

## ANONYMOUS MALE PARTS IN ARISTOPHANES' *ECCLESIAZUSAE* AND THE IDENTITY OF THE ΔΕΣΠΟΤΗΣ<sup>1</sup>

The staging of Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* is complicated considerably by the large number of individual male citizen parts in the play.<sup>2</sup> These include Praxagora's husband Blepyrus (312–477, 520–727), Blepyrus' anonymous Neighbour (327–56) and his friend Chremes (372–477), the First Citizen (564–871) and the Second Citizen (746–876), the Young Man 'Epigenes' (938–1111; cf. 931), and the δεσπότης who leads out the Chorus (1128–83). These are not necessarily all independent characters, but the great difficulty with the play is in deciding precisely who is to be identified with whom. R. G. Ussher, the most recent Oxford editor of the text, distinguishes four separate characters, and divides the parts in the following way:

- (A) Blepyrus is also the δεσπότης;
- (B) the Neighbour is the Second Citizen;
- (C) Chremes is the First Citizen;
- (D) 'Epigenes' is an independent character.

I have argued recently that Ussher's identification of the δεσπότης as Blepyrus cannot be right, and have gone on to suggest that it must therefore be an anonymous character who leads out the Chorus.<sup>3</sup> The first part of this analysis still seems to me correct. Blepyrus heads off for the Agora at around 727. He therefore cannot be the man who enters from the opposite wing at 1128, and then heads off at around 1178 in precisely the direction in which Praxagora's husband has already exited some 450 lines earlier. My division of the other parts of the play, however, was somewhat flawed, and what follows is an attempt to rethink the staging of *Ecclesiazusae* in a more systematic and thorough manner. Unfortunately, there can be no absolute certainty in matters of this sort. All the same, close attention to the text suggests that the Neighbour is the First Citizen, that the Second Citizen is an anonymous character, and that it is Chremes who is the δεσπότης.

A few preliminary facts can be taken as given. Blepyrus, the Neighbour and Chremes are three separate, independent characters, as the sequence of action in 311–477 shows. Blepyrus cannot be the Master (or, for that matter, any of the other anonymous male characters), unless we are willing to introduce into the play a degree of dramatic inconsistency found nowhere else in Aristophanic comedy.<sup>4</sup> Nor can either the First Citizen or the Second Citizen (whoever else they may be) return as the δεσπότης, for they too have already gone off to the Agora, at 871 and 876 respectively.<sup>5</sup> This basic information is summarized in schematic form in Table 1 with ● representing identifications that must be excluded.

<sup>1</sup> Thanks are due to the Editors, and to an anonymous CQ referee for careful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> I refer throughout to the text of R. G. Ussher, *Aristophanes: Ecclesiazusae* (Oxford, 1973; hereafter 'Ussher').

<sup>3</sup> S. Douglas Olson, 'The Identity of the Δεσπότης at *Ecclesiazusae* 1128f.', *GRBS* 28 (1987), 161–6; hereafter 'Olson'. I was not altogether fair to K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (London, 1972; hereafter 'Dover'), when I said (162 n. 6) that he noted and then ignored this problem. In fact, Dover, p. 193, offers a Suessian solution, without indicating any particular attachment to it.

<sup>4</sup> Olson 162.

<sup>5</sup> Olson 163–5. The Young Man cannot be the Master, since he is otherwise occupied after 1111, and no-one seems ever to have doubted that he is an independent character.

Table 1. *Basic information on the distribution of male citizen parts*

	Blep.	Neighbour	Chremes	1st Cit.	2nd Cit.	Δεσπότης
Blepyrus	×	●	●	●	●	●
Neighbour	●	×	●	—	—	—
Chremes	●	●	×	—	—	—
First Citizen	●	—	—	×	●	●
Second Citizen	●	—	—	●	×	●
Δεσπότης	●	—	—	●	●	×

A proper distribution of the male citizen parts in *Ecclesiazusae* thus depends on making sense of the relationship between Chremes and the Neighbour (311–477) on the one hand, and the two Citizens (564–876) on the other. If Chremes and the Neighbour are identified with the two Citizens, neither of the two composite figures that result can be the δεσπότης, who must then perforce be an anonymous character. If, on the other hand, one or both of the Citizens are themselves anonymous characters, either Chremes or the Neighbour might still be the Master. In order to solve this puzzle, we must begin by analysing the basic stage-action of the first half of the play.

