Alessandro Grilli and Francesco Morosi

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Musical and Poetical Meta-performance in Aristophanes and Ben Jonson

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Introduction*

Dynamics of Appropriation

Despite its specialized subject, this book must be understood as part of a broader and more ambitious critical endeavour. In the first place, our study aims to provide a comparative analysis of the dynamics of musical and poetical meta-performance as they emerge both from the surviving *corpus* of Attic Old Comedy (which adds up, for our purposes, to Aristophanes' eleven extant plays) and from Ben Jonson's comedies. However, this topic should be taken mostly as an exemplary case study illustrating, in a larger perspective, the dynamics of transtextual/intertextual appropriation, both in Ben Jonson's works and, *lato sensu*, in Early Modern theatre culture.[1]

* Although this book was conceived collectively by the authors, Chapters 1, 2, and 3 are by Francesco Morosi, while Introduction, Chapters 4 and 5 are by Alessandro Grilli. The authors are grateful to Silvia Bigliazzi, Cristiano Ragni, and Emanuel Stelzer for their tireless help in the production of this book, and to the anonymous referees for their precious comments.

[1] It may help to recall here Gérard Genette's distinction between transtextual and intertextual relationships, the former being a hyperonym of the latter: in Genette's words, transtextuality is "tout ce qui met un texte en relation, manifeste ou secrète, avec un autre texte" (1982, 7), and as such occurs in different forms (intertextual, paratextu-

However fundamental in Early Modern English literature, Jonson's *œuvre* holds no privileged position within the Western literary canon. This may have to do with a disadvantageous comparison with Shakespeare, who has been considered an unrivalled playwright in the history of Early Modern English literature at least since early Romantic criticism (as is well known, prior to that it was Jonson who was believed to be the most influential author of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Age). However, the main hurdle to the full appreciation of Jonson's works seems to us the composite and broad-spectrum nature of his art, which almost no empirical reader can understand in its richness and heterogeneity.

As a matter of fact, Jonson's poetics entails a quite peculiar 'ideal' addressee, one who should rely on a most varied, multi-layered cultural background; such addressee was uncommon in the 17th century, and is quite unattainable today. Jonsonian works resonate with constant and palpable tensions between their manifold strands, which span from learned poetry to popular drama and specialist literature of

al, metatextual, hypertextual, and architextual relationships, according to Genette, who lists those five types "dans un ordre approximativement croissant d'abstraction, d'implication et de globalité": 1982, 8); on the other hand intertextuality, a word with a longer and more illustrious background, and a much wider meaning in other theorists, is defined by Genette as the "présence effective d'un texte dans l'autre" (Genette 1982, 8): it entails a direct, specific link between a hypotext and a hypertext resulting from its close textual elaboration ("citation", "plagiat" and "allusion" being the main cases brought up by Genette). The complex semantics of intertextuality, particularly in early modern poetics, is duly accounted for by Carter 2021, 107-12. For our purposes, in this book we will use transtextuality to refer to a more generic form of relationship between texts, whereas hyper- and/or intertextuality will denote a closer, clearly detectable rewriting of a known hypotext.

all sorts. This is especially the case with comedy, the richest and most diverse literary form in Jonson's *corpus*. Jonsonian comedy is a brilliant, original coalescence of the most disparate literary components: in the first place, the tradition of ancient satire is the core of Jacobean city comedy,[2] which in turn presupposes an intense contemporary socio-political debate, to be found in philosophical treatises, political pamphlets, and other occasional texts.[3] Secondly, the colourful, diverse social world of Jonson's comedies cannot help reflect multiple specialistic cultures, and bring into the spotlight knowledge ranging from contemporary crafts to the *artes liberales* of Medieval universities. A third thread is also a legacy from the Middle Ages: morality play, as well as popular and street theatre, in its more or less farcical varieties. Lastly, but not less importantly, Jonson's works engage in a ceaseless dialogue with learned humanistic culture – with its Latin, Italian, French poetic models as well as with the Greek classics, newly available for the cultured Western readership.

Much has been done to appreciate such richness of literary references in Jonson's comedies. Suffice it to recall the vast research work on Jonson's classical models: Aristophanic influxes alone, which are certainly not the most widespread and studied transtextual features to be found in Jonsonian plays, were addressed by two monographs and one dissertation in a matter of five years (Gum 1969; Lafkidou Dick 1974; Armes 1974) – the present book being the fourth, albeit *sui generis*, instalment exclusively devoted to the subject.[4] The quantity and influence of such studies has led to

[2] A most fortunate critical label first introduced by Gibbons 2017.

[3] An aspect particularly enhanced by Leinwand 1986.

[4] In view of the high scholarly consideration received by Jonson

some well-established critical *clichés*, such as the one regarding Aristophanes and Jonson, whose literary connection has always been thought of as very strong.[5] However, as far as such intertextual relationships are concerned, the quality of scholarly contributions unfortunately does not often match their relative abundance. Most studies in the field are tainted by problems that we may think of rather as structural misconceptions than as contingent weaknesses. A meaningful example is provided precisely by Gum and Lafkidou Dick's monographs, whose comparative approach to Jonson and Aristophanes is consistently dependent on Northrop Frye's ideas about the comic plot as 'mythos of spring' (Frye 1957, 163-86). Since both studies are still current reference works for this topic, it is important to point out that they do not allow scholars of Early Modern comedy to grasp the perspective bias of Frye's comprehensive model of comic structure. Frye's theory is clearly centered on the 'low mimetic' form of Hellenistic-Roman comic play, and in spite of its rightful distinctions between Old and New Comedy (Frye 1957, 43-5), it tends to stress more the unity of the Western comic tradition than Old Comedy's peculiar and unparalleled features ("Dramatic comedy, from which fictional comedy is mainly descended, has been remarkably tenacious of its structural principles and character types": Frye 1957, 163). Having a substantial impact on the comprehension of one of the two poles of our transtextual relationship, such critical bias af-

within the context of Aristophanic reception, Ben Jonson is also an item of the recent *Encyclopedia of Greek Comedy* edited by A.H. Sommerstein (Steggle 2019).

[5] See, quite recently, Young 2012, 47-8: "In tone, structure, and satirical vigor, Jonson probably comes closer to the classic comedy of Aristophanes than any other English playwright."

fects and obscures all the conclusions we may reach on the subject. In other words, a fresh look at the Jonson-Aristophanes relationship requires in the first place a new critical perspective on Attic Old Comedy – a perspective one can hardly find in Gum and Lafkidou Dick's books.[6]

More generally still, those two books are an interesting testing ground for intertextual studies involving ancient texts, and show the general methodological liabilities that may affect this research field. In spite of its harshness, this caution seems useful in the present context, since it allows us to bring out some theoretical aspects which will be particularly profitable in the course of our discussion. To be sure, intertextual studies in Ben Jonson do not limit themselves to ancient literatures, but for our purposes we will pay particular attention to Jonson's attitude toward poets and playwrights of Greece and Rome.

To start with, when looking for sources or models, or better when trying to describe Jonson's relationship with a specific text, scholars tend to carry out their research in a monothematic and linear fashion, focusing almost exclusively on the presence of one single text/author throughout the Jonsonian *corpus*. Epistemically, this strategy is quite sound, and is justified by the natural limits of any scholar's competences. However, this can also prove strikingly unproductive, since it forces a multifaceted poetry into interpretive models

[6] Although we wish to devote a specific study to re-evaluate Frye's influence on Jonsonian scholarship, our perspective here can be made clear by referring to our latest works on Aristophanes: Grilli 2020-2021 and 2021; Morosi 2021. It goes without saying that our use of technical language in describing ancient comic codes is consistent with classical sources more than with the meanings made common by Frye's *The Anatomy of Criticism.*

of linear derivation, which can hardly account for the complexity of the many cultural and literary factors involved.[7]

Secondly, when a trans- or intertextual relationship is under scrutiny, the modern text gets the lion's share of scholarly consideration, whereas little attention is generally paid to the understanding of the hypotext, whose peculiarities are mostly diluted, if not utterly effaced, into a comprehensive and commonplace critical view. This is not *per se* problematic, since from what we can gather Jonson himself was a well-learned but quite generic reader: he was certainly not a specialist in Horatian or Aristophanic poetry, and it is reasonable to think that Jonson's Horace or Aristophanes do not mirror the theoretical complexity that the reading of these authors had, and has, reached throughout the centuries. However, even with this *caveat*, scholarly research dealing with literary models – especially if ancient models – still suffers from a major flaw: interpreters of Jonson's tend to think quite simplistically that ancient authors are fixed objects, that never change their literary features in the course of time.

Clearly, investigating fixed, unchanging objects makes *Quellenforschung* easier, but it hardly is the most effective way to address the question of transtextuality. The aesthetics of reception has highlighted more than once (for a short overview see Holub 1984, 32-6; 45-51; 57-63) how the meaning of a literary work is largely a matter of historical situatedness, of ever-changing views embodying the process of its historical understanding. The way in which an author is perceived

[7] Carter (2021, 109) rightly refers to Lanier 2014 and his view of the relationships bewteen texts "as being lateral rather than linear, akin metaphorically to rhizomatic root systems in certain plants as opposed to a vertical 'arboreal' structure".

and understood – by a reader, or an age – is not something objectively describable, or stable in the long run. Before being the subject of a literary *corpus*, authors are first and foremost readers, and as such they rely on mental models of the texts that they have experienced. A preliminary step to the analysis of transtextual dynamics, then, is to try to infer the mental image that authors form of the texts they wish more or less consciously to appropriate. To make just an example, we may think of Dante's Virgil: 21st-century scholarship is confident that Epicureism, Homeric tradition, and Augustan propaganda are fundamental features of Virgil's works, and 'our' Virgil – that is the mental image that a learned readership has built of Virgil today – is mostly permeated by them. However, if we tried to retrace any of these centrepieces of Vergilian poetry in Dante's *Comedy* we would be bitterly disappointed. Dante was either not able to or not interested in spotting those crucial components of Virgil's poetics. Thus, trying to project what we now know or appreciate of Virgil onto Dante's Virgil would be highly improductive, as well as seriously unmethodical. When studying Dante's intertextual, literary, and cultural appropriation of the Vergilian model, then, we must bear in mind Dante's knowledge and understanding of his Latin predecessor, with its possible blanks and its specificities. This amounts to a twofold work: on the one hand, we should embark on a historical work, in order to nail down what Dante's age thought, and knew, of Virgil, and to provide as much background information as possible; on the other hand, we should set the author's idiosyncratic view of his hypotext against this general historical backdrop. This critical and philological exercise has crucial repercussions on our perception of both the modern and the ancient author: it helps us understand the modern author's transtextual

strategy better, and at the same time it sheds some light on an ancient author's reception during a specific time and in a specific context.

Obviously, this is also the case with Aristophanes and Jonson. We should first of all try to understand and describe the Renaissance perception of Aristophanes, in order to grasp the specific features of the Aristophanic model that we suppose Jonson learned, absorbed, and then transformed. Then, when evaluating the precise nature and the extent of a relationship between an ancient author such as Aristophanes and a modern author such as Jonson, we should define the specific object of the hypertextual relationship, that is what Jonson actually 'imitated' from his model: if we want to conclude that Jonson is echoing Aristophanes, for instance, we must demonstrate that Jonson is actually echoing this or that specific element of Aristophanic plays or poetics. In other words, we must pinpoint the discrete and describable elements that we can find both in the alleged model and in its alleged intertextual transformation. However, all these elements, which should ground our contentions on transtextual relationships and show the physiognomy of those relationships, are far from being objective and unambiguous: except for direct mentions of the ancient author or his works, any other possible reference is open to discussion – even direct quotations are, since they are often difficult to detect and validate.

Let us now consider how one of the most thorough studies on the subject, Gum 1969, deals with the hypertextual relationship between Aristophanes and Ben Jonson. Gum's book is both authoritative and paradigmatic: on the one hand, it exerted a considerable influence over the subsequent studies of the Aristophanes-Jonson relationship and over their research methods; on the other hand, it sums up most

of the structural limits of this kind of intertextual inquiries. For both these reasons, it looks important to discuss in some detail the limits of its methods, in order to try and sketch the layout of a partially new approach to intertextual studies, which we will be adopting throughout this book.

Instead of considering the interpretation of Aristophanes as a historically dynamic process, Gum accepts the reading of Aristophanic drama that was widespread at the turn of the 20th century: some of the fundamental assertions that Gum makes about Aristophanes derive mostly from Theodor Bergk's *Griechische Literaturgeschichte* (1872-1894), Alfred and Maurice Croiset's *An Abridged History of Greek Literature* (1904), and Gilbert Norwood's *Greek Comedy* (1931). Then, if one of these sources points out an element whatsoever in the Aristophanic *corpus*, Gum's work as a comparatist comes down to trying and find the traces of *that* element in the modern counterpart. Gum is extremely systematic in doing so, although his thoroughness is also a means to shy away from a more rigorous theoretical scrutiny.

Firstly, Gum does not take into due account the historicity of literary interpretation. Instead, he takes the 19th- and 20th-century conception of Aristophanic drama as an objective basis for the general understanding of Aristophanes and his relationships with modern authors. As we have seen, however, this is certainly not true, and proof to this is the fact that most of Bergk's and Norwood's ideas on Aristophanes were overturned by scholarship in the second half of the 20th century – today, for instance, we have substantially different ideas on Aristophanic plots and characters (on which more below). In other words, an author, or a literary *corpus*, is no fixed object. On the contrary, they are subject to a historical process of reception, which continuously, and significantly,

changes their perception. To neglect this fact means to base one's research on quite unstable ground.

To be true, it is not recommended for a scholarly work on hyperxtuality to adhere completely to interpretations of the hypotext that are coeval with the hypertext, either. To make an example, another important analysis of the Aristophanes-Jonson relationships, Lafkidou Dick 1974, takes it for granted that Aristophanes was primarily a satirist, whose main aim was to "teach his fellow men through satire and ridicule and to inspire them with ideals for an intellectually and ethically better future" (4-5). This is certainly an important part of Aristophanes' poetics, but it is hardly the only one or the most relevant, as most contemporary scholars now tend rightly to observe. This is, however, the centrepiece of humanistic and Early Modern interpretations of Aristophanes, whom Jonson himself ranked among proper satiric poets such as Persius and Juvenal (see below, chapter 5).[8] By describing Aristophanes as a satirist, then, Lafkidou Dick is correctly taking into due consideration a historically well-founded interpretation of Aristophanes, which Jonson certainly shared. This choice allows her to understand a crucial point in the literary connection between the two authors. However, by limiting herself to *this* conception of Aristophanic poetry and by neglecting to highlight other important interpretive aspects come to light in the following centuries, she misses the opportunity to appreciate the partiality of Jonson's reading of Aristophanes – a fact that may be explained either as a

[8] This may well have been done to Horace's filter, both in *Satires* (cfr. 1.4.1-5, where Aristophanes, Eupolis, and Cratinus are mentioned as forerunners of satire) and in *Ars Poetica* (esp. 281-4). There is ample evidence of Early Modern interpretations of Aristophanes as a satirist: for an overview, see Miola 2013, 486-92.

cultural consequence, as a genre-related limitation, or as an idiosyncratic position of Jonson himself.

Apart from historical weaknesses, studies in Jonsonian intertextuality are also weakened by logical flaws. Some hypotheses of literary and hypertextual derivation, for instance, are based on forced inferences that tend to tip over contingent and necessary, particular and general. An example from Gum's understanding of the Aristophanes-Jonson relationship will show our point. One of the most evident traits of Aristophanic drama, on which a hypertextual connection can be established between Aristophanes and Ben Jonson, is, in Gum's opinion, the construction of characters: "Broad similarities are apparent between the characters . . . of Aristophanes and Jonson" (Gum 1969, 24). This judgment on Aristophanic characters is clearly derived from Norwood's *Greek Comedy*, as Gum himself declares at least twice (Gum 1969, 21n9; 27n25). Norwood's opinion is *per se* debatable, and it was actually debated, even by scholars quoted by Gum: Theodor Bergk (1894, cf. Gum 1969, 24n18), and Hans-Joachim Newiger (1957), whose theory on the development of characters in Aristophanic comedy Gum describes as "tenuous and unconvincing" (27n26). Such controversy among contemporary scholars should have suggested an altogether more cautious stance, since it reveals how interpretations are by no means stable and unambiguous, even synchronically. Anyway, Gum goes further than that, and argues that since Aristophanic characters are types who are not subject to evolution and Jonsonian characters are types who are not subject to evolution, then Jonson must have derived this feature from Aristophanes. Obviously, this is a paralogism, a logical mistake. For the argument to be correct, it should run as follows: if, previous to Jonson, Aristophanes is the only one to

feature fixed/stereotyped characters; if, among modern playwrights, Jonson is the only one to feature fixed/stereotyped characters; *then* Jonson may be supposed to have derived this feature from Aristophanes. If we neglect the exclusive nature of the premises ("only"), the argument is weakened to the point of fallacy – and it leads us toward a serious interpretive mistake (Plautine characters are no less 'fixed' than Aristophanes', as any reader can easily ascertain). We know perfectly well that contacts between two authors or texts are significant only if two marked (abnormal, salient) features match. On the contrary, it is impossible to show beyond any reasonable doubt that two texts are related with each other if only unmarked elements match. This is the same principle on which Lachmannian philology is based: we can only hypothesize a relationship between two manuscripts that both contain the same anomaly (a marked element, such as a mistake, or an omission), whereas it is impossible to demonstrate any kind of relationship when both manuscripts transmit a text that is sound (that is, that lacks any markedness).

If we look even more closely into Gum's arguing in favour of an Aristophanic derivation of Jonson's characters, we realize that his argument is far from convincing:

> The characters of an Aristophanic play are predominantly, though not exclusively, types. They all exhibit traits common to a whole class, and occasionally they are allegorical. . . . Jonson's fondness for allegorical characters is reminiscent of Aristophanes. (Gum 1969, 24)

To begin with, Gum himself must observe that even Aristophanic characters are not always types: then why should we desume the derivation of a feature that is not entirely and exclusively attested in the alleged model? Moreover, the com-

parison between Aristophanic and Jonsonian characters does not even rest upon their nature as types, after all. Rather, it is grounded on a particular form of type, that is allegorical characters. Here again, Gum must observe that Aristophanic characters are "occasionally" allegorical. However, this seems sufficient to state that Jonson's staging of allegorical characters is "reminiscent of Aristophanes". Fondness for allegory is, in turn, sufficient to conclude that "broad similarities are apparent" between Aristophanic and Jonsonian characters. In so doing, Gum obliterates among others a vast *corpus* of allegoric texts, among which Medieval and Early Modern morality plays offer another close and most plausible forerunner to Jonson's alleged fondness of allegoric types.

This kind of fallacious argument involves other unmarked formal elements of Aristophanic and Jonsonian *corpora*. See for instance the so-called "episodic structure", or "episodic plot". Again, Gum takes an aesthetic preconception for granted, and applies it to plays such as *Acharnians* or *Clouds*. Even if it were true (and there are many reasons to think it is not), this does not imply that all Aristophanic plays have episodic structures, let alone that episodic plots may serve as an efficient marked element in order to define the specificity of Aristophanic comedy. Moreover, even if both Aristophanes and Jonson consistently employed episodic plots, it is not necessarily true that they used the same *kind* of episodic plots: they may well be employing episodic plots based on the repetition of completely different patterns. In spite of all these *caveats*, Gum goes on to maintain that Jonson "liked the episodic structure of Aristophanes' comedies, and frequently employed it in his own plays" (at the best of our knowledge, we do not know of a *locus* where Jonson explicitly declares his fondness for Aristophanes' episodic plots, and Gum does

not provide evidence in this regard). Then, anytime he comes upon a Jonsonian episodic plot, Gum can conclude that this is an Aristophanic feature: the structure of *Bartholomew Fair* "is Aristophanic in its episodic plot" (169), since it "has a simple, episodic plot, which inevitably reminds one of the *Acharnians* and the *Clouds*" (190), and so does the structure of *Cynthia's Revels* (22).

In sum, most of the methods followed by scholars to carry out comparative analyses of Aristophanic and Jonsonian drama look questionable at the very least, and seem to us to call for a radical reconsideration of the question. The present book, of course, aims neither at answering thoroughly all the theoretical issues at stake, nor at providing a complete reassessment of the Aristophanes-Jonson relationship. As we have emphasised at the outset, this book deals with a very specific topic, and is only the first of many steps needed to reformulate this ample interpretive question. However, it already brings about some sort of 'paradigm shift', which is at least partially shared by contemporary studies in the field.

Before going into the details of our research, we could then sum up the main methodological premises to this work. In investigating the Aristophanes-Jonson relationship, we always bear in mind that any sound research on transtextual dynamics must

1. go beyond the understanding of any literary echo in terms of 'quotation';
2. pay more attention to the peculiar traits of the hypotext;
3. look for different points of contact between hypertext and hypotext than those parts of the dramatic code usually taken into consideration;
4. acquire a systemic point of view: textual relationships with the sources are hardly ever isolated relationships

with one single source;

5. consider differences between two texts, and not just analogies, as relevant and positive findings.

Set against this backdrop, the perspective of *Quellenforschung*, as useful as it may be in the identification of literary contacts, looks rather like a limiting factor. We know from important literary theorists (Kristeva 1969, Genette 1982, Hutcheon 2013 among others) that explicit quotations or allusions are only two of the many possible strategies of appropriation. Quotation is of course crucial in that it is evidence of contact, but it falls short when it comes to answering ampler questions as to the dynamics, the extent, and the meaning of contact. As a matter of fact, what the hypertext takes from its hypotext rarely limits itself to textual segments: based on the idea and the literary modelling that we can infer from the hypertext, we often find that the elements involved in the intertextual process are not necessarily those that we are used to consider, such as *verbatim* loans or textual allusions. Hence the need for a new way to measure intertextual dynamics, different points of contact that presuppose a more complex and all-round vision of the ancient source.[9]

First, an in-depth analysis of the specific dynamics of the hypotext is needed. Such an analysis can help highlight essential elements of the hypotext – some more conspicuous, others less so. It will not always be possible to assume that an author such as Ben Jonson did actually have the same aware-

[9] New strategies of conceiving "imitations" of ancient texts by modern and contemporary authors have been developed in the last few years, and some interesting results are finally available: see esp. Colin Burrow's book on imitation (2019), with a fine analysis of Ben Jonson's theoretical and practical stylistic and formal strategies to appropriate ancient works (235-78).

ness of those elements as current scholars do; however, we have extensive and substantial evidence to prove that authors frequently show a deeper and more immediate comprehension of literary phenomena than specialists.[10] As this book too will try to show, a versatile, well-learned, and profound dramatist such as Jonson was able to perceive literary and dramaturgical lines of force that were obscure for his contemporaries and are not often apparent to current readers, either.

This brings us to our second assumption. We believe that we should stop thinking of sources in terms of linear echoes of text strings, themes, or plot models. As was amply shown (e.g. by Conte 1974), the intertextual dynamics work as situations of systemic transformation: while entailing a one-to-one relationship between texts they also presuppose a contaminated creation, bringing together different sources. For this reason, we believe that any comparative analysis can be more profitable if it backs out of the mere erudite *Quellenforschung*: beyond piling up more items to the list of intertextual sources validated by more or less direct quotations, it is equally important to understand the complexity of the dynamics of appropriation, which may also lead to discover differences, disagreements, or misunderstandings taking place in the complex transformation from hypotext to hypertext. In other words, if we try to analyse deeper literary, cultural, social, and dramaturgical dynamics between genres, authors, and *corpora* we may be able to spot even distances between an author and his model – and this discovery may prove as hermeneutically fruitful as the discovery of any direct lineage. This comes to

[10] See e.g. the case of Thomas Randolph's translation of *Wealth* (1624), which bears clear signs of a unique understanding of the agon of Aristophanes' play: Morosi 2022.

say that any study aimed at investigating the transtextual relationship between texts can and should be thought of in the first place as a comparative analysis – one where not every parallel passage implies a direct or intentional rewriting of a 'source', but where analogies and differences help understand the scope and meaning of a creative process.

This is the case, we would contend, with Aristophanes and Ben Jonson, a literary interaction which cannot be reduced to a mere matter of occasional imitation. At present, this is a working hypothesis, which will hopefully find confirmation in the following chapters and in future contributions. We maintain that while Jonson certainly knew, read, and studied Aristophanes, his appropriation of Aristophanic comedy was driven by an image of it that was consistently different from ours. This may have to do in part with the fact that Aristophanes did not belong in all evidence to Jonson's personal literary canon: Jonson's knowledge of Aristophanes is a fact, but it involved an apparently looser relationship than his knowledge of other Greek authors, such as Lucian, or of his favourite Latin poets. In the first place, it could not rest upon a running English translation, and was based either on Divus' 1538 and Frischlin's 1586 Latin translations, or on the original Greek – which is considerably more difficult than most Greek literary texts. According to McPherson's recognition of Ben Jonson's library (1974, 17), among the 206 books known to have certainly been in Jonson's possession only 29 contain Greek texts, and in only four of them (items no. 60, 102, 107, 180 of McPherson's catalogue) no Latin translation parallels the Greek. Jonson's *marginalia* lead us to think that his knowledge of Greek, although much sounder than that of his contemporary fellow-poets, was not so astonishing as many a modern critic is inclined to think. When

reading Greek, Jonson was probably not proficient enough to be able to dispense with Latin or vernacular translations or other textual support. Therefore, as far as we know, Jonson's relationship with Aristophanes was not grounded in a close, consistent, continuous familiarity, as it is the case with other ancient authors, and as it is witnessed by the extant copies of Horace, Juvenal, or Martial from Jonson's personal library (see for instance McPherson 1974, 68-70 on the 1619 edition of Martial's epigrams).

According to McPherson's catalogue, Jonson's owned two different editions of Aristophanes' works, published respectively in 1607 and 1614 – in both cases, that is, when the English playwright was already at the peak of his career. The older is the 1607 edition by Édouard Biset de Charlais (*Aristophanis comoediae undecim, cum scholiis antiquis*, Aurelia Allobrogum, Cantoriana Societas, with contributions by Aemilius Portus, the son of the Cretan humanist Franciscus), which contained the Greek text of the eleven extant comedies paralleled by a Latin translation (Nicodemus Frischlin's for *Plutus*, *Clouds*, *Frogs*, *Knights*, and *Acharnians*; Florent Chrestien's for *Wasps*, *Peace*, and *Lysistrata*; Andreas Divus' for *Birds*, *Assemblywomen*, and *Thesmophoriazusae*) and a collection of ancient and modern commentaries (the sources are briefly acknowledged in the last page of the prefatory matter; possibly Jonson made use of this edition, but according to McPherson 1974, 26 the very occasional markings on this volume are "not of the kind usually made by Jonson"). The other edition of Aristophanes owned by Jonson is a part of a comprehensive collection of Greek poets (McPherson's catalogue no. 95: *Poetae Graeci Veteres Tragici, Comici, Lyrici, Epigrammatarii Additis Fragmentis ex probatis authoribus collectis, nunc primum Graece & Latine in unum redacti corpus*),

where a complete Greek text with Latin traslation (no notes or commentaries) is contained in Vol. 1, 721-1017.

