

IV. Old and New Comedy

Aristophanes' books, divine
production,
over which green Acharnian ivy waves,
how much Dionysus your page holds!
How your tales echo, filled with fearful
graces!
O comic writer, o far best in spirit,
your hate, your laughter, matched the
ways of Hellas.
(—Antipater of Thessalonike, *Anth.*
Pal. 9.186, transl. Reckford 1987, 437)

Athenians enacted discourses on violence in the performative genres of forensic speeches, curse tablets, and drama. Although comedy lacked the consequentiality of the law courts and binding magic—that is, it did not commit mediated violence against an opponent—it nevertheless performed violence on stage and therefore gives us invaluable insight into Athenian perceptions of violence. Comedy also needs to be treated in detail, regardless of the fact that its speech acts are fictional in contrast to those of lawcourt speeches and binding curses.

The staging of a drama in the holy precinct of Dionysus was as sacred as the performance of a ritual of binding magic¹ and as worldly as the performance of a speech in the courtroom or in the Assembly of the People. The ancients already recognized this tension, or rather this interdependence, between the cultic functions of theater and its role as entertainment. The characterization of Attic drama as ‘having nothing to do with Dionysus’ (οὐδὲν πρὸς τὸν Διόνυσον) was already proverbial in late antiquity, though the origin of the proverb is unknown.² Csapo and Miller see Attic drama as situated between two poles: on the one hand

1 Murray 1943, 46 speaks of a *ludus sacer* even with reference to New Comedy.

2 Zen. 5.40 (*Paroem. Gr.* I 137.10; Suda ο 806); cf. Diogenian. 7.18 (289.11). Cf. Pickard-Cambridge 1927, 166–168 on the unclear provenance of the proverb. The Athenians realized that their dramatic performances were quite detached from Dionysiac contents; the profane side of the theater emerged more and more during the late fifth century. Exceptions like Euripides’ *Bacchae* confirm the rule. On the dionysiac or un-dionysiac character of tragedy, cf. Bierl 1991, 4–8.

there is ritual proper with its efficacy—we will come back to the meaning of “efficacy” in this context shortly—on the other hand there is theater “as we know it” with its almost exclusive focus on entertainment. In order to characterize Attic drama appropriately in its peculiar position between these extremes, Csapo and Miller opt for the felicitous expression “ritual-drama,” as created by anthropology.³ Schechner and Turner have stressed time and again this peculiar interconnectedness as being typical of “real-life” Social Dramas and cultural performances (stage dramas).⁴ The relationship of drama to forensic speeches is thus clear. Whereas drama emphasizes the entertainment aspect without giving up the ritual aspect, deliberative speeches are more concerned with ritual efficacy without giving up their position as entertainment.⁵ Following Csapo’s and Miller’s terminology, we could also speak of the speeches as “dramatic rituals.” This is not to deny the fundamental difference between the fictional speech acts as uttered in Athenian tragedies and comedies and those uttered in forensic speeches with their claim to truthfulness, but both forms of expression performed discourses on violence within ritual frames and thus lend themselves to comparison.

In contrast to tragedy, which used heroic myth to comment on societal problems, Old and New Comedy reflected contemporary Athenian life in however distorted a form and dramatized corporeal violence onstage. For this reason, this chapter focuses on the representation of violence on the comic stage and examines how violence is to be seen in the perform-

3 Csapo – Miller 2007b, 4. Balme 1998, 29 rightly remarks that the labeling of a performance as ritual or theater mainly depends on its functions and context.

4 MacDowell 1995, 2 identifies four parts that make up a successful ancient theatrical performance: “tone of voice” (speaking of words), “stage action,” theatrical equipment in the form of costumes and scenery, and music, including the singing and dancing of the chorus. Cf. Gänzle 2000, 41–42 with a concise definition of performance; Turner 1989b, 141–42. Turner 1984, 25 talks about the convergence of Social and aesthetic drama. The evolution of Social Dramas is contained in aesthetic dramas; conversely, the rhetoric of Social Dramas is taken from cultural dramas. Cf. also Schechner 1977, 75–77. On the notion of the Social Drama, cf. above 14, n. 70.

5 The fundamental similarities between speeches and drama have frequently been pointed out. Cf., e.g., above 22, n. 2 and 31, n. 49. Harris – Leão – Rhodes 2010 emphasize the interconnectedness of law courts and drama. As Harris points out in his introductory chapter, the Athenian citizens had ample experience in both; the law courts and theater influenced each other. Burckhardt 1924 has already emphasized the close connection between comedy and the genre of *dēmēgoria* regarding vocabulary, style, and thoughts.

ative context of comedy. Having explored in the previous chapters how rituals restrained violence and ascribed sense to it, thus making it comprehensible in forensic speeches and binding magic, I will further analyze, in this section, the functions that violence fulfilled in comedy, and how and what kind of meaning violence assumed through the ritual context of performance. The comedies of Aristophanes and Menander have often been compared on general levels, beginning in antiquity, but have not yet been examined in terms of their representations of violence.⁶ This chapter seeks to overcome the narrow concentration on the rape motif, especially in the case of New Comedy,⁷ and to interpret all major forms of violence in Old and New Comedy. I intend to explore whether or not violence on the comic stage follows the discursive rules as established in chapter II. This undertaking entails the phenomenological interpretation of anti-structural elements, as they are typical of the liminal phase of a ritual process, in this case slapstick scenes, rape, and violence as perpetrated in the context of *kômoi* (festive processions). Anger and *hubris* need to be considered first, for they often precede and accompany acts of violence in real life and comic fiction. In the case of Aristophanes, *Wasps*, *Birds*, and *Clouds* showcase violence more intensively than any of his other comedies. These three plays will thus serve as case studies.

All eleven Aristophanic comedies, Menander's completely preserved *Dyscolus* (316 BCE), his *Samia* (314 BCE?), and the following larger fragments dealing with violence will be subjected to scrutiny: *Epitrepontes*, *Periceiomene*, *Misoumenos*, *Perinthia*, *Georgos*, *Heros*, *Colax*, and *Phasma*. The numerous fragments of the later Old, Middle, and early New Comedy will also be considered, but to a minor extent, owing to the lack of context. In the restricted frame of this chapter, it is not possible to address every instance of violence in these plays; rather, a more overarching and broad survey will set up Old Comedy as a foil against which to analyze New Comedy, and so to demonstrate the profound change in the dramatic treatment of violence that occurred between Aristophanes and Menander.

6 Cf. above 111–113 on the representation of violence.

7 But cf. also Sommerstein 1998a, 105–109 with a list of all rape scenes in Aristophanes.

Ritual Framing

When speaking of theater as a ritual, scholars hold widely different concepts, which we have to address briefly, one by one, before tackling the topic of violence on the Athenian comic stage. Unlike in the case of forensic speeches, comedy might have some of its roots in ritual origins, harking back to primordial times with animal-like heroes who disguised themselves with masks and made it their practice to insult people, especially high-ranking individuals (*aischrologia*).⁸ This question of ritual origins has only tangential bearing on the topic of this book. Nevertheless, it needs to be briefly addressed in any chapter dealing with theater and ritual (ritual origins). The second big issue is the interpretation of theatrical performance, as a whole, as ritual. Through the embeddedness of the performance in religious rites, the hypothesis that theater works like a large-scale ritual (i.e., theater production as ritual process) is relatively easy to show. The question of what kind of efficacy (i.e., ritual efficacy) this specific ritual might have had needs to be addressed separately. The assumption that certain plot motifs could be ritualistic, as hypothesized by the adherents of ritual poetics, a new trend in Classics, is plausible, but need not concern us in the context of this book, because it does not contribute to the overall understanding of violence on the comic stage.

Ritual Origins

The relationship between Greek drama and ritual is highly complex and hotly debated. Although the following interpretation of violence performed on the comic stage will be concerned with the ritual functions

8 In Aristophanes, the most famous example is the attacks on Cleon in *Knights*, directed against Paphlagon in the play: Ar. *Eq.* 247–254 (chorus with exhortation to use violence), 304–312 (chorus), and 285–302, 367–374, 691–725, and 902–940, where the Sausage Seller and Paphlagon heap insults on each other with extremely violent language. The debate whether or not this abusive language is derived from the iambographic tradition cannot be reiterated here. Suffice it to say that Bowie 2002 is skeptical about this link (abuse took place in many different contexts, public and private), whereas Degani 1993; 1987 and Rosen 1988 see a clear affinity between comedy's invective and that of the iambographic tradition, a connection that the audience, too, must have acknowledged. Zanetto 2001 is more careful and takes up a position between that of Bowie and Degani/Rosen.

of comedy as a whole on a synchronic level, a brief overview of ritual studies as far as they pertain to the origins of Greek drama may be appropriate here to contextualize the ensuing outline of other ritual layers contained in comedy. The historic origins of tragedy and comedy are shrouded in darkness and have given rise to many theories and speculations.⁹ The point of departure for any investigation are Corinthian and Attic vase paintings depicting Dionysiac scenes with maenads, satyrs, and the so-called padded dancers,¹⁰ and, especially, Aristotle's vague statements in his *Poetics*. Although Aristotle traces the origins of tragedy to dithyrambs, and comedy to phallic songs¹¹—both ritual cult events in the honor of Dionysus—many questions remain unanswered. How must we envision the transition from cult action to full-fledged drama with a sophisticated fictional plot?¹² The picture is even more complicated because Aristotle offers competing theories on the origins of theater. In his time already, Greeks did not remember them any longer, so various regions and cities claimed to have invented tragedy and comedy. The Dorians of the Peloponnese derived the word “comedy” not from the Athenian *kômos*, *kômazein* (reveling in Dionysiac processions), but from the word *kômai* (villages). Hence, “comic” actors got their name from wandering through villages. In addition, the Dorians pointed to dialectal differences. The Dorian word for acting is *drân*, whereas the Athenians used *prattein*. Hence, according to the Dorians, the word “drama” must have evolved from the Doric form. Megarians claimed that drama developed

9 Stark 2004, 46–65 gives an overview of German theories on the emergence of Greek comedy.

10 Stark 2004, 66–88, 97–102; 1995 *passim* interprets the padded dancers as beggars and sees comedy as derived from the derision of these beggars during symposia. Her denial that comedy might have had any Dionysiac origins (esp. 2004, 29–30) is untenable (cf. Bierl 2011a). More careful on the unknown identity of the padded dancers is Breitholtz 1960, 127–81. Cf. now, on a broad archaeological basis, the contributions to Csapo – Miller 2007a, esp. Smith 2007; Green 2007; Hedreen 2007.

11 Arist. *Po.* 1449a5–12.

12 Brask – Morgan 1988 have suggested an explanation for the quantum leap from primitive ritual to sophisticated theater from an anthropological perspective. It would be no coincidence that theater emerged simultaneously with the birth of democracy (i.e., a refined state society). Theater would have evolved out of prior communal rituals and conveyed to the public a canon of values from the state's perspective. Thus, theater served as a means of social control and thought-conditioning, with the goal of maintaining the social order. As intriguing as this theory might seem, it cannot be overlooked that Old Comedy does not communicate consistent patterns of sense.

during their democracy, whereas Sicilians built their claim on the early poet Epicharmus.¹³

The first systematic investigation into the ritual origins of drama was done by a group of British researchers, later called the “Cambridge ritualists.” Based on Sir James Frazer’s monumental book *The Golden Bough*, the team around Jane Harrison, Gilbert Murray, and others made extensive use of cross-cultural material to explore in greater depth than ever before the complex relationship between myth and ritual.¹⁴ Within this context, the study of Greek drama, too, and above all the vexed question of its ritual origins, was of paramount interest to these classicists.¹⁵ The results of the enormous amount of research conducted by the ritualists at the beginning of the twentieth century were well received by the general public, but regarded with suspicion by many of their colleagues in Classical Studies. Connecting and even embedding Greek culture in “primitive” and tribal rituals of other, often non-European peoples, dethroned the Greeks from the unique, lofty position they had held in contemporary idealism. Criticism was sharp. As early as 1927, Pickard-Cambridge formulated the most negative response to the group’s theories in his magisterial *Diithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy*. The Greeks, he claimed, have to be understood in Greek terms, within their own culture; their achievements cannot be explained by gleaning evidence from other cultures. The debate subsided during World War II, but from the 1960s on there has been a renewed interest in the relationship between Attic drama and rituals. After the traumatic experiences of two World Wars, the Vietnam War, and racism shattering the United States, an ever more painfully felt alienation of the individual from the collectivity led many people, and especially academics (mainly anthropologists, sociologists, and dramatists), to search for new communal experiences and their appropriate forms of expression. A growing awareness

13 Arist. *Po.* 1448a25–1448b3. On these origins in detail, cf. Storey 2010, 179–184. Csapo – Miller 2007a have brought the historical dimension of comedy’s ritual origins to the forefront again. Kerkhof 2001 confirms Aristotle’s report that Epicharmus did in fact exert decisive influence on Attic comedy.

14 Versnel 1993, 20–48 provides an excellent overview of the Cambridge school, including the criticism they received. Ackermann 1991 gives an intellectual history of the main players of the group. Calder III 1991 offers a good introduction to the works of the Cambridge group in his edited volume. Arlen 1990 provides a useful bibliographical overview of the work of Harrison, Murray, Cornford, and Cook.

15 Most eminently Cornford ²1961.

of an exaggerated rationality stemming from the growing degree of industrialization and technocracy in the Western world added to this phenomenon. Whether or not these intellectuals found satisfaction for these yearnings in the environmentalist movement or New Age groups, what all these endeavors had in common was the underlying quest for a new romanticism and a happier life more in tune with one's instincts, communal feelings, and corporeality. From the distance of more than a generation after the upheavals of the late 1960s, the so-called '68-movement, with all its exaggerations and unfulfilled claims, its successes and failures, can be assessed more rationally, and its approaches compared and even combined with intellectual movements from previous periods. Some assumptions of the Cambridge ritualists seem outdated today—not everything can be traced back to rituals—but many tenets have remained valid, most of all that we are still far from fully understanding the ritual implications of Greek drama.¹⁶ Although the Cambridge ritualists' alleged Euro- and Hellenocentrism are incompatible with the theoretical demands of post-colonial studies for a more just world order, and although the old ritualists' narrowing of the gap between Greek and other ancient cultures does not seem narrow enough today,¹⁷ the time has come for a more unbiased re-evaluation of the British scholars' endeavors. Since ancient literature is steeped in ritual and mythical patterns, scholars adhering to "New Ritualism" find these very patterns the appropriate heuristic tools for coming to a deeper understanding of literary works that were originally designed for performance on the occasion of religious festivals in semi-oral societies.¹⁸ New Ritualism has turned its at-

16 Schechner 1988, 1–5, 15 rejects the Cambridge ritualists' basic theses outright and argues that drama has less to do with rituals than with performance. Therefore, he maintains, the origins of drama cannot be derived from rituals. Nevertheless, Schechner did not tire of pointing out, time and again, the inseparable relationship between performance and ritual on a synchronic level. Both belong to the binary system consisting of efficacy (ritual) and entertainment (theater). He calls the continuum of this system "performance." Since ritual has the inherent tendency to become theater, and theater has the inherent tendency to become ritual, theater can be understood as the interconnection of efficacy and entertainment. Cf. Schechner 1990, 96, 102; 1977, 68, 76–90 with his description of the relationship between efficacy and entertainment as a "braid": "wherever we look, and no matter how far back, theatre is a mixture, a braid of entertainment and ritual" (93). Köpping 2003 gives a concise overview of the current *communis opinio* on the relationship between ritual and theater.

17 On the history of the scholarship, cf. Csapo – Miller 2007b, 1–8.

18 Bierl 2007a, 5, 51–53.

tention away from the unanswerable questions of the origins of theater,¹⁹ and has instead sought to reveal ritual structures within tragedy and comedy on a synchronic level. In the foreground now are questions as to what extent, how, and to what purpose the playwrights incorporated and transformed mythical and ritual material into tragedies and comedies. The variety of approaches is dazzling: whole ritual sequences can underlie plays, and rituals or parts of rituals can be staged and distorted, parodied, or only alluded to.²⁰ Whereas scholars working on these phenomena speak of the ritualization on the micro-level (i.e., internal structure) of the plays,²¹ I will not be concerned with the inherent ritual structure of comedy, but will rather regard theater performance, as a whole, as a ritual, and probe into the question of what this means for the violence discourse.

The fruits of this new surge in ritual studies have been so great that some scholars today discern a new sub-field in Classical Studies: ritual poetics.²² Most recently, even the vexed question of the ritual origins of Greek drama has been revived,²³ not without incurring the fierce resist-

19 Cf., e.g., Krummen 1998, 325, who argues that the analysis of ritual actions in tragedy is to be separated from the question of origins.

20 On ritual and mythical patterns in comedy, cf., e.g., Scholten 2006; Kotini 2005; Goff 2004, esp. 359–370; Sfyroeras 2004; 1992; Bierl 2002b; 2001; 1994; Lada-Richards 1999; Riu 1999; Nesselrath 1995; Bowie 1993; Marianetti 1993; Aronen 1992; Versnel 1993; 1992; Henderson 1991; R. Hoffman 1989; Craik 1987; Martin 1987; Paradiso 1987; Reckford 1987; Zannini Quirini 1987; Auger 1979; Hofmann 1976. Paradigmatic, but with all generalizations typical of the Cambridge ritualists, is Murray 1943, who claims that the old Dionysiac fertility cult remains alive in Menander in the form of the weddings (*gamoí*) celebrated at the ends of the plays.

21 Bierl 2009a, 14, 254–261, 337 speaks of the whole synesthetic event comprising rhythmic movements, rhythmic-metric texts characterized by metaphors, metonymies, alliterations, and metaphors that render the text poetic and ritualistic (I refer to the English translation of Bierl's German original from 2001). Cf. Gänszle 2000, 37–39 and above 182–188 on the ritualized language (micro-structure) as used in curse tablets and orations.

22 Explicitly Bierl 2007a, 51–53; Bierl – Lämmle – Wesselmann 2007 *passim*; Yatromanolakis – Roilos 2003 and 2004.

23 Csapo – Miller 2007a; indirectly, Rothwell 2007, who argues that animal choruses originally stemmed from the context of aristocratic, symposiastic *kômoi*, but soon adopted civilizing functions. A good point of departure for the study of the archaeological evidence for animal choruses is still Sifakis 1971, 73–93. Stark 2004 describes in detail the development of the political comedy of types as practiced in Athens as the exception to the more common social comedy of types, as typical elsewhere in the Greek world. Graf 1998b gives a succinct overview of the research on the origins of theater, including a discussion of the relevant lit-

ance of scholars who attempt to refute altogether the ritualistic approach to clarifying the origins of theater.²⁴ The debate is ongoing and livelier than ever.

Theater Production as Ritual Process

Within the Dionysiac festivals of the Lenaea and the Great Dionysia, the theater performance as a whole can indeed be understood as a civic ritual.²⁵ The demarcation of a certain space and time was key in defining a certain action as ritual. This holds true for meetings of the Assembly, the Council, and the law courts, for the deposition of a curse tablet, as well as for the performance of a stage drama. The festive context of the Lenaea and the City Dionysia, during which and only during which comedies were performed, does not have to be rehearsed here.²⁶

Rites of separation insulated the spectators from their daily lives in terms of space and time. The theater of Dionysus on the south slope of the Acropolis is surrounded by sanctuaries on the north and south.²⁷ This sacral-topographical embeddedness meant for the Athenians that,

erary sources. He parallels drama and ritual in a way similar to that of Schechner. Now, from an even broader perspective, cf. Graf 2007a. In his magisterial study, Adrados 1975 dared to raise the question of origins again, and has tried to give a universal answer encompassing the origins of tragedy, comedy, and satyr play as all stemming from agricultural rites. Following Pickard-Cambridge, Adrados does not believe in the usefulness of cross-cultural material to illuminate the Greek case. It is only after establishing his theories that he is willing to put his findings into the larger context of ritual and theater outside of Greece (369–450).

24 Stark 2004, 97–102; Rozik 2002; Friedrich 1983.

25 Riu 1999; Goldhill 1990.

26 Cf. the extensive coverage of the Athenian festivals by, e.g., Bierl 2011b, 37–57; Parker 2005, 155–384; von Möllendorff 2002, 49–53; Pickard-Cambridge ³1988, 25–42, 57–101; Parke 1977, 104–106, 125–135; Deubner ³1969, 124–131, 139–142. Goldhill 1990 points out in detail three civic rituals that were also part of the Great Dionysia: the allies' tributes were brought onto the stage for display, the honors for those who had benefited the city were read aloud, and the young adult orphans, whose fathers had died in war and whom the state had brought up at its own expense, marched into the *orchestra* clad in full hoplite armor. This expression of civic ideology and hegemonic power could not have been more ritualized.

27 Nielsen 2002 scrutinizes all known sanctuaries that comprised theaters, which she rightly calls “cultic theatres,” where ritual dramas were also performed. On the theater of Dionysus as cultic theater, cf. Nielsen 2002, 112–120.

coming from the Agora and flocking into the theater, they left behind the profane area of their routine business and entered a sacred space—at least during the festivals—in which a spectacle in honor of Dionysus would take place. The staging of the plays was partly understood as cult action, and participation in them as a kind of religious service to the god Dionysus, thought present in the form of a cult statue, which may have been put up in the holy precinct south of the *orchêstra*, if not in the theater itself.²⁸ In addition, special seats were reserved for the priests of Dionysus in the *prohedria*, that is, in the front row of the *koilon*, especially for the priest of Dionysus Eleuthereus in the center of the front row.²⁹ Perhaps it is not inappropriate to speak paradoxically of a secularized service. The performances took place on the occasion of the aforementioned festivals, which were marked off from daily life. The sacrifice of bulls before the beginning of the dithyrambs on the first day of the Dionysia separated, in a way visible to all, the festive realm of the theater from the secular world of daily life in terms of space and time. Even before this large-scale ritual slaughter, a *peristiarch* may have purified the theater by sacrificing a piglet and carrying it around, thus drawing a ritual frame around the holy and, through the ritual act, sacralized precinct.³⁰ In the ensuing liminal phase, during the performance of the plays, the Athenians became witnesses of extraordinary spectacles. Detached from their ordinary lives, the spectators felt like parts of a larger whole, a cultural *communitas*. The plays themselves surrounded spectators with anti-structural and ludic elements, the so-called Other World (Ital. *il mondo alla rovescia*), in which daily life configurations were no longer valid, or were even turned upside down. In the realm of fiction, alternative actions were tried out, social values were problematized, anti-worlds constructed and discussed, a comic hero's rise and downfall depicted.³¹ Thus, the limi-

28 Pickard-Cambridge ³1988, 60, 67 (with discussion of the sources).

29 Ar. R. 297; Pickard Cambridge ³1988, 268; 1946, 141–143.

30 Moulinier 1952, 101 (with discussion of the sources). On the same practice before meetings of the Ekklesia, cf. Bers 1994, 176 and above 23–24, nn. 3–9. Cole 2004, 48 stresses the sociological function of this circumambulatory ritual. It created order and drew a visual boundary indicating who belonged to the in-group and who did not. Wiles 2000, 43 combines the idea of ritual purification with the catharsis that was to be achieved in attending the performance of a dramatic spectacle. Schechner 1977, 110–11, 119 has a sharp eye for the religious edifices, altars, purification rituals, and sacrifices that converted a secular and profane area into a sacral space.

31 Cf. Turner 1988, 24, 76, 82, 92–94; 1984, 25–26, 40. Cf. on this aspect especially Zimmermann ²2006, 34 and Kenner 1970, 97–98 on the topsy-turvy world as en-

nal phase created by the performances enabled reflection on the highest level possible. Theater was a medium of reflection and, hence, also reflection about violence. From a methodological point of view, however, it must be noted that, in comedy, we primarily grasp aesthetically motivated mechanisms. Because of their fictional character, comedies can be read as historical documents only with great care and a considerable caveat; we will have to come back to the partly anti-mimetic and non-referential character of comedy. Nevertheless, the comedies of Aristophanes, with their strong elements of theatrical self-awareness, today called metatheatricality,³² and their references to the *polis*, however indirect, and those of Menander, with their explicit references to Athenian daily life, are closer to “reality” than tragedy, which, as a mimetic art form with a much more closed fictional world to display, is firmly anchored in Greek heroic

visioned in *Frogs*. In the topsy-turvy world of the theater, enabled by Dionysiac license, escapist fantasies and utopias could be tried out. On utopias in Aristophanes, cf. Farioli 2001; Zeitlin 1999; Versnel 1998b; Dobrov 1997; Hubbard 1997; Konstan 1997; 1995, 15–90; Rösler – Zimmermann 1991; Corsini 1987; Bertelli 1983; Heberlein 1980, 117–82; Zimmermann 1983 (repr. 1991), with a poignant critique of Schwinge 1977. Cf. also Cartledge 1990, 54–62 on e(u)topias and outopias, and Auger 1979 with regard to utopia and female figures in Aristophanes. On the highly sophisticated discourse on utopias also in other playwrights of Old Comedy, cf. Ruffell 2000. Important Athenian festivals staging the “otherworldliness” were the Anthesteria, Kronia, Haloa, Thesmophoria, and Skira (cf. Bierl 2004, 6). Cf. Versnel 1993, 90–135 on the Kronia, 229–288 on the Thesmophoria and the Roman festival for Bona Dea (extended version of Versnel 1992; cf. also Versnel 2006, 322 speaking of the Thesmophoria as a “ritual of exception and of role reversal”), and 136–227 on the Roman Saturnalia. On the Thesmophoria as ritual background for the chorus in Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae*, cf. Bierl 2009a, esp. 249–254. By taking *Thesmophoriazusae* as a case study, Tzanetou 2002 explicates that Athenians were more aware of the close affinity between ritual and theatrical performance than we are.

- 32 Good points of departure for metatheatricality in Aristophanes are still Muecke 1977 and Dover 1972, 55–59. Chapman 1983 describes the means by which Aristophanes frequently ruptures the dramatic illusion of his plays. N. Slater 2002, 236–239 emphasizes the pre-eminent role that metatheatricality plays in teaching the Athenian *dēmos* the staginess in all areas of life, especially politics. On the reciprocal communication between Aristophanes and his audience, cf. N. Slater 1999. For the purpose of this study, Slater’s consideration is valuable in so far as we can postulate that the same metatheatrical features also help the spectators to penetrate the intricacies of violence. Cf. Bierl 2009a, 220–223; 1991, 172–176 on the metatheatrical Dionysus in Aristophanes’ parody of Euripides’ *Helena* in *Thesmophoriazusae*; cf. Gutzwiller 2000 for Menander.

myth.³³ Just as in the dicastic courts and in the Assembly, the central role of the *dêmos* is also recognizable in theater: it watched its own hopes and anxieties, joys and worries, re-created and transformed onstage in invented plots. The comedies are thus indispensable sources for a comprehensive study of cultural phenomena, mentalities, and discourses, not least those about violence.

If we accept the basic premise that the performance of Attic drama as a whole operated like a ritual, we can deduce that it also fulfilled many of the functions of a ritual, especially that of opening up room for reflection within its liminal sphere. The violence discourse is embedded within the ritual macro-structure of the theatrical performance. Thus, the spectators, by watching a play and its performed discourses, simultaneously participated in the overarching civic ritual of the Lenaea and Great Dionysia. With the non-fictive theater performance as a whole encompassing the fictive stage action, symbolic meaning was ascribed to all actions onstage, including scenes of violence.³⁴ As a result, the condensed situation of social communication onstage was charged with a high amount of expressiveness.³⁵

Many of the citizens attending theatrical performances served as judges in court. Through the appellative character of theater, they were indirectly called upon to adjudicate the fictive happenings on stage and decipher the symbolic meaning of violence and conflict that the theatrical performance negotiated on a kind of meta-level,³⁶ not unlike the “real” occurrences that were negotiated in court. In both courtroom speeches

33 Cf. above 3, n. 14.

34 Turner 1989b, 174 speaks about ritual as the orchestralization of symbolic actions.

35 Cf. Köpping – Rao 2000, 7 summarizing Turner and Geertz.

36 Dramas were performed in the context of a theatrical contest. As with every competition, judges were required. For the dramatic *agônes* the procedure worked as follows: several men represented each of the ten tribes (how this first selection process worked is unknown); their names were put in ten urns; before the first performance, the archon drew one name out of each urn so that ten men represented each of the ten tribes; these ten men drawn by lot were called to judge the quality of the plays, and each inscribed his decision on a tablet, which was again placed in an urn; the archon then randomly picked out five tablets, on the basis of which the victor was determined and the awards granted (cf. Pickard-Cambridge 1953, 96–100 on the complex procedure). In voting, the judges certainly also took into consideration the reaction of the audience to the various plays. As a consequence, the playwrights’ work had to appeal to the whole *dêmos*.

and drama, the reception was guided by rhetoric and the orator's, logographer's, or playwright's intentions underlying the more or less fictional plot. As modern readers of the texts, we are equally called upon to make sense of the scenes of violence. We are at a crucial disadvantage, however, in so far as we no longer have access to the Athenian repertoire of cultural images and meanings, and the performance context is lost to us. I think that the discursive line, as established in chapter II of this book, can be applied as a heuristic tool to explain the violent *drômena* and *legomena* as performed on the comic stage. Exit rites must have signaled to the audience when the play was over so that they could reintegrate into society (re-aggregation).

Ritual Efficacy

If we follow the thesis that the staging of a comedy was similar to a ritual process, and if we take comedy seriously in its embeddedness in the contemporary world, not least because of its metatheatrical elements reaching out into the "real" world of the spectators, we cannot rule out that some dramas could also fulfill the function of a catalyst for pointing out social, political, and ideological conflicts, for mediating between divergent opinions, and reducing or mitigating tensions by bringing about a playful release of pent-up feelings and emotions without,³⁷ however, being able to suggest a viable and permanent solution. From this perspective, theatrical space could adopt the function of trying out a ludic and temporary cure for social upheavals. *Acharnians* or *Lysistrata*, for example, can be understood against the background of a specific historical situation, an encumbered Athens that may indeed have perceived the burden of a protracted war as a crisis threatening to disrupt Athenian society. In this scenario, Aristophanes would have tried to address this societal

37 Cf. Bierl 2004, 19; 2002b, 19; Reckford 1987, 279. Turner 1976, 118 is optimistic about the potential power of cathartic effects "causing in some cases real transformations of character and social relationships." Sutton 1994 sees comedy, as a whole, as functioning like catharsis. Laughter purges spectators of bad feelings, which is not only beneficial for them but also for society at large. Sutton 1980, 69–82 sees the comic catharsis as brought about by the mocking of authorities. MacDowell 1988, 8 briefly discusses catharsis as brought about by slapstick violence. Skeptical of the cathartic impulse is von Möllendorff 1995, 21–22.

conflict onstage with his comic ritual drama.³⁸ This would be an idealistic view of the power of theater, however. Can the staging of a drama really have an impact by reaching out into the world to affect human beings and generate change?³⁹ As far as ancient drama is concerned, the evidence is scant and ambivalent, but worth considering for two reasons. First, aesthetics and politics were interwoven in a way that is unimaginable for us. Second, theater worked like a ritual and rituals always show a certain degree of efficacy. It is exactly this efficacy of ritual, or the lack thereof, that is at stake here. Three examples demonstrating the very indirect or even non-existent relationship between comedy and reality shall suffice in this context.

However fictional, anti-mimetic, and non-referential Old Comedy was, Aristophanes must have produced *Knights* with Cleon in mind, if only to welcome him to his new office by heaping insults on him.⁴⁰ In

38 This does not mean that Aristophanes directly voices in his *Acharnians* a plea to end the war. As Carey 1993 has convincingly shown, things are more complicated, with comedy only articulating one strand of opinions among the Athenian people. On the ritual effect that *Lysistrata* might have had, cf. Bierl 2007b.

39 E.g., Heath 1987 *passim* denies outright that Aristophanic comedy has political intentions: "Politics was the material of comedy, but comedy did not in turn aspire to be a political force" (42). On the vexed question of the relationship between comedy and politics, cf. below 257, n. 75.

40 As suggested by Riu 1999, 235–239. On Cleon's alleged reaction, as addressed in Ar. *Ach.* 377–382 and 502–505, cf. also fr. 24 in Henderson's Loeb edition of *Acharnians*. To Wiles 2000, 33, the freedom to insult and slander individuals was central to classical comedy and epitomized the *parrhêsia* of Athenian democracy. In a similar vein, Henderson 1998a regards *parrhêsia* and *isêgoria*, as exercised in oratory and comedy, as the cornerstones of politically engaged art forms. Sommerstein 2004b; 2002, however, clearly denotes the boundaries of free speech. According to him, comedy was not above the law. Therefore, Pericles and Cleon could try to silence the poets; it was only popular opinion and the cultural understanding of comedy that protected comedy *de facto*. Sommerstein 2004b, 167–172 lists all ancient sources on the alleged prosecutions Aristophanes had to face. To Sommerstein 1986, the decree of Syracosius (in force between 415 and 411 BCE) is historical. It might have prohibited the *onomasti kômôdein* of persons condemned of impiety in the wake of the mutilation of the herms and the celebration of mock mysteries. In stark contrast to Sommerstein, Halliwell 2008, 244, 259–262; 2004, 139–140; 1991b *passim* claims that Old Comedy's satirizing was exempt from the law of slander. This was only possible because the exuberant kind of comic *aischrologia* was confined by the strictly defined boundaries of ritual license within the context of the Dionysiac festivals. By a similar token, Wallace 2005, 361–363, 365–368 could convincingly show

this case, the efficacy of ritual amounted to nothing. Shortly after the performance, the Athenian *dêmos*, roughly the same people who watched the play, elected Cleon *stratêgos*.⁴¹ Cleon sued Aristophanes before the Council in the wake of his staging *Babylonians* (426 BCE), but there is no indication that this lawsuit had any effect on Aristophanes' further career.

In the *Apology*, Plato's fictive Socrates alludes to Aristophanes' *Clouds* as one reason for his standing trial.⁴² This passage, however, is complex and hardly proves the efficacy of Attic comedy in the sense of having an impact on daily life. Socrates rather refers to those people who spread rumors about him, not people who spoke up against him in public. It is very doubtful that a comedy staged twenty-four years prior to the trial of Socrates would have had any bearing on the prosecution of the philosopher.⁴³ In addition, Plato's *Symposium* features Socrates and Aristophanes as interlocutors of equal standing in a friendly and highly intellectual conversation. At least the mature Plato does not seem to have borne any grudge against Aristophanes.

The year 405 saw the staging of *Frogs*. Aristophanes' success was overwhelming and he received the unprecedented honor of having his play restaged a second time. In this case, we seem to grasp a concrete outcome: what the chorus had demanded (the restoration of citizenship rights to those who had lost them in the wake of the oligarchic coup d'état of 411)⁴⁴ came true with the decree of Patrocleides. These hints that the thrust of a dramatic performance could at times reach out into

that the freedom of comedy was only curtailed under special circumstances, and then only very briefly.

41 Cf. Ar. *Nu.* 587–594. Carey 1994, 75 discusses the ambivalent efficacy of comedy. In comedy and the Ekklēsia, different attitudes of the *dêmos* found expression. According to Carey 1994, 80–82 people could only choose between two options in the Assembly of the People. The art form of comedy, however, allowed for a more subtle and multi-layered articulation of political sentiments. This is exactly the function of a large-scale social ritual. Cf. Stark 2004, 218–316.

42 Pl. *Ap.* 18c: ὁ δὲ πάντων ἀλογώτατον, ὅτι οὐδὲ τὰ ὀνόματα οἷόν τε αὐτῶν εἰδέναι καὶ εἰπεῖν, πλὴν εἴ τις κωμωδιοποιὸς τυγχάνει ὧν, 'But the most unreasonable thing of all is this, that it is not even possible to know and speak their names, except when one of them happens to be a writer of comedies.' And Pl. *Ap.* 19c: ταῦτα γὰρ ἑώρατε καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀριστοφάνους κωμῳδίᾳ, 'For you yourselves saw these things in Aristophanes' comedy.'

43 Whereas Halliwell 2008, 254–255 is very pessimistic about a connection between the performance of *Clouds* and Socrates' trial, Sommerstein 2007a, 3 is optimistic about the link.

44 Ar. *Ra.* 686–705. Cf. And. 1.73–79; Sommerstein 1996, 21.

the spectators' world notwithstanding,⁴⁵ we cannot claim that comedy alone was to be credited for bringing about this political decision. Many other factors, including discussions in the Assembly of the People, must have played a role as well, if not the decisive role.

Considering these tenuous ties between stage drama and reality, we cannot naively postulate a direct route between comedy and reality. Hence, comedy's efficacy is to be sought elsewhere. Athenian drama has to be acknowledged in its artistic, aesthetic, and open structure, but it is neither political satire nor *l'art pour l'art* taking place in a social vacuum without any pragmatic rooting in contemporary life. Athenians ascribed too much importance to theater to regard it solely as literature.⁴⁶ After all, they decided to subsidize theater attendance with the *theôrika*.⁴⁷ The fictional world on the comic stage was indeed connected to the "real" world of the audience via the manifold metatheatrical elements to be

45 For the theater anthropologist Schechner (cf. 1985, 18–21; Schechner – Appel 1990, 4–7), the power of theater to affect spectators on an emotional and cognitive level is a given because of the characteristics of a good performance: the "transformation of being or consciousness"; the "intensity of performance"; the inevitable "audience-performer interaction"; the whole "performance sequence," including rehearsal, actual performance, cool-down, and aftermath (Aristophanes frequently mentions the cooling-off phase during the revels and dinners following the performance); the "transmission of performance knowledge," an aspect that N. Slater 2002, 236–239 rightly puts into relief; and the stirring of an interest in "how performances are generated and evaluated." The last aspect is especially fascinating in the case of Athenian drama. The prizes awarded were enshrined in stone, the so-called victors' lists. In the dicastic courts, the winner who swayed the jury was the party who provided the best, most plausible, and authentic performance.

46 Wiles's sharp criticism (Wiles 1987) of Goldhill's *Reading Greek Tragedy* (1986) is revealing in this respect. To regard Athenian drama primarily as literature in the style of New Criticism is reductionist and does not do justice to its performative character (cf., however, Goldhill's response [1989]). Ritual theory, by contrast, is integrative and combines all dimensions of theater, the whole context, the performance sequence, the actors and the audience, and also, self-evidently, the text. In this sense, ritual theory can help bridge the gap between pragmatists and theater researchers like Wiles, on the one hand, and discourse analysts like Goldhill, on the other.

47 Pickard-Cambridge 1953, 270–273. Roselli 2009 illuminates the character of these subsidies in the fifth and fourth centuries. Although only formally introduced as state funds by Eubulus, precursors of the *theôrika* were distributed occasionally to spectators already in the fifth century, probably on Pericles' suggestion.

found mainly in Old but also in New Comedy.⁴⁸ Rituals, especially in the form of the chorus in its function as “shifter” between the fictional “there-and-then” onstage and the “here-and-now” of the theatrical performance not only guaranteed communication between the fictional world of the characters onstage and the extra-fictional, pragmatic world of the spectators (and actors),⁴⁹ but also kept the theatrical staging as such always transparent. The high level of metatheatricity is a characteristic feature of the *Archaia* and thus an integral part of Greek comedy. This deliberation brings us closer to the assumption that the performance of a comedy as a whole worked like a large-scale ritual, fulfilling ritual functions. Unlike forensic speeches and the deposition of curse tablets, the staging and viewing of a comedy did not really “do” something in a tangible sense. Rather, the generically open structure of comedy provided a space detached from the constraints of daily life where meanings could be freely reflected upon and negotiated; it provided a ludic space in which the downfall of the comic hero was depicted and, with it, the instability of all norms and values was laid bare. The “target” of derision constantly shifts and includes everyone, even the playwright. This space for reflection and negotiation was so dear to the Athenians that they made theater-going a citizen’s duty. Herein must lie comedy’s efficacy, beyond fostering a sense of belonging among the audience.⁵⁰

The Discursive Rules of Violence

Aristophanes

One of the biggest differences between the tragic and the comic stage is that tragedy avoided, in most cases, the open display of acts of violence onstage,⁵¹ whereas comedy needs violence onstage to be funny.⁵² An in-

48 Cf. above 245, n. 32.

49 E.g., Bierl, 2007a, 21; 2001 *passim*. Sifakis 1971, 23–2 already saw this double existence of the chorus between the worlds.

50 Unless we are willing to follow Schechner and assume that rituals may affect emotions and the intellect alike, and, in so doing, can generate changes on the affective as well as cognitive level. For these far-reaching changes, potentially brought about by ancient drama, we do not, however, have any evidence.

51 Exceptions confirm the rule, e.g., Euripides’ *Orestes*. Sommerstein 2004a has elucidated the conventions of performing violence in Attic drama. Killings can

sight into these generic differences will facilitate the ensuing interpretation of violence in Old and New Comedy. The stage and the *orchêstra* in the theater of Dionysus were both fictional and non-fictional spaces. Old Comedy, with its partly non-referential, anti-mimetic, and anti-illusionist character, constantly reminded the audience of its constructedness. The high amount of metatheatricity⁵³ kept a distance between stage action and real life at all times (unlike in tragedy). Since tragedy was a relatively closed poetic and performative system, rather mimetic and illusionist in its staging of a mythical plot,⁵⁴ it was bound to the stringent rules and conventions of representation that prevented the open display of violent actions, similar to oratory, where the depiction of graphic violence was, in most cases, avoided.⁵⁵ Comedy can, however, display acts of violence, because it does not pretend to be reality. These remarks should alert us already to the possibility that violence on the comic stage cannot mean the same thing as violence in real life.

The *poiêsis* of a comedy can fruitfully be compared to work in a laboratory. The comic poet selects all kinds of elements from daily life and other literary texts—for example, names, family constellations, contemporary social and political problems, cultural specifics, historical events, literary motifs, and ideologemes, including ritual patterns—combines them in a new way, and joins them with additional elements. According to Iser and A. Assmann, these terms (selection, combination, and addition) make up the process of creating fiction,⁵⁶ meaning that most ingredients are taken from the real world, but combined and contextualized differently. The result is a mock-mimesis of the real world, a fictional con-

be staged neither in tragedy nor in comedy. Blows cannot be performed in tragedy and possibly not even in satyr drama.

52 Goldhill 2006, 156–157.

53 Cf., e.g., Zeitlin 1999, 167. A prime example is Ar. *Ach.* 377–384, 497–507, where the persona of Aristophanes blends with the character of Dicaeopolis, thus breaking the comic illusion. Sutton 1988 assumes that Dicaeopolis' part may have been played by Aristophanes himself.

54 Rosen 2005, 265: tragedy was “a relatively ‘closed’ system which, while it could mirror well enough contemporary Athenian values and ideologies and even occasionally call attention to its own theatricality, was not dynamic and freewheeling in the ways Old Comedy could be.” On the different modes of speaking in tragedy and comedy respectively, cf. Taplin 1986.

