoriazusae* without a name, are the clearest indications that names are not one of the most important ways of indicating character.[20]

Finally, in some cases, things are reversed as it were, and it is character that gives names to figures. The two slaves in *Wasps* are not named, but the reference to the 'stealing of a cake' from Pylos (54–57) suggests that one is Demosthenes, and the timidity and abstemiousness of the other points to Nicias,[21] whose command at Pylos Cleon took over, claiming Nicias has been too inactive.[22]

Direct Characterization and Indirection

As may be expected in drama, direct characterization is often found before the entry of a major figure, especially so in the prologues and just before the

19 For this motif, cf. Olson 1992: 308 n. 15.

20 It is possible of course that names were revealed at the Proagon, but we do not know: 'there is no reason to believe that a detailed description of the action of the play was required. The fact that the actors appeared unmasked, in fact, argues strongly against this interpretation of the ceremony' (Olson 1992: 306 n. 10). Only a small proportion of the audience would have been present then anyway.

21 For Nicias' cautiousness, cf. e.g. Cleon's accusations of cowardice in Th. 4.27–28, his caution over the Sicilian expedition (id. 6.8.4, 25.1, 71, 97; Plu. *Nic.* 16.8–9), and Aristophanes' *mellonikian* 'dither like Nicias' (*Birds* 639); for his dislike of parties, cf. Plu. *Nic.* 5.1.

22 A sensible discussion in MacDowell 1995: 86–87. On naming of contemporaries, see Olson 1992: 316–318.

introduction of some choruses. The prologues of *Knights*, *Wasps* and *Peace* are the only extended examples of narration used for characterization. Here again, however, we find that the explicit characterization does not necessarily give the full picture and there is regular use of 'indirection', whereby the audience is sometimes made to expect a particular type of character but things turn out to be more complex.[23]

It is in this 'indirection' that we encounter the major feature of Aristophanic characterization: his figures are extraordinarily volatile and inconsistent, adopting a wide-ranging series of characteristics which are not accommodatable in any 'realistic' model. The best account of this aspect is that of Silk.[24] He proposes the term 'recreative' for this type of characterization, which he sees as having two advantages:

> specifically, because Aristophanic people have (or are given) the capacity to recreate themselves anew; and generally, because the label tends to suggest that these people do enjoy some relationship with 'reality', but a less straightforward one than the mimetic relationship implied by 'realist'.[25]

In the prologues, Aristophanes has two techniques: the protagonist is either present, alone or with another, and reveals their own character, or absent and other figures provide the description. The first technique is seen in its simplest form in *Lysistrata*. The seriousness and concern for the city that characterizes Lysistrata is immediately visible in the way she alone has turned up on time, scorns the sexual innuendos of the other women and orchestrates the whole scheme.[26] This essentially serious nature then accompanies her throughout the play.

Elsewhere, the initial characterization proves not to be the main feature of the figure, but a sort of 'blind' which throws the main aspect into relief: the defeating of the expectations raised by the earlier scenes makes the true plot all the more striking. The salient characteristics of the protagonist are then sometimes introduced by a claim to have come up with a solution to

23 This aspect of characterization can be lost in too typological an analysis of Aristophanes' figures, as in Sifakis 1992: 133–136.

24 Silk 2000: 207–255 (a revision of Silk 1990). See also Dover 1972: 59–65. For linguistic discontinuity, cf. Dover [1976] 1987b; del Corno 1997; Willi 2003, 2014: 175–185; also McClure 1999: 205–259.

25 Silk 2000: 221.

26 This is not to say she is entirely without humour: see Ruffell 2011: 58–60.

whatever problem they face. Thus Strepsiades begins *Clouds* with complaints about the war, his slaves, his son and his debts (1–24), but while the debts are the mainspring of the plot, this does not prepare us for the fact that the main comic aspect of the play is that he spends most of it attempting to cope with the intricacies of philosophy. The shift to this new topic is very sudden, marked by 'I've found a devilishly clever short-cut' (*Clouds* 75–76). However, if we expect a demonstration of the sort of intelligence that has come up with such a clever wheeze, we will be disappointed, as Strepsiades demonstrates nothing but deep stupidity when he enters the school. There are then further changes, which we shall discuss below.