The scant markings present in these editions make it hard to believe that Jonson made intensive use of both. Of course, Jonson may have read Aristophanes much earlier, in books he did not own, or in copies he later sold or that were destroyed in the 1623 fire of his library (this must be the case with Lucian's *Lexiphanes*, which is present in Jonson's library only in Bourdelot's 1615 edition of Lucian's complete works, but had already been the object of intertextual rewriting in the act V of *Poetaster*, as early as 1601).[11] Although we are not allowed to think that Jonson's library was considerably larger than the 206 volumes extant today (McPherson 1974, 6-10), it is quite probable that Jonson read and studied many of his most influential models in books which are lost to us. This could obviously have to do with the 1623 fire, but also with Jonson's habit of periodically selling his books when in need of money (a habit we know from Drummond's notes).[12] As far as selling books is concerned, we must bear in mind that precisely the most familiar and heavily used books would have been less suited for sale, being both more important for the seller and less appealing for the buyer. This could have led to the subsequent dispersion not of a random part of the library, but especially of its core, the one modern scholars would no doubt find the most important.

Indeed, we must not underestimate Jonson's familiarity with Aristophanes, since we do have explicit references to Aristophanic *texts* within the Jonsonian *corpus*. But even in this case, a closer look to the passages involved is far from

[11] See below, 130-1.

[12] Also quoted in McPherson 1974, 6.

confirming the idea that Jonson's references to Aristophanes were based on in-depth, extensive knowledge of his plays in the original text. Jonson's most explicit (and most quoted) quotation of Aristophanes is from *The Devil is an Ass* (1616), where three lines from *Wealth* (850-2)[13] are cited in the Greek original (5.8.112-4). In Anthony Parr's modernised edition of the play, which is part of the 2012 Cambridge edition (Jonson 2012, vol. 4, 465-609), the quotation reads as follows:

> Οίμοι κακοδαίμων,
> Kαι τρισκακοδαίμωυ, και τετράκις, και πεντά κίς,
> και δωδεκαικiς, και μυριακις.
>
> [Wretched, wretched me! Thrice wretched, four times, five times, twelve times, ten thousand times!]

The diplomatic transcription facing the modernised text in the online edition (last accessed Nov 4, 2022) is based on the 1641 [1631] folio (T. Harper's 1641 reprint of *F*), and has no Greek at all ("EVE. | Peace. | FIT. | O | POV. | He curses | In *Greeke* I thinke."). If we check Jonson's 1640 folio (*F*), the passage is quoted in the following form:

> Οὶ μοὶ, κακοδαίμων,
> Καὶ τρισκακοδαίμων, καὶ τετράκις, καὶ πεντάκις,
> Καὶ δοδεκάκις, καὶ μυριάκις.
>
> [Wretched, wretched me! Thrice wretched, four times, five times, twelve times, ten thousand times!]

As we can see, these lines are much more accurate in John Beale's notoriously sloppy printing of Jonson's plays[14] than in

[13] Not 852-3, as stated in Parr's note to this passage.

[14] One of the editors of the Cambridge Edition, John Creaser, em-

present-day critical editions: only two minor slips (Οὶ μοὶ for Οἴμοι and δοδεκάκις for δωδεκάκις) taint what is otherwise a fairly precise reference to Aristophanes' *Wealth*. Quite unlike *F*, Parr's modernised text contains numerous misspells,[15] which require proper emendation to get to what Jonson had presumably in mind from the beginning: Οἴμοι κακοδαίμων, / καὶ τρισκακοδαίμων, καὶ τετράκις, καὶ πεντάκις, / καὶ δωδεκάκις, καὶ μυριάκις.

This philological premise should show how a less than accurate reconstruction of the textual evidence could occasionally cloud our idea of Jonson's relationship with Greek texts. This passage, however, has interesting implications which go much further than mere spelling: Jonson's quote is an abridged version of 850-2 from *Wealth*, which in Biset de Charlais' 1607 edition (as we may recall, one of the two preserved from Jonson's personal library) read:

> Οἴμοι κακοδαίμων, ὡς ἀπόλωλα δείλαιος.
> Καὶ τρισκακοδαίμων, καὶ τετράκις καὶ πεντάκις
> Καὶ δωδεκάκις, καὶ μυριάκις. ἰού. ἰού.
>
> [Wretched, wretched me! I'm accursed and ruined! Thrice wretched, four times, five times, twelve times, ten thousand times! Ah, ah!]

phasizes Jonson's "extreme dissatisfaction with 'I.B.', Allott's printer John Beale, whose work does indeed blemish all three plays with innumerable errors." (Creaser 2014).

[15] In Happé's edition of *The Devil Is an Ass*, the text of the Greek quotation is similarly maimed by a curious mix of misspells, encompassing both the Greek and Latin alphabet: Οίμοi κακοδαίμων, / Καὶ τρίσκακοδαίμων, καὶ τετράκis, καί πεντὰκιs, / Καὶ δωδεκάκis, καὶ μυριάκis (Jonson 1994, 218).

Apparently, Jonson's deletion of ὡς ἀπόλωλα δείλαιος has no formal or metrical reason; it can more convincingly be ascribed to his wish to emphasize the keyword κακοδαίμων (closely followed by its intensified form τρισκακοδαίμων), which works as a hint to the play's demonic connotation (δαίμων ⇒ 'demon'). That this is the case is easily proved by the French words a few lines below (*DA* 5.8.119-20: "Oui, | Oui, monsieur, un pauvre diable! Diabletin!"), which also alludes to the 'devilish' energies unveiled by Fitzdottrel's glossolaly — see Eitherside's reaction: "It is the devil, by his several languages" (5.8.121). However, this demonic connotation is far from consistent with the context of Aristophanes' *Wealth*: κακοδαίμων (*misero*, in the Latin translation facing Biset de Charlais' Greek text: Aristophanes 1607, 86) has obviously nothing to do with the Christian devil. This adjective, a common interjection meaning 'wretched', is etymologically related to the Greek idea of (un)luck as the effect of personal divine action - hence 853, which concludes the Informer's entrance outcry: Οὕτω πολυφόρῳ συγκέκραμαι δαίμονι ("what a voracious fate has swallowed me", transl. Sommerstein in Aristophanes 2001). Therefore, Jonson's quotation of this passage does nothing but warp its literal meaning and its cultural implications in order to convey a connotative reference to the dwellers of the Christian hell. The removal of the ὡς ἀπόλωλα δείλαιος clause is further proof of this: those words display emotional distress with no 'demonic' connotation, and can therefore be conveniently cast off.

What do we learn from the analysis of this brilliant but mischievous reference to the Greek Aristophanes? In our opinion, first and foremost that, although we must not doubt Jonson's knowledge of the Greek text, its literary exploitation

appears more a matter of local curiosity and brazen parade than the result of actual familiarity. As we have tried to show, the choice of this passage depends more on the relevance of a signifier and the connotation of its contrived etymology than on the literal (and dramatic) meaning of the text.

These and many other considerations induce us to believe that Jonson's appropriation of Aristophanes is in the first place the appropriation of an *image* of Aristophanes, which Jonson received from the cultural and literary tradition with which he was most familiar. That image consists of judgments, syntheses, episodic references to single aspects of Aristophanes' multi-faceted and intricate world that were available throughout Humanist Europe (for a thorough overview of the Humanist reception of Aristophanes and his works, see Miola 2014). Secondly, Jonson's appropriation of Aristophanes works by means of a constant triangulation with some of the landmarks of Jonson's poetics: Horace and the tradition of ancient satire, to start with (hence Jonson's representation of Aristophanes as a satirist);[16] the philosophical and characterological tradition dating back to Theophrastus; the literary theories on drama that ever since Aristotle's

[16] It can easily be argued that this is the case even in one of Jonson's most explicit references to the Aristophanic tradition, in the induction to *Every Man Out of His Humour*, where Cordatus presents the play as "somewhat like *Vetus comedia*" (Ind. 228, ed. Ostovich in Jonson 2001). In spite of the detailed account of the genre development with which Cordatus provides the audience (Ind. 243-65), Asper's previous reference to the poetic mode of the play (Ind. 124-45) has much more to do with Horace's accounts of Old Comedy as satire (see esp. *Serm.* 1 4.1-8; 1.10.14-7; *Ars* 281-4, already referred to above) than with the technicalities about characters and chorus Cordatus dwells upon. The question of the 'Aristophanic mode' is neatly presented in Helen Ostovich's *Introduction* to the play (Jonson 2001, 18-28).

Poetics had been predominant all over Europe. Thirdly, Jonson's appropriation of Aristophanes is hardly ever a strictly intertextual appropriation, and very few direct or indirect textual quotations of Aristophanic comedy can be found throughout Jonson's works – a striking fact in view of Jonson's typical hypertextual strategy, consisting in the faithful reframing of entire sections of the hypotext (see below the discussions on Horace's satire 1.9 and Lucian's *Lexiphanes* in *Poetaster*, ch. 4). We should therefore reduce the critical value of an integrally intertextual interpretation of the Aristophanes-Jonson relationship. This judgment, however, is far from closing the subject. As we have seen, intertextuality is only one way of looking at the literary, cultural, and ideological connection between two authors or *corpora* — in some cases, it is not even the most productive. Although shying away from a close reading and reworking of Aristophanic passages, Jonson had read Aristophanes' plays, and appropriated some relevant features thereof — in terms of dramatic strategies, thematic structures, and overall ideology. Such appropriation was not necessarily linear (that is, it involved a more complex and diverse literary process), and did not necessarily produce similarities — in fact, the use of similar forms and strategies can lead to remarkable differences.

This book will test out this hypothesis, by means of a specific analysis of musical and poetical meta-performance, a fundamental theme that characterizes both authors and *corpora*. The overall strategies with which Aristophanes and Jonson insert, and make a meaningful use of, meta-performance in their dramas allow a comparison that, sectorial as it may be, can prove illuminating. As a matter of fact, meta-performance is a highly versatile feature, both from a dramatic and a thematic point of view. As such, meta-perfor-

mance allows to retrace analogies and differences between the two authors in three fields: formal aspects, literary and thematic assumptions, but first and foremost the ideological stance of the aesthetic judgment implied in any occurrence of meta-performance. We shall focus on some significant case studies such as *Poetaster*, a text displaying in greater detail than most other plays the complex lines of literary appropriation. Beyond simple linear transformations (quotations and allusions), richer and more twisted mechanisms can be observed. In a particularly interesting case, we can fathom the existence of a literary mediator – an intermediate source that already contained a first-layer intertextual connection with Aristophanes, and somehow deflected Jonson's linear appropriation of the Aristophanic model. As we will see, instead of a Jonson echoing Aristophanes, we can portray Jonson echoing Horace echoing – and crucially altering – Aristophanes. Horace's mediation has fundamental formal, thematic, and ideological consequences on Jonson's use of meta-performance – unquestionably very far from, if not opposed to, its handling in Jonson's 'original' model, Aristophanes.[17]

In other words, it seems fair to say that Jonson's image of Aristophanes was one that derived mostly from Horace's works and his literary appropriation of ancient comedy; their considerable influence over the following centuries, along with other crucial cultural phenomena, determined a high-

[17] It may be helpful to recall a passage of Jonson's commonplace book *Discoveries*, where he highlights the role of imitation in the poetical process: "observe how the best writers have imitated, and follow them. How Virgil and Statius have imitated Homer, how Horace, Archilochus; how Alcaeus, and the other lyrics, and so of the rest" (in Jonson 2014, 1760-2). Some insightful observations on this passage in Burrow 2019, 245-8.

ly partial reading of Aristophanes, that was passed down to Humanist Europe, and ultimately to Ben Jonson himself. All the evidence that we can gather (reading practices, coeval critical opinions, Jonson's own views on Aristophanes) shows, then, that Lafkidou Dick is certainly right in assuming that this second-hand 'satiric' version was Jonson's main and almost exclusive literary modelling of Aristophanic drama. However, we would contend, this is just one side of our hermeneutical problem. As a matter of fact, more clues can be found that are less evident but just as interesting: they allow us to conclude, as we will see in the following chapters, that Jonson's plays show some fundamental thematic as well as dramaturgical peculiarities that can be traced back to Aristophanic drama, after all. Even without having a personal and first-hand stance on Aristophanes, Jonson was able to gather some distinctive aspects of Aristophanic plays, and to adopt them in his plays. This was a creative rather than a scholarly process, and we need not suppose that it was completely self-aware: as we have seen, a systemic view of transtextuality proves that unintentional literary relationships are not hermeneutically and heuristically less relevant than explicit quotations – in fact, they may even be *more* relevant, since they account for deeper, and structural, literary phenomena. Our investigation into Jonson's *Poetaster* and its dramatic as well as ideological relationships with Aristophanic meta-performance will show, we hope, that literary models can exert significant influence over subsequent authors far beyond deliberate loans: the less subject to capillary quotations they are, the more powerful impact they can have upon the very definition of genres and dramatic techniques.

Jonson's partially inadvertent drawing from Aristophanic drama may very well be due to his need to find alternative

forms of dramatic and comic structures, and to innovate the traditional composition of Hellenistic and Roman comedy. Be that as it may, Aristophanes crucially affects some axiological elements of Jonsonian comedy. In this book, we will zero in on one those elements, the ideological value of poetical knowledge and, more broadly, of culture. This particular vantage point will show us two apparently conflicting features: on the one hand, Aristophanic drama exerts a decisive effect on the definition of the question and on its dramatic layout; on the other hand, although coming from the same field, Jonson's and Aristophanes' plays will reach two opposite ideological stances, due to literary, social, and political phenomena such as the pressure of genre, of readership (or spectatorship), of political positioning. Within a complex framework of intertextuality, a model can both exercise a profound influence over its hypertext, *and* be at the opposite side of that same hypertext. This is, we would contend, the case with Aristophanes and Ben Jonson.

To sum up, even if we were to exclude that actual, constant, and consistent phylogenetic relationships existed between Aristophanic and Jonsonian comedies, this would not make the comparison between the two *corpora* useless, or less interesting. *Prima facie*, this exercise is relevant as a sort of literary control experiment, that is as a way of highlighting some specific features of a *corpus* by comparing it to another similar, albeit not related, one. More importantly, such a comparison allows us to advance our knowledge in cultural history: the definition of differences and similarities between two salient moments in the history of literature is *per se* crucial, even if – or perhaps all the more so if – it does not rest upon phylogenetic relationships. In light of this, studying some features of Aristophanic and Jonsonian drama amounts not so much to

establishing strictly intertextual relationships, as to determine in which directions two epochs in the history of European culture dealt with similar anthropologic and social constants.

1

Defining the Question

During the trial against Horace's two rivals in Ben Jonson's *Poetaster* (first performed in 1601 and printed in 1602), some lines written by both Crispinus and Demetrius Fannius are read aloud and analysed:

> TIB. 'And, but that I would not be thought a prater,
> I could tell you he were a translator.
> I know the authors from whence he has stole,
> And could trace him, too, but that I understand 'em not full and whole.'
> TUC. [*Aside.*] That line is broke loose from all his fellows; chain him up shorter, do.[18]
> (5.3.266-71)

The last line of Demetrius' slandering poem does not respect any metrical pattern, and thus prompts Tucca's pun on breaking loose from chains. Two interesting aspects emerge from this brief scene: firstly, a discussion on poetry and metre provides the theme for a meta-poetic joke; secondly, lack of proficiency in versification is reason enough to be laughed at.

[18] Unless otherwise specified, the text of *Poetaster* will be quoted from the edition by David Bevington in Jonson 2012, vol. 2.

Crispinus and Fannius are evidently contemptible characters, to whom no sympathy whatsoever should be granted: interestingly enough, moral contempt matches poetic contempt – we are not supposed to empathize with them because they are both ethically despicable and poetically incompetent.

In order to achieve its more comprehensive goals, as argued above in the Introduction, this book aims at discussing some of the most common dynamics of meta-poetry and thematic highlighting of poetical and musical practices in Attic Old Comedy and Elizabethan drama. In doing so, we have a twofold purpose. On the one hand, we intend to provide a critical analysis of the peculiar status that music and poetry as themes enjoyed in two literary genres, such as ancient and Early Modern drama, that were both profoundly intertwined with them. On the other hand, we hope to contribute to the development of critical and hermeneutical tools for the comparison between Early Modern comedy and its ancient models, with a focus on Aristophanes.

Before tackling more specific points, some theoretical, historical, and methodological premises may be of some use. Let us start with semiotics.[19] The dramatic representation of poetical and musical performance *per se* is a sort of semiotic paradox, as ancient Greek comedy clearly shows.[20] As it can be

[19] Since any theatrical act is based upon convention and representation, semiotics has been, and still is, one of the most valuable interpretive tools of theatre and performance studies: for a general outlook, see Balme 2003, 58-64 and 2008, 78-83. For more in-depth studies, see Fischer-Lichte 1983 and 2014; Serpieri 1978; De Marinis 1982; Schmid, van Kesteren 1984; Aston, Savona 1991; Elam 2002.

[20] The paradox of meta-performance is particularly manifest in Attic Old Comedy, since among ancient theatre genres the *archaia* is the one that most evidently displays a meta-discursive vocation. Of course, me-

reconstructed from the dramatic texts, in fifth-century Athens, drama intrinsically consisted of music and poetry. Metre, songs, and dance were constituent elements of tragedy, comedy, and satyr play: music was an organic part of performance. In other words, the dramatic convention – which we may also call a dramatic code – provided for actors and *choreutai* to dance and sing, often in unison. This did not amount to giving those parts of the plays – and thus the simple act of singing and dancing – a thematic emphasis: singing and dancing were just parts of the code; accordingly, the author of drama was called a 'composer' (μελοποιός: Ar. *Ra.* 1250), and the role of the actor in a Greek production was cast as a singing role (Hall 2006, 288-320). Therefore, we are not always supposed to interpret musical interludes in ancient drama as marked stylistic or meta-literary excursions. For instance, when the comic Chorus introduced an *agon*, they suddenly swerved from iambic trimeters or trochaic tetrameters into lyric, from recitation without music into singing (see e.g. Aristoph. *V.* 526-45 ~ 631-47b).[21] However, these agonal *ōidai* should certainly not be taken as a form of explicit thematic highlighting of high-flown poetry and music, or as a shift onto a further

ta-performance is not limited to comedy, and, although less frequently, tragedy too resorted to meta-performance in order to create meaning: see for instance Cassandra's marriage hymn in Euripides' *Troades*, an authentic "Euripidean *coup de théâtre*" (Kovacs in Euripides 2018, 178) that emphasises the prophetess' wrecked situation by recourse to the unexpected perversion of a traditional musical form, or Xerxes' appearance at the end of Aeschylus' *Persae*, in which the poet employs the conventions of pre-literary *threnoi* to convey the sensation of funerary liturgy (Garvie in Aeschylus 2006, 336-42).

[21] Of course, this phenomenon did not occur in agonal *ōidai* only. We may also think of Choral *parodoi*, the Chorus' entrance songs, which often followed a prologue in iambic trimeters without music: Rode 1971.

level of fiction: the Chorus remained on the level of primary fiction, and simply modified their expressive code so as to include singing and dancing – not unlike what happens in musicals. As a part of the dramatic code of ancient drama, this also fitted perfectly within the range of an ancient audience's expectations. To be sure, the sung parts of the plays must have been perceived as different, from both a formal and a performative point of view.[22] However, they were not perceived as extraneous to the stylistic and performative texture of the play, and thus their simple presence did not entail a purposeful emphasis on, or a thematic treatment of, performance.[23]

[22] This seems common sense, and consciousness is certainly a key-factor for any evaluation of performance (Revermann 2006, 28). However, it is extremely difficult for a modern reader of ancient drama to determine exactly the aesthetic impact of singing and dancing on the response of the audience: ". . . how much of the sung language could be heard? Was the music such that it offered no obstruction to the meaning? Were the ears of the audience more acute than ours? . . . Or did the Greek audience hear a chorus perhaps as we hear an unfamiliar Verdi opera, catching two or three words out of every five? This suggestion may be near the truth" (Arnott 1989, 27). We may observe in passing that hearing an opera by Verdi may not be equally unfamiliar to all kinds of spectators: different levels of understanding are always implied when communication is involved – and indeed they may have been involved in the reception of ancient drama, too.

[23] The extent to which we can refer to dramatic convention in order to explain performative peculiarities of ancient spectacle is hard to assess. To make an example relating to vocal performance: given that vocality played such an important role in ancient drama, how recognizable was an actor's voice? And if it was indeed recognizable (as we may assume at least since the last quarter of the fifth century, when actors certainly had a public presence: Slater 2002, 22-41), how did it affect the audience's perception of fiction? We know that actors typically played

This book will focus on a different kind of poetical and musical feature of drama, musical parts that can be read as a mimesis of performance even on the level of primary fiction. To make an example from Aristophanic comedy, let us take Dicaeopolis' *phallophoria* in *Acharnians*: after drinking the thirty-year peace treaty with Sparta offered to him by Amphitheos, the protagonist goes back to his *deme*, where he organizes a private celebration of the rural Dionysia.[24] *Acharnians* is essentially our only significant first-hand piece of evidence for the festival and the phallic procession (πομπή) in honour of Phales that must have taken place during it. According to other sources (e.g. Plut. *Mor.* 527D), music and dancing in this scene of *Acharnians* explicitly mimicked forms of (ritual) performance, as Dicaeopolis himself candidly declares before singing: *Ach.* 261 ἐγὼ δ' ἀκολυθῶν ᾄσομαι τὸ φαλλικόν ("I'll follow and sing the phallic hymn").[25] This explicit declaration hints at a purposeful parody of an actual musical genre: unfortunately, we have no surviving parallel for phallic hymns

more roles within the same play: did their voice somehow impinge on the primary level of fiction? The problem was raised, for instance, in relation to the ending of *Philoctetes*, where more than one reader suggested that Heracles – whose role was played by the same actor who played Odysseus' – was none other than Odysseus himself disguised as god, and that the audience would have perceived the deceit thanks to their recognizing the actor's voice (for a critical discussion, Guidorizzi in Sophocles 2003, 323).

[24] On which see Pickard-Cambridge 1968, 42-54; Parker 2005, 316-7; Bednarek 2019.

[25] On Aristophanes' parody of the Rural Dionysia, see Horn 1970, 63-71; Habash 1995, 560-7; Olson in Aristophanes 1998, 141-52. Unless otherwise specified, Aristophanes will be quoted from the text of Wilson in Aristophanes 2007; translations are by A.H. Sommerstein, slightly modified.

to compare with the passage from *Acharnians*, but it is virtually certain that Aristophanes was here reproducing, albeit in a possibly free or comically distorted manner, a traditional poetical and musical form (Parker 1997, 127). By warning his audience that a performative mimesis is going to follow, Aristophanes thus places thematic emphasis on his character's performance, and triggers an implicit comparison between the real-life song and its comic replica in his spectators. In other words, the text represents an action which consisted in a poetical and musical performance even in the real world (i.e. outside the fictional world of the play). If we insert this real-world performance into the framework of the primary fiction of the play, this becomes *ipso facto* an act of meta-performance: a part of the primary code becomes the object of a meta-discursive representation.

Here lies, we argue, the greatest difference between this comic technique and another typically Aristophanic feature: the interruption of fiction (or the renegotiation of the fictional contract between author and spectator: Slater 2002, 3) through metatheatrical references. Metatheatre can be defined as a self-conscious form of theatre.[26] Metatheatre as an interpretive concept was introduced in the 1960s by Lionel Abel's seminal book *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form*.[27] Abel pointed at the presence of the so-called 'play-within-the-play' as the *principium individuationis* of metatheatre, and took it as an autonomous third genre, distinct from

[26] In the following pages, we shall refer to metatheatre in these terms, and shall not follow Bruno Gentili's definition of metatheatre as "teatro-selezione", that is, any play that is constructed from previously existing plays (Gentili 2006, 52).

[27] Abel 1963. Among the forerunners of metatheatre, see also Nelson 1958.

comedy and tragedy. This latter claim would soon be called into question and eventually discarded, but the interest in the playwrights' theatrical self-consciousness was destined to live on. At first, metatheatre proved an invaluable interpretive tool for Renaissance drama,[28] until the increasing influence of performance studies on Classics suggested scholars that metatheatre may be an interesting theoretical framework for ancient drama, too.[29] Ever since then, metatheatre has become an almost omnipresent concept in any interpretation of ancient drama, and most plays have been read at least once through the lenses of metatheatre. However, as far as ancient plays are concerned, terminology often falls short, and still looks too generic. In his book about metatheatre in Sophocles, for instance, Mark Ringer gave the following definition of metatheatre:

> Metatheatre . . . encompasses all forms of theatrical self-referentiality. These may include role playing, various forms of self-conscious reference to dramatic convention and other plays, and the many ways in which a playwright may toy with the perceived boundaries of his or her craft.

[28] The first studies in the field being those by Calderwood 1971; Egan 1975; and Hornby 1986.

[29] It is commonly held that the first scholarly works on ancient drama to explicitly mention metatheatre are those by Zeitlin 1980 (on *Orestes*); Segal 1982 (on *Bacchae*: see esp. 215-71); Slater 1985 (on Plautus); Ringer 1998 (on Sophocles). This geographically and culturally biassed commonplace can be challenged by recalling Barchiesi 1969, whose brilliant assessment of Plautus' 'metatheatre' exerted considerable influence on later classical scholars. For an overview see Thumiger 2009. Interestingly enough, Renaissance drama often provided classicists the theoretical as well as practical background for their studies on ancient metatheatre.

> Other elements of metatheatrical phenomena include ritual or ceremonial enactments within the play and the rupturing of dramatic illusion. . . . Metatheatre calls attention to the semiotic systems of dramatic performance.[30]

As can be seen, Ringer's definition assumes that any form of reference to a performative layer can be labelled as 'metatheatre'. Although theoretically more refined than most studies on ancient metatheatre, the most extensive and thoughtful study on Aristophanic metatheatre, Niall Slater's *Spectator Politics*,[31] still assumes this variety of forms for 'metatheatre'.