55 Cf. above 104–113.

56 Iser 1983, 125–126; ²1979, 300–307; A. Assmann 1980, 14–17. Bierl 2002b emphasizes the experimental character of Old Comedy within the ritual-pragmatic boundaries of the genre.

struct whose fictionality is always transparent to the spectator. As a consequence, we can hypothesize that violence and the discourse on it, which tend to converge in drama, might follow the discursive rules of violence as brought out in chapter II above. The obviously fictional world of comedy allows the comic poet to delineate and play with the boundaries of acceptable behavior on stage.⁵⁷ The extreme delight and amusement the spectators enjoyed partly stemmed from three closely related factors: first, the oscillation of this kind of violence between reality and play, enforced by means of metatheatricity (meaning that the spectators did not have to take onstage violence seriously or at face value); second, the superior knowledge that this was all temporary pretend-play, make-believe, a fictional laboratory within a splendid civic festival, which allowed the spectators to question the behavior of others and themselves; and third and most importantly, the awareness that (a) the comic heroes can easily and playfully break the boundaries and constraints of real life without incurring any sort of punishment,⁵⁸ and (b) that they themselves, as the audience of these heroes, can burst into unrestrained, shameless laughter without fearing any consequences.⁵⁹

As in previous chapters, the methodology will be phenomenological again, taking into consideration and applying the flexible discursive line between acceptable and unacceptable violence as a heuristic explanatory tool, as fleshed out in chapter II of this book. Other approaches for coming to terms with the phenomenon of violence on the comic stage are equally possible; for example, Kaimio's valuable explanation of Aristophanic violence within the structural elements of Old Comedy, or the interpretation of many comic scenes via Aristophanes' method of parodying tragedy (paratragedy).⁶⁰ These different approaches do not exclude

57 Schechner 1977, 66 rightly speaks of the "transformation of real behavior into symbolic behavior" onstage, which is the result of the specific context in which this kind of communication takes place.

58 Krummen 1998, 299 aptly characterizes the liminal situation of the spectators between reality and fiction.

59 Halliwell 2008, e.g., 245–248, 253 ("institutionalized shamelessness").

60 On Aristophanic paratragedy, cf. Rosen 2005, 255–261; Silk 2000, 42–97; 1993; and, still fundamental, Rau 1967. To what extent Aristophanes entered into a fruitful dialogue with Euripides on many different levels to enrich his own poetics, cf. the contributions in Calame 2004; Bierl 2009a, esp. 220–244 on paratragedy in *Thesmophoriazousae*, based on Euripides' *Helena* and *Andromeda*. Foley 1988 argues that, in *Acharnians*, Aristophanes not only parodies Euripides, but also puts allusions to tragedy into the service of comedy, not least in order to defend himself against Cleon. Harriot 1962 explicates that spectators attended the

but complement each other. We are still far away from a thorough understanding of corporal violence in Attic comedy, especially in regard to its relationship to violence as represented on the tragic stage. It is my intention to sketch here only one way in which we can make sense of violence in the ritual context of comedy and in the framework of a book that also examines forensic speeches and curse tablets as other genres through which discourses on violence can be performed. It is three comedies above all, *Wasps*, *Birds*, and *Clouds*, in which violence figures most prominently and which therefore contain somber undertones. The material in these three plays is so abundant that they warrant separate treatments in their own rights as case studies.

Anger

The treatment of anger in comedy needs full consideration because anger was a frequent precedent to violence in daily life and is often invoked in forensic oratory.⁶¹ Aristophanes makes full use of the semantic field of anger in Greek, with terms approximately corresponding to *anger*, *fury*, *rage*, *ire* in English, although the cultural specificity of emotions must always be kept in mind. Aristophanes employs the terms *orgê* (natural impulse, propensity, temperament, disposition, mood, anger, wrath),⁶² *thumos* (soul, spirit as the principle of life, heart, mind, courage, fits of anger, passions),⁶³ *mania* (fury, rage, frenzy), and *cholos* or *cholê* (gall, bile, bitter anger, wrath),⁶⁴ and often interchangeably, despite their different shades of meaning. These terms can range in meaning from thoroughly positive, to the expression of some kind of ill-feeling toward a person or group, and yet further to the outright stigmatization of a particular behavior as socially disruptive and therefore negative. Ambivalent usage is also frequent. In this respect, the comic playwright is in line with the highly differentiated use of these terms in the orators. Anger was problematized from the 450s on as a lack of self-control that ultimately endangered the

plays not just to be entertained; many of them had undergone rhetorical training or had at least acquired some rhetorical experience by listening to lawsuits. They did not read much, but were trained to listen carefully, concentrate, and thus memorize and recognize passages from other plays. This background explains why Aristophanes could allude to Euripides' tragedies years after their respective performances.

61 Cf. above 115–119.

62 Liddell – Scott 1968, s.v. “*orgê*.”

63 Liddell – Scott 1968, s.v. “*thumos*.”

64 Liddell – Scott 1968, s.v. “*cholê*.”

peaceful coexistence of members in a community.⁶⁵ Simultaneously, the orators reserved for themselves the entitlement to justifiable anger, if they were affected by some kind of transgression on the part of their opponents. Anger could thus cut both ways. As we will see, this highly complex semantic field is even more multifaceted and open to interpretation in Aristophanes.

In *Knights* 41, Demosthenes characterizes the *dêmos* in endearing words: it is ἄγροικος ὀργήν, ‘with a farmer’s temperament.’ In this sense, *orgê* is a positive quality because it is down-to-earth. In the *parabasis* of *Peace*, the chorus-leader is commonly regarded as the playwright’s mouthpiece.⁶⁶ Aristophanes speaks out with Heracleian temperament (752: Ἡρακλέους ὀργήν, ‘in the very spirit of Heracles’) against the war-mongers, conjuring up the figure of Heracles in his function as monster-slayer, thus resuming almost verbatim a passage from *Wasps*, staged the year before, in 422 BCE.⁶⁷ In *Clouds* 610, Selene claims to be angry (θυμαίνειν ἔφασκε, ‘she expressed her annoyance’), because Socrates has treated her badly. Her wrath is completely justified. If *orgê* or *thumos* denote the fighting spirit of the Athenians of old, especially that of the Marathon fighters, the terms have positive connotations. Their anger at the Persian intruders was more than justified; Aeschylus’ great merit was to have enhanced this martial attitude through his dramatic poetry (*Ra.* 1017: θυμοὺς ἑπταβοείους, ‘seven-ply oxhide hearts’). This same martial spirit also occurs at *Knights* 570 (ὁ θυμὸς εὐθὺς ἦν ἀμυνίας, ‘his spirit was defiant’) and *Wasps* 1082/83, where the chorus of wasps speaks of biting their lips in battle out of *thumos* (sharp, bitter spirit) against the Persians. In *Lysistrata*, we also discern some positive features about anger. Lysistrata speaks with pride of the women’s *cholê* (angry temper, sharp spirit) in chasing off the Scythian archers in a kind of battle (*Lys.* 464: ἦ γυναιξὶν οὐκ οἶε / χολὴν ἐνεῖναι; ‘Or did you think women lack gall?’).⁶⁸ In a comically touching scene, in which, in a great dialogue, the semi-chorus of old men is reconciled to the semi-chorus of old women. The men’s leader indirectly confesses that they have suffered from the women’s sex strike, the occupation of the Acropolis, and all the resultant turmoil. He also admits that, earlier, they took off their coats out of anger (1023: ἀλλ’ ὑπ’ ὀργῆς γὰρ πονηρᾶς καὶ τότ’ ἀπέδυν

65 Cf. above 115–116.

66 On this complex scene, cf. Hubbard 1991, 140–156.

67 A similar attack is to be found in *Ar. Eq.* 41.

68 Cf., similarly, *Ar. V.* 403; *Thesm.* 468; *Ra.* 4; Eubulus F 61 (K.-A.).

ἐγώ, ‘in fact, it was mean of me to take it off in anger before’), an indecent gesture because, in doing so, they revealed their enormous erections. The old women, however, have pity on the men. Because of their life experience, they know about men’s urges and plights. The women’s leader takes the old man by the hand and covers him with his cloak. The other women follow her example.

Frequently, the wrath of the comic hero or the chorus is directed against individuals. Aristophanes’ primary target of ridicule is Euripides and his tragedies, followed by Cleon. Onstage, these two figures deserve to be criticized; in other words, the anger and spite they provoke is not only justified, but practically a comic necessity.⁶⁹ In *Thesmophoriazusae*, the women rail against Euripides (e.g., 466, 518), because he has done them harm in his tragedies, by uttering the most evil and offensive slanders imaginable against them.⁷⁰ The In-law, disguised as a woman, and out to defend Euripides by confessing outright adultery in unabashed detail, tries to win the favor of the assembled women by claiming that their ire is justified (468: ἐπιζεῖν τὴν χολήν, ‘your bile is aboil’).⁷¹ In *Frogs*, in particular, laughter and ridicule are heaped upon Euripides. Dionysus admonishes Aeschylus again and again to control himself and suppress his anger against Euripides (844: μὴ πρὸς ὀργὴν σπλάγχνα θερμήνῃς κότῳ,⁷² ‘heat not your innards with wrathful rage’; 856–857: σὺ δὲ μὴ πρὸς ὀργὴν, Αἰσχύλ’, ἀλλὰ πραόνως / ἔλεγχ’, ἐλέγχου, ‘And you, Aeschylus, give and take arguments not angrily but calmly’), and the chorus, too, reminds Aeschylus: ‘Yes, take care, good sir, that you don’t reply in a rage’ (997–998: ἀλλ’ ὅπως, ὦ γεννάδα, / μὴ πρὸς ὀργὴν ἀντιλέξεις), and ‘that your anger

69 Aristophanes must have held Euripides in high esteem; otherwise he would not have taken him on in his comedies as frequently as he did. This can only mean that he considered him an equally gifted colleague.

70 Cf. Bierl 2009a, 172–74. Euripides’ critical attitude toward women was often subjected to mockery in comedy, e.g., Diphilus F 74 (K.-A.)

71 The bile that boils over symbolizes anger and combativeness. It is a frequent motif in Aristophanes; e.g.: *Ach.* 321–322 (Olson 2002, *ad Ach.* 321–322 with more sources), *V.* 403, and *Lys.* 464. *Pax* 66: confronted with the war, Trygaeus feels his bile (*cholê*) come up. To Olson 1998, *ad Pax* 66, *cholê*, the bile-sickness, signifies a kind of madness. He quotes many parallel examples, esp. *Nu.* 833 on “the lunatics Socrates and Chairephon.” *Cholê* is an illness which can also affect the brain. Sommerstein 2007a, *ad Nu.* 833 calls this sickness a “form of insanity ... due to overheating of the brain through an excess of bile (Hippocr. *On the Sacred Disease* 18).” Cf. also Alexis F 150.5 (K.-A.); Eubulus F 93.9 (K.-A.).

72 This phrase is possibly a humorous quotation from E. *Cyc.* 424 (Dover 1993, *ad Ra.* 844).

doesn't seize you' (994: μή σ' ὁ θυμὸς ἀρπάσας). Aeschylus is so taken aback (1006: Θυμοῦμαι μὲν τῇ ξυντυχίᾳ, 'I'm enraged at this turn of events') by Euripides' "impertinence" that he does not even want to converse with him. Even Zeus will be indignant: 'Surely fearful wrath will fill the heart of the mighty thunderer' (814: ἦ που δεινὸν ἐριβρεμέτας χόλον ἔνδοθεν ἔξει).

The second most common target of Aristophanes' mockery, after Euripides, is the politician Cleon. In *Knights* 993–994, Cleon's teacher grows so angry at him, because he insists on playing only Doric hymns, that he finally kicks him out of school (ὀργισθέντ' ἀπάγειν κελεύειν, 'angrily had him expelled'). The chorus-leader in *Wasps* speaks about 'three days' rations of rotten rage against that bloke' (243–244: ἡμερῶν ὀργὴν τριῶν πονηρὰν / ἐπ' αὐτόν).

Only one more "real" person had to endure Aristophanes' wrath: his comic rival Crates, whose productions were cheap, according to Aristophanes, and who therefore incurred the rage of the audience against him (*Eq.* 537: οἷας δὲ Κράτης ὀργὰς ὕμῶν ἠνέσχετο, 'And what violent rebuffs Crates had to endure at your hands'). It is to be noted that the *onomasti kômôdein*, the satirizing of living individuals by name,⁷³ was part of the Dionysiac license⁷⁴ and the literary and performative genre of comedy. Actors behind masks playing out fictional roles spoke these invectives, not recognizable individuals. As "real" as these mockeries might seem, the seriousness of their references to the persons targeted, who often stand in for a whole group, appears doubtful.⁷⁵

73 A good example is a fragment from Ar. *Triphales* F 563 (Henderson), where Theramenes is credited with decreeing three penalties: imprisonment, drinking hemlock, and exile.

74 Cf. Bierl 2002a *passim*. Hoffman 1989 probes into the inseparable connections between ritual license and the cult of Dionysus. To come to a better understanding of this peculiar cult, he uses cross-cultural material and Turner's terminology of liminality and *communitas*.

75 Bierl 2002a and Stark 2002, to name just two, have shown that comedy derides types, not individuals. Similar is Heath 1987. Contrary is Koster 1980, 72, who postulates a direct relationship between comedic derision and actual politics. He is right that the artful *diabolê* is a practice that oratory and comedy have in common (76), but Old Comedy instead plays with this rhetorical pose. More nuanced is Kraus 1985 (31–101 on *Acharnians*; 113–92 on *Knights*), because he fully considers the fictive aspects of Old Comedy. Gelzer 1999, 31–37 rightly sees comedy as a playful form of popular justice (*Rügebrauch*) in the specific form of using masks. The question of whom the *onomasti kômôdein* is referring to is only one aspect of a larger complex, the notoriously vexed prob-

In only a few instances is anger unquestionably negatively connotated. According to Dicaeopolis (*Ach.* 530), who is, admittedly, a highly problematic figure, morally speaking, Pericles' *orgê* caused the Peloponnesian War. The chorus-leader in *Frogs* exhorts his fellow-citizens to abandon their wrath against the disenfranchised citizens (700: ἀλλὰ τῆς ὀργῆς ἀνέντες, 'Now relax your anger') and to re-enroll them in the list of citizens, because they and their fathers fought alongside the rest of

lem whether or not (and if so, to what extent) Old Comedy had political meaning and thrust. The literature on this topic is immense. I point to some trends: Gomme 1938, who denies that we can pin down Aristophanes' political opinion, because, as an artist, he was impartial, has set the tone for much of modern research. Wysocki 1988 has confirmed that Aristophanes' political utterances cannot be taken at face value; von Möllendorff 1995, who offers a Bakhtinian interpretation, and van Steen 2007, e.g., detect so much complexity and playfulness in the plays that one coherent opinion underlying the text becomes unattainable. According to Heath 1997, 236, Aristophanes does speak an oratorical, political discourse, but it is "exaggerated in the ... comic world." Contrary to this current *communis opinio*, there has always been a long tradition in Aristophanic scholarship to take the plays seriously as political statements. Researchers on this side base their opinion on Ps.-X. *Ath.* 2.18, where the Old Oligarch complains that comedy creates caricatures of members of the upper classes, but always spares the masses. Ehrenberg 1968 paradigmatically stands for the ancient historian's wish to elicit as much historical information as possible from Old Comedy. As far as I can see, De Ste. Croix 1972, 355–76 is the most decisive of this group of scholars, arguing, against Gomme 1938, that Aristophanes had not only a consistent political opinion, but also a serious message with which he wanted to influence his audience. Also MacDowell 1995, 355 thinks that Aristophanes meant to sway the Athenians and that his invectives mean exactly what they say. In a similar vein, Ercolani (2006 and 2002) and Henderson (2003, 1998a, 1998b, 1993) are willing to ascribe more direct functions to the comedic satirizing of public figures. According to Henderson 1993, the *dêmos* could not be mocked and ridiculed, only tyrannical individuals. Olson 1996 argues for a decidedly political view of *Wasps*, where Aristophanes makes a plea for an improved democracy, not for oligarchy. Recently, Brockmann 2003 takes the political impetus of Old Comedy more seriously again. Zimmermann 2006 even goes so far as to ascribe didactic intentions to the playwright. Most recently, Sidwell 2009 sees Aristophanes as an arch-democrat involved in extreme competition against his rivals, especially the oligarchically minded Eupolis. To Sidwell 2009, e.g., 299, the characters represent real individuals, with satire referring to Aristophanes' rivals. Mediating voices in this debate are Carey 1994, 74, who regards comic satire as a more general means of control, complementing the law courts, and Robson 2009, 162–87, who takes a stance between the extremes and acknowledges the fundamental ambiguity inscribed in the plays, which makes research on politics in Aristophanes inexhaustible. Cf. Olson 2010 with a thorough overview of the scholarship.

the Athenians. The magistrate in *Lysistrata* orders the Scythian archers to march against the women as if in battle, since he cannot control himself any longer because of his wrath (504–505: χαλεπὸν γὰρ / ὑπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτὰς ἴσχειν, ‘I’m so angry I can’t keep my hands to myself’; 550: χωρεῖτ’ ὀργῇ καὶ μὴ τέγγεσθ’, ‘attack furiously and don’t go mushy’).⁷⁶ In *Acharnians*, almost all instances of *thumos* and *orgê* are negative. It is the negative energy of the conservative charcoal-burners who defend the continuation of the war and try to prevent Dicaeopolis from making a private truce with the enemy that is problematic. When the charcoal-burners threaten the comic hero, their anger at him is the precedent to violence. Dicaeopolis screams (352–354): ‘It’s terrible that the temper of gentlemen should grow so vinegary that they throw stones, and shout,’ δεινὸν γὰρ οὕτως ὀμφακίαν πεφυκέναι / τὸν θυμὸν ἀνδρῶν ὥστε βάλλειν καὶ βοᾶν / ἐθέλειν.⁷⁷ In line 321, Aristophanes uses a related pun: *thumalops* means ‘half-burnt piece of charcoal’ but also reminds one of the charcoal-burners’ unreasonable wrath (*thumos*).⁷⁸ In *Peace*, the Peloponnesian War is sometimes metaphorically circumscribed with *orgê*. Thus, the jars representing the Greek *poleis* were angry at each other and beat each other up, according to Hermes’ speech to Trygaeus (613).

This metaphorical use of the semantic field of ‘wrath/anger’ paves the way for an ambivalent understanding of these problematic emotions. Again in *Peace*, the gods give free rein to their wrath against the Greeks (204: Ἑλλησιν ὀργισθέντες, ‘They grew angry with the Greeks’) by moving out and handing the Hellenes over to War. Likewise, Peace is angry at the Athenians because they have treated her so badly (659: ὀργὴν γὰρ αὐτοῖς ὧν ἔπαθε πολλήν ἔχει, ‘she’s still very angry with them about the treatment she got’). While this kind of wrath is terrible for the Greeks and for the Athenians, respectively, it is understandable from a higher perspective. After all, the war among the Greeks is homemade and not the fault of the gods, whose anger is thus comprehensible. According to Praxagora’s speech on appropriate behavior in the Assembly, Thrasybulus ‘gets angry’ (*Ec.* 202: ὀργίζεται), because he is not installed as commander-in-chief. We see again how double-edged this kind of *orgê* is. Thrasybulus’ anger is justified from his perspective, but not from

76 Cf. a similar wording in *Th.* 5.70.

77 Olson 2002, *ad Ach.* 352–356 equates *thumos* with ‘wrath’ in this case and cites *Nu.* 1369 and *V.* 383 as other examples of this equation.

78 Cf. Olson 2002, *ad Ach.* 321 on the comic implications of this pun.

that of the women or, perhaps, the audience. Often, moral values acquire a meaning onstage opposite to that held in daily life. We will return to this phenomenon later.

As may be expected, words for anger also occur within contexts that are not readily identifiable as positive or negative in connotation. In the opening scene of *Frogs*, for example, Dionysus declares that he is sick of vulgar and obscene jokes (4: πάνυ γάρ ἐστ' ἤδη χολή, 'by now it's a groaner').⁷⁹ Later, at line 584, Xanthias is angry at Dionysus, who, as a consequence, curses himself. In *Birds*, the birds are initially suspicious of Euelpides' and Peisetaerus' arrival in their realm, but they gradually give up their anger at the intruders (Av. 383: οἶδε τῆς ὀργῆς χαλᾶν εἷξασιν, 'They look to be slackening their anger'; 401–402: καὶ τὸν θυμὸν κατάθου κύψας / παρὰ τὴν ὀργὴν ὥσπερ ὀπλίτης, 'lean over and ground your temper alongside your anger, like infantrymen').⁸⁰

The broad semantics of *orgê* can thus comprise many different meanings. It can be a good (and therefore justified), bad, or ambivalent emotion. The meaning of *orgê* and related words in this semantic field can range from the almost-endearing, ultra-democratic, wasp-like energy exuded by the old Marathon fighters in *Wasps*, to the hatred of Euripides and Cleon by the *dêmos*, or even to the fearsome anger of the gods. Whatever its semantics, however, 'wrath' is almost exclusively a characteristic of the citizenry as a whole, or another collectivity. If an individual indulges in wrath, he or she is rather the exception, or, most frequently, stands as an example for the body politic, with anger being the expression of a collective phenomenon played out through the body of one actor. *Orgê* is thus a communal experience, not yet an exclusively private feeling.

Hubris

The concept of *hubris* looms large in the orators. As to the broad semantics of *hubris*, Aristophanes' comedies are in line with the usage embraced by other authors and genres of Greek literature. Aristophanes uses *hubris* and related words in basically four meanings: wanton insolence, often expressed through physical violence; cases of sexual violence; offenses

79 On obscenity in Aristophanes, cf. Robson 2006, 70–94. The standard work on obscenity in Aristophanes remains Henderson 1991.

80 Sommerstein 1991, *ad* Av. 401–402 discerns a "parody of the military order."

against the gods, treated in the section on *Birds*; and *hubris* in the form of mere insults.⁸¹

Wanton insolence is mainly characteristic of the rich and young. If their transgressive actions, which might include assault and battery, were deliberately aimed at humiliating a victim, this shocking behavior was liable to a *graphê hubreôs*.⁸² Aristophanes mirrors Athenian law correctly on the comic stage. In *Wealth*, Penia defends her existence by arguing that *hubris* accompanies wealth (*Pl.* 564: τοῦ Πλούτου δ' ἐστὶν ὑβρίζειν, 'and arrogance [dwells] with Wealth'). In *Ecclesiazusae*, Blepyrus raises several objections against Praxagora's communal utopia, among them the question of how, after the abolition of money, rowdies would pay the penalty for attacking people after a symposion (*Ec.* 663–664: τῆς ἀκεῖας οἱ τύπτοντες πόθεν ἐκτείσουσιν, ἐπειδὴν / εὐωχηθέντες ὑβρίζουσιν; 'when people act rowdy after a dinner party and get into fights, how will they pay their fines for assault?'). The vocabulary used corresponds exactly to the language of oratory and shows once more that occurrences like those described by Blepyrus must have been quite frequent. The outrageous behavior of the women in *Lysistrata* is repeatedly called *hubris* (e.g., 399–401: τί δῆτ' ἄν, εἰ πύθοιο καὶ τὴν τῶνδ' ὕβριν; / αἱ τᾶλλα θ' ὑβρίκασι κακὰ τῶν καλπιδῶν / ἔλουσαν ἡμᾶς, 'Save your breath till you hear about *their* atrocities! They've committed every outrage, even doused us with those pitchers'). Not yielding to the sexual wishes of their husbands and occupying the Acropolis are regarded as severe transgressions of social norms and values that threaten to disrupt the social order and gender hierarchy. Therefore, a magistrate attempts to stop female insolence (425: ὅπως ἂν αὐτὰς τῆς ὕβρεως ἐγὼ σκέθω, 'I'll put a stop to their arrogance'), but in vain. The leader of the women's chorus is even so bold as to threaten to kick the men's leader,⁸³ an outrage that the man rightly, from his perspective, calls *hubris* (658–660: ταῦτ' οὖν οὐχ ὕβρις τὰ πράγματ' ἐστὶ / πολλή; 'Now doesn't this behavior of theirs amount to extreme hubris?'). The chorus of women assembled at the Thesmophoria, in Aristophanes' play of the same title, are hunting for any man who might have intruded on their secret festival. Such a violation of religious rites, also a form of wanton insolence and even *hubris*

81 An important instance of *hubris* in the comic fragments is Eubulus F 93.6–7 (K.-A.); cf. also Arist. *Pr.* 953b4, as cited by Sommerstein 2007b, *ad Ec.* 663–664.

82 Cf. above 120–125.

83 Threatening gestures were popular in Old Comedy. Cratinus, in his *Herdsmen*, has one protagonist threaten another with his fists (Cratinus F 19 [K.-A.]).

against the gods, is explicitly called *hubris* by the women (670–671: παράδειγμ' ὕβρεως ἀδίκων τ' ἔργων / ἀθέων τε τρόπων, 'to other men he'll be an example of outrageousness, of wrongdoing, of godless ways!'), who insist that a potential malefactor would have to pay the penalty. A horrible fate would befall such a man, who would then serve as an example to deter all other men. In this scene, the chorus could not fulfill better its function as mediator between the fiction on stage and the "real" audience. The male spectators must have relished watching the festival of the Thesmophoria, from which they were normally barred, unfold on stage. The search of the frantic women for more male intruders in the *orchestra* (655–687), with the women looking around and maybe directing their gaze up to the *koilon*, the spectators' seats, with thousands of men in attendance, certainly could not fail to produce a special, comic effect.⁸⁴

Closely connected to *hubris* in the sense of wanton insolence with the intent to inflict shame on a victim, is *hubris* in the sense of forced sex, because both forms of transgressive behavior are associated with the young and rich who cannot contain their surplus energy. In *Thesmophoriazusae*, the servant deduces from the In-law's vulgar address to him (59–62: ὃς ἔτοιμος σοῦ τοῦ τε ποιητοῦ / τοῦ καλλιποῦς <κατὰ> τοῦ θριγκοῦ / συγγογγύλας καὶ συστρέψας / τουτὶ τὸ πέος χοανεῦσαι, 'One who's ready to take you and your mellifluous poet, and spin you around, and bend you over, and up your rampart funnel this cock of mine') that the In-law must have been a *hubristês* in his younger years (63: ἢ που νέος γ' ὦν ἦσθ' ὕβριστής, 'I can't imagine what a rapist you were when you were a boy'). Further instances of *hubris* in the meaning of "rape" figure prominently in *Birds* and will be treated in the discussion of that play.

In everyday Attic speech, *hubris* could metaphorically mean 'insult' or 'offense,' and we encounter this usage in Aristophanes as well. Brief remarks shall suffice in this context. In *Acharnians*, *hubris* has no physical component. Euripides reproaches Dicaeopolis for having insulted him (479: ἀνὴρ ὕβρίζει, 'The man's outrageous!'). In the same play, Aristophanes speaks through the chorus, complaining that he was criticized for humiliating the *dêmos* of the Athenians (631: καὶ τὸν δῆμον καθυβρίζει, 'and outrages the people'). Like Euripides before him, the general Lamachus also feels offended by Dicaeopolis' impertinence (1117: οἴμ', ὥς ὕβρίζεις, 'Oh! What impudence!'). In *Thesmophoriazusae*, the chorus of women demands punishment for Euripides' slandering them in his tragedies

84 Cf. Bierl 2009a, 175–176 on the speech act that the chorus of women performs in this scene.

(465: δεῖ δὲ ταύτης τῆς ὕβρεως ἡμῖν τὸν ἄνδρα / περιφανῶς δοῦναι δίκην, ‘For this outrage the man must pay us the penalty in no uncertain terms!’). *Hubris* assumes here a strong metaphorical note.⁸⁵ In line 535 of the same play, we encounter a similar reproach, directed at the In-law (ταύτην ἐῶσαι τὴν φθόρον τοιαῦτα περιυβρίζειν / ἡμᾶς ἀπάσας, ‘to let this scum get away with slandering all of us so outrageously’). This scene derives its special comic effect from the fact that, a few verses before this remark, the women themselves wanted to strip the In-law and whip him, an act that would also constitute *hubris*. A magnificent instance of paratragedy and metatheater is the scene in which the In-law and Euripides engage in role-playing, the first impersonating Helen, the second pretending to be Menelaus. “Helen” unveils “her” face and blushes in the presence of an unknown man (903: αἰσχύνομαί σε τὰς γνάθους ὕβρισμαίνῃ, ‘I feel shame—for the violation of my jowls’). Within the pretend-play, the beautiful Helen feels insulted and uncomfortable after her cheeks have been revealed; on the actors’ level, however, the actor refers to his shaved cheeks. As Austin and Olson remark, “this is thus a brief irruption of the ‘real world’ of the story into the parody of [Euripides’] *Hel[ena]*, the effect of which is to stress, at the high point of the action, precisely how ludicrous everything going on on stage really is.”⁸⁶ In *Peace*, the arms-dealer complains about Trygaeus’ denigrating his goods (1229: παῦσαι μ’ υβρίζων τοῖς ἐμοῖσι χρήμασιν, ‘Stop outraging my wares!’), and in line 1264 the arms-dealer and the spear-maker both claim to feel insulted (ὕβριζόμεθα, ‘That’s an insult!’). In the slapstick-like opening scene of *Frogs*, Dionysus is shocked by Xanthias’ insolent behavior. Sommerstein observes that Xanthias “does not know his place. Rather than grumble as he does, he ought to be grateful that his master has allowed him to ride instead of walking.”⁸⁷ In *Wealth*, more instances are to be found. A sycophant is mocked; he complains about the insult (886: ἄρ’ οὐχ ὕβρις ταῦτ’ ἐστὶ πολλή; ‘Well, isn’t this absolutely outrageous?’; 899: τούτους ὑβρίζειν εἰς ἔμ’; ‘with their outrageous conduct toward me?’). A young komast teases an old woman by making fun of her white hair; she feels seriously offended (1044: τάλαιν’ ἐγὼ τῆς ὕβρεος

85 Austin – Olson 2004, *ad Th.* 465 remark that the language of *hubris* “adds an angry, emotional note.”

86 Austin – Olson 2004, *ad Th.* 903; cf. on this scene also Rau 1967, 53–65.

87 Sommerstein 1996, *ad Ra.* 21 (οὐχ ὕβρις ταῦτ’ ἐστὶ καὶ πολλὴ τρυφή, ‘isn’t this outrageous, the behavior of an utterly spoilt brat’).

ἤς ὑβρίζομαι, 'Mercy me, the insults I'm subjected to!'; 1074: εἶναί σ' ὑβριστήν φησι, 'She says you're insulting').

To sum up: The word *hubris* as used in the Aristophanic corpus shows the same spectrum of meanings as in oratory or other genres of Greek literature. It ranges from mere verbal insult to actual beatings, thus encompassing the broad notion of *hubris* in all its transgressiveness as circumscribed by Athenian law. As a pattern, we can discern that Aristophanes takes elements from daily life and puts them into different contexts. In most cases, supra-human comic heroes,⁸⁸ figures marked as liminal through their boundless energy, ambivalent characters, and grotesque plans to establish problematic utopias, commit *hubris*. Since the main protagonists are somewhat doubtful figures, their actions are as well. It is striking that, unlike in tragedy or in the later New Comedy, hybristic behavior is often physically shown on the Aristophanic stage, only to evoke an immediate, negative response from another protagonist. The audience could probably laugh about these instances, but at least onstage the fictional order was endangered, as for example in *Lysistrata* or *Wasps*. At this point it is important to stress the openness and polyvalence of Aristophanes' ritual work of art.

According to Riu, insults in comedy mostly happen at thresholds, when people arrive or meet each other for the first time. That is, in certain speech acts framed by a specific, pragmatic context, insults can almost be taken as friendly welcomes.⁸⁹ This is all the more true because, in Greek comedy, the actor's mask would have covered his individuality: the mask utters the insults; therefore the actor's utterances cannot necessarily be understood as personal statements aimed at particular historical persons.⁹⁰ Since hybristic behavior is *per definitionem* insulting, Riu's observation is also true for the commitment of *hubris* in comedy. And indeed, a survey of all above-mentioned instances of *hubris* confirms the picture. Hybristic acts mark thresholds. They mark either the arrival of a protagonist or chorus, or a character's first encounter with an opponent or chorus.⁹¹ Thus, *hubris* defines a borderline situation and creates a boundary.

88 Cf. Whitman 1964, esp. 21–58 on Aristophanes' absurd comic hero and his or her interconnectedness with Aristophanic fantasy.

89 Riu 1999, 238–239. In a book-length study, Cottone 2005 establishes Aristophanes' practice of insulting as an intrinsic part of his dynamic poetics dealing and competing with the Euripidean model.

90 Cf. above 257, n. 75.

91 On the aggressive nature of the chorus in Old Comedy, cf. Treu 1999; Carnicelli 1975.

When the insult finally leads to blows in the play (as it often did in real life), the audience experiences violence in a liminal situation. Violence would then serve to define the thin borderline between acceptable and unacceptable behavior (the flexible line as established in chapter II), and the line of separation between the realm of laughter (within the range of acceptable behavior) and the realm of seriousness (outside the range of acceptable behavior, about which we cannot laugh any longer). The special delight of comedy is derived from the fact that the realm of seriousness (i.e., violence) is pulled onto the stage and is thus still laughable. Nevertheless, the flexible boundary is there and Aristophanes constantly plays with it (similar to the orators in court), thus deliberately blurring the line between the comic and the serious. In fact, he constructs and enacts this line through the actors' bodies on the comic stage. Since it is up to the individual spectator to determine where the line between fun and seriousness runs, it is partly from this process of definition that ancient spectators as well as modern readers of the plays have derived so much satisfaction and joy, delight and amusement. In what follows I shall verify whether the hypothesis that violence marks a threshold can serve as a heuristic model to reach a better understanding of the main instances of violence on the comic stage—i.e., slapstick violence.

Slapstick

Research has not yet made much of slapstick violence in Greek comedy. I use "slapstick" as defined by the *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

a type of physical comedy characterized by broad humour, absurd situations, and vigorous, usually violent action. The slapstick comic, more than a mere funnyman or buffoon, must often be an acrobat, a stuntman, and something of a magician—a master of uninhibited action and perfect timing ... The rough-and-tumble of slapstick has been a part of low comedy and farce since ancient times, having been a prominent feature of Greek and Roman mime, in which bald-pated, heavily padded clowns exchanged quips and beatings to the delight of the audience.⁹²

Murphy sees Aristophanes as heavily influenced by popular entertainment and derogates this kind of banter to an under-class amusement: it is "likely that many scenes and bits of comic stage-business are directly imitated from a sub-literary, farcical type of performance known to the

92 *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*: <http://www.search.eb.com/eb/article-9068154>, s.v. "slapstick" (accessed March 29, 2011).

Greeks of the fifth century B.C.”⁹³ Aristophanes, then, in Murphy’s view, is no better than his audience and indulges likewise in this unsophisticated, lowbrow humor:

There is certainly enough evidence to demonstrate the existence of popular entertainments which were familiar to Aristophanes and his audience, and from which he borrowed material to season, so to speak, his literary comedies and make them more acceptable to the ‘groundlings’ in his audience. The possibility, however, cannot be ruled out that he used this type of material because he himself enjoyed it and thought it funny.⁹⁴

MacDowell rightly discerns jack-in-the-box-type clowning in Philocleon’s futile attempts to break out of his own house (*Wasps*), prevented by his son Bdelycleon (see below), and custard-pie-type slapstick when the women pour water over the men in *Lysistrata*. But he does not offer an overarching model to come to terms with and explain the ubiquitous violence on the Aristophanic stage. Moreover, the blatant discrepancy between Aristophanes’ claim to have freed comedy from coarse “Megarian” slapstick,⁹⁵ and his simultaneous full use of rough-and-tumble scenes has not yet been sufficiently researched.⁹⁶

Kaimio, in her convincing analysis of violence in specific parts of Aristophanic comedy, comes closest to making sense of most of the instances of slapstick in Old Comedy. She differentiates between two forms of violence: violence as happening at certain points in comedy (*parodos*, *agôn*, expulsion episodes in the second part of the comedy after the *parabasis*)

93 Murphy 1972, 189.

94 Murphy 1972, 169.

95 Ar. *Ach.* 655–656; *Eq.* 510; *Nu.* 537–562; *Pax* 729–774; *V.* 54–66; *Ra.* 1–24.

96 Cf. Dobrov 1988 with regard to the passages mentioned in n. 95. He postulates a specific comic *muthopoiêsis* which was not successful—unlike tragedy, with its heroic myth—in subduing the farcical elements of Dionysiac ritual. Arnott 1989 has shown that, in Athenian drama, performance was more important than a written text. Most recently, Russo 1994 and Thiery 1986 have given full justice to Aristophanes as a stage author. A script, in Schechner’s sense, was there, but drama “as we know it” (sticking closely to a written text) was not in the foreground as much as it is today. This fluidity allowed for a large amount of improvisation, including inconsistencies and logical breaks, as can be found in all classical dramatists. During the fifth and fourth centuries BCE we also observe in the development of drama the gradual transition from a basically oral to a fully literate society. Another way to explain the discrepancy between theoretical claim and theatrical practice is to take into consideration the degree to which comedy was bound by the parameters of the genre, and knew how to play with them to achieve innovation (Bierl 2002b; Zimmermann 1998 [*non vidi*]). This explanatory model could be combined with Dobrov’s approach.

and violence involving a typology of preferred victims who are prone to suffer violence at any point in comedy (slaves, officials, paratragic violence).⁹⁷ With regard to the beating of slaves, a stock motif in ancient comedy, she correctly observes that this use of violence always casts a negative light on the perpetrator.⁹⁸ Thus, pure slapstick, devoid of any sense, is hardly ever found in Aristophanes, and in this respect Aristophanes may be accurate in his renunciation of coarse ribaldry and humor.⁹⁹ Although I agree with this interpretation, I wonder if such a formal classification of the scenes of violence can do justice to the whole spectrum of violence as exhibited in Old Comedy. Kaimio, indeed, must confess that she cannot make much of the slapstick scenes at *Lysistrata* 1216–1224 and *Birds* 1323–1336.

Following Kaimio's thesis that all scenes of violence ultimately serve to characterize the persons who commit those acts of violence, I will be concerned, in what follows, with a fundamental question: how is the negative portrayal of the perpetrator brought about while, in the end, he is never held accountable for what he does? What makes the audience laugh and even identify with the hero, and, at the same time, laugh at and see his violent actions in a problematic light? The answer lies, I suggest, in the gelastic transgression of thresholds that were valid in real life. Violence as committed in comedy playfully questions these real-life boundaries and thus vaguely defines them in a way similar to the treatment of violence by the orators in the forensic speeches. This deliberate ambivalence, which accounts for a good part of the audience's amusement, is achieved because the acts of violence onstage, with their inherent breaching of regular societal norms, are embedded within a large-scale ritual:¹⁰⁰ The two layers of ascribing sense to particular scenes, the fictive plot onstage and the space of the audience (*koilon*), are in tension with each other. Within the plot played out on the comic stage, conventions

97 Kaimio 1990, 53.

98 Slapstick cannot do without brawls and beatings. In Pherecrates' *Petale* (Pherecrates F 144 [K.-A.]), an exasperated victim encourages an assailant to *παίειν με τύπτειν λακπατεῖν ὥθειν δάκνειν*, 'punch me, beat me, trample me, push me, and bite me,' transl. in Pherecrates F 136 (Edmonds). Biting and even chewing off a person's ear occur in Hermippus' *Soldiers*: Hermippus F 51 (K.-A.). Other slapstick scenes rely on vulgar language, e.g., *κατεσκέδασέ μου τὴν ἀμίδα κεχηνότος*, 'as I was gaping he dumped the piss pot over me' (F 653 [Henderson]).

99 Kaimio 1990, 66–67, 71.

100 On Aristophanes' deliberate ambiguity with regard to his humor, cf. Jacquinod 2005.

of daily life are more or less intact. But, at the same time, the plot is embedded within the larger, ritual framework of a Dionysiac festival. The comic license granted during these festivals provided for a different perspective and cast a special, humorous light on the actions onstage. Between these two levels, an incongruence arose in the assessment of staged violence.¹⁰¹ This friction generated, for the spectator, a layer of distance from the actions onstage, which allowed him to interpret what he saw onstage with a certain amount of irony. Since all dramatic actions derive symbolic sense from their embeddedness in ritual, scenes of violence and slapstick humor are also charged with a high level of expressive symbolism. The goal of the following pages is to flesh out this communicative aspect of slapstick scenes. I will concentrate on the *beating of slaves*; the *expulsion of authorities*; the *parody of the judicial system*; the *reversal of family relationships* and of *gender roles and religious customs*; *father-beating scenes*; and other scenes of violence, including the *maltreatment of women (short of rape)*, *metaphorical violence*, *mugging at night*, and *parodies of tragedies*. Neither a mythological nor a structural analysis can do justice to the multiple meanings of slapstick scenes. It is my hypothesis that they follow the discursive rules of violence as laid out by the orators and are therefore to be interpreted against the backdrop of the customs and norms of Athenian daily life.

Although the *beating of slaves*, a stock motif in Old and New Comedy, was not a transgression of Athens' legal and moral codes—in chapter II it was shown that violence against slaves belonged to the realm of normalcy—it helped portray the master negatively. The following list gives only a few prime examples and does not claim to be exhaustive. In *Wasps*, the slave Xanthias, beaten black and blue by the drunken Philocleon, dashes onstage wailing about his sufferings (1292–1296) and thus anticipates his master's violent *kômos* (1326–1537). Just as in a tragic narrator's report, the spectator is informed about the hero's misdeeds. In *Pax*, the chorus-leader criticizes the low humor of slave-beating scenes (742–747) in the *parabasis*, while in the same comedy this motif is transposed onto an al-

101 I very much thank Peter von Möllendorff (Gießen) for corresponding with me in detail about this question. Following Warning 1976, he thinks that the ritual of comedy grants relief from daily life and allows the spectator not to assess the contents morally. In fact, being able and free to ignore moral judgments is key to achieving the immediate effect of comic laughter. Any serious pondering about the plot would be counterintuitive to the goal of comedy. While I agree in essence, I do think that reducing Aristophanes' comedy to mere entertainment does not do justice to this kind of sophisticated drama.

legorical level: The master Polemos (War) beats the ears of his slave (Hubbub) and forces him to fetch the morsel with which he wants to crush the Greek cities (255–256). The play *Knights* opens with great tumult: Demosthenes and Nicias, Dêmos' slaves, come running out of the house after a severe beating by Paphlagon (1–29).¹⁰² To Kaimio, this opening scene already characterizes the brutal rule of Paphlagon over Dêmos.¹⁰³ But Paphlagon becomes a victim of violence himself, when the Sausage-Seller brutally beats him down in a brawl (451–456).

Apart from the extended scenes of *expelling authorities* in *Birds*, there are two hilarious scenes of informer-bashing in *Acharnians*. At lines 824–828, Dicaeopolis whips a sycophant offstage by metaphorically referring to his leather straps as *agoranomoi*. The task of the *agoranomoi* was the maintenance of law and order in the Agora.¹⁰⁴ It is ironic that the sycophants, who pester many people but are integral to the Athenian court system, are driven out so as to re-establish order in Dicaeopolis' state. The ironic flavor is increased even further if we take into account that acting on behalf of the one-man *polis*¹⁰⁵ can include the threatening of an Athenian citizen with a whip, an action that, in daily life, was a severe breach of a fundamental rule of interaction, that is, the inviolability of the Athenian citizen body.¹⁰⁶ Onstage, this rule of interaction is reversed. One must beat a sycophant, even if he is an Athenian citizen, to render Dicaeopolis' problematic city safe. Seen from the perspective of the outer ritual, the scene even gains an additional layer of irony: the establishment of the hero's norms takes place in the middle of Dionysiac license and revelry. Operating far outside the norms, Dicaeopolis becomes the laughingstock of the *dêmos*. His unsocial behavior must have been clearly recognized by the spectators as a problem. One could not be *a-polis* in real life. Dicaeopolis, however, has the license and the power to do so within the festive frame of the Dionysia, and this very fact amused the audience. In lines 925–952, Dicaeopolis strikes a second informer, Nicarchus, packs him up, puts him into a vessel, and turns him

102 On their attempt to escape, cf. Dobrov 1988, 22–23, 25; Murphy 1972, 174, 188. On the slaves' flogging, cf. Ar. *Eq.* 64–72.

