Nothing to Do with Dionysos?

Athenian Drama in Its Social Context

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None of this appears in satyric drama, which follows tragedy in its complete respect for the fiction of the stage. The play stays at one remove from the audience, which observes without being called to account. Satyric drama as far as we know never parodies tragedy, and the principal characters, such as Odysseus, maintain their epic stature without any caricature or burlesque. (Note the dignity of the three actors on the Pronomos Vase.) Nor does it contain any political allusions. The “comedy” of satyric drama lies somewhere else.

In fact, it resides in the constitutive element of the genre: the presence of satyrs required by the nature of the chorus. It works by playing with myth, by taking a well-known story and overlaying it with a group of satyrs who react to the situation in their own peculiar fashion. The recipe is as follows: take one myth, add satyrs, observe the result.

The comic effect springs from this collage of satyrs and myth, the revision of myth through this specific filter. The joke is one of incongruity, which generates a series of surprises. Euripides’ Kyklēps, for example, depicts the progressive rediscovery of wine and the rituals for drinking which were so basic to Athenian culture. The presence of satyrs within the myth subverts tragedy by shattering its cohesiveness. Tragedy poses fundamental questions about the relation between mortals and gods, or it reflects on such serious issues as sacrifice, war, marriage, or law. Satyric drama, by contrast, plays with culture by first distancing it and then reconstructing it through its antitypes, the satyrs. It does not seek to settle a controversy, nor to bring man face to face with his fate or the gods. It plays in a different key, with the displacement, distortion, and reversal of what constitutes the world and culture of men; it reintroduces distance and reinserts Dionysos in the center of the theater.

Both in the images and on the stage, then, satyrs use the medium of parody to reveal a world under the aegis of Dionysos. They appear as blatant meddlers, creators of disorder, fashioning before the spectator’s eyes a negative anthropology, an anthropology of laughter. That is why, it seems to me, satyrs are good to represent.

38 On this point, see the essay by Konstan in this volume.
lateral forms of public speech. Like legal trials and Assembly speeches, Athenian theatrical performances and dramatic texts were closely bound up in the mediation of conflicting social values. Notably, though perhaps inevitably, the physical settings for mass meetings of the people—the Pnyx and the Theater of Dionysus—were very similar in terms of spatial organization. The seating in the theater was egalitarian, as it was in the Assembly and in the people's courts. In each case, the mass audience faced, listened to, and actively responded to, the public discourse of individual speakers. There were, of course, differences between the procedures of the theater and the more overtly political arenas of the Assembly and the courts—the playwright was not voted upon directly by his audience and did not face the audience in propria persona (although comic parabases could come close). But the congruity between the political and theatrical arenas meant that the responses of Athenian citizens as jurors and Assemblymen were inevitably influenced by the fact of their having been members of theatrical audiences, and vice versa.

Athenian political society provides the primary context for political rhetoric: speeches delivered in the Assembly or Boule and at trials involving politicians. Speeches written for these contexts may be characterized as elite/mass texts: the expert orators who authored them were invariably identifiable as elite in terms of their abilities (especially as trained speakers) and their wealth. But the texts were written for delivery to an audience composed primarily of ordinary citizens. As all politicians (ancient and modern) must realize, the public speaker is constrained to take the opinions and attitudes of his audiences into consideration if he hopes to gain their sympathy and their votes. Consequently, the analysis of political rhetoric provides a window on the ideology—that informed the relations between ordinary and elite citizens. 5

Attic dramas of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. can also be regarded as elite/mass texts, since they too were written and produced by elites for presentation to a mass audience. But, although citizens probably made up the bulk of the dramatic audience, noncitizens also attended in some numbers. 6 The internal concerns of Athenian political society provided only part of the material of Attic drama. The set of problems specific to the citizen body is evident in dramatic texts, but the concerns of both tragic and comic performances transcend the realm of the citizenry. Athenian dramas were often concerned with the relations between citizens and noncitizens. There have been any number of studies of Athenian "theater and politics," but the implications for reading dramatic texts of paying close attention to the context of the intersections and disjunctions between the two societies of classical Athens—the world of the citizen and the world that the citizen and the noncitizen cohabited—are still largely unexplored. 7

We suggest that the dramatists' treatment of issues affecting the whole society may be clarified by a prior analysis of the more limited and specific concerns of the political society; an investigation of the sociocultural underpinnings of courtroom and Assembly speeches will illuminate the concerns and conduct of drama. The concerns of Attic dramatists were,
of course, not merely political: they encompassed the broadest and most profound of human subjects, among them the erotic, the divine, kinship, family authority, and the relation of nature to culture. It is, nevertheless, characteristic of Attic drama that these supapolitical concerns are often dramatized precisely through political action and political speeches. Moreover, the vocabulary, the symbols, the rituals, and the structures of this political drama are those of democratic Athens. This suggests that, for an analysis of Athenian society, the study of political rhetoric and drama must go hand in hand, and that in some cases the ideological background revealed by political rhetoric will elucidate the meaning of dramatic texts.

Our approach may appear to invert the obvious chronological order, since the fourth century B.C.E.—the date of most preserved speeches—is posterior to the “Golden Age” of tragedy and Old Comedy in the fifth. But there was political rhetoric in the fifth century and drama in the fourth. If we accept the congruity of rhetoric and drama as public speech, it is reasonable to look at rhetoric first, because it allows us to proceed from the specific and more knowable thing—relations within political society, revealed by courtroom trials and legislative debate—to the general and less knowable: the larger and more complex network of relations within the whole society.

II. Method: Political Sociology and Cultural Anthropology

The two modern disciplines we have employed to clarify the relationship between elite/mass texts and their social context are political sociology and cultural anthropology. Both disciplines are concerned with the interplay of ideology and communication. Individually, each discipline presents the historian with only a partial explanation of social relations and social change. But when the two disciplines are integrated, this difficulty largely disappears. Specifically, anthropological analysis reveals symbolic structures, and sociological analysis, with its functionalist tendency, shows how these structures become operational in the actions of individuals and groups. In sections III–VI we offer some examples of the ways in which this combined method can be applied, but we are more concerned here with pointing out a direction for future research than in presenting definitive readings.

The origins of the modern discipline of political sociology can be traced back to the work of Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Robert Michels, among others. The central concern of the field is to demonstrate how the sociological ordering of society leads to and is affected by political structures. A key problem addressed by political sociologists is that of explaining the interplay of conflict and consensus, especially in democracies. In analyzing a society that appears to function well, the political sociologist attempts to understand how the forces of conflict and consensus are brought into balance.

There is no doubt that both conflict and consensus were important in the development of classical Athens. As Gouldner, among others, has pointed out, aristocratic Greek culture was extremely competitive, and competition took the form of a “zero-sum game”—for every “winner” whose status was increased through success in competition, there were one or more losers whose standing was lowered. This led to extremely vigorous, even savage, competitions which, when fought on the political plane, were potentially dangerous to the stability of the state. Consensus (homonoia) was regarded by the Athenians as a central democratic virtue and was praised by the orators as essential to the continuation of society. But, like unrestrained competition, pure consensus was potentially dangerous, because only simple matters were likely to produce a true consensus, and an attempt to run the state by means of a politics of consensus threatened to lead to stagnation and to the alienation of those talented, well-trained, and wealthy individuals whose ideas and whose cooperation were essential to the survival of the society.

The relationship emphasized by political sociologists is that between masses and elites: ordinary citizens and those who possess special privileges. Athenian political society certainly included a small percentage of individuals who were elite in terms of their abilities, their wealth, or their birth status: the Athenian vocabulary of status includes any number of terms to describe such persons. Ordinary Athenians, those who were involved in the political process, were those who were “masses” and not “elites.”

