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COMEDY AND THE TROJAN WAR

I

The role of the Trojan War in epic and tragic poetry is well known, its role in comic poetry less so. Yet the war did feature in a number of ancient comedies. This fact might seem surprising, not only because fighting and death are subjects unlikely to give rise to much hilarity, but also because one tends to associate comedy with a type of subject matter markedly different from that of tragedy and epic. Nevertheless, many comedies did adopt mythological subjects,[1] and even those set in present-day Athens might allude to myth. This article aims to examine the Trojan War theme as it appears in Old Comedy, and to explain its function with reference to the social and intellectual context of late fifth-century Greece. Thinking about this topic may also open up certain larger questions about the genre of comedy and its relation to myth and tragedy.

First, a *caveat*: there is no extant comedy of the 'mythological' type, and for the most part one has to deal with sparse fragments and testimonia.[2] This makes it hard to be confident about the manner in which comedians handled the myth. Not only the content but also the date of most plays is unknown. Thus a degree of imagination and guesswork is called for—which, though unprovable, may allow one to situate otherwise unrewarding shards within a satisfying conceptual framework. And there is considerable room for optimism. A number of comedies demonstrably made use of the Trojan War theme—including Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, *Birds* and *Daedalus*, Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* and *Nemesis*, Eupolis' *Prospaltians*, and Plato's *Menelaus*—and for some of these plays the evidence is reasonably substantial.

Apart from a few insignificant passing references, and a few allusions which are too insubstantial to interpret,[3] the evidence adds up to a remarkably consistent picture. In the first place, it appears that the comedians were interested in the Trojan War less for

[1] O. Mössner, 'Die Mythologie in der dorischen und altattischen Komödie' (Diss., Erlangen, 1907) gives a survey of all known material. See also (inter alia) H.-G. Nesselrath, 'Myth, parody, and comic plots', in G. Dobrov (ed.), *Beyond Aristophanes: Tradition and Diversity in Greek Comedy* (Atlanta, 1995), 1–27, and A. M. Bowie, 'Myth and ritual in the rivals of Aristophanes', in F. D. Harvey and J. M. Wilkins (edd.), *The Rivals of Aristophanes: Studies in Athenian Old Comedy* (Swansea–London, 2000), 317–39.

[2] N.B.: all comic fragments are cited from R. Kassel and C. Austin (*Poetae Comici Graeci*, Berlin–New York, 1983–) unless otherwise noted.

[3] E.g. Ar. *Lys.* 155–6 (Menelaus as an example of men's powerlessness before women; cf. *Ilias Parva* fr. 19 Davies; Eur. *Andr.* 627–31). References to Helen as an example of feminine unreliability occur at Ar. *Birds* 1638–9 and *Thesm.* 788–9. Ar. fr. 358 may be an obscure reference to Helen. Cratinus' *Men of Ida* (frr. 90–1) may have been concerned with the Trojan War. Polyzelus' *Demotyndareus* (frr. 1–5) seems to have made use of Tyndareus (and so possibly the birth of Helen); in fr. 5 Hyperbolus is called a 'Trojan' (*Φρύγα*). Philyllius wrote a *Helen* (*PCG* 7.374, test. 1), of which only the title survives. Telecleides may have written a comedy called *Phrygians* (Diog. Laert. 2.18: the text is obscure; cf. Telecleides fr. 41). The Trojan War, and heroes such as Patroclus and Teucer, are seen as (in some sense) the 'typical' content of tragedy at Ar. *Frogs.* 924–33, 963, 1040–1. The Sicilian tradition also records the titles of 'Trojan' comedies, including Epicharmus' *Philoctetes, Trojans, Odysseus the Deserter, Odysseus Shipwrecked* (*PCG* 1.15, test. 36). Little is known apart from the titles: but cf. G. Norwood, *Greek Comedy* (London, 1931), 1–60, 83–102.

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its own sake than as a focus through which other concerns could be articulated and explored. Second, it is clear that comedy (along with other genres) created, or drew attention to, parallels between the world of myth and contemporary politics. Perhaps none of this is surprising; but third (and most interestingly), of the comedies which can be shown to have mentioned the war, almost all seem to have been interested exclusively in its causes and early origins, rather than, as one might have expected, in episodes from the main period of fighting, the events leading up to the sack of Troy, or the events narrated by the *Iliad*. No doubt other lost plays dealt with later events in the Trojan narrative—a few known fragments do allude to Achilles, Odysseus, Agamemnon, the Wooden Horse,[4] and so on—but it is the *causes* of the war, above all other aspects, to which comedians turned their attention.

I suggest a particular reason for this tendency, which can be located quite precisely within intellectual and political currents of the late fifth century. It seems to me that the Trojan War came to acquire something like a paradigmatic or metaphorical function in fifth-century thought and literature. Clearly the war was used, as one might expect, as a means of exploring the concept of war in a general sense, which could be used as a vehicle to reflect on contemporary conflicts in all sorts of different ways. But it seems that the war also functioned more specifically as a symbol of the concept of problematic causation: it was used, repeatedly, as a means through which the causes and the justifiability of wars were explored.

The comedians played a crucial part in the development of such a concept, but connections can also be made with other writers and thinkers of the fifth century. Causation is essentially the defining feature of the new genre of history-writing in particular:[5] Herodotus and Thucydides both established a strong connection between the Trojan War and the search for causes and explanations, by positioning the war very near the start of their respective *Histories*, at the beginning of a long causal chain linking past and present. But, paradoxically, since these historians also explicitly cast doubt on the historicity of the war, it could never straightforwardly be seen as an event susceptible of rational explanation.[6]

The reaction of poets, dramatists, and sophists to the 'historical' concept of causation is also of interest. Fifth-century drama in general (not just comedy) shows a recurrent preoccupation with the Trojan War in terms of its causes. Tragedy developed a tendency to trace its characters' sufferings to their very beginning (ἀρχὴ

[4] Cratinus' *Cheirons* (frr. 246–68) centred on Achilles' early life and his tutor Cheiron; cf. Pherecrates' *Cheiron* (frr. 159–65), Plato (incert. fab. fr. 207). Plato, *Envoys* (fr. 232) refers to the Wooden Horse (δούριον ἵππον), in what may simply be a passing reference. Strattis' *Troilus* and *Philoctetes* (frr. 42–3, 44–5), and Hermippus' *Agamemnon* (fr. 1), may have been paratragic; cf. Aristophanes' *Banqueters* (fr. 234), which may refer to Iophon's *Ilioupersis* of 428, Cratinus' *Odysses* (frr. 143–57), Theopompus' *Odysseus* (frr. 34–7), and Metagenes' *Homer*, which may have parodied epic. The ruins of the Phrontisterion at the end of Ar. *Clouds* (1484–5) are tentatively compared by Sommerstein (ad loc.) to the ruins of Troy (cf. Eur. *Tro., Hec.*). Ar. *Birds* 1757 (ἐπὶ δάπεδον Διὸς) may allude to the gods' council at Hom. *Il.* 4.1–4 (so Dunbar and Sommerstein ad loc.).

[5] 'Causation' in history almost always means the causes of *wars*: cf. A. Momigliano, *Studies in Historiography* (London, 1966), 112–26. See general discussion in J. Gould, *Herodotus* (London, 1989), 63–82 and P. Derow, 'Historical explanation: Polybius and his predecessors', in S. Hornblower (ed.), *Greek Historiography* (Oxford, 1994), 73–90.

[6] Hdt. 1.1–5; Thuc. 1.1, 21–4. Recent discussions of the problem of the 'truth' about the Trojan War, and the relationship between historians and epic, include B. Graziosi, *Inventing Homer: The Early Reception of Epic* (Cambridge, 2002), 111–23 and N. Luraghi (ed.), *The Historian's Craft in the Age of Herodotus* (Oxford, 2001).

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κακῶν): the identification of the crucial first point in the chain is an especial *topos* of choral odes, and the Judgement of Paris, the wedding of Helen and Menelaus, and the rape (or elopement) of Helen are frequently highlighted in this regard.[7] Euripides' *Helen* famously—and quite outrageously—dealt with the causes of the war, and a number of other Euripidean tragedies took the war, and the personal guilt of Helen and others, as the subject of set-piece rhetorical debates.[8] There were also Sophoclean plays on the subject, with titles such as *The Judgement*, *Shepherds*, *The Demand for Helen's Return*, and *Fellow-Diners*.[9] One of the most unusual treatments of the causes of the war, from around the same period, is the sophist Gorgias' virtuoso 'defence' of Helen, which is really a parade of its author's own views on the power of rhetoric and the relationship between language and reality.[10]

The causes of the Trojan War exerted such an appeal on the imaginations of all these writers, I suggest, precisely because of their status as an insoluble problem—an event whose causes could never *truly* be known. The subject of the war became a historical free-for-all: an excuse for poets and dramatists to write imaginative fiction. Nevertheless, thinking about the causes of wars is not just an academic problem to be considered in the abstract. The late fifth century was, clearly, a crucially significant time—but not simply in the sense that it provides an intellectual context in which to locate exciting new ideas. The political context is equally crucial, since both history and drama were being written at a time when Athens and her allies were more or less constantly at war. So there emerges another, far more urgent dimension to the Greeks' attempts to find explanations for wars. Thinking about the Trojan War became a way of thinking about current wars—a way of conceptualizing sensitive current affairs from the relatively safe, 'desensitized' distance of the remote (or fictional) past. Imposing a pre-existing narrative and interpretative structure onto a complex, messy and disturbing series of current events is one way in which people might more easily come to terms with them. Why did the war come about? Was it justified? Who was to blame? These questions were examined through the distorting lens of the Trojan War, which in drama became, in a sense, a mythical 'double' of the war currently in progress.[11]

