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LYSISTRATA AND FEMALE SONG*

Among the many points of interest in N.G. Wilson's admirable new text of Aristophanes is his handling of the closing scene of *Lysistrata*, and in particular the question of the heroine's role in that scene. In the new OCT we find the short speech 1273–8 ascribed to Lysistrata, while the apparatus notes 'legato tribuunt quidam' (in other words, to one of the Athenian males already on stage). The song which follows (1279–90) is also given to Lysistrata, but the apparatus comments 'quis canat incertum est.'[1] Finally Lysistrata is presumed to speak the single line 1295 inviting the Spartan ambassador to sing a fresh song.

Traditionally Lysistrata was given the speech and the song was generally assigned to the chorus.[2] A firm break with this tradition came with Wilamowitz's edition of 1927. Wilamowitz assigned the initial speech and line 1295 to an Athenian male (a Prytanis in his text), and the song which comes between to the chorus. Henderson (1986) gives both speech and song to one of the Athenians, and in his notes expresses some uncertainty as to whether Lysistrata appears in the final scene at all, though in the end he allows her silent presence. Alan Sommerstein in his commentary vigorously argued for Lysistrata's participation as both a speaking and a singing character, and it seems that he has convinced Wilson.[3]

In this short article I wish to express some doubts about the prominence given by these editors to Lysistrata (Part I), and to examine the larger question of which female characters in Old Comedy are given singing roles (Part II).

* I am grateful to Angus Bowie, Stephen Halliwell and *CQ*'s anonymous reader for helpful suggestions; remaining errors and exaggerations are my own.

[1] N.G. Wilson (ed.), *Aristophanis fabulae*, 2 vols. OCT (2007), 2.63. In the companion volume, *Aristophanea* (Oxford, 2007), Wilson does not discuss the attributions.

[2] Of course, manuscript attributions have no authority and should not carry weight in deciding such matters; as Wilson comments in his praefatio, '*Ratio et res ipsa* must be the basis for decisions' (Wilson [n. 1], *Aristophanis Fabulae*, 1.viii).

[3] Besides A.H. Sommerstein's note on *Lys*. 1273–90 (partly anticipated in his review of Zimmermann in *CR* 36 (1986), 203–4), see the addenda in his edition of *Aristophanes: Wealth* (Warminster, 2001) 302–3, and *Talking about Laughter* (Oxford, 2009), 244–6, 252–3. For a review of opinions, see G. Mastromarco in G. Mastromarco and P. Totaro, *Commedie di Aristofane*, vol. 2 (Turin, 2006), 428–9 n. 236. Mastromarco attaches more weight to the first person plural in 1277 than does Sommerstein, who somewhat understates its importance. If the speech is ascribed to Lysistrata, this seems to make her include herself among the culpable. M. Revermann, *Comic Business* (Oxford, 2006), 253 n. 44 supports Lysistrata's presence as a speaker in the final scene, while allowing that the question is disputed.

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I

Sommerstein argues for Lysistrata's role in the final scene on the following grounds.[4] My response follows each point in order.

(1) '[T]he proper person to effect the reunion of husbands and wives is the person who previously effected their separation.' This depends on what the poet and the Athenians would have thought 'proper': see below.

(2) It would be 'gratuitously clumsy' if a male Athenian restored the wives to their husbands when he himself is among that group. This argument, if valid, is equally applicable to Lysistrata herself, as earlier passages of the play are most naturally understood as indicating that she has a husband.[5]

(3) The speaker of 1273–8 addresses both Athenians and Spartans as 'you', just as Lysistrata did in the preceding scene; whereas the Athenian delegate previously spoke in terms of 'we'. But this is a matter of context. When the Athenians emerging from the party were speaking to each other and commenting on the amiability of the Spartans, they naturally used 'we'. When the speaker of 1273–8 calls all present to order and expresses hopes for the future, that speaker assumes an authority over all present. The point in dispute, as with (1), is who can properly assume that authority as the play draws to its close.

(4) The wives cannot have emerged from the Acropolis unsummoned and escorted: Lysistrata is the one who must lead them on. The first proposition seems arbitrary. Henderson does accept it, but makes Lysistrata a silent presence, a compromise which Sommerstein finds deeply unsatisfactory: 'we cannot leave her standing silent while one of the men, whom throughout the play she has completely dominated, commands the proceedings'. That judgement presupposes that the status of Lysistrata must remain constant to the end, a position I question below.