8 See, for example, Seymour M. Lipset, “Political Sociology,” in Sociology Today, ed. Robert K. Merton (New York, 1959), 81–114, esp. 83: “The central concern of the study of politics is the problem of consensus and cleavage.” On the origins of political sociology, see ibid., 84–91, citing Marx, de Tocqueville, Weber, and Michels as the “founders” of the field. For other useful introductions to the discipline, see Martin N. Marge, Elites and Masses: An Introduction to Political Sociology (New York, 1981); Philo C. Washburn, Political Sociology: Approaches, Concepts, Hypotheses (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1982).


10 On homonoia, see, for example, Isocrates, 6.67, 7.31, 69, 8.19, 12.178, 258, 18.44, 68; Lysias, 2.63–65, 18.17–18, 23.21–23, 30; Andokides, 1.106, 108; Demosthenes, 9.18, 25.89; Hyperides, 3.37; Deinarkhos, 3.19. Cf. Moses I. Finley, Democracy Ancient and Modern (New Brunswick, N.J., 1973), 62–64; Stephen T. Holmes, “Aristippus in and out of Athens,” American Political Science Review 7 (1973): 23–9. Although elite writers sometimes spoke of homonoia as an ideal which was lacking at Athens (e.g., Xenophon, Memorabilia 3.3.16), we do not agree with Nicole Loraux, The Invention of Athens (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), 196, that homonoia was a “moderate” (as opposed to a democratic) political virtue.

11 E.g., gnōrīmοi, kaloi k'agathoi, khōrentes, aristoi, eudaimone, kerēstoi. Moses I. Finley.
collectively called by the orators to pléthos or hoi polloi, were much more numerous and by their numbers dominated voting in Assembly and courtroom. Because those with privileges in society tended to try to maximize their privileges at the expense of the unprivileged, the interests of the Athenian citizen-masses came into conflict both with the interests of the noncitizens of Attika and with those of the citizen-elites.

Social stratification within the Athenian citizenry was not only a matter of relative degrees of material comfort. The possession of elite attributes by the few resulted in power inequalities, since when a conflict of interests between individuals resulted in legal action, the elite litigant enjoyed various advantages. The Athenian well educated in the arts of speaking was more likely than his nonelite opponent to present a convincing argument to the jury. The rich litigant could buy a finely honed speech from a logographer. Wealth also provided leisure for preparation, and made it financially possible to engage in protracted litigation. The aristocrat, who inherited a sense of personal excellence, could call on influential friends and clansmen for support. After the jury had reached a decision the self-help nature of legal restitution favored the individual able to muster superior physical force. The functional advantages enjoyed by members of the elite within the legal system posed a quagmire for the Athenian démos.

On the other hand, the democratic political order seemed unjust to some elite Athenians. As Aristotle noted (Rhetoric 1378b26-1379a9; cf. Politics 1283b14-1284b34), an individual who is superior to his fellows in any one way tends to believe he is entitled to a generally privileged position in society. He who considers himself worthy of privilege because of his social superiority may regard it as an injustice to be placed on equal footing with average citizens. And yet Athenian government

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1 Politics in the Ancient World (Cambridge, Eng., 1983), 2, considers these to be economic class terms, but although wealth was a common denominator of elites, this oversimplifies the situation. For the division of elites into the traditional triad of wealth, ability, birth status: Aristotle Politics 1286b27-9025, 1293b34-39, 1296b15-34, 1317b39-41, Rhetoric 1310b19-30, 1378b3-7924, Nikomachean Ethics 1131b24-29; Demostenes, 19.285, Isokrates, 19.36, Lytias, 2.80, 31.12, 14.38, 44. Cf. R. Seager, "Elitism and Democracy in Classical Athens," in The Rich, the Well Born, and the Powerful, ed. F. C. Jaber (Urbana, III., 1973), 7, for other references. Adkins, "Problems," 154, notes that there is a general tendency for ancient orators to list three virtues, rather than four or five, because of the pleasing "tricolor" effect this produces.


13 The conflict between the values of competition and consensus and between the aspirations of the masses and the elites were consequently sources of strain, yet Athenian political society was remarkably stable. From the second quarter of the fifth century through the third quarter of the fourth Athenians governed themselves democratically; the only serious interruptions were two short-lived oligarchic coups (411/10, 404/3), one established under pressure of the Peloponnesian War, the other imposed by the victorious Spartans after Athens' defeat. In both cases the Athenians promptly expelled the oligarchs and restored their democracy. Vastly superior military forces allowed the Macedonians to replace the Athenian democratic political order with an oligarchy in 322 B.C.E.; but even after repeated demonstrations of Macedonian military might in the late fourth and early third century, the Athenians continued to struggle to restore democracy. The historical record forbids the notion that the survival of democracy was the result of inertia, or a historical fluke.

How, then, did the Athenians deal with existing social inequalities, especially between rich and poor? Class tension was rife in Greece in all periods and often broke out in active conflict between the upper and lower classes. The existence of the democracy itself provides only a partial so...
olution to the problem of Athens’ relative social stability. The democratic government indeed gave the poorer citizens a degree of protection against the property-power of their wealthy fellows, and so moderated class antagonism. But the elite litigant remained functionally more powerful than his ordinary opponent, and the poorer Athenian’s envy and resentment of the privileges enjoyed by the wealthy man was far from eliminated. Nor does the existence of the democracy in and of itself explain why the wealthy were not more active in agitating for a political position that would match their property-power and could guarantee the security of their goods.

As Seymour M. Lipset noted, “a stable democratic system requires sources of cleavage so that there will be struggle over ruling positions . . . but without consensus—a value system allowing the peaceful ‘play’ of power [our emphasis] . . . there can be no democracy.” In order to explain Athens’ social stability and the survival of the democracy, therefore, we need to explain the nature of the power of the Athenian people. Various scholars,—e.g., Moses I. Finley, G.E.M. de Ste Croix, and Christian Meier—have identified the use of political power by political equals to moderate the effects of social inequality as a key factor in the Athenian sociopolitical order. But power is not simple; a proper explanation of the démos’ kratos will have to embrace not only the more obvious elements of voting and the reality and threat of physical force, but also authority and legitimacy, ideology and communication, relationship and reciprocity.

while sometimes overemphasizing the role of class, is the best and fullest treatment of the problem. For different views see, for example, E. Ruschensbusch, Untersuchungen zu Staat und Politik vom 7.-4. Jh. v. Chr. (Bamberg, 1978); ideology and class tension play little part in civil strife; all conflicts are between competing hetairiai of aristocrats and are caused by foreign policy problems. A. Lintott, Violence, Civil Strife, and Revolution in the Classical City, 750–330 B.C. (London, 1982), esp. 34; tensions arise “from the fundamental inequality between rich and poor,” but the “rareness of genuine class conflicts” is “their most striking feature”; cf. ibid., 272–73 for criticism of Ruschensbusch’s position. For a catalogue and analysis of states of the fifth and fourth centuries, see H.-J. Gehrke, Statis: Untersuchungen zu den inneren Kriegen in der griechischen Staaten des 5. und 4. Jh. v. Chr. (Munich, 1985).

15 Lipset, “Political Sociology,” 91–92.


As an example, Turner notes the tremendous importance of the Christ myth in Mexican politics. He argues that in such disparate events as Hidalgo’s insurrection of 1811 and the emperor Maximilian’s choice in 1867 to eschew flight from Mexico, Mexican political actors chose martyrdom to “fulfill the prophecy,” or fulfill the model presented by so many symbols of the Mexican cultural scene—symbols in which the processual myth that ends in the via trucis is represented.

What were the “prophecies” that the Athenian politician might have chosen to fulfill? “To be the best and always superior to others,” like Achilles, to avenge the honor of his oikos, like Odysseus, to die in battle like a hoplite of Tyrraios? An Athenian politician might have chosen his myths from a variety of sources: from epic, from Archaic poetry, from art, from history oral or written, even from war or athletic competition—and finally, from tragedy. Tragedy was of central importance in Athens; as S. C. Humphreys writes, tragedy was “the main symbolic form of classical Athens.”