II

One comic scene in particular provides a crucial illustration of the 'paradigmatic' function of the Trojan War, as well as underlining the connection between intellectual and political ideas. This is a well-known passage from Aristophanes' *Acharnians*,

[7] E.g. Aesch. *Ag.* 355–487, 681–809, 1455–61; Eur. *Andr.* 274–308, with the commentary of P. T. Stevens (Oxford, 1971) ad loc.; *Hec.* 629–56; *Hel.* 23–67; *IA* 1283–1335; *Tro.* 919–44. Discussed by W. Allan, *The Andromache and Euripidean Tragedy* (Oxford, 2000), 205–9; M. Hose, *Studien zum Chor bei Euripides* (Stuttgart, 1990–1), 2.103; F. Jouan, *Euripide et les chants cypriens* (Paris, 1966), 95–142. T. C. W. Stinton, *Euripides and the Judgement of* Paris, *JHS* suppl. 11 (London, 1965) discusses one particular theme.

[8] E.g. *Tro.*, *Hec.*, *Andr.* See M. Lloyd, *The Agon in Euripides* (Oxford, 1992).

[9] Some of these plays may have been satyr-dramas: see H. Lloyd-Jones (ed.), *Sophocles III: Fragments* (Harvard, 1996).

[10] Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen* (DK 82 B11): see R. Wardy, *The Birth of Rhetoric* (London, 1997) and the edition of M. D. MacDowell (Bristol, 1982).

[11] The 'current war' is usually assumed to be the Peloponnesian War; but I have more to say on this later (Sections IV–V below). Almost all (ancient and modern) productions of Trojan War drama staged in times of war have in some way drawn comparisons between the Trojan War and contemporary events: see E. Hall, F. Macintosh, and A. Wrigley (edd.), *Dionysus since 69* (Oxford, 2004) *passim*.

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produced at the height of the Peloponnesian War in 425 B.C. Here (497–556) the character Dicaeopolis makes a speech to the Athenian assembly in which he outlines a peculiar, distorted version of the causes of the Peloponnesian War. First of all (he says), there was some minor dispute about trade between the Athenians and Megarians; but next, some Athenians stole a Megarian prostitute called Simaetha; then, in return, the Megarians abducted two courtesans of Aspasia (528–9) . . .

κἀντεῦθεν ἀρχὴ τοῦ πολέμου κατερράγη
Ἕλλησι πᾶσιν ἐκ τριῶν λαικαστριῶν.

. . . and from that burst forth the origin of the war upon all the Greeks—from three tarts.

Aristophanes trivializes the causes of the war, putting the Megarian Decree on a level with the theft of a few prostitutes. The implication is that Pericles and Aspasia started the war for insignificant, personal motives: a theme which surfaces in various other war-comedies (see below).

There is no direct indication that the subject is anything other than the Peloponnesian War, but the passage alludes indirectly to the Trojan War in several ways. First of all, it is a parody of a speech from Euripides' lost *Telephus*, in which Telephus spoke before the Achaean assembly about the origins of the Trojan War.[12] Pericles is likened to Olympian Zeus, thundering from on high (530–1), an image which enhances the mythological flavour of the passage (whether or not it has anything to do with the Euripidean original).[13] It has been argued that this Aristophanic 'reshaping' of the origins of the Peloponnesian War is an absurd fantasy and is not intended to have any serious political point: 'in attacking a mythical war of his own invention, Aristophanes avoids the issues we might expect the serious opponent of a war to raise'.[14] It is true that the detail of Dicaeopolis' argument is fantastic, and that it bears no relation to actual events or policies of 425, but we should not downplay the 'seriousness' of the allusion to *Telephus* and the Trojan War. The detail is, I think, less important than the general outlook, which is of causes which are contested, difficult to comprehend, obscure, concealed (accidentally or deliberately) behind various layers of disguise, irony and parody.

This observation may in turn affect one's view of the relationship between comedy and tragedy, or (at any rate) of the precise manner in which Aristophanes employs *Telephus* here. As Helene Foley has demonstrated in an influential article,[15] Aristophanes' use of Euripides raises important political questions about the justifiability and the conduct of the Peloponnesian War, at the same time as it makes a case for the serious political function of comic drama (by comparison and contrast with tragedy). Nevertheless, Euripidean parody is only one among a number of strands in this complex passage: it is possible to identify separate literary, intellectual and political strands in the humour. The Trojan War also functions *in its own right* as a symbol of

[12] See P. Rau, *Paratragodia: Untersuchung einer komischen Form des Aristophanes* (Munich, 1967), 22–40; cf. M. Heath, 'Euripides' *Telephus*', *CQ* 37 (1987), 272–80 and C. Collard, M. Cropp and K. Lee (edd.), *Euripides, Fragmentary Plays I* (Warminster, 1995), 17–52.

[13] Pericles also appeared as 'Zeus' (and Aspasia as 'Hera') in other comedies: e.g. Cratinus, *Cheirones* fr. 259, Eupolis, *Prospaltians* fr. 267, Hermippus, *Fates* fr. 42; cf. Plut. *Per.* 3.5. It is not known how close to *Telephus* the parody was: for a sceptical view, see D. M. MacDowell, 'The nature of Aristophanes' *Akharnians*', *G&R* 30 (1983), 143–62.

[14] C. Carey, 'The purpose of Aristophanes' *Acharnians*', *RhM* 136 (1993), 245–63 (at 261); he compares the 'wildly inaccurate' account of the War's origins at *Peace* 605–11.

[15] H. P. Foley, 'Tragedy and politics in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*', *JHS* 108 (1988), 33–47.

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problematic causation, irrespective of its paratragic function.[16] In other words, Dicaeopolis' speech alludes to the Trojan War precisely because it embodies a problematic conception of causation—and this fits in with the play's subversive political message for the audience of spring 425. Transforming the Peloponnesian War into a version of the Trojan War has the effect of contesting its causes, making them seem more ambiguous and questionable. In addition, the justifiability of the conflict is being questioned (as in the Euripidean original and elsewhere).

There may be a further sign that the Trojan War is being alluded to here (which also serves as a further indication that paratragedy is not the only point of Dicaeopolis' transformation into Telephus). It has seemed to many scholars that the causal principle in Dicaeopolis' speech is taken from the opening chapters of Herodotus (1.1–5): the reciprocal abduction of women, as in Herodotus, is seen as a laughably unsatisfactory cause for going to war, and the whole passage has what might be called a 'Herodotean' flavour.[17] Others are more sceptical, either noting the absence of any definite verbal echoes or doubting that Herodotus' *Histories* were published by 425;[18] it has been suggested that both Herodotus and Aristophanes may independently have used a common source (such as *Telephus*).[19] But these objections can, I think, be answered. In the first place, parody does not invariably depend on direct verbal quotation.[20] As for the question of Aristophanes' knowledge of Herodotus, so little is known about the 'publication' of the *Histories* that dogmatism is impossible, but it seems perfectly conceivable that portions of the text were known to Athenians in 425 in some form (even if not a complete text of the whole work).[21]

It seems obvious to me (at least) that Herodotus *is* being parodied, but as I have just observed with respect to Euripides, parody is only part of the bigger picture. We cannot know exactly which texts were known to Aristophanes and his audience, but perhaps this is not the most important question to ask. The fact that Aristophanes (along with other comedians) could joke about causation in this way, and by doing so expect to raise a laugh, shows that the issue was part of the discourse of popular culture more generally. The joke relies on the audience's identifying with the familiar theme of problematic causation, whether or not they knew *Telephus*, and whether or not they were meant to think of Herodotus' opening chapters as well.[22] In any case, to think in terms of the 'influence' of history (or tragedy) on comedy is to imply a one-way process, in which 'frivolous' comedy is largely dependent on the more 'serious' genres. But it may be better to conceive of the intellectual context in a more

[16] Indeed, the 'surprisingly' un-Euripidean character of Dicaeopolis' speech has been noted: R. M. Harriott, 'The function of the Euripides scene in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*', *G&R* 29 (1982), 35–41.

[17] E.g. K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (London, 1972), 87; L. Edmunds, 'Aristophanes' *Acharnians*', *YClS* 26 (1980), 13; S. D. Olson (ed.), *Aristophanes, Acharnians* (Oxford, 2002), liii–iv; Rau (n. 12), 22–3; D. Sansone, *ICS* 10 (1985), 1–9.

[18] E.g. MacDowell (n. 13); C. W. Fornara, 'Evidence for the date of Herodotus' publication', *JHS* 91 (1971), 25–34.

[19] Heath (n. 12), 272–3.

[20] For a nuanced definition of different forms of parody, see M. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-modern* (Cambridge, 1993), esp. 5–53.