103 Kaimio 1990, 66, 71. Murphy 1972, 177–181 points to archaeological evidence in the form of vase paintings that depict farcical elements for the sake of popular entertainment.

104 Olson 2002, *ad Ach.* 824–825.

105 Dicaeopolis is actually an *a-polis*. To Pl. *Lg.* 928e, an *a-polis* is a criminal dropout.

106 Cf. above 62, n. 174; 87, n. 288; 124, n. 448.

over to a Theban to be carried off to Thebes, a hilarious parody of the economic exchange between Athens and Thebes.¹⁰⁷ Again we see that Aristophanes does not make use of slapstick scenes for the sake of slapstick alone, but pursues very concrete goals. His comedies are always physical and somatic, and their claims remain tangible throughout. The message of these scenes is clear enough: people who harm the city's well-being—in Dicaeopolis' eyes and world—deserve to be expelled.

Even more problematic, from the everyday perspective, is the resistance shown in *Lysistrata* 387–475 against the Scythian archers, an informal “police” force that was on duty until the end of the fifth century. The rebellious women, clad in hoplite armor, defeat a group of Scythian archers in a kind of battle under Lysistrata's command.¹⁰⁸ This resilience against state power is all the more remarkable, since the fighters are not bold men daring to face the police, but male actors dressed as women who are disguised as men! The symbolism of this transvestism is clear. The reversal of gender roles is threatening to all men and undermines the order of the state. Ironically, however, the women's plan is to save the city from war and destruction. To this end, they do not even shrink away from meeting the archers in battle.¹⁰⁹ Although women were not supposed to fight men, according to Athens' gendered understanding of battle and war, these citizen women derive some justification for their daring actions because they are fighting Scythian barbarians. Gender reversals as well ethnic and political considerations, combined with transvestism, make for a very complex scene.

On an allegorical level, in the play *Wealth* (lines 454–612), the comic hero Chremylus drives out Poverty (Penia). In a highly sophistic *agôn*, Penia defends herself. Chremylus tries to refute her, but words alone are not enough. He is not as mighty as the supra-real heroes of old, Dicaeopolis, Trygaeus, or Peisetaerus. Nevertheless, he pursues his utopian

107 Goldhill 2006, 157.

108 Cf. Goldhill 2006, 157. Sommerstein 2007c, *ad loc.* explicates the dense texture of this scene. Cf. also Hall 1989b, 46–47; Henderson 1987, *ad loc.*

109 Another famous scene involving this foreign “police” force is Ar. *Th.* 930–1225, where, for the first time in Attic literature, a foreigner speaks in broken Greek. On this scene, cf. now Willi 2003, 198–225 from a linguistic perspective and Hall 1989b *passim*. Like Hall, Willi 2003, 222 regards the foreigner's talk as “a literary expression of Greek ethnocentricity,” but also concludes (225) that the Scythian's being immune to Euripides' poetry protects him from the traps of tragedy. Barbarian language is thus more honest than deceitful tragic language. In Ar. *Ach.* 40 the archers have only one short entrance onstage.

goal: wealth for everyone. Although he cannot win by argumentation, he still “succeeds,” which marks him as an ambivalent figure. He hustles Poverty offstage and manages to bring about a happy end.

Closely connected to the expulsion of authorities is *parody of the judicial system*. As far as I can see, there are two prime examples of this comic technique in Aristophanes, one of which is Philocleon’s mock trial of a dog (V. 894–1008), treated below; the other is concerned with slapstick beating. It is the magnificent pain-*agôn* between Dionysus and his slave Xanthias in *Frogs*. Aeacus whips them both to find out who the real god is (635–673) and both suffer tremendously under the blows. Each of them, however, tries his best to swallow the pain so as to prove that he is the god. The fun part in this scene is of course the fact that Dionysus himself, the god of theater, performs and is as vulnerable and whiny as the mortal. Aristophanes’ metatheatrical game with the tension between theatrical illusion and reality is played out on the actors’ bodies.¹¹⁰ The parody of the *basanos*, the judicial institution to discover the truth via torture, could not have been more sophisticated. Whereas the audience could certainly laugh about this scene onstage, bystanders who saw the grim proceedings of *basanos* in the Agora probably did not laugh about the plight of the tortured. The litigants in court, at least, tried hard to spare their slaves this lot.¹¹¹

In other slapstick scenes, the *reversal of family relationships*,¹¹² *gender roles*, and *religious customs* is even more systematic. Shortly before the young women engage with the Scythian archers in *Lysistrata*, the fight for the Acropolis reaches its peak. The semi-chorus of old women douses the semi-chorus of old men with water (352–386),¹¹³ a typical example of custard-pie-type slapstick, but here charged with more than one symbolic meaning.¹¹⁴ Perusino offers a psychoanalytical interpretation of this scene. Whereas the men want to smoke out the women from the Acropolis—the fire standing for phallic power—the women extinguish the fire with water, the symbol of femininity. The latter frustrates and defeats

110 Goldhill 2006, 158–160. Cf. Bierl 2011a on Dionysus’ pivotal role in Old Comedy and 1991, 27–44.

111 On torture, cf. above 88, n. 297.

112 The fact that Bdelycleon tries to educate his father, Philocleon, without success in *Wasps*, and that this failure leads to a violent *kômos*, epitomizes the generational conflict. The conflict between Pheidippides and Strepsiades in *Clouds* escalates into the notorious father-beating scene.

113 There are more vulgar dousing scenes in Aristophanes than this, cf. above 267, n. 98.

114 Perusino 1999, 74–78; MacDowell 1988, 10–11.

male potency. One could also say that the women are rational and cool off masculine irascibility, which is raging like fire. Female violence again cuts both ways. It threatens male dominance but it is not an end in itself. The women resort to violence only to stop violence forever, to save the city from war, and re-establish the traditional, paternal world order. The happy end is thus masculine and an affirmation of the existing social order.

Whereas the topsy-turvy world of *Lysistrata* ends in the final affirmation of male dominance, the communal utopia in *Ecclesiazusae* presents a nightmare-like finale.¹¹⁵ The old woman wins the competition against the young woman for the right to sleep with poor, young Epigenes first. As if this were not enough for Epigenes, two more old hags appear onstage and quarrel with each other about the youth. He cannot escape, but is dragged by the three old women into the house to have sex with them (893–1111). This scenario, so horrible for the young man, of having to consummate a perverted gynecocracy, is mitigated, it is true, by a more conciliatory ending—Blepyrus dances off to dinner arm in arm with two young girls shortly before—but it is abundantly clear that a true communal life that entails sharing everything is not possible, not even—or, should we rather say—especially not among women. Turning gender relations upside down is thus not a viable solution to resolve everyday problems. In the end, all Aristophanic utopias fail, because they are impossible to implement and would be even worse than reality. They fail not because of the violence involved, but because of the irrationality and lack of community spirit on the part of the individual. But since violence is inherent in these problematic utopias, it is discredited, too, alongside the utopias themselves.

How severely the breach of a religious taboo was punished is exemplified by *Thesmophoriazusae*. Euripides and Agathon shave Euripides' In-law, Mnesilochus, singe his bottom and crotch with a torch, and disguise him as a woman so that he will be able to participate unrecognized in the women's celebration of the Thesmophoria. There, it is his mission to defend Euripides' plays. The plan goes all wrong. The women discover the man behind the disguise, strip him naked, and have him nailed to a

115 According to Dettenhofer 1999, Aristophanes was not concerned with a communist utopia or an emancipatory movement, but brought a piece of anti-Spartan propaganda onstage, either to plead for the rejection of Sparta's peace offer or to welcome the rejection by the Assembly.

wooden plank by a Scythian archer.¹¹⁶ Goldhill and Zeitlin have masterfully analyzed the game of transvestism on several planes.¹¹⁷ In contrast to those in *Bacchae*, the scenes of clothing and unclothing here all happen onstage. Even the In-law's punishment is imagined to have taken place in full view of the audience. The multiple humiliations that the In-law has to endure, and that are all seasoned by strong allusions to tragedy, largely result from his willingness to put his own gender at risk. This is funny to the audience but not to the fictional character onstage. The boundaries between the fiction of the enacted there-and-then and the here-and-now of the real-life frame are blurred when the raging women search the *orchêstra* for more male intruders. The difference in the perception of violence by the participants of the stage action and the spectators accounts for a good deal of the spectators' amusement.

Some of the most ambivalent scenes of violence in Old Comedy are probably the instances of *father-beating*.¹¹⁸ Because this type of scene is quite frequent in Aristophanic comedy, we can deduce that the violence of sons against their own fathers must have been a major preoccupation for Aristophanes.¹¹⁹ The existence of a *graphê kakôseôs goneôn* in Athenian law, a public procedure to punish the maltreatment of one's own parents, points to the atrocity of such a crime in the minds of the Athenians.¹²⁰ Aristophanes' poetic metaphor in *Frogs*—according to Heracles, those who have struck their fathers or mothers lie in 'lots of mud and ever-flowing shit' in Hades (Ar. *Ra.* 145–146: εἴτα βόρβορον πολλὸν / καὶ

116 Hall 1989b, 52 dubs the Scythian archer in *Thesmophoriazusae* as “the comic counterpart of the barbarian villains in the Euripidean escape-dramas on which the plot is loosely based.”

117 Goldhill 2006, 157–158; Zeitlin 1999; 1981.

118 On the generational conflict in *Clouds* and *Wasps*, cf. Zimmermann 2007; in *Frogs*, von Möllendorff 2007.

119 In Pherecrates' *Ant-Men*, a son curses his father: Pherecrates F 121 (K.-A.).

120 Todd 1993, 107–108. Appropriate civic behavior toward one's parents was part of the *dokimasia* procedure, a check of moral qualification that *archontes* and public speakers (*rhêtores*) had to undergo (Arist. *Ath.* 55.2–3; X. *Mem.* 2.2.13; Aeschin. 1.28). Aeschin. 1.28 explicitly mentions father- and mother-beating as a major offense. We may assume that the idea of treating one's parents well was an integral part of all types of *dokimasia*. Cf. on these passages in detail Feyel 2009, 25–27.

σκόρπ ἀείνων)¹²¹—is in line with the abhorrence Athenians felt with regard to this severe transgression of moral norms.

The most prominent scene of father-beating in Aristophanes is to be found in *Clouds* and will be treated below, in the context of that play. Another short instance, Blepyrus' objection to Praxagora's proposal of complete sexual community among men and women, does not shed favorable light on young Athenian men. Only the respect of their own fathers would make them abstain from father-beating, if at all. The pessimistic, certainly exaggerated passage deserves to be quoted in full:¹²²

Then from now on won't sons methodically strangle each and every older man? Because even now they strangle their acknowledged father; what will happen when he's unacknowledged? Won't they'll shit on him as well?

Other instances of slapstick violence portray the *maltreatment of women* (*short of rape*), *metaphorical violence*, *mugging at night*, and *parody of tragedy*. All of these scenes make sense in the context of the respective comedies and are again ambivalent.

The magistrate in *Lysistrata* is so angry at the women's meddling with things that allegedly do not concern them that he threatens Lysistrata with a thorough beating (503). This menacing of a free Athenian woman must be seen against the background of all other scenes of violence directed against women in comedy. Sommerstein's comment deserves to be quoted in full:

The Magistrate, like Lysistrata's husband (520; cf. also 516), thinks it quite proper to strike a woman merely for talking about matters that ought not to concern her. This attitude is found in Ar. only in the present play; elsewhere physical violence against women is associated with drunkenness (cf. *Wasps* 1388ff) or with moral corruption (cf. *Clouds* 1443ff). Even female slaves, in marked contrast to male slaves, seem never to be beaten, though they are sometimes raped ... In view of Old Comedy's fondness for physical violence in general ... this taboo on such violence against women must be regarded

121 On the relationship between Euripides' Heracles in his *Peirithous* and Aristophanes' Heracles in *Frogs* from a metafictional standpoint, cf. Dobrov 2001, 133–156.

122 Ar. *Ec.* 638–640:

οὐκοῦν ἄγξουσ' εὖ καὶ χρηστῶς ἐξῆς τὸν πάντα γέροντα
διὰ τὴν ἄγνοιαν; ἐπεὶ καὶ νῦν γινώσκοντες πατέρ' ὄντα
ἄγχουσιν· τί δὴθ', ὅταν ἀγνῶς ᾖ; πῶς οὐ τότε κάπιχεσθούνται;

Cf. Sommerstein 2007b, *ad Ec.* 635–643 on Plato's solution to this problem as proposed in his communal utopia in *R.* 460c–d; 461c–e; 463c–d; 465a–b.

as significant, and the breach of the taboo in the present scene highlights the arrogance and unreasonableness of Athenian males.¹²³

The significance of this scene is neatly expressed in these words. Sommerstein's observations hold true even if we consider the background of the women's potential rape by their own husbands (*Lys.* 160–166 and 225–227). Domestic violence, as we have seen, belonged to the realm of normality and would not have been perceived as anti-structural by the male theater audience.¹²⁴ But the magistrate's behavior toward Lysistrata was certainly the transgression of a taboo, because he was not entitled to touch a free citizen woman.¹²⁵

Even when violence is relegated to a metaphorical meaning only, it is still full of symbolic significance. By having the chorus-leader boast, 'I'm the one who hit Cleon in the belly when he was at the height of his power' (*Nu.* 549: ὃς μέγιστον ὄντα Κλέων' ἔπαισ' εἰς τὴν γαστέρα), Aristophanes harks back to *Knights*, performed one year prior (424 BCE), and reminds the audience of his daring attack and his satirizing of the powerful politician.

Several times, night-time mugging is envisioned, frequently in combination with clothes-snatching. It was obviously all right to wish for an enemy to be assaulted by night and get his head broken by a drunkard (*Ach.* 1165–1173). *Frogs* 715–716, for example, refers to Cleigenes' running the risk of being waylaid and stripped of his clothes when he walks around at night, drunk and without his stick. According to Sommerstein, Cleigenes is cast here in an unfavorable light.¹²⁶ He is not only an alcoholic, but is also characterized as aggressive by his wearing a weapon, which was no longer customary at Athens.¹²⁷ This also presents him as a coward, since his life was not in danger in the streets of the city. In the utopian other-world of *Ecclesiazusae*, the danger of encountering footpads is banned forever, because, as Praxagora explains, once everyone has a share in

123 Sommerstein 2007c, *ad Lys.* 503.

124 In Aristophanes' fragmentary *Aeolosicon*, the women take it for granted that they are beaten black and blue (Aristophanes F 9 [K.-A.] = F 10 [Edmonds]). In an unattributed Aristophanic fragment, violence against a woman is clearly expressed (F 676 [Henderson]). Unfortunately, we do not know the context of this fragment. Cf. above 155, n. 584; below 283, n. 159.

125 If even female prisoners of war enjoyed a minimum degree of protection (cf. above 89–90; 124, n. 451), the magistrate's threat to beat a free woman in the comedy is to be regarded as an anti-structural feature.

126 Sommerstein 1996, *ad loc.*

127 Cf. above 49, n. 126.

everything there is no longer any need to steal and rob people of their clothes (668–670). Euelpides tells Peisetaerus in *Birds* how he was mugged and knocked down with a cudgel by a clothes-snatcher, when he had just left the city walls to go on a trip,¹²⁸ having mistaken the dark of night for the early morning hours because of the aberrant crowing of a bird (495–498). Here again we can perceive a double standard in these scenes. Within the fictive plots, Athenian law holds sway, and clothes-snatchers are therefore *kakourgoi* and, as such, subject to the *apagôgê* procedure that could have led to their immediate execution, if they confessed their guilt. The audience could laugh about these scenes because they themselves were not the victims of the muggers and were safe in the seats of the theater of Dionysus.¹²⁹

Old Comedy cannot be fully understood without considering its constant references to tragedy. Parody of tragedy (paratragedy) and its mythological plotlines is hence a major source of humor. A few examples shall suffice in this context. *Birds* 712 and 1482–1493, and *Acharnians* 1167–1168, have to be read together. It was not desirable to meet a hero at night. Orestes, in particular, the son of Agamemnon, had not only killed his mother, but was also accustomed to waylaying people and stripping them of their clothes. Orestes, as the archetypical footpad, provided the nickname for various miscreants in Athens, three of whom we know: the son of a certain Timocrates, Diocles of Phlya, and one of the adherents of Callias.¹³⁰ These passages provide good illustration of how Old Comedy plays with mythology and jokingly refers to “real” people. In *Birds* 1565–692, Heracles is presented as a gluttonous brute with his diplomatic skills limited to threatening a Triballian with his club while on the gods’ embassy.¹³¹

In two grand scenes, Aristophanes parodies Euripides’ *Telephus* (from 438 BCE), in which Telephus escapes death by taking Agamemnon’s young son hostage and threatening to kill him. In *Acharnians*, the chorus of the fanatical charcoal-burners wants to prevent Dicaeopolis from striking a private truce with the Spartans, by violent means if neces-

128 Also Middle Comedy makes use of the motif of mugging, in close connection to kidnapping: Antiphanes F 202 (K.-A.), a fragment from Antiphanes’ *Soldier or Tychon*. On this scene, now with commentary, cf. Olson 2007, p. 187 (E3) with p. 440 (transl.).

129 MacDowell 1988, 12 sees the reason why the spectators could laugh about violence onstage in their feeling of superiority with regard to the victim onstage.

130 Sommerstein 1998b, *ad Ach.* 1167–1168 and 1991, *ad Av.* 712 and 1485–1493.

131 On this scene, cf. Kaimio 1990, 70.

sary (204–236). They attack him and are about to stone him—the appropriate capital punishment for a traitor (280–283), although the violence is to be taken ironically—when the comic hero suddenly goes inside the house and comes back with a basket of coals, presents it as a hostage, and threatens to split it open if they advance any further (326–365).¹³² Under this pressure, the charcoalers back off and agree to listen to Di-caeopolis.

Aristophanes must have loved the tragic pathos of the *Telephus* scene, which lent itself so well to parody, because he used the motif again in *Thesmophoriazusae*, this time on an even grander scale than in *Acharnians*.¹³³ When the In-law attending the Thesmophoria in the guise of a woman is discovered, unmasked, and threatened by the women, he takes Mica's baby hostage in order to save himself (689–761).¹³⁴ As it turns out, the baby is only a wineskin that the In-law finally cuts open, spilling the wine all over Mica. What started out as a dreadful scene ends in comic relief. In all these paratragic instances, violence is prescribed by myth and domesticated by the comic framing.

In her analysis, Kaimio cannot make any special sense out of *Lysistrata* 1216–1227 and *Birds* 1323–1336. To her, these scenes are pure slapstick for the sake of slapstick only.¹³⁵ In the passage toward the end of *Lysistrata*, two Athenians remove slave doorkeepers by force, thus allowing the celebrating Spartans to come out and join the Athenians. Sommerstein has pointed to the strong metatheatrical element of the phrase 'What a stale routine!' (*Lys.* 1218: φορτικὸν τὸ χῶριον).¹³⁶ Here it is not the fictive character but the very real actors who are speaking. Aristophanes does not want to fall back on the traditional, low humor of slapstick violence. This remark allows the audience to think about the violence normally used by Athenian citizens against slaves onstage.¹³⁷ Moreover,

132 On this hostage-taking scene, borrowed from Euripides' *Telephus*, cf. Zimmermann 2006, 128–129; Sommerstein 1998b, *ad loc.*; Kaimio 1990, 68–69.

133 Rau 1975, 339 remarks that, for two-thirds of *Thesmophoriazusae*, tragedy forms the background, however parodied and comically reshaped. Cf. Rau 1967, 42–50 (*Thesmophoriazusae*), 19–42 (*Acharnians*); von Möllendorff 2002, 150 (*Thesmophoriazusae*), 67–69 (*Acharnians*). On the Telephus-motif in *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazusae* comparatively, cf. Platter 2007, 143–175; Scholten 2006 on Aristophanes' playing with the myth of Telephus in *Acharnians*.

134 Kaimio 1990, 69.

135 Kaimio 1990, 67.

136 Sommerstein 2007c, *ad loc.*

137 Revermann 2006b is willing to grant the Athenian audience a high theatrical competence that they acquired through their active participation in choruses

in the preparation of the common feast shared by the Athenians and Spartans, these slaves are the last, though insignificant, obstacle to the final reconciliation with the Spartans. They are easy to overcome, yet their presence at a door marks a threshold separating the old animosities from the more peaceful, brighter future. Stepping over this threshold forcefully is a kind of retarding moment, able to enhance suspense and make the audience laugh once more. In this function, this kind of violence is no longer transgressive, not because Athenian citizens had every right to manhandle slaves, but because they act here onstage on behalf of a larger cause, bringing about peace between Athens and Sparta.

In *Birds* 1323–1336, Peisetaerus menaces his slave Manes with blows in accordance with the chorus of birds. This impatience and lack of self-control characterize Peisetaerus neatly. He is a *polupragmôn*, a typically Athenian busybody who upholds traditional hierarchies. Cloudcuckooland does not change anything about the Athenians' unquenchable aspiration for power.

Aristophanes cannot do without slapstick, but, as I hope has become clear, each and every slapstick scene makes sense and conveys a message more important than mere lowbrow humor. Is Aristophanes, in the end, correct in claiming that he elevated comedy from ribald vaudeville theater to a self-reflective art form, or was it all self-referential and joking make-believe? In the magnificent metatheatrical self-praise of *Peace*, Aristophanes has the chorus-leader boastfully speak as his mouth-piece:¹³⁸

In the first place, he [Aristophanes] was the only man on earth to stop his rivals from making jokes about rags and waging war on lice; ... and to cashier those slaves who run away or pull hoaxes or get a beating ... By getting

and their frequent attendance of theatrical performances. At the same time, he emphasizes the “stratified decoding” of the plays’ sense by the spectators (99, 118–120). Not everyone understood the performances in the same way, but the playwrights made certain that their dramatic products could be understood on different levels and were entertaining to everyone in the audience.

- 138 Ar. *Pax* 739–750: πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ τοὺς ἀντιπάλους μόνος ἀνθρώπων κατέπαυσεν εἰς τὰ ῥάκια σκώποντας αἰεὶ καὶ τοῖς φθειρσὶν πολεμοῦντας·

... ..

... καὶ τοὺς δούλους παρέλυσεν
τοὺς φεύγοντας κᾶζαπατώντας καὶ τυπτομένους, ἐπίτηδες

... ..

τοιαῦτ’ ἀφελὼν κακὰ καὶ φόρτον καὶ βωμολοχεύματ’ ἀγεννῇ
ἐποίησε τέχνην μεγάλην ἡμῖν ἀπύργωσ’ οἰκοδομήσας
ἔπεσιν μεγάλοις καὶ διανοίαις καὶ σκώμμασιν οὐκ ἄγοραίοις.

rid of such poor, lowbrow buffoonery, he's made our art great and built it up to towering size with impressive verses, conceptions, and uncommon jokes.

So although Aristophanes does make use of these very same motifs, he charges them with more than bawdy humor.¹³⁹ The friction between stage action and Dionysiac frame allows Aristophanes to play with the boundaries delineating the meaning of violence. Everything that happens inside the confines of the Dionysiac festival, with its exuberant license, can be perceived as funny, as not being subject to everyday scrutiny and moral assessment. Only seen from within the fictional plot onstage, however, the flexible line of daily life between acceptable and unacceptable behavior is intact. There is also acceptable and unacceptable violence. Acceptable violence onstage is no problem, but the judgment of unacceptable violence onstage is quite different. Aristophanic comedy can make fun and, at the same time, indirectly problematize this kind of violence, not least because human beings tend to exclude and marginalize phenomena about which they laugh. Laughing itself draws a boundary similar to the one described in chapter II of this book. We can laugh about calamities as long as they do not affect us, happen within our cognitive horizon, and are somehow tolerable. Atrocities occurring outside this sphere are monstrous and more appropriate for tragedy than for comedy. This perspective explains the different layers of Aristophanic violence, slapstick in particular.

Rape

While the scholarly treatment of rape in Menander has developed into a subfield of Classical Studies,¹⁴⁰ there is, to my knowledge, only one article on rape in Aristophanes (and Menander), by Sommerstein. While he underlines the “aggressive assertion of superiority” that is expressed in rape,¹⁴¹ he does not miss the fundamental differences from New Comedy. In Old Comedy, rape is never “a present or past event; [it] is always threatened, anticipated or imagined.”¹⁴² The victim is almost always a

139 McLeish 1980, 94–95 differentiates among six types of bawdy: explicit bawdy, explicit bawdy prepared, explicit bawdy involving a third party, secondary bawdy, double entendre, and bawdy gesture.

140 Cf. above 5, n. 28. Although Fantham 1975 mentions rape only in passing, her article triggered research on women in Menander so that, from the 1970s on, we can see that women's studies have reached the realm of New Comedy.

141 Sommerstein 1998a, 109.

142 Sommerstein 1998a, 105.

slave,¹⁴³ not a free citizen woman (with exceptions to be found only in *Lysistrata* and *Birds*, and a fragment maybe from *Thesmophoriazusae* II).¹⁴⁴ All rapists are mature men over thirty and married.¹⁴⁵ These preliminary remarks alone suffice to show that Aristophanes sends an ambivalent message concerning rape. It can be both a “harmless” incident, designed to express the sexual abundance and fertility of a happy, utopian life,¹⁴⁶ as well as a problematic occurrence. A close analysis of all instances of anticipated rape in Old Comedy will once more corroborate the discursive openness of the Aristophanic stage.¹⁴⁷ I treat the comedies in chronological order.

As is often the case in Aristophanes, and as is typical of the male perception of sex in Athenian sources, the line between consensual sex and rape is blurred. In an extended pun playing with agricultural double-entendres, the chorus-leader in *Acharnians* envisions three sexual encounters with Reconciliation, thus stressing his still fully intact virility (994–999).¹⁴⁸ More open to interpretation is Dicaeopolis’ prayer to Phales, a companion of Dionysus, to grant him the chance to rape a young and blooming girl (263–275) as a punishment for her stealing wood. The status of the girl is not directly expressed, but as she is occupied with fetching wood from the forest, it is safe to assume that she is a slave.¹⁴⁹ Dicaeopolis regards her theft as a kind of excuse for the rape, but Olson is right in observing that the rape of another man’s slave constituted *hubris*.¹⁵⁰ What is the message of this scene? *Hubris* is not a concern for the egotist Dicaeopolis in his utopian wish to establish for himself, and just

143 A typical phrase from the fragments is Philyllius’ statement in *Cities* that ὅ τι ἂν τύχη <δ> μάγειρος ἀδικήσας, τὸν αὐλητὴν λαβεῖν πληγὰς, ‘whatever mistake the cook may make, the fluteplayer gets beaten’ (Philyllius F 9 [K.-A.]; transl. in Philyllius F 10 [Edmonds]).

144 Sommerstein 1998a, 105; anonymous fragment of Old Comedy, Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae* II? 5 A (Edmonds). Cf. Zeus’ (?) remark that his wife has been forced in a fragment from Alcaeus’ *Endymion* (?): Alcaeus F 31 (K.-A.).

145 Sommerstein 1998a, 109.

146 On the *Schlaraffenland*-motif, a characteristic feature of the world turned upside down, cf., from a broad anthropological perspective, Kenner 1970, 69–82.

147 Cf. the useful overview given by Sommerstein 1998a, 105–109.

148 Cf. Sommerstein 1998b, *ad loc.* The triple penetration is a frequent motif in Aristophanes. Cf. also *Eq.* 1388–1391; *Av.* 1256.

149 Olson 2002, *ad Ach.* 272–273; cf. Bierl 2009a, 314–325 on the phallic and private celebration of the rural Dionysia in the *parodos* of the play.

150 Olson 2002, *ad Ach.* 272–275.

for himself, a kind of paradise. Similar to the slave-beating scenes that lay open the cruel nature of their masters, this imagined rape of another man's property characterizes the protagonist in all his ambivalence. He has no qualms about transgressing the boundaries that the community has drawn. This scene paradigmatically shows the tension between the luxurious and sexually abundant lifestyle that the comic hero demands for himself and his followers and the limits that society poses onto his complete and at times ruthless claim to self-fulfillment.¹⁵¹

In *Knights*, the Sausage-Seller tries to lure Dêmos over to his side and presents him with a slave boy carrying a camp stool. The Sausage-Seller encourages Dêmos to enjoy the boy sexually. This is the only scene in Aristophanes in which the rape of a boy is suggested (1384–1386). Immediately afterward (1387–1391), two allegorical Peace-terms (*Spondai*) enter the stage, in the form of two beautiful girls. The word *spondai* is feminine in Greek, and a vulgar wordplay ensues. Dêmos is fascinated by the beauty of the girls and asks the Sausage-Seller if he can 'satisfy [his] thirty-year itch with them' (1391: ἔξεστιν αὐτῶν κατατριάκοντούτῃσαι;).¹⁵² Sommerstein gives an insightful etymology of the word κατατριάκοντούτῃσαι: "to pierce them (*outasai*) three times (*tria*) with a long pole (*kontos*) from below (*kata*-)."¹⁵³ The suggestion of triple penetration proves again that the sexual potency of Dêmos is beyond doubt. Several more times in Aristophanes' comedies we will encounter silent women, whom the comic hero is allowed to rape or have consensual sex with. We do not know how these women were represented onstage. Were they, in accordance with stage conventions, men in the disguise of women, or is it imaginable that, for the purpose of titillating the male audience, female prostitutes appeared naked onstage?¹⁵⁴ It is interesting to

151 The final scene (*Ach.* 1197–1231), in which Dicaeopolis dances off with erect phallus and two dancing girls by his side is a finale characteristic of Old Comedy. Rape and consensual sex are not distinguished. The "wonderful" conditions of peace that Dicaeopolis enjoys are explicitly contrasted to the dire calamities from which the general Lamachus suffers.

152 Translation taken from Sommerstein 1997 *ad loc.*

153 Sommerstein 1997, *ad loc.*

154 Sommerstein 2007c, *ad Lys.* 1114 follows Henderson and believes that male actors enacted female objects of desire: "it is certain, and in most of the other passages cited it is probable, that the girl(s) appeared nude (i.e. that they were impersonated by men wearing appropriately designed bodysuits and padding: see J. J. Henderson, *YCS* 26 [1980] 163–4)." While Zweig 1992 is careful enough not to answer the vexed question of whether mute nude female figures were represented by padded male actors or female prostitutes, she demonstrates convincingly

see Dêmos' reaction to getting the chance of indulging in homo- and heterosexual activities. He is delighted and cannot wait to consummate the Peace-treaties. The members of the *dêmos* assembled as audience could surely laugh about their own sexual appetites as presented onstage, but laughter also creates a critical distance.

We find rape similarly represented in *Peace*. Trygaeus and his slave bring Theoria (Holiday, Show-time), a handmaid to Peace, onstage, make her strip in front of the audience, and entrust her to the councilor in the first row. During this long scene (868–908, 523–867 as preparation), full of vulgar and unequivocal sexual language, the audience had to join in the game.¹⁵⁵ Metatheater at its best potentially broke down the invisible barrier between plot and Dionysiac ritual. A truly sexual performance was now possible. Trygaeus makes it clear that the five hundred councilors can have sex with Theoria without further ado: 'you can lift her legs in the air right away and have a Liberation Feast! Just look at this cooker of hers!' (889–891: ὥστ' εὐθέως ἄραντας ὑμᾶς τῷ σκέλει / ταύτης μετέωρῳ κᾶτ' ἀγαγεῖν ἀνάρρυσιν. / τουτὶ δ' ὁρᾶτε τοῦ πτάνιον), thus directly suggesting gang rape.¹⁵⁶ What probably occurred is that Trygaeus took her by the hand, led her across the *orchestra*, where one prytanic officer, coached by the playwright, received her. She sat down among the *prutaneis*, naked and silent, until the play was over.¹⁵⁷ It comes as no surprise that Trygaeus, in the exit scene, dances offstage together with the chorus-leader and the two semi-choruses, looking forward to having sex with Opora (Cornucopia), who is also a handmaid to Peace (1329–1340). We can only guess whether or not this kind of sexual intercourse was understood to be consensual, but we have to keep in mind that Theoria and Opora are allegorical figures standing for the blessings of peace, not real human beings, even though represented by (female?) actors on stage.

In *Thesmophoriazusae*, rape has an almost metaphorical sense in the verbal exchange between Agathon and Euripides' In-law. The latter threatens to rape the former (59–62), one of the rare instances of the rape of a man in Aristophanes. The scene is decidedly funny and has

that these scenes are pornography rather than the celebration of exuberant sexuality. They unmistakably show to what high degree male dominance over women was entrenched in Athenian culture.

155 On the whole scene, cf. Robson 2006, 132–186; Henderson 1991, 64–66, 169–170.

156 Cf. Sommerstein 2005, *ad loc.* on all the sexual allusions and word-plays.

157 Olson 1998, *ad Pax* 905–906.

strong slapstick qualities. At lines 157–158, the In-law again uses foul language, suggesting to Agathon that he will take him from behind when he is about to write a satyr-play. This is not even envisioned as rape, but is a meta-literary joke, since satyr-plays centered on racy, sexual humor.¹⁵⁸

A different image of rape emerges in *Lysistrata*. When the heroine suggests the sex-strike to her companions, the women fear they might be raped by their own husbands (160–166). Later, in their oath to the common cause, the women also take potential rape by their husbands into consideration (225–227).¹⁵⁹ That this fear is not unfounded becomes clear from Cinesias' remarks after he has been titillated and duped by his wife, Myrrhine, who pretends she will seduce him but, to make him suffer more, suddenly disappears shortly before the sexual act. Cinesias is outraged by his wife's impertinence and wishes to rape her, with the help of Zeus (973–979). These scenes from *Lysistrata* are the only three passages in the whole of the Aristophanic corpus that allude to the rape of married women (i.e., female citizens). In the grand scene of reconciliation, staged by Lysistrata, between the Athenian and the Spartan envoy, Reconciliation herself (Diallage), in the guise of a naked and beautiful young woman, appears onstage (1112–1189).¹⁶⁰ The men, having suffered for quite some time from the plight caused by the sustained sex-strike, are now even harder pressed than before. They cannot divert their gazes from Reconciliation and are now ready to strike the truce to enjoy, finally, the fruits of peace. Unlike in *Acharnians* (990–999), Diallage appears onstage in *Lysistrata*, thus heightening the performative effect of the scene by underlining the men's sexual arousal right in front of the tangible object of sexual desire. On a concrete, physical level, the naked Diallage, whose erogenous zones are distributed as spheres of influence to the men contracting for peace, embodies the unity of Greece.

In *Ecclesiazusae*, the relationships of sexual power in Athenian society are laid open. A reversed world order, in which women reign, automatically entails women raping men. Whoever is in charge also has the

158 On both scenes, cf. Austin – Olson 2004, *ad loc.* The dancing-girl, Fawn, who sleeps with the Scythian archer for a drachma in order to distract him while Euripides releases the In-law from the plank (*Th.* 1172–1225) is not the victim of a rape. She is nevertheless a silent character.

159 From the perspective of Athenian men, forced sex with their wives was legitimate. But the women clearly express concern and are afraid of violence (*bia*), so that we can definitely speak of rape. Cf. above 155, n. 584; 275, n. 124.

160 Cf. above 281, n. 154 on the question of whether prostitutes played the roles of these silent and naked women.

right to rape members of the other sex. Toward the end of the play, however, this gruesome prospect of a true gynecocracy is somehow mitigated. On the command of his wife Praxagora, Blepyrus is given two young girls before he goes off to dinner (1137–1138), a conciliatory gesture that heals the world again, at least for Blepyrus.

Like every other form of violence in Aristophanes, rape has a broad semantic range of meanings and is therefore open to interpretation. Rape is fundamentally ambivalent and can be either harmless or problematic, according to its circumstances and who its victims are. In eight out of eleven Aristophanic comedies, rape is mentioned as a fantasy or threat by a male protagonist; it never actually occurs on the comic stage. It is always imagined as something pleasant for the comic hero. In most cases, he longs for the rape of, or consensual sex with, subordinate women who are in no position to defend themselves. Legally, a man could do anything he liked with a slave, as long as he owned that slave. Molesting or maltreating one's own property was not violence in the eyes of Athenian men, because this kind of patriarchal behavior belonged to the realm of normalcy. Unlike in Menander, citizen women were, in most instances, not the targets of sexual violence in Old Comedy, and if *Lysistrata* and her female companions are afraid of being raped by their own husbands, this fear only underlines their unprecedented boldness in defying their husbands' sexual wishes. Often, sexual fulfillment has a metaphorical sense—the heroes want to sleep with *Diallage* in *Lysistrata*, or with *Cornucopia* (*Opore*) and *Holiday* (*Theoria*) in *Peace*—standing for the fullness of life, the paradisaical utopia of a golden and peaceful age revived by the comic hero. Rape in this sense, then, is the expression of exuberant happiness. On this surface level, forceful sex was not problematized; the male audience could certainly laugh. In this sense, Aristophanes was far less transgressive than Menander, who took the rape of a citizen girl (who was always impregnated by the sexual act) as the point of departure for the gradual resolution of troublesome complications. This does not mean, however, that rape is a harmless event throughout Old Comedy. Aristophanes sticks closely to Athenian law, which recognized rape as a threat to the established order if a woman under a man's *kuria* was the victim.¹⁶¹ Thus rape is cast in a critical light when the perpetrator does not respect social hierarchies. The threatened sexual violation of divine figures, like *Iris* and *Basileia* in *Birds*, is excessive misconduct (see below). Raping another man's slave

161 Cf. above 53, n. 145; 76, n. 242; 77, n. 246; 78, n. 252.

(*Acharnians*) and stealing a flute-girl from a symposion to have sex with her (*Wasps*) are unacceptable, and characterize the comic hero negatively. In Athens, strict moral codes regulated homosexual behavior. The molestation of boys (*Knights*, *Thesmophoriazousae*), however funny it is meant to be, emphasizes the moral depravity of Dêmos and the In-law. Rape thus becomes a tool of negative characterization in the hands of the dramatist. Once more, we discern different layers within one type of violent behavior. The whole range of meanings attached to rape is in line with the polyvalence of all other kinds of violent behavior in Aristophanes. The comparison with Menander will be telling. One significant difference should be addressed at this point already. In contrast to Menandrian comedy, Aristophanic comedy graphically displays the sexual urge onstage through the actors' wearing of leather *phalloi* around their waists. Although sexual intercourse was not directly performed onstage, larger-than-life erections, obscene gestures, and the appearance of titillating figures like Diallage on the stage could not fail to create a highly sexualized atmosphere.

Three Case Studies: *Wasps*, *Birds*, and *Clouds*

The ensuing inquiry follows the structure employed above, in examining anger, hubris, slapstick, and rape. The violent *kômos* in *Wasps* is of such paradigmatic importance to the genre of Old Comedy that a special subchapter will be dedicated to it.

Wasps (422 BCE)

Aristophanes has addressed in *Wasps*, more than in any other comedy, the theatricality and ritual character of the Athenian courtroom, and blended them with those of the theater. The generational conflict between Philocleon (Cleon-lover) and his son Bdelycleon (Cleon-hater) is embedded in a wider web of conflicts: whereas Philocleon stands for old age, poverty, democracy, the judicial system, and the Agora—that is, he embodies the qualities of a typical Athenian busybody driven by political activism—his son is the exact opposite. Bdelycleon stands for youth, wealth, aristocracy, the symposion culture, and the *oikos*, and thus epitomizes political passiv-

ity.¹⁶² The two men symbolize these opposing views and are close relatives, with a certain amount of mutual understanding and a willingness to take responsibility for each other. Democratic energy, however, if exaggerated, is recognized as a fundamental problem. Philocleon is obsessed by his jury duty. Bdelycleon is concerned about his father's state of mind and is at first successful at hindering his father's comrades, the chorus of elderly jurymen (wasps), from dragging him along to the courtroom in the Agora. To find compensation for his father's favorite activity, Bdelycleon stages a private trial within the *oikos* of the dog Labes (891–1008). The setting is absurd. The real-life situation of a courtroom trial is grotesquely distorted. The proceedings should be held in the Agora, not at home. There should be hundreds of judges, not one man. The whole ritual framing is lacking and this fact alone renders this parody of a trial unsuccessful. Bdelycleon dupes his father into releasing the defendant, an act of mercy that Philocleon has actually never before granted. This botched “courtroom” ritual leads to ever-increasing absurdity and chaos in the remainder of the comedy. If we regard the play within the play together with the scene of transvestism, in which Bdelycleon forces his father to change his old garb for new, symposiastic clothes (1122–1164), and the scenes in the street, in which Bdelycleon tries to mitigate his father's aggressiveness and uninhibited energy (1326–1387, 1442–1449), as a liminal phase (i.e., the stage between perverted democratic vigor and a calm, aristocratic culture), we may observe that all these attempts on the part of the son to (re-)educate his father fail in the end. Could theater itself be a form of redress, in Turner's terminology, an alternative space in which Philocleon's unchecked energy could find its outlet in a functioning form of liminality that provides a safety valve for disturbing, over-energetic, maniacal, and egotistic behavior?¹⁶³ We will see to what extent a closer look at the violence perpetrated in this play challenges this hypothesis.