To go back to meta-performance, we believe that a more specific use of definitions may be of some help in understanding different semiotic processes of theatre. In particular, we would contend that meta-performance (such as, for instance, any form of celebration within the play) is not the same thing as metatheatre (that is, any explicit self-conscious reference to the play as a play and to the playwright's, or the actors', work). While metatheatre and the breaking of the fourth-wall stress the difference between first-level fiction and reality, meta-performative segments stress the difference between first-level fiction and second-level fiction. In other words, meta-performance does not impinge at all on dramatic 'illusion',[32] but provides a further articulation there-

[30] Ringer 1998, 7-8. Ringer's definition of metatheatre is clearly indebted to Hornby's: "The possible varities of concious or overt metadrama are as follows: 1. The play within the play. 2. The ceremony within the play. 3. Role playing within the role. 4. Literary and real-life reference. 5. Self reference" (Hornby 1986, 32).

[31] Slater 2002.

[32] That of 'illusion' (as opposed to 'reality') is a highly contentious concept within theatre and performance studies: for an outlook, see Hornby 1986, 13-28.

of.[33] Trygaeus' flight on the *mēchanē* in Aristophanes' *Peace*, for instance, reminds the audience of the difference between primary fiction (a character flying aboard a dungbeetle) and reality (the actor in the actual theatre with its structures and props). On the other hand, Dicaeopolis' performance of the phallic procession does not interrupt the primary fiction by reminding us of the conventional nature of the theatrical act, but adds a further, secondary strand of fiction (in this case: ritual performance).[34] This difference between metatheatre and meta-performance holds true in Renaissance drama, as well.

As we shall see in greater detail in Chapter 4, Jonson's dramatic *corpus* is extremely rich in metatheatrical elements; they tend to occur mostly in liminal contexts, such as prologues or intermeans, that is, segments whose fictionality is set at a higher level over the primary fiction. Following the example of prologues by Plautus and, even more so, Terentius, Jonson's metatheatre thematizes not just the specific occasion and context of the staging, but more broadly the codes of dramatic writing and performance. When Stage Keeper, Book Holder, and Scrivener come onstage in the Prologue of Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* to discuss matters regarding the writing and performance of the drama itself, they are

[33] In this regard, we agree with Muecke 1977, 55-6 when he described metatheatre in Aristophanes as follows: "The fiction may therefore be interrupted and be shown to be fiction by being contrasted with the 'reality' of the performance. But when the illusion . . . is broken, what happens is that a second fiction is introduced into the play".

[34] This is the reason why, we would contend, ceremonies within the play cannot be defined as an act of metatheatre, as Hornby 1986 (on Shakespearean drama) and Ringer 1998 (on Sophoclean drama) did: it is, rather, an act of meta-performance.

clearly breaking the first-layer fiction and making an act of metatheatre. Moreover, Jonson seems keen on inserting such metatheatrical references not only in the prologues or intermeans of his dramas: in act 1 of *The Devil is an Ass*, for example, the staging of a play entitled *The Devil is an Ass* is mentioned (1.4.20-1), and in many other points of the play the characters, within the dramatic fiction, clearly allude to elements of the coeval theatre practice. A telling example, drawn from the same play: looking for someone able to interpret the Spanish woman, Engine mentions Richard (Dick) Robinson, who was most probably the actor who interpreted Wittipol in the play, that is, the character who ends up dressing up as the Spanish woman (2.8.63-75). This self-reference creates a deliberately confused combination of primary reality (Robinson's historical figure) and secondary fiction (Wittipol's disguise as the Spanish woman), thus strengthening the *effet de réel* of the primary fiction itself.[35]

On the the other hand, meta-performance is a different, and more subtle, way of emphasizing the performative nature of reality, since its nature as a second-layer fiction does not damage or disturb at all the coherence of the drama's primary fiction. When, for instance, during the puppet play in act 5 of *Bartholomew Fair* Leatherhead tells Cokes "Between you and I, sir, we do but make show" (5.4.222)[36], he is not breaking the first-layer but the second-layer fiction – he is

[35] Such confusion between different layers of fiction and reality is further emphasized by the exchange between Engine and Merecraft preceding the mention of Robinson: "ENGINE Why, sir, your best will be one o'the players. / MERECRAFT No, there's no trusting them. They'll talk on't, / And tell their poets." (2.8.60-2).

[36] The text of *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) is quoted from John Creaser's edition (Jonson 2012, vol. 4).

referring to meta-performance and not to the primary performance. Metatheatre and meta-performance, then, both explicitly denounce the performative nature of what goes on onstage, but in quite different ways: the former by opposing first-level fiction to reality, the latter by articulating fiction itself into two different levels.

In Aristophanic drama, performance and meta-performance coexist, and, however different they may be, are constantly intertwined with each other, in manners that are often so subtle that they may be hard for interpreters to discern. Moreover, meta-performance itself can take different forms in Aristophanic comedy, ranging from linear events such as the parody of the hymn to Phales in *Acharnians* to more complex situations in which the elements themselves of the poetical and musical code become the object of the discourse or the dramatic interaction. Take for instance the well-known scene with the ληκύθιον in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (1198-1245): while discussing the main defects of Euripidean prologues, Aeschylus keeps interrupting his rival by inserting, at the end of each line and in the same metrical stance, the dull phrase ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν ("mislaid his oil-flask"). Interpreters have long debated over the exact meaning of this unusually prolonged joke:[37] whatever it may be, metre quite certainly played a role, by emphasising Euripides' stylistic shabbiness in the resolution of the fourth foot of the iambic trimeter into a tribrach. Reiteration is also an aspect of performance, and insisting reiteration – as is the case with the ληκύθιον – may also be read as a form of meta-performance.

[37] For a synthetic overview, see Del Corno in Aristophanes 1985, *ad Ra.* 1208; Dover in Aristophanes 1993, *ad Ra.* 1200; Griffith in Aristophanes 2013, 129-31.

Of course, when we mention 'performance' we are introducing a *Grenzbegriff*. As tantalizing as it may seem, Martin Revermann is right in arguing that "[t]here can be no such thing as a complete performance analysis of any theatre - past, present, or future" (Revermann 2006, 46). Any performance is an ephemeral event, and as such it produces meaning through bodily co-presence (Fischer-Lichte 2010, 29-31).[38] These assumptions are sadly all the more true for ancient drama, which precludes any form of autopsy. This raises a number of major problems that cannot obviously be dealt with in this chapter.[39] For the purposes of this work, it is sufficient to hint at some specific issues. As we have seen, performance, and meta-performance, entail visual, acustic, and sometimes tactile and olfactory modes of production and reception. In the absence of such elements, we must only rely on the text; at the same time, it is important to bear in mind that texts do not at any rate provide all the information we need – on several occasions, they provide inaccurate, incomplete, or ambiguous information.[40] In other words, studies on

[38] See also Slater 1985, 1: "Nothing is more elusive than the theatrical moment".

[39] The scholarly discussion on these topics is impossible to summarize briefly. For a well-balanced discussion, see e.g. Revermann 2006, 46-65.

[40] To begin with, we cannot be sure that the text is thorough in listing all the actions that went on onstage; we cannot even be certain that it lists all the "significant actions" (as Taplin 1977 calls them), that is, all those actions on which the dramatist wanted to draw the attention: see for instance Ajax's laughter in the prologue of Sophocles' *Ajax* as analysed by Revermann 2006, 59-60. But even if we were to assume that the text is thorough in describing what happened onstage, we would still have to face the absence of any visual, or performative, document that may help us to assess the precise nature of the ancient dramatic

metatheatre and meta-performance entail studies on performance. Unfortunately, however, performance studies applied to ancient drama are a theoretical and methodological quicksand. These observations are not meant to reduce the hermeneutical contribution of performance criticism, but to narrow its scope in view of the actual possibilities of a satisfactorily philological reconstruction of performance itself.[41] In the following pages, we will try to glean from texts as much information as possible on ancient, as well as Elizabethan, musical, metrical, and poetical performance. However, we must not forget that a satisfying archaeological reconstruction is impossible, and most readings of ancient performance are deemed to be partial at best.

For these reasons, when considering the meaning of meta-performance in ancient and Early Modern drama we prefer to do so with particular attention to its specific dramatic function – that is, focussing not so much on formal as on dramatic grounds. In other words, we will analyse the deeper dynamics that meta-performance triggers in terms of

convention. As Taplin himself recognized (1977, 34), "one cannot say a priori that anything *must* have been represented". In the case of the earthquake in Euripides' *Bacchae*, for instance, even if we believe that the text lists all the actions that the audience saw onstage, the text certainly does not explain *how* those actions were carried on (Goldhill 1989). In other words, we have no means to determine the aesthetic and dramatic conventions of ancient drama: as a consequence, we cannot use the text in order to assess what Taplin called the "visual meaning", and what we may now call the "performative meaning", of ancient drama. As Mastronarde observed, we are here "in the realm of controlled speculation" (1990, 254).

[41] For an interesting outlook on the specific characters of performance – and on the challenges of its reconstruction and analysis – see Hall 2010.

dramatic relationships between characters, studying performance from a literary more than a formal or technical perspective. From a methodological standpoint, then, this work assumes a reader- (and spectator-)oriented perspective, one that considers the aesthetic consequences of dramatic statements in terms of the response of their implicit target.[42] This critical perspective proves quite useful to the attempt of offering a general and comprehensive interpretation of comic meta-performance. As a matter of fact, we will show that, in broad terms, meta-performance strongly contributes to the creation of dynamics of emotional involvement with, and/or emotional distancing from, the dramatic and symbolic stances represented by each character.

It is still not the time to draw a comprehensive taxonomy of meta-performance in Jonson's drama. For the moment, it will suffice to hint at Jonson's marked tendency towards literary meta-performance: we can find in the Jonsonian *corpus* several places where the primary fiction represents a musical or poetic performance. In the light of what we said above, it could be useful to divide those instances into two groups, depending on whether meta-performance is more directly aimed at a dramatic or at a characterological function. Among the former, we can list all those moments of musical

[42] The most consistent theoretical formulations of a reader-oriented interpretive framework are those by Iser 1978 and Fish 1980: both scholars argued in favour of identifying the reader's experience and the meaning of any literary text. Some implicit statements in the direction of a reader-oriented perspective, however, may be found in earlier theories of literature, from Aristotle's theory of *catharsis* (*Poet.* 1449b22-8) to William Empson's theory of ambiguity. For a general outlook of reader-response criticism, see Tompkins 1980, 201ff.; Mailloux 1990; Davis, Womack 2002, 51ff.

meta-performance that play a significant role in the development of the plot, such as Quicksilver's song in *Eastward Ho!*, which proves able to move Touchstone and thus allows the final reconciliation (5.5.40ff.), or the puppet show in act 5 of *Bartholomew Fair*. Among the latter, we can list all those cases where poetic meta-performance helps portray a character in relation to his or her abilities and aims. Such feature is quite common throughout Jonson's plays, too: one need only think of *Every Man In His Humour*, where, as we shall see below, Stephen's poetic meta-performance shows both his poetic ambitions and his monumental incompetence; or of *Epicene*, where the would-be poet Jack Daw must undergo an actual poetic exam (2.2), which again reveals his complete lack of talent and the impracticability of his wishes. Of course, that between dramatic and characterological meta-performance is only a working distinction, drawn just in order to start framing the interpretive problem. As we shall see, even when meta-performance is primarily aimed at ridiculing a negative character (when, then, it can be labelled as a case of 'characterological meta-performance'), it can result in a strong contrast between two or more characters, thus crucially carrying out a dramatic function, as well.

To go back to the brief passage of Jonson's *Poetaster* discussed above, the reading of Crispinus' and Fannius' poems is a standard form of meta-performance. Meta-performance, however, is not neutral: it serves Jonson's comic and dramatic purpose of defining two different factions – those who show literary proficiency, such as Horace, and those who do not – and channeling the audience's empathy (which we called the emotional involvement) towards one of the two factions. Meta-performance is thus both an instrument for the creation of the reader's (and spectator's) response and a symbol of

the power relationships among characters in the play. This dramaturgical behaviour shows remarkable points of contact with Aristophanic drama and its strategies – although, as we shall see, some relevant differences can also be traced.

Meta-performance, then, is a useful field for anyone interested in a comparative study of Aristophanic and Elizabethan comedy. It offers, we would contend, the possibility of studying deeper interactions between these two genres, overarching – although of course not overlooking – the critical question of *Quellenforschung*.[43] In other words, it seems to us that it is possible to frame the problem of the relationship between the Athenian *archaia* and Elizabethan comedy not just in terms of specific intertextual borrowings of the latter from the former, but also in the broader terms of comparatistic studies, in order to identify interpretive parameters that may help us highlight parallel or dissimilar literary, dramatic, and comic strategies. Of course, a semiotic work on two historically different genres cannot – and should not – disregard, or exclude, a historicist basis. On the contrary, it must imply it. This is the reason why we shall not, in the remainder of this book, talk abstractly of the Elizabethan comic code, but we shall limit our analysis to a specific *corpus*, that of the comedies by Ben Jonson – an author that can be called with good reason an 'Aristophanic' playwright.[44] Our comparative analysis, then, pertains to the comparison of two individual poetic stances, as a case study of a more complex cultural process of broad transformations experienced by the dramatic code

[43] An exercise on which scholars of the Jonson-Aristophanes relationship often embarked: see above, Introduction.

[44] ". . . his (*scil.* Jonson's) understanding of Aristophanes is crucial to his own poetics . . . Aristophanes served as a model and inspiration for Jonson's plays, early and late" (Miola 2014, 496-8).

through the centuries.

This work, then, deals with comic meta-performance in Aristophanes and Ben Jonson. In chapter 2, we will put forth a taxonomy of meta-performance in Aristophanic drama. In chapter 3, we will analyse at greater length a specific case of Aristophanic meta-performance, that of the 'inadequate performance', i.e. a meta-performance created or delivered by inadequate characters. Lastly, chapter 4 will deal with the transformations of this dramatic feature in Ben Jonson's plays, through specific close-readings and comparative analyses with further variations of the Aristophanic model in Molière's comedy. As we shall see, a fundamental change occured over the centuries: although the formal and comic frameworks remain unchanged, the dramaturgical function and the ideological stance of the scene are turned upside down, causing a radically different distribution of the emotional involvement, as it emerges from the above-mentioned passage of *Poetaster*. This profound transformation, it will be argued, affects our understanding of the formal feature of meta-performance, but also impacts on the fundamental ideology of ancient and Elizabethan comedy, revealing a semiotic interference between the code of comedy as farce and that of comedy as satire.

2

"I'll Play Helen". A Phenomenology of Meta-performance in Aristophanic Drama

A taxonomy of meta-performative sections in Aristophanic drama must first draw a distinction between parody (or paratragedy) and thematic meta-performance. Although they can certainly have some intersections, parody and meta-performance are two separate parts of the comic code. By 'parody', we mean the intertextual interference of the comic statement, which requires the knowledge of another non-comic statement in order to be understood. This latter statement undergoes a transformation that has the primary aim of disqualifying the statement itself,[45] or, as Julia Kristeva put it, of introducing an opposite meaning in somebody else's *mot* (Kristeva 1969). By 'paratragedy' – the most frequent form of parody to be found in Aristophanic drama – we mean an intertextual interference of the comic statement not as much

[45] Rau 1967, 11: "Die komische Pointe der Parodie beruht nicht . . . auf einem einfachen Kontrast zwischen Form und Inhalt, sondern auf einem überraschenden Widerspruch zwischen der durch Nachahmung erwarteten in Inhalt und Form harmonischen Gestaltung der Vorlage und ihrer 'Anpassung', d.h. Verzerrung, an geringfügige und lächerliche Umstände".

with a specific text as with the code of a different textual form (tragedy). The result is not far from that of parody – except that the comic disqualification affects an entire literary genre (in this case, tragedy), and not just one text or author.[46] Meta-performance implies instead a completely different situation, as it attributes a thematic significance to performance: not only is the act of performing (acting, singing, dancing) explicitly mentioned by the text – it is all the text is about. By doing this, the text confers a specific dramatic status upon the performance, making it a meta-performance, or a second-level performance. Parody and paratragedy can of course be given a thematic emphasis in terms of performance (see for instance the case of paratragedy in *Thesmophoriazusae*, discussed below), but can also limit themselves to simple non-thematic segments of comic statements, without particular outputs on the dramatic, and performative, level. In other words, parody and paratragedy do not necessarily imply a thematic focus on their being performed; on the other hand, in order to be defined as such, dramatic meta-performance must be thematically emphasised as a form of performance. Parody and paratragedy can be found in segments of comic

[46] These two kinds of intertextual interference seem to be known since antiquity: in discussing *urbanitas*, for instance, Quintilian admits both the possibility of quoting lines with slight (comic) modifications, or to forge new lines that resemble well-known passages (6.3.96-7; Quintilian, however, only defines the latter of these two cases as παρῳδία). Modern analyses of Aristophanic parody seem to accept both kinds of interference, as well: see for instance the difference drawn by Peter Rau (1967, 14-5) between "Zitat", "Variation" (or "Deformation"), and parodic "Imitation", or that drawn by Fabian Zogg (2014, 15) between "Einzeltextreferenzen" (comic references to specif texts), and "Systemreferenzen" (comic references to a whole literary genre).

discourse, and brief parodic and/or paratragic portions can be inserted into a comic statement without being given any meta-performative and thematic emphasis. Take for instance this passage from *Peace*, at the outset of Trygaeus' flight to Mount Olympus (154-6):

> ἀλλ' ἄγε, Πήγασε, χώρει χαίρων,
> χρυσοχάλινον πάταγον ψαλίων
> διακινήσας φαιδροῖς ὠσίν.
>
> [Now go, Pegasus, have a safe trip. Go with bright ears pricked, and make the golden-bitted rattle of cavessons ring!]

The whole passage is "tragisch stiliert" (Rau 1967, 96), and then is a case of paratragedy. As the scholia inform us, Aristophanes did not limit himself to a general stylistic imitation of the tragic code, but went on to parody a specific text, by inserting the rare adjective χρυσοχάλινον, drawn from Euripides' *Bellerophon* (Eur. fr. 307-307a/8 *TrGF* ἴθι, χρυσοχάλιν', αἴρων πτέρυγας).[47] The use of both parody and paratragedy in this point of the play, however, is not highlighted, or treated thematically: the comic discourse simply drops a casual reference to the tragic style and to a tragic text, without drawing the audience's attention to performative and meta-discursive aspects. On the contrary, meta-performance gives thematic emphasis to the performative dimension of the comic statement, and explicitly codifies the enunciative gap between the two levels of fiction: the text of the primary fiction declares that any reference to poetical or musical texts or codes is made *en abyme*, i.e. within the framework of a second-level

[47] Zogg 2014, 121-2; Olson in Aristophanes 1998, *ad loc.*

performance, as in the above-mentioned case of Dicaeopolis' *phallophoria* in *Acharnians*, where the protagonist declares ᾄισομαι τὸ φαλλικόν ("I will sing the phallic hymn"), thus thematically emphasising the act of performing.

That said, we can now turn to a taxonomy of meta-performative practices in Aristophanes' plays. Aristophanic meta-performance can take a variety of forms:

1. Non-agonistic situations:
   a. Organic meta-performance
   b. Parodic meta-performance
2. Agonistic situations:
   a. Conjunctive meta-performance (as a means to establish alliances or positive bonds between characters)
   b. Disjunctive meta-performance (as a means to exercise power over a character)

Type 1 refers to all those situations in which meta-performance does not affect, or pertain to, the relationship among characters, and is not used by the poet to create, or describe, power relations among them. Within this kind of meta-performative phenomena, we can then distinguish non-parodic – or organic – meta-performative segments (1a.), and parodic segments (1b.).

In type 1a. the poetical and musical elements are an organic part of meta-performance, that is, they do not imply any parodic emphasis on the code that is the object of meta-performance. This kind of meta-performance can be exemplified by the *phallophoria* in *Acharnians*, where the singing of the phallic hymn – comically reshaped though it can be – does not contain explicit or implicit parodic elements of

a specific text or of a specific code.[48] Of course, meta-performance triggers the identification of both a codified form (the hymn) and a codified situation (the ritual procession). However, in this case meta-performance does not imply at all an aggressive complicity between the character and the spectators against the meta-performative content. In other words, the poet wants his audience to recognize the performative situation (and in order to do so, he singles it out by emphasizing the second-level performance), but does not want them to laugh at any parodic distortion. Under this assumption, then, it is only partially correct to subsume the phallophoric meta-performance in *Acharnians* under the term "parody", as Aristophanic scholarship has been doing for decades.[49] This is also the reason why historians of religions have felt safer to use Dicaeopolis' *phallophoria* as a historical source than any other Aristophanic parody: although some literary distortion must certainly have occurred, the text shows no parodic intent in displaying this meta-performance. The very lack of

[48] Zimmermann (1985, vol. 2, 41-2) rigthly includes this passage in the "nicht-parodische Monodien".

[49] This passage has been labelled as a case of *Gebetsparodie*, parody of rites, or better para-ritual (Kleinknecht 1937; Horn 1970). However, as we have argued, the recognition of a specific formal code and/or situation is only part of parody, as the disqualification of hypotexts and codes is also fundamental to the nature of parody. This is particularly true in this case, as we know from Aristotle (*Poet.* 1449a9-14) that comedy was born precisely out of ritual *phallophoriai* (or at least we can conclude that the origin of comedy out of phallic processions was still perceived as historically plausible by 5th- and 4th-century Athenians): while parody requires some distance between the parodying text and the parodied text, there can be no sufficient distance between two experiences that are on the same enunciative wavelength, both on the level of primary fiction and on that of secondary fiction.

meta-discursive aggression is testament enough to the reliability of this passage as evidence of actual religious and ritual practice.[50]

On the other hand, type 1b. pertains to all those meta-performative sections that imply an explicit and direct parody of one or more texts. The extraordinary scene with Euripides' In-law in the second half of *Thesmophoriazusae* provides us with an excellent case study. After discovering that they have been infiltrated by Euripidean spies, the women lock Mnesilochus up while waiting to pass his death sentence. Mnesilochus thus tries to attract Euripides' attention by performing some bits from his tragedies. Aristophanes' literary genius goes even further, and selects passages drawn from Euripidean plays featuring famous captive women, such as Helen and Andromeda. Mnesilochus performs scenes from both tragedies, and in the case of *Andromeda* sings a parodic version of the protagonist's monody (*Th.* 1015-55 = Eur. frr. 117-22 *TrGF*).[51] The second-level, and meta-performative, fiction (incarcerated tragic heroines) thus matches, and comically magnifies, the first-level fiction (incarcerated Mnesilochus). This correspondence is made possible by the explicit deployment of meta-performance (*Th.* 846-51):

[50] Most recently, see Parker 2005, 316, 467, and Bednarek 2019, who endorses a different reading of the ritual actions involved.

[51] Meta-performance of *Andromeda* does not limit itself to the notable case of the monody, but includes the brilliant scene with Euripides-Echo (1056-97), again introduced by a meta-discursive statement: ΕΥ. ἀλλ', ὦ τέκνον, σὲ μὲν τὸ σαυτῆς χρὴ ποεῖν, / κλάειν ἐλεινῶς. ΚΗ. σὲ δ' ἐπικλάειν ὕστερον. / ΕΥ. ἐμοὶ μελήσει ταῦτά γ'. ἀλλ' ἄρχου λόγων (*Th.* 1062-4; "EURIPIDES Now, child, it's up to you to do your bit and wail piteously. IN-LAW While you wail in response after me. EURIPIDES I'll take care of that. Now start uttering").

ἰλλὸς γεγένημαι προσδοκῶν· ὁ δ' οὐδέπω.
τί δῆτ' ἂν εἴη τοὐμποδών; οὐκ ἔσθ' ὅπως
οὐ τὸν Παλαμήδη ψυχρὸν ὄντ' αἰσχύνεται.
τῷ δῆτ' ἂν αὐτὸν προσαγαγοίμην δράματι;
ἐγᾦδα· τὴν καινὴν Ἑλένην μιμήσομαι.
πάντως <δ'> ὑπάρχει μοι γυναικεία στολή.

[I've gone cross-eyed with looking out for him, and still no sign of him. What can be holding him up? It can only be that he's ashamed of Palamedes because it was such a bore. What play can I use to entice him here? I know: I'll imitate his new Helen. I've got the woman's costume already, anyway.]

Meta-performance is, again, clearly evoked by Mnesilochus: whatever the precise meaning that we are to assign to μιμήσομαι at 850,[52] it is clear that Mnesilochus declares that

[52] A contentious debate has taken place on the exact meaning of μιμέομαι in this passage of *Thesmophoriazusae*. For linguistic and contextual reasons (Rau 1967, 15 n. 17), we can be quite confident in ruling out the meaning of 'parody' (Mitsdörffer 1954, 59; Komornicka 1966, 55). It is harder to decide whether the verb should be interpreted as 'imitate' – the standard meaning of the μιμέομαι – or as 'perform' (*contra*, Sörbom 1966, 37, 72). Unfortunately, the only other Aristophanic parallel where μιμέομαι could be interpreted as 'imitate' (*Pl.* 290-1, another meta-performative instance) is as ambiguous as this one: Carion declares that in singing he is τὸν Κύκλωπα / μιμούμενος, and the scholia (292a α) inform us that he is here referring to Philoxenos' dithyramb *Cyclops*. Then, it seems impossible to choose beyond reasonable doubt which of the two meanings is most appropriate. Be that as it may, the difference between these two meanings does not look decisive in the assessment of meta-performance, since to imitate a musical or a poetical piece logically implies to perform it. *Pace* Austin, Olson in Aristophanes 2004, *ad Th.* 850-1, both mimesis and performance imply "an elaborate project of dramatic re-presentation", and we can say that therein lies the dramatic momentum of the whole section.

he is going to perform a play by Euripides. As a matter of fact, the object of μίμησις is τὴν καινὴν Ἑλένην ("the new *Helen*"), one of Euripides' latest tragedies, first staged in 412 BCE, the year before the staging of *Thesmophoriazusae*.[53] Moreover, meta-performance here involves different layers of performing – not just the textual and actorial aspects, but also the visual aspect, as Euripides' In-law focuses on Helen's, as well as his own, "woman's costume". A similar situation will occur at *Th.* 1012-3, where the chains prompt the meta-performance of Andromeda's monody: πάντως δέ μοι / τὰ δέσμ' ὑπάρχει ("Well, I've got the chains, at any rate").

As the continuation of the scene shows, this instance of meta-performance from *Thesmophoriazusae* is consistently different from the cases of organic meta-performance (type 1a.) discussed above. The text does indeed replicate the performance of some Euripidean scenes, and does so in a quite faithful way.[54] However, the intent of this operation is not neutral, but openly parodic, that is, comically aggressive. An

[53] Since at 848 Mnesilochus has referred to Euripides' play *Palamedes* as τὸν Παλαμήδη (we have no doubt that in this case the expression designates the play), it is safe to conclude that at 850 the same expression can be interpreted in the same way (Muecke 1977, 65).