[21] On Herodotus' method of composition and 'publication' (including the possibility of public performance), see W. A. Johnson, 'Oral performance and the composition of Herodotus' *Histories*', *GRBS* 35 (1994), 229–54; R. Lattimore, 'The composition of the *History* of Herodotus', *CPh* 53 (1958), 9–31; cf. Lucian, *Her.* 1.

[22] A similar point is made by C. Pelling, *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian* (London, 2000), 154–5: he is sceptical about a Herodotean reference.

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complex, dynamic sense, and instead think in terms of the 'interdependence' of the genres. Comedy, tragedy and history all reflect contemporary culture, and they can be seen as parallel responses to the same issues.

III

We have seen that *Acharnians* uses the Trojan War as a means of conceptualizing the causes of war, at the same time as establishing an unambiguous connection between myth and politics. In addition, the mythologizing of real events can be seen as an oblique form of protest—a way in which Aristophanes could express unease at the causes, and the justifiability, of the current conflict and the course which it was taking.[23] Aristophanes is not alone in any of this: the same threads run through other comedies too. Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros*, perhaps the most interesting lost comedy on the Trojan War theme, also connected myth, politics and protest, but did so in a different, less explicit manner. The play itself is lost, but a large amount of information about its contents is preserved in a section of the ancient Hypothesis discovered in papyrus a little over one hundred years ago.[24] I offer a translation below:

> . . . judgement . . . Hermes departs and they share some words with the audience about the poets,[25] and when Dionysus has appeared they mock and jeer at him. Then the goddesses arrive on the scene <and offer gifts> to him—Hera offers unassailable tyranny, Athene offers courage in war, and Aphrodite offers to make him extremely beautiful and desirable—and Dionysus judges Aphrodite the winner. Afterwards he sails to Sparta, abducts Helen, and returns to Ida. Shortly after this he hears that the Greeks are ravaging the countryside and <searching for Paris>. So, concealing Helen in a basket with all speed, he transforms himself into a ram and awaits further developments. Paris enters, detects them both and orders them to be taken to the ships, in order to hand them over to the Greeks. When Helen refuses, he takes pity upon her and keeps her with him to be his wife, but he sends away Dionysus to be handed over. The satyrs follow him, encouraging him and promising not to betray him. In the play Pericles is satirized most convincingly through *emphasis* for having brought war upon the Athenians.

This fragment, one of our most important pieces of evidence for Old Comedy, has often been discussed:[26] I confine myself to the most important points and some new observations.

The most striking feature of the plot is that it offers a radically revised version of the causes of the Trojan War. Paris is absolved from guilt (unusually, he appears as a sympathetic character), while Helen's own guilt is minimized; instead, it was Dionysus—startlingly—who caused the war, disguised as Paris! This overturning of the standard version of events is an outrageous example of what is sometimes called 'counterfactual' history. This adjective is defined as 'pertaining to, or expressing, what has not in fact happened, but might, could, or would happen in different con-

[23] See Foley (n. 15), Carey (n. 14), and MacDowell (n. 13) for more about the political 'purpose' of *Ach*.

[24] *POxy.* 663 = *PCG* 4.140–1, test. 1.

[25] Translating Körte's περὶ τῶν ποιητῶν rather than Kassel–Austin's περὶ ὑῶν ποιήσεως: see below for discussion.

[26] Kassel and Austin ad loc. cite bibliography up to 1983; additional recent discussions include E. Bakola, 'Old Comedy disguised as satyr-play: a new reading of Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros*', *ZPE* 154 (2005), 46–58; M. Revermann, 'Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* and the head of Pericles', *JHS* 117 (1997), 197–200; R. Rosen, *Old Comedy and the Iambographic Tradition* (Atlanta, 1988); A. Tatti, 'Le *Dionysalexandros* de Cratinos', *Metis* 1 (1986), 325–32.

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ditions'.[27] Counterfactual writings, in the ancient or the modern world alike, may be used to reflect on both past and present; but in the fifth century they gain interpretative complexity because of the plural and often contradictory nature of myths, and the difficulty of distinguishing the categories of 'myth' and 'history' from one another. The Trojan War, perhaps, particularly lends itself to counterfactual experiments because more than most events it seems to hover ambiguously on the border between these categories.[28]

Notable parallels for counterfactual Trojan War dramas are provided by Euripides' *Helen* and *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, both of which use alternative versions of familiar myths (Paris abducted not Helen but a phantom-double; Agamemnon sacrificed not Iphigenia but a fawn). Though the plots of these dramas range quite widely over the Trojan myths, including both Iliadic and Odyssean material, it is significant that (once again) it is the origins and causes of the war that provide the main focus and the source of counterfactuality. In fact, these Euripidean tragedies have a number of other themes in common with Cratinus, including disguise and deception, appearance and illusion, the guilt (or innocence) of Helen and Paris; the capricious behaviour of the gods, and (above all) the problematization of myth as a source of knowledge about the past.[29]

These similarities might be thought to have generic implications: what is the difference (if any) between comic and tragic treatments? An explanation might lie in the perceived 'genre-bending' tendencies of late Euripides. Both *Helen* and *IT* have from time to time been labelled 'comic' or 'tragicomic':[30] perhaps Euripides, under the influence of comedy, was aiming to produce a new or hybrid type of drama. Whatever one's point of view on that thorny issue,[31] there remain a number of important differences between the tragedian and the comedian. Apart from the obvious differences of form and performance, the main distinction is political.[32] Although both Euripides and Cratinus might broadly be called 'anti-war' playwrights, the level of topical and political engagement in the tragedies is far lower: Euripides' interests tend more towards philosophy and religion than politics.

Perhaps it is the counterfactual aspect of these tragedies, in particular, which has led to their being labelled comic. Counterfactual experiments are essentially ludic in nature, and it is easy to see how any writer who flagrantly rejects the accepted 'facts' of myth or history might appear to be fundamentally lacking in seriousness.[33] But 'ludic' is *not* invariably the same as 'ludicrous' or 'comic', and in fact the tone and

[27] *OED*[2] (1989).

[28] G. M. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths* (Harmondsworth, 1974), 22–4 sees the Trojan War as, paradoxically, both historical *and* mythical: it is 'quasi-historical', too bound up with history and pragmatic reality to count as a myth proper. On this subject in fifth-century discourse see V. Hunter, 'Thucydides and the uses of the past', *Klio* 62 (1980), 191–218; R. Thomas, 'Herodotus and the floating gap', in Luraghi (n. 6), 196–210.

[29] I explore these themes in detail elsewhere: M. E. Wright, *Euripides' Escape-Tragedies: A Study of Helen, Andromeda, and Iphigenia among the Taurians* (Oxford, 2005).

[30] E.g. A. Pippin, 'Euripides' *Helen*: a comedy of ideas', *CPh* 55 (1960), 151–63; B. M. W. Knox, 'Euripidean comedy', in *Word and Action: Essays on the Ancient Theater* (Baltimore, 1979), 250–74; E. Segal, 'The comic catastrophe: an essay on Euripidean comedy', in A. J. Griffith (ed.), *Stage Directions: Essays in Ancient Drama in Honour of E.W. Handley*, *BICS* suppl. 66 (London, 1995), 46–55.

[31] See Wright (n. 29), 6–43.

[32] Cf. O. P. Taplin, 'Fifth-century tragedy and comedy: a *synkrisis*', *JHS* 106 (1986), 167.

[33] Cf. J. Merriman (ed.), *For Want of a Horse: Chance and Humour in History* (Lexington, 1984).

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purpose of such writing can vary greatly. Even though both ancient and modern attempts at counterfactual writing have been dismissed as frivolous *jeux d'esprit*, they often have a serious purpose.[34] Imagining what *might* have happened, given different conditions, causes one to consider from a new angle the connection of events in a sequence and the link between cause and effect, and to question the basis for one's knowledge of what really happened. It might even be argued that the concept of counterfactuality underlies all historical accounts of causation (in that they consider and reject alternative causes, and imply that later events would not have happened without earlier ones). Counterfactual writing can be silly or serious, tragic or comic: it does not belong to any one genre in particular.[35]

I shall return to the problem of the relationship between comedy and tragedy (see V below); but in any case, Cratinus' use of counterfactuality is perfectly serious, if not in the same way as tragedy. Although the plot of *Dionysalexandros* is brashly absurd, it raises important questions about the justifiability of war, the disingenuous or corrupt behaviour of politicians, and the extent to which the public really knows what is going on. Nevertheless, it is worth inquiring exactly how the play's political message emerged. As the last sentence of the Hypothesis shows, *Dionysalexandros* satirized Pericles. But, unlike *Acharnians* and other political comedies, which were set in current-day Athens, *Dionysalexandros* seems to have been set entirely in the world of myth. How, then, did the satire operate?