A similar sudden revelation introduces Dicaeopolis' plan for a private treaty with Sparta: 'I'm going to carry out a great and amazing deed' (*Ach.* 128). He begins by discoursing on various theatrical and musical pains that he has suffered, before we discover that this is merely a priamel leading to his disappointment with the city's political behaviour. He presents himself as a poor farmer and the sole man in the city with its welfare at heart. The impression in the early part of the play is largely positive, as Dicaeopolis tries hard, if not entirely successfully, to make the assembly see how it is being duped, treats Amphitheus much more humanely than the officials and has a warming scene with his family at his Rural Dionysia (237–279). The audience's sympathy is further piqued by his adoption of the tattered clothes of Telephus, the most wretched of all Euripides' ragged heroes (393–489), and by his measured discussion of the blame to be attached to Athenians and Spartans in the war, which wins over half of the Acharnians (496–572). His discomfiting of Lamachus adds to this picture of a fine defender of peace over war (566–625). However that picture changes radically once he has set up his personal state.[27] His treatment of the Megarian's daughters is frankly little short of child-abuse (729–835); his treatment of another countryman, Dercetes, who like him has suffered in the war, is something of a shock (1018–1047); and his refusal to share his success with anyone except a wife who wishes to stymie the city's war-effort by keeping her husband from the battle-line may be amusing, but shows little concern for his former fellow-citizens (1048–1070): 'this man has discovered great pleasure in his treaty, but it doesn't look as if he is going to share it with anyone', as the Chorus say (1037–1039). We may laugh at his second discomfiting of Lamachus (1071–1143), but Lamachus is now on his way to defend Athens from attack, and scarcely deserves the mockery. One feels that the justice of Dicaeopolis' new state leaves something to be desired.

27 Cf. Bowie 1993: 32–35.

The technique is similar in the case of Pisetaerus. He and Euelpides begin the play hopelessly lost in the countryside, following the instructions of apparently incompetent birds: 'isn't it terrible that here we are wanting to go to the dogs and having made our preparations, but we can't find the way?' (27–29). He cannot cope with Athenian life and its incessant law-courts (40–41), and is seeking a 'place without *pragmata*' (44), where life is all pleasure. Everything seems to point to a comedy about the kind of idyllic never-never land suitable for such ne'er-do-wells, where for instance food appears automatically, as in plays such as Cratinus' *Pluti* or Teleclides' *Amphictyons*. Again, the transition comes out of the blue: when Tereus is recounting the pleasures of the birds' life, Pisetaerus suddenly bursts out 'Ah! I can see a grand design for the race of birds, and future power, if you do what I say' (162–163), and gives the birds the advice, 'establish a single city' (172). From this moment on, the former no-hoper takes control of the action and we do indeed get a never-never land, but one which is much more sinister in nature than expected, with its terrifying armies, its expulsion of any characters who might trammel its power, the deposing of the Olympian gods and the assumption of total tyrannical power by Pisetaerus.

In the second technique, the protagonist is kept off-stage and other characters, often slaves, provide the description; this has the advantage of building up suspense until the dramatic arrival of the protagonist. The protagonist is described in extreme terms: in *Knights*, Demus is said to be 'rustic in temperament, a bean-chewer, short-tempered … a difficult old man, half-deaf' (41–43). In *Wasps* and *Peace*, madness is at the heart of the characterization: Philocleon 'is suffering from the strangest disease' (*Wasps* 71–90); Trygaeus 'is mad in a novel fashion' (*Peace* 54).[28] The madnesses mark the protagonists out as somehow affected by divine or demonic forces (Bdelycleon uses the standard procedures to try to cure his father),[29] and prepare us for the larger than life or even superhuman feats they will perform, be it freedom from all human restraints, bringing peace or securing universal prosperity. In *Wasps* and *Peace*, the full extent of the madness is made clear when the protagonist arrives, as Philocleon makes manic attempts to escape through the smoke-hole, the door, under a donkey and so on, and Trygaeus appears triumphantly on his somewhat unsteady beetle. In a variation, Demus is held back for several hundred lines.

28 In *Wealth*, Carion says of Chremylus that 'wise [Apollo] has sent my master away in a melancholy madness' (*Wealth* 11–12), but Chremylus is already on stage.

29 On madness and the divine, cf. Parker 1983: 243–248.

But here again we come up against indirection: the characteristic suggested in these prologues does not turn out in any simple way to be *the* characteristic of the figure. Despite his off-stage shouting at Zeus, Trygaeus is hardly mad once he has ridden his beetle to heaven, and though Philocleon has his wild moments, for much of the time he is relatively sane; both also go through a number of transformations as the plot proceeds.