[54] Luckily, we can have an interesting insight in Aristophanes' technique at least in the case of *Helen*, for which the hypotext survives. We can thus see that Aristophanes draws on and combines three scenes, by quoting a good portion of the original and supplying connecting verses in paratragic style (Austin, Olson in Aristophanes 2004, *ad Th.* 855-919). On the other hand, the case of *Andromeda* – for which only fragments are preserved – has proven a methodological and philological minefield, due to the fact that the lines between parody and faithful reproduction are often blurred. On the reconstruction of *Andromeda* on the basis of Aristophanes' meta-performance, see Kannicht 2004 (*TrGF*), 5.233-45; Klimek-Winter 1993, 55-316.

example will suffice (*Th.* 909-10):

> Ευ. Ἑλένῃ σ' ὁμοίαν δὴ μάλιστ' εἶδον, γύναι.
> Κη. ἐγὼ δὲ Μενελέῳ σ' ὅσα γ' ἐκ τῶν ἰφύων.[55]

> [Eu. Lady, I never saw one more like Helen. In. Nor I like Menelaus, by those vegetables.]

Th. 909 is identical to *Hel.* 563, and both the narrative and the performative situation are akin: just as Menelaos has met captive Helen (whom he has not yet recognized), so Euripides – playing his own character and saying his own lines – has just come to the rescue of captive Mnesilochus, dressed up as a woman. However, meta-performance here is meant not just to replicate organically the original performance of *Helen*, but to laugh at *Helen* and its author. This is why l. 910 abruptly swerves from faithful reproduction, and inserts a malicious *pointe* against Euripides, through the mention of his mother's alleged service as a vegetable-monger.[56]

This brief dialogue shows quite clearly how parodic meta-performance works. By prompting laughter at the parodied text, it also implies the spectators' emotional distancing from it. On the other hand, this creates an active complicity between the spectators and the comic statement, at the expenses of the parodied text and its author. One last observation can be made on this strategy: the comic text resulting from parodic meta-performance normally does not involve

[55] At 910 we accept the reading preserved in the scholia and in the Suda (ἰφύων), to correct the unmetrical ἀφύων transmitted by R: for a discussion, see Austin, Olson in Aristophanes 2004, *ad loc.*, with whom we agree in considering Grégoire's conjecture ἀμφίων far more banal (*contra*, Wilson in Aristophanes 2007 and Wilson 2007, 158-9).

[56] On which see Roselli 2005.

any contrast. Although two or more characters are involved, they do not use meta-performance against one another: at *Th.* 909-10, for instance, Euripides and Mnesilochus do not exploit their meta-performative act in order to establish a power play, but only cooperate against the parodied text.[57] Within the primary fiction, the presence of a secondary, meta-performative fiction is only functional to literary dynamics between comic text and hypotext. In other words, parodic meta-performance of type 1b. only involves a contrast between the comic statement and its parodied hypotext, whereas there is no opposition within the comic statement.

The picture of *Thesmophoriazusae*, however, is more complex than this. As a matter of fact, meta-performance in *Thesmophoriazusae* does not limit itself to parodic purposes, but also serves two dramatic purposes, as Euripides' In-law uses meta-performance to entice Euripides, and obtain freedom. When Euripides finally comes onstage, he and Mnesilochus do indeed exploit meta-performance *against* Mnesilochus' captors, Critylla and the archer. The jailers are – or at least should be, in Euripides' hopes – victims of meta-performance: by performing tragic pieces, Euripides and his In-law aim to confuse them, and to establish a power relationship based on a difference in performative and literary expertise. Critylla is dragged into the parody of *Helen* as the prophetess Theonoe (who plays a crucial role in Helen's liberation), and the archer is made fun of in a prolonged joke with

[57] This is all the more remarkable, since the comic *pointe* at 910 is meant against Euripides himself. Evidently, there is a clear-cut difference between Euripides as an actual playwright and Euripides as a comic character: meta-performance is directed against the former, while the latter, as an integral part of the comic text, cooperates in the aggression.

echoes (*Th.* 1083-97). Two interesting elements emerge from this picture. Firstly, meta-performance can be employed for dramatic purposes, that is, for creating a dramatic contrast, or a power play, among characters: meta-performance can thus have a relevance for the overall action of the comedy. Secondly, power plays created through meta-performance revolve frequently around knowledge: since performing requires poetical, musical, and literary competence, those who can (meta-)perform are culturally and intellectually superior, and consequently more powerful.[58] Meta-performative power plays, however, do not always come to a successful end. In *Thesmophoriazusae*, for instance, neither the parody of *Helen* nor that of *Andromeda* reach Euripides and Mnesilochus' aim: however ignorant they may be, Critylla and the archer use common sense, and are not fooled by Euripidean tricks. Eventually, meta-performance is what wins the day: after failing with *Helen* and *Andromeda*, Euripides brings onstage a dancing-girl, and puts on a provoking production to create a diversion, and have his In-law flee (*Th.* 1172ff.). Interestingly, the only meta-performative strategy that works is the one that does not involve Euripidean tragedy, but a far less refined performance. Euripides' failure as a playwright is thus a meta-performative failure, as well.

These observations bring us to the second major form of Aristophanic meta-performance (types 2a. and 2b.), i.e. meta-performative sections that imply a contrast both against the hypotext *and* within the comic text itself. As is custom-

[58] An interesting Jonsonian parallel for the deceptive use of meta-performance in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* is provided by *Bartholomew Fair* 3.5, where Edgworth and Nightingale team up to rob the spectators of Nightingale's meta-performance: while the latter sings, the former snatches the spectators' purses.

ary, Aristophanic drama tends to imply a clear-cut distinction between two opposing forces – the action springs almost invariably from a dramatic contrast between two conflicting stances.[59] Every element in the drama contributes to the creation, and the connotation, of this fundamental contrast: time and space, for instance, prove extremely effective in the semiotic definition of power in Aristophanic comedy.[60] As the case of *Thesmophoriazusae* shows, meta-performance is no exception to this rule, and can play an important role as power broker in Aristophanes' plays. Within this general framework, we can further distinguish between two partially different types of meta-performative power-play: meta-performance can be either used as a semiotic tool to connote an existing power relationship (2a.), or as a dramatic tool to *create* a power relationship (2b.).

Let us first take a look at type 2a., by means of an example drawn from *Peace*. Throughout the comedy, Aristophanes surreptitiously describes peace as the only obvious choice that the Athenians should make, the only desirable and logical scenario for the city.[61] Just as subtly, Aristophanes

[59] This fundamental feature of Aristophanic comedy has been widely studied: see e.g. Paduano 1974b.

[60] On time as a power broker in Aristophanes, see Grilli 2020; on space, see Morosi 2021.

[61] Whatever our opinion may be on peace and war, we must bear in mind that Aristophanes' position in *Peace* is a fully ideological stance: by the time *Peace* was composed and staged, Nicias' peace treaty had not been signed yet, and therefore peace was still just an option on the table for Athens. Thus, to depict peace as an obvious fact was an act of propaganda, which may have convinced the Athenians, and certainly did convince modern scholars, who have consistently interpreted *Peace* as a celebration of a state of peace, the chronology of the play notwithstanding (for bibliography and critical discussions, see Sicking

also suggests that his hero's endeavour, the freeing of Eirene, will benefit everybody indiscriminately.[62] At a closer look, however, the finale of *Peace* presents us with a more typically Aristophanic situation: the hero's triumph, represented by a sumptuous wedding feast at his house, is not for everyone. Trygaeus only selects those who truly back peace, while he excludes from his feast – and thus from the bliss of peace altogether – those who are ideologically compromised. Some diptych scenes illustrate these dynamics: two characters come to Trygaeus' house, but only the pacifist is let in, whereas the warmonger is sacked.[63] A clear-cut opposition between two stances is thus represented, and given dramatic, and theatrical, nature. Among these diptych scenes, one uses meta-performance to connote the opposition between war and peace. Two children come onstage: one is the son of general Lamachos, Aristophanes' target in *Acharnians*, the other is the son of Cleonymos, well-known in Athens for his cowardice in battle and for having abandoned his hoplite gear to save his life.[64] The two children are asked to sing a song, and their choice falls on two opposed contents (*Pax* 1269-1302, *passim*):

Τρ. αὐτοῦ παρ' ἐμὲ στὰν πρότερον ἀναβαλοῦ 'νθαδί.
Παιδιον Α′ "νῦν αὖθ' ὁπλοτέρων ἀνδρῶν ἀρχώμεθα—"
Τρ. παῦσαι

1998, 77-84).

[62] No other surviving play by Aristophanes places greater emphasis on Panhellenism than *Peace*: Cassio 1985.

[63] On these closing scenes of *Peace*, and on their ideological strategy, see Fabbro forthcoming.

[64] Traill 1994-2012, vol. 10, 579410; Storey 1989; Olson in Aristophanes 1998, *ad Pac.* 446.

ὁπλοτέρους ᾆδον, καὶ ταῦτ᾽, ὦ τρισκακόδαιμον,
εἰρήνης οὔσης· ἀμαθές γ᾽ εἶ καὶ κατάρατον.
Π. Α΄ "οἱ δ᾽ ὅτε δὴ σχεδὸν ἦσαν ἐπ᾽ ἀλλήλοισιν ἰόντες,
σύν ῥ᾽ ἔβαλον ῥινούς τε καὶ ἀσπίδας ὀμφαλοέσσας."
Τρ. ἀσπίδας; οὐ παύσει μεμνημένος ἀσπίδος ἡμῖν;
Π. Α΄ "ἔνθα δ᾽ ἅμ᾽ οἰμωγή τε καὶ εὐχωλὴ πέλεν ἀνδρῶν."
Τρ. ἀνδρῶν οἰμωγή; κλαύσει, νὴ τὸν Διόνυσον,
οἰμωγὰς ᾄδων, καὶ ταύτας ὀμφαλοέσσας.
Π. Α΄ ἀλλὰ τί δῆτ᾽ ᾄδω; σὺ γὰρ εἰπέ μοι οἷστισι χαίρεις.
Τρ. "ὣς οἱ μὲν δαίνυντο βοῶν κρέα," καὶ τὰ τοιαυτί·
"ἄριστον προτίθεντο καὶ ἅτθ᾽ ἥδιστα πάσασθαι."
. . .
Τρ. κάκιστ᾽ ἀπόλοιο, παιδάριον, αὐταῖς μάχαις·
οὐδὲν γὰρ ᾄδεις πλὴν πολέμους. τοῦ καί ποτ᾽ εἶ;
Π. Α΄ ἐγώ;
Τρ. σὺ μέντοι νὴ Δί᾽.
Π. Α΄ υἱὸς Λαμάχου.
Τρ. αἰβοῖ.
ἦ γὰρ ἐγὼ θαύμαζον ἀκούων, εἰ σὺ μὴ εἴης
ἀνδρὸς βουλομάχου καὶ κλαυσιμάχου τινὸς υἱός.
ἄπερρε καὶ τοῖς λογχοφόροισιν ᾆδ᾽ ἰών.
ποῦ μοι τὸ τοῦ Κλεωνύμου 'στὶ παιδίον;
ᾆσον πρὶν εἰσιέναι τι· σὺ γὰρ εὖ οἶδ᾽ ὅτι
οὐ πράγματ᾽ ᾄσει· σώφρονος γὰρ εἶ πατρός.
Παιδιον Β΄ "ἀσπίδι μὲν Σαΐων τις ἀγάλλεται, ἣν παρὰ θάμνῳ
ἔντος ἀμώμητον κάλλιπον οὐκ ἐθέλων."
Τρ. εἰπέ μοι, ὦ πόσθων, εἰς τὸν σαυτοῦ πατέρ᾽ ᾄδεις;
Π. Β΄ "ψυχὴν δ᾽ ἐξεσάωσα—"
Τρ. κατῄσχυνας δὲ τοκῆας. ἀλλ᾽ εἰσίωμεν.

[Tr. Stand here beside me, my boy, and right here, before you go in, give us the opening of the song you mean to sing. First Boy "But now let us begin of younger warriors—" Tr. Stop singing of warriors, and that, you utterly wretched

creature, when we're at peace! You are a stupid, damnable child! F.B. "And when, advancing against each other, they were at close quarters, they dashed together their bucklers and their centre-bossed shields". Tr. Shields? Will you please stop mentioning shields to us? F.B. "And then together rose men's cries of pain and cries of triumph". Tr. Men's cries of pain? By Dionysus, I'll make you howl for singing of cries of pain, and centre-bossed ones at that. F.B. Well, what shall I sing? You tell me what things you enjoy. Tr. "Thus they feasted on flesh of oxen", and this sort of thing: their horses' sweating necks, since they were sated with war" . . . Damn and blast you, little boy, you and your battles! You sing of nothing but wars. Whose son are you, anyway? F.B. Me? Tr. Yes, by Zeus, I mean you. F.B. I'm the son of Lamachus. Tr. Ugh! I was certainly wondering, as I listened, whether you weren't the son of some lummock who wants a fight and laments not having one! Push off and go and sing to the spearsmen. Where is Cleonymus' little boy, please? Sing something before you go inside. You, I'm quite certain, won't sing about trouble and strife; you've got a sensible father. Second Boy "Some Saian now glories in my shield, the faultless armament / which I unwillingly abandoned beside a bush—" Tr. Tell me, my little cockerel, are you singing about your own father? S.B. "But I saved my life—" Tr. And put your parents to shame. Let's go inside.]

The act of singing is highlighted, and the performance of music is, again, given thematic emphasis, thus creating a secondary fiction. Moreover, from a metrical point of view the performance is musically impeccable and remarkably close to the original.[65] However, in this case meta-performance is

[65] See for instance 1270, where the so-called *correptio Attica* is realised, and the group –πλ– in ὁπλοτέρων causes a syllabic lengthening,

neither organic to the comic statement, nor simply parodic. The choice and the performance of poetic pieces is here functional to the connotation of two different ideological stances, that are linked to two different *kōmōidoumenoi*, an Athenian general and an Athenian draft dodger. According to a poetic theory that Aristophanes will state some years later in *Thesmophoriazusae*, a close and direct relationship exists between the nature of song and the nature of those who compose and perform it.[66] *Talis pater talis filius*: whilst Lamachos' son chooses Homer and *epos*, Cleonymos' son significantly chooses Archilochos' fragment 5 West on the desertion of the poet's own shield, a similar situation to that of Cleonymos himself. As Trygaeus explains to Lamachos' son, since there is peace (εἰρήνης οὔσης, 1272) there is no reason at all to sing war-like songs[67] – music and poetry are thus mobilised for a political aim and for a dramatic aim. By describing a crucial ideological opposition between war and peace, meta-performance also describes, and emphasises, the fundamental dramatic opposition on which the play is based. It comes as no surprise, then, that these two opposite performances produce two opposite dramatic outcomes: after the respective performances, Lamachos' son is sacked (ἄπερρε καὶ τοῖς λογχοφόροισιν ᾆδ' ἰών, 1294; "go to hell, and go sing

a typically epic phenomenon of which lyric parts of ancient drama are usually shy (see Barrett in Euripides 1964, *ad Hipp.* 760).

[66] See esp. *Th.* 146-72, with Paduano 1998. For a broader analysis of this aspect of Aristophanic poetics, see below, ch. 4.

[67] Trygaeus' intolerance towards war is such that he cannot even hear words that are *similar* to war-like terms: at 1270, ὁπλοτέρων ἀνδρῶν (drawn from fr. 1 of *Epigoni*) clearly means "younger heroes", but the assonance with, and the etymological derivation from, ὅπλα ("arms") triggers Trygaeus' pacifism.

for the spear-makers!"), while Cleonymos' son is obviously let in (ἀλλ' εἰσίωμεν, 1302; "let's go inside").

The agon between Euripides and Aeschylus in *Frogs* is a similar case to that of *Peace*, although it is not as clear as the poetic *certamen* between the two children. Meta-performance is obviously crucial to the agon of *Frogs*, where two poets discuss their respective arts by means of a poetic competition. Each poet is assigned a recognizable style, as well as idiosyncratic opinions on the rival and on the poet's mission. Based on the result of the agon, Dionysus will eventually choose which poet to resuscitate, that is, the meta-poetic agon will determine the outset of the dramatic action. As in *Peace*, then, meta-performance creates two opposite poetic and ideological fields, which are based on a dramatic and thematic opposition within the play. Meta-performance in *Frogs* also conforms to type 2a. in our taxonomy. Unlike *Peace*, however, the agon of *Frogs* shows a more consistent meta-literary interest, which tends to blur the dramatic opposition between two stances: both poets are made fun of, and until the end of the play the audience are not unilaterally convinced to pick a side.[68] By choosing Aeschylus, Dionysus simply makes the least bad choice for comedy as a genre: Euripides is a stock character in Aristophanic drama, and the critique against his poetry and ideology are an integral part of Aristophanes' comic repertoire. Anti-Euripidism, then, is one of the fundamental axioms of Aristophanic comedy: such an anti-Euripidean stance is repeatedly stated in *Frogs*,[69] and

[68] This could also be due to the difficult state of the text, which is to some extent corrupt. The *constitutio textus* of the last portion of the agon of *Frogs* is still one of the hardest questions to solve for Aristophanic textual criticism (see e.g. Wilson 2007, 183; Cannatà 2003, 271-82).

[69] Even in extra-agonal contexts: see for instance the connotation of

makes it logically impossible to stage Euripides' victory at the end of the agon. Aeschylus' triumph, then, is neither determined nor clearly described by musical and poetical parody. In other words, meta-performance in *Frogs* helps connote two opposed fields, but fails to bring about such a clear-cut opposition as the scene of *Peace* discussed above.

More complex a case can be found in *Wasps*. Meta-performance is obviously essential for the sympotic scene after the dog's trial, when Bdelycleon tries to train his father Philocleon for a symposium that they are going to attend. Among the instructions that he gives his father, Bdelycleon also tests his musical and poetical knowledge, in a hilarious meta-performative scene (esp. *V.* 1208-50). Bdelycleon's training of his father in social etiquette necessarily involves musical and poetical upbringing, as the elite symposium in *Wasps* is mostly a cultural paradigm.[70] Social status, political stances, and culture (in the form of poetical knowledge) frequently coalesce in Aristophanic symposia, where "values, political and moral, public and private, were tested" (Bowie 1997, 1-2). Then, meta-performance plays a fundamental role in laying out cultural preparation and the connected ideological values.[71] By doing so, meta-performance in *Wasps* again

Euripides as a rascal at *Ra.* 80-1.

[70] Biles, Olson in Aristophanes 2015, xxxvi. The elitist nature of 5th-century BCE symposia is a highly contentious theme: for an overview of comic evidence, see Wilkins 2000, 204-11. In any case, it seems fairly sure that the symposium of *Wasps* is clearly represented as an institution of the elite.

[71] In Aristophanic drama, this frequently occurs *e contrario*, as Vetta 1983, xxxi rightly observes: ". . . il simposio privato compare nella commedia aristofanea sempre come metafora di una condizione sociopolitica adoperata da chi ad essa non appartiene; vi si richiama il servo

serves a dramatic function, allowing to connote further the contrast that is going on between father and son through literary and performative references to a repertoire with which any contemporary audience was well acquainted. Throughout the drama, Bdelycleon and Philocleon are consistently described as politically and culturally opposed to each other: the former is represented as a conformist and is linked to the new sophistic education (Morosi 2018, 18-21), while the latter adheres to a radical, democratic, and pro-Cleonian position. As frequently in Aristophanes, meta-performance gives this dramatic opposition a musical and comical stance (*V.* 1224-7):

> ΒΔ. . . . καὶ δὴ γάρ εἰμ' ἐγὼ Κλέων,
> ᾄδω δὲ πρῶτος Ἁρμοδίου, δέξει δὲ σύ.
> "οὐδεὶς πώποτ' ἀνὴρ ἔγεντ' Ἀθήναις—"
> Φι — "οὐχ οὕτω γε πανοῦργος <οὐδὲ> κλέπτης".

> [Bd. Now suppose I'm Cleon, and I start by singing *Harmodius*, and you've got to take it up. "Never was such a man born in Athens—" Ph. "Never was such a thief or such a scoundrel!"]

This is a classic case of thematic meta-performance: the act of singing is explicitly mentioned (ᾄδω, 1225), and is given a dramatic aim – the father must complete the son's song in order to prove fit for the symposium.[72] Aristophanes is

quando vuole imitare il padrone, lo finge il rozzo quando si prepara a entrare nella società che conta".

[72] Symposia are a literary and social *topos* in Aristophanic drama: scenes featuring feasting are extremely common, especially at the end of each play, and symposia can be found in almost every surviving comedy: see Bowie 1997 and Pütz 2007 (on symposium in *Wasps*, 83-102). Pütz 2007, 96 correctly compares the imagined symposium in *Wasps*

here referring to a *skolion*, a well-known song dedicated to the tyrannicide Harmodius. Bdelycleon sings the first line (probably meant to praise Harmodius' courage), and has his father complete the song. Philocleon's line is musically and metrically flawless,[73] but disrupts the *skolion*, and introduces an anti-Cleonian *pointe*. The sympotic scene in *Wasps*, then, seems to subvert partially the fundamental dramatic dynamics between father and son. On the one hand, Philocleon acts as expected, by looking largely inadequate to any social context: although the imaginary symposium is only attended by Cleon's acolytes, he consistently attacks Cleon with his songs. On the other hand, this political standpoint is surprising, as Philocleon is substantially related to Cleon's party.[74] In other

to the disastrous symposium narrated in *Clouds* (1354ff.). However, we do not agree with Pütz's contention that ". . . there (*scil.* in *Clouds*) it is more a matter of taste, not so much of education". As we will try to show in what follows, in Aristophanes' treatment of the generation gap through *Clouds* and *Wasps* poetical tastes and education are one and the same: Phedippides' as well as Bdelycleon's musical and poetical tastes heavily depend upon their new, sophistic, education; on the other hand, Strepsiades' and Philocleon's unwillingness to adapt to the new trends shows an opposite educational and political standpoint. For a thorough comparison between the two scenes (and their ideological fundament) see Morosi 2018, esp. 15ff.

[73] Biles, Olson in Aristophanes 2015, *ad V.*1226-7; see also Parker 1997, 72.

[74] We do not find that Philocleon's criticism of Cleon can be explained away as a "quick change", as Pütz 2007, 92 does. Philocleon's surprising political u-turn justifies Bdelycleon's satisfied reaction at 1249: τουτὶ μὲν ἐπιεικῶς σύ γ' ἐξεπίστασαι ("Well, you understand that fairly well, anyway"). However we are to interpret τουτὶ μέν (Biles, Olson in Aristophanes 2015, *ad loc.* take it as referred to 1243-8 only; Fabbro in Aristophanes 2012, 274n321 and Jedrkiewicz 2006, 81 take it as referred to the whole scene), it is clear that Bdelycleon observes

words, the dramatic opposition between Philocleon and his son is preserved in terms of social adequacy, but is blurred in terms of ideology. As was rightly observed (Jedrkiewic 2006, 67), Philocleon adopts the sympotic culture to distort it. However, the distortion is quite surprising in terms of how the content of distortion affects the *ethos* of the character as has been constructed thus far. We may say that in this precise point, the disruption of the sympotic codes – and by extension the rejection of Bdelycleon's power over him – is even more important to Philocleon than his own political allegiance.

The theme of musical and meta-performative competence in *Wasps* is way more complex than its treatment in the sympotic scene. Throughout the comedy, the political distance between Philocleon and Bdelycleon is only a cue of a more profound rift, the fight around the generation gap and the exercise of power in the household.[75] This rift between father and son is substantiated by opposite political stances, social statuses, and economic positions – and by culture, as well. The whole play represents a fundamental cultural disproportion: Philocleon is σκαιός ("stupid") and ἀπαίδευτος (*V.* 1183, "ignorant"), and is definitely not up to his son's refined, and sophistic, culture. Ignorance is described in *Wasps* as a form of performative incompetence: when asking his father to acquit the hound Labes, for instance, Bdelycleon explains that Labes never learnt to play the lyre (κιθαρίζειν γὰρ οὐκ ἐπίσταται, *V.* 959), that is, he is uneducated. From Philocleon's (and Aristophanes') anti-elitist perspective, ignorance in this

his father's social inappropriateness but is pleased by his new political position.

[75] This is certainly the narrative and dramatic core of the play: Paduano 1974a; Fabbro in Aristophanes 2012 and Fabbro 2013; Grilli 2020 and 2021.

field is anything but a flaw – on the contrary, it is indeed a very positive one. Philocleon's ignorance is an aware rejection of a new model of culture, against which Aristophanes has been advising his audience ever since *Babylonians* – it is thus a form of moral resistance against an immoral paradigm. Accordingly, the rejection of the new culture is described as a performative rejection, too: Philocleon claims in the face of his son that he never learnt to play the lyre, either (κιθαρίζειν γὰρ οὐκ ἐπίσταμαι, *V.* 989). Lack of musical and performative education, thus, amounts to ignorance, and ignorance fully orients the audience's empathy toward Philocleon, redressing his problematic political positions.[76] At the end of the play, Philocleon's resistance to Bdelycleon takes the form of a meta-performative resistance: the old juror enters a dancing competition with the sons of the playwright and dancer

[76] The sympathetic relationship that any spectator or reader develops with Philocleon has been read as problematic even by distinguished Aristophanic scholars: "If we still like him, why do we?" wondered for instance K.J. Dover (1972, 127). In particular, Philocleon's political standpoint (which Aristophanes certainly did not share) has been seen as a major obstacle to a comparison between him and any other Aristophanic comic hero. However, empathy toward Philocleon works at a far deeper level, that of power relationships: under this respect, Philocleon is as marginalized as any other comic hero, and his fight is exactly as untamable. "Is it that Aristophanes – Dover went on –, by some dramaturgical skill which resists analysis, has compelled us to like him?". Aristophanic dramaturgy does not resist analysis, though, and the dramatic tool by which Aristophanes has the audience sympathize with his hero is precisely culture, which plays a fundamental role in the the hero's marginalization, as it frequently does in Aristophanic drama. As don Lorenzo Milani wrote in Barbiana, "The worker knows 300 words, while the master knows 1,000 – and this is why he is the master".