Clifford Geertz, in his analysis of a much less highbrow cultural form, the cockfight in Bali, has suggested what seems to us to be a very fruitful way to look at tragedy. Despite the great and obvious differences between a Greek tragedy and a Balinese cockfight, they have this in common: they are both playful activities—“deep play,” as Geertz says—with a serious purpose: they spell out externally an internal truth. In other words, both tragedy and the cockfight may be understood and analyzed as texts, in which reality is represented in a structured system. A member of the audience can read out both the ethos of his culture and his own private sensibility.

In the violent, winner-taking-all cockfight, the observer can find out what a man, usually composed, aloof, almost obsessively self-absorbed, a kind of moral autosade, feels like when, attacked, tormented, challenged, insulted, and driven as a result to the extremes of fury . . . [he] has totally triumphed or been brought totally low.

22 Ibid., 123.

This experience has much in common with watching the performance of a tragedy. As Geertz writes,

the cockfight creates what . . . could be called a paradigmatic human event—that is, one that tells us less what happens than the kind of thing that would happen if, as is not the case, life were art and could be as freely shaped by styles of feeling as Macbeth and David Copperfield are. Enacted and re-enacted . . . the cockfight enables the Balinese, as read and reread, Macbeth enables us, to see a dimension of his subjectivity.

Geertz goes on to argue that art or games do not merely display experience; they color experience with the light they cast it in. To the Balinese, not merely is the cockfight like life, but—and here we apologize for the echo of high school sports banquet oratory—life is like the cockfight. To quote Geertz again: “If we see ourselves as a pack of Micawbers, it is from reading too much Dickens.”

We may apply this analysis to Athens. Attic tragedy both displays and creates “[private] temperament and social temper at the same time.”

The Athenians went to the theater to observe what it felt like to choose between murdering your mother and leaving your father avenged, like Orestes; or to face unbearable and undeserved shame, like Oidipous; or to be a woman so mistreated by a man that you murder your own children to punish him, like Medea. They went to observe characters who were both noble and terrifying, and whose actions were both edifying and repellent.

To the Athenian orator, tragedy held a particular appeal as a cultural paradigm to which he might refer. The orator knew that his audience would make cross-references to the theater; Thouskydides’ Kleon, for example, calls the Athenians “spectators [theatai] of speeches” (Thuk., 2.38.4). The characters of tragedy have grandeur and dignity: any suggestion that an orator was as noble as, e.g., Theseus, as courageous as Prometheus, as self-sacrificing as Alkestis, as long-suffering as Philoctetes, would add grandeur to his cause. At a price, however: not even the noblest character of tragedy could be described as friendly, sympathetic, or lovable. Who would want Prometheus, for example, on the next couch at a symposium? When it comes to tragedy, therefore, the orator was in a double bind. To avoid all reference to tragedy was to give up a valuable symbol. To identify oneself too closely with tragedy, on the other hand, was to risk alienating the audience. The man in the street was
not Prince Neoptolemos, and would feel put off by any orator who felt that he was meant to be. The clever orator, therefore, would try to have it both ways: he would both identify himself with the heroic characters of tragedy and distance himself safely in the ranks of hoi polloi. 29

If political rhetoric makes use of the symbols and structures of tragedy, so too tragedy makes use of the symbols and structures of political rhetoric. The Athenian tragic playwright was in no narrow literary compartment; his subject was the life of the polis. If the characters were mythical, if the setting was usually out of Athens, if the dramatic date was ancient, nevertheless the rhetoric of politics in tragedy is largely the rhetoric of contemporary democratic Athens. Both tragic poets and political orators could see themselves as teachers: both aimed at the improvement of the citizen, both communicated through rhetoric. 30

Like the orator, the tragedian referred to another genre. He constantly reminded the audience that the theater of Dionysos was in many ways analogous to the Pnyx or dikastêria or bouleuterion—not merely spatially, but culturally. Both tragedians and orators wrote speeches that were artistic, competitive, and political. Aristotle (Poetics 1451b) says that the real difference between a poet and a historian is not that one writes verse and the other prose, but that one writes about what did happen and the other about what might happen. We might say, similarly, that the real difference between an orator and a tragedian is that one tries to persuade the audience to engage in a specific political action, the other to persuade the audience of a more general, more ideal, but no less political truth. 31

The political symbolism of tragedy may be less direct than that of a political oration (Pentheus does not cite the laws, chapter and verse), but it is no less powerful. Indeed, as Abner Cohen points out, indirect political symbolism is more resonant with meaning than a blatant and straightforward political speech. Politics can be powerfully manifested in apparently nonpolitical institutions, such as rites of passage, funerals, and drama. 32

In sum, political sociology raises questions about the nature of stability given the tension caused by conflict between values (competition and consensus) and between classes (masses and elites). Cultural anthropology places emphasis on the importance of symbolic action and interaction. Combining these two approaches, we may suggest that Athenian political society was stabilized by communication between citizens in a language composed of a vocabulary of symbols. The importance of mass communication in modern democratic states is now widely recognized, but it has not been taken enough into account in previous attempts to explain the nature of the Athenian sociopolitical order. 33 The language of symbols which facilitated communication between Athenians grew out of the interaction of ideology and events within the context of the arenas of public speech. By recognizing that Athenian public communication was a dynamic, interactive, and symbolic process, undertaken in different forums within a relatively stable but not ossified ideological context, we can begin to understand public discourse and its role in the democratic polis. The public forums provided an environment in which the "tactics" of symbols could be devised and tested and so integrated into a cultural strategy which allowed a high degree of harmony within a status-stratified society.

In the following four test cases we look at ways in which the nondiscrete "realms" of political oratory and decision making and of literary culture and drama were integrated in rhetorical and dramatic texts. In each case, the texts are inexplicable outside the context of a political culture which formed and was informed by public speech. The first two cases look at ways in which expert political orators attempted to manipulate an audience of juror-theatregoers by appealing to an ideological background which stresses both egalitarian and elitist principles. Next, we look at two dramatic texts which refer to the appropriate behavior and decision-making processes of political society. These dramatic texts


30 The relationship of myth and contemporary politics in Attic tragedy is a rich and complex subject, the source of many fruitful scholarly debates. If it is clear that the tragedians were neither indifferent to contemporary politics nor engaged in direct and specific political endorsements, it is not so clear precisely how the many references to Athenian political life are to be taken. Among the best starting points to this question are J. Redfield, "Die 'Frösch' des Aristophanes: Komödie und Tragödie als Spiegel der Politik," Antiqua 4 (1963-1964): 422-39; the essay by Redfield, in this volume; Bernard Knox, Oedipus at Thebes (New Haven, 1957), esp. chap. 2; Knox, Sophocles and the Polis," in Sophocles, ed. Jacqueline de Romilly, Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 29 (Geneva, 1981), 1-17; Jean-Pierre Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, Mythos et tragédie (Paris, 1973); B. Vickers, Towards Greek Tragedy (London, 1973), 100-164; O. Taplin, "Fifth-Century Tragedy and Comedy: A Synthesis," JHS 106 (1986): 167; and the essay by Goldhill in this volume. Still eloquent is Victor Ehrenberg, Sophocles and Pericles (Oxford, 1954); see also John H. Finley, "Politics and Early Attic Tragedy," HSCP 71 (1967): 1-14. On tragedy as an approach to the tensions and oppositions of the social order, see Charles Segal, "Greek Tragedy and Society: A Structuralist Perspective," in Segal, Interpreting Greek Tragedy, Myth, Poetry, Text (Ithaca, 1980), 21-47. For the symbolic and political meaning of Athens, Thebes, and Argos as settings of tragedy, see the second essay by Zeitlin, "Thebes," in this volume. On tragedy's "distance in fictional space and time," see the essay by Winkler in this volume.