Demus is more problematic. When he appears (728), he is suitably cantankerous and concerned about Paphlagon, but very soon starts to warm to the Sausage-seller and to see evidence of Paphlagon's deception; he decides where the competition between the two will take place, despite Paphlagon's desperate pleas that they not use the Pnyx (751–752); and there is more of the aged old man than of the tough bean-chewer in the pleasure he takes in the gifts and services the men bring him. That the play will end with Paphlagon's defeat is obvious, but this unexpected alienation from Paphlagon enables the audience to savour the gradual development towards it.

The surprise comes when the Chorus tell Demus that he has an enviable power to make all fear him, but that he is too easily led and deceived (1111–1120). His reply is that he knows what he is doing, and likes to 'nourish a thieving protector (*prostatēs*) and, when he's filled himself, seize him and strike him down' (1127–1130; cf. 1141–1150). Since Paphlagon is third in a sequence of such *prostatai*, this is perhaps a justifiable claim, but it becomes more problematic when, after his transformation, Agoracritus reveals to him how foolish he used to be, and Demus says 'I had no idea … Was I really such a silly old man? … I'm ashamed of my earlier mistakes' (1347, 1349, 1355). It is hard to negotiate this glaring contradiction,[30] and hard too not to think that here we do have a case where character is determined by story.[31] There is greater pathos and power in the scene since, if Demus was as much in control as he claimed earlier, there would be no real need for a saviour any more than there was with the earlier Flax-seller and Sheep-seller. In fact, his gratitude is greater and the magnitude of Agoracritus' achievement all the greater, if he reverts to being a slightly pathetic old man.

30 For a suggestion, cf. Brock 1986.

31 Against too facile a use of this idea, see Silk 2000: 209.

Character and Plot

These shifts in Demus' characterization allow the audience to look at this embodiment of themselves in a variety of different ways, and this is another major aspect of characterization in Aristophanes: such shifts are not there simply for laughs or the result of generic convention. They can play a major role in the creation of the plots and the analysis of the questions raised by the play. What follows is not however an attempt simply to restate the idea that character in Aristophanes is the servant of plot. Character and plot will be seen to have a dynamic and organic relationship whose function is to allow a deeper analysis of the questions raised by the play.

It is time to look at a chorus, and we will start with that in *Wasps*.[32] Our expectations about their character are firmly laid down by Xanthias' description of his master's jury-mania. We expect irrepressibility and physical toughness, and as they are about to appear, they are introduced as being like a nest of wasps, with stings, and wild as sparks (223–227). When they actually appear however, they are stumbling along in the mud and darkness, at the mercy of their sons; they sing a touching song about the kind of old-man's problems Philocleon may be suffering from; and they have to explain how they cannot buy their sons food. There is obvious humour in the surprising contrast here, but more importantly the scene offers an alternative way of viewing the city's old jurors: they are old men, poor and dependent on others. These two pictures will articulate the audience's responses to them and their profession through the play.[33]

The wasp-like violence of the Chorus envisaged by Xanthias finally manifests itself when Bdelycleon discovers Philocleon about to escape to the Chorus. The Chorus suddenly lose their frailty and engage in a furious battle, which is figured as a re-run of the Persian Wars. Philocleon calls on the autochthonous Athenian culture-hero Cecrops (438), while the Wasps present themselves as the opponents of tyranny (417, 464, 487) and monarchy (470, 474), represented by Bdelycleon. Ranged against them are the Eastern slaves Midas, Phryx and Masyntias (433), who like the Persians of old bring fire against Athens, and use the smoke to rout Philocleon and the Wasps (457, 459).

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32 For another Chorus which shows radical shifts, see *Peace*, where they are variously Panhellenes, Athenians, and Athenian peasants; see Sommerstein 1985: xviii–xix.

33 The same technique is found in *Acharnians*, where the panicked Amphitheus describes the Chorus as 'tough old men, hearts of oak, hard, Marathon-fighters, tough as maple' (180–181), before they come in arthritically and lament their lost youthfulness. They too will assume a more vigorous attitude when the time comes.