*Ecclesiazusae* probably uses two stage-doors, although this cannot be proved, and it is worth considering other possibilities as well.<sup>6</sup> If there are two stage-houses, one of them (which I will call 'House A') clearly belongs, at least initially, to Praxagora and Blepyrus. It will be from this house that Praxagora emerges at 1 and Blepyrus at 312, and about which the action at 510–70 centres.<sup>7</sup> The other house ('House B') will then belong to one of Praxagora's fellow-conspirators, Ussher's Woman B (esp. 33–7), and to the Neighbour (cf. 327), Ussher's ἀνὴρ γυναικὸς B, who together apparently form a second household (compare 40 and 340–1).<sup>8</sup> If there are actually three stage-doors, on the other hand, one ('House C') remains unoccupied for the first several hundred lines of the play;<sup>9</sup> if there is only one, it will have to stand (in what may seem to us a confusing and contradictory way, but must have been for the original audience an acceptable and easily understood convention) for the entrance to several separate houses and households.

When Chremes first appears on stage (372), he is coming from the Assembly (376), from the direction I will call 'Wing A'. Chremes' cryptic final remark (εἴμι 477) tells us nothing about the direction in which he exits. He cannot turn around and go back in the direction from which he came, since that would make his entrance unmotivated,

<sup>6</sup> The question of the number of stage-doors in *Ecclesiazusae* has been the subject of considerable scholarly debate. E. Fraenkel, 'Dramaturgical Problems in the *Ecclesiazusae*', in *Greek Poetry and Life: Essays Presented to Gilbert Murray* (Oxford, 1936), pp. 257–77, and Ussher, pp. xxx–xxxi, opt for two doors. A. M. Dale, 'An Interpretation of Ar. *Vesp.* 136–210 and its Consequences for the Stage of Aristophanes', *JHS* 77 (1957), 207–9, and C. W. Dearden, *The Stage of Aristophanes* (London, 1976), pp. 20–30, believe there is only one. Th. Gelzer, 'Aristophanes', *RE* Suppl. 12 (Stuttgart, 1970), 1498, and Dover, p. 198, argue for three. This is an important and interesting problem but, as I argue below, ultimately has little effect on how the male citizen parts in the play are distributed.

<sup>7</sup> On the text and staging of this scene, see most recently S. Douglas Olson, 'The Staging of Aristophanes, *Ec.* 504–727', *AJP* 110 (1989), 223–6.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Fraenkel, op. cit. (n. 6), 257; Dale, op. cit. (n. 6), 208; Dover, p. 198; Ussher *ad* 327–71. In 877–1111, 'ownership' of the house or houses on stage is transferred to a series of Hags, but it still seems reasonable to assume that some degree of consistency is maintained up to this point.

<sup>9</sup> The woman who enters at 30 (Ussher's Γυνή A) clearly enters from the wing (cf. 27–9), and is therefore appropriately distinguished from Praxagora's γείτων, Woman B (33–4).

and because he would then be heading straight toward the Chorus, who also enter from Wing A ('the Pnyx') at 478, and who are on guard specifically against being seen by men (478–88, 493–500). Chremes must therefore exit either into the opposite wing ('Wing B'), or into one of the stage-houses. If there is only one stage-door, he most likely goes into the wing, since otherwise he and Blepyrus would be required to say goodbye to one another (477) and then simultaneously exit into the same place. Chremes will then be a character in transit, much like Aegeus in Euripides' *Medea* 663–758, or the corpse at *Frogs* 170–7. So too if there are only two doors, with House B explicitly inhabited by the Neighbour, House A by Blepyrus, Chremes probably goes into 'Wing B', although strict logic of 'ownership' might be ignored here, and he might go into House B instead. If there are three doors, finally, Chremes could easily exit into House C, while Blepyrus goes into House A.

By 478, therefore, Blepyrus and the Neighbour are within their houses, Chremes either in Wing B or within a house as well. The Chorus now enter from Wing A, followed closely by Praxagora and another anonymous woman at 500–1. Only at 564, when the First Citizen abruptly breaks into the argument going on between Praxagora and Blepyrus, who has in the meanwhile returned on stage from his house (520), does the staging and thus the division of male citizen parts in the play become confused and controversial. In my earlier examination of the problem I followed Ussher in assuming that the First Citizen is Chremes, and under the three-door hypothesis in particular this is at least technically possible.<sup>10</sup> Sufficient evidence can be mustered, however, to show that this identification cannot be right.