Anger is the emotion that best characterizes *Wasps*, in a literal sense. In line 1082/83, where the chorus of wasps speaks about biting their lips in battle out of *thumos* (sharp, bitter spirit) against the Persians, this *thumos* is meant positively. At the same time, it is also obvious that their fighting spirit, in its gross exaggeration, is turning into a problem, as democratic energy goes more and more awry in the play. More here than in any

162 Von Möllendorff 2002, 98–104.

163 It is von Möllendorff's merit to have worked out the highly ritualistic dimension of this comedy. Cf. von Möllendorff 2002, 94–104 and especially his graph (103).

other Aristophanic comedy, we see that drama is able to shed light on the same phenomenon from at least two different angles. To the wasps, who symbolize the Athenians of old who are passionate judges and uphold the lawcourt system that stands for democracy, their anger is positive, justified, even a manly virtue and moral obligation. The chorus of wasps wants to attack Bdelycleon, Philocleon's son, with anger (403: κινεῖν ἐκείνην τὴν χολήν, 'to launch the wrath'; 424: ὀργῆς καὶ μένους ἐμπλήμενος, 'full of rage and spirit') and with their stings in order to free Philocleon. And indeed, Bdelycleon is afraid to rouse their anger (223–224: τὸ γένος ἦν τις ὀργίσῃ / τὸ τῶν γερόντων, 'whoever riles that tribe of oldsters'); he warns the servant Xanthias of their horrible stings. In lines 646–649 the wasps speak again about their anger at Bdelycleon (646: ἐμὴν ὀργήν, 'my anger'). After asking Bdelycleon to give up his own anger at his father and them, the wasps finally abandon their ire and declare Bdelycleon winner of the argument (726). Thus, Bdelycleon has managed to appease the chorus. This can only mean that even the chorus of fervent democrats somehow acknowledges Bdelycleon's feelings. They implicitly grant that Bdelycleon's concern is justified to a certain extent. To Bdelycleon, his father's and his comrades' perverted energy is not only obsolete, but also menacing and threatening to become meddlesome and imperialistic. His father lost the *juste milieu*; democratic passion as expressed in his psychological dependence on the law courts became a dangerous addiction. Within the context of a trial, Philocleon's energy is directed against the defendant as anger (560: εἴτ' εἰσελθὼν ἀντιβοληθεὶς καὶ τὴν ὀργὴν ἀπομορθθεὶς, 'Then after I've been supplicated and had my anger wiped away'), because more often than not the behavior of the accused was perceived as anti-democratic.¹⁶⁴ Philocleon takes great delight in describing how the defendants implore him to lay down his wrath and have pity upon them (567: ἐγὼ γελάσω καὶ τὸν θυμὸν καταθῶμαι, 'to make me laugh and put away my anger'). It is only when he is invoked in this way that he shows moderation, might abandon his wrath (574: τῆς ὀργῆς ὀλίγον τὸν κόλλοπ' ἀνεῖμεν, 'we wind down the pitch of our anger a little'), and may grant pardon. Shortly before the hilarious mock-trial scene staged by Bdelycleon for his father as an inner play within the outer play of the theater production, in which Philocleon holds court judging a dog (891–1008), Bdelycleon addresses the chorus and asks that his father let go exactly this hard-heartedness and wrath (883–885: καὶ παυσάμενον τῆς δυσκολίας / ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς / τὴν ἀκαλήφην ἀφελέσθαι,

164 Cf. above 58; 92, n. 312; 128, n. 474; 136; 139; 159.

‘and put away his bad temper, from his anger drawing the sting’). So, while a certain democratic anger is justified against a miscreant, Philocleon’s exaggerated, perverted form of wrath is not. Anger becomes problematic at the point where the limits of usefulness are transgressed.¹⁶⁵ Bdelycleon does his best to suppress his father’s unchecked anger (risking the wrath of Philocleon’s colleagues) or to find different outlets for it, but ultimately fails. As we will see time and again, Aristophanes shows both sides and demonstrates onstage to what extent a certain ill-feeling is still tolerable, and when it becomes excessive. As in the orators, the ritual of public performance draws boundaries and creates a discursive and flexible line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

The most famous instances of *hubris* in Aristophanic comedy are to be found in *Wasps*, where it mainly denotes battery of free citizens. As Bdelycleon invites his father to take part in a symposium at a friend’s house, Philocleon at first wants to abstain from heavy drinking, because he well knows about the consequences of losing control of oneself.¹⁶⁶ In the wake of the lavish feast, however, Philocleon cannot resist: he drinks too much, starts rampaging with his unquenchable energy, and hits innocent passers-by during his drunken revel.¹⁶⁷ Of all the men in the company, he behaves the most outrageously (1303: ὑβριστότατος μακρῶ). In lines 1418–1419 we see to what extent the context of *hubris* is anchored in Athenian law. A beaten accuser enters the stage with a witness and declares that he will file charges of *hubris* against Philocleon. Bdelycleon knows what is at stake and immediately offers the wronged man compensation in any amount he wishes. Nevertheless, Philocleon rages on and strikes the accuser a second time, who leaves the stage, telling the *hubristês* to carry on with his outrageousness until he faces his judge (1441: ὕβριζ’, ἕως ἂν τὴν δίκην ἄρχων καλῇ, ‘Go on, be outrageous—until the magistrate calls your case!’). In this play, we see that the unbridled, wasp-like energy of Philocleon transgresses the boundaries of acceptable behavior and is therefore no longer compatible with the judicial norms of

165 Cf. Olson 2002, *ad Ach.* 352–356 referring to the heated dialogue between Diaecopolis and the chorus: “although a certain amount of anger is understandable and expected in a situation such as this, utterly unreasonable anger is not.”

166 V. 1252–1255. Epicharmus has a similar passage about the detrimental consequences of heavy drinking (Epicharmus F 146 [K.-A.]). Telling are also Alexis F 160 (K.-A.) and Eubulus F 93 (K.-A.) with lists of escalation.

167 V. 1299–1341, 1417–1441. At V. 1306, Philocleon is also compared to a donkey because of his gluttony and his enormous, supra-human sexual appetite. On the *hubris* of the donkey, cf. Fisher 1976, 189–190.

Athens. Within the fictional, dramatic action played out onstage, this is certainly true. The exuberant energy of the larger-than-life individual that forces its way beyond the norms and conventions of society is problematic from a communal perspective. Another matter is to what extent the spectators may have regarded Philocleon's riotous conduct as problematic. On the surface level, they certainly did not. They knew well that it was all play and that Philocleon would dance offstage; therefore they could relish this playful breach of everyday boundaries. In fact, they saw their own hidden wishes fulfilled onstage. Again we see the openness of comedy. Although the actor's behavior was only outrageous onstage, and the bearer of Philocleon's mask was not expected to carry this kind of exuberant license into the civic realm outside the theater, it would have been a transgression had the actor tried to elide the permeable line between stage and civic ritual. Despite all festive, Dionysiac license, pelting other citizens was, in the eyes of the spectators, only permissible onstage. In addition, a closer look reveals that a ritual is violated here: the rite of passage that young Athenian males, the ephebes, had to undergo. In this ephebic rite, young men were transferred from a state of immaturity, in which they were granted a certain amount of license, to maturity, responsibility, and the right to carry arms. Philocleon reverses this ritual of becoming an adult: as an old man who should be temperate and circumspect, he is regressing into unbridled puberty, unheeding of social norms and expectations.¹⁶⁸ To the Athenians, a violated ritual was always reason for concern.

The term "jack-in-the-box slapstick," as masterfully described by MacDowell, neatly describes the scene in *Wasps* in which Philocleon tries to break out of his own house to join the chorus of courtgoers but is held back by his own son, Bdelycleon, and his slave, Xanthias. The idea of a grown man's son, and even his slave, detaining him, in particular in his function as father and master, was unheard of.¹⁶⁹ As if the violation of Philocleon's social status, as implied by his age, gender, citizenship, and role in the family, were not enough, another, fundamental boundary is transgressed here. As Philocleon is about to let himself down on a rope, Bdelycleon intervenes. He orders Xanthias to take a harvest wreath from the door and strike his father with it, which Xanthias actually does (397–402). Bdelycleon is well aware of the multiple transgressions this

168 Von Möllendorff 2002, 100; Bowie 1987.

169 Cf. above 62, n. 174; 73, n. 223; 87; 99; 124–125 the cases of *hubris* regarding the detainment of a free Athenian citizen.

act entails and has recourse to mediated violence.¹⁷⁰ It is the slave, after all, who commits the atrocity, not he himself, the son. Nevertheless, this breach of social norms is blatant; it remains an indirect form of father-beating. What is more, under no circumstances could a slave hit his master, and especially not with olive or laurel branches that had been dedicated to Apollo on the occasion of the fall festival of the Pyanopsia.¹⁷¹ The wreath has a religious meaning and its misuse as a weapon certainly constitutes the transgression of a religious taboo as well. Philocleon's violent resistance is hence understandable and justified, and, later in the play, he strikes back. At lines 1382–1386 he knocks down his own son. And although the play's spectators would have deemed this aggressive act more socially acceptable than Bdelycleon's behavior toward his father, the frequent Aristophanic motif of father-beating is nonetheless humorously reversed in this scene.

In *Wasps*, there is only one instance of forced sex, when Bdelycleon asks Philocleon to stop judging in the Agora and judge instead at home, for example, in the case of their maidservant. These lines (768–770) contain a pun with the double meaning of imposing only one fine, and having sex with the maid once at the door.¹⁷² Since the two men here are speaking of their own housemaid, they do not perceive her rape as transgressive; hence the act does not constitute *hubris* in their eyes. Bdelycleon makes this “harmless” suggestion to keep Philocleon in the house. Another matter is Philocleon's later appearance with the silent flute-girl Dardanis, whom he stole from a symposion to have sex with her (1341–1381). This is a problematic variant of the sexually charged exit scenes so typical of Old Comedy. It comes as no surprise that Bdelycleon drives her offstage, especially after Philocleon has declared he will buy her freedom and make her his concubine (*pallakê*) after the death of his son (1351–1353). This statement is funny on two levels. First, it was a common notion in Athens that a son might wait for his father's death to install a woman of doubtful reputation in his *oikos*; Philocleon, feeling young and reinvigorated in the company of the young girl, thus reverses the natural order of things. Second, it was socially disreputable to live with a former prostitute, although this of course happened in real

170 On the mediation of violence and the mitigating circumstances it provided in some cases for the responsible party, cf. above 94–96.

171 Cf. Sommerstein 2004c, *ad V.* 398–399.

172 Sommerstein 2004c, *ad loc.*

life.¹⁷³ This double inversion of socially acceptable behavior leads directly to Philocleon's hybristic behavior (see above) and the frenzy of his violent *kômos* that concludes the play.

Violent kômos: Most Aristophanic plays conclude with *kômoi* symbolizing the start of a feast, or the celebration of a victory or wedding.¹⁷⁴ From the point of view of genre, these final revelries have the function of opening up the stage action and smoothly leading into and merging with the festive atmosphere of the outer ritual, the Lenaea or Great Dionysia. In contrast to a *pompê*, a celebratory and official procession in the honor of a god, a *kômos* in the strict sense of the word is the festive, frolicsome, and rather uncontrolled marching around of revelers, often drunk, in the honor of Dionysus, especially after dramatic *agônes*. But *kômoi* were also held privately after dinner parties. Symposiastic elements are therefore crucial ingredients of any *kômos*: a cheerful atmosphere, alcohol, music, singing and dancing, cups, torches, garlands, and the presence of flute-players and other girls. Also typical of *kômoi* are the mockery of public figures and/or the derision of socially disreputable behavior.¹⁷⁵ If it is true that comedy derived its origins from such *kômoi*, any comedy using this motif somehow harks back to these Dionysiac and ritual beginnings of the genre and tries to vary it. But there is more to comic *kômoi*: as Bierl demonstrates,¹⁷⁶ the theatrical staging of a *kômos* (often choregic) was the re-enactment of a real-life *kômos*, which marked and was part of the liminal and initiatory sphere through which young aristocrats crossed the threshold between adolescence and adulthood. Within this puberty ritual, the young men were granted—often in symposiastic contexts—a considerable degree of “Dionysiac” license, which comic drama incorporated into its structure and brought to the stage. Although komastic mockery, the derision of particular persons (*skômmata*), and physical aggressiveness belong together,¹⁷⁷ they normally followed certain

173 Cf. Ps.-Dem. 59 and Lys. 3 and 4 on living together with slaves as problematic behavior.

174 Pütz 2007 distinguishes between “cheerful, celebratory *kômoi* at the end of plays” (128–138), as exemplified by *Acharnians*, *Frogs*, *Wealth*, *Birds*, *Peace*, *Ecclesiazusae*; “religious *kômoi*” (138–142), as represented by *Acharnians*, *Frogs*, and *Ecclesiazusae*; and “violent *kômoi*” (142–146). Pütz admits that the categories overlap. *Lysistrata* does not meet any classification. For these reasons, her categorization is of limited heuristic value.

175 Cf. above 72–73 on *kômoi* as elements of popular punishment.

176 Bierl 2009a, esp. 278–280.

177 Cf., e.g., Lys. 4 on the violence committed among rivals for *hetairai*.

established rules in daily life. Some comedies, however, show excessive komastic behavior, perversions of this celebratory ritual, and thus the dangers inherent in any such comic license.

The most notorious test case in Aristophanic comedy is Philocleon's *kômos*, performed single-handedly at the end of *Wasps*. Special irony is created by Philocleon's resolution before the symposion not to indulge in alcohol too much. He claims to know about the troublesome outcome of such unrestrained behavior, which, he says, often ends in battered doors, assault, and battery (1252–1255), but his ensuing behavior ends in exactly these transgressions. Bdelycleon has tried to resolve the tension between himself and his father several times, but without success. All of Bdelycleon's attempts to educate, domesticate, and civilize his father have failed. The liminal situations of the *oikos* court, the scene of transvestism, and finally the scene in the streets of Athens do not lead to a satisfactory outcome, the taming of the arch-democrat Philocleon with his unquenchable, wasp-like energy. We will focus on the last scene, Philocleon's rioting on his way back home from the symposion. At line 1292 Xanthias, Philocleon's slave, runs onstage after receiving a severe beating from his master. Like a messenger in tragedy,¹⁷⁸ he reports his master's drunken and riotous behavior and thus paves the way for the latter's appearance on stage from line 1326 on. Philocleon has stolen a slave prostitute away from the party (1345–1381) and now menaces passers-by with blows (1327–1331, 1386); in fact, he strikes people indiscriminately without taking heed of their social class or rank (his own slave, 1296, 1307; everyone, 1323; his own son, 1386; the woman Myrtia, 1390; a citizen, 1422). This unacceptable misbehavior can rightly be called *hubris* (1303, 1319, 1418, 1441). When the wronged parties finally raise their voices against him and demand legal redress or extrajudicial compensation (1389–1391, 1406, 1417–1426), Philocleon drives them away by force. After Bdelycleon has dragged his father into the house at 1449, Philocleon bursts out again at 1484 with snorting nostrils, like a bull, the animal of Dionysus, after having danced all through the night. Xanthias characterizes this supra-human, god-like energy as the 'onset of madness' (1486: *μανίας ἀρχή*; similarly, at 1496: *μανικὰ πράγματα*, 'it's crazy business!'), while Philocleon descends into the *orchêstra*, replies with vulgar remarks to Xanthias' warning that all the injured people might stone him in the end (1491), and takes on the tragedian Carcinus and his three sons in a

178 Rau 1967, 162–168 on Aristophanes' *Botenszenen* humorously shaped after Euripides' models.

dancing contest, hinting at the possibility that he will beat these representatives of tragedy to a pulp (1503). In frenzied ecstasy, Philocleon maniacally dances offstage.¹⁷⁹

How are we to understand this exuberant finale? It is not enough to state, with Pütz, that “Philocleon’s rude conduct and excessive dancing overstep the boundaries of the usually accepted behavior on such an occasion.”¹⁸⁰ Von Möllendorff ascribes a healing function to the ritual efficacy of theater in this case. Whereas the tensions between Philocleon and his son could not be resolved in the fictive plot onstage, these conflicts are now channeled through the *orchêstra*, with the theater building and representatives of tragedy being integrated into this final, and at last successful, attempt at coming to terms with Philocleon’s extreme energy. According to von Möllendorff, theater addresses here its own theatricality and leaves fiction behind. In doing so, it becomes another space of the *polis* in its own right, equal to Agora, *oikos*, and street. In its capacity to bring about *communitas*, theater demonstrates the shortcomings of these other spaces and points to its own strengths. Finally, theater enables Philocleon to do what he could neither achieve at home nor in the Agora, living his tyrannical individualism in full.¹⁸¹ But is the outcome all that positive? Philocleon operates far outside the limits as drawn by Athenian law. His obnoxious bullying of Athenian citizens is permissible and funny onstage, but would be unbearable in real life. Unmistakably, this perverted *kômos* is supposed to demonstrate drastically the dangers of a democratic energy that has gotten out of control. If the integration of the heroic individual into democratic society—that is, the reconciliation of the aristocratic claim to egotistic self-realization with the final integration of the hero into the community of the *polis*—has been the overarching theme of all Greek literature since Homer, Aristophanes enacts the collapse of this reconciliatory endeavor in an almost depressing way. This breakdown is only bearable because it is made funny. The problematic traits of Philocleon’s hypertrophic conduct that cannot be integrated are exposed to ridicule.¹⁸² Thus, violent *kômoi* test the limits, the tightrope

179 MacCary 1979 has demonstrated that Philocleon is an *ithyphallos*, dancing in the end to a mixture of tragic, satyr-like, and comic tunes, i. e., “proto-dramatic phallic performances in honor of Dionysos” (145).

180 Pütz 2007, 145.

181 Von Möllendorff 2002, 102 and in his correspondence with me on this scene.

182 Whitman 1964, 52 gives a most sympathetic characterization of the Aristophanic comic hero: “A desperate small fellow, inexcusably declaring himself for a social savior; an utterly self-centered rogue of *poneria*, representing a universal gesture

walk between exuberant license during the Dionysiac ritual and violence that harms the community. Similar to the tragedians, Aristophanes enabled his spectators to look into the abyss.

A side-glance at one more, admittedly perverted and violent *kômos* may be permissible in this context.¹⁸³ In *Ecclesiazusae*, Blepyrus only alludes to a violent *kômos*, trying to refute Praxagora's utopian plans. How will symposiasts pay compensation to people they have struck (664: ἐὼ-χθηέντες ὑβρίζουσιν, 'after a dinner party and get into fights'), he asks, if money has been abolished?¹⁸⁴ The violent scene toward the end of the play, in which two old hags drag the young man Epigenes by force into a house, quarrelling with each other in an amorous contest and staking their claims on which of them gets to have sex with him first, has a distinct message. The reversal of gender roles has not brought about a blissful utopia as designed by Praxagora, not even for the women. The nightmare—for young men—of a complete gynecocracy and breakdown of the social order is mitigated by the final scene, in which Praxagora commissions her maid to bring two young girls to Blepyrus, her own husband, who dances offstage with them in the traditional way. This *kômos*, as prescribed by the genre, displays considerably less exuberant vitality and force than that in *Wasps*.

What happens in violent *kômoi* or conclusions to the plays? They breach the boundaries of the genre as well as boundaries of real-life interactions¹⁸⁵ (i. e., the thin line between boisterous license and violence), and

of thumb-to-nose unto all the high and mighty; a coward who runs away from his enemies for the moment, and then dances on their graves with godless cheer; a fast talker, a hoper-for-the-best and a believer-in-the-worst; a creature of infinite ambition, infinite responsiveness, and infinite appetite – the comic hero, as represented in Aristophanes, somehow makes up a figure of salvation, survival against odds; he is the self militant, and devil-take-the-means.”

183 Ar. *Lys.* 306–403 (the women thwarting the attack of the men armed with torches by pouring water over them) is not really a *kômos*. The same is true for *Lys.* 1216–1222. The Athenians are about to celebrate a party with the Spartans and have a little scuffle with some slaves—the passage is unclear and suggests a variation of the doorkeeper motif (cf. Henderson 1987, *ad loc.*)—but the *kômos* itself can hardly be called violent. For an opposing view, cf. Pütz 2007, 142–143, 145–146, who interprets both scenes as violent *kômoi*.

184 On assaults committed by drunken komasts on passers-by, cf. Olson 2002, *ad Ach.* 980 and 1166–1168 with the following sources (among others): V. 1253–1254, 1322–1331, 1389–1391, 1476–1496; *Ec.* 663–664; Men. *Dysc.* 230–232; *Epitr.* 169–171; Eubulus F 93.8–10 (K.-A.); E. *Cyc.* 445–446, 507–509, 534–537.

185 On the boundaries of the comedic genre, cf. Bierl 2002b.

thus mark them more clearly. Violence at the end of a comedy is situated at the *limen* of a comic play that is still embedded within the liminal phase of a Dionysiac festival. Insulated or mediated by this festive layer, violence is kept at a sufficient distance from the audience. Spectators could laugh because this outer dramatic layer was intact and would thus prevent the violence onstage from coming near them, but they were also called upon to reflect on the violence depicted. The theater was a laboratory that allowed for such intellectual experiments. The “as-if” situation of fictional play enabled the spectators to judge violence on different levels. Within the fictional world, Athenian law was basically intact, and so *hubris*, for example, was outrageous. Through the distance of pretend-play, however, the spectators, safely embedded in the extra-fictional world, could still laugh. The fact that the fictional contract between actors and audience to suspend disbelief could be broken at any time in Old Comedy prevented the creation and conveyance of a consistent message.

In addition, Aristophanic characters are complex and do not offer consistent models of identification. Dicaeopolis,¹⁸⁶ Strepsiades, Philocleon, and Peisetaerus are as ambivalent as Lysistrata¹⁸⁷ and Praxagora. As trickster figures they are endearing, but their actions are also doubtful, the premises of their great ideas and the concrete materialization of them not beyond reproach. The distance that was always maintained between stage characters and spectators empowered the latter to both like and dislike the characters simultaneously, to identify with them partly, disapprove of them, and criticize those characters’ actions as well as question their own behavior and desires, which were critically mirrored and grotesquely distorted onstage. In the case of Philocleon, this multi-layered communication between the stage characters and the spectators might have worked as follows: yes, we all love law courts, so we sympathize with Philocleon’s passion, but we should not overdo it as he does. Yes, he is a great hero of Marathon, but he could also adjust a bit more to the modern refinements of civilized culture. Yes, we find his raging fury at the end funny and we would like to join him in dancing offstage and having sex with slave women, as he does, but once the theater production is over and the “real” *kômos* begins, we cannot be as hybriatic and disruptive of the *kômos* as he is. The openness and polyvalence of Aristophanic

186 Cf., e.g., Platter 2007, 42–62 and Fisher 1993 on Dicaeopolis’ ambivalent personality.

187 Cf., e.g., Faraone 2006 on Lysistrata as priestess and prostitute.

comedy especially apply to violent *kômoi*, which, as endings to the plays, open them up to daily life and thus also enable reflection about violence.

Birds (414 BCE)

Birds may well be Aristophanes' gloomiest and most mysterious comedy. Its extraordinary length testifies already to the special status it enjoys within the Aristophanic corpus. As to form, the comedy imitates the closedness of tragedy, in itself an important hint for any interpretation of the play. The comic hero Peisetaerus, allegedly sick of Athenian court culture, aspires to the utopia of a *polis apragmôn* (40–41, 44).¹⁸⁸ Whereas, in *Wasps*, the exuberant Philocleon breaks away from societal conventions only in the very end, Peisetaerus is so full of himself that he transcends the narrow boundaries of his hometown in the very beginning of the play. Together with his friend Euelpides, he is right away on the lookout for a utopia that he could found by himself. In his endless ambition and unlimited energy, Peisetaerus even surpasses Philocleon and is, in fact, more of a busybody (*polupragmôn*) than his comic predecessor. Step by step, he carefully builds up his own empire, a castle in the air (*Nephelokokkugia*, Cloudcuckooland), located somewhere between man and the gods. In his larger-than-life capacities, he has the power to set aside the laws of nature and eventually even rival the gods by becoming ruler over the whole universe.¹⁸⁹ I have described, time and again, Aristophanic comedy as the attempt at delineating the line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior, but Peisetaerus transgresses that boundary from the outset: his self-confidence has long turned into unbearable arrogance and hybriistic self-assertiveness. And yet, the play can be read from many different angles, though three main interpretations predominate: (1) understanding the play as a positive and escapist fantasy,¹⁹⁰ quite detached from contemporary politics, (2) reading the play as political allegory, and (3) seeing the play as a parody of myth.¹⁹¹ The second

188 Also for Bierl 2004, 18–19 this utopia is regressive and harks back to a primordial, animal-like Otherworld.

189 Auffarth 1994 demonstrates to what extent the “sacrificial strike” that directly challenges the supremacy of the gods in *Birds* is anchored in oriental literature and the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.

190 Henderson 1998b *passim* and Sommerstein 1991, 5 do not see the dark sides of the “comic” hero Peisetaerus. To Henderson, *Nephelokokkugia* inspires hope as a superior alternative to Athens.

191 Von Möllendorff 2002, 108–115 gives a summary of the main interpretive trends.

and third interpretations overlap and, in my opinion, allow us to discern a relatively coherent message. In what follows, I adhere to these latter two interpretive models.

In *Birds*, Peisetaerus is never angry, but calm and focused on his goals. His interlocutors, be they gods or men, are overwhelmed and duped by his masterful sophistic rhetoric and are not angry either. Anger, therefore, need not be addressed here. *Hubris* is quite a different matter, however. Two different meanings of *hubris* are clearly expressed within the play: battery and rape. *Hubris* as battery occurs, for example, when Peisetaerus beats up the decree-seller,¹⁹² who then wishes to take Peisetaerus to court on a charge of *hubris* (1046–1052). In so doing, he precisely follows Attic legal language. *Hubris* in its meaning of rape will be considered below under the category of rape.

Comic license during Dionysiac festivals is best expressed in the release of pent-up feelings and aggressions, mainly against state agencies. The playful expulsion of authorities is thus a central part of all carnival-esque occasions, and Aristophanes does not fail to make abundant use of this slapstick motif in *Birds*. Peisetaerus shows traits of a tyrant by chasing off nine successive intruders into his Cloudeuckooland. His first victim is a priest (859–894),¹⁹³ the next a poet who would like to compose dithyrambs and other poems in honor of the new city (904–958), and next comes an oracle-monger (959–991). At line 992 the astronomer Meton enters the stage, wanting to take measurements of the airy city. Peisetaerus, upset by this plan, kicks him offstage shortly afterward (1016–1020). The next intruder to incur Peisetaerus' aggression is the inspector from Athens, who gets beaten and driven out even more quickly than his predecessor (1021–1034). Nevertheless, he shows up again and is repelled a second time, together with the decree-seller (1035–1057). The pinnacle of Peisetaerus' insolence, however, is his blasphemous insulting and chasing off of the goddess Iris, whom he sends to Zeus with a threatening message (1199–1261). In lines 1375–1409, Peisetaerus chases Cinesias, poet of dithyrambs, out of *Nephelokokkugia*. His whipping and expulsion of

192 An interesting variant of an expelled professional is the bookseller in the fragment Theopompus F 79 (K.-A.).

193 In *Pax* 1118–1126, Trygaeus has the priest and soothsayer Hierocles beaten and driven off by a slave. Hierocles later calls on witnesses to file charges of battery (*dikē aikeias*) against Trygaeus. Cf. below 304, n. 215 on other passages of calling on witnesses. Interestingly, and in line with the ritual of Dionysiac license, winning over the fictive plot onstage, the evil-doers nowhere have to face the consequences of their misdemeanors.

the informer (1410–1469), a hereditary pest in Athens,¹⁹⁴ shows how serious Peisetaerus is about severing all ties with Athenian democracy. In offending and striking people who are actually necessary for the founding and maintenance of a democratic *polis*,¹⁹⁵ Peisetaerus demonstrates that he does not intend to establish a democracy, but, on the contrary, his own solitary rule. By not admitting or even eliminating the democratic professions from the new utopian *polis*, democracy itself is driven out. In claiming all power for himself and even eating some of his subject birds for a wedding meal, a horrifying scene (1688–1689, with 1579–1590 as preparation),¹⁹⁶ he makes it abundantly clear that he is, in fact, a tyrant, and he is even addressed as such (1708: δέχεσθε τὸν τύραννον ὀλβίοις δόμοις, ‘welcome your ruler to his prosperous palace’). The *polupragmôn* (busybody) Peisetaerus, who cannot abstain from political maneuvering—and for whom Cloudcuckooland is not an escapist retreat from litigious Athens but a transient phase used as a means of establishing his tyranny over the entire cosmos—shares many features with the stereotypical Athenian: he is clever, if not cunning, suspicious of his fellow countrymen, restless in his pursuit of visionary dreams of power, and loves daring entrepreneurship even at the expense of turning over the natural world order.

In *Birds*, beating one’s father is ostentatiously kept ambivalent. Whereas the chorus advocates the reversal of moral values by claiming that striking one’s father is “good” in the birds’ realm (757–758: εἰ γὰρ ἐνθάδ’ ἐστὶν αἰσχρὸν τὸν πατέρα τύπτειν νόμῳ, / τοῦτ’ ἐκεῖ καλὸν παρ’ ἡμῖν ἐστίν, ‘Say by custom it’s shameful here to hit your father; up there it’s admirable’),¹⁹⁷ Peisetaerus rejects a young man seeking access to the new kingdom because he wants to get away with killing his father. Peisetaerus first cajoles the young man into disclosing his true intentions by saying, ‘We do in fact consider a bird very manly who’s beaten up his

194 Against the backdrop of these frequent and highly meaningful expulsions of authorities, Peisetaerus’ threat to beat the slave Manes if he does not prepare more and more wings faster and faster (1313–1336), seems like a conventional and quite harmless comic occurrence.

195 Cf. MacDowell 1988, 7.

196 Previously, Peisetaerus had pointed out to the birds that human beings are so cruel as to eat them (531–538), a fact about which he expresses deep resentment. The contradiction in his utterances only underlines his sophistic rhetoric and opportunism.

197 On this complex scene, cf. Dunbar 1995, *ad loc.* with extended material on Athenian social norms regarding parents, esp. Xen. *Mem.* 4.4.20.

father while still a chick' (1349–1350: καὶ νῆ Δί' ἀνδρεῖόν γε πάνυ νομίζομεν, / ὅς ἂν πεπλήγη τὸν πατέρα νεοττὸς ὄν), only to cite immediately afterward the old Solonian law, adapted to the birds' situation, according to which the young must sustain their parents, if they have brought them up (1353–1357). It is remarkable to what extent Athenian law is still valid in the "other world" of Clouduckooland. Peisetaerus does not want to have criminals in his state and recommends to the young man that he let his father live, and instead get rid of his aggressions on the Thracian warfront (1360–1369). The birds' kingdom is not a safe haven for malefactors of all kinds. It is not a lawless, topsy-turvy world in which everyone can do what he pleases, to the detriment of others. The fact that not even the would-be tyrant Peisetaerus, who is entirely driven by his own imperialistic ambitions, tolerates violence against parents casts all previous and subsequent father-beating scenes in Aristophanic comedy in a highly problematic light, especially the most somber of these scenes: the blows that Strepsiades receives from his son Pheidippides in *Clouds* (see below). Aristophanes has taken great care to weave ambivalence into the very fiber of *Birds*.

During the optimistic and exhilarated atmosphere that prevailed in Athens immediately after the beginning of the Sicilian expedition, it might have been impossible for a comic playwright such as Aristophanes to speak his mind openly and raise a warning voice. Can we say, then, that *Birds* is an anti-imperialistic allegory, Aristophanes' coded criticism of megalomaniac imperialism, and that Peisetaerus stands for Alcibiades, who, through his mastery of sophistic rhetoric, dupes the birds/the Athenians into believing in *Nephelokokkugia*, a dream-like castle in the air that is founded only on empty words? The birds are as gullible as the Athenians, and the latter are as imperialistic as the former. Does Aristophanes want to say that in each Athenian lurks a potential tyrant who is unable to keep his democratic energy under control, and therefore ultimately aspires to sole rule? Scholars have read the play this way,¹⁹⁸ and once more we see that slapstick scenes can indeed be highly meaningful.

198 Arrowsmith 1973 offers a cogent interpretation of the play from the American perspective during the Cold War, with Peisetaerus embodying the Athenian *dēmos* as assembled in the audience and driven by his boundless phallocratic and tyrannical imperialism. Most recently, Rosenbloom 2006, 270–271 continues to think along these lines, interprets *Birds* and Euripides' *Trojan Women* in close connection to each other, and states that both texts are subversive in yearning for the *apragmôn polis*.

Scenes of rape, a subject far more problematized in *Birds* than in any other Aristophanic comedy, can also be shown to have meaningful significance. As Peisetaerus threatens to dethrone Zeus and incinerate his palace, the goddess Iris warns him in paratragic diction not to incur Zeus' wrath, cautioning that human arrogance will always be punished by the gods (1238–1242). As a consequence, Peisetaerus is so brazen as to threaten to rape Iris three times, if she continues to annoy him (1253–1256).¹⁹⁹ She is so baffled that she flies off, warning Peisetaerus that her father will stop such hybriatic behavior before long (1259: ἢ μὴν σε παύσει τῆς ὕβρεως οὐμὸς πατήρ, 'I swear my father will put a stop to your insolence!').²⁰⁰

The protagonist's diabolic and violent nature is exposed even more through a gloomy mythical parallel. Indeed, one scene can be seen as a parody of the myth of the Thracian king Tereus, who raped Philomela, sister of Procne, his wife, and was later transformed into a bird after unknowingly consuming his own son, Itys. Aristophanes probably refers to the myth as shaped by Sophocles in his tragedy on Tereus.²⁰¹ Humorously, in *Birds*, the traditionally chaste Procne appears naked (?) onstage 665–673 and is not unwilling to be kissed by Euelpides, who actually wants to have sex with her. What is more, as von Möllendorff has worked out, Peisetaerus' career ladder turns the Sophoclean plot on its head. In the original myth, Tereus is a tyrant, rapes Philomela, eats his own son Itys unknowingly, and, as a punishment, is transformed into a bird. Aristophanes reverses this familiar order of events from the myth: Peisetaerus starts out as a fellow citizen of the birds, deliberately eats birds as a wedding meal (1688–1689), and gradually turns into a tyrant. But one step is missing. There is a narrative gap between Peisetaerus' (pseudo-)cannibalism

199 Cf. Ar. *Ach.* 994 on the triple penetration. Dunbar 1995, *ad Av.* 1253–1256 with reference to *Ach.* 271–276 is right in pointing out that Peisetaerus does not threaten her with rape out of sexual desire, but to punish her. As Scharffenberger 1995 could demonstrate, several literary and pictorial models are in the background of this scene: Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, satyr plays (in Euripides' *Cyclops* Helena is threatened with gang rape at lines 179–182), and vase paintings, where lustful satyrs are eager to molest unwilling nymphs. On the mythological grounding of the Iris figure and Aristophanes' adaptation, cf. Zannini Quirini 1987, 62–65; Hofmann 1976, 110–119.

200 Cf. Buis 2002 on the different layers of *hubris* in *Av.*

201 On the relationship between Sophocles' and Aristophanes' Tereus from a meta-fictional standpoint, cf. Dobrov 2001, 105–132. On Aristophanes' shaping of the myth of Tereus, cf. Zannini Quirini 1987, 23–44, and, still valuable, Hofmann 1976, 72–78.

and his becoming a tyrant. In this context Basileia, a godlike figure, plays a pivotal role. Does Peisetaerus ultimately rape her as Tereus has raped Philomela? The answer is not clear, but it is telling that Basileia is on stage from line 1720 on and, like all other female figures in Aristophanes that are envisioned as victims of rape, does not speak.²⁰² We can compare this visual performance of an aposiopesis with the same technique as practiced by the orators.²⁰³ In Demosthenes' *Against Meidias*, for example, the deliberate performance of silence in the courtroom appearance of Straton, barred from speaking in public because he has been disenfranchised by Meidias, serves the purpose of denigrating Meidias as an evil-doer.²⁰⁴ Is something similar going on in Aristophanes' play? Be that as it may, Peisetaerus' behavior is presented as highly problematic through the use of many motifs, among them his potential rape of Basileia (1720–1765). In its mythical dimension, this kind of rape is different from the frolicsome exit scenes starring drunken revelers at the brink of indulging in peace and all the joys it brings. Peisetaerus' tyrannical and supra-human egomania has transgressed all human boundaries and is frightening in its blasphemous threat to rape a divinity.²⁰⁵ Only his final marriage to Basileia might mitigate this impression (1536–1543, 1634–1693, 1720–1765),²⁰⁶ which does not detract, however, from the unsettling portrayal we get from the “comic” hero. And in general, Aristophanes' tone is more muted than in any other of his comedies: he makes fewer direct political allusions, does not use the comic technique of the *onomasti kômôdein*, and basically abstains from obscenities.²⁰⁷ The unusual humor throughout the play, supported by the specific meanings of violent words and deeds, underscores once more the tyrannical imperialism Peisetaerus is striving for and, with him, maybe most Athenians?

202 Von Möllendorff 2002, 114–115.

203 On Aristophanes' art as an orator, cf. Harriott 1986, 27–45 (attack and defense); 46–67 (praise and blame).

204 Cf. above 110, n. 376.

205 Cf. Sommerstein 1991, *ad Av.* 1536–1543 on the identity of Basileia. Hose 1995a, 58–67 focuses on Peisetaerus' *hubris*.

206 On this kind of *hieros gamos*, cf. Hofmann 1976, 138–160.

207 Von Möllendorff 2002, 115.

Clouds (423 BCE)

Where *Birds* is unsettling already, with its overly cruel and ruthless hero, *Clouds* is even more so.²⁰⁸ This play is concerned with the fundamental societal and cultural changes Athenians were exposed to from the mid fifth century BCE on. A new system of education, sophistic training in oratory, had destabilized the old canon of values and promised quick success in the public venues of Athens. The boorish farmer Strepsiades is deeply in debt because of his son's aristocratic lifestyle. Both realize that they have to get rid of their creditors by arguing away their debts. But where to learn good rhetoric? As it happens, their neighbor is Socrates, whom Aristophanes characterizes as an arch-sophist. Strepsiades takes lessons with him first, but to no avail, and later sends his son to Socrates' school. There, Pheidippides learns how to deceive and make the worse argument the better. Strepsiades is enthusiastic about his son's success but, soon afterward, learns the hard way that his son can turn his newly acquired "education" against him. Pheidippides beats up his father and threatens to do the same to his mother. Strepsiades' endeavor to dupe his creditors has, in fact, only aggravated the conflict between generations and turned his family life upside down. Fully aware of his big mistake, he is desperate and finds no other way out than to set Socrates' house on fire.

It must be remembered that what we now have preserved is the second version of *Clouds*, which was never performed. The original version, which we do not have, was not successful in the comic *agôn*. We do not know exactly what kind of changes Aristophanes made before producing the second version, but, according to an ancient plot summary (*hypothēsis*), there are three major deviations from the original.²⁰⁹ (1) Aristophanes obviously replaced the *parabasis* with a new one (518–562) in which he bitterly complains about the first version's failure. He considers *Clouds* his best play, because it is intellectually far superior to the comedies of his rivals. (2) A long *agôn* (889–1104) between the better argument (also called 'just argument,' or *logos dikaios*) and the worse argument (also called 'unjust argument,' or *logos adikos*) epitomizes what the dramatic conflict is all about. (3) The burning down of Socrates' thinkery (*phrontistērion*) was a completely new conclusion to the play

208 For an opposing viewpoint, cf. Fisher 1984, who does not see any serious elements in *Clouds*.

209 Coulon 1952, Hypothesis VII (p. 162) = *Clouds* I, Testimonia (ii) Hypothesis A7 (Henderson).

(1476–1511).²¹⁰ Since Aristophanes must have regarded these major alterations as crucial means of improving the depth and quality of his play,²¹¹ they are key to our understanding of it. While the self-evident *parabasis* need not be analyzed in this context, and the incineration of the reflectory will be treated below in detail, we will look first at the *agôn* between the *logos dikaios* and the *logos adikos*, abstractions for the binary oppositions in which many Athenians felt themselves trapped.

The *logos dikaios* grounds his arguments in custom, tradition, and the law; that is, in the old value system. The *logos adikos*, by contrast, no longer accepts the stable normativity of old; for him, “good” is whatever one feels is advantageous. Ruthlessly and unscrupulously, he tramples on old-fashioned values and praises arbitrariness and irresponsibility. Through his arguments, ties to the past are severed and values become interchangeable.²¹² In the end, the disrespectful *logos adikos* wins the debate and takes on Pheidippides’ education in Socrates’ reflectory, which, in turn, leads to the ensuing disasters. The long *agôn* containing the debate between the two types of arguments, itself a grand satire on sophistic thinking, is thus pivotal in the play and also paves the way for an understanding of the role of the chorus of clouds. The topic of the comedy is rhetoric and, more broadly speaking, language, communication, and the questions of who is in command of language and what kind of power it can wield.²¹³ The clouds are equivalent to language itself; in fact, they are a cipher for language, with all its chances and risks. Thus, they unite tradition and old values with new trends. In their constant state of flux, they are fundamentally open and flexible, adaptable to every new situation.²¹⁴

210 On the three changes, cf. Marianetti 1997, 6. O’Regan 1992, 138 assumes that the second version of *Clouds* is a response to the first, failed version. This second version includes more vulgarity than the original, which, because of its sophistication, did not appeal to the audience. According to Hose 1995b, Aristophanes presented, in the figure of Socrates, a new type of comic hero who foreshadowed New Comedy. He was no longer the democratic hero who committed himself to the *polis*, but was a below-average figure who cared only about himself. This new type of comic hero did not yet appeal to the audience.

211 Sommerstein 2009, 176–191 (with older literature on the relationship between the first and the second versions of *Clouds*) is of the opinion that Aristophanes did not substantially rewrite the first version, but that some minor changes did indeed shift meanings considerably.

212 Marianetti 1997, 8–9 with more binary pairs.

213 Von Möllendorff 2002, 139.

214 Ambrosino 1983.

Violence in this play can again be addressed under the heuristic categories as applied in all previous cases. Anger is consistently portrayed negatively in *Clouds*. Shortly before setting fire to Socrates' *phrontistêrion*, Strepsiades prays to Hermes not to be angry at him (1478: ὦ φίλ' Ἑρμῇ, μηδαμῶς θύμαινέ μοι, 'Well, Hermes old friend, don't be angry with me') for having questioned the gods' existence in the wake of Socrates' teachings. He chastises his own blasphemous thoughts as *paranoia* and *mania* (1476). From Strepsiades' perspective at least, Hermes' *thumos* is justified and frightening. As we have seen multiple times, emotions onstage can acquire a meaning opposite to that held in daily life, or can be looked at from different perspectives that the theater provides. In the great *agôn* between Strepsiades and his son, Strepsiades chokes down his rage (1369: ὅμως δὲ τὸν θυμὸν δακῶν, 'But I bit back my anger') when Pheidippides insults Aeschylus and his archaic-sounding poetry. Slapstick scenes follow father and son's mutual insults and lead to the notorious father-beating scene, which we will treat in greater detail below. From Strepsiades' perspective, his anger is certainly more than justified; to his son, however, who is by now a cunning and ruthless *sophos*, and perhaps also to the audience, Strepsiades' anger is unwarranted. He is characterized as a boorish, backwards-looking, and uneducated citizen.

Hubris is not lacking in *Clouds* either. A first instance is closely connected to the motif of the expulsion of authorities. In lines 1214–1302, the bankrupt Strepsiades chases off two creditors and even threatens the second with a goad. The frightened creditor is shocked, labels Strepsiades' violent conduct *hubris*, and calls witnesses to help him (*Nu.* 1297–1302),²¹⁵ a frequent social practice, certainly familiar to every Athenian in the audience. The ambivalence of these scenes must have been recognizable to the audience: although there is good reason to get rid of sycophants and creditors, they are Athenian citizens, and the latter would be entitled to claim their property back from the debtor, Strepsiades. Another instance of *hubris* occurs in the context of "wanton" behavior. In a great parody of myth, the worse argument refutes the better argument by explaining that Thetis abandoned Peleus because he did not satisfy her enough with hard-core sex (1068–1069: κῆτ' ἀπολιποῦσά γ' αὐτὸν ὄχετ' οὐ γὰρ ἦν ὑβριστής, / οὐδ' ἡδὺς ἐν τοῖς στρώμασιν τὴν νύκτα παννυχίζειν / γυνὴ δὲ σιναμωρουμένη χαίρει, 'And then she up and desert-

215 Calling on witnesses in threatening situations is a popular motif in Aristophanes (*Nu.* 495; *Ach.* 926; *V.* 1436–1445; *Av.* 990, 1019, 1031, 1466; *Ra.* 528–529; *Pl.* 932; *Pax* 1119).

ed him because he wasn't a roughneck, and no fun to spend the night with between the sheets. A woman enjoys being lewdly used'). In addition, *hubris* also denotes offensive behavior toward the gods themselves. Shortly before setting Socrates' thinkery ablaze, for example, Strepsiades accuses Socrates and his followers of having disobeyed the gods (1506: τοὺς θεοὺς ὕβριζετε, 'outraging the gods').²¹⁶

As to slapstick, Aristophanes formulates the norms with which the characters onstage should comply. In lines 494–498 Socrates asks his new student Strepsiades what he would do if he were beaten. In full accordance with Athenian law and the new value system of the democratic *polis*, he replies that he would wait briefly, call on witnesses, and go to court. It is telling enough that Socrates does not give an answer to this perfectly legitimate proposal. In 57–59, Strepsiades threatens his slave with beatings and maltreatment. He is thus presented as an impatient and cruel bully.²¹⁷

Before tackling the father-beating scene that leads up to the incineration of Socrates' thinkery, we have to consider again that we do not know Aristophanes' motivation in substantially altering the conclusion of the play: whether he sought to teach his audience a lesson for not understanding the play at its first production, as suggested by the *parabasis*, or whether he tried to be more amusing than before so as to win back the favor of his audience, or at least his readership. It is also possible that Aristophanes took license to overhaul the play, including putting in unusual, potentially off-putting scenes. Be that as it may, we must work with what we have and can safely assume that Aristophanes provided his readers with a more sophisticated play once he had the chance to rework it. Modern scholars, most notably Reckford, Revermann, and, in recent years, Riu, have emphasized time and again the peculiarity of *Clouds*. Reckford, in particular, has not ceased to emphasize that *Clouds* is a funny play, like all other Aristophanic comedies.²¹⁸ Let us scrutinize the relevant scenes in chronological order. Aristophanes puts the first clue for interpreting the later father-beating scene in line 911, where the better argument uses the

216 Other slurs on Socrates are to be found, e.g., in Eupolis F 386 (K.-A.) and F 395 (K.-A.), which present him as a drunken glutton. Patzer 1994 examines the figure of Socrates in the fragments of Old Comedy. They concentrate on his ugliness and the rags he wears. *Clouds* offers much more, but also contains the stock motifs of intellectual-bashing.