31 See the essay by Redfield in this volume.


33 See, for example, John W. Riley and M. W. Riley, "Mass Communication and the Social System," in Sociology Today, ed. Merton, 537-78, esp. 563-69. Cf. ibid., 538-39, 541 n. 15, 545 n. 33, for a discussion of modern mass communication theory as an elaboration of the basic principles set down by Aristotle, although Riley and Riley suggest that modern models stress the interactive nature of communication more than did Aristotle. Henderson, in his essay in this volume, demonstrates the important results that can be achieved through analyzing comedy as a form of social communication.
draw on ideological assumptions that are recognizable from the study of political rhetoric. But in the dramatic texts we see a willingness to transcend and challenge the delicate internal balance of political society, by confronting it with the larger issues of the society as a whole.

III. The Attic Orators' Use of Poetry and History

The ambivalent attitude the Athenian dèmos held toward the subjects of rhetoric, rhetorical ability, and rhetorical education made the role of the elite political orator complex and problematic. When a well-known politician stood up to speak in Assembly or in a law court, his audience was eager to be entertained and instructed, but might distrust him if he were to reveal too obviously the extent of his skill. For his part, the expert speaker knew that his political career depended upon neither alienating nor disappointing his listeners. The Athenian orator who hoped to capture and hold the attention of his audience might have spent hours or days composing his speech so that the argument would be tight, the style engaging, and the delivery smooth. But he was expected to maintain the fiction that his eloquence was born of conviction and the passion of righteous indignation, rather than preparation. Demosthenes' opponents mocked his speeches for having the "stink of midnight oil" (Plutarch, Life of Demosthenes 7.3, 8, 11), and Demosthenes himself, who had the reputation (rightly or wrongly) of being poor at extemporaneous speaking, had to overcome the opprobrium of working too hard at his speech writing. The Athenians demanded a very high standard of oratory from their politicians, but they did not necessarily like to be frequently reminded that the orator was an educated expert who possessed abilities and training that set him above the average citizens.

The difficulties faced by the orator who had to put on a good show, but avoid giving offense, are well illustrated by politicians' use of poetic and historical examples. Quotations of poetry and citations of historical precedent could enliven a speech and help to buttress the argument by the inspired wisdom of the poet and the authority of past practice. The technique held a certain risk for the speaker, however. Demosthenes (19.246-48) complained that Aiskhines called other men logographers and sophists as an insult, but was himself open to the same reproach. Demosthenes sets about proving this by pointing out that in the course of his speech Aiskhines quoted from Euripides' Phoinix, which he had never performed on stage himself. Yet Aiskhines never quoted from Sophokles' Antigone which he had acted many times. So, "Oh Aiskhines, are you not a sophist... are you not a logographer... since you hunted up [zeptes] a verse which you never spoke on stage to use to trick the citizens?" (19.250).

The argument that underlies Demosthenes' comment says a good deal about Athenian attitudes toward elite use of literary culture. According to Demosthenes, Aiskhines is a sophist because he "hunts up" quotes from a play with which he had no reason to be familiar in order to strengthen his argument. Clearly the average Athenian would not be in a position to search out quotes when he wanted them; if the ordinary citizen ever wanted to quote poetry he would rely on verses he had memorized, and his opportunity to memorize tragic poetry was limited. Demosthenes implies that the contents of an individual's memory and his general knowledge learned from experience were perfectly democratic and egalitarian; specialized research undertaken to support an argument in court, on the other hand, was sophistic and elitist. What Aiskhines should have done (and, as Demosthenes implies, would have done were he not a sophist) was to quote the plays which he had memorized. Since he ignored the play he knew and quoted poetry from a play he did not know, he was proved to possess a sophist's training which he used to trick the average citizens on the jury. The orator who displayed evidence of special knowledge left himself open to the charge of using his elite education to deceive the audience.

The orator also had to be very careful to avoid giving the impression that he disdained the educational level of his audience. The public speaker's role was, in its essence, a didactic one: he attempted to instruct his listeners in the facts of the matter under discussion and in the correctness of his own interpretation of those facts. But when using poetic and historical examples, the Athenian orator had to avoid taking on the appearance...
ance of a well-educated man giving lessons in culture to the ignorant masses. A passage in Aiskhines' speech Against Timarkhos that precedes a series of poetic quotations makes clear the pitfalls the orator faced in citing poetry:

But since you [my opponents] bring up Akhilleus and Patroklos, and Homer and the other poets as if the jurors are without education [anēkoōn paideias] and you, yourselves, on the other hand, are superior types [eukhēmoneis tines] who far surpass [periphrōnonuves] the dēmos in learning [historia]—in order that you may know that we too [kai hēmeis] have previously heard and have learned a little something, we shall say a few words about these matters.

(A. 1.141)

Aiskhines justifies his intention to use poetic quotations by referring to his opponents' plan to cite poetry against him. He characterizes his opponents as educated snobs who imagine themselves to be in possession of a grasp of literary culture that is superior to that of the dēmos. Aiskhines uses the first person plural to suggest that he is one with the dēmos whose knowledge of the poets has been impugned. He suggests that "we"—Aiskhines and, at least by implication, the people—have listened to the poets, not that he himself has made a special study of literature. Thus Aiskhines makes himself a spokesman for the dēmos, called upon to defend the jurors against the scurrilous implication that they are ill educated. The jurors are therefore prepared to listen sympathetically to the series of quotes which Aiskhines will recite in order to disprove the elitist claims he has impugned to his opponents. Aiskhines' elaborate justification appears worthwhile only if he believes the quotes will help convince the jurors, but at the same time is worried that they could construe his poetic indulgence as exactly the sort of intellectual snobbery he accuses his opponents of indulging in.

Demosthenes also uses quotations from poetry in his speeches against Aiskhines, although he quotes poetry more rarely and invariably justifies himself by Aiskhines' prior use of poetry. Typically he simply throws back the passages Aiskhines has previously quoted and so carefully avoids suggesting that his own knowledge of poetry is superior to that of his listeners. Demosthenes assumes that his audience is composed of theatergoers. When mocking Aiskhines' career as a tragic actor (19.247), he says that "you [jurors] know perfectly well" that it is the privilege of bit-players (tritagōnista) like Aiskhines to play the role of the tyrant. The orator thus uses the "everyone knows" topos to avoid the impression of having a knowledge of theatrical performance greater than that of his audience.

Lykourgos prefaced a quotation from Tyrtaios by asking hypothetically, "who does not know" that the Spartans brought Tyrtaios from Athens to train their youths in virtue (1.106). And, after a long quote from Euripides, he states (1.101–2) that "these verses, gentlemen, educated [epaideuetes] your ancestors [patērαs]." He also recommended Homer to the jurors, whom "your ancestors thought alone of the poets worthy of recitation at the Panathenaic Festival." The potentially elitist thrust of Lykourgos' horatutory comments is deflected by the speaker's emphasis on the ancestral Athenian respect for the poets and by his reference to the value of poetry being proved by its inclusion in the public festival.

Athenian orators used a similar approach when citing examples from history or myth. Demosthenes usually introduces his historical excurses with a prefatory "I am sure you all know ..."—thereby avoiding the impression that he knows more about the past than does the average citizen. In a similar vein, one of his clients (Demosthenes, 40.24–25) discusses the career of the demagogue Kleon whom "they say" captured many Lakedaimonians and had great repute in the polis. Aiskhines (2.76) cites the example of Kleophon "the Lyremaker" whom "many remember" as a slave in fetters. It was not the done thing to claim a specialized knowledge of history, but it was acceptable to appeal to the memories of the Athenian elders. In discussing exiles during the Korinthian War, for example, Demosthenes (20.52, cf. 19.249) claims that he is obliged to mention events he had heard about from "the older citizens among you." Aiskhines (2.77–78, 3.191–92) recounted how his own father, who lived to be ninety-five and had shared in the great struggles that had followed the Peloponnesian War, had many times told his son the story of the disasters of the war and of the virtuous conduct and strict standards of jurors in the postwar years. Allusions to the memory of the older citizens or of one's ancestors allowed the orator to avoid assuming the role of an educated man instructing his inferiors. There was clearly an appeal to authority involved in the references to elders, but notably the elders were
the only subset of the démos to possess clearly defined legal and political privileges.41