Carcinus, and meta-performance is again the vector of dramatic meaning (*V.* 1484-99):

Φι. κλῇθρα χαλάσθω τάδε. καὶ δὴ γὰρ
    σχήματος ἀρχὴ—
Ξα. μᾶλλον δέ γ' ἴσως μανίας ἀρχή.
Φι. —πλευρὰν λυγίσαντος ὑπὸ ῥύμης·
    οἷον μυκτὴρ μυκᾶται καὶ
    σφόνδυλος ἀχεῖ.
Ξα. πῖθ' ἐλλέβορον.
Φι. πτήσσει Φρύνιχος ὥς τις ἀλέκτωρ—
Ξα. τάχα βαλλήσει.
Φι. —σκέλος οὐρανίαν ἐκλακτίζων.
    πρωκτὸς χάσκει· —
Ξα. κατὰ σαυτὸν ὅρα.
Φι. νῦν γὰρ ἐν ἄρθροις τοῖς ἡμετέροις
    στρέφεται χαλαρὰ κοτυληδών.
    οὐκ εὖ;
Ξα. μὰ Δί' οὐ δῆτ', ἀλλὰ μανικὰ πράγματα.
Φι. φέρε νυν ἀνείπω κἀνταγωνιστὰς καλῶ.
    εἴ τις τραγῳδός φησιν ὀρχεῖσθαι καλῶς,
    ἐμοὶ διορχησόμενος ἐνθάδ' εἰσίτω.

[Ph. Let these doors unbarred! Behold the opening of the figure – Xa. More like the onset of madness, if you ask me. Ph. – of bending the torso with a swing! How the nostril snorts, how the vertebrae crack! Xa. Go and drink hellebore! Ph. Phrinicus cowers like a cock – Xa. They'll be stoning you soon. Ph. – and kicks out a leg sky-high. The arse doth split – Xa. Look out for yourself! Ph. – for now in my limbs the supple socket-joints rotate. Wasn't that good? Xa. No, by Zeus, it wasn't, it was a madman's behaviour. Ph. Come now, let me make a proclamation and call for opposition. If any tragic performer claims to be a good dancer, let him come on here and dance it out with me.]

Although Philocleon is back from a symposium, this does not look much like Dionysian frenzy, or "cultic ecstasy" as some have argued.[77] It is, as Philocleon himself explains, a meta-performative contest. Music and dancing (a long sequence of *schēmata*) are intertwined,[78] and serve two dramatic aims. Firstly, they emphasize Philocleon's newly acquired fantastic rejuvenation: Xanthias' observations notwithstanding, the old juror has reacquired miraculous mobility and flexibility, to the extent that he can make unexpected dance movements. Secondly, and even most importantly, they further clarify through meta-performance the distance between father and son, and Philocleon's rejection of Bdelycleon's cultural models: by referring to the early tragedian Phrynicus, Philocleon reinforces his relationship with older music – and older culture. On the contrary, up-to-date playwrights and performers such as Carcinus and his children are to be challenged and eventually discarded. As Xanthias announced some lines earlier (*V.* 1478-81), Philocleon aims at revitalizing Thespis' archaic art (τἀρχαῖ' ἐκεῖν') and showing paradoxically that *à la mode* tragedians are in fact old stuff.[79] In other

[77] Biles, Olson in Aristophanes 2015, xxxvii. Biles and Olson read most of the "meta-poetics" of *Wasps* through the lenses of "Dionysian poetics", equating Philocleon's situation to the pattern of Dionysian plays such as *Bacchae* or the *Cyclops.*

[78] The exact reconstruction of how this scene was performed is impervious: see Fabbro in Aristophanes 2012, 305-6n385, 310-1n396; Rossi 1978.

[79] Interestingly enough, this kind of artistic preference matches that of another ignorant old character, Strepsiades in *Clouds* (on whom more below). During yet another symposium, he and his son Pheidippides argue about music: Strepsiades prefers Aeschylean tragedy, whereas Pheidippides favours Euripides. A violent row arises, and Strepsiades' behaviour during the symposium is called ἀρχαῖον by Pheidippides,

words, Philocleon's victory consists in his firm rejection of new cultural models: his own rejuvenation also brings about a 'cultural' rejuvenation, which makes old culture look new, and new culture old. The comic hero's triumph, then, is a meta-performative triumph. Meta-performance is thus a key to the understanding of the whole dramatic and characterologic structure of *Wasps*, illustrating two opposite existing ideological stances. Moreover, by using meta-performance, a character — such as Philocleon in *Wasps* — is able to overturn an existing power play, or establish a new one. This leads us to our next point, meta-performance as a power play, and its ideological central position in Aristophanic comedy.

just as Philocleon's in *Wasps*. Of course, the affinity between the two scenes is not fortuitous at all, and shows the existence of a pattern in the use of meta-performance as a tool to represent a dramatic contrast. The observation made by A.M. Bowie (1997, 5) on the symposium of *Clouds* can thus well be extended to that of *Wasps*: "The collapse of relationships within the *oikos* is figured through the collapse of the symposium".

3

Meta-performance as Power Play

The case of Philocleon *vs* Bdelycleon in *Wasps* and, partially, that of Critylla and the archer *vs* Euripides and his In-law in *Thesmophoriazusae* have shown that meta-performance can both illustrate character dynamics within a play and give actual substance to a power play. In other terms, meta-performance can be used by the poet not just to connote semiotically any existing relationship among characters (type 2a.), but also to create new power relationships that are based on the proficiency in meta-performance itself (type 2b.). This is the most interesting type of comic meta-performance, since it actively involves dramatic dynamics.

An uneven distribution of musical and poetical competence can effectively contribute to an actual assertion of power: if A displays a pronounced theoretical and/or technical musical and poetical competence (A sings, composes, gives lessons on music and poetry), A can exert a form of power. However, if B rejects A's dominant position in a way or another, a power play begins, which is based precisely on musical and poetical competence, that is, on meta-performance. In such a situation, the differential distribution of (performative) knowledge is the textual sign of a dynamic (that is dramatic) imbalance between two opposing forces, and char-

acters: by using his or her competence, A exerts a force on B; by rejecting, or reviling, or disconfirming, A's competence, B can exert an opposite force on A. The meta-performative dynamics, then, are an invaluable power broker, that allows the poet to structure the power relationships on which the dramatic action is based.[80]

A clear case study can be drawn from *Birds*, after Peisetairos has founded his mid-air city. Among a great many visitors, Peisetairos also receives two poets. The two come onstage at two different moments of the play,[81] but their dramatic impact can be connected to the general pattern of *alazones*, unwelcome intruders. In Aristophanic drama, all *alazones* visit the hero to ask for a share of his or her goods; in *Birds*, most *alazones* offer some service in return – the two poets offer meta-performance. In the first scene, the poet performs a ready-made ode for Cloudcuckooland (*Av.* 905-23):

ΠΟΙΗΤΗΣ Νεφελοκοκκυγίαν
τὰν εὐδαίμονα κλῇσον, ὦ

[80] The use of knowledge as a tool for asserting supremacy is as frequent in Aristophanes as it may seem logically bizarre. Knowledge is not an exclusive or exhaustible good, i.e. its possession by A does not prevent B from enjoying it, as well. However, Aristophanic drama often treats knowledge as an exclusive good, one whose possession by A automatically excludes B. If this is true, then knowledge can be used in power plays, since those who possess it can exclude those who do not possess it.

[81] *Birds* is the only extant Aristophanic comedy to have two *alazones* sequences instead of one. This can be explained in light of the peculiarity of the first half of *Birds*, which stages the foundation of a new city. The first sequence of *alazones*, then, exclusively refers to the act of founding the city, and features intruders that have to do with the founding process: a priest, a poet of *ktiseis*, an oracle-monger, a surveyor, an Athenian inspector, a vendor of imperialist decrees.

Μοῦσα, τεαῖς ἐν ὕμνων
ἀοιδαῖς.
Πε. τουτὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα ποδαπόν; εἰπέ μοι, τίς εἶ;
Πο. ἐγὼ μελιγλώσσων ἐπέων ἱεὶς ἀοιδὰν
Μουσάων θεράπων ὀτρηρός, κατὰ τὸν Ὅμηρον.
Πε. ἔπειτα δῆτα δοῦλος ὢν κόμην ἔχεις;
Πο. οὔκ, ἀλλὰ πάντες ἐσμὲν οἱ διδάσκαλοι
Μουσάων θεράποντες ὀτρηροί, κατὰ τὸν Ὅμηρον.
Πε. οὐκ ἐτὸς ὀτρηρὸν καὶ τὸ ληδάριον ἔχεις.
ἀτάρ, ὦ ποιητά, κατὰ τί δεῦρ᾽ ἀνεφθάρης;
Πο. μέλη πεποίηκ᾽ εἰς τὰς Νεφελοκοκκυγίας
τὰς ὑμετέρας κύκλιά τε πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ
καὶ παρθένεια καὶ κατὰ τὰ Σιμωνίδου.
Πε. ταυτὶ σὺ πότ᾽ ἐποίησας; ἀπὸ ποίου χρόνου;
Πο. πάλαι πάλαι δὴ τήνδ᾽ ἐγὼ κλῄζω πόλιν.
Πε. οὐκ ἄρτι θύω τὴν δεκάτην ταύτης ἐγώ,
καὶ τοὔνομ᾽ ὥσπερ παιδίῳ νῦν δὴ ᾽θέμην;

[Poet Cloudcuckooland the blest O celebrate, Muse, in the strains of thy hymns! Pe. Where does this thing come from? Tell me, who are you? Po. I? One who pours forth a strain of honey-tongued words, a punctual servant of the Muses – to quote Homer. Pe. You mean you're a slave, with that long hair? Po. Nay, all we songmasters are punctual servants of the Muses – to quote Homer. Pe. No wonder you've got such a punctural thin cloak to match. But look, poet, what have you damn well come up here for? Po. I have composed many fine songs in honour of you Cloudcuckooland, dithyrambs and maiden-songs and songs *à la* Simonides. Pe. When did you compose these? Beginning when? Po. Long, yea, long have I been celebrating this city. Pe. But look, I've only now begun making its naming-day sacrifice, and it was just now that, as with a child, I gave it its name!]

The ode is replete of known lyrical, and Pindaric, material; metre, convincingly aeolic, suggests that a musical performance must have taken place.[82] As Nan Dunbar points out, "the humour of this scene is related to . . . incongruity, both in the contrast between the poet's warbling of fancy songs . . . and the prosaic outbursts thall all this provokes in Peis[etairos]".[83] Dunbar was right in observing that the scene implies an overt hostility against the poet. Comic repertoire and comic ideology orient the audience, and prompt them toward a programmatic refusal of the poet's offer: since in Attic Old Comedy poets and culture-mongers are almost invariably untrustworthy babblers, the poet's mere act of performing is doomed to failure. As it frequently occurs in Aristophanic drama, Peisetairos reduces the dynamics of archaic lyric poetry, usually based on the remuneration of the renowned performer, to a more mundane *quid pro quo*, or even worse to a fraud (the poet's ulterior motives will be demystified at *Av.* 931-55: see below). Aristophanes' comedy deprives culture – and poetry as its fundamental component – of its moral authority, and shows it as incapable of generating value (on both a metaphoric and an economic level). Thus, any act of culture, including meta-performance, becomes a fraudulent transaction: in *Birds* as in many other cases, the poet is trying to sell something that is literally worthless. Poetic culture is used to confuse and mystify: the quotes from Homer only make communication more ambiguous, and are necessary to conceal the obvious, that is, the poet's destitution and his need for money. The poetic discourse as such is represented

[82] On metre, see Parker 1997, 324-32; Dunbar in Aristophanes 1995, 522-8; Prato 1962, 182-90.

[83] Dunbar in Aristophanes 1995, 522.

as deceiving: as Peisetairos himself notices, the ode in honour of Cloudcuckooland was composed before the city even existed, and the poet's claim that he has been composing odes for the city for a very long time (πάλαι πάλαι, 921) is exposed as a downright lie. A disproportion can thus be observed between what the poet offers – mere words –, and what he asks for – economic benefits –: accordingly, his request must be turned down.[84]

A similar situation occurs with the second poet, the dithyrambographer Cinesias. Again, a meta-performative act is shown, and is violently rejected (*Av.* 1392-1409):

Κι. ἅπαντα γὰρ δίειμί σοι τὸν ἀέρα.
εἴδωλα πετηνῶν
αἰθεροδρόμων
οἰωνῶν ταναοδείρων—
Πε. ὠὃ ὄπ.
Κι. ἁλίδρομον ἁλάμενος
ἅμ' ἀνέμων πνοαῖσι βαίην.
Πε. νὴ τὸν Δί' ἦ 'γώ σου καταπαύσω τὰς πνοάς.
Κι. τοτὲ μὲν νοτίαν στείχων πρὸς ὁδόν,

[84] This is the meta-literary version of yet another typical feature of Aristophanic comedy, the refusal of the gods and their cult. If the symbolic values represented by the gods are interpreted through the materialistic lense of Aristophanic drama, their relationship with the mortals takes on a completely different meaning. What they offer, i.e. their symbolic power, is not proportional to what they ask, i.e. actual goods such as the smoke of offerings. This point of view triggers a unique process of demystification of traditional religion, whose results we can appreciate from the agon of *Birds* (esp. *Av.* 571-610): when asked how birds can effectively take over from the Olympians, Peisetairos makes a long list of actual goods (corn, fruits, money) with which birds can provide mortals while the gods cannot.

τοτὲ δ' αὖ βορέᾳ σῶμα πελάζων
ἀλίμενον αἰθέρος αὔλακα τέμνων.
χαρίεντά γ', ὦ πρεσβῦτ', ἐσοφίσω καὶ σοφά.
Πε. οὐ γὰρ σὺ χαίρεις πτεροδόνητος γενόμενος;
Κι. ταυτὶ πεποίηκας τὸν κυκλιοδιδάσκαλον,
ὃς ταῖσι φυλαῖς περιμάχητός εἰμ' ἀεί;
Πε. βούλει διδάσκειν καὶ παρ' ἡμῖν οὖν μένων
Λεωτροφίδῃ χορὸν πετομένων ὀρνέων,
Κρεκοπίδα φυλήν;
Κι. καταγελᾷς μου, δῆλος εἶ.
ἀλλ' οὖν ἔγωγ' οὐ παύσομαι, τοῦτ' ἴσθ' ὅτι,
πρὶν ἂν πτερωθεὶς διαδράμω τὸν ἀέρα.

[Ci. I'll go through all the airs for you. "Likeness of winged courses of the sky of long-necked birds —" Pe. Whoa there! Ci. "O to leap my upward way and travel together with the blasts of wind —" Pe. By Zeus, I am going to put a stop to these blasts of yours." Ci. "— now going towards the way of the south, now bringing myself closer to the north wind, cleaving the harbourless furrows of the sky —" Really elegant, old man, this cleverness of yours, really clever! Pe. Why, don't you enjoy being "wing-whisked?" Ci. Is this how you treat me, the trainer of the cyclic choruses, whom the tribes are always fighting to have? Pe. Then would you like to stay with us and train here, for Leotrophides, a chorus of flying birds, a tribe of the Corncrakeites? Ci. It's plain you're making fun of me. But anyway I'm not going to stop, you can be sure of it, until I've got myself wings and run right through the airs.]

By the use of dithyramb Aristophanes frequently represents new poets and modern poetic tastes – a sort of *entartete Kunst*, formally over-refined, and morally void.[85] Cinesias'

[85] The abscence of content and the fatuous nature of dithyrambic

words simply do not mean a thing: the verses are pure nonsense, an exhibition that is an end to itself. There is a substantial hiatus between poetry and reality, between words and their concrete referents. Peisetairos' resort to violence, then, takes on two meanings. First, corporal violence is an obvious realization of concreteness: as such, it is the simplest and fastest way to fight against fraudulent abstractness. Second, in Aristophanes' view, violence is a proportionate reaction to dishonesty. Since Cinesias' poetic discourse is deceiving *qua* poetic, Peisetairos is perfectly entitled to act violently against the poet. Physical violence is not disproportionate in relation to poetical, or *lato sensu* cultural, deception: the fraudulent use of knowledge is one of the most vivid Aristophanic neuroses, and is seen as a form of considerable psychic violence. As such, it can be met by parallel forms of violence, including physical violence.[86]

Coming back to the issue of this chapter, the scenes with the poets in *Birds* show the dramatic potentiality of meta-performance. Both poets exploit a meta-performative trick to deceive the comic hero and find a solution for their in-

poetry have a dramatic output, since dithyrambographers are frequently represented as flying, that is, as not having their specific gravity (a physical as well as aesthetic concept). The relationship between the sky (a usual theme of dithyramb) and the aerial position of poets is therefore an aesthetic critique: Morosi 2021, 231-9.

[86] On the violent nature of rhetoric and culture, see also O'Regan 1992. A clear example of the equivalence between physical violence and psychic violence caused by deceitful culture can be found in *Clouds*: on the verge of killing Socrates and his sophists, Strepsiades retorts against Socrates the philosopher's own fraudulent verb ἀεροβατεῖν (*Nu.* 225 ~ 1503), thus demonstrating that the intellectual form of violence inflicted by Socrates upon Strepsiades is so serious that it can be met, and matched, by physical violence.

ferior position. They need something from Peisetairos, but have nothing to offer but deception. Meta-performance is used to overturn the power relationships within the play, but is rejected, and ultimately fails. Peisetairos' rejection of meta-performance, thus, is first and foremost the assertion of his superior position. Such an assertion also implies an aesthetic declaration. In the name of a traditional(ist) taste, Peisetairos refuses hyper-contemporary poetry, and thus exerts his dramatic power. In other words, the aesthetic choice parallels, and justifies, the assertion of dramatic power. In doing so, the comic hero attracts the audience's sympathy by appealing to two synergic elements: a. rejected meta-performance is bad *qua* new and experimental – as such, it is illicit; b. rejected meta-performance is bad because it exploits a meaningless, ambiguous, and ultimately deceitful poetic discourse – as opposed to the upright, honest, and material goods traded by the hero. The refusal of what is perceived as intrinsically dishonest thrills the audience's expectations, and arouses their heartfelt empathy.[87]

Meta-performance is not rejected by a better poet, but by an everyman: in terms of positional criticism,[88] we can say

[87] As K.J. Dover rightly observed for the scene with Meton in *Birds*, the cultural difference between an intellectual and an everyman also implies a strong social constraint, the breaking of which immediately excites the audience's sympathy: "The violence with which Peisetairos treats Meton is a self-assertion not only of the plain man against his intellectual superiors but of the individual against the constraints imposed by society" (Dover 1972, 37).

[88] The concepts of 'position'/'positioning' (Hollway 1998, 227 ff.) aim to rethink, in a post-structuralist perspective, the notion of 'subject' as "a position within a particular discourse" (Henriques *et al.* 1998, 204). They refer to the attributes in which the identity of an interlocutor is expressed through the micro-phenomena shaping the interaction, and

that the superiority of the positive hero (Peisetairos) rests exactly upon his intentional poetical and musical incompetence, and on his simple traditional poetic tastes. This aesthetic choice is a sufficient guarantee of the hero's honesty and candor.

A complementary dramatic situation can be found in all those scenes where meta-performative and meta-linguistic competence is used as an oppressing instrument at the expenses of somebody who lacks that kind of competence. This is, for instance, the case with Strepsiades' metrical training in *Clouds* (*Nu.* 627-55). Although from a strictly dramaturgical perspective this scene is not equivalent to those with poets in *Birds* (it is not one of the stock scenes of unwelcome intruders), remarkable similarities can be observed that allow a comparison. In the scene of *Clouds*, the *technē* of poetry is represented as a *shibboleth*, a competence only known to a particular group of people, which Socrates and his thinkers use to choose and recognize the worthy members of their group. A cohesive concept, poetry is therefore an exclusive instrument, as well: those who cannot prove to be familiar enough with it are automatically excluded from the sophists' society, and from the benefits connected to the participation

defining the nature and extent of his/her constraints in relation to other interlocutors and other elements of the symbolic reference system. This means that the positioning theory, as Carmen Dell'Aversano first showed (2018, 395), can prove a valuable tool for the analysis of literary, and especially dramatic texts, which are based on direct discursive exchange: "la *positioning theory* può offrire spunti particolarmente produttivi per la comprensione del funzionamento del testo drammatico, il cui oggetto è appunto il processo attraverso cui le reciproche posizioni dei personaggi (e del pubblico nei loro confronti) vengono negoziate nell'interazione attraverso strumenti e mosse discorsive".

in the group. As such, poetry in *Clouds* is a power broker. Poetry and meta-performance, then, are at the heart of power relations both in *Clouds* and in *Birds*. However, as compared to *Birds*, the situation in *Clouds* is at least partially symmetrical. In *Birds* poets possess knowledge that Peisetairos does not possess, but the hero's ignorance is exactly his strength. On the contrary, in *Clouds* Socrates has notions that Strepsiades has not, but Strepsiades' ignorance is anything but a strong point (*Nu.* 636-55):

ΣΩ. ἄγε δή, τί βούλει πρῶτα νυνὶ μανθάνειν
ὧν οὐκ ἐδιδάχθης πώποτ' οὐδέν; εἰπέ μοι.
πότερα περὶ μέτρων ἢ περὶ ἐπῶν ἢ ῥυθμῶν;
Στ. περὶ τῶν μέτρων ἔγωγ'· ἔναγχος γάρ ποτε
ὑπ' ἀλφιταμοιβοῦ παρεκόπην διχοινίκῳ.
ΣΩ. οὐ τοῦτ' ἐρωτῶ σ', ἀλλ' ὅτι κάλλιστον μέτρον
ἡγεῖ· πότερα τὸ τρίμετρον ἢ τὸ τετράμετρον;
Στ. ἐγὼ μὲν οὐδὲν πρότερον ἡμιέκτεω.
Σω. οὐδὲν λέγεις, ὤνθρωπε.
Στ. περίδου νυν ἐμοί,
εἰ μὴ τετράμετρόν ἐστιν ἡμιέκτεων.
ΣΩ. ἐς κόρακας· ὡς ἄγροικος εἶ καὶ δυσμαθής.
ταχύ γ' ἂν δύναιο μανθάνειν περὶ ῥυθμῶν.
Στ. τί δέ μ' ὠφελήσουσ' οἱ ῥυθμοὶ πρὸς τἄλφιτα;
ΣΩ. πρῶτον μὲν εἶναι κομψὸν ἐν ξυνουσίᾳ,
ἐπαΐειν θ' ὁποῖός ἐστι τῶν ῥυθμῶν
κατ' ἐνόπλιον, χὠποῖος αὖ κατὰ δάκτυλον.
Στ. κατὰ δάκτυλον; νὴ τὸν Δί', ἀλλ' οἶδ'.
ΣΩ. εἰπὲ δή.
Στ. [τίς ἄλλος ἀντὶ τουτουὶ τοῦ δακτύλου;]
πρὸ τοῦ μέν, ἔτ' ἐμοῦ παιδὸς ὄντος, οὑτοσί.
ΣΩ. ἀγρεῖος εἶ καὶ σκαιός.

[Socrates Come on now, tell me, what do you want to

begin now by learning, of all the things that you were never taught before at all? About measures, or words, or rhythms? STRESPIADES Measures for me, please. The other day a corn-dealer cheated me out of two quarts. SO. I'm not asking you about that; I'm asking you what you consider the best measure aesthetically – the three-measure or the four-measure? ST. I think the gallon measure is second to none. SO. You're talking nonsense, man. ST. Will you bet me, then, that a gallon doesn't consist of four measures? SO. Oh, the hell with you, you dimwitted rustic! Perhaps though you might be able to learn about rhythms. ST. But how will rhythms help me get my daily groats? SO. Well, for a start, it'll make you seem refined in company, and be aware what kind of rhythm is enoplian and what kind is digital. ST. Digital? But, by Zeus, I know that. SO. Then tell me. ST. [. . .] Well, in the old days, in my boyhood, it was this. SO. You're a stupid peasant.]

The meta-performative exhibition in *Clouds* involves the technical, meta-linguistic dimension of musical performance: the teacher tries to train his pupil to the basic notions of poetical and musical language, but the pupil is remarkably stubborn.[89] The whole scene is based on a typical Aristophanic joke, the comic confusion between two meanings of an ambiguous word. In this case, Strepsiades takes μέτρα as 'agrarian measures', whereas Socrates obviously means 'poetic metres'. This meta-linguistic mistake is a powerful symbol of the difference between Strepsiades and Socrates: a social difference, but most of all a cultural difference. Strepsiades' rustic origins, which Socrates stresses here (ἄγροικος, *Nu.* 646; ἀγρεῖος, 655), are typically related to ignorance, as

[89] See also *Nu.* 627-31.

Strepsiades himself notices at the outset of the play, apologizing for his ignorance (ἀμαθής, *Nu.* 135): σύγγνωθί μοι· τηλοῦ γὰρ οἰκῶ τῶν ἀγρῶν ("Forgive me: I live in the fields", *Nu.* 138).[90] The training at the Thinkery, then, is a way to acquire the knowledge that is necessary to fit in an exclusive group, and thus acquire a position of strength.[91] Strepsiades is sure that Socrates' teaching will have an important practical, and economical, outcome, and that culture will ultimately prove an instrument of power: ὠφέλεια, 'profit', is obsessively mentioned throughout the play (τί δέ μ' ὠφελήσουσ' οἱ ῥυθμοὶ πρὸς τἄλφιτα, *Nu.* 648) as Strepsiades' first aim.[92] As in the case of *Birds*, those who ask to be let into an exclusive group (the citizens of Cloudcuckooland; the thinkers) hope to derive a benefit from their admission. What is different is the qualification needed to be admitted: in *Birds*, knowledge is a sufficient element to be repelled, while in *Clouds* it is the only important *atout* that visitors must possess. *Scientia est potentia*: in *Clouds* knowledge is the definite power broker.

It is important to observe that although the dramatic situation in the two plays varies, ideology does not. In other words, Aristophanes' moral consideration of meta-linguistic and meta-performative competence is an invariant. Both in *Birds* and in *Clouds* (as well as in many other Aristophanic plays), musical and poetical culture are represented as an oversubtle and fraudulent technique, from which honest people should keep well away. What varies is the dramatic context: in the case of *Clouds*, the protagonist wants to enter a

[90] On Strepsiades' *agroikia*, see below.

[91] This social drive is evident at 649, where Socrates explains that the main benefit deriving from the knowledge of metre is social recognition (πρῶτον μὲν εἶναι κομψὸν ἐν ξυνουσίᾳ).

[92] Nussbaum 1980, 94; Grilli 1992, 151-68.

system where abstruse and deceitful knowledge is a positive value, and has a clearly immoral purpose.[93] Since Strepsiades only aims at cheating and stealing, to learn a dishonest model of culture is his highest aspiration. This is why Socrates' notions, which are in all respects identical to those of the poets in *Birds*, are shown as desirable in *Clouds*, and can therefore grant power instead of comically justified repulsion.