(5) [6] The ancient hypothesis[7] states that Lysistrata, after entertaining the men, hands over the women to their menfolk to take away. Although interesting in itself, that statement cannot of course have evidential value as reconstruction of the original production. Moreover, the relevant sentence of the summary seems at this point to be referring to Lysistrata's speech at the end of the preceding scene (1181–7): thus ξενίσασα echoes 1184 ξενίσωμεν, and τὰς γυναῖκας ἑκάστοις recalls 1186–7 τὴν αὐτοῦ γυναῖχ' ὑμῶν λαβὼν | ἄπεισ'ἕκαστος. It may then be inappropriate to exploit it in discussion of the final scene.

The significance of this question of staging should not be underrated. Sommerstein is right to highlight it as an important aspect of the play's conclusion. In essence we are considering the question who is in charge as the play ends: Lysistrata or the men who normally run Athens' affairs, the men whose judgement has been shown to be defective but who have now, thanks to the heroine's initiative, been guided back onto the right

[4] Points 1–4 appear in his edition, *Aristophanes, Lysistrata* (Warminster, 1990), 221–3; for point 5 see n. 6 below.

[5] D.M. MacDowell, *Aristophanes and Athens* (Oxford, 1995), 241, emphasizing lines 507–20. Sommerstein's note on 503 appears to accept this.

[6] The fifth argument appears in Sommerstein, *Wealth* (n. 3 above), 304, and is restated in his *Talking about Laughter* (n. 3), 252–3.

[7] Not printed in Sommerstein's own text, but see Wilson (n. 1, *Aristophanis fabulae*), 2.4 (lines 31–2).

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path? If, as Sommerstein maintains, Lysistrata is still the figure of authority in the last scene, then the play goes further than any other in the direction of giving visible[8] and politically effective power to the female sex. If she does not speak, and still more if she does not appear, then the audience will assuredly conclude that her work is done and that she has stepped back into the traditional subordinate role of a woman.

Interpretation of Lysistrata's role as a heroine and authority-figure has long been associated with the well-known thesis of David Lewis, explicitly invoked by Sommerstein, that the heroine's name and status are analogous to the priestess of Athena Polias, Lysimache.[9] Whether this is allusion, allegory or analogy is not just a matter of terminology. Examination of the surviving plays makes clear that different degrees of correspondence between characters on stage and figures in contemporary Athens are possible. Lamachus is at one end of the spectrum, Paphlagon, Labes and the slaves in the first half of *Knights*[10] occupy different positions along it: if we accept the usual reading of the evidence, Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* may have offered yet another model, whereby Dionysus in some sense represented Pericles.[11] Individuals as varied as Socrates, Cleisthenes and Aeschylus are portrayed and travestied under their own names; Lysistrata is not. Nevertheless, Lewis and others have used the parallel to explain not only the respect with which the other women in the drama regard the heroine, but also the fact that, despite her citizen-wife status, her name is used openly in the presence of other men, contrary to comic (and rhetorical) practice elsewhere.[12] If the audience did take it for granted that this was Lysimache by another name, this might lead them to accept her participation in the final proceedings.[13]

Yet there are difficulties. As other critics have noted, Lysistrata may be a serious heroine but she does not appear exclusively in serious circumstances. In particular, the scene with Diallage, in which she introduces the seductive female figure who embodies the prospect of peaceful resolution, involves crudely physical humour as Athenians and Spartans alike leer and paw the body of Diallage, accompanying their actions with lustful double-entendres (1112–88). If Lysistrata is seriously lecturing them on political history throughout all this without noticing their very different priorities, she is in danger of seeming absurd; if she is fully aware of the men's attitude (as

[8] This qualification alludes to the disappearance of Praxagora in the latter scenes of *Eccl.*: see below.