This scene has a counterpart later, in the epirrhema of the parabasis where, now that Philocleon is no longer a juror, the Chorus have become calmer and more rational, and again stress their aged weakness ('O you who were once mighty in choruses and battles … that was before, before', 1060–1063). In their reminiscing about their fighting days, they talk of themselves as autochthonous (1076) and as hoplite-wasps who drove the Persians off with their stings (1081–1090), and describe the battle between the Athenians and Persians as 'when the barbarian came filling the whole city with smoke (*tuphōn*; cf. 457 *tuphe*) and setting it ablaze' (1078–1079). This is the mirror-image of the fight-scene, in that in the past it was the Athenians who were victorious, and the two scenes need to be read together. The epirrhema is a reminder that these Wasps, who earlier were presented as an obstacle to the solving of the problem of Philocleon and as rather pathetic old men who made ludicrous claims about their fierceness and strength, were also the men who saved Athens from its greatest peril, the Persians, and prevented just the kind of Eastern tyranny of which they accused Bdelycleon and were criticized for so doing (488–499).

Taken together, the two scenes thus raise the question whether their waspishness is completely bad, since it was precisely this which saved the city. This suggestion that the Wasps are central to Athenian well-being and safety is then corroborated in the antepirrhema, where they praise their work in the courts, defending the city from enemies within: 'packed in tight like this by the walls, bent over to the ground, like larvae moving around in the cells of the honeycomb' (1109–1111). The zeal of the old jurors may therefore have its faults, and may even be a little bit laughable, but they beat the Persians and the courts are the places where Athenian democracy is practised and defended. Their characterization swings between these two poles.

Similar points are made also through the changes in characterization undergone by Philocleon himself. He begins as the wildly youthful figure trying to escape the house, which demonstrates his mad desire for jury-service and is transformed first into a rather ineffective warrior, and then into a more calm and rational debater with Bdelycleon on the merits or otherwise of the courts. In the subsequent domestic court, however, he returns to the uncompromising juror of the start of the play, in his determination to find the dog Labes guilty. This reversion allows Aristophanes to pursue a comparison between the democratic courts of Athens and this private court. The courts have been pilloried and parodied in the previous part of the play, and are recalled also by the way in which the private court has many features of their procedures and appurtenances, such as the dock, clepsydra and voting-jars, even though there is only a single person to judge. Philocleon's reversion to a judge immediately prejudiced against the defendant ('he really looks the thief', 900), and the ease with

which he is tricked into voting the wrong way, then give the audience a taste of an alternative kind of justice, where everything depends on one man, who may be entirely unfit for the task. This prompts a reconsideration of the democratic courts: for all their faults displayed earlier, are they not in the end preferable to putting everything into one man's perhaps autocratic or incompetent hands?

After the deception at the end of the trial and his collapse ('So, I am nothing now!', 995), Philocleon really is 'recreated', this time as a young man. New clothes mark this reversal in character, as the old Athenian juror in his cloak and felt-shoes becomes a youth in Persian robe and Spartan slippers, and is taught posh aristocratic ways in preparation for a visit to a symposium (1122–1387). This transformation takes him into contact with another kind of judicial system, with which the democratic courts can once more be compared. When he refuses to go drinking because of the inevitable criminal charges that follow drunken behaviour, Bdelycleon reassures him he has nothing to fear 'if you associate with the great and good': either they will beg off the complainant or a witty remark learnt in the symposium will turn the whole thing into a joke (1256–1261). This introduces a third kind of justice, which one might call 'oligarchic', in which a rich and powerful elite can ignore or circumvent the courts. Again, the question is posed whether one is perhaps not better off with the democratic courts.

This last transformation also provides yet another way of looking at the attempt to cure Philocleon of his dedication to juries. The result of his attendance at the symposium is a drunken *kōmos*, on which he runs through the street attacking passers-by. This *kōmos* recalls another one from the start of the play, the entry of the old men in the parodos. Decrepit, poor old men, going to work by lantern-light early in the morning with their *paides*, are the polar opposite of the fit aristocratic youths riotously abroad from a night's drinking late at night with lamps and servants.[34] However, in contrast to the parodos, Philocleon's *kōmos*, like those of aristocratic youths, is far more destructive to those around; he seems now beyond the reach of the justice sought by those he has assaulted on the way. The animal imagery of the beginning of the play also returns, with the sons of Carcinus, 'the crab' (1509–1537) whom he worsts in wild dancing. Bdelycleon has succeeded in freeing his father from jurymania, but the old wild and waspish spirit that defeated the Persians and kept Athens safe in the courts is undimmed, but now out of control. Again, a question is posed: which *kōmos* do we prefer, that of the dedicated if somewhat waspish and laughable jurors or of the youth of Athens' gilded elite?

