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ALCIBIADES AT SPARTA: ARISTOPHANES *BIRDS**

Although there is a long tradition, going back at least to the tenth century, that would see Aristophanes' *Birds* (performed in the spring of 414 B.C.) as somehow related to the exile in Lacedaemon of Alcibiades, and to the fortification of the Attic township of Decelea by his Spartan hosts (*Arg. Av.* 1 Coulon), current scholarship surrounding *Birds* is firmly in the hands of those who are antipathetic to seeing the creation of Cloudcuckooland in terms of a political allegory. 'The majority of scholars today... flatly reject a political reading';[1] *Birds* has 'no strong and obvious connection with a topical question of public interest';[2] 'attempts to find in *Birds* any extensive allegorical comment... are unconvincing'.[3] Not only is it widely believed that '*Birds*... is strangely free of political concerns'.[4] but also that 'the theme of the *Birds* is absurdity itself... it is about meaninglessness' (ibid. 179). This is a tradition that descends from A. W. von Schlegel, for whom *Birds* was 'merely a "Lustspiel", full of imagination and the marvellous, with amusing touches at everything, but with no particular object'.[5] This approach was reinforced by the fact that by the second half of the nineteenth century, the allegorists had apparently spun out of control. By 1879, there were no fewer than 79 accounts of the *Tendenz* of the *Birds*—some political, some 'escapist fantasy'—on offer.[6] The most influential allegorical interpretation of *Birds* was J. W. Süvern's study of 1826,[7] but which is now generally dismissed, and only mentioned to be held up as a warning to those who might be tempted to take the allegorical route.[8] This paper takes a different point of departure, namely Pierre Brumoy's *Le théâtre des grecs* (Paris, 1730), an allegorical treatment that is full of good sense, and which was too hastily dismissed by Süvern, and ignored by others.

The fact that this line of research has been off limits for so long does little credit to classical scholarship; there is a lot of scholarly rubble to be shifted and a lot of ground to be made up. Joseph Farrell has recently identified the fundamental problem: 'We are in the habit of reading ancient literature through nineteenth-century lenses. Whether this is so because our profession coalesced in that century or because all of us, classicist or not, are still, nearly a hundred years later, caught in the grip of its chief intellectual and spiritual categories, I will not attempt to say. For whatever reason, it troubles us when we cannot make our ancient texts speak to us in a voice that would have been intelligible to Arnold, Carlyle, or Mommsen'.[9] It is much more fun, though, to make the text of Aristophanes speak in a voice that would

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[1] D. Konstan, 'A city in the air: Aristophanes' *Birds*', *Arethusa* 23 (1990), 187.

[2] A. Sommerstein, *The Comedies of Aristophanes* 6. *Birds*. (Warminster, 1987), 1.

[3] N. Dunbar, *Aristophanes Birds* (Oxford, 1995), 3.

[4] C. H. Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero* (Cambridge, MA, 1964), 169.

[5] W. C. Green, cited by F. H. M. Blaydes, *Aristophanis Aves* (Halle, 1882), x.

[6] W. Süss, *Aristophanes und die Nachwelt* (Leipzig, 1911), 137, citing W. Behaghel, *Geschichte der Auffassung der Aristophanischen Vögel* (Heidelberg, 1878–79).

[7] J. W. Süvern, *Über Aristophanes Vögel* (Berlin, 1827); English translation, Süvern (1835).

[8] G. Dobrov, 'Aristophanes' *Birds* and the metaphor of deferral', *Arethusa* 23 (1990), 214.

[9] J. Farrell, 'Allusions, delusions, and confusions, a reply,' *Electronic Antiquity* 1 (6) (1993).

have been intelligible to his original audience. It is especially odd that comedy should be held to be allegory-free by most of its students, when political-allegorical interpretations of tragedy are today gaining acceptance.[10]

Satirizing 'by name'

There is evidence to suggest that legislation (associated with the name of Syracosius) was passed in 415 stating that it should thenceforth be illegal to lampoon people on stage by name (*μὴ κωμῳδεῖσθαι ὀνομαστί τινα*).[11] There is another possible reference to this same legislation in the tradition that at about the same time Alcibiades (who was then a general)[12] 'passed a law to the effect that comedy should no longer be written openly, but figuratively'.[13] It might thus be claimed that in failing to mention Alcibiades in a play written during the next few months, Aristophanes was simply obeying the law. An obvious example in *Birds* is to be found in lines 145–7, where there is a reference to the *Salaminia*, one of the Athenian state triremes. Everyone—even the allegorical sceptics—takes this to be an allusion to the recall of Alcibiades in 415, but the procedure, *ἀποκρύπτον μὲν τὸ ὄνομα, τὸ δὲ πρᾶγμα δηλῶν* ('hiding the name, but making clear the act'), in the words of the writer of one of the medieval plot-summaries (*Arg. Av.* 2.47–8 Coulon), is of wider applicability.

There is, however, much disagreement over the meaning of Syracosius' legislation, or indeed whether it existed at all.[14] Since 37 Athenians are mentioned 'by name' in *Birds*, it has been suggested that the legislation was quickly a dead letter, or even was never enacted in the first place. The absence from *Birds* of the names of any of those found guilty of parodying the Eleusinian Mysteries or the mutilation of the Herms, and notably Alcibiades, was noted by J. Droysen,[15] and some believe the law to have applied to them: that these are the individuals whose name should not be mentioned on the stage.[16] This explanation may contain a grain of truth, but not for the reasons hitherto given. Greek comedy is supposed to 'differ from abuse, since abuse delivers the insults in an unconcealed manner, whereas comedy needs what is called *ἔμφασις*'.[17] *Emphasis* was a technical term meaning 'innuendo', rather than

[10] E.g. one might cite (without holding a particular brief for any of them): G. Zuntz, *The Political Plays of Euripides* (Manchester, 1963); papers in P. J. Euben (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (Berkeley, 1986); C. Meier, *Die politische Kunst der griechischen Tragödie* (Munich, 1988) (trans. *The Political Art of Greek Tragedy* [Baltimore, 1993]); M. Borowska, *Le théâtre politique d'Euripide: problèmes choisis* (Warsaw, 1989); A. F. H. Bierl, *Dionyos und die griechische Tragödie: politische und 'metatheatralische' Aspekte im Text* (Tübingen, 1991); G. Serra, *Edipo e la peste: politica e tragedia nell' 'Edipo re'* (Venice, 1994); U. Neumann, *Gegenwart und mythische Vergangenheit bei Euripides* (Stuttgart, 1995).