[9] D.M. Lewis, 'Who was Lysistrata?', *BSA* 50 (1955), 1–12, repr. in id., *Selected Papers in Greek and Near Eastern History*, ed. P.J. Rhodes (Cambridge, 1997), 187–202. Sommerstein's endorsement of this position in his commentary is whole-hearted (more cautious formulation in *Talking about Laughter* [n. 3], 64–5, but the caution does not seem to affect his willingness to extend Lewis' argument, see n. 13 below). Others have expressed more reserve: see e.g. K.J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (London, 1972), 152 n. 3; M. Heath, *Political Comedy in Aristophanes* (Göttingen, 1987), 15; J. Henderson, *Aristophanes: Lysistrata* (Oxford, 1987), xxxvii–xli; S. Halliwell, *Aristophanes: Birds and other Plays* (Oxford, 1998), 84–5 n. 7.

[10] Many commentators have accepted that these represent Nicias and Demosthenes, but their names are never used, and K.J. Dover, 'Aristophanes, *Knights* 11–20', *CR* 9 (1959), 196–9 (= *Greek and the Greeks* [London, 1997], 307–10) took a very sceptical position.

[11] For a recent discussion of this, see E. Bakola, *Cratinus and the Art of Comedy* (Oxford, 2010), 183–8.

[12] Sommerstein, 'The naming of women in Greek and Roman comedy', *QS* 11 (1980), 393–418 (= *Talking about Laughter* [n. 3], Chapter 2).

[13] Sommerstein in the addenda to *Lysistrata* at the end of his edition of *Wealth* (n. 2), and in *Talking about Laughter* (n. 3), 244–5, adds the further suggestion (made by E. Sibley in 1995) that in the final scene Lysistrata is actually wearing the aegis of the goddess Athena Polias. That takes the assimilation of Lysistrata and Lysimache to its extremes.

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seems more plausible in view of line 1119), she is more like a pander than a priestess. The more fully we identify Lysistrata and Lysimache, the more convincing Lysistrata may seem as a spokeswoman for Athens; but that involves accepting that Aristophanes is prepared to put a highly respectable citizen wife and priestess in a situation in which she is surrounded by and to some degree engaged in provoking obscene actions and utterances from citizen males.[14] There are other passages earlier in the play which compromise Lysistrata's moral seriousness as a heroine[15] and which may encourage the reader to adopt a looser and less direct or allegorical relationship between the character and the real Athenian priestess.[16]

A broader view of the Aristophanic corpus may be useful in clarifying my own position. I would suggest that in each of the women's plays something closely approximating to the normal order of things (including a satisfyingly superior situation for the men) is restored at the end. This is clearest in *Thesmophoriazusae.* By the end of the play the old relative has been rescued and released without penalty;[17] Euripides not only avoids paying the extreme penalties envisaged earlier but makes peace with the women with remarkable ease (and on easy terms) (1165–71);[18] even the Scythian has his way with the captivating slave-girl. At the end the chorus comment that their time of play is over and it is time for each to head home: the unusual conditions which prevail during the Thesmophoria are ended (1227–31). The case of *Ecclesiazusae* is obviously more complicated. In the last scene there is no doubt that women are still in charge of the reformed Athenian society. But as has often been observed, we do not see Praxagora governing or in a state of authority over men; she disappears from the play after she has outlined the programme for the new order (final exit at 724 or 729). It is equally striking that in the final scene the emphasis is on the good fortune and physical euphoria of Blepyrus, her husband, hailed by a slave as 'o blessed one, thrice-fortunate' (1129). Above all, despite his passive role in the entire play, Blepyrus at the end is seen as enjoying all the hedonistic delights – including sexual delights – that are normally the reward of the comic *hero* in the final scene of celebration and festivity (cf. esp. *Acharnians* and *Birds*). The social and political reversal which has brought this about is almost entirely subordinated to the pleasurable privileges enjoyed by the male who 'stands in' for the absent comic heroine.

If we follow Sommerstein, we give Lysistrata something of the dominant role that Aristophanes *avoids* giving to Praxagora in the finale of *Ecclesiazusae.* Supporters of his view may point to the fact that Aristophanes seems quite willing to allow the comic hero Peisetaerus a far more dominating role at the close of *Birds*: there, not only the customary political order but the cosmic order itself has been overturned, and the audience onstage and off are invited to applaud. But that is mythological

[14] Note S. Halliwell's remarks in 'Aristophanic sex: the erotics of shamelessness', in M. Nussbaum and J. Sihvola (edd.), *The Sleep of Reason* (Chicago, 2002), 120–42, at 125.