According to the Hypothesis, Pericles was satirized δι' ἐμφάσεως, a phrase which is normally taken to denote hidden meaning, suggestion, or innuendo: in other words, that the Dionysus/Paris character was also made to represent Pericles, by cryptic allusion of some sort.[36] This does not necessarily mean (as some think) that Dionysus/Paris represented Pericles all the way through the play: it may be that parallels were drawn only in specific lines or scenes. It is clear that audiences were accustomed to watching comedies in which characters had more than one identity,[37] and it seems that part of the audience's experience of comedy consisted of guessing 'who was who' at different points within a play; but the identities of characters are sometimes remarkably fluid, changing at different points in the plot rather than being fixed throughout the play. This is particularly true during episodes of paratragedy, which depend on the characters' slipping in and out of different *personae* as the changing scene demands. For example, 'Dicaeopolis' in *Acharnians* has been seen as

[34] See N. Ferguson (ed.), *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (London, 1997), 1–88 for an interesting survey and critique of such exercises in modern history.

[35] Explicitly counterfactual speculation is found in Homer (e.g. *Il.* 16.684–7, 698–701) and fifth-century historiography (e.g. Hdt. 1.191.5, 3.15.2, 7.168.3, 8.136.3, 9.113.2). On many more occasions Herodotus records alternative accounts between which he (or the reader) must choose: for a full list see D. Lateiner, *The Historical Method of Herodotus* (Toronto, 1989), 84–90. Note also Lucian's tantalizing reference (*De Scrib. Hist.* 31) to a historian who included the future in his work!

[36] So W. Körte, 'Die Hypothesis zu Kratinos' *Dionysalexandros*', *Hermes* 39 (1904), 481–98, and most subsequent interpreters. On this meaning of ἔμφασις, cf. [Plut.] *Vit. Hom.* 26; *Auct. Herenn.* 4.54; Demetr. *Eloc.* 288; *Tract. Coisl.* 31–2 Koster; Quint. *Inst.* 8.3.83, 9.2.64; discussion in R. Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy* (London, 1984), 202–6. However, the Aristophanic scholia use ἔμφασις simply to mean 'emphasis' (*ΣCl.* 1214; *Birds* 731; *Peace* 470, etc.): see W. G. Rutherford, *A Chapter in the History of Annotation* (London, 1905), 264–6.

[37] A number of comedies have 'two-name' titles of a similar sort to *Dionysalexandros* (Aristophanes' *Aeolosicon*, Polyzelus' *Demotyndareus*, and Strattis' *Anthroporestes* and *Lemnomeda*, among others). These titles may simply denote a 'disguise' motif; alternatively, they may have involved more complex 'innuendo' in the form of shifting or multiple identities.

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representing (some or all of) Aristophanes, Eupolis, Telephus, Orestes and the city of Athens, as well as an ordinary Athenian peasant.[38] It may be that the central character in *Dionysalexandros* was required at different times (consecutively or simultaneously) to become Dionysus, Paris, or Pericles—not to mention the ram—and perhaps yet more identities would emerge if only the text survived.

Alternatively, it is possible to see the whole play as a more consistent, coherent allegory, with the Trojan War functioning in its entirety as a mythical 'double' of the current war, and Paris/Dionysus representing Pericles all the time—a Διονυσοπερικλεαλέξανδρος, as it were.[39] Certainly there are parallels for this more consistent type of character identification: the caricature of Cleon as 'Paphlagon' in Aristophanes' *Knights* and of Hyperbolus as 'Maricas' in Eupolis' play of the same name.[40] Michael Vickers (who has argued, controversially, that political allegory is ubiquitous in comedy) even claims that 'polymorphic characterization' of this sort was the norm in *all* plays.[41]

There are a number of ways in which ἔμφασις may have worked, including word-play, puns, veiled allusions to Pericles' activities, or distinctive traits of personality or speech exploited in performance. It is clear that recognizable portrait-masks were sometimes used:[42] thus, even if the Paris/Dionysus character was never explicitly named or referred to as 'Pericles', a mask would have made the identification obvious.[43] But in any case, Aristophanes' *Knights* shows that satire could operate effectively without names or masks: no spectator familiar with Athenian politics could fail to see that 'Paphlagon' is Cleon.[44]

The evidence so far is inconclusive, but there are other signs that Cratinus' play functioned as a coherent allegory. Several scholars have identified a number of supposed parallels between the plot of *Dionysalexandros* (or the Judgement myth as generally known) and what is known about Pericles' career up to 430 from other sources.[45] These parallels are ingenious, but ultimately they do not prove anything. However, another piece of evidence makes it seem more likely that Dionysus/Paris

[38] N. R. E. Fisher, 'Multiple personalities and Dionysiac festivals: Dicaeopolis in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*', *G&R* 40 (1993), 31–47, refers to the 'baffling' number of roles adopted by a single character (Dicaeopolis), but concludes that the audience was accustomed to this phenomenon.

[39] So Revermann (n. 26), 199; a similar, though more nuanced, view of ἔμφασις is taken by I. Ruffell, 'A total write-off. Aristophanes, Cratinus, and the rhetoric of comic competition', *CQ* 52 (2002), 138–63.

[40] See I. C. Storey, *Eupolis, Poet of Old Comedy* (Oxford, 2003), 197–214 on both plays. In another (unnamed) comedy, mentioned by Lucian, Cleon 'is' Prometheus (Κλέων Προμηθεύς ἐστι, Lucian, *Prom.* 2.26 = *PCG* adesp. fr. 456): possibly this refers to the same sort of technique.

[41] M. Vickers, *Pericles on Stage: Political Comedy in Aristophanes* (Austin, 1997), xxvi, 15–16. See I. C. Storey, *BMCR* (1997), 9.15 for a sceptical view of Vickers' approach.

[42] See K. J. Dover, 'Portrait-masks in Aristophanes', in *Greek and the Greeks* (Oxford, 1987), 267–78.

[43] Revermann (n. 26) makes the attractive suggestion that the mask took the form of a prosthetic 'onion-head', since Pericles' famously misshapen head was the subject of jokes in other comedies. Cf. Plut. *Per.* 3.3–7, 13.9, quoting Cratinus, *Cheirons* fr. 258; *Nemesis* fr. 118; *Thracian Women* fr. 73; Eupolis, *Demes* fr. 115; Telecleides fr. 47.

[44] *Knights* 230–3 shows that no portrait-mask was used. Cf. *Peace*, where Cleon is satirized again, this time 'riddlingly' (ἐς Κλέωνα . . . αἰνίσσεται, 47), through the image of the dung-beetle.

[45] J. Schwarze, *Die Beurteilung des Perikles durch die attische Komödie und ihre historische und historiographische Bedeutung*, *Zetemata* 51 (Munich, 1971), 6–24 traces a large number of perceived parallels; these are summarized and discussed by Rosen (n. 26), 52–3. Tatti (n. 26) finds an allegorical significance in the gifts offered to Paris (Pericles).

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indeed represented Pericles throughout the play. In Hermippus' *Fates*, Pericles was addressed as follows (fr. 47.1–3):

> *βασιλεῦ σατύρων, τί ποτ' οὐκ ἐθέλεις*
> *δόρυ βαστάζειν, ἀλλὰ λόγους μὲν*
> *περὶ τοῦ πολέμου δεινοὺς παρέχηι;*

King of the satyrs, you make an awful lot of speeches on the subject of war—but whyever do you not want to go out and fight?

The joke depends on Pericles being readily identified with Dionysus, and this fragment is usually taken as being a deliberate intertextual reference to Cratinus' play.[46]

In a sense, it is not important to prove the extent to which *ἔμφασις* operated, or to argue that *Dionysalexandros* was entirely allegorical. Whether or not the central character was explicitly identified with Pericles, and whatever the precise extent of that identification, it would not have been difficult for an audience watching the play to discern echoes and parallels of the current situation in the events of the Trojan War. (By way of comparison, one notes that tragedies are often read as having a specific political significance, even though no explicit link is ever made between past and present.[47]) It is Cratinus' focus on *causation* that is more important, together with the fact that a link *of some sort* was made between heroic Troy and democratic Athens.

It was not just comedians who sought to establish parallels between the present day and the world of myth, and the point of doing so need not have been pejorative or satirical. For writers of history, the scale and importance of the Trojan War gave it the status of a standard against which other military campaigns could be measured. Both Herodotus and Thucydides begin their *Histories* with precisely such a comparison, thereby emphasizing the importance not only of their own subject matter (the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars, respectively) but also of their own literary enterprise, which invites comparisons with Homeric epic.[48] In addition, politicians themselves sometimes aimed to gain political capital by appealing to the imagination of a public intimately familiar with their myths. They might draw explicit comparisons between myth and reality, or even consciously model their own actions on mythical models, in an attempt to elevate their own exploits to 'heroic' status. Naturally, the Trojan myths would have been particularly potent in this regard, and a number of examples show how they could be manipulated by politicians. Cimon, for instance, after the capture of Eion in 475 B.C., erected a statue of Hermes with an inscription comparing the Athenian army to those Athenians who had fought under Menestheus against Troy in the *Iliad*,[49] while Agesilaus deliberately tried to recreate Agamemnon's sacrifice at Aulis before his expedition to Asia in 396.[50]

Even more interestingly, Pericles himself deliberately established a connection between the Trojan War and the conflicts of the 430s. When he returned to Athens after his Samian expedition in 439, he compared his own achievements favourably to those of Agamemnon, observing that it had taken Agamemnon ten years to capture

[46] See *PCG* 5.582–3; cf. Schwarze (n. 45), 101–9. But see also n. 86 below.
[47] Cf. (in particular) Euripides' use of the Trojan War myths in *Tro.* and other plays: see N. Croally, *Euripidean Polemic* (Cambridge, 1994).
[48] Hdt. 1.3–4; Thuc. 1.9–12.
[49] Plut. *Cim.* 7.5–6.
[50] Plut. *Ages.* 6; cf. Xen. *Hell.* 3.43.