217 Cf. Kaimio 1990, 67.

218 Cf. Reckford 1976, 94–97, 100, 106, 112–113, where he emphasizes the playful side of the theater performance.

word ‘father-beater’ or ‘father-slayer’ (πατραλοίας) as a swearword denoting the worse argument.²¹⁹ The foreshadowing is thus clear; after all, Adikos, the worse argument, will teach Pheidippides. In 1321, finally, Strepsiades dashes out of his house like the slaves at the beginning of *Knights*, wailing that he has been beaten by his own son and imploring his neighbors, kinsmen, and fellow demesmen to come to his aid (1321–1324). In the ensuing heated argument, in which Strepsiades calls his son a ‘parricide’ (1327: πατραλοία) and ‘burglar’ (1327: τοιχωρύχε),²²⁰ Pheidippides quite sophistically proves that he was in the right in striking his father. Strepsiades realizes that his son has learned this clever reasoning and twisting of words to his own advantage at Socrates’ school. Naïve Strepsiades is finally forced to concede to the seemingly logical sophistry of his son and sounds the retreat, addressing the audience: ‘In my opinion, you gentlemen of my own age out there, his argument is right, and we should concede that these youngsters have made a valid point. It’s only fitting that we should wail if we misbehave.’²²¹

At this final point, Strepsiades has made a complete fool of himself. Because of his lack of intellectual capacity and rhetorical skills he must surrender to the whimsical arguments of his son. His failure is ridiculous and so pokes humorous fun at Strepsiades. The natural family order is turned upside down.²²² To provoke his father even further, Pheidippides next proposes to beat up his mother too (1443). Strepsiades is now exasperated, furious, and desperate. He sees no way out other than to throw his son, together with Socrates and the worse argument, into the *barathron* (1447–1451), a ravine into which only criminals were cast for execution. As Strepsiades again bewails his fate, the chorus-leader makes it abundantly clear that it is all his fault (*Nu.* 1454–1455: αὐτὸς μὲν οὖν σαυτῷ σὺ τούτων αἴτιος, / στρέψας σεαυτὸν εἰς πονηρὰ πράγματα, ‘No, you’ve only yourself to blame, since you took the twisted path that leads to evildoing’). What he means is that Strepsiades went astray when he tried to evade payment to his creditors by sending Pheidippides

219 Juicy swearwords can be found, e.g., in Phrynichus’ *Muses*: Phrynichus F 34 (K.-A.): ὦ <καὶ> κάπραινα καὶ περίπολις καὶ δρομάς, ‘O you wild sow, you street-walker, you drab,’ transl. in Phrynichus F 33 (Edmonds). On this play in detail, cf. Harvey 2000, 100–108.

220 My translation; Henderson’s ‘criminal’ is not specific enough.

221 Ar. *Nu.* 1437–1439: ἐμοὶ μὲν, ὦνδρες ἥλικες, δοκεῖ λέγειν δίκαια / κάμοιγε συγχωρεῖν δοκεῖ τούτοισι τάπεικῃ. / κλάειν γὰρ ἡμᾶς εἰκὸς ἐστ’, ἢν μὴ δίκαια δρῶμεν.

222 Cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1259b3, where Aristotle equates the authority of a father with that of a king.

off to school so that he could learn how to outwit them. Strepsiades recognizes his mistake, but he is now enraged and takes revenge on the “real” evildoers, Socrates and his servant Chaerephon, whom he actually wants to murder (1465–1466). Pheidippides does not follow his father’s call—he cannot attack his teachers—so Strepsiades burns the *phrontistêrion* to the ground, with the help of his slave, Xanthias. The father-beating scene thus blends into the final act of destruction, the incineration of a philosopher’s house, unheard of on the comic stage.

The scene of arson (1484–1509), unique in Attic drama, poses even more interpretive problems, against which the father-beating scene must be assessed. The highly aggressive act is accompanied by words no less aggressive (1508–1509: δῖσκε, παῖε, βάλλε, πολλῶν οὖνεκα, / μάλιστὰ δ’ εἰδὼς τοὺς θεοὺς ὥς ἡδίκουν, ‘Chase them! Hit them! Stone them! They’ve got it coming many times over, but most of all for wronging the gods’).²²³ Within one and the same horrifying sentence, there is also another layer: in Strepsiades’ eyes, Socrates and his pupils have offended the gods by denying their existence. We should not forget that Socrates was indeed accused of blasphemy (*asebeia*), among other charges, in 399 BCE, so Strepsiades’ reproach must have been plausible to many in the audience. But the fact remains that this brutal and uncompromising exit scene is the sheer opposite of the frolicsome revels of the *kômoi* that normally conclude comedies. Sommerstein sees three bases for the scene: (1) the torch-scenes of comedy, normally the “symbol of Dionysiac joy,” but here perverted “into a weapon of destruction”; (2) “the smoking ruins of Troy” in tragedy (E. *Hec.* 823, *Tr.* 1256–83, and *Supp.* 980–1030); and (3) real-life events, such as the spiteful burning of the house of the Pythagoreans in the Italian city of Croton. Almost all of them died in the flames (Iamb. *VP* 249; D.L. 8.1.3).²²⁴ Because, in *Clouds*, the torch is only an accessory, and there is not even the remotest hint of Troy, only one conclusion remains: Aristophanes comes very close to representing the depressing reality of anti-intellectual sentiments in the Greek world.

Older research has wondered, on a concrete level, whether or not the character of Socrates was killed in the fire onstage. While Kopff, for example, argued that Socrates was indeed murdered, Harvey refuted this assumption as being implausible for a comedy. After all, people simply do

223 Cf., for similar exhortations, Ar. *Ach.* 280–283; E. *Rh.* 675–676; X. *An.* 5.7.21.

224 Sommerstein 2007a, *ad Nu.* 1484–1485. Comedians heaped fun on Pythagoreans because of their poor way of living: Alexis F 223 (K.-A.); Aristophon F 10, 12 (K.-A.).

not die in comedy, a claim repeated by Reckford, who tries to defend the hilarity of *Clouds*.²²⁵ In a similar vein, but on a grander scale, the debate about the play's final, violent scene has been resumed in recent years. Following in Reckford's footsteps, Revermann does not try to dismiss the high level of violence contained in this scene. He concedes that there is a complete deviation from the normal pattern, wherein a reconciliatory ending merges into the joyous revel of drunken komasts, the requirement of the genre. Nevertheless, Revermann cogently argues that this kind of violence is still comic violence, which is, to a certain extent, justified against Socrates.²²⁶ While Riu is in agreement with Revermann on the uniqueness of *Clouds*, he offers an interpretation that is diametrically opposed to Revermann's. Riu sees Aristophanes in an alliance with Socrates. After Aristophanes' failure with *Clouds*, he might have felt that he and Socrates were misunderstood by the Athenians and badly treated because of their reputation as intellectuals. If Strepsiades is representative of the Athenian *dêmos* in its rejection and even condemnation of Socrates and his wisdom, the portrayal of the *dêmos* as depicted via Strepsiades is not flattering. He is a boorish blockhead, unable to think for himself and

225 Reckford 1987, 388–402; Kopff 1977; Harvey 1981. Davies 1990 has convincingly shown that what happens at the end of *Clouds* is a method of legal self-help, the so-called *Wüstung* that has as its aim exile, not death. Marianetti 1992, 131–132 thinks that *Clouds* draws a consistently negative image of Socrates. She substantiates her thesis by pointing out to what extent Aristophanes parodies the Eleusinian mysteries in *Clouds* (Marianetti 1993). More refined is Erbse 1954, 420, who denies outright that we can move from the poetic figure of Socrates to his historical persona. An even balance between a more positive and a rather pessimistic assessment of *Clouds*' functions and Socrates' role can be found in Platter 2007, 84–107; O'Regan 1992; Gelzer 1956. Schmid 1948 adds a valuable diachronic perspective. What was originally meant to be a relatively harmless derision of an intellectual was turned into a biting attack by Socrates' enemies in 399 BCE, a time charged with mistrust and profound anguish after Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian War and the recently overcome tyranny of the Thirty. According to Hubbard 1991, 112, Aristophanes mirrors himself in the figure of Socrates, questioning the very sense of artistic and intellectual endeavors in general.

226 Revermann 2006a, 226–235. Nussbaum 1980 reveals Socrates' mistakes and ambivalent depiction in *Clouds*, and can demonstrate similar traits in the "historical" Socrates. Aristophanes could exaggerate and distort the traits of a living person, but he could not completely falsify a living and widely known character. Whitehorne 2002 is more skeptical about the historical connection and claims that Aristophanes, in the figures of Socrates, Euripides, and Agathon, does not paint historically accurate characters, but uses stereotypes of contemporary intellectuals as stock motifs for his comedies.

yet, at the same time, overtly cunning and acting for his own advantage. According to this interpretation, Socrates has done little wrong. Strepsiades sent his son to him to have him taught how to deceive creditors, and Socrates was successful at teaching Pheidippides, but cannot be held responsible for the ill use that the latter made of his newly acquired skills.²²⁷ If Aristophanes felt, as early as 423 BCE, that Socrates was as scorned by the Athenian people as he himself was, the playwright's sensitivity and insight would come close to a sinister foreboding of Socrates' fate twenty-four years later. If it was really Aristophanes' intention to speak on Socrates' behalf, to characterize him as innocent victim, and the *dêmos*, by contrast, as brutal, foolish, and incapable of understanding intellectuals, he did no good for Socrates. Unfortunately, Aristophanes would then have been misunderstood once more; Strepsiades would have been seen by the Athenians as a down-to-earth citizen repenting of his doubts about the gods and taking the law into his own hands to eradicate a modernist imposter and intellectual trickster. Regardless of the question as to what extent the fictive Socrates onstage mirrored the historical Socrates, Socrates' eventual trial and death may point to the reality of this latter interpretation, even though the connection between the performance of *Clouds* in 423 BCE and the trial and execution of Socrates in 399 BCE is tenuous.²²⁸ Aristophanes seems to have captured the general hostile atmosphere with regard to intellectuals pretty well, although we will never know the truth about his intentions and how he felt about Socrates before and after his failure in the dramatic contest.

Let us not forget, however, that Socrates is not the comic hero, but Strepsiades. In his gullible reliance on *ponêria* (badness) and the *logos adikos*, he eventually accelerates the break-up of his own family, an event he has tried to prevent since the beginning of the play. Thus, Strepsiades almost appears as a tragic figure. Further allusions to tragic motifs,²²⁹ especially Strepsiades' two victory hymns (1154–1166, 1206–1213), which precede both his final downfall and the parody of tragedy at the play's end, point in the same direction: the line between comedy and tragedy is blurred in this play. Plato's Socrates in the *Symposium*

227 Riu 1999, 261–270. We could still say, however, that Socrates is not careful enough in his selection of students: Strepsiades does not have the necessary intellectual capacities and deliberately tries to deceive, and Pheidippides lacks the moral qualities needed to deal with new insights in a humane and responsible way.

228 Cf. above 249, n. 43.

229 For more information, cf. Milanezi 2009, XXIV–XXV; O'Regan 1992, 109–111.

at least deems it possible, and even demands, that one and the same person should be able to write comedy and tragedy alike. The famous end to the *Symposium*, set in 416 BCE, deserves to be quoted in full.²³⁰

and immediately he [Aristodemus] saw that all the company were either sleeping or gone, except Agathon, Aristophanes, and Socrates, who alone remained awake and were drinking out of a large vessel, from left to right; and Socrates was arguing with them ... but the substance of it was, he said, that Socrates was driving them to the admission that the same man could have the knowledge required for writing comedy and tragedy—that the fully skilled tragedian could be a comedian as well.

The tragedian Agathon and the comic playwright Aristophanes have to be compelled to believe what Socrates suggests, it is true, but Socrates' reasoning cannot be meant as a criticism of potential shortcomings on the part of the two dramatists; rather, it should be read as a compliment to their dramatic geniuses. We do not know what the historical Socrates and Aristophanes thought about the line between tragedy and comedy, but the fact that Plato portrays them freely discussing this topic seven years after the performance of *Clouds*—the dialogue itself was probably written around 380 BCE—demonstrates that there was at least some feeling that comedy and tragedy belong together in the end.

It is fascinating to see how one and the same scene, the incineration of Socrates' house, has generated diametrically opposed interpretations. Semantic openness and polyvalence seem to have made some scenes inexhaustible. The polyphony of *Clouds* is more than *spoudaiogeloion* at its best. Aristophanes, in his frustration over the failure of his first *Clouds*, wrote a conclusion to the second *Clouds* that deviates so strikingly from the main patterns of how a comedy should end that it may not be wrong to say that Aristophanes, here, is pushing against the very boundaries of the genre. He appropriated for himself the carnivalesque license that he cherished so much. As a supreme master of the genre, he dared to become its transgressor and play with its limits, thus himself becoming

230 Pl. *Smp.* 223c–d: ἐξεγρόμενος δὲ ἰδεῖν τοὺς μὲν ἄλλους καθεύδοντας καὶ οἰχομένους, Ἀγάθωνα δὲ καὶ Ἀριστοφάνη καὶ Σωκράτη ἔτι μόνους ἐγρηγορέναι καὶ πίνειν ἐκ φιάλης μεγάλης ἐπὶ δεξιᾷ. τὸν οὖν Σωκράτη αὐτοῖς διαλέγεσθαι ... τὸ μέντοι κεφάλαιον, ἔφη, προσαναγκάζειν τὸν Σωκράτη ὁμολογεῖν αὐτοὺς τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἀνδρὸς εἶναι κωμῳδίαν καὶ τραγῳδίαν ἐπίστασθαι ποιεῖν, καὶ τὸν τέχνῃ τραγῳδιοποιὸν ὄντα <καὶ> κωμῳδιοποιὸν εἶναι.

an ambivalent trickster figure plumbing the depths of the *conditio humana*.²³¹

The Double-Layeredness of Violence

We have to investigate further the perspectives from which violence was acceptable and unacceptable to the audience, and how Aristophanes both uses violence as entertainment and indirectly problematizes it at the same time.

At first glance, most scenes of violence in comedy are unproblematic. The spectators could (and did) laugh about the violence committed onstage, and they enjoyed the possibilities of identifying with the comic hero, often a brutal and tyrannical *hubristês*, and of getting carried away without having to take responsibility. Many of the scenes of violence within the plays involved actions that fell within the realm of acceptable behavior, and the Dionysiac license granted by the civic ritual of the theater performance sheltered the audience further. Indeed, violence and *hubris* were dangerous in the pragmatic, extra-fictional world of the audience, but the play performed onstage remained largely play. The spectators were conscious of this distance and experienced laughter in its more playful aspect. While comic laughter does have the capacity to stigmatize and exclude, it can also endear the comic hero to the audience and cause them to sympathize with him to a certain extent. And although I pointed out above that most Aristophanic comic heroes are ambivalent figures, the same also holds true for the violence each of them exerts. In as much as the comic hero happens to be likeable, his violent behavior may even seem acceptable. Riu's thesis that insults often happen at thresholds and mark them as such can be expanded.²³² Since there is acceptable and unacceptable violence, violence performed onstage delin-

231 Edmunds 1986, 226–229 has discerned a sinister and destructive Aristophanes. The clouds stand for Socrates' *daimonion* and his irony, both of which are impossible to grasp. At the same time, the clouds also symbolize Aristophanes' own ability to create ever-new forms. And there are more links between the playwright and the philosopher to be observed in the play. What this amounts to is that Aristophanes, in mocking and criticizing Socrates, destroys his own position and comedic creation. On the basis of all eleven Aristophanic plays, but with special emphasis on *Clouds*, Strauss 1966 sees embodied in Aristophanes' dealing with Socrates and his philosophy the eternal tension between poetry and philosophy, here with Aristophanes' deeming poetry superior to philosophy.

232 Riu 1999, 238–241.

ates the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable conduct. Consequently, comedy dramatizes this boundary by staging violence. If the comic performance as a whole serves as a ritual, a primary function of this ritual must be to define the limits of acceptable behavior in a similar way as the law courts constructed and represented them.²³³ In comedy, even more than in oratory, the limits of what is acceptable are in a constant state of flux, depending on what interpretive standpoint the observer chooses to adopt on the two layers of sense. This constant shifting of sense is also the product of Aristophanes' deliberate discursive and semantic openness. Every type of behavior that lies within the boundaries emphasized in a particular play is acceptable, and the play's spectators are thus enabled to laugh about violent stage actions that they regard as comprehensible and not too atrocious; any conduct that lies outside these boundaries, is off-color, barbarian, and not to be laughed about (at least in daily life). As became clear in the chapter on the orators, this line is highly culturally specific. Humor often remains untranslatable, and anyone who has traveled knows about the highly diverse notions of what constitutes a joke in different cultures. Twenty-five hundred years separate us from the Athenians, who might not have laughed at ideas we find funny today, and vice versa. Even within the same cultural horizon, every individual spectator, like a judge in court, had to define for himself what constituted acceptable and unacceptable violence by participating in the civic ritual of Old Comedy. One member of the audience might have laughed at seeing Socrates' *phrontistêrion* on fire; another might not. But one fact remains certain: Aristophanes' plays were comedies, and people attended them to laugh and experience a comic release from their daily sorrows and troubles.

At second glance, however, things are more complicated. Aristophanes indirectly charges each and every blow that he has his actors strike with some kind of negative sense. The evidence is abundant. The self-referential and meta-theatrical *parabaseis*, mostly spoken by the chorus in its function as mediator between the fictive world onstage and the pragmatic and extra-fictional world of the performance itself, pretend to be understood as authorial statements by the playwright. These statements, however ironically they might have been meant, explicitly criticize slapstick humor,²³⁴ although Aristophanes undermines his own tenets directly af-

233 Cf. above e.g., 142–146.

234 Ar. *Ach.* 655–656; *Eq.* 510; *Nu.* 545–550, 560–562; *Pax* 748–753; *V.* 54–66, 1043–1045.

terward, because violence remains an integral part of his comedies. This kind of criticism is more than the denigration of allegedly untalented and vulgar rivals who have to resort to low-brow humor because they lack comic ideas. We will come back shortly to the alleged tension between Aristophanes' claim to have purified comedy from "Megarian" jokes and his "failure" to do so.

It is true that the ritual of watching a play unfold onstage protects the spectator and keeps him safely ensconced in a superior position from which he can laugh about the events playing out before him; however, the very same distance that dissociates the violence onstage from the spectator and enables him to laugh also creates the capacity for the audience to judge critically the acts of brutality displayed in the course of the play. This consideration addresses the ambivalent nature of laughter itself. It is not always playful and meant in sympathy, but is often meant to be offensive and marginalizing. Laughter and biting mockery exclude people from a community that defines itself through precisely this kind of aggressive joking. Versnel even shows that laughing seldom had positive connotations in Greek culture, at least not for the victim, the person laughed about.²³⁵ Violence involves a perpetrator and a victim. At whom could the audience laugh? To the victims onstage, violence was not funny; neither was it so for the beaten slaves, the almost-raped women, the beaten father, Socrates, the expelled decree-seller, or the Scythian archers. Even if violence was confined to the stage, we cannot rule out that the audience at some point felt pity for the victims in *Birds* and perhaps also for Socrates and other injured characters. The question is: to what degree did the spectators relate to and identify with the widely different victim-figures represented onstage? In all probability they hardly did, and we can be quite positive that the Athenian audience laughed about these scenes. But the main protagonists are also laughed at; in most cases they are the dominant agents of violence, endowed with tyrannical, larger-than-life qualities that also defy an all-too-easy identification with them. The comic heroes were ambivalent figures and so the violence perpetrated by them was as well. As problematic and disagreeable as the

235 Versnel 1999, 138–139. An even more complicated picture is drawn by Halliwell 1991a *passim*, who argues that Old Comedy could combine harmful derision (*aischrologia*) with harmless, celebratory, and inconsequential laughter by combining ritual abuse with festive license. The integration of these contradictory concepts remained problematic and tested the limits of appropriate laughter and festivity.

comic hero may have been, his violent misconduct was equally problematic and disagreeable.

A further consideration concerns Athenian law, which held almost uncontested sway within the fictional plot.²³⁶ According to the rule of law, many of the violent instances displayed were transgressive and at times endangered the social and political order onstage. We can deduce from *Clouds*, for example, that setting Socrates' house ablaze constituted arson and would have been tried before the Areopagos in real life. We can still say that this severe breach of law adopted a playful character within the atmosphere of comic license, but the basic fact remains that this deed would not have been condoned in democratic Athens. Does the text contain any clues about how to read this action? Yes, indeed. The arsonist Strepsiades is not presented as a positive character. He is naïve and untalented, and gets a thorough beating from his own son, against whom he cannot defend himself, either physically or verbally. His final and excessive outburst of violence against Socrates only demonstrates the depth of his own failure. In his helplessness he cannot communicate and express his problems adequately. His final, desperate action casts him, once and for all, in a negative light. The fact that evildoers and violence-mongers like Strepsiades get away scot-free in comedy and are never held accountable for their wickedness is indicative of how comedy works. In real life, condoning this type of behavior was impossible, as the spectators well knew. The audience could relish the funny and playful breaches of Athenian law as presented onstage, but was always aware of their inherently problematic nature.

Given the widely different meanings that onstage violence acquires through plot and performance as civic ritual it is possible to identify at least two layers of sense displayed by most violent scenes. As we have seen before, Riu shows that, in certain speech acts, insults can almost be meant as friendly greetings.²³⁷ The mask of the actor covers the individual behind it; insults uttered on the comic stage are therefore not to be understood as personal statements, and are not aimed at particular persons, but mark boundaries of various kinds. Insults are clustered around metaphoric thresholds, often when the comic hero meets another character or the chorus for the first time. Insults also often precede violence. Is it possible, then, that violent actions show traits similar to insults? When insults turn into blows, violence happens at a threshold

236 Cf., e.g., above 304, n. 215 on the calling of witnesses.

237 Riu 1999, 238–239.

and thus defines a borderline, often the boundary between old and new, between the ordinary and utopian dreams or bizarre other worlds. Violence would then mark a frontier on multiple levels. From this perspective, we can discern even greater meanings in scenes of violence. The most obvious line drawn is the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable behavior, as discussed above. Again, the emphasis lies on unacceptable conduct. Through the embeddedness of violent behavior within the plot and the civic ritual of the theatrical performance, this boundary constantly shifts. A definitive interpretation of many violent scenes has thus been irrecoverable, for the ancient audience as well as for modern scholarship. To give just one example, Kopff and Harvey, Reckford and Revermann, as well as Riu, are all correct in their divergent viewing of *Clouds* as a funny or not-so-funny play. At the core of comedy lies a fundamental instability; everyone and everything is funny and problematic, somehow entitled to certain actions and at the same time not. Nothing is secure and definite; there is no sense-producing axis around which the plot can revolve. The possibility of constant shifts and changes of perspective enables a complex humor which forces the spectator to ponder seriously about what he is watching and hearing, including violence. Many figures, especially the comic heroes, invite the audience to identify with them, but also inhibit such identification because of their deep ambivalence.

Whereas judges in court had to come to a verdict and define, for example, the meaning of *hubris* in a concrete case, meanings in theater could remain open. This semantic polyvalence is to be explained not only via the fictional and artistic character of the plays, but also through the pragmatic conditions of staging them. The fictive plot and the outer ritual of the theater performance charged the deeds and words enacted onstage with different, sometimes even contradictory, meanings. These two layers generated, and continue to generate, tensions in the understanding of comedy as a holistic piece of art.²³⁸ Moreover, Aristophanes

238 My thesis on the double-layeredness of the sense of violence is in line with Halliwell's findings on the double-layeredness of *aischrologia*, which came to my knowledge only late in the production of this book. I quote from Halliwell 2008, 262 a passage that also addresses the vexed question of politics in Aristophanes: "The result [of the translation of grotesque shamelessness into theatrical artifice] is a sort of blurred focus between the world inside the plays and the phallicly costumed actors on display ... in the Dionysiac festival itself. As with the specific junctures (or transpositions) of 'ritual laughter' in Aristophanes ... so with *aischrologia* in general Old Comedy seems able to endow it with a subtle

and his colleagues wanted to win in the dramatic *agôn* and so had to convince a pluralistic audience of the quality of their work. Whereas, in the *depositio* of a curse tablet, the gods of the underworld decided what *katadô* meant in a particular case, and whereas, in court, several hundreds of judges rendered a verdict, five jurors drawn by lot decided success in the dramatic contests. But of course these five men tried to base their decision on the will of the audience as much as possible by paying special attention to the applause after the respective plays. This means that, in the end, works of Old Comedy had to pay respect to the pluralism of opinions at Athens and had to appeal to as many different views as possible in order to have a realistic chance of winning. A fundamental polyphony of meanings was the necessary consequence.

Aristophanes knew the discursive rules of violence in daily life well. He took, dramatized, and played with them, thus deconstructing them with the help of his fictional worlds. In this way, he enabled his audience to transgress the limits of their “normal” world and think deeply about what they saw and heard in the theater of Dionysus. With the rules of daily life temporarily suspended, and through the performance of actors disguised in whole-body masks, the spectators experienced breaches of customary behavior more intensely than in the forensic narrations performed in court. They enjoyed the ambiguous art of the playwright tremendously, but were aware of the fact that the violence displayed within the fictive plot onstage would not necessarily be something to laugh at, if it occurred in real life.

Aristophanes’ Discourse on Democracy – Summary

There is more to the comic hero than we can discern today in the texts we have. The figure of the trickster, the notorious deceiver, goes back to primordial times. In his pre- and supra-human, even animal-like, existence, his violence is an intrinsic part of primitive, pre-*polis* behavior that throws into relief the modern, democratic, anti-revenge discourse that is spoken

double role: both as material for (distorted) representation of an imaginary world, and at the same time as the fulfilment of its own Dionysiac performance. This irreducible doubleness creates ... a sort of ambiguity and undecidability at the level of socio-political function.”

in the law courts.²³⁹ The comic hero's claim to have the right to go back to the golden age of full tables and boundless sexual satisfaction creates a regressive and therefore problematic utopia.²⁴⁰ Stage and reality clash. After the performance, the pre-Zeus time is over; now is the time of the well-ordered *polis*, the time of Zeus and Dikê. The comic hero, as an antipode to this new *polis*-discourse, struggles with these new forces and can found his problematic and actually untenable utopia only temporarily, during the carnivalesque license of the other-world permitted during the Lenaea and Dionysia.²⁴¹ As soon as the performance, with its other-world, is over, the larger-than-life buffoon has to withdraw, surrender, abdicate. His power is broken until he is revived at the next Dionysiac festival. As long as he is active, however, the hero's existence is deeply sinister and frightening, as are his claims and actions. The ubiquity of violence, together with numerous metatheatrical elements, opens up the text and points toward problematic, topsy-turvy worlds and utopias made gloomy by the ambivalent comic hero, who often founds and maintains his own, respective utopia by violent means. But, either because all these utopias fail in the end, or because it is made clear to the audience that they are doomed to failure, their inherent violence is negatively charged and discredited. Violence on the comic stage is therefore largely negative when examined more closely. It is exaggerated and perverted democratic energy. Democracy, in the Athenian mindset, is good and great, but its surplus power can go awry in the theater. Here, the abuse of democracy often turns into violence and, as such, shows menacing traits. It jeopardizes the social and political order and tends toward tyranny. The Athenian *dêmos* itself was always prone to become a *turannos* toward its allies, slaves, women, and (*horribile dictu*) even against the gods themselves. The unpunishable delight that the spectators must have taken in watching these transgressions does not contradict the indirect problematization of such violence as tyrannical, hybristic, and barbarian. This negative characterization of violence is, in the end, as effective in Old Comedy (albeit at an indirect level) as the stigmatization of opponents in oratory. The same transgressions that are represented in forensic speeches

239 On the comic hero, cf. above 264, n. 88; 293, n. 182; below 368, n. 412. From a different angle, Halliwell 2008, 249–250 corroborates the view of an atavistic comic hero by speaking of comedy as a pre- or sub-democratic institution that allowed for shameless laughter about democratic institutions and representatives of the democracy (*aischrologia*, “agorafication”).

240 According to Heberlein 1980, 177–182, the “great plan” is always ironized.

241 Cf. Versnel 1998b.

are *mutatis mutandis* reflected on the comic stage. In other words, the transgressions enabled by the comic license of the carnivalesque Dionysiac festivals overstep the lines of real life. It is this breach, however, that visibly demarcates the realm of good behavior. In the speeches, this misconduct is rhetorically highlighted and brought to trial; on the comic stage, this violence, and with it the failed utopias and the violent heroes who strive for them, are also brought before a “judging” audience and ridiculed.

In Aristophanes, violence happens at the level of the *polis* and is therefore always highly politicized. It is interwoven with questions of gender and family relationships and, consequently, of power. These relationships do, therefore, affect the *oikos*-level, but are analyzed in their capacity of helping to maintain the *polis*. Hence, violence is less concerned with individual suffering than with the plight of the *polis* and its institutions as a whole.

Although this political kind of violence is mostly occasional and generic in Old Comedy, Aristophanes manages to individualize the violent motifs used, thus going far beyond comical farce and slapstick and creating something new, the charging of Dionysiac license with critical undertones, an extremely artful form of *spoudaiogeloion*, however rhetorical and ironic his claim might have been. While the performance itself of an individual play comes to a point of closure, the work of art, in all its dimensions, is always open in its meanings. In analogy to the open texture of Athenian law, we could also speak of the open texture of Old Comedy. In Aristophanic comedy, plot and ritualistic performance context overlap in their inherent functions of providing and ascribing sense and meaning to whatever happens onstage. The fictive plot that plays out on the stage and the outer ritual with its rooting in pragmatic, extra-fictional conditions shed different meanings on the actions (*drômena*) and words (*legomena*) performed onstage, and therefore generate tensions, if not incompatibilities, between the two layers. The ambivalence inscribed in scenes of violence accounts for our difficulties in discerning a consistent, valid meaning for violence on the Aristophanic stage. Since violent scenes are always polyvalent and offer various ways of seeing and assessing the violence staged within them, we cannot reach any single, definitive interpretation. What is to be done? We may compare this interpretive impasse with the view of violence constructed in and through lawcourt speeches, in which violence is not presented as a given fact, but as a ritual construct. This is true even more so in a decidedly open theater. More flexible interpretations might be appropriate if we take into account

that the aesthetic mode of acting and speaking, in particular, recoils from simplification and easy solutions. From Old via Middle to New Comedy, Attic comedy shows a trend toward providing more closure and more definitive meanings for the violence represented onstage. That being said, it is now time to probe into Menander and the depiction of violence on the stage during his time.

Menander

Menander is the only author of New Comedy whose work survives in any semblance of lengthy passages. The earliest of his plays that we have preserved, *Dyscolus*, dates to 316 BCE and is thus separated by seventy-two years from Aristophanes' last comedy, *Wealth* (388 BCE). To enable a comparison between Aristophanes and Menander, the Menandrian plays will now be subjected to the same scrutiny as the Aristophanic plays, using the interpretive categories of anger, *hubris*, slapstick scenes, rape, and violent *kômoi*. The basic question is whether or not violence in Menander is as double-edged as it is in Aristophanes. As we shall see, the range of meanings contained in key concepts such as anger and *hubris* is massively curtailed when compared to that used in the Aristophanic equivalents. For this reason, the ensuing analysis will proceed play by play to elicit the exact semantics of the phenomena within the context of the respective plays.

Anger

Anger cannot be understood without also considering the means of its suppression, *enkrateia* and *sôphrosunê*. From the fifth century on, the ideology of *enkrateia* and *sôphrosunê*, originally aristocratic concepts, became more and more the hallmark of virtuous democratic behavior, mainly through the dissemination of Attic forensic speeches and the ever-ongoing process of democratization of elite values in Athens (i.e., the fact that the masses did not cease to appropriate upper-class behavior, gestures, and lifestyle). In response to Macedonian monarchy, democratic ideals were generalized even more and constructed as overarching Greek values and even universal humanitarian principles in contrast to Macedonian (i.e., barbarian) shortcomings. Thus, the democratic discourse of *enkrateia* and *sôphrosunê* merged into a broader discourse on Greekness, which in turn became more and more equated with civilization in general under Hellenistic rule.

Anger looms large in almost all Menandrian plays, most of all in *Samia*.²⁴² All negative actions and misunderstandings occur because of negative *orgê*. Based on external criteria, the play is usually dated to 314 BCE. The theme of the comedy is Athenian status-consciousness and the long way to a marriage that befits the rank of the bride and groom. The old, rich Demeas has adopted Moschion as his son. The cunning slave Parmenon supports his young master in all situations. Demeas lives with a young Samian *hetaira*, Chrysis, whom he impregnated, but the child died right after birth. Demeas, being abroad on a long business trip, is unaware of these happenings. Their neighbors are the “poor”²⁴³ and elderly Niceratus and his wife, and their daughter, Plangon. When Niceratus accompanies Demeas on his business trip, Moschion helps the women of Niceratus’ household and comes to know and love Plangon. Whether or not he rapes Plangon, we do not know, because, as is typical of New Comedy, the sexual act that occurs, in this case during the festival of Adonis, is only alluded to (48–49: αἰσχύνομαι. / ἐκύ]ησεν ἡ παῖς, ‘I am ashamed. The girl got [pregnant]’). After Moschion realizes that he has impregnated Plangon, he immediately asks her mother for permission to marry her. But things are not that easy; only virgins are allowed to marry. To conceal the unwelcome pregnancy and make Plangon still appear to be a virgin, Chrysis is willing to declare the baby her own and breastfeed him (77–86). Severe complications occur as a result. Moschion is afraid to tell his adoptive father the truth and fears that he will not grant him a wedding befitting his status. When Demeas sees Chrysis with the baby, he assumes that Moschion has had sex with her and has thus besmirched his bed. The final denouement resolves all problems and Moschion can marry Plangon, despite their difference in class status.

In anticipation of Demeas’ reaction to Chrysis’ having a baby, allegedly by Moschion, Chrysis describes him as a ‘hot-tempered man’ (83: τὸν ὀργιλώτατον).²⁴⁴ We will see that all violent actions in this comedy are the result of a negative *orgê*. And in fact, Demeas is driven out of his mind when he sees Chrysis with the baby (206–282), because he thinks his

242 Menander’s play *Orgê* is unfortunately not preserved.

243 We should keep in mind, however, that “poor” in Menander does not mean destitute or impoverished. Menander’s personae live at the very top echelons of society, the three hundred richest citizens in town. The “poor” are those “some cuts below them” (Casson 1976, 57).

244 As a concubine, she can speak onstage. According to Henry 1985, Menander invented the good *hetaira* who has her share in the development of the plot and its final denouement.

own adopted son is the father. Gradually regaining his temper, Demeas, in a great monologue, excuses his son on grounds of his youth and the influence of wine (339–342). He admits that, in his anger, he lost control of himself (341: ἄκρατος),²⁴⁵ and he now identifies the “real” culprit as the whore Chrysis, who (he supposes) must have seduced Moschion. Full of anger, he throws Chrysis out of his house (370–398), an unjustified action since she has borne him a child like a citizen woman, has not had sex with Moschion, and has helped her neighbor Plangon to conceal the baby’s true identity by breastfeeding him herself. Thus, her behavior was impeccable, selfless, and generous.²⁴⁶ Observing the scene of Chrysis’ cruel rejection, the cook speaks of Demeas as raging in a frenzied state of mind (361: μαινόμενος; 363: μαίνειθ’, ὥς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, ‘Yes, he’s crazy, that’s my view’).²⁴⁷ From the point of view of the history of mentalities, it is interesting to see that the adopted son is far more important and dear to the father than his own life partner. To Niceratus, Chrysis complains that Demeas is crazy (415: ἐμμανής, ‘lunatic’), and the old man confirms the impression that Demeas must be out of his mind (416: Δημέας χολᾷ, ‘Demeas is mad’).²⁴⁸ Finally, however, Demeas calms down, ‘swallows [his] anger’ (447: καταπιὼν τὴν χολήν) and is willing to arrange the marriage between his adopted son and Plangon.²⁴⁹ Concerning his father’s doubtful behavior toward Chrysis, Moschion reminds Demeas not ‘to give way to rage in all this’ (462: [ο]ὐ πάντα γὰρ / ἐπιτρέπειν ὀργῇ προσήκει), and the quarrel between father and son escalates in the ensuing verses. The conflict between the generations is archetypal. Unlike in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, where Pheidippides beats up his father, Strepsiades, Menander’s characters are more tactful and better heed traditional Athenian rules of conduct. Moschion wants to speak and explain to his father what has really happened, but he does not get the chance to do so because his authoritarian father cuts him short. Even worse, Niceratus now enters the stage and reviles Moschion for what he has allegedly

245 On youth and drunkenness as mitigating factors, cf. Lamagna 1998, *ad Sam.* 341 (with more sources).

246 So Lape 2004, 166–167. But Chrysis also pursues her own interests. She needs a substitute for her own lost baby. We do not know if Demeas was ever supposed to be informed that the child was not his own.

247 These utterances are qualified in so far as the cook is traditionally a joke character.

248 Cf. Men. *Dysc.* 89; *Epit.* 393.

249 Gomme – Sandbach 1973, *ad Sam.* 447 add that this phrase recurs in Chrysippus, *SVF* ii. 891.

done. Niceratus is on the brink of losing his mind (492–520). In a tragic pose, he claims that Moschion's sexual affair with Chrysis is worse than the three most shocking cases of incest and sexual abuse in Greek mythology: Thyestes' adultery with his brother's wife, Aerope, and incest with his own daughter, Pelopia; Oedipus' marriage to his own mother, Jocasta; and Tereus' rape of Philomela, his wife's sister (495–497).²⁵⁰ Given the circumstances, these comparisons are inappropriate and therefore ridiculous. Niceratus expands on the mythological metaphors by wondering why Demeas has not 'adopted ... Amyntor's wrath, and blinded [the evil-doer]!' (498–500: Ἀμύντορος / νῦν ἐχρῆν ὀργὴν λαβεῖν σε, Δ[η]μέα, καὶ τουτονὶ / ἐκτυφλῶσαι).²⁵¹ The educated spectator could draw special amusement from the fact that, in many versions of the myth, Phoenix was in fact innocent (as Moschion is). In a mutual reinforcement of the other's argument, the two old men become more and more exasperated (506–520). Finally, Moschion manages to get a word in to reveal that Plangon is the mother, not Chrysis (529). At this news, Niceratus rages in fury. His daughter has lost her virginity and is thus not fit for marriage under the strict Periclean laws. Niceratus, in his severe state of shock, rages like a victim in a Greek tragedy (533–540). Gomme and Sandbach remark on this scene: "the whole atmosphere and vocabulary are those of tragedy ... There is also a contrast ... between the confused rage of Niceratus on seeing his daughter suckling the baby, and the self-control of Demeas when he saw Chrysis."²⁵² As angry as Demeas is at the possibility that his son has slept with his concubine, he is nonetheless able to pull

250 On these examples and their rooting in myth and literature, cf. Lamagna 1998, *ad Sam.* 495–496; Bain 1983, *ad Sam.* 495; Gomme – Sandbach 1973, *ad Sam.* 495 ff. Cf. Dedoussi 1970, 167–168. Cf. also above 86 on the stepson's denigration of his stepmother as Clytemnestra in Antiphon 1.17. Goldberg 1980, 102 argues already that this funny reference to mythology makes *Samia* appear to be a farce. On the degree to which Menandrian comedy is steeped in tragic patterns, cf. Hurst 1990 (with older literature). On paratragic motifs in *Samia* specifically, cf. Blume 1974, 80–81, 119, 175–176, 184, 196–197, 212, 230, 268. On the similarities between Menander and Euripides, cf. Fitton 1981 (Menander alludes to Euripides, in his late comedies above all) and Andrews 1924, who shows that Menander harks back to about twenty Euripidean tragedies. Menander is dependent on Euripides on many levels, such as plot construction and his general thought-world.

251 Gomme – Sandbach 1973, *ad Sam.* 498 connect this passage to Hom. *Il.* 9.448–463 and Euripides' *Phoenix*. Cf. also Bain 1983, *ad Sam.* 498. On the wrath of Amyntor in detail, cf. Lamagna 1998, *ad Sam.* 498–499.

252 Gomme – Sandbach 1973, *ad Sam.* 532–534.

himself together and “swallow” his anger. Thus, furious rage stands in deliberate contrast to *enkrateia*—a pattern in Menander, as we will see.²⁵³ While Demeas and Moschion seem to be reconciling with each other (535–538), Niceratus rages on. Chrysis runs off with the baby because Niceratus pursues them with a club. Although this familiar kind of slapstick does not, as frightening as it looks,²⁵⁴ get out of hand—Niceratus refrains from touching his neighbor’s property—Demeas and Chrysis rail against the senseless and unenlightened violence exerted by the simultaneously comic and tragic figure of Niceratus (550–585). Since Niceratus is eager to kill Chrysis and Plangon’s baby—or so he says, at least (553–556, 560–561, 580)²⁵⁵—Demeas wants to duel with him (570). This scene, too, is steeped in mythology and is thus funny. Ajax dueled with Diomedes (Hom. *Il.* 23.802–25), but contemporary associations are also conceivable: “Cassander held funeral games in 316/15 in honour of Philip, Eurydike, and Kynna, which included μονομαχίας ἀγῶνα, εἰς ὃν κατέβησαν τέτταρες τῶν στρατιωτῶν, ‘a contest of pair fighting, to which four soldiers stepped down’ (Diyllos ap. Athen. 155a).”²⁵⁶ At the height of his frenzy, Niceratus finally physically attacks Demeas, an utterly inappropriate action since Demeas is socially superior to Niceratus (572–576). Demeas defends himself by striking the first blow, thus incurring the risk of committing injustice in order to protect Chrysis.²⁵⁷ A brief and slapstick-like scuffle ensues before the struggle continues verbally, with language borrowed from the Attic courtroom.²⁵⁸ Both men accuse each other of

253 Webster 1950, 201–204 makes out a lack of *sôphrosunê* that leads to physical passions like anger. If Menander has the characters of Demeas and Niceratus suffer from a deficit of *sôphrosunê*, he is in close affinity with Aristotle, as Quinn 2001 has shown in detail.

254 Keuls 1973, 18 cannot find this slapstick scene funny.

255 It is important to note that Niceratus, at this point in the plot, is fully aware that the baby is Plangon’s child, his grandchild. His wish to wash off Plangon’s stain of lost virginity is stronger than his willingness to accept his own grandchild (Keuls 1973, 14).

256 Gomme – Sandbach 1973, *ad Sam.* 570 (transl. by author). On the duel in Menander from a linguistic point of view, cf. Humpers 1922.