[15] Already in the opening scene she advocates the use of dildos to help them endure privation (158), and she shares the wine as eagerly as her companions (238; one of them cautions her to take only her share).

[16] I am here assuming a greater degree of coherence in Lysistrata's characterization than would be allowed by M. Silk, *Aristophanes and the Definition of Comedy* (Oxford, 2000), Chapter 5, who argues for systematic discontinuity in Aristophanic characterization. Silk does however concede that Lysistrata is 'broadly noble' (p. 244; cf. p. 280).

[17] Notable here are the lines *Thesm.* 1204–6, in which Euripides dispatches him to be reunited with a previously unmentioned wife and children.

[18] See further C. Austin and S.D. Olson, *Aristophanes: Thesmophoriazusae* (Oxford, 2004), lxiv–viii.

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comedy, and the triumphant figure is male. I question whether Athenian audiences would have been willing to give their applause to a conclusion in which peace and sexual reunion were not only brought about but endorsed and overseen by an authoritative female figure. That she might be linked with an actual living female, Lysimache, actually increases the difficulties rather than removing them. No other Aristophanic comedy gives a character drawn from contemporary Athens political power to bring about developments which notionally outlast the action of the drama (Lamachus, Paphlagon, Socrates, are at the receiving-end of humiliations inflicted by *fictional* heroes; Aeschylus is restored to life by an Olympian god). To have the Athenian Prytanis sing the lines would balance the Spartan singer, and since it is the men who have been fighting each other, this is perhaps a more satisfactory demonstration of the benign effects of the new peace than to have an Athenian woman involved. Restoration of normality means the return of the male to power.

II

The counter-arguments offered above are not decisive, and some may still prefer to see Lysistrata as having a place in the closing scene of the drama which bears her name. If she is present, however, I strongly doubt that she is allowed to sing.[19] We can usefully address this question in a larger context, by considering where and when women (other than the choruses of the three women-centred plays) are allowed to sing in Aristophanes. The answer is, very rarely indeed. Discounting the passage under discussion, there are only two cases: the brief paratragic appeal of Trygaius' children to their departing father at *Peace* 114–18 (lyric dactyls), and the songs of the lustful women in *Ecclesiazusae*, the one an old hag, the other a beautiful younger woman (893–9, 900–23, 938–45), who then engage in duets with the lover whom they both desire (942–5 [the hag] answering 938–41, 960–8 [the young woman] answering 952–9).

These two cases stand in contrast with the number of times a male character sings in Aristophanes' plays. Male song without the chorus' involvement occurs at the following places:[20] *Acharnians* 263–79 (Dicaeopolis), 1190–1225 (Dicaeopolis and Lamachus), *Clouds* 1154–70, 1206–13 (both Strepsiades), *Wasps* 317–33 (Philocleon), 1226–48 (Bdelycleon and Philocleon), 1326–40 (Philocleon and the angry man), *Birds* 229–59 (Hoopoe), 904–52 (Poet), 1337–9 (Father-beater), 1372–1400 (Cinesias), 1410–15 (sycophant), *Lysistrata* 1247–72 and 1296–1321 (Spartan ambassador), *Thesmophoriazusae* 101–29 (Agathon), 914–15 (Relative), 1015–55 (Relative), *Frogs* 1264–77, 1284–95 (Euripides, parodying Aeschylus), 1309–28, 1331–63 (Aeschylus, parodying Euripides), *Wealth* 316–21 (Carion). This produces a total of 22 sung contributions (though a few of these, particularly in *Birds* and *Wealth*, are very brief). If one adds occasions on which a male character engages in sung duet with the chorus, the figure rises by fifteen (there is at least one example in every play except *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*).

[19] It is not of great importance that she has not sung at any earlier stage of the play. Given the figures I present in what follows, this is statistically unsurprising. In any case, even in tragedy a character may break into song for the first time at a very late stage in the drama: e.g. Creon in Soph. *Ant.*, Iphigenia in Eur. *IA* (as the text now stands).

[20] See the data presented in L. Parker, *The Songs of Aristophanes* (Oxford, 1997).