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Troy, but that he himself had taken only nine months to subdue Samos.[51] We might also recall Pericles' famous boast, in the *epitaphios*, that Athens is so great as to have no need of a Homer to commemorate her.[52] So it appears that Pericles himself may have provided Cratinus with some of the ammunition which he used for his satirical assault in *Dionysalexandros*. This would have added appreciably to the humour: in Cratinus' version, Pericles becomes not Agamemnon but Paris, not the hero but the villain! No doubt the audience would have rather enjoyed seeing their leader's inflated rhetoric rebound on him in this ironical way.

It is clear that the Athenian audience was capable of conceptualizing current-day concerns in terms of myth, but the question remains why Cratinus should have resorted to this type of disguised or cryptic satire, δι' ἐμφάσεως, rather than giving the play a contemporary setting and naming Pericles openly. One answer to this question is that mythical satire is simply a funny and inventive concept in its own right; but there may be more to it than that. In fact, comedy for a long time seems to have avoided openly using politicians as central characters.[53] However that might be, *Dionysalexandros* was not the only play to satirize Pericles by means of myth. Several other mythological comedies criticized Pericles for his motives in waging war or his conduct of the campaign. But before turning to these plays, and their bearing on matters of chronology and interpretation (IV below), a little more can perhaps be said about political and literary themes in *Dionysalexandros*.

The fragments yield far less of interest than the Hypothesis, but they do exhibit one noteworthy feature in particular: a curious preoccupation with sheep. Fragment 45 is well known in other contexts, on account of its representation of the noise made by sheep:

ὁ δ' ἠλίθιος ὥσπερ πρόβατον βῆ βῆ λέγων βαδίζει

. . . and the silly fool is going about like a sheep, saying 'baa baa' . . .

There is also the (more obscure) fr. 39, with its reference to clipping-shears:

ἔνεισι δ' ἐνταυθοῖ μάχαιραι κουρίδες,
αἷς κείρομεν τὰ πρόβατα καὶ τοὺς ποιμένας

And here are some clippers, which we use to shear sheep—and shepherds.

Fr. 48 too is about shearing (νακότιλτος ὥσπερεὶ κωδάριον ἐφαινόμην, 'I appeared with my hair shorn just like a fleece'), while fr. 43 mentions sheep-droppings (οἰσπώτην).[54] Now the image of Paris as shepherd is familiar from numerous accounts, and we have already seen from the Hypothesis that Dionysus disguised himself as a ram in the course of the play (which may explain these jokes); it has been suggested that the chorus was composed of shepherds.[55] However, there may be an

[51] Plut. *Per.* 28.7 (= Ion, *FGrH* 392 F16); cf. *De Glor. Ath.* 350E.

[52] Thuc. 2.41.4.

[53] It has been argued that Ar. *Knights*, Eupolis' *Maricas*, and Plato's *Peisander* in the 420s were innovative in this respect: see A.H. Sommerstein, 'Platon, Eupolis, and the "demagogue-comedy"', in Harvey and Wilkins (n. 1), 437–51.

[54] Fr. 313 (ποιμὴν καθέστηκ'· αἰπολῶ καὶ βουκολῶ), placed by Kassel–Austin among *incertae fabulae*, was also assigned by Kock (= fr. 281) to *Dionysalexandros*.

[55] See W. Luppe, 'Die Hypothesis zu Kratinos' *Dionysalexandros*', *Philologus* 110 (1966), 184–92; Bakola (n. 26), 49–51 suggests that satyrs (Hypoth. col. 2, 42–3) took on the duties of shepherds.

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additional level of *political* significance here (beyond the fact that sheep are inherently rather comical creatures).

Michael Vickers' ingenious 'allegorical' explanation is, I think, far-fetched (he himself buries it away in an 'Appendix');[56] but it is still possible to find a political significance to all this sheep-related humour. Rather than looking for a complex allegorical meaning, I suggest that Cratinus may have been aiming to make a more simple, general point about the political behaviour of the *demos* and its relationship to its leaders. If, in the world of the play, 'Paris' (*qua* shepherd) did represent Pericles, it is not hard to see how his 'sheep' might have represented the Athenian citizenry, either for the whole play (though one cannot tell how the plot as a whole would have worked) or (more likely) for the sake of individual jokes and comparisons. Thus Dionysus'/Pericles' own transformation into a sheep would thus seem a nice bit of irony (fr. 39, quoted above, may be connected with this moment in the play). Cratinus would not have been alone in making this association: a number of other passages, from comedy and elsewhere, contain the unflattering image of the *demos* as a flock of foolish, docile sheep who allow themselves to be herded about by manipulative politicians.[57]

There is more to *Dionysalexandros* than political comedy alone. No doubt the play will have contained its share of literary comedy too, in the form of allusions to, or parodies of, previous treatments of the Trojan War and Judgement myths. Without the complete text, it is pointless to speculate very far along these lines, but I tentatively suggest that the offer of bribes to Dionysus/Paris involves one (hitherto unidentified) literary in-joke. According to the Hypothesis, Aphrodite offered Dionysus/Paris not (as elsewhere) the most beautiful *woman* for a companion, but rather the prospect of *himself becoming* the most beautiful and desirable being in existence (*τῆς δ' Ἀφροδίτης κάλλιστόν τε καὶ ἐπέραστον αὐτον ὑπάρχειν*, col. i, 16–19). This works as a joke on its own terms: both Dionysus and Paris are characterized in the literary tradition by effeminate good looks and vanity, and, furthermore, a sexier hero would naturally have a far better chance of success in matters of the trouser. However, there may be an additional, intertextual level to the humour, consisting of a play on the famous opening of Sappho's 'Helen' poem (fr. 16 Voigt).[58] This begins in the style of a priamel, posing the question 'what is the most beautiful thing in the world (*τὸ κάλλιστον*)?' The answer—it is whatever one loves—is given only after a series of alternatives (a cavalry troop, an army, a fleet) has been rejected. Part of this poem's impact comes from its unusual connection of ideas and its unexpected conception of what constitutes beauty: as its most recent editor has remarked, it 'leads the listener to think that the argument will develop in a different direction, with Helen as the object

[56] Vickers (n. 41), 193–5 believes that the play concerns the demagogue Lysicles (whom Aspasia married after Pericles' death, and whom Aristophanes (*Knights* 132) calls a 'sheep-dealer'). However, it is unclear how the 'allegory' worked, or what Lysicles has to do with the other themes of the play; this theory also requires a production date later than is usually accepted (see below).

[57] The image of an Assembly full of 'sheep' is seen at Ar. *Clouds* 1203; *Knights* 264; *Wasps* 31–6 and 955. Cf. *LSJ* s.v. *πρόβατον* (1.2) for other proverbial refs. Note also the well-known remarks of Thucydides' Cleon (3.38) criticizing the docility of the 'audience' in the Assembly.

[58] Thus I prefer Kassel–Austin's text of lines 16–19 (quoted) to any emended version: e.g. W. Luppe, 'Nochmals zum "Paris"-Urteil bei Kratinos', *Philologus* 124 (1980), 124–8 (*τὴν καλλίστην τε καὶ ἐπεραστοτάτην αὐτῶι ὑπάρχειν*); cf. J. Ebert, 'Das "Parisurteil" in der Hypothesis zum Dionysalexandros des Kratinos', *Philologus* 122 (1978), 177–82 (*καλλιστόν τε καὶ ἐπεραστότατον γάμον ὑπάρχειν*). Such emendations ignore the 'Sapphic' possibilities of the phrase.

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of love (Paris preferred her to manlier bribes). In fact, the line of thought more subtly pursues Helen as subject'.[59] But if τὸ κάλλιστον is whatever one loves, then Helen is not the only possible answer to the question. What if the most beautiful thing in the world was not Helen but the vain, narcissistic Paris (Dionysus) himself? This is the intriguing possibility which Cratinus seems to be raising: in a sense, it might amount to another counterfactual reworking of a well-known idea. Perhaps (who knows?) Helen's own beauty was also contested in the course of the play: an *ugly* Helen, or at any rate a Helen whose beauty was inferior to that of her abductor, would be an interesting proposition.[60]

Finally, I believe one can see a yet further—this time metatheatrical—significance to the Judgement of Paris theme, which can be situated within the characteristic concerns of comedy as a genre. That is, judgement is a subject of interest in its own right. It is well known that comedians are preoccupied to an unusual degree, and in an unusually self-conscious manner, with the business of competition, rivalry and the adjudication of the comic competition. The characters and the chorus, often adopting the *persona* of their playwright, frequently make explicit appeal to the audience and judges, referring to their own superiority over their rivals, as well as drawing attention to their past, present and future success or failure in the competition.[61] It is probable that when the chorus (?) in *Dionysalexandros* 'talked to the audience about the poets' (Hypoth., col. 1, 6–9), they were talking (*inter alia*) about the rivalry between the competing comedians and the merits of Cratinus' play, perhaps in the course of a *parabasis*.[62] From this it is a small jump to imagine a metatheatrical interpretation of Cratinus' plot, in which the Judgement of Paris/Dionysus, in addition to all its other functions within this play, emerges as a sort of counterpart to the adjudication of the festival judges, with the competing playwrights taking on the role of the jealous goddesses in this scenario.[63] Dionysus, as the god of the comic festival, would have been a well-qualified (if perhaps somewhat temperamental) adjudicator: one naturally calls to mind his similar role as judge in the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides in Aristophanes' *Frogs*.