The legitimacy of the authority of the elders helps to explain the rhetorical topos of castigating the audience members for having fallen from the pinnacle of excellence achieved by their ancestors: Athenian orators noted how the ancestors lived in simple virtue and maintained equality among themselves (Aiskhines, 3.26); they did not give excessive honors to unworthy men (Aiskhines, 3.178, 182); they had been on guard against traitors, free from the laxity now common (Demosthenes, 19.181). The ancestors had chosen excellent men as political leaders and advisers.42 They attributed to the démos all that was good and fine, and to the rhetores that which was evil (Aiskhines, 3.231). Unlike the ancestors, who had punished even Themistokles for making himself “greater than themselves,” modern Athenians were not willing to bring malefactors to justice (Demosthenes, 23.204–5); thus, whereas in the past the polis was master of the politicians, now it was their servant (Demosthenes, 23.209).43

Other criticisms by political orators, while not mentioning the ancestors, take a similar tone: the Athenians were slack, failed to be on their guard, and idly awaited disaster (Demosthenes, 19.224, 18.149); they made citizens of slaves and rabble ([Demosthenes], 13.24); they gave up their own control of offices, especially generalships, by allowing the same men to be reelected for years on end (Demosthenes, Exordium 55.3). The Athenians gave orators too much leeway, placed too much trust in them, and did not punish them strictly enough. They put their faith in rogues, while ignoring the good advice of genuine patriots.44 They were misled, despite their native intelligence and good laws, because they chose to pay attention to speeches alone and they ignored the lifestyle of politicians (Aiskhines, 1.179). They had fine judgment but did

41 Elders and their privileges: e.g., Thouskydides, 6.13, 8.1.3; Aiskhines, 2.22, 171, 3.2, 4; Hypereides, 1.22. Athenian jurors had to be thirty years of age as, most probably, did magistrates. Arbitrators had to be sixty.42 Excellence of ancestor’s choice of leaders: e.g., Deinarkhos, 1.40; Lysias, 30.28; Demosthenes, 58.62; Aiskhines 3.181-82.
43 Aristotle, in Rhetoric 1417b12–16, notes that in deliberative oratory one may relate things about the past so that the hearers will make better decisions in the future, and that this may be done in a spirit either of praise or of blame. On the tendency of the orators to reproach their audiences for not living up to their ancestors’ standards, cf. Dover, Greek Popular Morality, 25; Dover, “The Freedom of the Intellectual in Greek Society,” Talanta 7 (1979): 49.
44 Too much leeway, too much trust: Lykourgos, 1.12; Demosthenes, 9.54, 23.147. Exordium 55.2; Lysias, 18.16. Insufficiently strict: Lysias, 27.4–5; Demosthenes, 23.206. Trust rogues, ignore patriots: Demosthenes, 18.138, 19.226, 51.21, Exordium 42.1. Aristophanes’ comic demagogues make similar claims, e.g., Knights 1340–44, Ekklesiazousai 173–207; cf. below, section VI.

not apply it consistently, as shown by their unwillingness to be harsh enough toward bribe-taking politicians (Demosthenes, 23.145–46, cf. 24.172).

Although each criticism had its particular context and was intended to put the speaker in the best light and his opponent in the worst, the thread running through the various topoi of blame is clear enough: the orator “attacks” the people for not living up to their own ideals. The people are accused of being too generous with grants of citizenship, of giving over their mass power into the hands of a few evil men, of ignoring their own laws, of trusting rhetoric instead of depending on their collective wisdom.

Thus when the orator blamed the people, he typically did so by appealing to both exclusivist and egalitarian principles. He took the position of reminding his audience of the pristine democratic code of thought and behavior from which they had strayed. The orator called upon the Athenian to be the democrat his forefathers had been, and in so doing the speaker paid court to an egalitarian climate of opinion and asserted the importance of excluding from the citizen body those who were not proper members of political society.

IV. ANDOKIDES, ON THE MYSTERIES

The trial of Andokides for impiety in 400 B.C.E. is less well known than the trial of Sokrates for impiety in 399 B.C.E., but what Andokides loses to Plato’s timeless rhetoric, he gains in the specificity of his oratorical guile. Andokides was charged with having participated in the recent Eleusinian Mysteries after having been legally debarred from doing so by Isotimides’ decree of 415. Andokides defended himself successfully by claiming exemption under the amnesty of 403.45 Isotimides had attacked Andokides in 415 because of Andokides’ involvement in the mutilation of the Hermas and, allegedly, in the profanation of the Mysteries. As a result, Andokides had been driven into exile. In 400, home again, Andokides denies any involvement in either scandal. Moreover, he faces the old unofficial charge that, in order to save his own neck, he had betrayed his hetairoi (comrades), his syggeenes (kinsmen), and, worst of all, his father.46

Much of Andokides’ defense consists of a retelling of the events of 415

46 On the cultural significance of betraying philoi, see Dover, Greek Popular Morality, 304–6.
in his own favor. He also discusses more recent events, such as his quarrel with his distant relative Kallias over an epiklēros (heiress). Andokides weaves two themes together in both narratives: the defense of the family and tragedy. Andokides chooses his words carefully, with an eye toward the jury. "Don't," he asks them, "be suspicious of what I say [la legomena], don't hunt down [thérēuein] my phrases [rhēmatα]" (1.9; for Andokides' consciousness of his audience, cf. 1.33, 55). Lest the audience be unfriendly, Andokides draws on all his knowledge of the art of rhetoric.

In the witch-hunt following the discovery that the Herms had been mutilated, Andokides and nine other male relatives, as he relates, were thrown into prison. He sets the scene dramatically:

We were all thrown into one prison. Darkness fell, and the gates were shut. Mothers, sisters, wives, and children had gathered. Nothing was to be heard save the cries and moans of grief-stricken wretches bewailing the calamity which had overtaken them.

(Andokides, 1.48)

This scene may be stagey, but it does not specifically refer to Attic tragedy. If, however, the reference to cries and moans—έν δέ βοή καὶ οίκτος κλαοῦμιν καὶ οδορομοίν τα παρόντα κακὰ—perhaps evokes a subliminal nod of recognition of similar behavior in dramatic choruses, that nod would be reinforced by the next passage:

In the midst of it all, Kharmides, a cousin of my own age who had been brought up with me in my own home since boyhood, said to me: "You see the utter hopelessness of our position, Andokides. I have never yet wished to say anything which might distress you; but now our plight leaves me no choice. Your friends and associates outside the family have all been subjected to the charges which are now to prove our undoing: and half of them have been put to death, while the other half have admitted their guilt by going into exile. I beg of you: if you have heard anything concerning this affair, disclose it. Save yourself; save your father whom you must be dearer to you than anyone in the world; save your brother-in-law the husband of your only sister; save all those others who are bound to you by ties of blood and family; and lastly, save me, who have never vexed you in my life and who am ever ready to do anything for you and your good."

(1.49–50)

As often in tragedy, the protagonist's philos—his friend or relative—discusses his terrible situation with him. The passage vaguely recalls scenes between Elektra or Pylades and Orestes, between Khrysothemis and Andokides must save his family; and happily, by doing so, he can also save three hundred innocent Athenians wrongly condemned to death. What about the ἥταιροι whom he must turn in, however? Well, all but four of them had already been denounced and either had been executed or escaped. They were, moreover, guilty. "So," Andokides (1.53) says, "I decided that it was better to cut off from their country four men who richly deserve it—men alive today and restored to home and property—than to let those others go to a death which they had done nothing whatever to deserve."

The ordinary Athenian might daydream about speechifying in the face of a tragic dilemma or about facing up to a tyrant, but he would give himself a happy ending. Andokides knows this. Most people, he says (1.57), would prefer life to a beautiful death. And he is no different. Having raised himself to an egregious dignity through Kharmides' speech, Andokides drops back into the crowd several paragraphs later. He did not face a choice, he says, between noble death and shameful life; on the contrary, it would have been shameful for him to die, when, by living, he could save his family and his polis (1.57–58).