The action in 728–45 makes it very clear that the First Citizen's home is visible on stage (cf. 753–5), and the suddenness with which he breaks into the dialogue at 564 also suggests that he enters from a stage-door rather than from a wing. Perhaps more important, it is clear that the First Citizen, unlike Chremes (cf. 376–457) but like the Neighbour (cf. 351–2), was not present at the Assembly to hear Praxagora make her arguments there. He must therefore be convinced by her now of the need for and the feasibility of a female-dominated Athens (esp. 568–70). If the First Citizen is to be identified with any of the men who have already appeared on stage, therefore, he must be the Neighbour, who is within his house on stage and has not been to the Assembly today (339–43; cf. 351–3), and who has already shown his readiness to intrude uninvited into Blepyrus' affairs (cf. 327–50).<sup>11</sup> He can scarcely be Chremes, who has already heard Praxagora make her arguments (428–53), and who may very well be in Wing B in any case.<sup>12</sup>

Conclusions so far are summarized in Table 2. Regardless of the number of stage-doors, therefore, if the First Citizen is not simply an anonymous man, he must be identified with the Neighbour rather than with Chremes, and this new composite character cannot be the Master. The crucial question that remains is thus whether Chremes takes another part in the comedy, and if so, what it is. Chremes may not

<sup>10</sup> Thus also Fraenkel, op. cit. (n. 6), 272–3, who never explains how he arrives at his division of parts; Dover, p. 198.

<sup>11</sup> That the Neighbour's *ἱμάτιον* and *ἐμβάδες* have disappeared (340–2) does not keep him offstage, since he apparently still has his *χιτών*; cf. the remarks of L. M. Stone, *Costume in Aristophanic Poetry* (Salem, 1984), pp. 144–6. That the Neighbour mocks Blepyrus for wearing female costume (329–33), on the other hand, shows that he has not resorted to the desperate expedient of putting on his wife's clothes.

<sup>12</sup> It might always be the case, of course, that the First Citizen is an anonymous character, who appears unexpectedly here for the first time and breaks into the conversation. As I argue below, however, this makes no difference in how we assign the other male parts, and in particular the role of the *δεσπότης*.

Table 2. *Possible distribution of male citizen parts*

	Blep.	Neighbour	Chremes	1st Cit.	2nd Cit.	Δεσπότης
Blepyrus	×	●	●	●	●	●
Neighbour/ First Citizen	●	×	●	×	●	●
Chremes	●	●	×	●	—	—
Second Citizen	●	●	—	●	×	●
Δεσπότης	●	●	—	●	●	×

return on stage at all, of course, although I will argue below that he does. If he does return, it must be as either the Second Citizen or the δεσπότης, but it cannot be as both, since whoever plays the Second Citizen cannot be the Master. The δεσπότης, on the other hand, must be either Chremes or (following my previous conclusion) an anonymous, independent character.

At 746, the Second Citizen enters, and paces about soliloquizing (746–52) until he notices the Neighbour/First Citizen drawing up his goods before his house (753–5). It is not clear whether the Second Citizen enters from a stage-door or from a wing. On the one-door hypothesis, he probably enters from a wing, since the Neighbour/First Citizen is busy with his possessions around the door of ‘his’ house. On the two- and three-door hypotheses, on the other hand, the Second Citizen can enter from either wing or from a door.<sup>13</sup> None of this helps us determine whether Chremes can take the part. The only way of deciding whether the Second Citizen can be identified with Chremes, in fact, is the (admittedly somewhat subjective) criterion of dramatic character. In his initial conversation with Blepyrus, Chremes seems to be at least half convinced by Praxagora’s arguments about female decency and superiority (esp. 441–64), and he exits on a note of bemused acquiescence in her plan (469–76). The Second Citizen, on the other hand, declares from the very first that he has no intention whatsoever of cooperating with the new regime (esp. 746–52, 760–8, 777–9). He refuses outright to trust the women (esp. 831–2), and is quickly characterized as a selfish and greedy hypocrite (esp. 853–62). If these were real human beings, we might hypothesize that Chremes had done some thinking offstage and come back several hundred lines later, with serious new reservations about Praxagora’s plan. As these are dramatic characters, who have no real existence offstage and thus no opportunity to ‘think’ there, however, we cannot posit any such intellectual evolution. The Second Citizen therefore cannot be Chremes, but must instead be a new, anonymous character, who appears here and here alone in the drama. If this is so, the only question that remains is whether Chremes is the δεσπότης, or whether he never appears again after 477, and the Master is simply another anonymous man.