An excellent parallel is provided by an Aristophanic passage which explicitly compares the circumstances of the comic competition to the Judgement of Paris

[59] G. O. Hutchinson (ed.), *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford, 2001), 163.

[60] Note that comedy (in general) shows a preoccupation with exaggerated ugliness of behaviour and appearance: cf. Ar. *Poet.* 5.1449a34; *Proleg. de Com.* 6.146–7 Koster. Certain comic vase paintings, which may reflect (in some sense) themes from drama, depict an exaggeratedly ugly character which has been identified as Helen: A. D. Trendall and T. B. L. Webster, *Illustrations of Greek Drama* (London, 1971), 4.27–8 (Bari 8014, Berlin F3045). We may also recall Euripides' Helen wishing that she could become uglier and therefore happier (*Hel.* 262–5).

[61] Excellent recent discussions include M. Heath, 'Aristophanes and his rivals', *G&R* 37 (1990), 143–58; Ruffell (n. 39); K. Sidwell, 'Poetic rivalry and the caricature of comic poets: Cratinus' *Pytine* and Aristophanes' *Wasps*', in A. J. Griffith (ed.), *Stage Directions: Essays in Ancient Drama in Honour of E.W. Handley*, *BICS* suppl. 66 (London, 1995), 56–80.

[62] The papyrus reading (πυωνποιη) needs expanding if it is to make sense. For the reason outlined, I think Körte's περὶ τῶν ποιητῶν is far preferable to Rutherford's περὶ υἱῶν ποιήσεως ('on the generation of sons', adopted by KA). However, if the latter supplement is right, presumably some political point about Pericles' sons (*vel sim.*) is intended: see W. G. Rutherford, 'The date of the Dionysalexander', *CR* 18 (1904), 440; cf. E. Handley, '*P.Oxy.* 2806: a fragment of Cratinus?', *BICS* 29 (1982), 109–17. Bakola (n. 26), 46 and W. Luppe, 'περὶ υἱῶν ποιήσεως', *ZPE* 72 (1988), 37–8 defend Körte's supplement.

[63] Cf. A. M. Bowie, 'The parabasis in Aristophanes: prolegomena, *Acharnians*', *CQ* 32 (1982), 27–40, for discussion of the use of the *parabasis* to mirror the themes of the main plot.

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(*Birds* 1102–17). Here the members of the bird-chorus invite the judges to see themselves in the role of Paris (1102–4):

> τοῖς κριταῖς εἰπεῖν τι βουλόμεσθα τῆς νίκης πέρι,
> ὅσ' ἀγάθ', ἢν κρίνωσιν ἡμᾶς, πᾶσιν αὐτοῖς δώσομεν,
> ὥστε κρείττω δῶρα πολλῶι τῶν Ἀλεξάνδρου λαβεῖν.

We wish to say a word to the judges on the subject of our victory: we'll give them all such marvellous gifts—if they vote for us—that they'll take home rewards far greater than those offered to Paris!

The chorus leader goes on to outline the benefits which the birds will, supposedly, bring to the judges if they make the 'right' decision, and the punishment which they will exact if they award the prize to another dramatist (they will shit all over them). Clearly this is a form of bribery, comparable to the machinations of Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite. Comparing the judges to Paris at the fatal beauty-contest has the effect of ridiculously elevating their status: the consequences of their decision will be as momentous, Aristophanes claims, as the consequences of Paris' choice on Mt Ida. His tongue is firmly in his cheek, of course; but since the judges were indeed open to bribery and corruption on occasion, there is also (as so often) a serious edge to the joke.[64]

This parallel strengthens the case for a metatheatrical reading of Cratinus. There might also be consequences here for the debate over the number of competitors at the Dionysia and Lenaea festivals during the late fifth century.[65] In both *Dionysalexandros* and *Birds*, the assimilation of competing playwrights to jealous goddesses would, surely, work far better if there were three (rather than five) comedians in the competition, corresponding to Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite. But this is only a tentative suggestion. One should not, perhaps, be over-literal when interpreting such evidence;[66] and in any case the date of *Dionysalexandros* is unknown (see IV below).

It seems clear that Cratinus' play was a fascinatingly multi-layered comedy. Its focus on the origins of the war, though central to the whole plot, was far from being the only source of humour and invention. In addition, it combined elements of political commentary, counterfactual myth-making, parody, literary allusion, metatheatricality, and the dizzying juxtaposition of different levels of reality, illusion, and

[64] In Pherecrates' *Krapataloi* (fr. 102), a character (the chorus leader?) says: 'I urge the judges who are now sitting in judgement not to break their oath or give unfair judgement' (*τοῖς δὲ κριταῖς / τοῖς νυνὶ κρίνουσι λέγω, / μὴ 'πιορκεῖν μηδ' ἀδίκως / κρίνειν*). For similar appeals to the judges cf. *Birds* 445–7, *Clouds* 1115–30, *Eccl.* 1154–62. Cf. Dem. 21.17–18, recounting an attempt by one Meidias to bribe the *didaskalos*, the archon, and the *choregoi* as well as the judges. Plato, *Laws* 2.659A–C (cf. 3.700C–701A) criticizes the tendency of judges to be swayed by the unpredictable behaviour of the audience. On dramatic judging in general, cf. A. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 2nd edn., rev. J. Gould and D. M. Lewis (Oxford, 1988), 95–9; E. Csapo and W. J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor, 1995), 157–65; C. W. Marshall and S. van Willigenburg, 'Judging Athenian dramatic competitions', *JHS* 124 (2004), 90–107.

[65] Many believe that the number of comedies produced at each festival was reduced during the Peloponnesian War from five to three, and that comedies were produced on separate days, to follow each of the three tragic/satyric tetralogies (Hypoth. to Ar. *Clouds*, *Peace*, *Birds*, *Ach.*, *Knights*, *Wasps*, *Frogs:* see Pickard-Cambridge (n. 64), 83). The most recent discussion, summarizing previous scholarship, is I. C. Storey, 'Cutting comedies', *Drama* 12 (2002), 146–67.

[66] This *is* comedy, after all; and the audience may have made the connection between playwrights and goddesses even if the numbers did not exactly correspond: cf. Eur. *Supp.*, where a chorus of fifteen represents the mothers of the Seven against Thebes.

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character identity. Furthermore, the seeming presence of a group of satyrs[67] raises puzzling questions about the play's possible manipulation of generic boundaries: why satyrs in a *comedy*? Did they form a (or the principal) chorus?[68] *Dionysalexandros* is certainly the most interesting of the Trojan War–related comedies (to judge by the surviving evidence). As we shall see, it has also influenced the way in which other mythological comedies have been interpreted.

IV

There is less evidence for other lost comedies on the Trojan War theme, but still the same pattern emerges: an interest in causation and the origins of the war above all other aspects. There is also, as in *Acharnians* and *Dionysalexandros*, a certain amount of political humour along with the myth; but the political content, and its evidence for the date of the plays, has often been overstated. Certain scholars have assumed, first, that all these mythological comedies can be read allegorically; second, that they are all 'really' about Pericles and the Peloponnesian War; and third, that they all cluster very closely around a particular date (430–29 B.C.) and the first few dramatic festivals after the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War.[69]

Such a view is perfectly plausible, and it is easy to see why one might make these assumptions: the plot of *Dionysalexandros* illustrates just how myth might function (to some degree) as political allegory, and Plutarch's *Life* suggests that comedians often attacked Pericles through myth (either in plays of the 'mythological' type or in passing allusions, it is hard to tell which).[70] However, the production dates are far from certain (see below). In any case, even if one believes in the principle of allegorical interpretation, it has to be admitted that some of the specific points of correspondence detected between myth and real-life politics are tenuous and unconvincing.[71] More importantly, though, the problem is that there is just not enough evidence to allow such confidence: in fact, little can be said for certain about these plays beyond the fact that they were preoccupied with causation.

The action of Cratinus' *Nemesis* (frr. 114–27) seems to have centred on the conception of Helen and her birth from an egg. It is generally thought that Eratosthenes' *Catasterisms*, describing Zeus' transformation into a swan and union with Nemesis, preserves the general outline of the plot,[72] though it is worth stressing that this does not make it clear quite what a *comic* version of the myth would look like. It is clear that the egg somehow found its way into Leda's nest, and the fragments (especially fr. 115) suggest that there was a certain amount of knockabout humour involving its incubation and hatching.[73] There are also signs that Zeus' disguise and deception

[67] Hypoth. col. 2, 42–3; cf. Hermippus, *Fates* fr. 47 (see n. 46 above).