257 On the importance of who struck the first blow, cf. above 34–35. Cf., on this passage, Gomme – Sandbach 1973, *ad Sam.* 572–576 with Men. *Dysc.* 168; X. *Cyr.* 1.5.13; Lys. 4.11; Arist. *Rh.* 1402a.

258 Goldberg 1980, 103 stresses the comic contrast between Niceratus’ language, which partly shows characteristics of high poetry, and his fits of rage, which are farcical from the very beginning.

being sycophants (578).²⁵⁹ Finally, in a scene of comic relief, Demeas manages to calm down Niceratus by explaining to him with mythological examples how gods impregnated mortal women (589–595). The hilarious scene ironizes Niceratus' fury and presents the events as brought about by the gods. Since Moschion will marry Plangon, he will atone for his own sin and wash away Plangon's stain. In a calm and private conversation, Demeas and Moschion seem to reconcile with each other. Demeas does not blame Moschion for being angry (695), because he admits that he treated him unfairly. On the contrary, Demeas concedes that he made a mistake by acting irrationally (702–703: οὐ δίκαι[ως] ἤτισάμην τί σε. / ἡγνόησ' ἥμαρτον ἐμάνην, 'I accused you wrong[ly], didn't know the facts, made an error. I was crazy').²⁶⁰ He asks for understanding, but deeply regrets that his son made his blunder public by wishing to go abroad as a mercenary (707–708).²⁶¹ In a final confusion, Niceratus is afraid of Moschion's alleged trying to evade marriage and wants to bind him as a *moichos* who has been caught *in flagrante delicto* and has even confessed his crime (717–718). As such, Moschion would be a *kakourgos* and subject to the death penalty under Athenian law, but several other remedies were conceivable as well, among them marrying the injured girl.²⁶² This is probably what Niceratus is supposed to have had in mind with this overreaction.²⁶³ Moschion, however, interprets this renewed physical attack on his person differently and draws his sword to defend himself against the ranting father of the girl.

From a broader perspective, we could say that *Samia* is about anger, justified and unjustified, and its ultimate inappropriateness.²⁶⁴ Violence and the anger preceding it are explicitly exposed to ridicule and criticized onstage. Violence in Menander stems from ignorance and misunderstand-

259 Lamagna 1998, *ad Sam.* 578; Bain 1983, *ad Sam.* 575 ff.

260 On the effective asyndetic list of three verbs, as typical of Greek prose style, cf. Lamagna 1998, *ad Sam.* 703.

261 According to Grant 1986, there is no real reconciliation between Demeas and Moschion. The father-son relationship remains problematic because Moschion tends to see Demeas as a friend, which does not work.

262 On the different possibilities, cf. above 53, n. 145.

263 Cf. Gomme – Sandbach 1973, *ad Sam.* 717–718.

264 Groton 1987 recognizes that anger is the driving force of the play—when it subsides, the plot is over—but does not see Menander's unequivocal criticism of *orgê* and *mania*. On Demeas' and Niceratus' outbursts of anger, cf. Lape 2004, 157–158, who emphasizes that Niceratus cannot control himself. Cf. also Scafuro 1997, 262–263.

ings²⁶⁵ and is therefore irrational and ridiculous, as Blume has rightly observed.²⁶⁶ Threatening someone with violence is anachronistic,²⁶⁷ the pure burlesque useless. The father Niceratus exemplifies this view paradigmatically. He is coarse and rustic, endowed with all the traits of a boorish *agroikos*.²⁶⁸ This means that his propensity to violence is not urban but barbarian. As we shall see, this negative view of anger and violence pervades the whole Menandrian corpus, and that of New Comedy in general.²⁶⁹ This negative meaning is consistent and, unlike in Aristophanes, unambiguous.

If Old and New Comedy are based on tragedy and constantly engage with it, a short side-glance at Euripides may be permissible in this context.²⁷⁰ Euripides presents violence mythologically in manifold ways, but never fails to lay open its destructive character. The play *Orestes*, for example, performed in 408 BCE, has a distinct message for the Athenians. Every form of violence proves senseless in the play²⁷¹ and Euripides builds in elements of parody and irony in order to push the boundaries of the description of graphic violence in the tragic mode. Violence thus becomes, at times, ridiculous. This ironization of violence creates a certain distance between stage action and spectator and enables the latter to reflect upon and finally dissociate himself from violence. If a historical

265 Stoessl 1973.

266 Blume 1998, 138.

267 Blume 1998, 139–140. In a way, Menander ironizes the wrath of Achilles. It is an outdated epic emotion, inappropriate for modern, bourgeois life. A fragment of Menander's *The Ladies' Lunch* says outright that πατήρ δ' ἀπειλῶν οὐχ ἔχει μέγαν φόβον, 'a threatening father can't inspire much fear' (Menander F 453 [Edmonds]).

268 Blume 1998, 141.

269 Numerous fragments of New Comedy deal with anger and cast it in a highly unfavorable light; e.g.: Philemon F 156–157 (K.-A.); Menander F 574, 629–630, 780, 1089 (Edmonds). Menander F 614 (Edmonds) speaks a different language and seems to contradict the passages quoted so far: κακῶς ἀκούων ὅστις οὐκ ὀργίζεται πονηρίας πλείστον τεκμήριον φέρει, 'not to show anger when you've been maligned marks you as the owner of a wicked mind.' We do not know the context of this passage and it is possible that this exception confirms the rule established so far. It is also possible that Menander, in this particular instance, follows Arist. *EN* 1126a4–8 (cf. above 117, n. 411), because this rather uncompromising attitude fits the situation better.

270 On Menander's relationship to Euripides, cf. now Blanchard 2007, 63–70; still valuable is Katsouris 1975 on the influence of tragedy, esp. Euripides, on Menander.

271 Burkert 1974 *passim* calls the violence in this tragedy "absurd."

reading is permissible, among the many other possibilities for understanding the play, one may say that brutality in the *Orestes* occurs as a consequence of imperialism. In such an interpretation, Euripides may be referring, how directly we do not know, to the senseless continuation of the Peloponnesian War: the Atrides want to perish in the burning palace, which they themselves have set on fire.

In *Bacchae*, performed after 406 BCE, violence is the consequence of religious delusion.²⁷² The play may well be the most enigmatic of all Euripidean works, but one strand of interpretation concerns the criticism of religious zealots, who, nine years before, on the occasion of the mutilation of the herms, had instilled suspicion and fear into their fellow citizens and organized a witch-hunt for the parties responsible.²⁷³ Rational sophists, like Euripides, or philosophers, like Socrates, put up intellectual resistance but did not prevail. Seven years after the performance of *Bacchae*, under different political circumstances, Socrates was executed, allegedly for committing *asebeia* and corrupting the Athenian youth. An ironical undertone is also discernible in *Bacchae*. But if violence is already partly ironized in tragedy, and Attic comedy, in turn, ironizes tragedy on various levels, violence in a play like Menander's *Samia* is ironized on at least two levels simultaneously. The message is clear: violence, anger, and furious rage are outdated and inappropriate means of conflict resolution. The adherence to and propagation of the new, civilized discourse of the *polis*, as seen in tragedy in the fifth century, is taken up by New Comedy and related to society in general.

Other Menandrian comedies confirm this picture. In *Epitrepontes*, Charisius rapes Pamphile while he is drunk, and later marries her without knowing that it was she whom he raped. As a consequence of the rape, Pamphile becomes pregnant and bears a child only five months into her marriage. To save her marriage and reputation, she exposes the baby while Charisius is on a trip abroad, but a slave informs him about all these happenings. Charisius is shocked about the alleged infidelity of his wife, moves in with his friend Chaerestratus, and hires the *hetaira* Habrotonon to distract himself from his sorrow. Because he loves his wife, Pamphile, he does not touch the prostitute. Pamphile's father, Smicrines, is more exasperated about his son-in-law's prodigality than about his public infidelity (128–131). In the meantime, the shepherd Daus has found Pamphile's child, a son, and has passed him on to Syrus, a slave and

272 On *Bacchae*, cf., e.g., Seaford 1996; Segal 1985; 1982.

273 Cf. Th. 6.27–29, 53, 60–61; And. 1.

charcoal-burner belonging to Chaerestratus. A bitter quarrel breaks out between Syrus and Daus about the recognition tokens that were found with the baby: Daus wants to keep them for himself because he found the baby; Syrus argues that they belong to the child. The men appeal to Smicrines to serve as arbitrator in their case, and he decides in favor of Syrus, unwittingly becoming, in the process, judge of his own grandchild's fate. Later, with the help of the selfless Habrotonon, the truth comes to light; everyone is happy that Charisius himself is the father of the child, and the married couple is reunited.

In the second act of the play, the quarrel over the abandoned baby's recognition tokens introduces the idea of madness. During the quarrel, Syrus accuses Onesimus, Charisius' slave, of being 'mad' (393: *χολᾶς*).²⁷⁴ And, later, Onesimus himself complains that his master is 'quite mad—yes, by Apollo, mad! He's really crazy. Yes, he's mad, by heaven!' (878–879: ὑπομαίνειθ' οὗτος, νῆ τὸν Ἀπόλλω, μαίνεται / μεμάνητ' ἀλ[η]θῶς· μαίνεται, νῆ τοὺς θεοῦς). The idea of anger as madness surfaces when Smicrines threatens to crack his old slave Sophrone's head (1026) and later reproaches her for making him boil (1126: σύ μοι χολῆν / κ]ινεῖς, 'Your antics make me boil'). Gomme and Sandbach explain the metaphor: contemporary Greek medical theory espoused that excessive amounts of black bile could boil over and drive people mad.²⁷⁵ Excessive anger was thus considered madness, something to be afraid of and to be treated. Smicrines' anger and violent language are comparable to that of Niceratus in the *Samia*. His fury against his daughter, who, in his eyes, has conceived a child out of wedlock, is presented as boorish, and he, as punishment, is exposed to ridicule.²⁷⁶ In this play, Smicrines menaces a slave, Sophrone, with blows in the traditional fashion of masters in Old Comedy, but he also rages against his own daughter. Angry at what is, essentially, his own lack of information, Smicrines threatens to crack Pamphile's skull and drown her in a pond. All of his threats are inappropriate and out of date.²⁷⁷ In the liminal phase of the stage action, the world is turned upside down, in so far as Onesimus, Charisius' slave, feels superior to Smicrines, his master's father-in-law, in his attitude to violence, because he, the slave, knows more than the old citizen.²⁷⁸ In a reversal of social

274 Cf. Men. *Sam.* 416: Δημέας χολᾶ, 'then Demeas is mad.'

275 Gomme – Sandbach 1973, *ad Epit.* 393 and 880–881 (cf. *Sam.* 416; *Dysc.* 89).

276 Blume 1998, 122.

277 Blume 1998, 123.

278 Blume 1998, 124.

roles, Onesimus feels sovereign, because the threat of violence fails completely. Smicrines stands isolated onstage. He is the last to know the truth, because he is such a violent character.²⁷⁹

In the fragmentary *Aspis*, a report of the soldier Cleostratus' death leaves his two uncles, Smicrines and Chaerestratus, divided over the fate of Cleostratus' young sister. Smicrines, the older of the two brothers, claims the right to marry her himself, under the law of the *epiklêros* ("heiress"), which required that the property of an heiress remain within the family. The greedy Smicrines grows angry with the resistant Chaerestratus, who decides to fake his own death, with the help of the good slave Daus, in the hope that Smicrines will forget about the young girl because of the prospect of getting an even greater inheritance from Chaerestratus himself by marrying his daughter. Ultimately, the report of Cleostratus' death turns out to be false, but it is unknown how the play ended.

When the wretch Smicrines realizes that his brother Chaerestratus intends to marry the *epiklêros* off to someone else, he becomes angry (180–181: πάντα ταῦτ' ὀργίζομαι / ὀρῶν, 'Seeing all this makes me angry'). Daus pretends to Smicrines that Chaerestratus is dying of 'bile, anguish, loss of sanity, a choking spasm' (422: χολή, λύπη τις, ἔκστασις φρενῶν, / πνιγμός). This vocabulary is generally used as a metaphor to characterize severe states of fury. Insanity is a disease that requires medical treatment, and *orgê* and *mania* are its symptoms. In fact, the doctor whose help is enlisted speaks about 'gall' (439: αὐτῷ τὴν χολάν, 'maister's (?) bile') and says that the patient '[i]s vomitin' bile' (451: ἀνερεύγεται τι τὰς χολᾶς). In the doctor's opinion, this illness will be fatal.

In *Periceiomene*, Moschion embraces and kisses Glycera, who is the property of the Corinthian soldier Polemon, unaware that the object of his lust is his own twin sister. Polemon is outraged (163: εἰς ὀργήν) when he hears about Glycera's lack of resistance to Moschion's hugging and kissing, and, to humiliate her, cuts her hair short, a punishment typically reserved for convicted adulteresses. This brutal act results directly from Polemon's ignorance and lack of self-control.²⁸⁰ Glycera did not re-

279 Blume 1998, 125–126.

280 Compare Polemon's irascible character to Thrasonides' exemplary self-restraint in *Misoumenos*, as fleshed out in detail by Lape 2004, 190–201. In imitating the shearing of an adulterer's pubic hair when caught in the act, Polemon cuts off Glycera's hair *after* the alleged seduction, which never actually took place. Thus, Polemon is in the wrong, his violence uncivilized. In the course of the play he learns how to behave like a civilian. Lape 2004, 174–188 reads the whole play as a grand metaphor, with Polemon standing for the Hellenistic

sist the kiss because she knew that Moschion was, in fact, her brother. Further complications ensue, which need not concern us here. Instead, let us turn to the quarrel between Polemon's slave, Sosias, and Moschion's slave, Daus, whose verbal bickering might easily have led to a scuffle or brawl. In a heated dialogue, Daus characterizes Sosias as being 'in a foul temper' (368: ἄνθ]ρωπος ὀργιζόμε[εν]ος), and the situation threatens to get out of hand when Daus calls Sosias a 'filthy liar' (378: συκοφάντης) and Sosias retorts with a rhetorical question asking whether Daus thinks they (i. e., Sosias and his master) are 'not [hot-blooded], or real men' (379–380: οὐκ ἔχειν ἡ[μᾶς] χολήν / οὐδ' ἄνδρας εἶναι;).²⁸¹ The old Corinthian Pataecus, father of Glycera and Moschion, mediates the conflict between Polemon and Moschion and calms down their heated emotions. In doing so, he speaks the new discourse of moderation: he has the courage to ask his daughter's master, Polemon, 'not to shout' (489: μὴ βόᾶ), and, shortly afterward, explains to Polemon that using violence is senseless. Rather than exacting physical punishment, Pataecus advises, he should go to court to file a complaint against Moschion (500–503): 'He's wronged you, so lodge a complaint, if you can meet and talk. Use force, though, and you'll lose your case! This wrong doesn't call for a reprisal, but a complaint.'²⁸² Thus, Gomme and Sandbach see the legal implications of Pataecus' advice: "if Polemon uses force to recover Glykera he will be acting illegally and be condemned when brought to trial."²⁸³ The norms of Greek civilization, derived from Attic judicial culture, have become so strong that they serve as a deterrent for every deviation from them.

In the play *Dis exapaton*, Sostratus pities his friend Moschus but is, at the same time, angry at him (99: ἔγωγ' ὀργίζομαι, 'I'm mad at him'), because he believes that Moschus is in love with his *hetaira*. Sostratus does

kings and Glycera symbolizing the Greek city-states striving to maintain their independence. The goal is the "complete reciprocity between the participants" (Lape 2004, 188). This enhanced equality within balanced gender relations suggests, as Lape contends, on the political level, a greater equilibrium between the Greek *poleis* and Hellenistic kingdoms. This interpretation is insightful, but seems reductionist. Further research needs to be done to ascertain whether or not this analogy is valid on every level.

281 Gomme – Sandbach 1973, *ad Pk.* 379 explain the semantics of "gall, bile" again, and give numerous examples from Greek literature.

282 Men. *Pk.* 500–503: ὥστ' ἐγκαλεῖν / ἀδικεῖ σ' ἐκείνος, ἂν ποτ' ἔλθῃς εἰς λόγους. / εἰ δ' ἐκβιάσει, δίκην δ' ὀφλήσεις· οὐκ ἔχει / τιμωρίαν γὰρ τὰδίκημ', ἔγκλημα δέ.

283 Gomme – Sandbach 1973, *ad Pk.* 499–503.

not yet know that his friend, instead, loves the girl's sister, Bacchis. Again we see that *orgê* is a result of ignorance, a state that needs to be mended.

Like Aristophanes, Menander uses the terms *orgê*, *thumos*, and *cholê* almost interchangeably. At the same time, however, their meaning in Menandrian comedy is much narrower and less ambiguous than in Aristophanes. The concept of anger pertains exclusively to family relationships, which, from the viewpoint of a male protagonist, have gone wrong. But since all obstacles can be overcome in comedy—most typically the rapist always marries the rape victim—*orgê* is always unjustified, a false and futile means of conflict resolution because it prevents communication. Menander consistently portrays anger and, with it, the loss of moderation, negatively, as rustic, barbarian, tyrannical, and even un-Greek qualities, not worthy of free Athenian citizens. This concept of anger shows close affinity to the ideology of the forensic speeches. After the onset of, and mainly on grounds of, the Macedonian rule over Athens, the democratic violence discourse, thoroughly democratized through forensic speeches, had become even more generalized on an essentially human level by the time of Menander. Since folly and the violence resulting from it are inappropriate means of conflict resolution, the playwright ironizes wrathful raging, most notably in *Samia*. This critical stance becomes possible because *orgê* is no longer a collective phenomenon, as, for example, in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, where the old but glorious fighters of Marathon embody wrath in its most positive shade of meaning, the fierce willingness to resist foreign intruders. *Orgê* is no longer the perverted democratic energy exuded by Philocleon and his companions in *Wasps*, but has turned into a personal defect. If generalization is permissible in this context, one could put forward the following hypothesis: whereas the individual defines himself via the *polis* in Aristophanes, it is the other way around in Menander, where the sum of individual citizens makes up society. This fundamental difference accounts for the very different use of the concept of *orgê* in both playwrights. In Aristophanes, it is the expression of a communal feeling: the body politic is angry at Euripides or Cleon; the charcoal-burners or the wasps as a collective are angry at deviant individuals. *Orgê* is not yet a private emotion. In Menander things are different: wrath is the private shortcoming of an individual within an *oikos*. But since society is made up of the sum of all individuals, their respective private feelings do matter on a political level, because they ultimately affect society as a whole. It is thus necessary to quench and eliminate wrath from every single household. If exercised on a grand and uncontrolled scale, loss of one's temper has the potential to harm society. Private emo-

tions and their control are thus as important as ever for the proper running of the *polis*. Once again we see the affinities among forensic speeches, curse tablets, comedy, and other media that this study does not treat (e.g., grave stelai and vase paintings). Emotions that are possibly problematic for society must be suppressed. In this respect Menander is as close to a fifth-century understanding of emotions as Aristophanes. Only the perspective has shifted, which makes for a new kind of comedy. But why did this shift occur? Why did the concept of anger undergo this profound change, which seriously narrowed the range of meanings that the concept had in Aristophanes? We can only speculate. In an age of uncertainties, when Athenian democratic identity was constantly under question by Macedonian oligarchy, theater may have served to provide the citizens of Athens with definiteness, a portrait of stable values, couched in traditional terms, in order to enhance citizenship ideology and discourses about Greek identity.²⁸⁴ Athenians, it seems, no longer appreciated the semantic openness of Old Comedy. Comedy had to adjust to new circumstances and cater to new expectations and tastes. Plutarch's rant against Aristophanes is a late but telling testimony of how Greeks under the Roman Empire did not understand Aristophanes and his poetic and political program.²⁸⁵ The Athenians of the late fourth century BCE might not have thought much differently.²⁸⁶

Hubris

Whereas the concept of *hubris* is frequent in Aristophanes, it only plays a minor role in Menander. When it appears, it refers exclusively to illicit sex, including rape. In *Samia*, for example, Niceratus tells Demeas that he would not have let Moschion commit 'outrage' by having sex with another man's concubine (507–508: οὐκ ἂν εἰς ἄλλον ποτὲ / ὕβρις, οὐδ' ἢ συγ[κλ]ιθεῖσα, 'never would he or his mate have outraged another!'). Instead, he would have sold the guilty *hetaira* and his son into slavery. And, in *Periceirromene*, Glycera, in a conversation with her father, Pataecus, re-

284 Herein lies Menander's political impetus, as Lape 2004 suggests (*passim*).

285 Plu. *Mor.* 10.853–854. A compiler gave this summary—a comparison between Aristophanes and Menander—of one of Plutarch's lost essays. Plutarch condemns Aristophanes outright and praises Menander without taking any notice of the different historical and social circumstances, as well as the different poetics and intentions of the playwrights.

286 Most famously Aristotle, who probably never saw a performance of Old Comedy (Arist. *EN* 1128a15–19; *Rh.* 1419b8).

fers to her master, Polemon, and his potential rape of another girl as *hubris* (722: [εἰς ἑτέραν τινὰ / ὕβριζέτω τὸ λοιπόν, 'Let him assault [another girl] in future').

One of the most famous instances of *hubris* in Menander is to be found in Gorgias' dialogue with Sostratus in the play *Dyscolus*. Since this play will be of major importance in the following subchapters, I include the outline of its plot here, although only one scene explicitly pertains to *hubris*. Menander's best-preserved play, awarded the first prize at the Lenaea of 316 BCE, *Dyscolus* is about class barriers and the misanthrope Cnemon's difficult and antisocial character—he shuns human society out of conviction.²⁸⁷ Cnemon has an unmarried daughter, with whom he lives in isolation. The girl's mother, Cnemon's estranged wife, Myrrhine, lives next door with the poor farmer Gorgias, her son from a previous marriage. The rich town-dweller Callipides has two grown-up children, a son named Sostratus and a beautiful daughter, Plangon. The former owns two slaves, Pyrrhias and Getas; the cook Sicon is also part of the family. Sostratus falls in love with Cnemon's daughter, but wooing her turns out to be difficult because of Cnemon's unapproachable character. Chaereas, Sostratus' close friend, offers to lend the would-be lover a helping hand; he says he would even be willing to burn down doors and help him kidnap the girl, a clear ironization of scenes of violent *kômoi* and abduction marriage.²⁸⁸ Sostratus first speaks to Gorgias, the half-brother of his beloved girl. From line 285 on, the deep suspicion that the honorable young farmer feels toward the rich city-dweller Sostratus is evident: he fears that the rich young man might seduce his half-sister. Gorgias' suspicions encapsulate the social tensions between rich and poor, town and countryside.²⁸⁹ And Gorgias is frank about his reserva-

287 Zagagi 1994, 105 speaks of a "character study of the misanthrope." On the comedic type of the misanthrope, often called "Timon," cf. Olson 2007, p. 92–93 (B21) with p. 425 (transl.) and more sources. Schäfer 1965, 91–95 discerns the beginnings of psychological character-painting with regard to Cnemon. Especially in the fourth act, Cnemon transgresses the narrow boundaries of the type and becomes a person, but then Menander, who may not have been aware of his own literary boldness, subjugates the figure of Cnemon under the predominance of the plot again. Anderson 1970 contends that Menander unites Aristotle's theory of *hamartia* with his own aesthetic and moral theories.

288 Menander certainly plays with traditional door-breaking scenes as a slapstick motif derived from Old Comedy. Cf., e.g., Heracles' smashing a front door in a fragment of Aristophanes' plays (Aristophanes F 300 [K.-A.]).

289 Ramage 1966 sees the divide between town and countryside vividly described in this scene. It is overcome in the end through *philanthrôpia*. According to Arnott

tions. He reminds Sostratus that a poor man, when outraged, becomes the bitterest enemy of a rich offender. In this context, Gorgias talks—in all probability—about *hubris*, meaning an extreme form of insult and humiliation stemming from Sostratus' having had illicit sex with his (i.e., Gorgias') unmarried half-sister: 'When a poor man's injured, he's the bitterest foe of all, for sure. At first, he's just pathetic; later, he takes all his tribulations as a [personal] [insult], not just as mischief!'²⁹⁰ Finally, Gorgias recognizes Sostratus' honorable intentions after he has sworn to marry the girl (315).

In Menander, *hubris* mostly denotes rape. This means a massive curtailment of the broad semantic range of the word as we encounter it in Aristophanes. There is no more *hubris* against the gods in Menander, no more *hubris* in the *kômoi* concluding the plays, with one notable exception that we will deal with shortly. Transgressions in general are hardly depicted by Menander, and since rape had never been openly displayed on stage, there was no room whatsoever left for the representation of *hubris* in Menandrian comedy. Unlike on the Aristophanic stage, where *hubris* occurred in many different shapes and grades, the stage of New Comedy was no longer the place for the expression of *hubris*.

Slapstick

Aristophanic comedy is unthinkable without slapstick, however elaborate its implied meaning is. What about Menander? Not even New Comedy can do without the rumble and tumble, as rare as it is. Although slapstick scenes are much less frequent in Menander than in Old Comedy, they have specific meanings that are different from those in Aristophanes. Because they are anchored in anger, they present an explicit discourse about civilized conduct by showing what human behavior is not supposed to look like. I proceed again play by play, according to the importance of the slapstick scenes, to discern their functions in the context of the respective plays.

1964, Menander reveals all his dramaturgical craft in this scene. He fleshes out the social nuances very well. Gorgias' railing against the innocuous city-dweller testifies to his own narrow-mindedness.

290 Men. *Dysc.* 295–298: τῶν δ' ἀπάντων ἴσθ' ὅτι / πτωχὸς ἀδικηθεὶς ἐστὶ δυσκολώτατον. / πρῶτον μὲν ἐστ' ἐλαινός, εἴτα λαμβά[νει / οὐκ εἰς ἀδικίαν ὅσα πέπονθ', ἀλλ' εἰς ἔβριον. In a fragment, Menander makes it clear that a citizen should not indulge in a pleasure that is based on *hubris*: Menander F 728 (Edmonds).

In *Dyscolus*, Sostratus sends his slave, Pyrrhias, to Cnemon's door to make investigations for him, but Pyrrhias later runs onstage complaining that Cnemon has driven him away after pelting him with clods of earth, pears, and stones (81–123). The threatened man echoes tragic diction: ἀπόλωλα, 'I'm all in' (83). For a slave to run onstage after receiving a beating from a free man, is a standard scene in Old Comedy.²⁹¹ Pyrrhias' wailing description of what has happened to him characterizes Cnemon's rude character and is at the same time a fitting way to ridicule and discredit the kind of violence Cnemon uses. Already in this scene, Menander presents the misanthrope and his actions as 'mad.' The peevish Cnemon confirms this picture over and over again with his own words. When his usual isolation is disturbed, he rants and raves about the way people intrude on his property (153–178). He mocks the Attic lawcourt system, criticizes civilization in general (176–178), and finally loses his temper when Sostratus' entire family shows up to sacrifice at the altar of Pan (430–455). When Getas, one of Sostratus' slaves, knocks on Cnemon's door to borrow something, Cnemon heaps insults upon him (466–486). The cook Sicon does not believe Getas and thinks that, with more subtlety and diplomacy, they can get what they want from the old man. The result is a wonderful scene of slapstick comedy that can be regarded as a doublet of the one mentioned above (Cnemon's pelting of Pyrrhias with stones at lines 80–123): Cnemon threatens Sicon with a strap and gives him a thorough hiding with it (500–503). Sicon breaks free but, understandably enough, bears a grudge against the fierce and brutal man. When Cnemon later falls into a well and Gorgias and Sostratus are about to rescue him, Sicon recommends that they instead throw a huge rock down the well to make Cnemon stay down there forever (631–632). After his rescue, Cnemon explains to Gorgias and Myrrhine why he withdrew from human society (711–723): he was disappointed by mankind and strove to live an independent life, fully autonomous and self-contained. This questionable ideal as formulated by Cnemon mirrors the concept of *autarkeia*, as defined by Aristotle.²⁹² It stands in stark contrast to the Greek practice of neighborliness,²⁹³ as worked out by

291 Cf., e.g., Ar. *Ach.* 176–177.

292 Arist. *Pol.* 1253a1; *EN* 1177a28–36. According to Zagagi 1994, 107, Cnemon's "deliberation reflects contemporary arguments about the relation between the individual and society."

293 Zagagi 1994, 104.

Schmitz.²⁹⁴ Cnemon now admits that he was wrong and is deeply moved that Gorgias, whom he did not even greet before, has saved his life (722–729). Cnemon now transfers to Gorgias all the powers of a *kurios* and commissions him to find a suitable husband for his daughter (730–747). Gorgias knows what he has to do. He unites his half-sister with Sostratus and speaks the betrothal formula in lines 761–763. Callipides then speaks the betrothal formula for Gorgias and Plangon (842–844), a scene that leads to the double wedding that concludes the play. Although Cnemon makes concessions and shows some kind of insight, he does not undergo a real change (729–747). He just accepts help within the family and is not interested in how life goes on; he wants to continue his stubborn routine and live on in solitude. This loose end is the prerequisite for the final scene, which I will treat in more detail below. The servants Sicon and Getas, both previously beaten by Cnemon, take revenge in a funny way (893–960). They carry the old man out of his house while he is asleep and lay him down on the bare ground. Cnemon wakes up and is exasperated. The slaves finally help him up, force him to dance, and carry him into the neighboring house, where the wedding feast is in full swing. In other words, the Athenian citizen Cnemon has to endure a violent reintegration into human society (*hubris*) at the hands of two slaves. Menander presents Cnemon's own violence as rustic and uncivilized throughout the play.²⁹⁵ His barbarian behavior can be compared to Niceratus' senseless and ridiculous fury in *Samia*. Menander has internalized the discourse on Greek civilization. No one can live without the help of other human beings.²⁹⁶ Self-restraint and moderation are key to maintaining good relations with one's fellow citizens and neighbors. Cnemon has to learn this fact the hard way, but actually fails to do so.²⁹⁷

We get a similar picture in *Samia*. After Demeas discovers Chrysis with a baby, he wrongly assumes that his son Moschion has slept with his *hetaira*. He is so furious that he wants to cast Chrysis out of his house, together with the baby (130–136, 370–398). If the child were in fact his son's child, Demeas here would be on the brink of exposing his own grandchild.²⁹⁸ He cannot believe that his son has betrayed him,

294 Schmitz 2004, 423–431.

295 Blume 1998, 89–90.

296 Cf. Blume 1998, 93.

297 The old form of the *kômôdein*, to poke fun at someone through masks, is well preserved in this play. Cf. Gelzer 1999, 12.

298 Cf. Keuls 1973, 13–14 on this kind of child exposure.

and asks the slave Parmenon about what has been going on (302–324). But when Parmenon can only give limited information, Demeas becomes furious about his slave's supposed obstinacy. He threatens to thrash him (305–306), strike him with a strap (320–322), and brand him. All of these threats belong to the typical arsenal of problematic master-slave relationships in Old and New Comedy. Toward the end of the play, the same slave suffers bodily harm,²⁹⁹ this time from his master's son, Moschion. Although Moschion's marriage has already been arranged, he still intends to take revenge on his father for having accused him of such a serious misdeed as having impregnated his *hetaira*. Moschion pretends that he is going abroad as a mercenary so that his father will ask him for understanding and implore him to stay at home. To carry out the scheme, Moschion asks Parmenon to bring him his cloak and sword (660). Parmenon does not understand and is unwilling to carry out the order. Moschion threatens him with a whip (663), but now explains to him what he is up to. Parmenon goes inside and realizes that the wedding preparations are already in full swing. He comes out again, without cloak and sword, and tries to convince his master that the scheme is unnecessary. Moschion, in a rage, hits Parmenon in the face (678). The blow is so strong that it splits the slave's lip (679). This is violence beyond slapstick. Masters could, legally, treat their slaves in this way, but in this case the punch is overly brutal and Menander depicts it as problematic.

All these outbreaks of violence in Menander result from preceding anger and an inability to keep it under control. The slapstick scenes ridicule violence and present their agents as immature and unenlightened. Thorough argumentation informs the unknowing and does away with their ignorance as well as the irrational emotions that stem from it. Seen from the angle of the ideal of self-restraint, we could say that rustic stupidity and ignorance may lead to un-Greek violence that dissociates its perpetrator from society. Whereas Demeas in *Samia* and Gorgias and Callipides in *Dyscolus* embody the values of a refined Hellenistic civilization, Niceratus in *Samia* is as misanthropic, rustic, and crude as Cnemon is in *Dyscolus*. The final pacification at the end of each and every Menandrian play testifies to violence that has become problematic. Without the problematization of violence there would be no Happy End. In political terms, we could say that the civic and civil violence discourse was equated with the ideology of Hellenistic urban culture. The vocabulary of the Me-

299 Zagagi 1994, 129 rightly argues that *Samia* resembles farce because of the multiple “repetition[s] or reversal[s] of situations and motifs.”

nandrian as well as Aristophanic stages reflected that of contemporary ideology and discourse, albeit in different guises. The fragments of the play *Colax* and *Perinthia* confirm the picture established so far.

In *Colax*, two men love a beautiful *hetaira* who is the property of a pimp. One of the lovers is Pheidias, a young man who is accompanied by his slave, named Daus, and a fawner. The other man is Bias, a rich specimen of the braggart-soldier type. He, too, has a “parasite” in his entourage. In excerpt E 225–237,³⁰⁰ the pimp reports, terrified, that Pheidias and his sixty poor friends have cudgels in their hands and might use them to try to steal the prostitute from him. Since she makes more money than ten other prostitutes together, he is afraid that they might kidnap or sell her to another suitor or pimp. In this scenario, he would have to go to court to sue them, and he is frightened by this prospect.³⁰¹

We do not know the exact plot of the play *Perinthia*, which is only preserved in a few fragments. The old, married man Laches has one son and owns many slaves, among them Daus. The main protagonist, the girl Perinthia, may not even have appeared onstage. For whatever reason, Daus is to be punished by his master. He seeks asylum at the stage altar. To force him away from the altar, people start piling a pyre up around him. The same kind of threat is found in Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae* (726–727, 749), where “the angry women threaten to burn Euripides’ kinsman at the altar.”³⁰² As normal as violence against slaves was deemed in the Greek world, it is equally certain that Daus was saved in the end. People do not die in comedies. Menander’s dramatic technique in this particular instance consists of driving the violence against a slave to the extreme, only to have the slave rescued in the end, thereby proving the futility of the violence exerted on him.

When we compare slapstick violence in Menander to that in Aristophanes, we see a fundamental discrepancy. Menander cannot do without traditional slapstick, but it is not as much in the forefront as in Aristophanes. The latter’s claim—if it is not just a highly ironic, rhetorical pose—to have civilized comedy by subduing vulgar violence was only fulfilled by Menander and probably other authors of New Comedy. Just as in Aristophanes, violence in Menander serves the goal of characterizing the violence-monger in a bad light. But it lacks typically Aristophanic multi-

300 As in Arnott’s 1996 Loeb edition (p. 183) = F 109–121 (Kö.) = F 126–138 (Pernerstorfer).

301 On this scene, cf. Gomme – Sandbach 1973, *ad Kol.* 120–132.

302 Cf. Gomme – Sandbach 1973, *ad Per.* 1 ff.

dimensionality. Menander consistently presents slapstick violence as primitive and outdated, and he always subjects it to ridicule. In contrast to Aristophanes, only a few stock motifs of slapstick are even extant in what is preserved from New Comedy. Slave beatings are frequent, but we search in vain for the expulsion of authorities, father-beating scenes, arson, or the parody of the judicial system, apart from Cnemon's brief critical remarks about the Athenian law courts. Gender roles and religious customs are discussed and challenged—the mercenaries in *Periceirromene* and *Misoumenos* are, in the end, sensible young men;³⁰³ Chrysis in *Samia* is as reproductive and nurturing as a citizen woman³⁰⁴—but never really reversed, and family relationships are not turned upside down. Chrysis and Habrotonon are impressive stage characters, to be sure, but they do not have the utopian format of a Lysistrata or Praxagora. Aristophanes' larger-than-life male heroes, endowed with boundless energy, like Dicaeopolis, Trygaeus, Philocleon, or Peisetaerus, have given way in New Comedy to human-sized men, young and old, with their strengths and weaknesses. This is not to say that New Comedy is not political or visionary, but that its tone is milder and gentler than in Old Comedy. Violence is less transgressive on the Menandrian than on the Aristophanic stage. Masters still beat slaves, but this is normal. Only once does a father threaten his own daughter (Smicrines against Pamphile in *Epitrepontes*). No son hits his father, and gods are certainly never struck, like Dionysus in *Frogs*. Has New Comedy become tame? Within the frame of the *oikos*, certainly not, but the *polis* is no longer the point of reference, because it had lost its political functions by the time Menander was writing his comedies. Referring to the *polis* now meant referring to society as a whole, which was deprived of its former political ambitions and preoccupations. In order for a playwright to reach this kind of audience, he no longer had to be political. The authors of Old Comedy liked breaking rules of interaction on a grand scale to open drama up to utopia. New Comedy mainly follows social norms, but is still no less reflective. The obligatory Happy Ends after myriad complications also serve to create an ideal world. How realistic was it for siblings to find each other again after decades apart, or for female slaves to bring about reconciliation in a household?

In Menandrian plays, plot and ritual frame are less in tension with each other than in Aristophanes, because the action onstage is less fantas-

303 Lape 2004, 171–201.

304 Lape 2004, 166–167.

tic than in Old Comedy. It is, after all, more likely (from a Greek perspective) that a man would marry his rape victim than that someone would conclude a separate peace with Sparta, or that women would go on a collective sex-strike or set up a full-fledged gynecocracy. With the difference between stage action and festive ambiance during the Dionysiac festivals massively reduced, the spectators of New Comedy essentially watched their own lives unfolding onstage. They could identify more with the human-sized stage personae than with Aristophanes' fantastic, animal-like creations. Thus, the outer frame lost much of its original function—that is, to check what happened onstage by providing a different perspective that added more layers of meaning to the action performed. With the stage action more and more resembling the world of the audience and vice versa, theater became, paradoxically enough, a closed system.³⁰⁵ New Comedy appealed to the spectators by making them ponder many issues, but it did not involve them so actively and physically as did the anti-illusionist plays of Old Comedy. The immediate ritual of Old Comedy, which did not yet know a strict barrier between actor and audience and could never decide between the fictional there-and-then onstage and the here-and-now of the performance, gave way to the gradual evolution of the *Guckkastenbühne*, which drew the line firmly between the two worlds and scarcely broke the illusion of the fictional plot. Stage and *koilon* were forever separated. The reduced role of the chorus in Menander is symptomatic of this fundamental change. It does not oscillate any longer (as it did in Aristophanes) between fictional role and actual performance, but has been reduced to the function of a mere divider between acts.³⁰⁶

In Aristophanes, other instances of slapstick violence concerned the maltreatment of women, metaphorical violence, mugging at night, and the parody of tragedy. What is the situation like in Menander? In *Periceirromene*, the excited dialogue between Sosias, Polemon's slave, and Daus ironizes a form of popular justice, the *Rügebrauch* of shattering the doors of a wrongdoer and calling him out,³⁰⁷ especially if he maintains a socially

305 On the reasons for the growing comic illusion in fourth-century comedy that finally led to Menandrian comedy, cf. N. Slater 1995.

306 Cf., e.g., Lape 2006. Pöhlmann 1988 demonstrated already that the chorus sings on the empty stage, never intervenes in the plot, and enters and leaves the stage for every one of its performances, thus underscoring the five-act structure of the plays. On the continuity and change of the comic chorus during the fourth century, cf. Rothwell 1995.

307 On the motif of door-breaking scenes, cf. above 332, n. 288.

inappropriate love affair. Glycera flees from her master, Polemon, to the house of her neighbors, Myrrhine and Moschion. She does so by her own free will, but Sosias implies that Moschion and his people are detaining a free woman against her will, a woman whose *kurios* is his master, Polemon. If true, this accusation would constitute a severe case of *hubris*. Anticipating a housebreaking scene, Sosias warns Daus that Polemon will come with his own men, break the door open, and free the girl (375–393). Before line 467, Polemon does indeed show up with his “army,” probably only consisting of Sosias, the flute-player Habrotonon, and a few men, to drag Glycera back to his own house, with violence. Pataecus is now onstage, ready to intervene (469–471). He addresses the more sensible Polemon, because he seems to be less drunk than Sosias. At first, Pataecus’ mediation seems to be only half successful. Sosias encourages Habrotonon to sound the attack (476); the whole scene, however, is ridiculous. A flute-girl is supposed to support a sham attack with only a few men? The occasion is totally inappropriate. The quite civilized mercenary is ready to talk to Pataecus anyway and just sends Sosias offstage (481).

The action of the fragmentary play *Sicyonioi* unfolds after four-year-old Philumene is kidnapped and sold into slavery.³⁰⁸ The main theme of the play is Athenian citizenship and how Philumene and the young man Stratophanes come together in the end. Because of the fragmentary state of this play, as with many other works of New Comedy, it is hard to come to more general conclusions, but, as far as we can tell from extant fragments, the scenes discernible as slapstick, do not alter the picture we can glean from the larger pieces.

Rape

In contrast to Aristophanic comedy, most forms of violence have a consistently negative meaning in Menander. There is only one notable exception: rape. The issue of rape is deeply ambivalent in New Comedy and is more complex than in Aristophanes. Modern research is divided on how to assess the open meaning of forced sex in Menander. The striking diversity of modern opinions suggests that ancient spectators and readers might also have been at odds to come to terms with the frequent phenomenon of sexual violence in Menandrian plays. Here is a summary of the

308 The fickleness of fate, a popular motif in New Comedy, is already used in Middle Comedy, with explicit regard to kidnapping in a fragment of Antiphanes’ *Soldier or Tychon* (Antiphanes F 202 [K.-A.]).

main contradictory viewpoints, presented in comparison with the motif of rape in Aristophanes.

On the one hand, Menander's plays confirm the thesis derived from the evidence of the forensic speeches. If a man raped his own wife or slave, the act belonged to the realm of normalcy. In Menander's plays, rape does not take place in public, does not need spectators to assess it as "rape," and is not even verbally dramatized in most cases. Rather, it is only hinted at, with the exception of the rapes in *Epitrepontes* and the *Eunuch* of the later Roman playwright Terence, who used *Epitrepontes* as his model. Given these parameters, one gets the impression that, on the Menandrian stage, rape is a "harmless" event that affects neither the world of the male citizen rapist nor even the final outcome of the play, the inevitable Happy End. What we glean from a parallel reading of the forensic speeches and Menander's comedies is a continuity of values from one genre to the other—an unsurprising result, given the fact that Menander's plays date to a time not too long after the bulk of fourth-century oratory.

On the other hand, Sommerstein has worked out a disconcerting undercurrent in New Comedy. In Old Comedy, only slaves are potential rape victims; in New Comedy, only free citizen girls are raped, and they always become pregnant. In New Comedy, the rape is always carried out; in Old Comedy, it is only imagined or threatened. Another blatant discrepancy between Aristophanes and Menander is the fact that rape never triggers the plot in Old Comedy, whereas it almost always does so in New Comedy. Thus, as the type of sexual violence changes from Old to New Comedy, rape gains heightened importance in Menandrian plays. What all of this amounts to is a deliberate reversal and aggravation of the Aristophanic rape motif by Menander.³⁰⁹ Since the differences in the treatment of rape in the two authors are obvious, I suggest the hypothesis that Menander intentionally inscribed ambiguity into the substance of his rape plots. This chapter seeks to explicate the reasons for this startling phenomenon, first by briefly examining the Menandrian texts and how they express "rape" verbally, then by exploring current controversial interpretations and determining what they can add to the study of this topic.