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Does the rarity of female song in Aristophanes need an explanation? There are obvious qualifications to make. There is hardly any song in *Wealth.* Not all plays include female characters: there are none in *Knights*, none except the chorus in *Clouds*, none except the angry bread-seller Myrtia in *Wasps.* Some plays have female characters but not in speaking roles. *Acharnians* has Dicaeopolis' wife and daughter, the bridesmaid who begs a favour, and the tarts who are fondling him at the end; Opora and Theoria in *Peace* are as silent as Diallage in *Lysistrata*. Dardanis the flute-girl in *Wasps* and the Muse of Euripides in *Frogs* are in the same category. Where females do have vocal roles, they are often of a type whom we would not expect to sing, such as the innkeeper in *Frogs* or the piglet daughters of the Megarian in *Acharnians*.

In a way, however, this only pushes the question a stage back. If the rarity of female song in comedy is a function of the rarity of notable female characters, that is itself a feature of the genre which invites comment – especially since women have such a prominent place in contemporary tragedy. Of the surviving tragic dramas only *Philoctetes* has an exclusively male cast.[21] Moreover, in tragedy generally and in Aristophanes' time in particular, women are given solo songs (monodies) frequently and these songs are often high points of the play.[22] The impact of these monodies is evident even in the parodic treatment of a Euripidean female lament in *Frogs.*

Henderson in a stimulating paper[23] has explored the evidence for female characters in comedy across the board. Given the state of the evidence, his account is inevitably vulnerable to refutation by a single new discovery, but it remains interesting that these propositions can be maintained on the basis of what we have. He argues (a) that comedy in the beginning was an all-male preserve; (b) that while mythological females were admitted early (mythical comedy would be hard to stage otherwise), and a variety of stereotypes such as hetaerae and market-women were current, the comic poets were slow and hesitant about presenting citizen wives on stage; (c) that *Lysistrata* is the first attested example of a play which introduces Athenian wives as characters. He suggests as a reason for these phenomena that 'Athenian taboos protecting the women's domestic world were still too strong to permit the creation of such females in a manner that would satisfy the fifth-century Athenian taste for raunchiness and rough satire' (p. 138). Another suggestion he makes is that the 'scandalous ladies' in Euripidean tragic drama in the third quarter of the fifth century may have prompted the comic poets to break new ground. If so, however, they seem not to have ventured far in the direction of female monody, despite its prominence in Euripides' *œuvre*.

Henderson's argument is speculative, but I suspect that his claim about Athenian taboos, or at least inhibitions, is on the right lines. My own hypothesis is twofold:

[21] Satyr-drama too seems reasonably welcoming to women. Although *Cyclops* has none, *Ichneutae* includes Maia, Hermes' mother, and *Dictyulci* has Danae; and some satyr-plays are named after women (e.g. Aesch. *Amymone*, *Circe*, perhaps Soph. *Marriage of Helen*, *Nausicaa* [if the last two were satyr-plays]).

[22] See esp. W. Barner, 'Die Monodie', in W. Jens (ed.), *Die Bauformen der griechischen Tragödie* (Tübingen, 1971), 277–320; E. Hall, 'Actors' song in tragedy', in S. Goldhill and R.G. Osborne (edd.), *Performance Culture and Athenian Democracy* (Cambridge, 1999), 96–122, revised as 'Singing roles in tragedy' in *The Theatrical Cast of Athens* (Oxford, 2006), 288–320; also E. Hall, 'The singing actors of antiquity', in P. Easterling and E. Hall (edd.), *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession* (Cambridge, 2002), 3–38. Hall's account of tragic song is seminal, but she does not address the question of comedy (comic song is mentioned only briefly in the 2002 paper at 30–1).

[23] J. Henderson, 'Pherecrates and the women of Old Comedy', in D. Harvey and J. Wilkins (edd.), *The Rivals of Aristophanes* (London, 2000), 135–50.