To go back to metre in *Clouds*, although Socrates' Thinkery is highly exclusive, it is not impenetrable: unlike Peisetairos in Cloudcuckooland, Socrates is open to the possibility of admitting new students, including Strepsiades. Strepsiades' expulsion from the Thinkery, then, is not so much a prejudicial act (like the indiscriminate expulsions from Cloudcuckooland), but rather the consequence of his absolute intellectual inadequacy. This plainly demonstrates the intrinsically exclusive and vexatious nature of knowledge – especially of technical knowledge such as that required by Socrates. As shown by Strepsiades' attempts to connect Socrates' abstract metrical concepts to agricultural referents, musical and poetical knowledge is perceived as the exhibition of the clearest possible separation between the word as a sign and its reference. As such, the culture of the Thinkery is a perfect embodiment of all the values that are considered as negative in the comic world – a world based on the enjoyment of corporal and material goods, and nowhere near the mediated reasons of prestige and symbolic abstraction. Although the code of the musical and poetical technique is just part of a wider programme, it seems significant that the text that has first depicted philosophers as teachers of rhetoric[94] focuses almost

[93] Even by Aristophanic standards: see Grilli 1992, 168-99.

[94] *Nu.* 92-9; 111-8. See O'Regan 1992, 27-32.

exclusively on the metrical, poetical, and meta-linguistic nature of their training. An abstract and abstruse knowledge, musical and poetical competence is particularly suited as a vexatious instrument, since its gratuitousness makes it easy to exploit it for the purpose of violence or abuse. Within this framework, the exchange between Strepsiades and Socrates at 648-51 is of special interest. Strepsiades' comic perspective tries to connect the metrical training to a material profit: "how will I earn my bread?". Socrates' answer (650-1) is a tautology: knowing metre allows to discern enoplia from dactyls, that is, knowing metre allows to know metre. The tautology, we believe, is the perfect representation of the high level of self-referentiality of Socrates' musical and poetical teaching, and its complete detachment from the real world.[95]

The whole scene seems to correspond to a typical situation in Greek comedy (especially in Middle and New Comedy), that which involves the stock character of the ἄγροικος, the rustic.[96] Although *agroikia* seems to encompass a wide and diverse range of characters and situations, we may summarize the core of this comic feature as the dramatic com-

[95] Of course, musical competences bear direct practical consequences, in that they become sympotic competences. In other words, they become social competences, that allow a rapid social ascent. However, Strepsiades' impulsive tendency to reduce everything to the basic needs of life shows the fundamental vanity and futility of Socrates' teaching – and of social codes.

[96] The figure of the rustic in ancient comedy was first drawn by Aristoteles, who explicitly related *agroikia* to comedy in *EE* 3.2, 1230b18-20 (*agroikia* is a recurrent concept in Aristotle ethics: see e.g. *EN* 2.2, 1104a24-5; 2.7, 1108a23-6; 4.14, 1128a4-9, 1128b1-4). The fragments related to *agroikoi* in Middle and New Comedy were first studied by Otto Ribbeck (1888); see also Legrand 1910, 72-80. For an up-to-date overview, now see Konstantakos 2005.

parison between two or more characters who do not belong in the same *milieu.* The ἄγροικος, who comes from a rustic context, is the victim of a failed assimilation: he cannot understand and ultimately does not share the codes of the community of which he wants to be part.[97] As was correctly observed, Strepsiades is the prototype of this stock character.[98] However, some differences may be noticed, which can help us clarify the dynamics of meta-performance in *Clouds* and in Aristophanic comedy. To start with, assimilation: from the fragments of Middle and New Comedy devoted to ἄγροικοι, it seems clear that the process of assimilation is given an absolutely positive value: although within a comic context, the community which the ἄγροικος tries to enter is depicted as more refined and more urbane, and integration implies the smoothing of the character's rough edges. Of course, this also implies the assimilation to a new culture – a new language, a new behaviour, new knowledge, etc. In general, then, Middle and New Comedy draw a clear axiological line between the rustic and the new urban *milieu*: the former is given, *qua* rustic, a negative judgment, and his assimilation into the latter is an absolutely positive – albeit comic – fact.[99] This also orients the dynamics of comedy in the scenes with the ἄγροικος: the audience is expected to laugh *at* the rustic, *with* his urban counterpart.

[97] From what we can gather from fragments, the most common situation was the banquet, where the *agroikos* showed utterly inappropriate manners and competences: Konstantakos 2005, 11-21.

[98] Konstantakos 2005, 4-7. At the present state of our knowledge, it is impossible to say whether the *agroikos* belonged to comic traditions older than the *archaia.*

[99] On the ideological negativity of the *agroikos* in the fourth century BCE, suffice it to read Aristotle's remarks (see above, n. 96).

As we have seen, Aristophanic comedy cannot share this positive prejudice towards the more culturally refined context into which the ἄγροικος tries to be integrated. As a consequence, no clear-cut axiological distinction can be made between the ἄγροικος and his cultured counterparts. And if the ideological values assigned to the two parts vary, the dynamics of comedy also vary. Mockery affects *both* the rustic and the intellectual, in ways that are synergic and intertwined. On the one hand, we laugh *with* Socrates *at* Strepsiades, because the latter proves to be a complete idiot, utterly incapable of absorbing even the basic notions of metre. On the other hand, we laugh *with* Strepsiades *at* Socrates, because the latter's teaching is vacuous and uselessly overcomplicated.[100] In more general terms, although it is also a sign of his limited intelligence, Strepsiades' dumb resistance to Socrates' training is what ultimately preserves the comic ideology from the new inane and deceitful culture. From a dramatic point of view, the power play in *Clouds* (and wherever in Aristophanic comedy a cultural disparity can be observed) is a form of oppression brought about by the fraudulent use of culture. Resisting to cultural oppression may be a sign of

[100] The difference between 'laughing at' and 'laughing with' is at the core of Hans Robert Jauss' theory of comic heroism (Jauss 1976, then Jauss 1982, 189 ss.); Jauss is so eager to distinguish two different profiles of comic hero that he is led to neglect how *both* dimensions can coexist in literary texts as strands of their multilayered, occasionally conflicting meaning (Grilli 2021, 121 n. 133). We can also describe these dynamics in terms of dramatic functions: in *Clouds* Strepsiades serves the protagonist-function, while Socrates serves the adjuvant-function. In terms of reader-response, the spectators' positive expectations, then, should only be directed toward Strepsiades. Surprisingly enough, this does not occur, showing that Strepsiades is an utterly peculiar comic hero (Grilli 1992, 87-209; 2021, 163-8).

dumbness, but nonetheless results in not being oppressed. Based on this observation, we can see that Strepsiades' training finds a striking parallel in the symposium in *Wasps*: Bdelycleon's failed training of his father belongs to the same dramatic situation, that of the dumb resistance against education. This not only shows that Bdelycleon's culture can actually be compared to Socrates',[101] but most importantly that in both cases the relationship between characters is a power relationship, based on the violent use of knowledge.[102] In terms of reader-response, this vexatious use of knowledge is what prompts the audience's empathic response towards the illiterate protagonist. Aristophanic drama shows a clearly positive stance towards the oppressed: in other words, oppression systematically – or better, intrinsically – calls for solidarity towards the oppressed.[103] These dramatic dynamics are invariably set in motion by meta-performance. Herein lies, we would contend, a second relevant difference with the other surviving texts about ἄγροικοι: in the fragments of Middle and New Comedy, never is the competence required to be integrated into the new group so specifically defined as a poetic and meta-performative competence, and never is such an elaborate meta-performative exhibition put in place.

Dramatic meta-performance thus seems a creation by Aristophanes, and a peculiarity of his drama. Its intimate relationship with knowledge defines Aristophanic ideology

[101] See above, ch. 2.

[102] It seems hardly fortuitous that both plays illustrate the relationship between father and son by means of the latter's wish for the former's death: Morosi 2018,14-5.

[103] As Paduano 1974b, 348 observed, "l'oggetto del potere [è] portatore della solidarietà del poeta e di quella istituzionalmente richiesta al pubblico".

around the crucial theme of the social and political value of culture, and of its 'sophistic' reform. Failure to meta-perform is an unmistakable sign of the character's ineptitude, but it is also an effective strategy of resistance against deceitful forms of knowledge. Failure to meta-perform, then, is an altogether positive fact in most instances of Aristophanic dramatic meta-performance, as it also entails a more or less deliberate refusal to adhere to the disvalues of a party that is clearly depicted as negative. Such positive interpretation of failed meta-performance is precisely what marks the difference between Aristophanes and Ben Jonson, as we shall see in the next two chapters.

4

Elizabethan Transformations: Jonsonian Meta-performance

In light of the analytical description given thus far of Aristophanic meta-performance, we can now turn to Ben Jonson's drama, and sketch out a comparison between the two authors on the basis of dramatic dynamics related to meta-performance as an exhibition of musical and poetical competence. Such comparison does not adopt solely an intertextual approach, aimed at detecting parallel passages (quotations, thematic analogies, textual allusions).

To be sure, any analysis of the relationship between two literary genres or two *corpora* cannot overlook the importance of a *Quellenforschung*-based confirmation of the existence of historical links between the authors in question. In the case of Ben Jonson, parallels with Attic Old Comedy were already drawn by his contemporaries, and Jonson may be the *Comoedus* whose "great grandfather" was Aristophanes mentioned by Thomas Tomkis in his play *Lingua* (1607).[104] At

[104] The comment is made by Phantastus: "he is become nowadays something humorous and too-too satyrical up and down, like his great grandfather Aristophanes" (text quoted in Bradley, Adams 1922, 33). For other 17th-century parallels between Jonson and Aristophanes, see

the present stage of our knowledge, it is safe to assume that this literary kinship was based upon direct knowledge. Jonson knew Aristophanes, and, having learned ancient Greek at Westminster School (Lafkidou Dick 1974, 5), had had the opportunity to read his comedies to some degree. We know for sure that Jonson possessed at least two modern editions of Aristophanic comedies, printed in Geneva respectively in 1607 and 1614 and equipped with both the Greek original and a Latin translation.[105] Aristophanes was a source of inspiration for Jonson, who names the ancient poet on several occasions, and explicitly situates his own work as a dramatist in continuity with, among others, Aristophanes.[106] In *The Devil is an Ass* (5.8.112-4) he even quotes in full a couple of lines from the Greek text of *Wealth*.[107]

This is certainly sufficient evidence for claims about Jon-

Herford, Simpson in Jonson 1925-1952, vol. 10, 319-20; 337.

[105] Gum 1969, 13. As already mentioned in the Introduction, one of the editions was the Biset de Charlais and Portus edition (Geneva 1607), which also offered scholia and a diffuse commentary: on Jonson's copy, some scattered marginal notes can be found (McPherson 1974, 25-6). Since both copies are still extant, the destruction of Jonson's library by fire in 1623 could provide a *terminus post quem* for the purchase of these volumes (according to Gum 1969, 13 – an assumption strongly, and convincingly, rebuked by McPherson 1974, 6 and n. 9). It is difficult to say with any degree of certainty if Jonson owned other editions of Aristophanes' comedies before that date (this issue is discussed above in the Introduction).

[106] See for instance the "Apologetical Dialogue" added to the 1616 printing of *Poetaster*: to justify the amount of satire in his comedy, Jonson calls Old Comedy into play, and connects his own poetry to that of three ancient models – Aristophanes, Persius, and Juvenal (on the relation between ancient comedy with Latin satire, more later).

[107] The passage is discussed in the Introduction: see above, 28-30.

son's direct knowledge, and deliberate use, of Aristophanic comedy. Jonsonian scholars, then, have directed their attention to the intertextual relationship between the two authors, focussing on specific textual similarities or formal aspects.[108] In the following pages, we will look closely at the Early Modern development of a formal feature of comedy, meta-performance (as defined in chapters 2 and 3), but we will do so through the dramaturgical approach that we have already adopted in analysing the Aristophanic *corpus*. In this regard, we will concentrate not so much on exact intertextual quotations or formal elements of Jonsonian meta-performance, but rather on the stance of Jonson's comedies towards their addressee and the objects of ridicule. We will then compare this element with the stance that Aristophanic comedy adopted in similar comic situations, in order to determine whether, and to what extent, Jonson's ideology connected to meta-performance is comparable to Aristophanes'. It will be argued that Jonson's comedies often share basic formal traits of Aristophanic meta-performance, in a way that sometimes can even be read as evidence of Jonson's first-hand knowledge of Aristophanes. However, the cases of dramatic meta-performance drawn from *Every Man in His Humour* and *Poetaster* will also show the existence of fundamental ideological differences between the two authors, who often assign a similar formal feature two completely different meanings.

[108] Two major studies were devoted to the question in the 20th century: Gum 1969, and Lafkidou Dick 1974. For an updated overview of the question, now see Miola 2014, esp. 495-502. On single texts, see for instance Davison 1963 (*Volpone*); Potter 1968 (*Bartholomew Fair*). Although Aristophanic scholarship has been shy of reception studies until recently, some works have examined Aristophanes' Early Modern *Nachleben*: see Lord 1925, 157-61; Hubbard 1991, 231-40; Steggle 2007, 52-65.

To begin with, Jonson's comedy is very fond of organic meta-performance (1a.), that is, cases which do not imply any parodic emphasis on the code that is the object of meta-performance. An illuminating example can be drawn from Act 5 of *Bartholomew Fair* (first staged in 1614 and first printed in 1631), where a puppet show takes place within the play. By playing Marlowe's and Chapaman's *Hero and Leander*, the two puppeteers meta-perform both the puppet show and the high-flown style of poetry: meta-performance amounts then to a parody of the poetic and dramatic code, in a metatheatrical performance which is organically woven into the dramatic fiction.[109] In such cases, metatheatrical features are absorbed into a more 'realistic' second-level performance, and betray a stronger willingness to preserve the unity of dramatic illusion. On the contrary, Aristophanes did not refrain from disrupting first-level fiction through metatheatrical hints, which then evolved into an overtly parodic meta-performance: this is what happens, as discussed in chapter 2, in *Th.* 850 ("I'll imitate his new *Helen*") where Euripides' In-law takes no account of verisimilitude when he presents his song as a parody of the poet's most recent tragedy. However, to keep the balance between 'realistic' likelihood and meta-poetical discourse, Jonson exploits a typically Aristophanic comic strategy: the presence of a *bōmolochos*, a rustic who comments

[109] Of course, this example shows that organic meta-performance (that is, type 1a. of meta-performance) can work on a parodic level (then conforming to type 1b. of meta-performance) at the same time. In fact, in this case from *Bartholomew Fair*, the parodic sense is enhanced by the distance between types 1a. and 1b. of meta-performance: the puppeteers are serious in performing *Hero and Leander*, while Jonson is certainly not serious in transforming Marlowe's poem into a laughing stock.

on the meta-performance, thus guaranteeing a continuous though annoying interaction between first- and second-layer fiction, and emphasising the meta-discursive nature of parody. Bartholomew Cokes plays the role of *bōmolochos*, and insistently comments on the meta-performance that he is attending. His comments are frequently meta-poetical and meta-discursive comments:

> PUPPET COLE *You rogue, I am no pandar.*
> COKES He says he is no pandar. 'Tis a fine language; I understand it now.
> (5.4.130-1)

As well as demonstrating Jonson's dexterous use of organic meta-performance, the simpleton's lines show the playwright's penchant for multi-layered performative strategies, where both verisimilitude and meta-literary discourse coexist and appeal to a multi-layered audience.

From now on, however, our attention will be mostly devoted to forms 2a. and 2b. of meta-performance as described in relation to Aristophanic comedy. As we have seen, the comic poet can use meta-performance either to connote semiotically any existing relationship among characters (this is what we labelled as type 2a.), or to create new power relationships that are based on the proficiency in meta-performance itself (type 2b.). In following Jonson's use of types 2a. and 2b. of meta-performance, we will be able to focus on the *dramatic* impact of meta-performative circumstances in his plays, and draw a comparison between the ideology of meta-performance in Aristophanic and in Jonsonian comedy.

From a Freudian perspective (Freud 1905), any comic text is by definition organized so as to arouse laughter at the expenses of a victim. The psycho-social dynamic of any sit-

uation of mockery consists in an aggression on the part of two co-laughers (the actual mocker, and a spectator, who becomes an accomplice) to the detriment of a third party. From a structural point of view, this triangle holds true for any situation of aggressive mockery, but it does not from a positional point of view. In other terms, although the triangular structure of mockery remains stable, each situation prompts a specific kind of relationship between the mocker and the audience, and between the mocker and the victim. These positional variations allow to have a clearer picture of the general stance of the text.

In Ben Jonson's comedies, the meta-discursive and meta-performative exhibition of musical and poetical competence does not tend to present two equivalent options (as is the case with the agon between Aeschylus and Euripides in Aristophanes' *Frogs*). On the contrary, Jonson's meta-performance usually results in highly polarized dynamics between two opposites: one represents the positive values of metrical and poetical competence, while the other represents all the negativity connected to incompetence, pretentiousness, and pomp. An elementary example can be found in *Every Man In His Humour* (first staged in 1598 and printed in 1601, then revised by Jonson before 1616) [110], where we are faced with would-be poets (Matthew) and would-be knights (Wellbred). At the outset of the comedy, for instance, Wellbred sends his cousin Edward Knowell a letter that tries to imitate the code of a person of letters. Edward's father, who first reads the

[110] We shall quote *Every Man In* from the folio revised edition of 1616, as edited by David Bevington in Jonson 2012, vol. 4. One of the most evident differences from the first version of the play is that the play was moved from Florence to London, and accordingly all characters were given English names.

letter, has high expectations of Wellbred's style:

> Well, I will break it ope – old men are curious –
> Be it but for the style's sake and the phrase,
> To see if both do answer my son's praises,
> Who is almost grown the idolater
> Of this young Wellbred.
> (1.2.55-8)

A peculiar kind of meta-performance is thus introduced: the reading aloud of the letter does not carry out an eminently informative function (as it frequently does in drama)[111], but it is given a meta-discursive focus through Knowell Senior's introduction. The audience's attention is thus directed towards the "style" of the letter: although the meta-performance is somewhat mediated by the fact that the letter is read by somebody else, we are asked to concentrate on the stylistic and poetic aspects of what is read. Unfortunately, the meta-performance uproariously fails, and the incompetent author is mocked as obtuse and devoid of any poetical *esprit de finesse*:

> Is this the man,
> My son hath sung so for the happiest wit,
> The choicest brain the times hath sent us forth?
> I know not what he may be in the arts,
> Nor what in schools, but surely for his manners
> I judge him a profane and dissolute wretch,
> Worse by possession or such great good gifts,
> Being the master of so loose a spirit.

[111] See for instance Ceccarelli 2013, 183-264 for letter writing in ancient drama, and Hopkins 2002 for a brief outlook of Shakesperean letter writing (see her n. 2 for further bibliography).

Why, what unhallowed ruffian would have writ
In such a scurrilous manner to a friend?
(1.2.78-87)

This brief example shows how Freud's triangular structure works in connection with meta-performance: two separate sides are clearly distinguished, the mocker (Knowell's father) and the victim of mockery (Wellbred); the third side, audience, is asked to sympathize with the mocker on the grounds of poetic competence. Poetical meta-performance, then, is the dramatic primer of aggressive laughter, and it draws a clear-cut axiology between those who are meta-performatively competent (absolutely positive), and those who are meta-performatively incompetent (absolutely negative).

These dynamics emerge even more clearly from a later scene of *Every Man In His Humour*, when Stephen recites some of the verses that he has sent to his lover in response to a message of hers:

STEPHEN 'Sfoot, I have lost my purse, I think.
EDWARD KNOWELL How, lost your purse? Where? When had you it?
STEPHEN I cannot tell. – Stay!
BRAINWORM [*Aside*] 'Slid, I am afeard, they will know me. Would I could get by them!
EDWARD KNOWELL What, ha' you it?
STEPHEN No, I think I was bewitched, I –
EDWARD KNOWELL Nay, do not weep the loss. Hang it, let it go.
STEPHEN Oh, it's here. No, an it had been lost, I had not cared, but for a jet ring Mistress Mary sent me.
EDWARD KNOWELL A jet ring? Oh, the posy, the posy?
STEPHEN Fine, i' faith:
Though fancy sleep,

my love is deep.

Meaning that though I did not fancy her, yet she loved me dearly.

EDWARD KNOWELL Most excellent!

STEPHEN And then I sent her another, and my posy was

The deeper the sweeter,

I'll be judged, by St. Peter.

EDWARD KNOWELL How, 'by St. Peter'? I do not conceive that.

STEPHEN Marry, 'St. Peter' to make up the metre.

EDWARD KNOWELL Well, there the saint was your good patron; he helped you at your need. Thank him, thank him. (2.4.19-41)

Stephen's brief rhymed poem tries to measure up his beloved Mary's message. However, his lack of poetical competence forces him to insert an obscure reference to St. Peter, which can only be explained *metri causa*, and dramatically drops the level of romance of the message. Here again, meta-performance and the meta-discourse on poetry and metre draw a line between positive and negative values, which are clearly and invariably associated to poetical competence. As was rightly observed, Jonson makes a direct parallel between "right reason" and "right poetry" (Colley 1974, 10), and the dramatic dynamics of comedy follow closely those of poetical, and axiological, judgment. Moreover, a Jonsonian constant surfaces here: bad poetry is associated to obtrusive and affected technique. Stephen does not master poetic techniques, and his lack of stylistic naturalness is exposed by his clumsy use of metre and rhyme. Bad poets do know stylistic rules, figures of speech, and all sorts of poetical technicalities

– the problem is that they are not able to hide it.[112]

Yet more eloquent an example can be found in the long scene with Horace and Crispinus in *Poetaster*. First staged in 1601, the comedy stands out in the Jonsonian *corpus* for its remarkable meta-poetical and meta-performative features. As most commentators have pointed out, *Poetaster* shows a surprisingly high number of intertextual relationships with ancient, and particularly Latin, literature. Some passages from Ovid's *Amores* and Virgil's *Aeneid* are explicitly read aloud in actual meta-performances (on which more below); Crispinus' song (2.2.153-62) draws upon Martial's 1.57;[113] Ovid's farewell is evidently based upon *Tristia*;[114] most elements of the fake divine banquet in 4.5 are inferred from *Iliad* 1.[115] Of course, the long pursuit of Horace by Crispinus in 3.1-3 is fashioned from, and dramatises,[116] Horace's *Satire* 1.9, featuring a *pes-*

[112] For another example of failed poetic meta-performance to be traced in *Every Man In His Humour*, see 4.2, when the would-be poet Matthew recites some verses stolen from Marlowe's and Chapman's *Hero and Leander* as his own. Matthew's poetical incompetence is such that he supposes that his listeners will not recognize a quite famous poem, and that he is not even able to produce some ten original verses, thus proving that his poetical vein has been completely dried out. A moral judgment is attached to Matthew's poetical failure: not only is he incompetent, but he is also a "filching rogue". Plagiarism as both a poetical and ethical crime is crucial to *Poetaster*, as well: Crispinus and Demetrius end up being accused as "plagiary" (5.3.211-2), probably in relation to their translating Horace in 4.3.96-7 (Moul 2006, 25; 2010, 138-41).

[113] Herford, Simpson in Jonson 1925-1952, vol. 4, 548.

[114] Cain in Jonson 1995, 204.

[115] Herford, Simpson in Jonson 1925-1952, vol. 4, 567-8; Moul 2006, 39.

[116] Horace's satire showed already signs of dramatic construction, and can be rightly called "a miniature drama" (Rudd 1966, 75; see also

tis, an annoying would-be poet who oppresses Horace with his futile small talk.[117] Although different parallels can be observed between the comedy and its hypotext,[118] some relevant differences may also be noticed, which can help understand Jonson's comic strategy and stance. The main difference is,

Weeda 2019, 201 "mini drama").

[117] On the the close relationship between *Poetaster* and Horace's *Satires*, see Moul 2010, 142-7.

[118] Both actions take place along the *via Sacra* - Hor. *Serm.* 1.9.1 *ibam forte via Sacra* ~ *Poetaster* 3.1 "The Via Sacra (or Holy Street)". Both the unknown *pestis* and Jonson's Crispinus take for granted that Horace knows them because of their artsy desires (*Serm.* 1.9.6 *'noris nos' inquit 'docti sumus'* ~ *Poetaster* 3.1.14-5 ". . . I could wish thou didst know us, Horace. We are a scholar, I assure thee"); moreover, Crispinus considers himself as the best singer in Rome, even surpassing Hermogenes (*Serm.* 1.9.25 *invideat quod et Hermogenes ego canto* ~ *Poetaster* 3.1.147 "And then for my singing, Hermogenes himself envies me"; the line is echoed already in 2.2.166-7). The reason why Crispinus wants to make Horace's acquaintance is Horace's close relationship with Maecenas, both in *Serm.* 1.9.43ff. and in *Poetaster* 3.1.199-204. Horace tries to use a sick friend lying in bed near the *horti Caesariani* as an excuse (*Serm.* 1.9.17-8 ~ *Poetaster* 3.1.106), and tries to deflect Crispinus' attention to his relatives – who are unfortunately all dead (*Serm.* 1.9.26-8 ~ *Poetaster* 3.1.149-56); the closing *pointe* is also similar: *felices! nunc ego resto* ~ "The more their happiness, that rest in peace, / Free from the abundant torture of thy tongue: / Would I were with them too!". Both texts connect the encounter with the pest with an unlucky prophecy given by a Sabine woman (*Serm.* 1.9.29-34 ~ *Poetaster* 3.1.157-72). Both the pest and Crispinus decide to ignore a lawsuit to stay with Horace (*Serm.* 1.9.36-41 ~ *Poetaster* 3.1.174-90). In both texts Horace hopes to be rescued by his friend Fuscus Aristius, but his expectations are frustrated (*Serm.* 1.9.61-74 ~ *Poetaster* 3.2.1ff.). Finally, in both the satire and the comic scene Horace is eventually saved by a lawsuit filed against his unsufferable chaperon (*Serm.* 1.9.74-8 ~ *Poetaster* 3.3). Quotations from Horace are from Klingner's edition (Horace 1959).

again, meta-performance. Unlike Horace's satire, which only evokes poetry but abstains from giving samples of the pest's poor style, Jonson's dramatisation of the scene devotes much attention to direct meta-performance. The *nugae* on which Horace meditates in the satire (*Serm.* 1.9.2) become an *impromptu* composition of an ode to Maecenas:

> HOR. [*To himself*] Hmh? Yes. I will begin an ode so; and it
> shall be to Mæcenas . . .
> Swell me a bowl with lusty wine
> Till I may see the plump Lyaeus swim
> Above the brim;
> I drink as I would write,
> In flowing measure fill'd with flame and spright.
> (3.1.1-9)

Horace's extraordinary poetic artistry is shown by Jonson as a great facility in composing: Horace can compose great poetry even while walking – verses come flowing out of his mouth in a completely natural fashion. This is not the first time that the theme of poetical ease emerges in *Poetaster*. In fact, this is the most consistent trait in the representation of true poets throughout the play. Ovid, for instance, "cannot speak, . . . cannot think out of poetry" (1.2.87-8), and is so fluent in versification that he even discusses law cases in metre:

> TIB. Let's see, what's here?
> Nay, I will see it—
> OVID Pray thee, away—
> [*They struggle; Tibullus secures the paper*]
> TIB. [*He reads aloud.*]
> 'If thrice in field a man vanquish his foe,
> 'Tis after in his choice to serve, or no.'
> How now, Ovid! Law-cases in verse?