309 Sommerstein 1998a, 105–109. The development of the rape plot was probably underway in Middle Comedy: rape plots with mythological themes may have been common in Middle Comedy and were then projected onto the *oikos*-level by Menander.

In the extant, but fragmentary, corpus of New Comedy, rapes occur in *Synaristosai*,³¹⁰ *Plocion*, *Citharistes*, *Phasma*, the *fabulae incertae* 1 (P. Cairensis 43227, from Aphroditopolis in Egypt) and 6 (P. Antinoopolis 15 = F adesp. 1084 [K.-A.], from a codex of the fourth century CE),³¹¹ twice in *Heros*,³¹² maybe twice in *Georgos*, and prominently in *Samia* and *Epitrepontes*.³¹³ *Dyscolus* and *Misoumenos* are exceptions, because rapes do not occur within these plays, but are either alluded to or, interestingly enough, the sexual union featured in the play requires the consent of the woman.

Fragment 1 of *Synaristosai*, quoted by an ancient commentator, includes a portion of a speech by the character Plangon, apparently the victim of a rape: ‘<For> the Dionysia had a procession <...> He followed me right to the door, and then with always dropping in and flattering <me and my mother> he knew me too well.’³¹⁴ The ancient commentator continues: ‘By describing seduction and sexual assault in a dignified way as ‘he knew me too well,’ he glossed over a disgusting act by the greater dignity of his language.’³¹⁵ As we will see, this smoothing over of the sexual act is typical of Menander’s diction, which is a far cry from Aristophanes’ direct and deliberately gross language.

We do not know much about Menander’s *Plocion*, on which Caecilius Statius’ *Plocium* is based. Aulus Gellius renders the relevant passage in Caecilius’ *Plocium* thus: *Filia hominis pauperis in pervigilio vitata est. Ea res clam patrem fuit, et habebatur pro virgine. Ex eo vitio gravida mensibus exactis parturit*, ‘The daughter of a poor man was violated during a religious vigil. This was unknown to her father, and she was looked upon

310 Plaut. *Cist.* 177–178.

311 On this text, cf. now Olson 2007, pp. 142–143 (C15) with p. 434 (transl).

312 Hypothesis of the play, line 3.

313 The play *Hiereia* (P. Oxy. 1235b = pp. 619–625 of Arnott’s 2000 Loeb edition) is preserved in too fragmentary a state to be treated here (the title character was raped as a young girl, bore a son, and met her rapist again a generation later). Very fragmentary are also *Perinthia*, *fabula incerta* 7, and *Titthe*, which may all have featured rapes as well. In *fabula incerta* 5 (P. Hamburg 656, from unknown Egyptian provenance), perhaps a mother was raped, but the play is too fragmentary for us to know for sure.

314 Men. F 337 (K.-A.) = F 382 (Kö.) = Arnott 2000, p. 344: Διονυσίων <γάρ> ἦν / πομπή. < / ὁ δ’ ἠκολούθησεν μέχρι τοῦ πρὸς τὴν θύραν / ἔπειτα φοιτῶν καὶ κολακεύων <ἐμέ τε καὶ> / τὴν μητέρ’, ἔγνω μ’.

315 τὸ γὰρ διεφθάρθαι ... καὶ ὕβρισθαι σεμνῶς “ἔγνω με” εἰπὼν ἐκόσμησε πρᾶγμα αἰσχρὸν σεμνοτέρῳ λόγῳ συνθέσει.

as a virgin. Being with child as the result of that assault, at the proper time she is in labour.³¹⁶

In *Citharistes*, the young Athenian Moschion rapes and impregnates Phantias' daughter in Ephesus. The plot might have been as follows: upon his return to Athens, Moschion perhaps leaves the girl temporarily, but then determines that he is in love with her, confesses his guilt to his mother, and asks his father to allow him to marry the girl, despite her Ephesian origin. In the end, the young couple marries, of course, but only because it turns out that Phantias' wife is, in fact, Athenian, not Ephesian. Thus, Phantias' daughter is fully Athenian and therefore fit for marriage. Moschion only hints at his misdeed and addresses his father: 'Father, if we avoid the victims of a wrong, who [sic] else can we help easily?' (*Kith.* F 3 in Arnott's 1996 Loeb edition [p. 139] = F 3 (Kö.): εἰ τοὺς ἀδικηθέντας, πάτερ, φευξούμεθα, / τίσιν ἂν βοηθήσαιμεν ἄλλοις ῥαιδίως;).

The plot of *Phasma* is complicated and unclear. Either husband A or B2 raped wife A2 a long time ago at the Brauronia festival, where many young girls were gathered to worship Artemis. Wife B talks about this incident and hints at what happened (199: μόνῃη πλανηθεῖς ἡ τάλαινα, 'The poor girl wandering [on her own ?]').

In *fabula incerta* 1, Moschion's rape of Cleaenetus' daughter, which neighbors witness, is mentioned several times. We can surmise that this sexual act is the reason for Cleaenetus' imprisoning of Moschion until he agrees to marry the girl. In this play, the protagonists several times call rape a wrong and violent act full of injustice. Chaereas, for example, says, 'Yes, rape's effective! Must I ask him to give away my girl, when I'm the injured party?' (24–25: ὦ βίας ἐρρωμένης. / πείθω παραδοῦναι τὴν ἐμὴν ἀδικούμενος / αὐτός;), and, 'Kleainetos, the girl was [seized] by Moschion, he's got her' (27: Μοσχίων τὴν παρθένον / ἔλῳν ἔχει, Κλεαίνετ'). And Cleaenetus replies, 'We've been wronged' (28: ἡδικήμεθα). Rape or seizure is mentioned again in line 4 of P. Oxy. 429 (F adesp. 1010 [K.-A.]: εἰς ἄρπα[γ]), which is attributed to this play.

In *fabula incerta* 6, a young man, while drunk (as so often in New Comedy), rapes a girl before her marriage. She manages to keep his cloak. He thinks that, since he married, he has not cheated on his wife, but alludes to former misbehavior (8–9: κοῦκ ... [/ μετὰ τοὺς γάμους], 'since my wedding [I've] not [misbehaved here ...]').

316 Gel. 2.23.15–18 compares some passages from the Menandrian play to the Latin version.

The play *Heros* has two rapes in its background. Laches rapes Myrrhine and marries her without knowing that she has been his victim. The twins Gorgias and Plangon are the result of this sexual act. Tibeius, Laches' former slave, now a freedman shepherd, rears the two children. Tibeius is so much in debt to Laches that the two children have to work off the debt of their "father." The free and rich Pheidias rapes Plangon. He marries her after it becomes clear that she is also free and Athenian. She is already pregnant by Pheidias at the time of their marriage. The hypothesis to the play speaks about sexual violence (6–7: γείτων δέ τις / προηδικήκει μετὰ βίας τὴν μείρακα, 'a neighbour had previously forced the maid') and refers to the young rapist as a doer of injustice (12: ὁ δ' ἡδίκηκός, 'the violator'). Laches also speaks of force when he asks his wife, Myrrhine, whether she was raped in her younger years (79: ἡδίκηκε]ν ἐκ βίας σέ τις ποτέ; 'did a man [misuse] you once, by force?').

In *Georgos*, the old Myrrhine has two children, a son named Gorgias, and a daughter who is pregnant. It is possible that Myrrhine herself was raped in her younger years. Since the family is poor, Gorgias works for the old but rich and wise farmer Cleaenetus, who may be his and his sister's father. Cleaenetus plans to marry Myrrhine's daughter (Gorgias' sister), who is possibly his own daughter. Another wealthy neighbor wishes to marry his step-daughter to his own son, but the young man has already raped and impregnated Myrrhine's daughter. It is unclear why he must not marry his victim immediately, but in the end they are certainly united in wedlock. Philinna, an old woman who is perhaps Myrrhine's nurse, speaks about the young rapist in negative terminology (29–30: γαμῆ / ὁ μ]αρὸς οὗτος ἡδίκηκός τὴν κόρη; 'Can this monster make a marriage when he's wronged this girl?'). A young man, probably a friend of the rapist, scolds him and reminds him of his moral duty toward the pregnant girl: 'Are you crazy? It's preposterous! Here you've lost your heart to a free-born girl, and then you say nothing! When a wedding's fixed for you, you ignore it without reason!' (ἐμβεβρόντησαι; γελοῖον· δὲ κόρης ἔλευ-θέρας / εἰς ἔρωθ' ἦκων σιωπᾶς καὶ μάτην ποιουμένους / περιορᾶς γάμους σεαυτῷ).³¹⁷ Most fascinating is fragment Arnott 9c (F 147–55 [Kö.]), in which Myrrhine presumably describes her own or her daughter's rape. She talks about a 'malefactor' (3: ὁ ἀδικῶν), who 'threw down behind' (6:]ῶπισθε κατεβαλ[.]), and 'on his/its back' (9:] ... ν ὕπτω. [).

317 Men. *Georg.* F 4 in Arnott's 1979 Loeb edition (p. 131) = F 4 (Kö.): quoted by Maximus Planudes on Hermogenes, *On Types* (Rhet. Gr. V 525).

Some of Menander's most hotly discussed texts regarding rape come from his *Samia*. With regard to *moicheia*, Demeas, in a great monologue (325–356), absolves his son, Moschion, of blame, on grounds of his youth and the power of wine. The whore Chrysis, who allegedly seduced his son, is to blame instead, he declares. Even more spectacular is Moschion's prologue, in which he frankly confesses his guilt and shows quite a bit of remorse about what he has done:³¹⁸ 'must I cause distress? [...] is painful. I've done wrong, you see' (2–3: λυπήσαί με δεῖ; / ὁδ]υνηρόν ἐστιν· ἡμάρτηκα γάρ). A few lines later he becomes quite explicit—within the strict conventions of New Comedy, at least—and tells the audience what happened, without, however, going into graphic detail:³¹⁹

“... I had rushed
Back from the farm, and found them [gathered] in
Our house here for the Adonis revels, with
Some [other] women. Naturally the rites
Proved [lots of] fun, and being there with them—
Oh dear!—I turned spectator, for [the] noise
They made kept me awake. They carried plants
Up [to] the roof, they [danced], they had an all
Night party—spread all through the house! I[’m scared]
To say what happened next—ashamed perhaps

318 Omitowaju 2002, 43–51, 200–201, however, puts Moschion's confession into perspective. Moschion has feelings of guilt, less because of the violence he has exerted than because his act makes a wedding necessary. He does not know how his father will react, so he feels shame in front of his father rather than about his victim.

319 Men. *Sam.* 38–55: ἐξ ἀγροῦ δὴ καταδραμὼν
ὥς ἔτυχ[έ] γ', εἰς Ἀδώνι' αὐτὰς κατέλαβον
συν]ηγ[μ]ένας ἐνθάδε πρὸς ἡμᾶς μετὰ τινων
ἄλλω]ν γυναικῶν. τῆς δ' ἐορτῆς παιδιὰν
πολλή]ν ἐχούσης, οἶον εἰκός, συμπαρὼν
ἐγ]ινόμην, οἵμοι, θεατῆς· ἀγρυπνίαν
ὁ θ]όρυβος αὐτῶν ἐνεπείκει γάρ μοι τινα·
ἐπὶ] τὸ τέγος κήπους γὰρ ἀνέφερόν τινας,
ὥρχο]ντ', ἐπαννύχιζον ἐσκεδασμέναι.
ὁκν]ῶ λέγειν τὰ λοιπ'· ἴσως δ' αἰσχύνομαι
ᾗτ' οὐδὲν ὄφελος· ἀλλ' ὅμως αἰσχύνομαι.
ἐκ]ύησεν ἡ παῖς. τοῦτο γὰρ φράσας λέγω
καὶ] τὴν πρὸ τούτου πράξιν. οὐκ ἡρνησάμην
τῇ] αἰτίαν σχών, ἀλλὰ πρότερος ἐνέτυχον
τῇ] μητρὶ τῆς κόρης· ὑπεσχόμην γαμεῖν
καὶ ν]ῦν, ἐπὰν ἔλθῃ ποθ' ὁ πατήρ· ὅμοσα.
τὸ π]αιδίον γενόμενον εἴληφ', οὐ πάλαι·

[When] there's no need, but still I am ashamed.
 The girl got [pregnant]. Saying that I tell
 What happened earlier, [too]. I didn't deny
 I was to blame, but first I went to see
 Her mother, I agreed to marry now,
 [I mean] when father's back, I swore an oath.
 [The] baby came quite recently, and I've
 Accepted it."³²⁰

In addition to this valuable scene, a papyrus fragment of twenty-one lines has been attributed to *Samia*, with all due caution (P. Berlin 8450 = F adesp. 1131 [K.-A.]). "Chrysis" talks about "Plangon" tearing her hair, perhaps after being raped. If the fragment belongs to *Samia*, its place must have been either in Moschion's monologue or right afterward at Chrysis' first entrance onstage. Both scenes make it abundantly clear that rape was not taken lightly. The girl's tearing of her hair is a gesture of utter despair and indicates her pain and shame. From line 716 on, we become witnesses of a last complication: Niceratus is eager to bind Moschion because, according to Niceratus, he is a *moichos* caught in the act,³²¹ who has even confessed his guilt. According to Athenian law, such people were regarded as *kakourgoi* who could be executed immediately.³²² Moschion, in an exaggerated pose of self-defense, draws his sword and menaces the furious Niceratus. The scene can be understood as a kind of comic relief, for immediately afterward the young lovers unite and Niceratus, with his rage completely calmed, speaks the betrothal formula. In my opinion, Niceratus' intention to tie up Moschion and deliver him to the authorities for execution cannot be meant seriously. Rather, this scene plays with the legal procedure of the *apagôgê* and the law on *moicheia*.³²³

As far as we can tell, rape is explicitly problematized for the first time in Attic comedy in *Epitrepontes*. The slave Onesimus tells Syrus that a girl was raped on the occasion of the Tauropolia (450–457). He uses the word *biasmon* (453) to denote the rape. Shortly afterward, the *hetaira* Habro-

320 On the Adonis festival and other festivals in whose contexts young men rape girls in New Comedy, cf. Bain 1983, *ad Sam.* 39.

321 Bain 1983, *ad Sam.* 717 makes it clear that this claim is not correct. Moschion confesses his guilt, but he was not caught in the act. Even more detailed on legal issues is Lamagna 1998, *ad Sam.* 717.

322 Cf. above 43, n. 96 and 54, n. 146.

323 Neither Lamagna 1998 nor Bain 1983 recognize the playful character of this scene. Gomme – Sandbach 1973, *ad Sam.* 713 ff. are useful but do not discern the full irony either.

tonon tells the slave Onesimus and the audience about the rape of Pamphile: ‘She was there with us, and wandered off. Then all at once she ran up by herself, tearing her hair and sobbing. Gods! Her cloak, so filmy and so lovely, was quite ruined, all torn to rags.’³²⁴ It is telling, however, that it is not Pamphile herself, but a prostitute who dares to speak out and talk about the pain inflicted on the young citizen woman. Similar to Moschion in *Samia*, the rapist, Charisius, repents what he has done, thinking that he has raped the whore Habrotonon and begotten a bastard child. Again, it is not the main protagonist who informs us, but his slave, Onesimus (878–907), whose monologue relates, in direct speech, Charisius’ reproaches to himself for having been implacable toward his wife Pamphile, who was forced to have sex, whereas he freely chose to rape the prostitute:³²⁵

“What a wife
I’ve married, and I’m in this wretched mess!”
When finally he’d heard the whole tale out,
He fled indoors. Then—wailing, tearing of
Hair, raging lunacy within. He went
On saying, “Look at me, the villain. I
Myself commit a crime like this, and am
The father of a bastard child. Yet I
Felt not a scrap of mercy, showed none to

324 Men. *Epit.* 486–490: ἐπλανήθη γὰρ μεθ’ ἡμῶν οὐδ’ ἐκεῖ,

εἶτ’ ἐξαπίνης κλάουσα προστρέχει μόνη,
τίλλουσ’ ἐαυτῆς τὰς τρίχας, καλὸν πάνυ
καὶ λεπτόν, ὃ θεοί, ταραντῖνον σφόδρα
ἀπολωλεκ[υ]τ’ ὄλον γὰρ ἐγεγόνει ῥάκος.

Omitowaju 2002, 173–174 observes that the torn cloak is a symbol of the violence used, and hence the rape. Pamphile did not give her consent to what happened. Pierce 1997, 166 reveals the symbolism of the scene: torn clothes stand for the destroyed virginity of the girl. One did not need to tear a whore’s clothes to have sex with her.

325 Men. *Epit.* 890–901: “οἷαν λαβὼν

γυναῖχ’ ὁ μέλεος ἠτύχηκα.” τὸ δὲ πέρας,
ὥς πάντα διακούσας ἀπῆλθ’ εἴσω ποτέ,
βρυχηθμὸς ἔνδον, τιμὸς, ἔκστασις συχνή.
“ἐγὼ” γὰρ “ἀλιτήριος” πυκνὸν πάνυ
ἔλεγεν, “τοιοῦτον ἔργον ἐξεργασμένος
αὐτὸς γεγονώς τε παιδίου νόθου πατὴρ
οὐκ ἔσχον οὐδ’ ἔδωκα συγγνώμης μέρος
οὐθὲν ἀτυχούσῃ ταύτ’ ἐκείνῃ, βάρβαρος
ἀνηλεής τε.” λοιδορεῖτ’ ἔρρωμένως
αὐ]τῷ βλέπει θ’ ὕφαιμον ἡρεθισμένος.
πέφρικ’ ἐγὼ μὲν· αὐὸς εἰμι τῷ δέει.

That woman in the same sad fortune. I'm
A heartless brute." Fiercely he damns himself,
Eyes bloodshot, overwrought.

Shortly afterward, Charisius enters the stage and, in a great monologue, accuses himself through the thundering voice of a supernatural power, a *daimonion* from above:³²⁶

A faultless man, eyes fixed on his good name,
A judge of what is right and what is wrong,
In his own life pure and beyond reproach—
My image, which some power above has well
And quite correctly shattered. Here I showed
That I was human. "Wretched worm, in pose
And talk so bumptious, you won't tolerate
A woman's forced misfortune. I shall show
That you have stumbled just the same yourself.
Then she will treat you tenderly, while you
Insult her. You'll appear unlucky, rude,
A heartless brute, too, all at once."

This monologue, spoken by one of the main protagonists, is unique in Menander, not least because it is only here that a *daimonion* speaks and the bad conscience of a rapist is clearly expressed.³²⁷ Konstan, however, raises important questions about Charisius' alleged feeling of guilt. The scene is famous because it seems that Charisius judges his wife and himself on equal terms, and shows humanity and a bad conscience because of the rape he committed. But is this really true? According to Konstan, Charisius has left Pamphile not because she was raped, but because she had borne a bastard child, a *nothos* from an unknown father. It is clear, according to Konstan, that it is not rape itself that is at

326 Men. *Epit.* 908–918: ἐγὼ τις ἀναμάρτητος, εἰς δόξαν βλέπων
καὶ τὸ καλὸν ὃ τι πότε' ἐστὶ καὶ ταῖσ' αἰσχροῖς σκοπῶν,
ἀκέραιος, ἀνεπίπληκτος αὐτὸς τῷ βίῳ—
εἰ μοι κέχρηται καὶ προσηκόντως πάνυ
τὸ δαιμόνιον—ἐνταῦθ' ἔδειξ' ἄνθρωπος ὢν.
"ὦ τρισκακὸς δαίμων, μεγάλα φυσᾶς καὶ λαλεῖς;
ἀκούσιον γυναικὸς ἀτύχημ' οὐ φέρεις,
αὐτὸν δὲ δεῖξω σ' εἰς ὅμοι' ἐπταικότα.
καὶ χρήσεται αὐτῇ σοι τότε' ἡπίως, σὺ δὲ
ταύτην ἀτιμάσεις· ἐπιδειχθήσει θ' ὄμμα
ἀτυχῆς γεγονὼς καὶ σκαιὸς ἀγνώμων τ' ἀνὴρ."

327 Cf. Gomme – Sandbach 1973, *ad Epit.* 912 on the *daimonion*; Omitowoju 2002, 177.

stake, but the begetting of illegitimate children. The same applies to Charisius himself. He does not repent the rape *per se*, but the procreation of a child out of wedlock. He has pity on Pamphile because she was forced to have sex, whereas he acted on his own free will. Nevertheless, he left her, which he now deems a merciless act. This is what he feels sorry about.³²⁸ Konstan's remarks notwithstanding, Charisius' remorse is of paramount importance for two reasons: (1) for the first time in Greek literature, a man repents, for whatever reasons, having committed rape; (2) his remorse has political implications. The system of values underlying Greek oratory and New Comedy is the same. Civilized society can only persist if its citizens can control themselves. We have been able to deduce this point from Menander's portrayal of anger control. The same normative code of behavior also applies to men's sex drive. Adult men have a responsibility to their families and to society as a whole; they have to suppress their anger and all troublesome emotions, as well as their sexual urges. Only the liminal phase of adolescence allows for some ritualized license; afterward, the self-controlled and temperate citizen is the ideal.³²⁹ Yielding to one's irrational feelings and sexual desires is either ridiculous, because inappropriate in one's advanced age, or dangerous, because it could trigger *stasis* in a worst-case scenario. Marrying a foreign woman or fathering a bastard child has immediate repercussions for the maintenance of society—the reason why Charisius is so concerned. His private emotions, and especially his moral lapse in begetting a *nothos*, are directly related to society. Private and public are intertwined throughout pre-modern times—the invention of a private realm as a separate sphere from the public occurred only after the Enlightenment—but this

328 Konstan 1994, 220. Similar are Lape 2004, 246 and Pierce 1997, 165–166, according to whom Charisius left his wife because she was pregnant, in his eyes by another man. He—and the audience—do not care whether the sexual act was rape or seduction. The child was the problem, not the rape. If there had not been a child, the sexual intercourse, no matter if rape or seduction, would hardly have mattered. This also holds true *mutatis mutandis* for the situation in *Samia* (Pierce 1997, 167–168).

329 Pierce 1998, 144–145 differentiates between two types of men with distinct concepts of masculinity. Young and unmarried men can engage in debauchery and drinking; the macho image is the prerogative of their youth. Married men, in contrast, have to live a more settled lifestyle with their wives and children, because they have assumed responsibility toward their families and society. They still compete against each other, but do so on a more peaceful, less exuberant level. Violence and rape were tolerated, if at all, only during the first phase. Outbursts of anger were deemed inappropriate for a mature man.

interconnectedness has hardly ever found more lasting expression than in Menandrian comedy. Hence, the domestication of one's basic instincts and the channeling of them toward marriage is a genuinely political act.

Lape suggests that *Epitrepontes* has a subversive power. When the male hero accepts that his wife has given birth to a bastard, he deviates from the normal, official attitude toward reproduction.³³⁰ Similar to Demosthenes' speech against Meidias, in which the former calls the latter a barbarian,³³¹ Charisius now calls himself a *barbaros* (898, 924); "the text ethnicizes the moral code."³³² Pamphile becomes a paragon of virtue and successfully claims for herself a high degree of emancipatory power. She makes her will prevail: against her father's wishes, she does not separate from her husband, an action that indicates that she is in charge of her sex life. Although the patriarchal norms are re-established at the end of the play, Pamphile emerges as morally superior. She has succeeded and Charisius has learned to question the traditional norms of reproduction.³³³

The passages quoted so far have already made it clear that rape is not a mere peccadillo in Menander.³³⁴ References to rape always mention, if only in passing, the pain and shame of the victim, but never as explicitly as in *Epitrepontes*. We nevertheless have to wonder about the degree to which the rapes are meant to be taken seriously when they are glossed over or only hinted at (as in the majority of cases), or when the brutal act itself is only discussed by subordinate figures in the play. These restrictions notwithstanding, what is new in Menander is that the victim's plight is actually addressed, whereas it never figured into Aristophanes' texts. The subtle problematization of rape and the elaborate challenge to gender relations and their inherent power relations helped to put social conventions into question, criticize their inflexibility,³³⁵ and thus soften their rigidity. In this way, New Comedy became a dynamic catalyst for social change and successful adaptation to new political, social, and economic conditions.

Two plays, however, present exceptions to the rule, because they contain no actual rape, but only allude to it. In *Dyscolus*, Chaereas suggests

330 Lape 2004, 247.

331 Dem. 21.48, 50 (indirectly), 150.

332 Lape 2004, 251.

333 Lape 2004, 251–252.

334 Cf. also Blume 1998, 114, n. 53.

335 Cf. Blume 1998, 121.

to his love-sick friend Sostratus that he should abduct Cnemon's beautiful daughter.³³⁶

Say a friend's in love
With a *hetaira*. I'm called in, snatch and bring
Her right away—get drunk, burn doors down³³⁷—I'm
Deaf to all reason.

These lines contain a clear parody of a violent *kômos* and abduction marriage (*Brautraub*),³³⁸ as depicted in Lysias 3 and 4, and also parodied in the *Colax* fragment Arnott E 225–37 (= F 109–21 [Kö.] = F 126–38 [Pernerstorfer]). The most famous passage in *Dyscolus* regarding rape is Gorgias' euphemistic distinction between seduction and rape, where he, full of suspicion, tells Sostratus what he thinks he is up to:³³⁹

You've set your heart, I think,
On a foul deed. You're hoping to seduce
An innocent free girl, or looking for a chance
To do an action for which you deserve
The sentence of a thousand deaths!

This passage is important because it is the only one in classical Athenian literature besides Lysias 1.32–33 that distinguishes between seduction and rape.³⁴⁰ In the end, however, Gorgias regards both forms of illicit sex as *hubris* (293–298). Unlike Lysias, however, Gorgias takes it for granted that rape is worse than seduction. Because of Euphiletus' and Lysias' somewhat biased agenda in court, we have every reason to assume that Lysias manipulated Athenian law on behalf of his client and that Menander's play more correctly expresses Athenian opinion.³⁴¹ The

336 Men. *Dysc.* 58–60: παραλαμβάνει τις τῶν φίλων
ἐρῶν ἑταίρας· εὐθὺς ἀρπάσας φέρω,
μεθύω, κατακάω, λόγον ὅλως οὐκ ἀνέχομαι·

337 Ireland 1995, *ad Dysc.* 60 (with Theoc. 2.127–128) indirectly speaks of the *exclusus amator* motif.

338 Cf. Handley 1965, *ad Dysc.* 58–62 with more sources.

339 Men. *Dysc.* 289–293: ἔργον δοκεῖς μοι φαῦλον ἐξηλωκέναι,
πέισειν νομίζων ἐξαμαρτεῖν παρθένον
ἐλευθέραν ἢ καιρὸν ἐπιτηρῶν τινα
κατεργάσασθαι πρᾶγμα θανάτων ἄξιον
πολλῶν.

340 Goldberg 2007, 128 is right in observing that Gorgias means seduction and rape, although he cannot name them directly.

341 If this is the case, Sommerstein 1998a, 104; Brown 1991; E. Harris 1990 are right, contra Carey 1995a; Cole 1984, 101, 107.

fact, however, that Lysias was able to present seduction as worse than rape testifies to the ambiguity and notorious open-endedness of Athenian law.³⁴² The larger context of the Menandrian passage (271–298) neatly expresses the social tensions between rich and poor, town and countryside, and the mistrust of the latter toward the former.³⁴³

Misoumenos is special in so far as no rape is mentioned, but the possibility of it constantly looms in the background. The soldier Thrasonides truly loves Crateia and has no intention to take her by force. He is the figure of the likeable and sensitive mercenary eager to appear civilized and thus Athenian.³⁴⁴ Crateia, however, hates Thrasonides because he has allegedly killed her brother in battle. It is interesting to see that she can enforce her consent without a *kurios*. As far as I can see, this is an isolated situation in the corpus of classical Athenian literature.³⁴⁵ It demonstrates to what extent Menander, most progressively, questioned the existing hierarchical power relations between genders.

The passages quoted above show that the interpretation of rape in Menander cuts both ways. There is a certain, however indirect, criticism of rape—it is never a harmless incident—but its ill effects can always be mended by the marriage of the rapist and his victim. A short overview of the research on this subject will confirm the open-endedness and polyvalence of Menandrian rape scenes.

A good point of departure, because it raises an important question, is an article by Porter, who analyzes rape in a larger historical framework. According to Porter, rape is a typical feature of patriarchal and frontier societies.³⁴⁶ While the first is true for Athens, the second is manifestly not. Porter also makes a good point about sexuality being culturally rather than biologically shaped. It would therefore be anachronistic to assume that the rape rate in pre-modern societies was as high as it is nowadays in the U.S. All of this is true and raises the question of why Menander was so

342 Cf. above 143, n. 539.

343 Arnott 1981, 224 analyzes the larger context of this scene (259–320) and concludes that traditional values are well expressed in it. Lape 2004, 116–117 sees in Gorgias' words the expression of democratic values against the potential *hubristês*.

344 Cf. Lape 2004, 171–173 on the new values as expressed in *Misoumenos* and *Periceiomene*. Civic ethics of the *polis* trump military force.

345 Exceptions confirm the rule and so this unique plot does not subtract anything from Omitowoju's apt observation that it was never the woman's consent that decided the legitimacy of a sexual relationship.

346 Porter 1986, 218, 231, 234–236.

obsessed with the motif of rape, even though it plays only a minor role in other forms of Athenian literature.³⁴⁷

One strand of research argues that rape is a shockingly harmless occurrence in Menander, an expression of a chauvinist society steeped in a patriarchal ideology and mentality. Although Athenians well understood the difference between seduction and rape, Athenian law did not differentiate between them, because the consent of the woman did not matter to males, from whose perspective the law was written.³⁴⁸ And although illicit sex could incur heavy punishment, and New Comedy generally reflects Athenian law correctly,³⁴⁹ rapists or seducers are never called to justice in Menander, because the dramaturgy would otherwise collapse.³⁵⁰ In fact, Menander sticks so closely to Athenian law that he often blurs the line between seduction and rape by using ambivalent vocabulary.³⁵¹ *Dyscolus* is a notable exception, but Gorgias condemns rape especially because he wants to protect his own sister. We are right in assuming, however, that most cases of illicit sex in New Comedy are rapes, because forced sex protects the respectability of the citizen girl. In contrast to a *hetaira*, an honorable girl cannot have sexual desires, in the Greek imagination. If intercourse occurs at all, rape is by far the preferable option, because it keeps the girl's honor and thus her marriageability intact.³⁵² The "only" problem, which we will deal with shortly, is the children who are born as a consequence of rape. Normally, rape is either glossed over or vaguely expressed via euphemisms.³⁵³ Exceptions, like Menan-

347 One must not forget that, aesthetically speaking, the motif of rape is a brilliant dramaturgical technique, because it enables the young man to marry the girl he feels attracted to.

348 As convincingly shown by Omitowoju 2002 *passim*.

349 Omitowoju 2002, 232.

350 Lape 2001, 80, 89.

351 Omitowoju 2002, 191–197, 203, 232; Scafuro 1997, 242. This is clearly the case in *Samia*, for example (Pierce 1997, 167; Scafuro 1997, 260). Lape 2004, 145, however, thinks that what happens in *Samia* is seduction rather than rape. Niceratus calls Moschion a *moichos*, which means 'seducer,' not 'rapist.' This is true, but if Plangon had consensual sex with Moschion, her chastity would have been seriously compromised.

352 Omitowoju 2002, 180–181, 228, 232; Pierce 1997, 166–167. Since, in *Samia*, Moschion and Plangon are neighbors, she probably recognizes him during intercourse. Her respectability would have suffered less in the eyes of the audience if the sexual act was rape.

353 Rosivach 1998, 20–21; Goldberg 1980, 94.

der's *Epitrepontes* and Terence's *Eunuchus*, confirm the rule.³⁵⁴ Slaves report the incidents. The emotions of the victims are so negligible that they are never further illuminated.³⁵⁵

What is worse, most victims do not even appear onstage.³⁵⁶ Notable exceptions are Pamphile in *Epitrepontes*, who evens speaks (but she is married from the outset of the play), and Plangon in *Samia*, who appears but remains a mute character. Why do the girls not speak, not even to their *kurioi*? Comedy might be closer to reality than has often been assumed. One possible reason for the silence of the traumatized girls is that they dare not speak about the shame they feel.³⁵⁷ Nevertheless, they speak through their (mostly absent) bodies. We encounter again, in a manner similar to that of oratory, the enactment of silence used for dramatic effect, albeit in a completely different function. Whereas the performance of aposiopesis in the orators emphasizes the misdeeds of the speaker's opponent,³⁵⁸ here it underlines the powerful hyperfertility of the young citizen woman: for each girl, rape is her first sexual experience that impregnates her immediately; she then gives birth to a boy. The role of these young citizen women is reduced to their reproductive function and embodies the statutes of the Periclean citizenship system.³⁵⁹ They are more beautiful than *hetairai*,³⁶⁰ and although young men in the plays do feel *erôs* toward both prostitutes and honorable citizen girls, they rape citizen girls exclusively.³⁶¹ Since the rapist in any given play will always marry his victim, the aggressive sexual act is only an anticipation of mar-

354 But even in *Epitrepontes* the language is restrained (Omitowaju 2002, 175).

355 Rosivach 1998, 1, 37, who lists (pp. 36–37) twenty-five markers that define rape in New Comedy. Pierce 1997, 177 adds that neither drama nor other Athenian sources depict the trauma of a raped girl, but she also admits that, sadly enough, interest in the psychological consequences of rape has only recently developed. Omitowaju 2002, 182–186 compares rape in Menander with that as portrayed by Euripides. In Euripides it is always a god that rapes a woman; he never marries her. But, unlike in Menander, the victim's feelings are discussed, e.g., *E. Ion* 891–901.

356 Rosivach 1998, 23.

357 Scafuro 1997, 272–278. But cf. below 358, n. 384 on the fact that the girls' silence has less to do with rape than with their marital status, social rank, and age.

358 Cf. above 109–111.

359 Lape 2004, e.g., 102.

360 Lape 2004, 104–105.

361 Lape 2004, 103–104, referring to *Epitrepontes*, in which Charisius does not even touch the noble whore Habrotonon. Cf. also Omitowaju 2002, 225–227 on the situation in *Samia*.

riage consummated, and is therefore unproblematic in the end. Through giving birth, the citizen women fulfill their most noble task, even before marriage. This means that the stigma is not the sexual act *per se*, but conceiving and giving birth to a child prior to wedlock. Here is the core of the problem: premarital sex was not just about virginity and penetration—Athenian men married widows with children—but about a bastard child (*nothos*) born out of wedlock. In *Epitrepontes*, Charisius suffers from feelings of guilt not because he has allegedly raped a prostitute, but because he has begotten a *nothos*.³⁶² Another source of remorse for the rapist, as developed in *Samia*, is that a rape that resulted in a child mandated a wedding³⁶³ that the young man's father might not approve of because of the social divide between the families of the rapist and his victim. Again, rape, whatever its immediate effects, turns out to be something harmless, if not even positive. It overcomes social barriers and makes possible a marriage between a "poor" girl and a rich young man, who feels irresistibly attracted to her. It almost seems as if the young man has to rape the girl he loves in order to be able to marry her.³⁶⁴ The baby is the medium that necessitates the marriage. From this perspective, rape is a social necessity and contains a good deal of utopian force.³⁶⁵ This anti-structural utopia no longer refers to the *polis*, as it did in Aristophanes, but to the individual *oikos*. True affection becomes the hallmark of an allegedly civilized understanding of citizenship and procreation.³⁶⁶ The horror of rape is thus downplayed as a necessary act and—shockingly for us—as an act of true emotion on the part of the rapist.

362 Konstan 1994, 224, 226–229.

363 The wedding only becomes necessary because of the child (Pierce 1997, 167–168). The rape alone would not have called for a wedding.

364 Sommerstein 1998a *passim* fleshes out that rape serves as an instrument for a boy and a girl to force marriage rather than allowing the girl's father to make the decision.

365 Lape 2004, 25, 106–108; Pierce 1997, 170.

366 Lape 2004, 114 sees an eminently political, democratically minded Menander at work, with the "comedies offer[ing] a veiled but nonetheless potent critique of the oligarchic ideology of citizenship." Similar is Omitowoju 2002, 231, who speaks of a "politicisation of heterosexual intercourse in Athens." Blanchard 2007, 31–42 is also in favor of a political reading of *Dyscolus*, but emphasizes Menander's careful treading and the reconciliatory aspects of the play.

In addition, a young man or his father sometimes has mitigating factors that help excuse the brutal act. Often, under the influence of wine³⁶⁷ and uncontrollable sexual passion, “it simply happens” at night, on the occasion of a religious festival that allows women to spend some time outside their usual confines of the *oikos*.³⁶⁸ The rape scenes are not devoid of context but, rather, allow for a separation of the sexual act from *hubris*,³⁶⁹ because it is not the intention of the young man to humiliate his victim. Again we see that the performative context of the deed and the inner attitude of the perpetrator are what make an act a crime. The frame is often the same: the rape happens at a festival, under the protection of darkness. There are no witnesses. The malefactor does not have any hybriistic intention; he simply “cannot help it.” In the end, the sexual act turns out to be unproblematic, because it has occurred between a citizen girl and a citizen man. Since few taboos were broken, this kind of violence was not highly significant and belonged almost to the sphere of normalcy. The real boundary that has been crossed and requires mending is the procreation of an illegitimate child, because the victimized girl inevitably conceives prior to wedlock. The wedding at the end of the play, however, resolves this problem for good. The plight of the young man functions as a kind of initiation ritual,³⁷⁰ with the rape marking his transition from adolescence to adulthood. In the liminal phase of adolescence, he drinks and misbehaves by crossing a sexual boundary. But he repents and is finally reintegrated into human society at a higher level, now being the *kurios* over a wife and a child. Because of his remorse for his past actions, the rapist is rewarded instead of punished: the Happy End allows him to marry the girl he desires sexually. The birth of the baby has already guaranteed the continuity of the *oikos*;³⁷¹ the wedding is only a post-factum affirmation of what has already been accomplished.³⁷² Even the rape victim does not show the slightest terror at the prospect of marrying her rapist. On the contrary, she is delighted to have found her rapist, the father of

367 Just as in the orators (sometimes), alcohol makes for mitigating circumstances. Cf. above 67–69.

368 According to Pierce 1997, 178, a religious festival constituted almost the only context in which a tryst could take place.

369 Lape 2004, 94–95 thinks that rape does not constitute *hubris* in Menander, because it is stripped of contexts.

370 Rosivach 1998, 37.

371 Sommerstein 1998a, 110.

372 Omitowaju 2002, 229.

her child, who is willing to marry her!³⁷³ Thus, New Comedy is basically conservative in confirming the existing status quo of a male-dominated society.³⁷⁴ Cultural cross-comparison—in modern-day Latin America, for example, many rape victims have to marry their rapists³⁷⁵—makes New Comedy shockingly realistic. New Comedy mirrored the audience's expectations, worldview, and mentality, and thereby also reflects what fourth-century Athenian men understood by a Happy End.³⁷⁶ The huge cultural distance between Athenian society, in which rape was only viewed negatively in certain contexts and under certain circumstances,³⁷⁷ and modern Western societies, in which rape always constitutes a crime, no matter what the circumstances are,³⁷⁸ has rendered New Comedy difficult to perform on the modern stage.

In stark contrast to the views presented so far, another strand of research argues that rape is partly problematized in Menander. According to this view, Athenian society never took rape lightly. Even if Athenian law did not differentiate between seduction and rape, the penalties for both crimes could be severe. It is hard to believe that sex forced on a citizen girl was taken more lightly in comedy than in reality. Although Menander nowhere describes in detail the psychological scars of the young women, it is obvious that he thinks of rape as an act of violence which requires some kind of compensation. Although rape is a conventional plot device, Menander's theatrical renderings are at times unusual. The spectator and the reader, at least, are supposed to have pity on the victimized girl.³⁷⁹ Although the violence of rape is only hinted at, some derivatives of *bia* can be found in the Menandrian corpus, especially with regard to rape and above all in *Epitrepontes*.³⁸⁰ And the Athenian audience knew well that the non-rendering of violence does not mean

373 Rosivach 1998, 103; Sommerstein 1998a, 111.

374 Rosivach 1998, 9–10.

375 E. Harris 2006, 330–332 and Pierce 1997, 177 interpret the options a girl's family had against the backdrop of Athenian realities. Who wanted to marry a raped girl who had a child that was conceived prior to wedlock? It must have been a sad reality that girls often had to marry their rapists, or else grow old in the *oikos* of their fathers (Scafuro 1997, 277–278).

376 Cf. Rosivach 1998, 41–42, 140–143. Pierce 1997, 179 draws a somber conclusion: “it was a man's world, in which women received minimal consideration.”

377 Cf. E. Harris 2004 *passim*.

378 Lape 2004, 95.

379 Pierce 1997, 170.

380 Raina 2006, 238–240.

that no violence occurred.³⁸¹ Moreover, women play prominent roles and are sometimes even in the foreground of the action. The prostitutes Habrotonon and Chrysis selflessly serve as foster mothers and heal the *oikos* by uniting the citizen couple.³⁸² This means that the ritual of comedy resolves the fictional conflict in a poetic way: marginal women from the fringes of society re-establish the citizen family as a functioning social network.³⁸³ With the poetics of New Comedy influenced by myth, it comes as no surprise that the comic playwright transforms the rape plots of myths into a comic paradigm. In mythology, young women are half-willingly impregnated by gods, such as Europa and Alcmena by Zeus and Creusa by Apollo, to name just three examples. Since the supra-human rapists are unidentifiable or cannot be talked about, their victims are doomed to silence because people in their surroundings would not believe them anyway. The traces of this mythic paradigm can be found in New Comedy, most notably in *Samia* (589–602). Although the assailant has become human and therefore identifiable—a major innovation of New Comedy—most raped girls still do not speak up.³⁸⁴ But the replacement of the “mythic paradigm” with the “social paradigm,” as Scafuro terms the different concepts, brings about tangible improvements for the victims. The situation is taken seriously now. The abused girl is not punished. The families meet to discuss the problem and seek redress within the parameters of Athenian law and social practice. In depicting this process, New Comedy is closer to Athenian realities than some speeches (Lysias 1, for example), with their exaggerated claims to forms of punishment that had actually become obsolete by the fourth century. Myth had been replaced by social practice and had become the

381 Raina 2006, 245.

382 Henry 1987, 145–147 rightly argues that we gain access to the core of the subject matter of New Comedy—i. e., the reconstitution of the broken family—by giving up an androcentric reading and interpretation of New Comedy.

383 Henry 1987, 148.

384 I thank Sharon James (Chapel Hill) for alerting me to the fact that the silence of these women has less to do with rape than with social class, marital status, and age. Raped citizen women do appear onstage and speak, if they are married or older. The following raped citizen women show up onstage and talk: Myrrhine in *Georgos*, Laches' wife in *Heros*, the priestess in *Hiereia*, Pheidias' step-mother in *Phasma*, Pamphile in *Epileptontes*, Glycera in *Periceiomene*, Crateia in *Misoumenos*, Phanostrata in Plautus' *Cistellaria*, and Philippa in Plautus' *Epidicus*. The prohibition on female speech is limited to the unmarried and young citizen daughter, whether or not she has been raped, as long as she is known to be a citizen.

foil against which comedy could unfold its human world.³⁸⁵ If it is true that the motif of rape in New Comedy is the comic reflection and reworking of the same motif in mythology, rape is indeed a stage convention in Menander. With this grounding in myth, “comic” rape may be less realistic than it seems at first glance. As a consequence, rape in New Comedy would lose some of its shocking normality for us.