[68] A question discussed by Bakola (n. 26) and Tatti (n. 26), 332.

[69] See in particular P. Geissler, *Chronologie der altattischen Komödie*, 2nd edn. (Zurich, 1969); J. McGlew, *Citizens on Stage: Comedy and Political Culture in the Athenian Democracy* (Ann Arbor, 2002); Schwarze (n. 45).

[70] On Plutarch and comedy, see P. Stadter, *A Commentary on Plutarch's Pericles* (Chapel Hill, 1989), lxiii–lxvii. On Pericles in comedy, cf. W. Will, *Thukydides und Perikles: Der Historiker und sein Held* (Bonn, 2003), 269–75.

[71] The worst offender in this regard was perhaps J. M. Edmonds: the commentaries in his *Fragments of Attic Comedy I* (Leiden, 1957) contain much fanciful material. For criticism of the political–allegorical approach to comedy in general, see Storey (n. 40).

[72] See KA ad loc. (= *PCG* 4.179–80, test. 2).

[73] This is supported by evidence from comic iconography: e.g. a fourth-century Apulian bell-*krater* (Bari 3899) shows a tiny Helen emerging from a giant egg, which a grotesque character

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played a part in the comedy, and several fragments refer to birds (frr. 114, 120, 121). The most interesting fragment, however, is fr. 118, which makes it clear that 'Zeus' was also (in some sense) Pericles, since he is addressed thus:

μόλ' ὦ Ζεῦ ξένιε καὶ καραιέ

Come, o Zeus, god of guest-friendship—and heads.

The joke relies on a punning connection between Zeus' cult title *Karaios* and the noun *kara* ('head'); it is one of a number of comic references to Pericles' oddly shaped head.[74] Thus *Nemesis* is comparable to *Dionysalexandros* in its conflation of mythical and real characters, but it goes a step further: by aligning Pericles even more emphatically with the divine (rather than human) sphere, and by comparing him to almighty Zeus (rather than a mixture of Paris and Dionysus), Cratinus implies even more clearly that Pericles' behaviour is unacceptable and that he is wielding his political power excessively.

Assuming that there is a more or less complete identification of Zeus and Pericles, Schwarze interprets *Nemesis*, like *Dionysalexandros*, entirely allegorically. For him, the disputed parentage of Helen corresponds to the disputed causes of the (Trojan or Peloponnesian) War, and Leda's incubation and hatching of the egg reflect the fact that the Peloponnesian War was 'hatched' in Sparta.[75] Alternatively, Edmonds suggests that 'Zeus' represents Pericles, 'Leda' Aspasia, and the 'egg' their son; thus the plot is a disguised version of Pericles' attempts to claim citizen status for his illegitimate child (cf. Plut. *Per.* 29, 37).[76] Perhaps Schwarze's reading is the more likely one, but the evidence is not really sufficient to allow us to decide either way. It is not even clear whether 'Zeus' represented Pericles for the entire duration of the play: perhaps the connection was made only once, in the joke quoted.

A similar version of the parentage and birth of Helen seems to have provided the plot of Aristophanes' *Daedalus* (frr. 191–204). We may assume, perhaps, that here Daedalus was called upon to supply the gruesome apparatus which allowed Zeus (*qua* swan) to enjoy sexual congress with Leda.[77] Fr. 191 is concerned with (Zeus'?) adultery, while two fragments (frr. 193–4) refer to eggs and egg-laying; there is also an intriguing reference to Zeus' ability to take on many different shapes and personalities (fr. 198). Most interesting of all, though, is a fragment (fr. 199) which shows that the birth of Helen was somehow linked to a discussion of the causes of war:

περὶ τοῦ γὰρ ὑμῖν ὁ πόλεμος
νῦν ἐστι; περὶ ὄνου σκιᾶς

What are you fighting a war over now?—over a worthless trifle.

Whatever the exact context and date of *Daedalus*, it seems clear that this play relies on the same nexus of ideas that we find in Aristophanes and Cratinus, using the

has struck with an axe. This image may have been influenced by *Nemesis* or a similar comedy: see Trendall and Webster (n. 60), 4.26; cf. *LIMC* 'Helen', 1–9. O. P. Taplin, *Comic Angels and Other Approaches to Drama through Vase-Painting* (Oxford, 1993), 82–3, discusses how such images might relate to drama.

[74] See n. 26 above.

[75] Schwarze (n. 45), 35–9.

[76] Edmonds (n. 71), 60–1. Cf. Rutherford's (n. 62) interpretation of *Dionysalexandros*.

[77] So T. Kock, *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta I* (Leipzig, 1880), 435, comparing the fake cow which Daedalus manufactured for Pasiphae; cf. KA ad loc.

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origins of the Trojan War as a means of conceptualizing the current conflict, as well as viewing the war(s) as thoroughly regrettable and pointless.

Eupolis' *Prospaltians* (frr. 259–67), which was probably produced in 429,[78] seems to have been concerned with the evacuation of Attica's population into Athens at the start of the Peloponnesian War (cf. Thuc. 2.13–24). Its plot is usually interpreted as a criticism of Pericles' slowness to respond to the first Spartan incursions into Attica;[79] but it also alluded to the Trojan War. The fragments mention a 'Phrygian' (fr. 259.113) and 'heroes' (fr. 259.124), details which do not add up to very much on their own; but rather more significant is that Eupolis called Aspasia 'Helen' (fr. 267). This connects *Prospaltians* to the other mythological and Trojan War-related comedies which assimilate mythical and real-life characters to one another, and it again demonstrates the use of the Trojan War (or, more broadly, the world of myth) as a comic counterpart to current political events, though it does not tell us how far this connection contributed to the play's plot.[80] If Aspasia was 'Helen', this may imply that Pericles was seen in the role of either Paris or Menelaus—either the abductor of, or the man who went to war for the sake of, a worthless woman—though it is hard to see precisely how this would correspond to other events in the play, except on a general level of cause and responsibility.

The title of Hermippus' *Fates* (frr. 42–50) indicates a mythological theme.[81] However, it is clear that it also referred openly to politicians and events from the real world (frr. 43, 46, 47)—another indication that 'mythological' comedy did not have to make *all* of its satirical points by means of ἔμφασις. I have already noted that 'king of the satyrs' (fr. 47) is probably a reference both to Pericles and to Cratinus; it also seems that *Fates*, like *Prospaltians*, satirized Pericles for his delaying tactics in 431–0 (fr. 46) and discussed the preparations for war (fr. 48).[82] If Pericles was called 'Zeus' in this play, as in *Nemesis* and *Daedalus*, then fr. 42 (ὁ Ζεὺς δὲ τούτων οὐδὲν ἐνθυμούμενος / μύων, 'Zeus closed his eyes and didn't care about any of this') might also be taken as a veiled criticism of his defence policy;[83] but it is difficult to see how Pericles could have become both Dionysus *and* Zeus in the course of the same play. Much about *Fates*, then, remains unknown; it is not even certain that it concerned the Trojan War at all. (A character in fr. 46 compares 'men of today' unfavourably to heroes of old—a stock Homeric theme—but this is not enough evidence for us to say that this was a Trojan War comedy.)

Less still is known about Plato's *Menelaus* (frr. 76–9), but the title perhaps speaks for itself. It is extraordinary to encounter Menelaus as the central or eponymous character (in either tragedy or comedy), which suggests that Plato gave Menelaus a

[78] Cf. *PCG* 5.294, test. 2a. Eupolis' first production was in 429: Geissler (n. 69) and Storey (n. 40), 230–1, identify this with *Prospaltians*.

[79] R. Goossens, 'Un nouveau fragment des *Prospaltioi* d'Eupolis', *RPh* 61 (1935), 333–49; Schwarze (n. 45), 114. Storey (n. 40), 230–46, thinks that 429 may be too late for topical jokes about Pericles' behaviour in 431–0; but since that was the date at which Pericles was deposed and put on trial, it seems likely that jokes about *any* aspect of his career would have been possible.

[80] Cf. other comedies which used the same method: Cratinus, *Thracian Women* fr. 73 and *Cheirones* fr. 258 (Pericles = Zeus); *Cheirones* fr. 259 (Aspasia = Hera); Eupolis, *Friends* fr. 294 (Aspasia = Omphale).

[81] *Cf.* Hermippus' *Gods* (frr. 24–35).

[82] See Schwarze (n. 45), 101–9; Geissler (n. 69), 24–5 dates *Fates* to 429.

[83] So Schwarze (n. 45), following A. Meineke, *Quaestionum scaenicarum specimen* (Berlin, 1826), 91–5 and T. Bergk, *Commentationum de reliquiis comoediae Atticae antiquae libri duo* (Leipzig, 1838), 318–22.

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different or more prominent role in events than usual. The only fragment of note (fr. 76) is a joke about a bad dinner-guest:

—εἰπέ μοι,
πῶς ὀλίγα λοιπὰ τῶν ἐπιτραπεζωμάτων;
—ὁ γὰρ θεοῖσιν ἐχθρὸς αὐτὰ κατέφαγεν.