34 Bowie 1997: 8–11.

This then raises the greater question whether the city is better served by Philocleon the cantankerous juror or the grotesque and violent *kōmast*. The courts may be subject to sustained and, to some extent at any rate, justified criticism in the early parts of the play, but the shifting characterizations of the Chorus and Philocleon conjure up a more nuanced picture. Jurors can be violent and capricious, prejudiced, bamboozled and bribed, but they are also the great defenders of the city, as hoplites in their prime and in the courts in old age, and they are ultimately family men with all the travails and frailties of humankind. They are far from perfect, but the attempt to stop them doing their job itself has its risks: it may be that the waspish character of the Athenians is in the end best channelled into the protection of city rather than allowed free rein.

If Philocleon ends up apparently free of social control, quite the opposite happens in *Clouds*, which is unique in Aristophanes' extant plays in the way that its protagonist does not achieve some sort of triumph at the end, but is brought to see the error of his ways. Far from enjoying the successes and new status of a Dicaeopolis, Demus or Pisetaerus, he finishes back in the character he was before embarking on his 'devilishly clever short-cut' (76): the strongly moral aspect of the play is emphasized by this circular variation in character. Strepsiades begins the play as someone who does not appear to appreciate his good fortune: he has married into a very wealthy family, but complains about expenditure on lamp-oil as well as his debts; horse-owning was not cheap but plenty could afford it and what we know of his debts does not suggest they were abnormally high. This tight-fistedness triggers his determination to pursue his clever idea of learning philosophy, but this idea is the only evidence of intelligence, since once he enters the Phrontisterion, he becomes the hopelessly stupid rustic incapable of making any progress, which allows Aristophanes to make all manner of fun of contemporary speculations. However, when his son has done the course, he suddenly becomes capable of deploying the kind of tricky rhetoric that foxed him before (1214–1303), which seems to indicate that he has achieved his aim, and he even goes so far as to sing a self-*makarismos* (1206–1213). Sadly, as Macleod showed,[35] such songs are always a prelude to disaster in tragedy, and we soon see Strepsiades as a rather sad old man at the mercy of his clever and rather brutal son's command of philosophical argument. This forces him to acknowledge the wrongfulness of his attempt to escape his social obligations like debt and to abandon the gods, and he finally takes Hermes' advice to burn the Phrontisterion down, restoring

35 Macleod 1981.

himself and the city to their previous, unphilosophical character. It would be hard to call *Clouds* 'tragic', but the self-*makarismos*, the sudden *peripeteia* that Strepsiades suffers and his *anagōrisis* of his sins all give a tinge to his character that is not found in any other protagonist.

Double Characterization

So far we have considered changes in characterization which have been sequential. There is one case in Aristophanes, however, where not an individual but a Chorus is simultaneously doubly characterized, with one characterization of the figures in the play and the other of the (more acute members of) audience. This is in *Clouds*.[36] For Socrates, the Clouds are his divinities. He asks Strepsiades, 'do you wish to associate with the Clouds, our divinities?' (252–253), before initiating him into their rites, summoning them to the Phrontisterion and hailing their paying attention to him with 'O greatly revered Clouds, you clearly heard me when I called' (291); they are supposed to nourish idle sophists, seers, doctors and foppish poets (331–334). However, they in fact make their true nature clear from their very first entry. The students in the Phrontisterion (198–199) cannot go into the open air, but they delight in it (275–290), and their father is Ocean (277), not exactly a sophistic deity. Their own stated reason for coming to Athens is not to see philosophers, but because of the 'reverence for secret rites … the gifts to the Olympian gods, high-roofed temples … the most holy processions for the blessed ones and … festivals at every season' (303–310); they hymn as rulers of the universe (563–574) the Sun, Moon and the Olympians, whose complaints they bring. Far from valuing idleness, they praise hard work (414–419) and the Stronger but not the Weaker Argument (1024–1030; cf. 959–960), and thrice warn Strepsiades of the consequences of his actions (810–812, 1114, 1303–1320). At the end of the play, Strepsiades tries to put the blame for his misfortunes on them, but they explain that 'we do this whenever we see someone falling in love with wrong-doing, until we cast him into disaster to make him realize he must fear the gods' (1458–1461).