Looking back, Andokides sees himself as someone who has suffered but learned through his vicissitudes. He says, in the summation of his speech (1.144–45), "I know what it is to be a xenos [foreign guest] and metic in the lands of neighboring peoples; I have learned what it is to be sōphrōn [self-controlled] and to take counsel rightly; I have learned what it is to suffer for one's mistakes [hamartiomena]." These call to mind the clichés of a tragic chorus. How fortunate for Andokides that he ended up not merely wise, but home again and rich.

Andokides uses the cultural paradigm of tragedy, but only for his own ends. He recognizes the degree to which the paradigm has colored his au-

47 Andokides has already established himself before the jury as a man who chooses the harder but nobler road, since he preferred to risk a trial in his native polis of Athens rather than go to a comfortable exile in Kypros: 1.3–5.
48 Cf. the high-flown language of 1.124, referring to Kallias: ὑπὸ παντὸν σκηνικότατος ανθρώ­
πόν, or of 1.127, referring to Kallias' mistress: ἵπτε γαίαν κόρας καὶ γυναίκας.
49 E.g., Aiskhylos, Agamemnon 250–52, Prometheus 239–61, 1039; Sophokles, Antigone
1347–53.
Andokides may be arguing that the prosecutors are guilty of the kind of tragedifying that Aristophanes, for example, mocks in the Dikaioiopolis-Euripides scene in Achnamnians (393–485).

We later learn that the prosecutors have alleged that the Two Goddesses had infatuated (paragogein, 1.113) Andokides to commit impiety. This might have called to mind the many occasions in tragedy in which the protagonist was infatuated by a deity: for instance, Ajax by Athena (in Sophocles' Ajax) or Herakles by Lyssa (in Euripides' Herakles Furens) or Pentheus by Dionysos (in Euripides' Bakhhai). Andokides protests that far from infatuating him, the Two Goddesses have saved him (1.114). He deflects the prosecutors’ case, but not without having ridiculed them.51

51 We are indebted to John J. Winkler for suggesting many of the ideas in the preceding two paragraphs.

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Andokides mocks the bombastic and overblown rhetoric of his opponents, arguably because of their clumsy misuse of the conventions of the tragic stage. For example, after asserting his innocence of any offense against the “Two Goddesses,” i.e., Demeter and Kôrê, he makes fun of the horrific and moralizing language of his prosecutors:

The stories of the prosecutors, who have shrieked out these awful and frightening versions of what happened [sa>ta ta deina ke phrikôdê anrôrhiazon] and who have spoken about other earlier offenders and men guilty of impiety toward the Two Goddesses, how each of them suffered or was punished—what do these words or deeds have to do with me?

(1.29)
And the frequency of demands by one character of another to speak, to speak in a certain fashion, and to be silent underlines the political nature of the rhetoric with which the playwright is concerned.

When, early in the play, Ismene promises, if not to help Antigone, at least to keep Antigone's purpose secret, Antigone scornfully urges her to tell the news to all (84–87). Then, when Antigone is apprehended at Polyneikes' grave-side, she refuses to deny her crime (435), just as, when confronted by Kreon, she refuses at first to speak, but instead keeps her eyes on the ground, which irritates Kreon (441). When she does reply, her statement is brief and defiant: “I say that I did it, nor shall I deny it” (443). Instead of answering Antigone immediately, Kreon first tells the guard who arrested her to leave—as if Antigone’s bluntness had shocked him. He then demands to know if Antigone had been aware of his proclamation, adding the rhetorical proscription: “You, tell me not at length, but briefly” (446). This statement initially appears peculiar. Antigone has been too brief; she needs to elaborate, not to cut down her words. Furthermore, Kreon seems in no position to demand brevity, since his previous speeches have been lengthy and pompous (162–210, 280–314). The audience is led to suspect that he is establishing a double standard based on both political and social status: a king and a male may indulge himself rhetorically, but a subject and a female must be laconic.

Our suspicions are soon confirmed. Kreon complains that Antigone’s action was bad enough but she has added to it “a second hubris” (482):

To boast of her deeds and laugh at her crimes.
Now, I would not be the man she would be the man,
If these deeds of might be credited to her with impunity.

(483–85)

In short, to the ruler of Thebes, speech is as important as action, and must be subject to strict control: speaking is power. The scene assumes an audience that was aware of the relationship between public speech, status, and political action. Sophokles’ audience would expect rhetoric to be the stuff of politics, and he does not disappoint them.

The background of Athenian political speaking elucidates a later scene in which Haimon tries to bring Kreon to his senses. He reports that a silent debate is going on in Thebes, behind Kreon’s back, in the darkness as it were (692, 700). The whole city of Thebes supports Antigone and thinks she deserves “a golden honor” (699, 733)—perhaps an allusion to the honorary crowns of Athenian politics. In other words, the Thebans

59 Ehrenberg, Sophocles and Pericles, 59, aptly compares Kreon to Shakespeare’s Polonius. He might have added that, like Polonius, Kreon would later be quoted without an appreciation of the original irony (Demosthenes, 19.247).

are engaging in a give-and-take reminiscent of the political rhetoric of the Athenian Assembly, except that they must carry out their debate in secret, because Kreon intimidates the dēmos (690). Haimon reproaches Kreon, at first diplomatically, and then bluntly, for attempting to monopolize all discourse (705–6, 757). By allowing Haimon to speak, Kreon seems to concede the point, but he then accuses Haimon of speaking entirely on Antigone’s behalf (748). He dismisses Haimon’s cogent arguments as mere cajolery from a woman’s servile instrument (using a contemptuous neuter, douleuma: 756). Again, it is the status of the speaker, not the content of the speech, which concerns Kreon. The blunt dismissal of a powerful speech and the refusal to credit anyone else in the play with the right to engage in political oratory would render Kreon a strikingly offensive tyrant to the members of the audience.

The politics of rhetoric continues to be debated in the interchange between Teiresias and Kreon. The prophet asserts the right to instruct the tyrant, and Kreon uncharacteristically agrees, but only at first (922–23). Teiresias is orator enough to assure Kreon of the good intentions of his rhetoric:

I mean you well, so I speak benevolently.
It is best to learn from one who speaks benevolently and for your profit.

(1031–32)

This is the standard oratorical claim of good intentions; compare, for example, Lysias (31.2): “I am not, however, pursuing any private feud, nor am I prompted by my ability or practice in speaking before you.” Kreon, however, is unimpressed. He accuses Teiresias of having taken bribes to speak as he does, just as he had earlier accused the guard who discovered Polyneikes’ burial (302–14, 1045–47). Bribery is a standard topos of Athenian political rhetoric. Like a good orator, Teiresias throws the charge back at Kreon:


Kreon: The whole breed of prophets loves money.
Teiresias: And the breed of tyrants loves shameful profits.

(1055–56; cf. 1054–55, 1061–63)

Like real Athenian political orators, Kreon and Teiresias argue over who knows best how to speak in the polis' interests. "Do you know that you're speaking?" Kreon asks, "about kings?" (1057). Teiresias replies that he certainly does know, but he, after all, is the man who has saved the polis for Kreon (1058). Kreon's reply is to call Teiresias a wise (sophos) prophet, but one who loves injustice (1059). His concession of sophia is ambiguous, since sophos could be a term of abuse as well as of praise (e.g., Thuk. 3.37.4; Eur., Med. 285, 299 and passim).

Kreon also accuses Teiresias not only of being a corrupt orator, but a poor one: Teiresias' warning, he says, is nothing but a common cliché (1049). This sarcasm is hardly justified from a speaker who has himself brought up the ship of state (162–65) and has said, in effect, that "the bigger they are, the harder they fall" (437–76). In any case, Kreon is bluffing. When Teiresias spells out Haimon's imminent death, a terror-stricken Kreon rapidly agrees to release Antigone from her prison. Teiresias has the last word on rhetoric:

Therefore, the gods arouse against you
Their sure avengers; they lie in your path
Even now to trap you and to make you pay
Their price.—Now think: do I say this for money?