OVID In troth, I know not; they run from my pen
Unwittingly, if they be verse.
(1.3.3-9)

This short dialogue is the dramatic realisation of a well-known passage from Ovid's *Tristia* 4, where Ovid explains that despite his efforts to write in prose *et quod temptabam scribere uersus erat* (4.10.26).[119] However, this is not just a learned quotation: ease in composing verses is the *principium individuationis* of inspired poets, who can do without technique, or at least master it so perfectly that they make the poetic process of composition look completely natural. The only reason why Virgil, the greatest poet of Rome, is not that fluent is his modesty, which makes him "chaste and tender in his ear, / In suffering any syllable to pass" (5.1.108-9), and his verses with "judgment laboured" (119). The difference with Crispinus is not difficult to spot. The poetaster is not able to compose *extempore*, and cannot even remember what he has already written:

CRIS. I do make verses when I come in such a street as this. Oh, your city ladies, you shall ha' 'em sit in every shop like the muses—offering you the Castalian dews and the Thespian liquors, to as many as have but the sweet grace and audacity to — sip of their lips. Did you never hear any of my verses?

HOR. No, sir. (*Aside*) But I am in some fear I must now.

CRIS. I'll tell thee some (if I can but recover 'em) I composed even now of a dressing I saw a jeweller's wife wear, who indeed was a jewel herself. I prefer that kind of tire, now . . .

HOR. [*Aside*] It's not possible to make an escape from him?

[119] Ovid's *Tristia* are quoted from Hall's edition (Ovid 1995).

CRIS. I have remitted my verses all this while. I think I ha' forgot 'em.
HOR. [*Aside*] Here's he could wish you had, else.
CRIS. Pray Jove I can entreat 'em of my memory.
HOR. You put your memory to too much trouble, sir.
(3.1.28-46, *passim*)

However, when Crispinus does remember his latest poem, the result is far from satisfying:

CRIS. Nay, gentle Horace, stay; I have it now.
HOR. Yes, sir. [*Aside*] Apollo, Hermes, Jupiter, look down upon me.
CRIS. [*Reciting*]
Rich was thy hap, sweet, dainty cap
There to be placed:
Where thy smooth black, sleek white may smack,
And both be graced.
'White' is there usurped for her brow: her forehead; and then 'sleek', as the parallel to 'smooth' that went before. A kind of paranomasy or agnomination; do you conceive, sir?
HOR. Excellent. Troth, sir, I must be abrupt and leave you.
(3.1.65-74)

The poem is not self-explanatory, and requires a complex auto-commentary. Moreover, Crispinus' verses are not as natural as Ovid's or Horace's, but follow an affected and artificial style, and use frigid figures of speech. There is no sign of poetic inspiration (as in the cases of Ovid and Horace), and overworked technique is too explicit. Moreover, the poetaster lacks even the slightest self-awareness: he cannot judge his own style, and takes it for granted that the true poet, Horace, is less acquainted with stylistic analyses than he himself ("do you conceive, sir?").

In dramatising *Serm.* 1.9, then, Jonson reworks Horace's idea of staging a would-be poet, and uses meta-performance to add a comic touch to the whole scene, transforming it into an actual undesired exhibition of poetry. This choice seems to hint at a more complex, and multi-layered, intertextual strategy. Of course, Jonson's main hypotext is Horace's satire. However, an Aristophanic model is also at work here, although in less evident a way than Horace's model.[120] It is Aristophanes' same meta-performative treatment of fraudulent poets as discussed above that provides Jonson with the comic paradigm for the realization of the scene along the *via Sacra*. To the Horatian situation, which provides the concrete narrative hypotext, a second hypotext is thus added in filigree – the stock scene with the *alazon* poet from *Birds*, which provides the broader comic and dramatic hypotext.[121] This

[120] Aristophanes is usually not considered as a hypotext for Horace's *Serm.* 1.9. However, Old Comedy famously provides an authoritative model for Horatian satires (*Serm.* 1.4.1-5), and Aristophanic comedies are a well-established presence throughout the *Sermones*: see e.g. Cucchiarelli 2001, 15-55; Keane 2002 and 2006. Besides, one may also suppose that Horace's model for the *sectator* poet could well have been the stock scene of the poet intruder that we find attested in Aristophanes' plays.

[121] This may be considered a particular form of "layered imitation", where "imitating authors… imitate more than one earlier writer… the way Milton imitated Virgil imitating Homer" (Burrow 2019, 14). In this case, however, the hypertextual relationship between Horace and Aristophanes is not so much a matter of intentional imitation as the possibly unintended resonance of an implicit hypotext. It is worth noting, therefore, that it is especially thanks to Jonson's rewriting of Horace's *Satire* 1.9 in the dramatic context of *Poetaster* that we are enabled to appreciate the Aristophanic colour of Jonson's immediate source text. As a consequence, this particular literary triangle

also shows in what terms, and to what extent, a comparative reading of Jonson and Aristophanes can be productive. All the attempts made by scholars to find precise textual parallels between *Poetaster* and Aristophanic comedy are so sparse and scarcely integral to the comic discourse that they seem hardly conclusive.[122] On the contrary, a structural approach to Jonson's 'Aristophanism', which identifies not just possible *Einzeltextreferenzen*, single textual references, but more profound, and structural, similarities (such as for instance the parallel construction of a comic situation) looks far more productive. In the case of meta-performance in *Poetaster*, the dynamics between Jonson's and Aristophanes' comedies (and between them and Horace's satire) are very similar, although, as we shall see, not identical: in Aristophanes, in Horace, and in Jonson we witness an attempt to be integrated or assimilated. The three positive characters – Peisetairos in *Birds*, Horace's *persona* in *Serm.* 1.9, and Horace in *Poetaster* – enjoy the benefits of their position: they are full members of a privileged community to which the pest requests access.

As a consequence, in all three texts we also witness an interesting process of dramatic construction of the protagonist's subjectivity, through the representation of a failed attempt to be admitted, and assimilated, into a community. The (positive) protagonist defines his own characteristics through a semiotic and positional opposition to his interlocutor and/or antagonist. *Omnis determinatio est negatio*: not only does any individual definition imply the negation

is only in part a 'window reference' in the sense of those explored in Burrow *et al.* fortcoming.

[122] See e.g. Gum 1969, 152-6. The only notable exception may be the comic trial, which might be quite safely compared to the poetic trial in *Frogs*, although specific parallels are hard to find there, too.

of somebody else's identity, but any individual definition is brought about by the negation of somebody else's identity. This allows us to infer some valuable observations from each of our three texts, especially as far as the specific difference between these texts in the characterisation of the positive characters is concerned.

Based on our premises, it should not be a surprise that the most relevant differences can be noticed in terms of meta-performance and meta-discourses on poetry. To start with, meta-performance is not always relevant to the definition of this assimilative process. In Horace's satire, the *persona* Horace is defending his own social group from the penetration of a character who does not deserve assimilation. Rejected assimilation of the pest is what proves that Horace is indeed a full member of Maecenas' circle.[123] Horace's elitism towards the pest has been sometimes called into question by scholars.[124] However, it is precisely elitism that gives dramatic stance to the "problems of the outside and the inside",[125]

[123] Weeda 2019, 204: ". . . [Horace] depicts himself as a full member of Maecenas' circle expressing in *S.* 1.9.48-52 his appreciation on the way the circle is organised by Maecenas. . . . The poem shows Horace's pride at being recognised as somebody close to Maecenas, albeit by a pushy nouveau riche. He also feels perfectly capable of assessing whether somebody fits as an associate".

[124] Whereas the majority of readers (e.g. Fraenkel 1957, 113) praise Horace's self-restraint towards an unsufferable bore, some have blamed Horace for his lack of sympathy (curiously enough, a typical critique against Aristophanic heroes), and his "elitist" stance (see e.g. Zetzel 2009, 38).

[125] Zetzel 2009, 38. Interestingly, Zetzel uses here a spatial metaphor that describes quite accurately the plot of most Aristophanic dramas (on which see Morosi 2021): ". . . Horace is on the inside, attempting to fend off the pest who is making an assault on the group". The metaphor

i.e. the battle for integration. These dynamics are in all respects akin to similar Aristophanic situations – except for one aspect. In Horace's satire, poetry is an extrinsic instrument for assimilation, and has no special relevance: it is an aspect among others. In other words, in *Serm.* 1.9 attempted assimilation has little to do with art: as we have seen, the pest does not recite a single line of his own, and the judgment on his unfitness to be part of Maecenas' circle does not take poetry into account. The pest is rejected not on artistic but on social grounds: he falls "crashingly into all the errors of taste and manners" that Horace has most condemned;[126] he looks ambitious, envious, and fatuous. Meta-performance does not play in *Serm.* 1.9 any role at all.

The case with Aristophanic poets in *Birds* and with Crispinus in *Poetaster* is diametrically opposed. Although analogous dynamics can be observed, assimilation in *Birds* is based upon, and represented by, meta-performance.[127] In other words, poetry and meta-performance are the fundamental testing ground for assimilation, albeit in two slightly different ways. For the first poet, art has an instrumental nature: he uses art in order to fulfil, in accordance with the social

is first exploited by Horace himself to describe the access to Maecenas' sympathy, at *Serm.* 1.9.56-8: "'difficilis aditus primos habet.' 'haud mihi dero: / muneribus servos corrumpam; non, hodie si / exclusus fuero, desistam'".

[126] Gowers in Horace 2012, 281.

[127] Another example of Aristophanic meta-performative assimilation – although not directly performed – is Pheidippides' aesthetic conversion at the end of *Clouds*: after being taught by the Worse Argument, the boy changes radically his tastes, and refuses to perform a piece by Aeschylus, performing instead a piece by corrupt Euripides (*Nu.* 1364-79). Pheidippides' integration into a different group implies a performative assimilation, as well.

codes of archaic lyric, some material needs. This ulterior motive is in fact the poet's only motive, and the performance of poetry is just a hypocritical mask, as Peisetairos easily shows (*Av.* 931-55):

Πε. τουτὶ παρέξει τὸ κακὸν ἡμῖν πράγματα,
εἰ μή τί γ' αὐτῷ δόντες ἀποφευξούμεθα.
οὗτος, σὺ μέντοι σπολάδα καὶ χιτῶν' ἔχεις,
ἀπόδυθι καὶ δὸς τῷ ποιητῇ τῷ σοφῷ.
ἔχε τὴν σπολάδα· πάντως δέ μοι ῥιγῶν δοκεῖς.
Πο. τόδε μὲν οὐκ ἀέκουσα φίλα
Μοῦσα τὸ δῶρον δέχεται·
τὺ δὲ τεᾷ φρενὶ μάθε Πινδάρειον ἔπος—
Πε. ἄνθρωπος ἡμῶν οὐκ ἀπαλλαχθήσεται.
Πο. νομάδεσσι γὰρ ἐν Σκύθαις ἀλᾶται στρατῶν
ὃς ὑφαντοδόνητον ἔσθος οὐ πέπαται·
ἀκλεὴς δ' ἔβα
σπολὰς ἄνευ χιτῶνος.
ξύνες ὅ τοι λέγω.
Πε. ξυνίημ' ὅτι βούλει τὸν χιτωνίσκον λαβεῖν.
ἀπόδυθι· δεῖ γὰρ τὸν ποιητὴν ὠφελεῖν.
ἄπελθε τουτονὶ λαβών.
Πο. ἀπέρχομαι,
κἀς τὴν πόλιν γ' ἐλθὼν ποιήσω τοιαδί·
"κλῇσον, ὦ χρυσόθρονε, τὰν τρομερὰν κρυεράν·
νιφόβολα πεδία πολύπορά τ' ἤλυθον."
ἀλαλαί.
Πε. νὴ τὸν Δί', ἀλλ' ἤδη πέφευγας ταυταγὶ
τὰ κρυερὰ τονδὶ τὸν χιτωνίσκον λαβών.

[PE. This pest is going to be a real nuisance to us, unless we can escape from him by giving him something. *(To a slave)* Here, you! You've got a jerkin and a tunic; strip off and give it to the learned poet. *(To the poet)* Have the jerkin; you cer-

> tainly seem to me to be freezing. PO. Not unwillingly doth my Muse accept this gift; but do thou learn in thy heart a word of Pindar's — PE. The fellow just won't leave us! PO. "For among the Scythian nomads an outcast from the host is he who possess no shuttle-woven garment: inglorious goeth" – a jerkin without a tunic. Understand what I say to thee! PE. I understand that you want to have the short tunic! *(To the slave)* Take it off; we must help the poet. *(To the poet)* Take this, and be off. PO. I'm going – and, moreover, when I've gone, I shall compose, in honour of your city, something like this: "O golden-throned one, glorify thou the shivery, icy land: o'er snowswept plains with many pathways have I gone". Alalai! PE. Why, by Zeus, you've already escaped from that iciness, now you've got that little tunic!]

As in the case of Horace's satire, a transaction – or more precisely an extortion – is offered here by the poet: to free himself from the nuisance coming from the pest, both Peisetairos and Horace's *persona* are invited to acquiesce to the intruder's request (see *Av.* 932). Unlike Horace, however, in Aristophanes, poetic meta-performance plays a crucial role, as the fundamental instrument of extortion: since no one wants to hear bad poetry, bad meta-performance is a powerful incentive to comply with the bad poet's requests.[128] In accordance with the deceitful nature of poetry described above, poetry activates a *quid pro quo* – in fact, it is the vector of the transaction. *Da ut non dem*: if you do not want to hear any more poetry from me, provide me with what I ask. The fake

[128] Bad poetry is here described by means of an aesthetic metaphor: as Paduano 1973, 124 and Toscano 1991 have noticed, the poet is repelled because his poetry is frigid, a common aesthetic concept in ancient theory of literature (see e.g. Arist. *Rh.* 3, 1405b-1406b; Aristoph. *Th.* 170 ὁ δ' αὖ Θέογνις ψυχρὸς ὢν ψυχρῶς ποιεῖ).

Pindaric verses recited by the poet contain hypocritically the poet's mundane request for a tunic.

On the other hand, the second poet, Cinesias, conceives art and poetry not as a means, but as an end. Cinesias' wish to be admitted to Cloudcuckooland does not directly depend on a concrete need. Rather, obtaining a pair of wings (throughout the comedy, the representation of citizenship in Cloudcuckooland) is necessary to practice his art by establishing a more radical correspondence between form and content. As Cinesias himself explains (*Av.* 1387): κρέμαται μὲν οὖν ἐντεῦθεν ἡμῶν ἡ τέχνη ("our art depends on clouds"). The verb bears here two overlapping meanings: a metaphorical meaning ("depend on"), but also a concrete meaning ("hang from"): the poetic art being frequently described as the activity of collecting preludes in the air, and the main content of dithyramb being aerial phenomena, a close relationship is established between composing and flying.[129] Although with a different strategy from the former scene, this second scene featuring a poet in *Birds* uses poetic meta-performance as the central element in the process of attempted assimilation.

In light of all this, it seems safe to say that though Horace is Jonson's fundamental hypotext in *Poetaster* 3, Jonson does not follow Horace in the actual dynamics implied by the dramatic power play between Horace and Crispinus on which the whole scene is based. Rather, the general dynamics of the scene, featuring a poetic and meta-performative uproarious failure, assimilate Jonson's scene to Aristophanes' *Birds*, and even more broadly to the Aristophanic model of failed poetical meta-performances. The complexity of Jonson's intertextual strategy, then, emerges in relation to meta-per-

[129] Aesthetics provide the grounds for geography: Morosi 2021, 232-6.

formance: in both Aristophanes and Jonson, the scene rests upon the insistent exhibition of poetical competence (or rather incompetence). Both Cinesias and Crispinus are extremely self-satisfied, and are eager to exhibit, i.e. to meta-perform, their own poetry, seeking an approval related to the quality of their *technē*. None of this happens in Horace: the display of poetical competence is limited to a couple of lines (*Serm.* 1.9.23-5), and is only mentioned in passing. It only connotes the pest, but does not orient the whole discourse.

Of course, this structural difference is not the only one that can be observed between the three texts in relation to meta-performance. As we have argued, the whole dynamics of attempted integration affect the characterization of positive characters, and has to do with the genre's ideology. In Aristophanes, Peisetairos' right to mock the poets does not rest upon a superior poetical competence. The judgment on the two poets' *technē* is morally negative, but is hardly ever formed on aesthetic grounds – Peisetairos is definitely not a better poet or a better performer. His power does not derive from a particular mastery of meta-performance, but rather from factors that are structural to comedy as a genre, and are related to the 'heroic grammar' and to the definition of inter-personal, social, and political features of ancient comedy.[130] On the contrary, we may say that the hero's position of power transcends meta-performance, or better breaks meta-performance. Peisetairos rejects meta-performance, and refuses to play the poets' game. Since meta-performance strongly implies deceit, resisting meta-performance means resisting deceit. From a thorough analysis of Aristophanes'

[130] On comic heroism, and the sources of the hero's incontestable position of power, see Whitman 1964 and Grilli 2021.

surviving plays, we might also conclude that the link between art and fraud is not fortuitous, positional, or contextual. On the contrary, it is continuous, consistent, and coherent. The rejection of meta-performance as the eminent representation of a modern and abstruse form of art is thus an integral part of Aristophanic ideology. This brings us back to Peisetairos' position of power: since it is closely related to a pillar of Aristophanes' ideology, the refusal of *entartete* meta-performance is *per se* an ideological ground on which the empathy with the hero, and ultimately his or her dramatic power, can be based. In other words, Peisetairos can reject meta-performance because he is in a position of power previously established, but he also establishes his position of power because he rejects meta-performance.[131] Aristophanes' anti-elitist ideology takes frequently the form of an anti-intellectualist stance, that is, an utter rejection of culture in all its shapes, meta-performance included. To reject meta-performative acts, then, is to reject any elitist positioning, and therefore take sides in the fundamental ideological matter of all Aristophanic culture, that of the people *vs* the elites.

In Jonson's *Poetaster*, the situation is different.[132] Crispinus' desire for assimilation does not directly aim at enjoying

[131] This situation does not differ much from the scene of *Thesmophoriazusae* analysed above: both Critylla and the archer are already in a position of power (they detain Euripides' In-law), but their rejection of Euripides' fraudulent meta-performance increases their dramatic strength, and generates empathy towards them.

[132] Although with a lower degree of explicitness, the situation of *Poetaster* is akin to that of *Every Man In His Humour*, where Edward Knowell and his refined friends can take the liberty of judging Matthew's poetic performance in the name of their membership of a group of self-proclaimed sophisticated literary specialists.

political or material goods: Crispinus is economically well-off (he describes himself as a "gentleman", 3.1.26), and only wishes to be admitted into the poets' group out of vanity and snobbishness. This activates a dynamic that we could describe as 'legitimist'. Let us see in what sense. Instead of fantasy cities such as Cloudcuckooland we are met here by the impalpable community of true poets, which at least partially coincides with the circle described by Ovid in *Amores* 1.15, whose translation is read aloud as a meta-performative monologue in *Poet.* 1.1.37-78, from which we quote the following passage:

> Homer will live whilst Tenedos stands, and Ide,
> Or to the sea fleet Simois doth slide;
> And so shall Hesiod, too, while vines do bear
> Or crooked sickles crop the ripened ear.
> Callimachus, though in invention low,
> Shall still be sung, since he in art doth flow.
> No loss shall come to Sophocles' proud vein;
> With sun and moon, Aratus shall remain.
> Whilst slaves be false, fathers hard, and bawds be whorish,
> Whilst harlots flatter shall Menander flourish.
> Ennius, though rude, and Accius's high-reared strain
> A fresh applause in every age shall gain.
> Of Varro's name, what ear shall not be told?
> Of Jason's Argo and the fleece of gold?
> Then shall Lucretius' lofty numbers die
> When earth and seas in fire and flame shall fry.
> Tityrus, Tillage, Aenee shall be read
> Whilst Rome of all the conquered world is head!
> Till Cupid's fires be out and his bow broken
> Thy verses, neat Tibullus, shall be spoken.
> Our Gallus shall be known from east to west;

So shall Lycoris, whom he now loves best.
The suffering ploughshare or the flint may wear,
But heavenly poesy no death can fear.
(1.1.45-68)

This literary canon does not just account for Jonson's ability to put to good use his classical readings.[133] Far from being a simple theorisation of the history of literature, the canon is – as is often – an aware poetical operation, which impacts both on the dramatic and on the extra-dramatic layers. From the point of view of the comic fiction, the overlapping of some of the authors mentioned in the list with the characters of the play (Virgil, Tibullus, and Gallus) suggests that the main aim of this catalogue is to create an actual poetical circle, spanning from Homer to the dramatic time. The membership of the circle will be the fundamental theme of the whole comedy, and the primer of the action. On the extra-dramatic level, of course, the canon can be extended to the author of the play himself, who insinuates through the identification with

[133] On Jonson's classicism in *Poetaster* see Koslow 2006, and Vickers 2014. In passing, it may be interesting to observe that Ovid's catalogue of immortal poets in *Amores* 1.15 reduces Greek comedy to Menander. Accordingly, Aristophanes is absent from the translation of that elegy declaimed by the character Ovid in this scene of *Poetaster*. But Jonson is far from forgetting Aristophanes in his own outlines of ancient poetic or dramatic history. In the "Induction" to *Every Man Out of His Humour* (246-65 ed. Ostovich: Jonson 2001, 126-8), Cordatus recalls Aristophanes in a meticulous, albeit largely imaginary, genealogy of Greek comic poets; in the "Apologetical dialogue" added to *Poetaster*, the Author defends the sharpness of his wit by citing Aristophanes, along with Persius and Juvenal, as a legitimizing precedent (Jonson 2012, vol. 2, 177 at 177-8). Many years later, "tart Aristophanes" is mentioned once again in Jonson's poem to the memory of William Shakespeare, this time in connection with Plautus and Terence.

Horace that he in turn is full member of the circle.[134]

Of course, the membership of the circle of true poets also implies a political membership.[135] In fact, the dramatic construction of *Poetaster* shows an attempt to parallel poetic aristocracy and political aristocracy. As has been rightly pointed out as regards Jonson's classical education, "... acquisition of classical learning meant that a particular text or author might function simultaneously politically and as an object fetishized in the emergent Jacobean aesthetic sphere of libraries and collections. Cultural value and pragmatic applicability were bound up together in the readers' undestanding of classical and European writers".[136] From the perspective of *Poetaster*, poetical membership is equivalent to social membership, and to political membership.[137] Thus, if the poetic

[134] *Poetaster* has notoriously been read as an allegory of contemporary poetry, and has been inserted into the critical framework of the so-called "war of the theatres", between Jonson and some of his rivals (especially Marston and Dekker). The debate was opened by Josiah H. Penniman (1897) and Roscoe Addison Small (1899), who fiercely questioned the validity of Penniman's identifications. Small's conclusions appear to have won wide acceptance among scholars. Be that as it may, nowadays it is not disputed that *Poetaster* contains a high degree of intertextual slandering (see e.g. Moul 2010, 140), and that Horace may be read as Jonson's poetic incarnation (see e.g. Loxley 2001, 54).

[135] As it already did in Horace's *Serm.* 1.9 (and in most contemporary Latin literature), through the figure of Maecenas.

[136] Sanders, Chedgzoy, Wiseman 1998, 8.

[137] The equivalence between poetry and politics of course involves the extra-dramatic level, too: since we are to think of Jonson as a virtual member of the exclusive circle of true poets, we are to imagine him as the virtual member of that peculiar political circle, too. The overlapping between politics and poetry has prompted many political readings of Jonson's drama, usually read as a celebration of an absolutist political ideology: see e.g. Norbrook 2002, esp. 155-72. For a partial

membership is exclusive, the political membership must be, as well – and vice versa. The political nature of poetry is stated explicitly by Jonson at the outset of Act 5, when Caesar welcomes Virgil, and wants him seated next to him:

> See, here comes Virgil; we will rise and greet him. [*He stands.*]
> Welcome to Caesar, Virgil. Caesar and Virgil
> Shall differ but in sound; to Caesar, Virgil,
> Of his expressèd greatness, shall be made
> A second surname; and to Virgil, Caesar.
> (5.2.1-5)

There is a perfect equivalence between political and poetical authority, to the point that the two highest representatives of each can be easily interchanged.[138]

If being a poet amounts to being granted a social and political privilege, then the dramatic action, which revolves around the integration into an exclusive circle, cannot do without poetry, and poetic judgment. Horace's position compared to Crispinus', thus, is a privileged one – a position of power, both artistic and political. Jonson takes on a long tradition of poetical despise of bad poetry,[139] and dramatises it by means of the dramatic situation of the rejected poet in *Birds*. In both cases, a poetical meta-performance fails.

reconsideration of this critical consensus, see Cain 1998, who reads *Poetaster* through the lenses of the Essex Rebellion of 1601.

[138] In the previous lines, Jonson explains to what extent poetry can contribute to, and be equated to, politics: poets serve a political function inasmuch as they bring honour to the State, and guarantee Rome's immortality through their works (somewhat of an understatement of the political repercussions of poetry as experience both in Augustan Rome and in Elizabethan England).

[139] On ancient texts, see e.g. Cozzoli 1996.