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first, that Aristophanes, and the comic poets in general, had little opportunity to give their female characters the opportunity to deliver solo songs, because in general comedy seems to present women in undignified, inferior and grotesque roles, where song would be inappropriate (bread-sellers, prostitutes and the like); second, that if and when they did include women of higher status or greater potential for seriousness, they were wary of giving them the opportunity to sing because it might involve treating those women with more empathy, and eliciting from the audience a greater emotional involvement, than comedy could easily allow.[24] This involvement might be a sense of pity or compassion; it might in other circumstances involve an erotic element,[25] which would be undesirable in cases where the drama presented citizen women.[26]

If this hypothesis is to be taken seriously, the exceptional cases in which women do sing clearly require explanation. In *Peace* the snatch of song is brief, paratragic and uttered by children, thus reducing the danger of either involvement or erotic arousal. The case of *Ecclesiazusae* is more difficult. Here the context is strongly erotic, the language often crude and explicit: young woman and old hags are in eager pursuit of the young man who participates in the sung exchange. The generic status of the episode is disputed: current critical opinion generally sees the scene as influenced by some form of mime.[27] The status of the women involved is also problematic, but with the old women at least the similarity of behaviour to that of aged prostitutes militates against their being viewed sympathetically. Halliwell has persuasively argued that neither the old women nor the young girl can be straightforwardly seen as citizen women: rather, they are marginalized as comic (or mimic) stereotypes, and the poet deliberately blurs their status so as to avoid direct confrontation of the consequences for Athenian wives and mothers if Praxagora's new sexual laws are applied to the freeborn population.[28] The shrewd observation of Sommerstein[29] that this scene is (uniquely in the poet's *œuvre*) hived off from the rest of the play, in that no character within it has figured before or will reappear later, also seems to mark the episode as interestingly kept at arm's length from the main plot line and still more from external reality.

Against my hypothesis, it might be argued that I myself have conceded that female characters in comedy are rare, that they often have very minor roles, and that many of them are characterized in such farcical or down-to-earth terms that song would be inappropriate. Is it possible to produce an example of a scene in which we might *expect*

[24] The *CQ* referee comments: 'I personally don't see the problem of there being women treated with seriousness, pity or compassion. My vision of Aristophanes can accommodate all these things, I think.' My own reading leads me to question how much evidence can be found in the dramas to justify this more positive vision of Aristophanes' representation of women.

[25] The relative's response to the song of the sexually ambiguous Agathon (*Thesm.* 130–3) is worth bearing in mind in this context.

[26] I have no fresh arguments to advance discussion of whether women could attend the dramatic performances: see A.W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens* (2nd edn by J. Gould and D.M. Lewis, [Oxford, 1968, rev. 1988]), 264–5, J. Henderson, 'Women and the Athenian dramatic festivals', *TAPhA* 121 (1991), 133–47, S. Goldhill, 'Representing democracy: women at the Great Dionysia', in R. Osborne and S. Hornblower (edd.), *Ritual, Finance, Politics: Athenian Democratic Accounts Presented to David Lewis* (Oxford, 1994), 347–69, E.C. Gerö and H.-R. Johnsson, 'Where were the women when the men laughed at Lysistrata? An inquiry into the question whether the audience of the Old Comedy also included female spectators', *Eranos* 99 (2001), 87–99. A blanket prohibition seems to me improbable, but it is likely that the audience was predominantly male.

[27] S.D. Olson, 'The "love duet" in Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*', *CQ* 38 (1998), 328–30.

[28] Halliwell (n. 14), 126–35.

[29] A.H. Sommerstein, *Aristophanes: Ecclesiazusae* (Warminster, 1998), 21.

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a female monody and are denied it? I would answer that there is one which I find particularly significant: the silence of Procne in the *Birds*. The nightingale is renowned in poetry (not least in tragedy) for the beauty and pathos of its song;[30] the hoopoe, Tereus, repeatedly refers to her as a songstress, and appeals to her to 'issue forth all the strains of the sacred chants | in which you lament' (210–11, trans. Halliwell); the chorus address her as 'partner in the songs I sing' (678–9). It looks very much as if the two Athenians are expecting her to sing; indeed, Euelpides responds to the pipe-tune *as though she had done so* (τοῦ φθέγματος, 223). Yet her participation in the music of the play is confined to the pipes on which the player mimics the nightingale's tune. Comedy can admit four speaking actors in a single scene,[31] and the examples listed above include several cases where two actors sing together (three in *Ecclesiazusae*). A pragmatic explanation is no doubt available: perhaps the poet and his sponsor could not afford more than one virtuoso singer, the hoopoe, for this performance.[32] But it is intriguing that the issue arises in the case of perhaps the most daring and extraordinary transformation of tragic myth into the comic mode. Aristophanes has taken the hideous tale of Tereus, Procne and Philomela, involving brutal rape, mutilation and revenge through infanticide, and defused it by reuniting and reconciling husband and wife in their metamorphosed form.[33] How this reconciliation was brought about is not explained, but taken for granted. Perhaps Procne remains a silent character not for practical or financial reasons, but because, if the nightingale were given voice, the question of the past could no longer be excluded. As even the hoopoe admits (212), the nightingale's song must be of Itys, of her murdered son, and it is barely possible to conceive of a monody that could treat such a theme as a source of parody or an object of laughter. That horror was one that not even Aristophanic humour could purge.[34]