(1074–78)

Teiresias' parting word to Kreon is that he must learn to have a "quieter tongue" (1089). And silence again becomes a key element in the play.

Kreon's repentance comes two late to avoid disaster. The rest of the play is an unfolding of doom and a personal descent from the tyrant's former heights of arrogance and rhetorical excess to a nightmare of quiet. Sophokles continues the theme of the politics of rhetoric, but now it ironically underscores Kreon's collapse. The tyrant at last achieves the silence he has long demanded from his underlings, but it is, as the chorus says, an excessive and heavy silence (1251; cf. 1256).

The first case is Haimon. When confronted by Kreon's entreaties in the cave, Haimon says nothing in reply (1227–32). Instead, he spits in his father's face and draws his sword on him. When Kreon leaps safely aside, Haimon turns the sword on himself and commits suicide. The second case is Kreon's wife, Eurydike. When she hears the report of Haimon's death, she leaves the scene, as the chorus notes, without saying one word, good or bad (1245). The messenger thinks that Eurydike is merely being discreet, and has gone inside to mourn, as befits a woman (1246–49). The chorus, however, recognizes how ominous her silence is (1251). Kreon returns presently, to hear the news of Eurydike's suicide.

Now Kreon no longer speaks in iambic verse as he did previously. In his final appearance, he is part of the closing kommos (lament), and sings his grief in dochmiacs. In metrical terms, Kreon has gone from the rhetoric of control to the music of emotional outpouring: a fitting punishment for one who has refused to listen to the speech of others.59

The chorus sounds a similar theme in its last speech:

Great words [megaloi logoi]
of the proud are paid in full
with great blows of fate.

(1350–52)

Sophokles here emphasizes the point that Antigone is in large part about logoi—about words and speeches. If Kreon has transgressed, it is not only in his deeds, but in his logoi, and in his attempt to control the logoi of others. His tyrannical actions would have offended the democratic principles of the audience in many ways, but most strikingly, perhaps—since drama itself depends on speeches—in his assault on freedom of speech. Kreon is a tyrant not least because he refuses to allow anyone else the right of public speech.60

Haimon's question to Kreon, "Do you wish to speak and yet not to listen?" (757), underscores both the absurdity of Kreon's position, and the difference between Kreon and an Athenian democrat. "Do you wish to speak?" Haimon asks; the phrase echoes the question asked by the herald at every meeting of the ekklesia: "Who wishes to speak?" (e.g., Demosthenes, 18.169; Euripides, Suppliant Women 438–40). Kreon too is a kind of herald (kerux), having proclaimed to the city his edict on Polyneikes (8), but he stifles rather than encourages debate. Antigone forces the audience to draw on its experience of political oratory by referring to the terms and topoi of public rhetoric, but also by raising serious questions about the politics of rhetoric. The play does not merely use speeches; it also discusses both the quality and the freedom of rhetoric. By his references to Athenian political oratory, Sophokles roots the fictive world of the tragedy in the reality of the democratic polis. He teaches the audience a general truth about the terrible consequences of suppression of free speech that has a specific application to the Athenian democracy and its invocation of parrhesia.

59 Lanza, Tiranno, 158.
60 Sophokles makes a connection between eleutherōs logein and the σύνεσθεία of the polis in the lost Epigoni, frag. 1921.
VI. Aristophanes, Ekklesiazousai

Ekklesiazousai, which was produced in the late 390s B.C.E., opens on a predawn gathering of women who are plotting to take over the government of the state. They plan to pack the Assembly with women in men’s clothing and thereby to pass a decree which will put women in charge. The plan succeeds and the women implement a new regime in which property is communal and sexual relations democratized, in that the old and ill-favored will have priority in sexual congress with the attractive. The practical difficulties these two innovations raise are revealed by the next two scenes. In the first, a skeptical male citizen discusses the workability of communalization with the more optimistic Khremes, friend of the husband of Praxagora, leader of the women. In the second scene, two young lovers have trouble getting together because several elderly and ugly women demand their rights to sleep with the handsome young man first.

The action includes the usual scatological and sexual fun and games, but the play is clearly and overtly concerned with politics. The playwright has much to say about various politicians and their nasty personal habits. There is also a good deal of pointed mockery of the topoi and pretensions of political rhetoric. The “rehearsal” scene, held in the dark before the Assembly begins (especially 110–23), pokes fun at the expert orators’ careful preparations and transparent attempts to appear spontaneous. The speech of the “Second Woman” employs the familiar topoi of inexperience at public address (150–53). The speech of Praxagoras plays upon several familiar rhetorical themes: I have an equal share in this country, just as each of you does; the polis is being ruined because of the people’s willingness to follow evil leaders; you citizens mistrust those who truly love you, but trust those who care nothing for you; you care too little for the state, too much for your private affairs; and you change public policy too often (173–207). Praxagora’s complaints are all parallel.


E.g., 71, 201, 248–55, 365–66, 397–421. On the political nature of the play, see E. Barry, The Ekklesiazousai as Political Satire (diss., Chicago, 1942), 44–76; contrast, E. David, Aristophanes and Athenian Society of the Early Fourth Century B.C., Mnemosyne, supp. 81 (Leiden, 1984), 29, who sees the Ekklesiazousai and Ploutos as “social comedies par excellence . . . [the playwright’s] focus of interest is on politics no longer.” Victor Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes: A Sociology of Old Attic Comedy, 3d ed. (New York, 1962), 68, considered that the discussion of “communism” marked a transition “from purely political to socio-economic thought,” but also suggested (358–59) that this was the only example of Attic comedy which dealt with a fundamental idea of political philosophy.

leded by the “blame” topoi used by real orators of the fourth century. The proposal for turning over the state to the women is also justified by a familiar rhetorical tactic: Praxagora claims that the women will be better at running the state because they do things according to the old ancestral ways (214–28): this can be read as a play on the rhetorical appeal to the authority of past traditions (cf. above, section III). Praxagora is praised by the women for her eloquence, and she lets on that she learned to speak well by listening to the orators on the Pnyx when her family was billeted there during the war (247–44). Here Aristophanes explicitly reveals that the speech is meant to mock the style of the real orators, and also gives Praxagora a chance to deny that she had any special training in rhetoric, another common topos.

All this helps to bring the comedy into the political realm where the elite leaders attempt to lead—or mislead—mass audiences of citizens. Yet the play still does not on the face of it appear very satisfactory as drama: Why do the women want to take over the state in the first place? No particular crisis is alluded to—Praxagora has things in common with Lysistrata, but her motivation is much less clear. Why do the women implement the two seemingly incongruous reforms in the areas of economic and sexual relations? Why does the action stop without a satisfactory resolution? Is this an ironic or absurdist evocation of a world turned inside out? Or is it a dazzlingly prescient and cryptic satire of ideas philosophers will bandy about a generation or two later? We maintain that it is neither, and that its meaning and comic thrust are clarified by the context of Athenian political ideology and practice.

Egalitarianism and its limits are the central themes of the play. In the real world of early fourth-century Athens the Athenian citizens were po-
political equals, and they used their political equality to mediate social inequalities both legally and on an ideological plane. But what were the limits of the use of political power to redress social inequality? The most glaring inequalities within Athenian political society were the result of the unequal distribution of wealth; what if the political equals used their legislative power to enforce economic equality? Wealthy Athenians certainly considered this a dreadful possibility. Indeed, there was no necessary reason for anyone to suppose a property-equalizing decree could not be passed in the Assembly. The Athenian state recognized no fixed limits to its power to interfere in the private affairs of citizens, as Aristophanes reminds his audience at several points.

Hence, it is not really surprising to find Aristophanes creating a situation which explores the possible effects of a decree which called for property communalization. He suggests that clever and selfish citizens would attempt to take as much as they could get from the new order, and give back as little as they could get away with. Here Aristophanes confronts his audience with the limits of their own public-spiritedness, with the insidious potential of personal greed and self-interest to undercut political solutions to social ills. With the destruction of the elite of wealth, he implies, the Athenians might be victimized by an elite of the clever and unscrupulous. Those who cooperate with the new economic order could end up losers, and surely this would increase the tensions that property redistribution might be expected to ameliorate.