Underneath the rape plot, we find in Menander the first traces of romantic love, which explains some of his popularity over the centuries. Although the playwright is not yet able to express romantic love verbally, he sometimes renders the consent of the woman crucial for marriage.³⁸⁶ In this regard, women show remarkable emancipatory independence in *Epitrepontes*, *Periceirromene*, and above all *Misoumenos*. Lape explains the humanism and romanticism of New Comedy against the backdrop of contemporary politics. Marrying the partner one loves marks a paradigm shift in fourth-century Athens and is certainly a striking deviation from contemporary social and legal practices, as expressed in the orators. We do not know how many (if any) Athenian fathers respected their daughters’ wishes more when marrying them off after watching a Menandrian comedy than before. And the romantic concept of a marriage for love does not exactly foreshadow the ideas of the Enlightenment period,³⁸⁷ but its underlying “individualist ethic” might have emerged “as a response to the general uncertainty” in the face of oligarchic rule in Hellenistic Athens. Menander successfully blends the old ideals of Periclean citizenship with romantic love.³⁸⁸

This new, romantic belief in love and the possibility of marrying a beloved partner also underlies the rape plot in other comedies and diminishes its horror on a poetic level, which brings us back to an interpretation of rape as a harmless occurrence. With regard to *Epitrepontes*, Lape sees rape as something structurally “positive,” as having a certain purpose, in contrast to rape in Aristophanes, where it means only threat and intimidation. In spite of Pericles’ racially exclusive citizenship law, rape allows

385 Scafuro 1997, 276–278.

386 Wiles 2001 *passim*.

387 Doblhofer’s warning (1994, 104–111) must be taken seriously. Although he discerns a growing problematization of rape over time, he does not see a radical turn in the ancients’ opinions about rape. The victim’s individual psyche was never an issue, only her social value as a producer of legitimate offspring.

388 Lape 2004, 98. Whether or not one sees *Dyscolus* as an entirely political play with an enormous anti-oligarchic thrust (as Lape 2004, 110–136 suggests) is a matter of interpretation.

for a renegotiation of gender relations and for a more “inclusionary and egalitarian” construction of citizenship.³⁸⁹ In *Dyscolus*, for example, we see how the tensions between city and countryside, between rich and poor, are resolved and a new, ideal community emerges. We could regard *Dyscolus* as a play reconciling oligarchic with democratic concepts in Athenian society rather than asserting an arch-democratic agenda.

In *Samia*, the friendship between two men overcomes class barriers.³⁹⁰ Because Niceratus’ daughter has been raped or seduced, Demeas and Niceratus, a wealthier and a poorer man, respectively, come to an agreement. Herein lies the reconciliatory and utopian power of the rape plot.

The politically progressive potential of New Comedy provides some explanation for the popularity and frequency of the rape motif in Menander. The Thirty Tyrants used to intrude into private homes. Their violation of the threshold of the *oikos* was sexualized soon after their overthrow, and the illegitimate penetration of a household came to be metaphorically equated with seduction (*moicheia*). Conversely, a seducer (*moichos*) was more and more endowed with the anti-democratic qualities of a tyrant. In the imaginary and emotive vocabularies of the Athenians, sex and politics merged, with the result that sex became politicized and politics sexualized. Lysias’ first oration, Lycurgus’ speech against Lycophrone, and Hyperides’ defense are telling evidence for this ideological and linguistic development. Since *moicheia* carried such strong associations with tyranny, Menander opted for rape rather than seduction as a suitable motif to drive his plots forward.³⁹¹ The rapist, after all, did not appear, in the end, as an aristocratic tyrant who would discredit the moderate oligarchy as embodied by Demetrius of Phaleron, but as a responsible young man guaranteeing the survival of society in the future by embracing the ideology of moderate oligarchy. We could hypothesize that part of the explanation for the frequent use of the rape motif in Menander lies in the discourse on the tyrannical character of *moicheia*.

Comparing the motif of rape in Aristophanes and Menander, we can draw the following conclusions. Old Comedy does not view rape negatively, but envisions it only occasionally and with regard to slaves and unreachable goddesses. Rape never actually happens and consequently never triggers the action. It is expressed in vulgar terms intended to amuse the male audience. In Menander, by contrast, initial signs of a

389 Lape 2004, 134–135, 252.

390 Lape 2004, 138.

391 Lape 2004, 88–91.

problematization of rape are partly recognizable. Rape actually happens often and affects free citizen girls, who always become pregnant. Therefore, rape has a highly symbolic meaning and propels the action of the play forward. The discourse on rape always keeps to the rules of decency. Thus, Menander turns the rape motif as used by Aristophanes upside down. Oscillating between the depiction of rape as a harmless incident, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a problematic event, Menander deliberately inscribed ambiguity and semantic polyvalence into his comedies that revolve around the rape motif.

Violent *Kômoi*

What remains in Menander of Old Comedy's violent *kômoi*, excessive examples of which are Philocleon's raging in *Wasps* and the old hags' quarrel about the young man (a perverted *kômos*) in *Ecclesiazusae*? Even a first reading of Menander's comedies makes it clear that most of his *kômoi* are peaceful events that occur at the end of the plays, often in the form of wedding feasts. They are very different from Aristophanes' exuberant and oftentimes utopian endings.³⁹² The excessive and drunken revelry of the latter, full of sexual allusions, has given way to more civilized scenes. If put at the end of a play and at the end of dramatic festivals, Menandrian *kômoi* also merged with the outer frame of Dionysiac festivity after the end of the performance.

In contrast to its crucial role as a "shifter" in Aristophanes, the chorus has lost its active part in the plots of New Comedy. Its function is diminished to that of a mere means of dividing acts.³⁹³ A typically Menandrian feature is that the entrance of the chorus marks the end of the first act. At this point, the members of the chorus appear onstage in the guise of drunken revelers and deliver their first entr'acte performance in komastic fashion (*Samia*, *Aspis*, *Epitrepontes*, *Periceiomene*, *Dyscolus*). The other acts are also marked by choral performances, but not by the specific form

392 Cf., e.g., the *kômoi* in Ar. *Ach.* 1227–1234 (Dicaeopolis dances off with two girls); *Av.* 1720–1765 (Peisetaerus' wedding to Basileia); *Ec.* 1149–1183 (Blepyrus dances off with a maid and two girls); *Lys.* 1296–1321 (Spartan delegate dances off, taking everyone with him); *Ra.* 1524–1533 (the victorious Aeschylus marches offstage together with Dionysus, Xanthias, and the chorus); *Pl.* 1194–1209 (Chremylus, the old woman, and the priest walk offstage with the chorus, singing). In *Nu.* 1490 Strepsiades perverts the ritual of the merry *kômos* by demanding a torch to burn down Socrates' thinkery.

393 Cf. above 339, n. 306.

of a *kômos*.³⁹⁴ Wedding *kômoi* conclude most Menandrian plays. *Periceirromene*, *Samia*, *Misoumenos*, *Dyscolus*, and *Sicyonioi* show special traits. *Periceirromene* and *Dyscolus* end in a double wedding. A high degree of standardized metatheatricality characterizes the finales of *Samia* (733–737), *Misoumenos* (989–996), *Dyscolus* (963–969), and *Sicyonioi*³⁹⁵ (418–423). At least two of the four features that, according to Gutzwiller,³⁹⁶ define metatheatrical play in Menander are fulfilled in these concluding scenes: direct reference to staging or performance, and allusions to technical dramatic terminology. Exemplary is a passage from *Samia* that deserves to be quoted in full.³⁹⁷

Handsome boys, young men and old,
Gentlemen, now all together loudly give applause that's
prized
By our god of theatre, as evidence of your goodwill!
May [the] patron of our nobles games, immortal Vic-
tory,
Visit too my cast and chorus with her favour evermore!

These metatheatrical scenes and wedding *kômoi* are the exact opposite of violent *kômoi*. The request for garlands and torches sets the signal; the metatheatrical exhortation is addressed to the audience; a brief prayer is dedicated to Victory.

The only violent *kômos* to be found in Menander is that in *Dyscolus*. The slaves Getas and Sicon, after physically carting Cnemon outside, help him get up, force him to dance, and carry him into the house next door to join the double wedding party (955–960). This forced reintegration into human society is the worst possible torture for the old, disgruntled man. That even this deviation from the main pattern of wedding *kômoi* is just a game with the traditional *kômos* form is made clear by the finale.

394 Lape 2006 *passim*.

395 In this play in particular, Menander uses metatheatrical elements to demonstrate the staginess of both law courts and comedies (Lape 2004, 235–236). On the *kômos* finale in *Sicyonioi* and all other, comparable scenes in Old and New Comedy in detail, cf. Belardinelli 1994, 227–233.

396 Gutzwiller 2000, 102.

397 Men. *Sam.* 733–737: παῖδες καλοί,
μειράκια, γέροντες, ἄνδρες, πάντες εὐρώστωσ ἅμα
πεμψ[α]τ' εὐνοίας προφήτην Βακχίῳ φίλον κρότον.
ἡ δὲ καλλίστων ἀγώνων πάρεδρος ἄφθιτος θεὰ
εὐμενῆς ἔποιτο Νίκη τοῖς ἐμοῖς ἀεὶ χοροῖς.

Bain 1983, *ad loc.* remarks that this ending is more elaborate than in other Menandrian plays.

The play ends with conventional, hortative formulas, thus framing the harsh treatment of the misanthrope and mitigating its harsh aspects.³⁹⁸ Many researchers have had a negative reaction to this scene. Wiles summarizes their positions:³⁹⁹ while Sandbach (Gomme – Sandbach 1973, *ad Dyc.* 880–958) sees Cnemon as a rather comic figure, Handley is willing to accept this scene as providing comic relief, but hesitates to ascribe only laughableness to the old man.⁴⁰⁰ The problematic idea of having slaves force a free man to do something against his will even endangers, according to Handley, the elaborate mixture of comedy and seriousness, the famous *spoudaiogeloion*.⁴⁰¹ Wiles himself stresses the contrast between a supposed Happy End and Cnemon's unaltered character. Is the scene not gruesome, with slaves manhandling a free Athenian citizen like a servant? In my opinion, Menander creates a dense web of literary allusions that made the whole scene comprehensible to the Athenian audience. He parodies here the *kômoi* of Old Comedy,⁴⁰² in which it is always free citizens who initiate the komastic *exodos*. In Menander's *Dyscolus*, slaves take over this important responsibility of triggering the *kômos* and exhorting the citizens in the audience to join them in joy and laughter. The parody of the *kômoi* of Old Comedy is easily recognizable on several more levels. First, the sexual potency of the hero in Old Comedy is gone. Cnemon cannot even walk by himself but needs the help of slaves. He does not join hands with several girls, addressing them all the while with overt sexual language, but two men carry him inside, his role being totally passive. He neither sings a wedding song nor dances, but speaks about a cave he is going to enter. It is hard to imagine that all these carnivalesque reversals are pure accident. Menander reaches the highest form of irony when slaves have to force Cnemon, a citizen, to take part in his own daughter's wedding feast.

398 According to Zagagi 1994, 112, Getas and Sicon carry out their revenge “in the spirit of the ancient *kômos*,” and their actions have “an unrealistic character.” Thus, the end of *Dyscolus* oscillates between comedy and reality and thus gives the final scene a particular humorous flavor.

399 Wiles 1984, 176–177.

400 Handley 1965, *ad Dyc.* 880.

401 Blanchard 1983, 111–113 offers too benign an interpretation of the scene and even believes (113) that “la participation de Cnémon au banquet peut être le premier d’une longue série d’actes destinés à créer en lui des nouvelles habitudes.”

402 Gomme – Sandbach's deliberations (1973, *ad Dyc.* 959) aim in the same direction: “We have here a muted echo of the more boisterous conclusions of some of Aristophanes' plays.”

Anti-structural elements during *kômoi* are discernible in both Old and New Comedy, but they are far more tangible in Aristophanes, with just a few examples being a son's beating of his father, and women's repelling of Scythian archers. The *kômos*, the reveling protagonists' merry and frolicsome marching across or exit from the *orchêstra*, sometimes shows transgressive features in Aristophanes. For example, the old and drunk Philocleon exudes Dionysian energies, dances through the night, and accosts passers-by on his way back home, an excess normally only granted to young men under special circumstances. In New Comedy, the role of the *kômos* is largely curtailed. Cnemon's reintegration into society against his will, the only example of a transgression during a *kômos* in Menander, is no more than a shadow of what the *kômos* could be and accomplish.

Menander's Discourse on Society – Summary

Unlike Aristophanes, Menander remains faithful to a literary and partly idealized "reality."⁴⁰³ Wrath and violence are still there as residual atavisms, because comedy needs them for generic reasons, but Menander directly and unmistakably demonstrates that violence, ire, rage, and fury are not suitable means of conflict resolution. In the final pacification in the Happy Ends of *Samia* and *Dyscolus*, for example, Menander explicitly problematizes violence and propagates the civil discourse of Athenian democracy, now more generalized into an overarching Greek concept of civilization. In spite of, or perhaps precisely because of the mitigated representation of violence onstage, we can assume that Menander regards the use of violence as harmful to society and not worthy of a free Athenian citizen. With Menandrian comedy, the violence discourse has reached out beyond the *polis* and reached the *oikos* level. Since, in Hellenistic times, society is also made up of individual *oikoi*, the violence discourse as spoken in New Comedy can be seamlessly combined and at times even be equated with the civil discourse of and on society. Two examples shall suffice. In *Citharistes*, an unknown speaker addresses Laches with the words 'Laches, I deem that learning never to do wrong's a civilised design for life.'⁴⁰⁴ And in *Georgos*, Cleaenetus says:⁴⁰⁵

403 Préaux 1957 rightly sees New Comedy as a blend of reality and escapism.

404 Men. *Kith.* F 4 in Arnott's 1996 Loeb edition (pp. 138–139) = F 4 (Kö.) = F 284 (K.): τὸ μὴθὲν ἀδικεῖν ἐκμαθεῖν γάρ, ὦ Λάχης, / ἀστεῖον ἐπιτήδευμα κρίνω τῷ βίῳ.

The best man, Gorgias, is he who can
 Bear most offenses with self-discipline.
 This venom and excessive rancour is
 A sign of weakness simply in men's eyes.

In this passage Cleaenetus expresses an ideology on society and appropriate behavior that Pericles had already lived.⁴⁰⁶ The discourses on society and violence, presented and merged into one by Menander, agree that violence is detrimental, because it is barbaric and, in a word, un-Greek. It is more appropriate for a tyrant than for an Athenian citizen. Menander, hence, in this respect, is closer to the fourth-century forensic speeches than Aristophanes, who still takes delight in presenting tyrannical and hypertrophic behavior, however problematic it is.

Although Menandrian comedies show some anti-structural features, such as the questioning of the traditional gender system in *Periceiomene* and *Misoumenos*, Menander rather sticks to the conventional rules of interaction, thus being less violent and utopian, and therefore closer to society than Aristophanes.⁴⁰⁷ That a master threatens his slaves with blows, for example in *Samia*, is normal and belongs to the repertoire of comic stock motifs. If the bourgeois citizen commits violence on the Menandrian stage, it is now *per definitionem* more civilized and domesticated than the unbridled outbursts of violence in Aristophanic plays. Wrath is always wrong. Slapstick scenes are less frequent than in Old Comedy and have a very specific meaning that strikingly deviates from the Aristophanic model. As an extension of unreasonable wrath, they enact a specific vio-

405 Men. *Georg.* F 3 in Arnott's 1979 Loeb edition (pp. 128–129) = F 2 (Kö.) = F 95 (K.):

οὗτος κράτιστός ἐστ' ἀνὴρ, ὃ Γοργία,
 ὅστις ἀδικεῖσθαι πλεῖστ' ἐπίστατ' ἐγκρατῶς·
 τὸ δ' ὀξύθυμον τοῦτο καὶ λίαν πικρὸν
 δεῖγμ' ἐστὶν εὐθὺς πᾶσι μικροψυχίας.

406 Cf. above 150, n. 563 (Plu. *Per.* 5.1–3; cf. also 7.5). An early praise of self-control in comedy is Epicharmus F 100 (K.-A.).

407 This is also reflected in Menander's relationship to Athenian law. As far as I can see, Brown 1983 *passim* stands alone in his opinion that Menander is vague and sometimes even wrong in his dealing with Athenian law. Turner 1984, Préaux 1960, and Taubenschlag 1926, to name just three, are convinced that Menander mirrors Athenian law correctly. Cf. E. Turner 1984, 253 on assault and battery. Menander could not afford serious blunders because the spectators and the judges of the plays, who were drawn by lot, knew Athenian law fairly well. Préaux 1960, 223: "le droit, dans la comédie, contribue au réalisme de la fiction," and 227: "le poète se conforme strictement aux règles en vigueur."

lence discourse by exemplifying what behavior within the family and among neighbors is not supposed to look like. Orderly weddings, not violent *kômoi*, now conclude the plays. No hybristic act is shown onstage, unlike in Aristophanes' plays. In comparison with the Aristophanic corpus, the semantics of *hubris* is narrowed down tremendously, having been reduced to the meaning of "rape" only. Rape is the only violent phenomenon that is open to interpretation in its negative quality. It looms in the background of most Menandrian comedies as a plot device triggering the plays' actions. In this function, however, it is partly problematized. Only rarely, as in *Epitrepontes*, can it be seen outright as negative. Apart from the discursive openness of the rape motif, however, most meanings are generally definite, with Menander overwhelmingly portraying violence as negative. These profound changes separating New from Old Comedy must have been deliberate. In opting to deviate from the presentation of violence as practiced in Old Comedy, Menander was no less reflective and political than Aristophanes and his colleagues. At stake are no longer the integration of primordial heroes into civilized democratic society and problematic utopias brought about by supra-human protagonists through often violent means, but the psychology of the human soul and personal relationships between different types and social ranks of citizens. Their conflicts are to be overcome via open and honest communication. How people are supposed to speak with one another is in the foreground in New Comedy. Violence has turned into a private emotion that harms the individual and her or his social environment. The fact that a candid and refined discourse on this kind of violence is now possible allows for the explicit problematization of violence itself.

Menander's rejection of violence is to be seen against the backdrop of his worldview and ethical code. As a pupil of Theophrastus and friend of Demetrius of Phaleron, the playwright was also deeply influenced by Aristotle, especially his *Rhetoric* and *Nicomachean Ethics*. With regard to *sôphrosunê* and *enkrateia*, Menander is in close agreement with Aristotle.⁴⁰⁸ These new values are also praised in the orators,⁴⁰⁹ but Menander created fictional individuals for the stage and imbued them with the virtues of civil behavior, gentleness, temperate feelings, impeccable conduct (in

408 Blanchard 2007, 99–108; Quinn 2001; Webster 1974, 43–55. Cf. above 323, n. 253. O'Sullivan 2009, 145, nn. 120 and 198 is more skeptical about a close relationship between Menander and Demetrius of Phaleron's regime.

409 Arnott 1981, 217 stresses that Menander's values are also found in many other authors of the fourth century.

the end), and generally exemplary humanity. Menander's genius lay in the fact that his stage characters never became too theoretical. They have flaws, commit mistakes, and thus seem real. Menander was able to breathe life into philosophical concepts and dramatize them onstage. He was not interested any longer in supra-human figures striving for utopias, but in ordinary people and their quite ordinary problems and how they can be resolved in the context of a more civilized Hellenistic society.⁴¹⁰ The focus is now on how people communicate with each other and what the obstacles are on their way to a deeper mutual understanding. People should only act once they are properly informed. Acting out of ignorance is always rash and a mistake.⁴¹¹ By watching these actions onstage, the spectators were invited to learn about waiting, keeping a low profile, controlling themselves—in a word, about *enkrateia*, the opposite of *orgê*. A proper process of reflection in the Menandrian theater would consist of embracing and internalizing the humanitarian and cooperative worldview as fleshed out by the orators, Theophrastus, and Aristotle.

Ritual Functions of Scenes of Violence in Comedy

Aristophanic comedy opened up a ritual space in which messages could be freely negotiated and the grand experiment of breaking down the barriers of daily life could take place in an unhampered way. The flexible line between good and bad behavior, as described by the orators, was not just narrated in comedy, but corporeally envisioned. Battery, including father-beating, *hubris*, rape, public and hidden violence, violence perpetrated in a state of drunkenness or sobriety, by old or young men, violation of thresholds, disturbance of the public order, as well as the perversion of religious customs and gender roles, citizenship status, and social rank are all theatrically represented, but from a funny perspective. The speaker's opponent, as characterized in a forensic speech, is comparable to the comic hero in his fundamental traits. In the imagination of the courtroom speaker, his adversary is a deceiver, a barbarian, and a tyrant embodying pre-*polis* behavior and a mental state prior to that of civilization. In the dream-like Otherworld of Old Comedy, a primordial, hypertrophic, hybriatic, tyrannical, and animal-like hero, the anti-type of the democratic

410 Treu 1981, 212–213.

411 Maurach 2005, 58–60.

citizen, playfully transcends, with his or her enormous innate power, limits that cannot be overstepped in reality.⁴¹² From these transgressions stems the great pleasure the Athenians derived from watching these spectacles. And just because this kind of violence was not meant to be taken too seriously, it lent itself to be reflected upon.

Nothing is more ritualized in Aristophanes than the habitual occurrence of vulgar and obscene slapstick and farce that characterize the actions of the comic hero. They are the vestigial remains of ecstatic Dionysiac fertility rites. No comic author has been able to do without this atavistic core of comic motifs, up to the present day. This fact alone explains already the relative prominence, structurally and proportionally, of Dionysiac rites in Old Comedy. Consequently, slapstick and farce always lurk in the background of any comedy and will eventually erupt, whether the author is willing or unwilling to accept this fact.⁴¹³

If these violent scenes are so ritualistic, they must also perform the function of rituals. They create *communitas*, the community of laughter, which leads to comic release⁴¹⁴ and the short-term, carnivalesque relief from social norms. Playful and liberating laughter also engenders, however, detachment from and exclusion of evil forces. This is the healing aspect of ritual. If the audience laughs at Philocleon and Peisetaerus, these problematic heroes are also criticized and, in a way, cast out. Fictional violence is presented within a civic ritual and is thus also insulated from the audience because it remains problematic and threatening. The spectators are supposed to watch and deride it, but only in order to banish and reject it. Ultimately, Aristophanes may have been right in saying that his farces were different from those put on by his rivals. The fragments preserved from other authors of Old Comedy are not substantial enough to allow us to ascertain the truth of Aristophanes' statement, which could merely be part of a rhetorical pose, an ironic pretense designed to initiate

412 In this capacity, the comic hero can be compared to the anthropological concept of the shaman, the *goês* or *magos* in the Greek world (Bierl 2009b). The hero, endowed with supra-human powers, often fulfills a healing role and is certainly able to undertake excursions to heaven as well as to Hades. Research on the goetic motifs of Old Comedy has not even begun yet. At the same time, Freyberg 2008 rightly attributes to Aristophanic Comedy a philosophical message—i.e., striving for a measure, as expressed paradigmatically in Plato's *Philebus*. Again we see that the thought-world of forensic oratory, and even philosophy, is also expressed on the comic stage, but in a dialectical sense.

413 Cf. Dobrov 1988, 26–29.

414 Cf. above 247, n. 37 on comic catharsis.

an even funnier competition with his rivals, who might have used the same *topos* in creating sophisticated theater. If his claim is genuine, however, Aristophanes' brand of comedy was more intellectual than his rivals', created more distance and irony, and his sophisticated plots restricted violence more intensively than those of his opponents ever could. Aristophanes is deeply rooted in the genre of Old Comedy, but takes on an avant-garde standpoint, for example by criticizing in his *parabaseis* the traditional farcical use of violence, at least more than any other author of the *Archaia* we know of. And if the specific ritual of performing a comedy has as its goal the healing function of laughter (i.e., laughter also about farce, which amounts to an indirect criticism of weird, slapstick behavior), we can now go one step further. Farce as exemplified by phallic processions, rude personal invective, indecency, slapstick violence, intruders, food theft, marginal figures who speak in dialects and foreign accents, and many more motifs, may all be traceable to early ritual practices. In order to achieve this under-the-surface critique of violent slapstick, Aristophanes tried hard, probably harder than his colleagues, to sever his comedy from these ritual origins of the genre. However "unsuccessful" he was, it is his endeavor that counts (if it was not just a comic pose). If we take seriously his attempts at controlling violence onstage and charging slapstick with sophisticated meaning and if we are willing to lend some credence to his repeated criticism of other playwrights' relying on mere vaudeville stunts, a further thesis imposes itself: *Aristophanes strove hard to create intellectual comedy*.⁴¹⁵ Obviously, he overtaxed his audience, which did not always understand him. The failure of *Clouds* and the playwright's disappointment afterward are telling enough. Aristophanes strove to make the impossible possible: although farce was ingrained in the genre and no comic author could do without it, he tried to overcome its premises even at the risk of transgressing the boundaries of the genre, as seen in *Wasps*, *Birds*, and *Clouds*. The contradiction between Aristophanes' constant railing against slapstick and his persistent use of it remains, but is explicable. His comedy is a hybrid oscillating between the rules of the genre and personal literary and theatrical ambi-

415 Dobrov 1988, 28 regards farce as the *pharmakos* (scapegoat) of comedy in a metaphorical sense. On a concrete, political level, Rosenbloom 2002 connects the idea of the scapegoat to that of the *ponēros*. *Ponēros* is an abusive word meant to denigrate a member of the social elites. They are sycophants and enslave the people and therefore deserve to be driven out. Similar is Zimmermann 2006.

tions. Unfortunately, the comedies of his rivals are not preserved well enough to verify Aristophanes' boast of having elevated comedy to new intellectual heights, but it is plausible that his criticism of farce, slapstick, and vulgarity went further than that of his colleagues, whose *old* Old Comedy would have been steeped even more deeply in the ritualistic slapstick of its origins. It comes as no surprise that comedy was officially introduced into the festive program of the Dionysia (486 BCE) and the Lenaea (440 BCE) after the establishment of the democracy. As in the depiction of violence in the orators and on the curse tablets, Old Comedy is similarly concerned with the topic of violence in its relation to the *polis*, with Aristophanes being more sensitive to this agenda than his rival colleagues, and thus foreshadowing the development brought about by Middle and New Comedy. As an element of the genre and atavistic remnant of its Dionysiac origins, violence is as prevalent in Old Comedy as in the forensic speeches and on the curse tablets, but it is nevertheless problematized indirectly, at least by the greatest representative of the genre, just as in other Athenian media of the time.

It is understandable that Old Comedy lost its *Sitz im Leben* early in the fourth century, with the new civic and civil discourses, firmly established after 403 BCE, that suppressed the open representation of violence.⁴¹⁶ But comedy was able to adjust to new political conditions. Menander dared to complete what Aristophanes had begun: the final and direct shunning of violence onstage. The mostly indirect criticism of violence in Aristophanic comedy was not enough in the later fourth century. Bawdy humor did not correspond to the new conventions of the time. To what extent the growing degree of literalization contributed to the taming of exuberant license onstage must remain the subject of further research. It seems likely that the semi-oral scripts with which Aristophanes must have worked favored slapstick-type interludes. Let us not forget that Lycurgus had the most important tragedies of the fifth century codified and thus started to create a literary canon from the 330s on. Menander, thus, worked under different cultural conditions. The increasing reliance on the written and thus domesticated word of the theater script may have made it easier for him to ban violence more successfully from the comic stage than Aristophanes. The latter was no longer understood by the late fourth century, and against this background of changed tastes and aesthetics, Aristotle's and especially Plutarch's (much later)

416 Cf. above 222–227 on the effect these discursive changes had on the practice of binding magic.

sharp criticism of Aristophanic vulgarity is understandable.⁴¹⁷ From Middle Comedy on, many playwrights dissociated themselves from the phallic and violent origins of Dionysiac ritual. Menander made the final step and overcame Dionysiac reminiscences almost completely, not always to his own benefit.⁴¹⁸ Only allusions remained. What had been exuberant *kômoi* in the old days of Attic democracy were now civilized wedding feasts. The genre had thus fundamentally changed. The claim that theater had nothing to do with Dionysus was now fulfilled.

As a complex civic ritual through which the city could represent itself,⁴¹⁹ theater was actively engaged in all contemporary debates, transformed them on a literary level, and raised more questions than it answered in order to generate reflection. Attic comedy (and tragedy) staged, within a ritual frame, violence discourses and, with them, discourses on democracy and society in general.⁴²⁰ Every violence discourse is inseparable from the discourse on society, for a society can only survive if violence is held at bay. To this end, a society has to come to a basic consensus on how to define violence and what to do about it. This enormously difficult process of thinking, communicating, and making decisions requires civic spaces where opinions can be formed, continuously exchanged, questioned, re-shaped, and represented. Athenian culture found these forums in the ritual performance of oratory and drama. *The political function of theater lay in its very ritual dimension, that is, in its capacity to dramatize and enact societally relevant discourses, thus enabling a deepened reflection about them.* I would like to push the fundamental similarity between the lawcourt system and comedy one step further. Although the audience as a whole did not judge the comedies, but five jurors drawn by lot,⁴²¹ it must have influenced these jurors through its reaction to the plays.⁴²² Thus, the spectators did have a certain say in determining the winners of the dramatic contests. They not only decided, however indirectly, which playwright would win the comic *agôn*, but they were also

417 Cf. above 331, n. 285.

418 Sometimes Menander's contemporaries did not fully appreciate his methods and preferred some of his rivals' burlesque comedies over his more mannered plays (Nesselrath 1990, 333).

419 Burkert 1987, 35: "Der Ort der Selbstdarstellung der Stadt ist die Festgemeinschaft im Theater."

420 Cf. above 126–131 the remarks on tyrants and barbarians as uttered in the ritual frame of forensic speeches.

421 Pickard-Cambridge 1953, 96–100; cf. also above 246, n. 36.

422 Pl. *Lg.* 659a, 700c–701b.

the moral judges of each and every word (*legomena*) and action (*drômena*) they heard and saw onstage (similar to the law courts). Thanks to the semantic openness of the comic scenes playing out before them, the spectators themselves, as participants in a ritual, were able to ascribe symbolic meanings to the discourses and actions enacted onstage. In doing so, they could become aware that it was their own agency that created and enhanced the identity of being Athenian through this large-scale community ritual, an experience similar to that in the courts and the Assembly of the People. This sense of community, which was to be attached to the discourses on violence and violent actions, helps us discern the ritual and political function of theater more clearly now. The symbolic meanings of actions and words represented onstage had to make the majority of spectators identify with them and make them laugh. At the same time, these meanings could only be partially identical to the views of most spectators, because the latter had to have the possibility to distance themselves from problematic actions and words through laughter. In the experiment of the downfall of the comic hero and his or her utopia, the Athenians gained a glimpse into the utopian and, at the same time, primordial Otherworld, which the playwright presented as not entirely positive, but highly problematic. In the realm of comic fiction, the Athenians' hypertrophic desires and bold alternatives to their often-depressing reality could be tried out without danger. In other words, the spectators assessed individually and as a collective, at least upon further reflection, the significance of the plot of any comic play and its highly complex interaction with the outer frame of the civic ritual. This means that the individual spectator, similar to the judge in court, had his share in determining the fair market value of a scene of violence on any given day of performance, including the overarching sense of the whole play. Even if we assume that defining the discourses on violence in public was a prerogative of the social elites, the under classes also participated in creating a socio-political consensus with regard to the definition and function of violence by serving as judges in court and watching plays in the theater of Dionysus. This fundamental agreement that was constantly called upon and asserted in the ritual venues of the courts, assemblies, and theater helped contain violence considerably. Thus, the audience was the ultimate master of a political artistic ritual, as would be expected from a direct and radical democracy. As far as this common ideology and trust in the political function of theater are concerned, Aristophanes and Menander were in agreement. But the specific means they used to reach their respective goals were very different. Both dramatists embraced the literary technique of *spoudaiogeloion*.

The simultaneity of humor and seriousness onstage, as well as the dissociation from and play with reality, rendered a deepened reflection about violence and its place in society possible.

Conclusion

This study is concerned with the way Athenians reflected on violence in the different media they had at their disposal. The courtroom speeches provided a ritual frame through which, in theory at least, everyone who wished to had the freedom to discuss directly the injustice he suffered. The genre of the speeches left room enough for interpretation and manipulation of Athenian law. In a culture of public display, the meaning of important concepts such as *hubris* and *moicheia* was kept deliberately ambivalent and found its exact significance in a particular context only through the performative act of a courtroom trial. Drama surpasses even the semantic openness of oratory through its fictional character. As Geertz and Turner have shown, cultural performances such as rituals, ceremonies, carnivals, parades, sporting events, and plays provide explicit or implicit metacommentaries on their social contexts. Applied to Athens, this theory implies that stage theater in the form of tragedies and comedies, especially at the unsurpassed intellectual level of Attic drama, also provides a social metacommentary on violence in Athens;⁴²³ that is, drama comments on society by staging violence. This means that, regardless of their plots, Attic dramas must be taken seriously as historical sources. In the context of this book, I have focused on comedy both for chronological reasons and because their relationship to “reality” seems more “immediate” than that inscribed in tragedy.

The theater was *the* medium of reflection in Athens. We know about the festive ritual frame in which fictive plots were staged, and can discern their ambivalent meanings and socio-political functions. The *communitas* created in the theater, with its subjunctive mode of speaking, gave rise to a reflexivity never achieved by any other cultural event of Athens. Aristophanes and Menander enact highly complex discourses on violence in different ways. Both comic playwrights point to and play with the limits of acceptable behavior by staging high-wire acts of violence. The thrill lies in the question of whether or not the comic hero, by performing violence, slips and breaks the norms and, if he does, what the consequences

423 Turner 1989b, 125, 159, 163–164, 170.

of this threshold transgression are. Dramatic works all show ambivalence, but there is a remarkable difference between Aristophanes and Menander.

In Aristophanes, rules of interaction are often blatantly broken. Hence, violence is more transgressive and primordial than in Menander. At times it is grotesquely exaggerated and is thus distanced from the audience. The discourse on the *polis* as political entity is in the foreground. Matters of constitution and foreign policy are negotiated on a literary level.

In Menander, by contrast, the violence discourse is firmly and directly tied to the discourse on Hellenistic society; it is even one of its integral parts. Just as in tragedy, violence is seldom directly represented on the Menandrian stage. By following discursive conventions, Menander is closer to fourth-century oratory, less utopian than Aristophanes, and therefore able to criticize violence more directly. As we did in the orators, we again grasp in comedy a process toward more direct problematization of violence from the late fifth to the fourth century.

How can we explain this development? The reasons for change are to be sought in politics and changing social and discursive patterns. In the atmosphere after the amnesty of 404/03, violence had become more problematic than ever before. The rules of democracy had stiffened and required the suppression of actual violence and even the medial expression of it (which does not mean that there was no violence). Fourth-century orators emphasize the rule of law more fervently than their predecessors, Antiphon and Andocides, in the fifth century. In contrast to the latter, the former articulate the new values directly and explicitly. Even on curse tablets one had to speak the moderate discourse of democracy; even on grave stelai one was not allowed to show unbridled emotions. At least in public, one had to comply with a strict code of behavior. Above all, one had to appear peaceful and rational, speak the "right" discourses, display *sôphrosunê* and *enkrateia* instead of anger, and, if violence was unavoidable, mask it by mediating it as far as possible and keeping to the normative rules of violent interaction.

Aristophanes and Menander reflect this process of change on the comic stage. Aristophanes discusses the rule of law indirectly; his larger-than-life characters often have difficulties remaining within the ideological boundaries of democratic Athens and subjecting themselves to tight democratic norms. Menander's characters chastise any irrational emotions that might block sensible solutions. The figures themselves embody the temperate citizen as the exemplary model to be emulated by

every spectator. Ritually speaking, we could say that the ritual dynamics of the performative genres of forensic oratory, binding magic, and drama allowed them to react to societal change like a seismograph and adjust accordingly, so as to continue to fulfill their ritual functions.⁴²⁴

Looking more closely at Aristophanes' and Menander's respective audiences, we can account even better for the fundamental shifts that occurred between the lifetimes of the two playwrights. Transformation processes were ongoing from Aristophanes' later comedies on (*Ecclesiazusae* [391? BCE], *Wealth* [388 BCE]), via Middle to New Comedy.⁴²⁵ One way of explaining the manifold changes is to postulate that the aesthetics of literary production and performance (*Produktionsästhetik*) hinges on the way an audience responds to a literary work of art (*Rezeptionsästhetik*). Aristophanes and Menander had different audiences in mind when they composed their respective comedies. This point is not intended to rehearse the speculations about the social composition of the Menandrian audience,⁴²⁶ but rather to envision the cultural differences between a

424 According to Nijawan 2005, 274, rituals are always in need of being adjusted to new circumstances. In the ritual dynamics of the slow transition from Old to New Comedy, we can well observe this process. The abolition of the chorus or the complete change of its function in New Comedy should be explained by societal processes of transformation. According to Walton – Arnott 1996, 52, the diminished role of the chorus reflects the growing role that characters now play in relation to the plot.

425 On the development from Old via Middle to New Comedy, cf. Nesselrath 1990, 331–340; Arnott 1972. Csapo 2000, 133 rightly emphasizes that the transition from Old to New Comedy is not an abrupt succession of one form of comedy through another, but rather a shift. Elements of Old Comedy can be found in the Nea and vice versa.

426 Aristophanes must have written for a mass audience. The social composition of the Menandrian audience, in contrast, is highly controversial: Slater – Csapo 1995, 287 and Arnott 1981, 215 assume that only the wealthy were able to afford going to the theater, because the Macedonian oligarchy had abolished the *theôrika* and the choregy. Rosivach disagrees (2001 and 2000). The abolition of the *theôrika* cannot have changed the composition of the audience dramatically. Dramas were only performed on a few days of the year, so that attending a comedy would only have caused a minimal loss of income. Perhaps an admission fee was no longer charged after 324 BCE, when the theater of Dionysus was all in stone and the wooden benches did not have to be maintained any more (2000). Similar to E. Turner 1984, 244, who also postulates middle-class families as the main audience, Rosivach 2001 argues that New Comedy remained a form of mass entertainment. Most spectators must have been farmers and could easily identify, for example, with Gorgias in *Dyscolus*, and laugh about Sostratus (Rosivach 2001, 131). The poor in the audience had lost their citizenship only recent-

mainly Athenian and a cosmopolitan audience. Menander also wrote for an Athenian audience, to be sure, but his plays nevertheless appealed to the Hellenistic *oikoumenê* and soon found widespread fame. Aristophanes wrote for the *polis* and some visitors who knew Athens well enough to understand the plots and their comic intricacies. The spectators laughed about Athenian institutions, problems of local politics, and above all about the satire of notorious public figures. The boundaries between good and bad behavior were drawn in compliance with the overall notion of the majority of the *politai*. The Athenians with whom Aristophanes communicated had divergent opinions and political leanings, but were culturally quite a homogeneous group. Aristophanes could expect them to understand all allusions to contemporary politics and to come to terms with the high degree of open-endedness and ambivalence inscribed in his plays.

Menander's plays, in contrast, ultimately also appealed to a diverse audience consisting of different peoples in far-off lands, who embraced cultural notions and value systems quite distinct from those cherished in Athens. Aristophanic openness of interpretation would have overtaxed these foreign audiences and made such comedies incomprehensible to them. The cognitive horizon of Menandrian comedy, by necessity, had to become more closed.⁴²⁷ Menander's culturally Greek message had to be clear and unequivocal: violence in whatever form is wrong, an evil we have to overcome to become civilized or, in a word, Greek. This mes-

ly (316 BCE) and must have been flattered by the message of the play, whose underlying "task" it may have been to reconcile the masses with the ruling oligarchy. Whatever the social composition of the audience, what we can say is that Menander was not a social revolutionary. Whoever sat in the audience, Menander's wish to reach an equilibrium between rich and "poor," to propagate marriages between wealthy and "poor" families, is undeniable. This is not a plea for social justice—the poor family remains poor—but a plea for mutual understanding and recognition of the moral worth of a poor family and its equal right to marry up (cf. similarly Wiles 1984, 178; Treu 1981, 214). This theoretical bridging of social gaps, at least in the private realm of marriage contracts, was later understood as Menander's deep-rooted belief in a timeless *humanitas*. Therefore his comedies, or rather excerpts from his comedies, were collected as *sententiae*. On Menander's *Nachleben* and influence on later dramatists, cf. Walton – Arnott 1996, 119–136.

427 There are also political reasons for this process toward more thematic closure. The Athens of New Comedy was no longer a democracy, but an oligarchy in which a pluralism of opinions could not be expressed as freely as in the times of Old Comedy.

sage was easy enough to grasp for cosmopolitan Hellenistic audiences from Egypt and Asia Minor to Bactria and the boundaries of India. They no longer understood the intricacies of Athenian local politics. Therefore, Menander and his colleagues had to compose their comedies in a more timeless fashion, by referring less directly and often to daily politics, without becoming apolitical. The *oikos* as the nucleus of society was understandable everywhere in the vast expanse of the Alexandrian empire. It was clear to everyone that whatever happened at home would also affect society as a whole. Whoever understood this timeless message and could comprehend New Comedy, with its ingrained sense of *philanthrôpia*, and especially its language, was Greek because of his *paideia*. Athenian playwrights were successful in creating a cultural *koinê*, a community whose values and language were based on but finally detached from Athens, the *oikoumenê* of the Greek world of Hellenism and the later Roman Empire.

Paradoxically, Menander opened up Athenian comedy for the world and made it cosmopolitan by reducing its interpretive openness,⁴²⁸ to which growing literalization massively contributed. In its thrust and cultural repercussions, this development cannot be overestimated. If we regard Athenians today as the inventors of democracy, Cleisthenes and Pericles are not the only ones to be credited with this achievement; credit is due also to Menander, who, with his bourgeois comedy, made democracy a universal idea.⁴²⁹ From Menander on, at the latest, democracy and violence stand in opposition to each other, with violence becoming the stamp of tyranny. By giving lasting expression to this connection in a literary form, Menander dissociates himself from the origins of democracy, which emerged in and through violence and struggle, civil strife and external war.

Looking at these diachronic developments, we can say that the perception and artistic treatment of violence underwent profound changes from the fifth to the fourth century BCE. This gradual change was discussed, negotiated, shaped, and represented in contemporary performances, in literature as well as in sculpture and on vase paintings. The trage-

428 Although I do not deny Lape's claim that Menander's comedy is characterized by "simultaneously conservative and subversive plots" (Lape 2004, 246) and that New Comedy fulfills a variety of functions on different levels, I do not think that Menander's plays are as polyphonic as those of Aristophanes.

429 Menander actually means a moderate oligarchy compatible with Macedonian rule (Major 1997), but older, democratic discourses permeate his idealized characterization of oligarchy.

dians, Aristophanes, and Menander all came back to the central topic of violence again and again, demonstrated its senselessness, and urgently recommended that it be overcome, not least for reasons of foreign policy (cf. Aristophanes' "comedies of war"). During the fifth and fourth centuries, no other fictional medium in which these questions could have been treated was more readily at hand than theater. Ancient historiography and biography follow different rules, and the novel had not yet been born. Theater provided a public space in which meaning and sense of words and deeds could be dynamically negotiated. Aristophanes and Menander articulated and visualized onstage the thin line, which had been mainly constructed in lawcourt speeches, between the use of violence that was still acceptable and that which was just not acceptable any more. Often enough, this balance gets lost in the plays. Aristophanes and Menander brought utopias and mock realities onto the stage and demonstrated to their respective audiences how to overcome political and social boundaries, at least in theory, by expelling evil forces, strengthening the community through the civic ritual of theater performances, and, within this ritual frame, providing guidelines for the regulation of conflicts.