We must of course ask whether the picture would be different if we had more plays by Aristophanes, or by his rivals. That question is not easily answered. Fragments of Old Comedy are often too short for us to identity the gender of the speaker, and the great majority, I would estimate, come from iambic portions of the play. Even when we are dealing with lyric, it may be impossible to determine whether the song is choral or monody.[35] Finally, if I am right in thinking that status was an important determinant, the odds are against our being able to show both that a fragment is solo lyric *and* that it is delivered by an actor representing a respectable Athenian woman. For what it is worth, however, I have not found in the extant fragments of the comic poets any passage

[30] See e.g. Aesch. *Supp.* 57–62, *Ag.* 1142–9, Soph. *El.* 147–9; A. Barker, 'Transforming the nightingale: aspects of Athenian musical discourse in the late fifth century', in P. Murray and P. Wilson (edd.), *Music and the Muses* (Oxford, 2004), 185–204, who argues for a very different reading of the nightingale's role.

[31] See esp. D.M. MacDowell, 'The number of speaking actors in Old Comedy', *CQ* 44 (1984), 325–35.

[32] For admirable analyses of the hoopoe's song, see E. Fraenkel, 'Notes on the hoopoe's song', *Eranos* 48 (1950), 75–84 (= *Kleine Beiträge*, vol. 1 [Rome, 1964], 453–61); N.V. Dunbar, *Aristophanes: Birds* (Oxford, 1995), 209–13.

[33] For an interesting contrast between tragedy and comedy in the handling of this myth, see R. Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment* (Oxford, 2009), Chapter 2.

[34] The *CQ* referee suggests that the horror may be the point: that Procne has a good reason for remaining mute, and the audience are meant to notice. But if this were the case I would expect someone to draw attention to the point (as in e.g. Eur. *Hipp.* 909–15, Ar. *Thesm.* 144); as things stand, I prefer to suppose that Aristophanes avoids drawing attention to the mythological past.

[35] Ar. *Anagyrus* fr. 53 parodies Phaedra in Eur. *Hipp.* 219–22, but these are anapaests.

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which can plausibly be added to the list of female solos given above.[36] We can only speculate whether mythological comedy, set in a different time and place from the political comedies which predominate among Aristophanes' *œuvre*, might have been more hospitable, at least for parodic purposes, to monodies of a kind prominent in Euripidean tragedy.

That Old Comedy is a more masculine genre than tragedy of the same era may not seem a very remarkable conclusion, though it is not a point that receives emphasis in the standard comparisons of the two genres.[37] Nevertheless, if these suggestions are on the right lines, they have implications important for all those concerned with ancient drama.

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[36] I am basically working from the remnants of those dramatists classified as Old Comedy in the recent Loeb edition produced by I.C. Storey (3 vols., Cambridge, MA and London, 2011).

[37] B. Seidensticker, *Palintonos Harmonia (Hypomnemata* 72, Göttingen 1982); O. Taplin, 'Fifth-century comedy and tragedy', *JHS* 106 (1986), 163–74, and 'Comedy and the tragic', in M. Silk (ed.), *Tragedy and the Tragic* (Oxford, 1996) 183–202; Silk (n. 16), Chapter 2; see also A. Sommerstein, 'Comic elements in tragic language: the case of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*', in A. Willi (ed.), *The Language of Old Comedy* (Oxford, 2002), 151–68.

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