The equalization of sexual opportunity is closely related, but goes a comic step further in suggesting political solutions to social problems and the power of the democratic public realm to override private choices in private life. The situation in which a lover’s choice of whom he will sleep with was subject to state regulation was not really so far-fetched in the context of Athenian political society, where egalitarian principles led the citizens to look upon election as potentially oligarchic, and where the lottery assured that all citizens had an equal chance at such privileges and prerogatives as public service might offer. If we extrapolate from the political realm to the social, why should the attractive have a better shot at the privileges of sexual pleasure? And why should the aged—who were, we must remember, the only legitimate politically privileged subgroup of the citizen body—be not given privileges in the sexual realm? Praxagora’s comment that the scheme is completely democratic (démotikê gê gnômé, 631) is funny, but not crazy. The proposals for communalization of property and equalized sexual relations stretched the existing reality, without inverting it; much of the deeper humor of the play relies upon showing the potential grotesquery of a further development of something that was familiar, and almost universally accepted—political equality and its social ramifications.

But the play operates on another level as well. The extension of political power to women challenges a basic tenet of the political society. Exclusivity was a principle as central and sacred to the existing political order as equality, and the rectitude of limiting access to the citizen body had been reaffirmed in 403 by the refusal to give block grants of citizenship to those who had aided the democratic resistance to the Thirty Tyrants. Consequently, by introducing Assemblywomen, Aristophanes confronts the audience, not only with the logical extremes of egalitarianism within the political society, but with the concerns and desires of those who were stranded outside that society. The women have no specific crisis they intend to solve, because they are attacking the male-only political order itself, not merely some symptom of that order (e.g., war). Consequently, the Ekklesiazousai may be read as an even more subversive play than Lysistrata. But it is important to note that the twisting of reality occurs within carefully established limits. In the real world women were closer to citizen status than were metics or slaves in that they were essential in the establishment of the condition of citizenship for all male citizens. Since the son of a male citizen and a noncitizen

65 Wealthy Athenians fear property distribution: Jones, Athenian Democracy, 54-61.

66 E.g., 377-78, 412-25, 465-75. On the power of the dèmos to legislate concerning private action, see especially Moses I. Finley, “The Freedom of the Citizen in the Greek World,” Talanta 7 (1976): 14-15. On the relationship between public and private in Athens, see Humphreys, Family, Women, and Death, 1-32, 61-74. D. Cohen, “Work in Progress: The Enforcement of Morals: An Historical Perspective,” Rechtshistorisches Journal 3 (1984): 114-20. Foley, “Female Intruder,” reads the play as an example of the invasion of the public (male, political) sphere by the private (female, domestic) sphere. This is very informative and reveals an important level of the play’s meaning. But Foley seems to go too far in arguing that it was due to the failure of the political sphere in the late fifth and fourth century that Athenian poets and philosophers “began to look at other social models for correction, including . . . the household” (19). Cf. below on the play’s reiteration of the primacy of political solutions to social problems.

67 730-876; cf. 204-5. The character of the skeptic is of key importance to the “ironic” reading of the play. See Sommerstein, “Aristophanes and the Demon Poverty,” 316, 319-20, 320-31; David, Aristophanes, 14; cf. 7, 32, 36.
woman could not be a citizen, Athenian women must impart something to their offspring which makes the latter worthy of political rule. The women's close and continuing ties to their sons are used as an argument to support the new order (233–34; cf. 635–49).

The playwright's concern with establishing limitations on the degree of dramatic unreality is exemplified by the unchanged or even lowered status of other noncitizen groups under the new regime. Slavery will remain important; indeed slaves will now do all the productive agricultural work and citizens will live off the surplus value of their labor (651–52). Consequently, although the bounds of exclusivity have been breached on one front, they are strengthened on another; Athenians will no longer have to engage in slavelike labor and so they will become more clearly a status elite in relation to the unfree population. The slave prostitutes will be further restricted by rules forbidding them to consort with citizen-males (718–24). Once again, this is a way of enforcing exclusivity bounds; now sexual relations, egalitarian within the citizen body, will be denied outside of it.

The world of the Ekklesiaizousai operates according to the central egalitarian and exclusivist tenets of Athenian political culture, even as it challenges the potential consequences, on the one hand, and the current application, on the other, of those tenets. Therefore, the Athens of Aristophanes' play was not a topsy-turvy never-never land, but a pointed and challenging allegory which confronts the members of the audience with the peculiar nature of the political order in which citizen-males were theoretically omnipotent political actors: both the conditions of inequality which pertain within the citizen body and the contradictions inherent in women serving as equal partners in creating cities depend on continued deception. be-


71 Cf. Ehrenberg, People of Aristophanes, 55.2–51, who notes that while metic hestai are not specifically mentioned here, they seem to be included in the pornos and doulos kosmoumen.
dramatic works, back into the early to mid-fifth century, a period from which we have no genuine surviving rhetorical texts. Playwrights and orators each referred to the other's genre, by references to actions, symbols, codes, vocabulary, paradigms, and rituals. Oratory drew on the audience's experience of theater; drama drew on the audience's experience of political and legal speeches. By so doing, each genre implicitly taught its audience that being an Athenian was a comprehensive experience, that there was no compartmentalized division between esthetics and politics. Athenian political culture was created in part in the theater of Dionysos, theatrical culture on the Pnyx.

Athenian dramatic and rhetorical texts were informed by political culture, but were also primarily responsible for generating the new signs through which it evolved. In the two-way communication of public speech, new and old symbols were tested by the mass audience and those which were effective—which struck a chord, which helped the society to function—were integrated into the language of social mediation. That language made possible communication between citizens and perhaps also between citizens and noncitizens across the hierarchical strata of social inequality. Thanks to the symbol-generating function of public speech in the various forums, the language of sociopolitical mediation in Athens was never static, and Athenian political culture was able to respond to changes in its external environment. The structural tactics of metaphors, analogies, images, and topoi that were devised by elite authors, displayed in public speech, and judged by mass audiences, were integrated into a comprehensive, flexible, and functionally effective sociopolitical strategy. Although there is much in this strategy that is nowadays unattractive—especially the continuing exclusion of noncitizens from participation in political life—it has much to tell us about the potential of democracy as a means of social, as well as political, organization.

JEFFREY HENDERSON

The Dēmos and the Comic Competition

The comic poets of fifth-century Athens aimed, in the words of the Initiate-Chorus of Fros [389–93], "to say much that is humorous and much that is serious, and to win the prize by playfulness and mockery, worthily of the festival." For students of Old Comedy "humorous" and "playfulness" are relatively unproblematic: the words and actions of the performers would make the spectators laugh. But the claim to be "serious" raises serious issues about the genre of Old Comedy, for the poets consistently said that their advice and admonishments to the spectators were true and just, that their explicit and often mordantly abusive treatment of individuals (through "mockery") would purify the polis and advance the people's interests, and that their portrayal of contemporary reality, however novel or facetious, was essentially believable. According to the poets, their genre was both artistic and political. Indeed, "worthily of the festival" inseparably links the genre with its civic context: the comic competition was a feature of the Lenaia and the Greater Dionysia, festivals attended by some seventeen thousand spectators, organized and regulated by the dēmos (sovereign people), the winning poet being voted by judges representing them.

In short, the comic poets pictured themselves as competing for the favor of the dēmos with a humorous spectacle of a special kind, which the dēmos' arkhēn had granted them permission and funds to put on at the appropriate yearly festival, and as public voices who could, indeed were expected to, comment on, and seek to influence public thinking about matters of major importance—the same matters that were being or might be presented to the voting dēmos in other settings and in different


1 They refer (in character) to the Eleusinian festival (addressing Demeter), but their words apply (as comic chorus) also to the comic competition of the Lenaia (addressing the spectators).