As Bakhtin says, only the Biblical Adam, that legendary namer of things, could ever know the beginning of a discourse. So it is also with accounts of literary theory. Posit a source for theoretical approaches to Aristophanes, and predecessors come out of the woodwork, from Cratinus to Aristotle and Freud to Foucault. Moreover, if we believe that reading is never wholly innocent, and that, consequently, our encounters with Aristophanes are importantly affected by presuppositions, strategies, and biases that illuminate certain aspects of the text while obscuring others, we may also believe that there are no non-theoretical approaches to Aristophanes at all.

The previous observation about theory links it inextricably with reception studies. Just as each reading/viewing of an artifact or a performance is informed by the theoretical presuppositions of its consumers, so also each encounter (including the experience of subsequent readings/viewings) is a species of reception. In this sense we could say that the general task of theory in any historically-determined episteme is to formulate a model sufficiently broad so as to organize the range of its reception. At the same time, however, the determination to undertake such a project (and the specific form that it takes) is itself a type of reception study and like all studies is part of a chain of interpretation and re-interpretation.

In accordance with this understanding of theory as a species of reception studies, it is not surprising that the range of issues and methodologies perceived as relevant to Aristophanes has substantially changed over the last generation, in part as a result of the introduction of methodologies borrowed

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1 If this is true, then a full treatment of the theoretical reception of Aristophanic comedy will have to be coextensive with the complete history of Aristophanic scholarship. We await the appearance of that mighty volume. The more modest goal of this essay is to discuss works about Aristophanes that explicitly engage theory. For a recent survey of both theoretical and "non-theoretical" approaches to Aristophanes, see Dobrov (2010).

2 It is thus fundamentally dynamic and unstable. Konstan (2014) argues that this notion extends from texts to genres themselves and emphasizes the degree to while ideas about genres are historically constructed and understood up against the ever-changing genres that help to define it.
The purpose of this essay is to offer a selection of these approaches which have been applied to the understanding of Aristophanes. It cannot hope to be exhaustive, given the many and varied approaches that have appeared. The following sections nevertheless testify to the degree to which theory has emerged in recent years with questions that have added new dimensions to discussions of Aristophanes and Old Comedy.

I add a couple of caveats. Since literary theory does not refer to a single methodology but to an ensemble, its collective influence on Aristophanic scholarship will not be monolithic. Further, one consequence of the late emergence of theoretical methodologies in scholarship on Aristophanes is that many of the authors I will mention are admittedly *bricoleurs* with respect to their practices. Scholars interested in the ritual basis of Old Comedy may combine a familiarity with Bakhtinian carnival culture with anthropological studies of ritual. Others may use intertextuality or performance criticism as tools to articulate what is primarily a feminist thesis. Thus, the theoretical rubrics I use to organize the material below also create distortions which I try to correct only on the fly. Finally, I cannot make any claims for comprehensiveness. The explo-

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3 That new methodologies have become attractive is itself symptomatic of the perception that important aspects of text, performance, and reception were unaddressed by theoretical models grounded in a positivist philology (e.g., political allegory, *roman à clef*).

4 There is no official date for the beginnings of theory in classics, but the foundation of *Arethusa* in 1967 gives a convenient starting point. Significant collections from the period and beyond attest to interest in new methodologies—e.g., Kresic (1981) and Foley (1981). Similarly, the foundation of theory-friendly journals *Ramus* (1972), *Helios* (1976), and *Materiali e Discussione* (1978) signaled an openness to new approaches. There was also some resistance, most famously the editorial statement of new editorial board of *The American Journal of Philology*, which asserted that “the use of innovative methods is, in itself, not sufficient reason for publication” (as if anyone ever thought it was) (*AJP* (1987) vii–ix). For more on this, see Konstan (1999). Even in the early nineties I was surprised to discover that organizing a panel on Bakhtin at the annual meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle-West and South could still generate incredulity from the after-dinner speaker at the banquet. For contrasting opinions on the usefulness of literary theory for classical texts, see the essays of Rubino (2005) and Willett (2005). More recent works have acknowledged the need to take stock and move forward. See, for example, the works of de Jong and Sullivan (1994), Schmitz (2007), Heath (2002), and Hitchcock (2008).

5 This is due, I think, to the fact that learning to write about literature is in part the search for a vocabulary that will allow the writer to give a shape to his or her observations about a text, a phenomenon, or a period. Discovery of such an approach, in turn, may uncover other contiguous modes of thought that may help to explicate corners of the text not sufficiently illuminated by the first.