

## THE ‘LOVE DUET’ IN ARISTOPHANES’ *ECCLESIAZUSAE*

Over sixty years ago, Walter Headlam identified *Ecclesiazusae* 960–76 as a paraclausithyron, or song sung by an excluded lover from the street to his beloved within.<sup>1</sup> In 1958, however, C. M. Bowra suggested that the whole of *Eccl.* 952–75 was actually the sole surviving example of a previously unrecognized genre of Greek lyric poetry, the informal love duet.<sup>2</sup> The thesis has been widely accepted, and is adopted by Rossi, Henderson and Silk, as well as by the Oxford editor, Ussher, who rejects Headlam’s identification explicitly.<sup>3</sup> Only Zimmermann has failed to embrace Bowra’s interpretation wholeheartedly, although he offers no detailed discussion of the passage.<sup>4</sup> In fact, *Eccl.* 952–75 is not evidence for a lost lyric genre, but a sophisticated literary parody, carefully designed as an elaborate poetic comment on the larger action of the play in which it appears. Bowra’s ‘love duet’ is a critical fantasy, whose fictional existence only serves to obscure the real purposes and humour of this Aristophanic love-song.

The assumption of the existence of Bowra’s new genre is actually a *petitio principii*, which allows the critic to avoid confronting the real poetic problems and purposes of the passage, under the guise of conducting literary-historical research.<sup>5</sup> There is in fact no evidence outside of these Aristophanic lines for the existence of Bowra’s new literary form in the fifth century B.C. Generically, the *Ecclesiazusae* passage has no predecessors and no obvious successors.<sup>6</sup> Nor do the genre’s supposed characteristics, and the sociological analysis which they underpin, seem as convincing now as they may have thirty years ago. The sexual explicitness which Bowra (p. 383) identifies as evidence of the love duet’s originally popular character can now be seen as typically Aristophanic.<sup>7</sup> The same must be said of the playfully mocking use of high lyric language.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. Headlam (A. D. Knox, ed.), *Herodas: The Mimes and Fragments* (Cambridge, 1922) ad II.34–7.

<sup>2</sup> C. M. Bowra, ‘A Love Duet’, *AJP* 79 (1958), 376–91, reprinted in C. M. Bowra, *On Greek Margins* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 149–63. Bowra’s assertion (p. 378 n. 8) that his differences with F. O. Copley, *Exclusus Amator: a Study in Latin Love Poetry* (APA Philological Monograph n. 17; Madison, 1956), who declared this the earliest example of the dramatic paraclausithyron, are ‘more a matter of terminology than of substance’, is clearly mistaken.

<sup>3</sup> L. E. Rossi, ‘“Qui te primus ‘deuro de’ fecit” (Petron. 58.7)’, *SIFC* 45 (1973), 36; J. Henderson, ‘Sparring Partners: a Note on Aristophanes’ *Ecclesiazusae* 964–965’, *AJP* 95 (1974), 344–7; M. Silk, ‘Aristophanes as a Lyric Poet’, *YCIS* 26 (1980), 149; R. G. Ussher (ed.), *Aristophanes: Ecclesiazusae* (Oxford, 1973) ad 960–3. I refer throughout to Ussher’s text.

<sup>4</sup> B. Zimmermann, *Untersuchungen zur Form und dramatischen Technik der Aristophanischen Komödien* Band 2: *Die andere lyrischen Partien* (Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie, Heft 166; Koenigstein im Taunus, 1985), pp. 68f. Zimmermann both cites Bowra’s assessment of the passage ‘als nachahmung volkstümlichen Poesie’, and identifies it as a paraclausithyron.

<sup>5</sup> If one is going to insist on inventing a genre to explain 952–75, one might just as well create one to explain 900–23 as well.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Ussher (1973) *ad loc.*, and the references provided there, on Sappho, fr. 137 and on the Marisa poem and the putative Greek model for Horace, *Carm.* 3.9. The strong narrative content in both of the latter suggests that they are related to mime rather than to our passage. The love duet thus does not fill a ‘gap’ in our understanding of Greek lyric poetry, as Bowra (1958), 376–9, esp. 379, implies.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. esp. Henderson (1975).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Silk (1980). Much of Bowra’s thesis depends on his vision of Aristophanes as a sincere and brilliant exponent of high lyric poetry, speaking out to defend his art from vulgar

The actual literary background of *Eccl.* 952–75 is much more complex, and much funnier, than Bowra saw.<sup>9</sup> As Headlam apparently realized, the poetic basis of the scene is an Aristophanic adaptation of a well-known poetic genre with exceptionally clear and prominent sexual roles, the paraclausithyron. By confusing sexual identities within this adapted song, and by at the same time assigning to the Young Man lines clearly ‘intended’ for the Young Woman, Aristophanes offers an elaborate poetic commentary on Praxagora’s new world.