However, there is a major difference between these two failures. As we have seen, in *Birds* mockery targets *technē* but it is not articulated in technical (meta-poetical) terms: although of course the art of the two Aristophanic poets is also laughed at as a specimen of bad poetry (in as much as it is *new* poetry), Peisetairos' positional, comic, and ideological strength lies in his complete extraneousness to that kind of art. In Jonson, what activates the Freudian dynamics of laughter is a judgment that is wholly intrinsic to art itself, and consists in a poetic superiority of the true poet as compared to the presumptuous scribbler. Horace's superiority is a technical, artistic, superiority, and allows him to look down on the poetaster. In *Poetaster*, then, poetic technique and any meta-performative and meta-discursive representation of poetry are a paradoxical *shibboleth*: they are certainly shown as a set of imitable competences,[140] but at the same time they are trenchant in distinguishing those who only know technique from those who possess true artistic inspiration. Actual excellence in art is thus shown as an essence, i.e. a condition that does not depend on extrinsical aspects such as acquired competence or imitation. What Crispinus wants in *Poetaster* is not an extrinsical acknowledgment of an extrinsical ability: he wants the impossible – he wants an essential assimilation. To be *one of* the true poets means to be *like* the true poets, which in turn means *to be* them. This is what René Girard called "metaphysic desire" (Girard 1961): even though the character's desire tends towards desirable

[140] The fact that literature can be imitated is crucial to the understanding of some major phenomena of ancient literature and poetics. Imitation and emulation are hermeneutical tools that have been variously used to account for intertextual relationship between texts (especially ancient texts): for a critical survey, see e.g. Conte, Barchiesi 1989.

objects or conditions (such as to be accepted as a member of an exclusive group), precisely this tendency implies a metaphysic desire, the need to be ontologically founded by the assimilation to somebody else's essence. With his impossible desire and his failed meta-performance, Crispinus sanctions *e contrario* the essential, ontological, superiority of the true poet. Moreover, this shows that the concept of 'true poet' is defined in *Poetaster* as a result of a process of external-internal mediation. The external-internal mediator is the subject that presents him/herself as the exhibited object of unattainable imitation:[141] in *Poetaster*, Horace, Virgil, and their circle work as external-internal mediators, offering themselves as unreachable models.[142]

Although in a slightly different way, poetic essentiality is a key element of Aristophanes' judgment of poetry, too. The equivalence between poetic value and moral value is fundamental to all of Aristophanes' literary theory: there is absolutely no way to distinguish good poetry from good moral attitudes, or bad poetry from bad moral attitudes. The

[141] The notion of 'internal-external' mediator has been introduced by Dell'Aversano 2022 to complement Girard's theory of mimetic desire; according to Girard (1961), desire arises as a result of a process involving a subject, an object, and a mediator whose desire for the object is perceived (or simply assumed), and imitated. According to Girard, mediators can be 'external', that is, ontologically unattainable (as for instance Jesus as an asymptotic model), or 'internal'. Internal mediators are equals, and imitation inevitably results in competition, whereas external mediation is structurally exempt from competition.

[142] The dynamics of imitation between Crispinus and Horace are clear from the beginning of 3.1. As soon as he spots Horace composing an *impromptu* poem, Crispinus immediately decides to be composing, too (3.1.3-4): "I think he be composing as he goes i'the street. Ha? 'Tis a good humour and he be: I'll compose, too".

theory of mimesis that Aristophanes formulates in *Thesmophoriazusae* (148-72) closely relates essence to composition: χρὴ γὰρ ποιητὴν ἄνδρα πρὸς τὰ δράματα / ἃ δεῖ ποεῖν, πρὸς ταῦτα τοὺς τρόπους ἔχειν (*Th.* 149-50, "A man who is a poet must adopt habits that match the plays he's committed to composing").[143] This basic theory provides an important aesthetic ground for the rejection of contemporary poetry, which invariably appears as too complex, too stylised, and overworked. Since there is a direct relation between a poet's style and a poet's nature, a simple, straightforward, and modest style (as was the archaic poets' style according to Aristophanes) amounts to simple, straightforward, and modest tropes. On the contrary, an over-refined, deliberately abstruse, and overcomplicated style (such as that of contemporary poets) coincides with a deceitful character. In both Aristophanes and Jonson, then, good poetry consists in simplicity, which in turn corresponds with an essential superiority. Any excess of technique and stylistic complication is associated with negative values.

In Ben Jonson, the poet's excellence is inherent to his identity: Jonson does not need to state it openly, but lets it emerge from the meta-performative contrast between poet and poetaster. In Act 5 of *Poetaster*, we are faced with two contrasting acts of meta-performance: the reading aloud of a piece of Virgil's *Aeneid* (5.2.56-97), and the reading aloud of Crispinus and Fannius' horrible poems (5.3.232-50). An ob-

[143] See also *Th.* 168-70: ταῦτ' ἄρ' ὁ Φιλοκλέης αἰσχρὸς ὢν αἰσχρῶς ποιεῖ, / ὁ δὲ Ξενοκλέης ὢν κακὸς κακῶς ποιεῖ, / ὁ δ' αὖ Θέογνις ψυχρὸς ὢν ψυχρῶς ποιεῖ ("Ah, that's why Philocles who's ugly writes ugly plays, and Xenocles who's a wretch writes wretched ones, and Theognis too, being a cold character, writes frigid ones"). On Aristophanes' theory of mimesis, see Paduano 1998.

vious difference can be drawn: the true poet masters every aspect of poetic technique (metre, rhetoric, music), but does so in such an elegant and natural fashion that he exhales poetry as if breathing (5.1.123); on the contrary, the poetaster's art is all but essential and natural: it is superfetation, redundancy, illness. This appears evident also from another famous scene of *Poetaster*, Crispinus' purge from some of the words that most offend good taste. Horace administers an emetic to Crispinus as punishment for his slandering poem:

> CRIS. Oh, I am sick—
> HOR. A basin, a basin quickly! Our physic works. – Faint not, man.
> [*A receptacle is brought and held up for Crispinus.*]
> CRIS. [*Retching*] O — retrograde — reciprocal — incubus —
> CAES. What's that, Horace?
> HOR. 'Retrograde', 'reciprocal', and 'incubus' are come up.
> GAL. Thanks be to Jupiter.
> CRIS. O — glibbery — lubrical — defunct — oh! —
> HOR. Well said; here's some store.
> VIRG. What are they?
> HOR. 'Glibbery', 'lubrical', and 'defunct'.
> GAL. O, they came up easy.
> CRIS. Oh — oh! —
> TIB. What's that?
> HOR. Nothing yet.
> CRIS. Magnificate!
> MEC. 'Magnificate'? That came up somewhat hard.
> CRIS. Oh, I shall cast up my — spurious — snotteries —
> HOR. [*To Crispinus*] Good. Again.
> CRIS. Chilblained — oh! — oh! — clumsy —
> HOR. That 'clumsy' stuck terribly.
> MEC. What's all that, Horace?
> HOR. 'Spurious snotteries', 'chilblained', 'clumsy'.

TIB. Oh, Jupiter!
GAL. Who would have thought there should ha' been such a deal of filth in a poet?
(5.3.411-35)

It is right to assume that the scene is indebted to a dualist conception, clearly separating the "disincarnate ideality" of high-flown poetry and the corporality of ordinary language (Koslow 2006, 120). It seems also fair to conclude that this dualistic conception serves here the polemical function of criticising Jonson's poetic rivals as "unclean birds" ("Apologetical Dialogue", 272), who compose with their bellies instead that with their souls.[144] However, a further conception may be observed in these lines. The poetaster's belly is replete with "filth": poetical composition does not come natural, but is described as the ingestion of external and unhealthy materials. Meta-performance and the meta-discourse on poetry, then, draw a clear-cut line between good and bad poetry: the essence of poets emerges through performance. What is more, it is quite safe to say that the vomit scene in *Poetaster* is reminiscent of a page of Lucian's *Lexiphanes*, a dialogue on the moral purpose and power of poetry. It has been demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt the the purging scene in *Poetaster* is wholly and deeply indebted to a very similar scene in Lucian's dialogue.[145] In Lucian, Lexiphanes is administered

[144] For Jonson's propensity to use food vocabulary as a metaphor for poetical activity, see Boehrer 1997 (especially 186-9 for an assessment on the poet's 'emetic' background). In all likelihood Jonson's comic target here was mostly John Marston: of the thirty-four words vomited by Crispinus, fifteen can be found in Marston's previous works (Herford, Simpson in Jonson 1925-1952, vol. 4, 579; Gum 1969, 102).

[145] Miola 2019, esp. 171-2. See also Duncan 1979, 130; Yearling 2016, 138; Carter 2021, 89.

an emetic, in order to vomit all the bombastic words that his belly contains; analogously, Crispinus must be purged of all the bad poetry that he has ingurgitated thus far. In Freudian terms, we can say that the dynamics of aggressive laughter follow again, in both Lucian and Jonson, the triangular structure, and comply with the Jonsonian axiological configuration: poets represent a completely positive pole, and unite against the negative pole represented by the poetaster, who is the victim of mockery.

Scholars have considered Aristophanic comedy as the model for this passage,[146] but any attempt to find precise parallels fell short: in Aristophanes' extant comedies there certainly is no clear parallel for a character vomiting words.[147] However, the tone of the scene is somewhat Aristophanic – in fact, this even seems the most Aristophanic scene in *Poetaster*.[148] What sets this mainly Aristophanic tone is not a precise textual reference but the adoption of a more general aspect of

[146] See e.g. Gum 1969, 154.

[147] Gum's hypothesis was the agon of *Frogs*, where Euripides claims to have put Aeschylean poetry on a diet: *Ra.* 939-44. To be sure, in *Poetaster* the idea of the diet emerges in Virgil's prescriptions after the emetic kicked in. However, in Aristophanes' *Frogs* Euripides' diet affected poetry and not a poet, and in any case this provides no parallel for the vomiting of words.

[148] In our opinion the closest Aristophanic parallel to the emetic purgation of Crispinus has nothing to do with Euripides' dietary prescriptions in *Frogs*, which have no connection whatsoever with vomit, but with *Acharnians*, where the very first scene (*Ach.* 6-8) displays the protagonist's joy over the punishment of his archenemy – the penalty consisting in vomiting back the bribes Cleon had wrongfully taken. However, this parallel can only show analogies in the use of vomit as a comic device, since Lucian's passage is clearly the most immediate inspiration for Crispinus' penitential therapy.

Aristophanes' meta-discourse on poetry (then shared by Lucian), that is, the materialistic nature of language and poetry. This conception derived from ancient aesthetic theories,[149] and was notoriously exploited in the comic scene of the weighing of verses in the agon of *Frogs*. What we find, rather surprisingly, in Jonson is a similar "materialistic conception of language", in a scene that stands out for its "outrageous literalism".[150] But alas, this architextual Aristophanic feature does not come from a direct reading of Aristophanes' plays, but rather from what we may call here an intermediary, Lucian, whose fortune in the Renaissance was far wider than Aristophanes' (Miola 2019, 160-2).

However, one more observation may be added regarding this scene and its intertextual dynamics. Centuries later, the purge in Lucian's *Lexiphanes* was re-read and adapted by Martianus Capella in his *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (2.135-8), a text only known to specialists today but widely read in early modern universities, linking 'modern' Renaissance knowledge to medieval education.[151] In order to be admitted to the Olympus, Philology must first vomit – in the form of books and rolls of parchment – all the knowledge that she ingested earlier (2.135): "ni haec . . . quibus plenum pectus geris, coactissima egestione uomeris forasque diffuderis, immortalitatis sedem nullatenus obtinebis" ("unless you vomit and excrete with a resolved effort all things that of which your stomach is replete, you will not be able to access

[149] See Porter 2010 and 2016.

[150] Koslow 2006, 121. See also Vickers 2014, 167: "In Lucian's dialogue the doctor observes these words being exgurgitated, as if they were material lexical items".

[151] Jonson's knowledge of Capella's *De nuptiis* is made certain by direct quotations, as shown by Gordon 1945.

the seat of immortality").

Unlike Lucian's *Lexiphanes*, in which the purge is simply a form of punishment, the passage from Capella's *De nuptiis* describes an attempt at assimilation: the gods are described as a highly exclusive and desirable group, the access to which requires an extremely selective process of cooptation.[152] These dynamics are comparable to those of *Poetaster*, and of course are, in both texts, closely related to culture: useless, or damaging, knowledge is described as the major obstacle to the full membership of both groups. In translating and adapting a passage from Lucian, then, Jonson may have been aware of its direct literary descendant, Capella's *De nuptiis*. But even if such a triangular intertextual relationship did not exist, Jonson's use of Lucian's scene is slightly but significantly different: Crispinus' purge is not only a punishment, but is also the prerequisite to be let into a highly desirable and almost impenetrable group, access to which is granted based upon precise aesthetic as well as social and moral canons.

The comparison between poets introduced by the reference to Lucian's *Lexiphanes* brings us to Jonson's major overturning of Aristophanes. The usual stance of the Aristophanic text implies that the true good amounts to an overall condition of existential fullness: the hero gains, and enjoys at the highest possible level, all the physical, sensual, and sexual pleasures. Any form of deprivation of this sensual fullness is depicted as suspect and contemptible.[153] Social norm, in its

[152] The hypothesis that vomit was an actual form of initiation can be ruled out: see Lenaz 2011, 298-9.

[153] See for instance the agon between Chremylus and Penia in *Wealth*, where Penia argues for the importance of poverty in a functioning society: although her arguments are rational, they cannot be accepted in the comic framework. Thus, Chremylus' famous answer -

fundamentally anti-vitalistic drive, is usually at the opposite semiotic pole of comedy. Moreover, this basic setting of Aristophanic drama implies the magnifying of an ordinary character up to a universal apotheosis. This entails two fundamental consequences. First, an ideology of ordinariness: the fantastic glorification of ordinary characters also implicates that anything that looks over-refined or generally extraordinary is shown as intentionally deceitful and questionable, and must ultimately be rejected. Overworked poetry, extensive knowledge of eccentric notions are *per se* opposed to the ideological structure of Aristophanic comedy. Second, the ideology of ordinariness also implies a socially and politically disruptive position: to magnify an ordinary character means almost inevitably to disrupt consolidated positions of power, and to subvert the established order.[154] In other words, Aristophanic drama is intrinsically anti-legitimist and iconoclastic: far from justifying or legitimating the established cultural, social, and political order, Aristophanes offers an alternative scenario, however fantastic – the revenge of the

οὐ γὰρ πείσεις, οὐδ' ἢν πείσῃς (*Pl.* 600, "you won't persuade me, even if you do persuade me") - is not just the expression of an uproarious irrationalism, but is the representation of the impossibility of matching comic ideology and the sacrifice, hower partial, of pleasures.

[154] Of course, this observation has fuelled a long debate around the deeper nature of Aristophanic comedy. Two different concepts have been expolited to account for the disruptive nature of Aristophanes' drama, utopia (see e.g. Bertelli 1983; Corsini 1987; Tordoff 2007; Canfora 2014) and Carnival (starting from Bakhtin 1979; on Aristophanes, see von Möllendorff 1995; Edwards 2002; Platter 2007). Whereas utopia is certainly a key to the understanding of Aristophanes, we believe that Carnival is not particularly suitable to the interpretation of Old Comedy, which unlike Bachtin's Carnival zeroes in on an absolute individualism (Dell'Aversano 2016).

ordinary individual against oppressive social institutions.

On the contrary, the stance of Jonson's text implies that the true good amounts to a condition of artistic satisfaction: the positive subject is the true poet, whose inspiration exceeds and transcends the rules of any technique, while the negative subject is the poetaster, someone who limits himself to a technical competence but shows no inspiration whatsoever. In other terms, Jonson's comic hero is not an ordinary character as Aristophanic comic heroes – on the contrary, in Jonsonian comedy only extraordinary characters can serve the dramatic function of protagonists, whereas ordinary people must be confined to the role of antagonists. Since, as we have seen, poetic privilege also entails social and political privilege, the praise of essential, ontological, extraordinariness establishes an ideological system opposed to that of Aristophanes – a system that is designed to legitimate the established order, and to make it impenetrable and indisputable. By placing privileged characters on the positive pole of the dramatic dynamics, and showing their privileges as the natural consequence of an essential superiority, Jonson ends up justifying an 'aristocratic' situation, the existing privileges of the happy few, and the order that has produced them. After all, this is the same dynamic that we can observe in Horace, who is strenuous in defending the membership of his privileged circle from the assaults of an outsider.

Meta-performance orients two structurally similar but ideologically opposed kinds of dynamics of assimilation. At the outset of most Aristophanic plays, the comic hero is faced with a situation of dis-integration: he or she is an outcast, and is denied the full membership of a community. Failed assimilation of the *alazones* in the second half of almost each surviving play, then, affects characters who were fully inte-

grated in the previous order, and is a reaction against the hero's former dis-integration. In other terms, the hero's endeavour consists in the complete overturning of the dynamics of assimilation – those who were previously integrated are not integrated anymore, and vice versa. In Jonson, instead, failed assimilation impacts on characters who must not be assimilated, because their own essence excludes them. There is no overturning of an established order – instead, we observe a confirmation thereof.

5

Conclusion. *Vive la science!*

This book aimed at partially reassessing the relationship between Aristophanic and Jonsonian comedy by means of the analysis of a shared formal and comic trait, dramatic meta-performance. Both *corpora* feature prominently scenes that explicitly thematize musical and poetical performance. In both *corpora*, meta-performance is often assigned a dramatic value, that is, it has the function of connoting characters and the relationships among them. Therefore, a comparative reading of the comic strategies adopted by the two authors as regards meta-performance may prove useful to draw some general conclusions about the two *corpora*.

The analysis of Aristophanic and Jonsonian instances of dramatic meta-performance has shown a fundamental ideological divergence between the two *corpora*, and the two genres. Both authors present comic situations in which mockery is based upon the superiority of the mocker on his target. However, this position of superiority rests on different grounds. In the case of Jonson, the mocker's superiority is granted by a poetical superiority (which in turn is indebted to a precise conception of poetry as essence and inspiration). The victim of derision is described as lacking proficiency in poetry and meta-poetry, or better as lacking a fundamental part of poetic creativity. From this point of view, Jonson's characters are comparable to the comic type of the ἄγροικος in Middle and New Comedy (see above, ch. 3). The social and comic dynamics implied by Jonson are exactly the same: the rustic's illiteracy and inadequacy to a superior context generates laughter

– while Crispinus is vomiting his worst words, we laugh *at* the poetaster, *with* the poetic circle of the happy few.

As we have seen, this structure is not comparable to that of Aristophanic laughter. Although some scenes with the rustic accept the typical superiority complex of the cultured character over the ignorant, aggressive mockery is never directed exclusively towards the ignorant. We laugh *at* the ignorant *with* the intellectuals and at the same time we laugh *at* the intellectuals *with* the ignorant. The ignorant is exposed as culturally and socially inadequate, but his/her role as *bōmolochos* allows them to make commonsensical observations able to demystify the intellectuals' abstruse and treacherous meta-performance. See for instance Euripides' meta-performance in *Thesmophoriazusae*: at first, both Critilla and the archer are deceived by Euripides' obvious intellectual and cultural superiority, and we laugh at their ineptitude; however, their staunch sense of reality is what ultimately demystifies Euripides' tricks and prompts the spectators' laughter against Euripides' fraudulent poetry. A similar situation also occurs in *Clouds*, with Strepsiades' exasperated question after Socrates' long lesson on words and genders (*Nu.* 693): ἀτὰρ τί ταῦθ' ἅ πάντες ἴσμεν μάνθανω; ("But why should I be learning these things, that we all know?").

In an anti-elitist environment such as Aristophanic comedy, then, the rustic's ignorance is what makes him/her both ludicrous and able to expose the fraud of high-flown culture. This is a comic stereotype, and a comic dynamic, that we clearly do not observe in Ben Jonson, but does not fade away in European drama after Aristophanes. If we take for instance Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (first staged in 1670), we can easily observe that the lesson given to Monsieur Jourdain follows closely the model of *Clouds*:

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN Apprenez-moi l'orthographe.

MAÎTRE DE PHILOSOPHIE Très volontiers.

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN Après vous m'apprendrez l'almanach, pour savoir quand il y a de la lune, et quand il n'y en a point.

MAÎTRE DE PHILOSOPHIE Soit. Pour bien suivre votre pensée, et traiter cette matière en philosophe, il faut commencer selon l'ordre des choses, par une exacte connaissance de la nature des lettres, et de la différente manière de les prononcer toutes. Et là-dessus j'ai à vous dire, que les lettres sont divisées en voyelles, ainsi dites voyelles, parce qu'elles expriment les voix; et en consonnes, ainsi appelées consonnes, parce qu'elles sonnent avec les voyelles, et ne font que marquer les diverses articulations des voix. Il y a cinq voyelles, ou voix, A, E, I, O, U.

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN J'entends tout cela.

MAÎTRE DE PHILOSOPHIE La voix, A, se forme en ouvrant fort la bouche, A.

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN A, A, Oui.

MAÎTRE DE PHILOSOPHIE La voix, E, se forme en rapprochant la mâchoire d'en bas de celle d'en haut, A, E.

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN A, E, A, E. Ma foi oui. Ah que cela est beau!

MAÎTRE DE PHILOSOPHIE Et la voix, I, en rapprochant encore davantage les mâchoires l'une de l'autre, et écartant les deux coins de la bouche vers les oreilles, A, E, I.

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN A, E, I, I, I, I. Cela est vrai. Vive la science.

MAÎTRE DE PHILOSOPHIE La voix, O, se forme en rouvrant les mâchoires, et rapprochant les lèvres par les deux coins, le haut et le bas, O.

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN O, O. Il n'y a rien de plus juste. A, E, I, O, I, O. Cela est admirable! I, O, I, O.

MAÎTRE DE PHILOSOPHIE L'ouverture de la bouche fait justement comme un petit rond qui représente un O.

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN O, O, O. Vous avez raison, O. Ah la belle chose, que de savoir quelque chose!

MAÎTRE DE PHILOSOPHIE La voix, U, se forme en rapprochant les dents sans les joindre entièrement, et allongeant les deux lèvres en dehors, les approchant aussi l'une de l'autre sans les rejoindre tout à fait, U.

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN U, U. Il n'y a rien de plus véritable, U.

MAÎTRE DE PHILOSOPHIE Vos deux lèvres s'allongent comme si vous faisiez la moue: d'où vient que si vous la voulez faire à quelqu'un, et vous moquer de lui, vous ne sauriez lui dire que U.

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN U, U. Cela est vrai. Ah que n'ai-je étudié plus tôt, pour savoir tout cela.

MAÎTRE DE PHILOSOPHIE Demain, nous verrons les autres lettres, qui sont les consonnes.

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN Est-ce qu'il y a des choses aussi curieuses qu'à celles-ci?

(2.4)

As in *Clouds*, Monsieur Jourdain's naive remarks expose him as an utterly ignorant character. However, his amazement at his master's insignificant though ostentatious lesson ("Vive la science") also shows the useless and fraudulent nature of the philosopher's teaching. Monsieur Jourdain's commonsensical observations impact on the void pretentiousness of the rules of *technē*. As Monsieur Jourdain will famously observe, "il y a plus de quarante ans que je dis de la prose, sans que j'en susse rien" ("I've been making prose for forty years without even knowing it!"). Here again culture is shown as a pompous set of banalities and tautologies, completely detached from concrete reality: things simply exist, without any need for *technai*. Of course, this attitude transforms the dynamics of laughter: we certainly laugh at Monsieur Jour-

dain, but we also laugh with him at the charlatan.

Jonson's scenes with the rustics work in a completely different way, as they invariably presuppose laughter at the rustic, and never laughter with the rustic. No comedy is made about the artistic and cultural superiority of intellectuals. This variation in stance and axiology between Aristophanes and Ben Jonson is curious. As a matter of fact, we have seen that the dramatic impulse in using meta-performance as a formidable means of comedy derives from Aristophanes; however, although receiving this comic feature from Old Comedy, Jonson does not adhere to its deeper ideological stance. This phenomenon might be explained, we argue, by means of Jonson's intertwining of literary genres and codes. We can say that Jonson contaminates his models, and the connected codes, by inserting in the dramatic forms of Old Comedy the stance of satire. As we have seen, Horace's stance towards any outsider is akin to Jonson's. Horace's own life and experience was that of an outsider, and it can be argued that much of his poetry is an attempt to address the problem (Newmann 2011). In particular, Book 1 of *Sermones* serves among others the function of proving Horace's perfect credentials as part of Maecenas' circle (Weeda 2019): in order to do this, Horace needs to establish a bond of solidarity between himself and those who are labelled as 'superior'. Even more broadly, Latin satire's moralising posture necessarily implies a superiority complex towards the social vices and follies that it aims at sanctioning.

Jonson's relations with Latin satire is subject to a contentious debate.[155] Be that as it may, Jonson himself frequently compares his early dramas to ancient satire, especially in re-

[155] For an up-to-date reassessment, see Moul 2010, 94-134 (see 98-106 for Jonson's early plays).

lation to satire's tendency to ridicule individual "humours" and social flaws. This fundamental role is crucial to the understanding of Jonson's reading of Old Comedy, as well. As many commentators have noticed,[156] poetic licence in personal satire is the very area in which Jonson saw a greater continuity with Old Comedy. As Cordatus observes in the "Induction" of *Every Man Out of His Humour* (first staged in 1599 and printed in 1600), "I see not then but we should enjoy the same *licentia* or free power to illustrate and heighten our invention as they [*scil.* the poets of ancient comedy] did, and not be tied to those strict and regular forms which the niceness of a few (who are nothing but form) would thrust upon us" (Jonson 2001, 128, 261-5). In light of this, it seems highly significant that in the "Apologetical Dialogue" added to *Poetaster* Jonson mentions in the same breath Aristophanes and two Latin satiric poets:

> Ha! If all the salt in the old comedy
> Should be so censured, or the sharper wit
> Of the bold satire termèd scolding rage,
> What age could then compare with those for buffons?
> What should be said of Aristophanes?
> Persius? or Juvenal? Whose names we now
> So glorify in schools, at least pretend it.
> Ha' they no other?
> (173-9)

It seems to us that Jonson's understanding of Aristophanes focussed heavily on a quality of his poetry that Early Modern commentators almost invariably tended to overestimate: sat-

[156] See e.g. Herford, Simpson 1925 in Jonson 1925-1952, vol. 1, 376.

ire.[157] In other words, for an Early Modern dramatist it was quite obvious to combine Aristophanic comedy and Latin satire, and to contaminate the respective features (since its first edition, *Poetaster* is explicitly qualified as a "comical satire"). This is, we contend, what happens with Aristophanic meta-performance and its transformation by Ben Jonson. The English author receives a comic feature from Aristophanes, and uses it to dramatise a satire by Horace. In doing so, he adopts both the comic strategy of the former and the ideological stance of the latter.

[157] As is known, the identification between Old Comedy and satire was prompted by a Horace himself, who in *Serm.* 1.4 offers a genealogy of satire that originates in Old Comedy and is then transferred to Rome by Lucilius. On the satirical interpretation of Aristophanes in Early Modern times, see Miola 2014, 486-92.

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Alessandro Grilli is Associate Professor of Classics and Comparative Literature at the University of Pisa. His research interests range from ancient drama (especially Aristophanic comedy) to the classical tradition, and extend to literary theory, applied rhetoric, film, gender and queer studies. His latest book was published in 2021 (*Aristofane e i volti dell'eroe. Per una grammatica dell'eroismo comico*, Pisa, ETS).
Francesco Morosi is a Post-doctoral Fellow at the University of Pisa. He studied at the Scuola Normale Superiore and the University of California – Berkeley. His main research interests are in the field of ancient Greek drama and its reception. He published chiefly about Aristophanic comedy and Aeschylean and Sophoclean tragedy.

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