Technical questions of staging help us here not at all. There is one otherwise very odd detail in the text, however, which strongly suggests that Chremes does return on stage one final time. Until his final farewell at 476–7, Chremes is a nameless character, precisely parallel to the anonymous ἀνὴρ who is the Neighbour/First Citizen. At the very last moment, as Chremes is already on his way offstage, however, Blepyrus addresses him by name (477). This is extremely peculiar. Elsewhere in Aristophanic comedy, the identification of characters by name is often delayed for what may seem to us an unreasonably long time, but no-one (with the exception of mute servile

<sup>13</sup> The staging of Ussher is chaotic and confused here: *ad* 356, he says that the Neighbour exits into his house, but *ad* 746–876 he insists that the same character appears as the Second Citizen ‘from the right’.

characters – cf. 867–8) is ever named only at the moment they leave the stage for the final time.<sup>14</sup> It is thus a reasonable assumption that Chremes is being marked out here as someone who will return on stage at some later point in the play and, as we have seen, this can only mean that he is the *δεσπότης*. This conclusion meshes well with what we have been able to establish about Chremes' whereabouts up to this point. The Master probably enters from Wing B, heading off to dinner in the Agora in Wing A (1135), although it is possible that he emerges from a stage-door. As we have seen, Chremes has on the one- and two-door hypotheses most likely been in Wing B since his exit at 477, while on the three-door hypothesis he may also have been in House C. On any hypothesis, he can easily appear as the *δεσπότης* and logically exit into Wing A.

Regardless of the number of stage-doors, therefore, the male citizen parts in *Ecclesiazusae* ought probably to be divided in the following way:

- (A) Blepyrus (312–477, 520–727);
- (B) the Neighbour (327–56) and the First Citizen (564–871);
- (C) Chremes (372–477) and the *δεσπότης* (1128–83);
- (D) the Second Citizen (746–876);
- (E) the Young Man 'Epigenes' (938–1111).

This staging does depend on certain implicit assumptions, most important among them that Aristophanes practised a relative economy of characters in *Ecclesiazusae*. If the First Citizen is not the Neighbour but an anonymous character, there would be six rather than five individual male parts. Since Chremes probably returns in any case after 477, however, and since he probably should not be identified with either of the two Citizens, the likelihood is still that he (rather than the Neighbour) is the *δεσπότης*.

It might at first blush seem odd that Aristophanes has chosen to end his comedy with the relatively obscure Chremes rather than with Blepyrus, the apparent male lead, in the role of the Master. Blepyrus, however, is ridiculed and humiliated constantly from the moment he first appears on stage. He is mocked by his Neighbour, who makes fun of him for wearing women's clothing (esp. 329–30), and by Chremes, who informs him (with obvious glee) that he has just been denounced publicly at the Assembly (436–9). He is also made an ass of by his wife, who calmly ignores his blustering (esp. 520–49) and never allows him to find out what has actually gone on at the Pnyx. He has in any case lost all dignity in the eyes of the audience from the moment he appears on stage, wearing a *ἡμιδιπλοῖδιον* and Persian boots, comically eager to find a 'private' corner in which to relieve himself (esp. 320–2). If *Ecclesiazusae* is to end in any sort of positive way, it needs a new hero for the final scene. Unlike Blepyrus or the Neighbour, Chremes has not even had his clothing stolen. It is thus appropriately he who takes the part of the Master and leads out the Chorus.

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<sup>14</sup> Thus, for example, Dicaeopolis is not given a name until *Ach.* 406; the Sausage-seller in *Knights* remains anonymous until 1257; Euelpides and Pisthetairus do not identify themselves by name until *Birds* 644–5; Cario in *Wealth* is only given a name at 624. All of these characters, however, continue to take part in the action after they are identified.