A. Tell me, how is it that there is so little left of the dinner that I laid out?
B. Because that godforsaken [Paris?] has eaten it all.

If Paris is the guest under discussion, we can perhaps see this as an example of comedy turning a traditional theme to its own characteristic ends. Paris' violation of *xenia* is a commonplace throughout the tradition, but a Paris whose unacceptable behaviour took the form of excessive eating and drinking would be remarkable. Thus Menelaus' fatal hospitality takes the form of an unconventional comic feast, and the abduction of Helen is seen as just one aspect of Paris' generally atrocious etiquette.[84]

So much for the content of these plays; if one is trying to establish a direct connection between comedy and politics, the date of their production is also important. But apart from *Acharnians* (425), none of these plays can be dated beyond all doubt. *Dionysalexandros* is almost universally dated by scholars to 430 B.C.,[85] given that it criticized Pericles for 'bringing war upon the Athenians' (and that the war started after the dramatic festivals of 431), but this reasoning is not exactly watertight. Although the origins and outbreak of the Peloponnesian War would have been particularly topical issues in 430, it would still have been possible (albeit less and less funny, perhaps) to discuss them in comedy in *any* subsequent year. There is no firm *terminus ante quem*, since it is not known when Cratinus died.[86] On the other hand, *Dionysalexandros* may have been written considerably *before* 430, since there is no reason to assume that the 'war' in question is the Peloponnesian War. Mattingly argues that it is concerned with the *Samian* War, and that Cratinus wrote the play in 438.[87] This is just as plausible as the more widely accepted alternative—perhaps even preferable, if one remembers that Pericles' own projection of himself in the image of Agamemnon dates from precisely this time,[88] and that Euripides' *Telephus* also dates from 438. (Mattingly mentions neither of these facts, but they add considerable support to his theory.) The same objections can be made against dating *Nemesis* to 430: apart from

[84] *Menelaus* fr. 78 also involves food; cf. Cratinus, *Dionysalexandros* fr. 45, concerning a guest (Paris again?) who came to dinner uninvited. Homer's *Odyssey* provides another obvious model for the excessive gourmandizing of undesirable suitors. On dining as a characteristic feature of comedy in general, see J. M. Wilkins, *The Boastful Chef: The Discourse of Food in Ancient Greek Comedy* (Oxford, 2000).

[85] Most scholars follow the dating of Geissler (n. 69), 24–5; cf. Schwarze (n. 45), 21–4.

[86] Aristophanes in 421 B.C. reports that Cratinus 'died' (*Peace* 700–1), but this may be a joke of some sort: see S. D. Olson's edition (Oxford, 1998) ad loc. Hermippus' *Fates* fr. 47 (*βασιλεῦ σατύρων*), which seems to satirize a living Pericles in the present tense, must have been written before his death in 429. If this fragment does indeed refer to Cratinus' depiction of Pericles, then a date of 430 or earlier for *Dionysalexandros* seems inevitable. But *βασιλεῦ σατύρων* is not *incontestably* a reference to *Dionysalexandros*: Pericles *qua* Dionysus may have appeared in other comedies too.

[87] H. B. Mattingly, 'Poets and politicians in fifth-century Greece', in K. H. Kinzl (ed.), *Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean in Ancient History and Prehistory* (Berlin–New York, 1977), 231–45. This idea is revived by I. C. Storey, 'Euripides, comedy and the war(s)', in J. Davidson et al. (edd.), *Greek Drama III: Essays in Honour of Kevin Lee*, *BICS* suppl. 87 (London, 2006), 171–86: I am grateful to Ian Storey for showing me an advance copy of this essay.

[88] See n. 51 above.

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its similarity of theme to *Dionysalexandros* and the other mythical comedies, there is no particular reason to think that it was concerned with the Peloponnesian War. In fact, a case has been made for dating *Nemesis* after 414 (and even for assigning it to a younger playwright of the same name).[89]

Granted that *Fates* does contain a reference to *Dionysalexandros*, there is (*pace* Geissler and Schwarze) no reason to suppose that it was put on at the festival *immediately* following the earlier play: the reference to Pericles *qua* 'king of the satyrs' testifies only to the fact that *Dionysalexandros* was a well-known play. A date of 429 is therefore unprovable. Nevertheless, the subject matter of *Fates* (and its closeness to *Prospaltians*, which probably does belong to 429) might provide better contextual evidence for connecting it to the Archidamian (rather than any other) War and dating it *c.* 430–429. Aristophanes' career had not yet begun in 430, which means that *Daedalus* was definitely produced later (perhaps much later);[90] and as for *Menelaus*, so little is known about its plot or author that speculation seems pointless.

To sum up: it would be impossible to prove that these mythological comedies were *not* straightforward political allegories, that they were *not* all about Pericles and the Peloponnesian War, or that they were *not* all produced during a fairly short period towards the beginning of that war. Nevertheless, there is ample room for doubt.

V

A positive conclusion emerges from all this scepticism. As I have been trying to argue throughout this article, the point is not that the Trojan War functioned as a mythical counterpart to the Peloponnesian War *in particular*, nor that it was used by comedians to satirize Pericles *in particular*, nor that it was a theme of current interest only within a very narrowly defined period of time (a single year). All this might be true, but it is far from certain. What is certain is that in general the comedians used the Trojan War as a means of exploring contemporary conflict, and that in particular they recurrently focused on the issue of causation in its own right. As I claimed at the outset, the Trojan War was used by comedians—along with historians, tragedians, sophists and others—as a means through which to explore the idea of contested causation in a broadly applicable sense. To the historian whose interest lies primarily in Pericles' life and politics, this 'weak' reading of the evidence may seem disappointing. But my interpretation is really aimed at the historian of ideas, whose interest lies in the development of a concept within its broader cultural context.

I also suggested above that thinking about this topic might affect one's perspective on the genre of comedy in general, and its relation to myth and tragedy. It is clear from the above discussions (if it had not been before) that all this is not a straightforward case of comedians 'straying' into tragic territory, as it might be for the purpose of parodying or subverting tragic themes and subject matter. The large number of other known mythological comedies probably tells against such a view;[91]

[89] *Σ*Ar. *Birds* 521 (= Cratinus fr. 125) seems to place *Nemesis* after *Birds.* W. Capps, 'The *Nemesis* of the Younger Cratinus', *HSCPh* 15 (1904), 61–75, argues that the play is the work of the younger Cratinus, a fourth-century poet. F. R. B. Godolphin, 'The *Nemesis* of Cratinus', *CPh* 26 (1931), 423–6, argues that the Aristophanic scholiast is confused about the date, having mixed up two archons with similar names.

[90] Geissler (n. 69), 45 dates *Daedalus* after 421, but his basis for assigning this (and other dates) is questionable, since it relies on filling in the 'gaps' left in the calendar after certain dates have been filled with other (undatable) plays. M. S. Silk, *Aristophanes and the Invention of Comedy* (Oxford, 2000), 18, tentatively places *Daedalus* in Aristophanes' 'middle' period (415–405).

[91] See n. 1 above.

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but at any rate, comedy seems to have a distinctive interest of its own in the world of myth, quite separate from its interest in parody. To refer to this type of comedy as 'burlesque' or 'parody', as many do, is to imply that there is something intrinsically secondary or parasitic about it; that it is invariably to be seen as feeding off another literary tradition. But even if there is an element of paraliterary activity at work, in the comedies we have studied it exists side by side with an energy and variety of treatment which cannot be accounted for by such means alone.[92] Comedy turns towards myth independently and on its own terms, adapting myth in order to explore characteristic themes of the genre, including (as we have seen) politics, social behaviour and the dynamics of the comic competition. And comedy may influence tragedy, as well as vice versa: for instance, it could plausibly be argued that Euripides knew and was inspired by Cratinus' Trojan War comedies when writing his (remarkably similar) *Helen*.

The comedians can be seen to have engaged creatively with the Trojan myth in particular, using it as a means of exploring social, intellectual and political problems in parallel with other contemporary writers of all types: in fact tragedy, comedy and history can be seen as mutually interdependent genres. All the writers whom I have mentioned are reacting in comparable ways to the epic tradition, the cultural prestige of Homer, and the pervasiveness of myth in society, against a background of war, political upheaval, and rapid intellectual change. In all of these texts, and in fifth-century culture more generally, the Trojan War symbolized a war whose origins are shady and disputed, which was fought for trivial causes (or perhaps for nothing at all), which brought into question the motives of the leaders who waged it, and which brought a huge amount of unnecessary suffering: in this symbolic sense the myth was deliberately, uncomfortably relevant to the real-life problems of the present day. The war both is and is not a joking matter, because comedy (whatever else it may be) never lets us forget that it is a *serious* genre.[93]

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[92] These are no doubt ambitious-seeming claims, but the interface between tragedy and comedy is too large a subject to treat adequately here: I return to it at greater length in a forthcoming book.

[93] This piece was originally written for a conference on Cratinus which Ian Storey and I planned in 2004. The conference (alas) never took place, but I am grateful to Ian for many stimulating discussions. Thanks also to Bob Cowan, Richard Seaford, Tim Whitmarsh, John Wilkins and the anonymous readers who have helped me to improve this article in numerous ways.

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