If, in the cases we have looked at so far, the contrasting shifts in character are not easily reconciled in realist terms, here the changes are an integral part of the Clouds' nature and mode of operation. Paradoxically, it is Socrates who

36 For this, see Segal 1969.

reveals the truth.[37] When Strepsiades is bemused that the Clouds seem to be women at one minute and fleeces at another and can generally take a wide variety of forms, Socrates explains that 'they become whatever they want', taking appropriate shapes 'to mock the madness (*mania*)' of their victims (348–350): they have seen the effeminate Cleonymus, and so have become women. What he does not realize is that this is what is happening to him: they have taken the character of 'sophistic' deities in order to mock and punish a sophist; and the same is true for Strepsiades, since they have 'twisted' their nature to mock 'the son of Twister'. This double characterization allows them at once to be perceived as on Socrates' side and to fulfil the characteristic mythological function of clouds of punishing the wicked.[38]

A somewhat different kind of double characterization can be seen in the pairs Strepsiades and Phidippides, and Philocleon and Bdelycleon. Here it is social milieu which is doubled, but again the doubling is used for the analysis of the play's themes. In each case, a father is represented as a traditionally poor or rustic Athenian and the son (and wife in *Clouds*) as much more aristocratic. Strepsiades tells how he (43–48)

> had the most delightful country life, mouldy, unkempt, lying about as one pleased, full of bees and sheep and pressed-olives. Then I married the niece of Megacles, son of Megacles, I a rustic, she from town, classy, luxurious, very much the *grande dame*.

Like his mother, Phidippides with his horse-racing is firmly of the aristocratic milieu. Similarly, Philocleon is an old juror, but his son moves in much more grand company. In each case, these apparent contradictions in realist terms allow a perspective on philosophy and the law from rich and poor: for instance, Philocleon's passion for and Bdelycleon's dislike of the courts need to be viewed through the fact that each represents a different ideological stand-point, which means their view of the courts should not be seen as necessarily objective or uncoloured by that ideology.

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37 For the tradition of seers who can see the future for others but not for themselves, see X. *Smp*. 4.5; Pl. *Ap*. 22b–c, *Men*. 99c–d, *Ion* 534b–e.

38 Cf. the stories of Ixion, Athamas and Helen, with Bowie 1993: 127–130.

Minor Characters

Variation in the character of protagonists also plays a role in scenes with the intruders who often invade the stage in the latter part of plays. Here the variation is used less to deepen the characterization of the protagonist and more to create cameos that capture the spirit of the figure in question in a deft manner without descending into cliché. *Birds* has the richest sequences of these intruders, and Pisetaerus shifts his nature to help frame each. Thus, with the Priest, he acts as a *bōmolokhos*, drawing humour from the wordy Priest's prayer (863–894); the Poet is gently persuaded to leave by the gift of clothing, not because of any compassion on Pisetaerus' part, but because only thus will he stop reciting and leave (904–951); the Oracle-seller is given a witty taste of his own oracular medicine (959–991); and the Inspector is twice forcibly expelled with his voting-urns, in a scene more significant for the banishing of such democratic instruments than for the sudden violence of Pisetaerus (1021–1034, 1046–1057).

The Later Plays

In *Ecclesiazusae* and *Wealth*, the complexities of characterization we have discussed largely disappear and much greater consistency takes their place. The names become less significant and reminiscent of stock names in later comedy. Costume-change plays an important role in the women's victory in *Ecclesiazusae*, but it does not involve a change in the essential character of the men and women. Along with fantastical plots about riding to heaven on a beetle or taking over the world, characters with extreme variations of nature are no more. Praxagora achieves her aim through a simple vote in the assembly rather than a sex-strike and occupation of the Acropolis and, if Lysistrata is not a character of great diversity, Praxagora is even more matter of fact. Chremylus' universal prosperity comes about with the minimum of fuss; he is introduced by the 'madness' motif like Philocleon and Trygaeus, but this turns out to be Carion's take on his apparently odd behaviour rather than a feature of his nature, as in the case of Philocleon and Trygaeus. Minor characters in the earlier plays were generic, a poor poet, a grasping priest and so on, but in these plays more prominent characters too are much more so than before: Blepyrus remains an essentially bumbling old man, his neighbour and Chremes play their roles in a straightforward manner. The Old Women in *Wealth* are extreme caricatures but they are so in a consistent way. As realism takes over the plots, so it does the characters.