The setting of the lovers’ song is precisely what one would expect for a paraclausithyron.<sup>10</sup> A young man appears, having eaten (cf. 988) and drunk, and carrying a torch (978). He knocks at his beloved’s door (cf. 976), and makes the threat which Ussher admits is ‘the traditional gesture of the lover in despair’, that if he is excluded, *καταπεσὼν κείσομαι* (963).<sup>11</sup>

The audience can thus reasonably expect a lover’s serenade. The text as well seems to have close affinities to the paraclausithyron. As Bowra saw (pp. 380f.), the refrains of the song, as its simplest and most patterned elements, are the most likely to belong to the original, pre-Aristophanic version.<sup>12</sup> The majority of the refrains are clearly originally intended to be sung by men alone, and sound peculiar in the mouth of the Young Woman. As Bowra observes (p. 381), ‘that the Young Man should ask the Young Woman to open the door and let him in [*ἄνοιξον ἀσπάζου με* 974] is natural and easy, but that she should say the same to him [971f.] is almost pointless’. Similarly, he notes (p. 381) that the lovers’ words in 952a and 960 (*δεῦρο δὴ δεῦρο δὴ*) ‘have no very practical significance, since the only course is for her to come down and unlock the door for him’.<sup>13</sup>

There is thus no point here in unsubstantiated literary-historical hypothesizing along the lines of Bowra’s thesis. The Young Woman’s part is obviously a deliberate, if peculiar, Aristophanic adaptation of a song properly sung by a man, and that song is certainly a paraclausithyron. The air of sexual confusion continues, however, in the third refrain-element (*μέθες, ἰκνοῦμαι σ’ Ἐρως | καὶ ποιήσον τόνδ’* [τῇνδ’ 968] *ἐς εὐνὴν τὴν ἐμὴν ἰκέσθαι* 958–9a; 967–8b) which, as Rossi notes, is much more appropriate for the Young Woman, who is within (and who indeed speaks the lines first), than for the Young Man, who is in the street.<sup>14</sup> If the basic poetic model for the love-song in *Ecclesiazusae* is the paraclausithyron, Aristophanes has here stepped beyond the strictures of his raw materials, and has deliberately created and injected extreme confusion into the social and sexual roles in the scene. The reasons for this

pretenders. As Silk (esp. 124–51) has shown, however, the comic playwright was no practitioner of the pure, elevated lyric style. Instead, ‘the ultimate affiliations of Aristophanic lyric...are, for better or worse, with popular culture’ (125).

<sup>9</sup> It is a reasonable criticism of Bowra’s thesis that, for all its ingenuity, it is not funny. *Ecclesiazusae* is generally a piece of scathing satirical slapstick, and we might reasonably expect the same to be true here.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Headlam (1922) *ad* II.34–7.

<sup>11</sup> Ussher (1973) *ad loc.* On the image, cf. L. E. Rossi, ‘Un’ Immagine Aristofanea: “L’Amante Escluso” in *Nub.* 125 sg.’, *Archeologia Classica* 25–26 (1973–74), 667–75. Ussher’s comment that ‘the youth here is not a type of “exclusus amator”...’, for the girl has no disinclination to admit him’ misses the point. However illogical or inappropriate it may seem, the Young Man is playing the part of an excluded lover (cf. 960–3; 974). That ‘one may isolate [the paraclausithyron] only by ignoring the obvious form of the duet’ (Ussher *ad* 970) is of course true, but ignores the essential question of what is pre-Aristophanic here, and what is deliberate poetic distortion.

<sup>12</sup> Bowra (1958), 380f.

<sup>13</sup> Bowra (1958), 380, suggests that *δεῦρο δὴ δεῦρο δὴ* is a standard erotic invitation. Rossi (1973), 34–40, is unable to offer any parallels to support this assertion. (The ‘insupportable tautologia’ which Rossi [38] claims a non-erotic *δεῦρο* in combination with *καί κτλ* creates at 953–4, may actually be further Aristophanic literary parody, along the lines of the criticism of a similar Aeschylean device at *Frogs* 1152ff.)

<sup>14</sup> Rossi (1973), 37.

decision ought to be sought not in the strictures of some hypothetical lost lyric form, but in the larger purposes of the drama.

The plot of *Ecclesiazusae* centres on the feminization of Athens' men and the resulting assumption of male roles by the city's women, and on the chaos that ensues.<sup>15</sup> Certainly the humour intended in these lines consists precisely in the (marvellously inappropriate) attempt by a Young Girl to sing a male lover's serenade, and in the broadly comic sexual-social confusion in the Young Man's response. The lyric catastrophe that occurs onstage here illustrates, more clearly than mere slapstick (cf. 976–1111) ever could, the ridiculous nature of the new world. *Ecclesiazusae* 952–75 is not a snippet of a lost genre of Greek song. It is a powerful and deliberate poetic composition, whose purposes within the play, and thus whose humour, are clear.

Howard University, Washington, D.C.

S. DOUGLAS OLSON

<sup>15</sup> Cf. esp. S. Said, 'L'Assemblée des Femmes: Les Femmes, l'Économie et la Politique', in *Aristophane, les Femmes et la Cité* (Cahiers de Fontenay 17; Fontenay-aux-Roses, 1979), pp. 33–69, and H. Foley, 'The Female Intruder Reconsidered: Women in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*', *CP* 77 (1982), 14–21.