[11] Schol. *Birds* 1297; cf. S. Halliwell, 'Comic satire and freedom of speech in classical Athens', *JHS* 111 (1991), 55–6.

[12] R. Develin, *Athenian Officials* 684–321 B.C. (Cambridge, 1989), 142–8.

[13] Tzetz. XIAi 97–8 (Koster). This information comes in the context of Eupolis' *Baptae*, performed shortly before the Sicilian expedition: I. C. Storey, 'Dating and redating Eupolis', *Phoenix* 44 (1990), 1–30; idem, 'The dates of Aristophanes' *Clouds* II and Eupolis' *Baptae*: a reply to E. C. Kopff', *AJP* 114 (1993), 71–84.

[14] The debate, which verges at times on the theological, is well summarized by Halliwell (n. 11), 54–66; add Dunbar (n. 3), 239.

[15] J. Droysen, 'Des Aristophanes Vögel und die Hermokopiden', *RhM* 3 (1835), 161–208.

[16] A. H. Sommerstein, 'The decree of Syrakosios', *CQ* 36 (1986), 101–8, with references to earlier literature.

[17] *Tract. Coisl.* 31–2 (Koster). On the possible derivation of the *Tractatus* from Aristotle's lost *Poetics*, see R. Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy: towards a reconstruction of* Poetics *II* (London, 1984). Cf. Plut. *Per.* 16.1: in describing the way in which comic writers lampooned Pericles, Plutarch calls their technique *paremphasis*.

'explicitness' as it does today.[18] It was defined by Quintilian as 'the process of digging out some lurking meaning from something said'.[19] We should thus expect to find hidden meanings in comedy.

For example, if *Birds* does relate to Alcibiades at Sparta, the wordplay on φοινικιοῦς and φοινικόπτερος in the context of the first birds in the Chorus to come on stage (272–3), will not only relate to the 'pink flamingo', but will also allude to the φοινικίς that was the 'red military cloak of the Spartans',[20] as well as to the φοινικίς that was 'the red banner' with which those who (like Alcibiades) were found guilty of profanation were solemnly cursed at Athens.[21] The bird in question is λιμναῖος ('a marsh bird'): there was a λίμνη ('marshy lake') next to the royal palace at Sparta.[22] Several ideas thus come wittily, *emphatically*, together. But there are those who would immediately say that this kind of interpretation would involve impossible intellectual contortions by the average member of Aristophanes' audience. This objection can best be met by observing that if *we* are aware of these possibilities, how much more aware would a member of the audience have been in 414. Better still, imagine for a moment that Aristophanes did *not* intend to make these allusions; how crass and insensitive of him to use words that did carry such potential semantic baggage.

Another way in which *emphasis* was employed was to use the names of real people in order to make allusive points about the principal targets of Aristophanes' wit. Thus, for example, the name of Execestides (11, 764, 1526), with its overtones of absence[23] and unnatural vice,[24] would well play *emphatically* upon the current status and reputation of an Alcibiades who was both in exile and notorious for his irregular personal life.[25] Proper names of real people play a role similar to those that may have been made up for the occasion. The name of Philocrates (14, 1077) may come into the latter category; meaning 'lover of power' it would appropriately allude to an Alcibiades who was suspected by some of aiming at tyranny the year before the performance of *Birds* (Thuc. 6.15). While such references may well have been wounding to the historical Execestides, and to Philocrates (if he did exist), their names were simply the vehicles for the lampooning of a larger target.[26]

In a treatise written in *c.* 430 B.C.,[27] we learn that 'the kind of person who [was] usually lampooned on the stage [was] rich, or aristocratic, or powerful'; the only poor

[18] 'We [today] are simply not attuned to writing which proceeds by indirect suggestion rather than by direct statement.... When we 'emphasize' something, we proclaim it to our readers, leaving no doubt that we want its presence known. The ancient writer does the exact opposite': F. Ahl, 'The art of safe criticism in Greece and Rome', *AJP* 105 (1984), 179.

[19] Quint. *Inst. Or.* 9.2.64 (trans. Ahl [1984], 176).

[20] Ar. *Lys.* 1140; Xen. *Lac.* 11.3.

[21] Lys. 6.51; cf. D. M. Lewis, 'After the profanation of the Mysteries', in *Ancient History and its Institutions: Studies presented to Victor Ehrenberg on his 75th birthday* (Oxford, 1966), 177: Not only was Alcibiades condemned to death for the profanation of the Mysteries, 'but his property was confiscated, his name was put on a stele, and all priests and priestesses were instructed to curse him. All...except one...duly did so, turning to the west and waving red sheets.'

[22] Xen. *Lac.* 15.6. And was the Eurotas valley the haunt of flamingoes in the fifth century? It was certainly marshy: Plut. *Lyc.* 16.14.

[23] Cf. ἐξοίκιστος, ('expelled from home').

[24] Cf. Hsch. s.v. *Ἐξήκεστος· ἡταιρηκώς, ὅθεν καὶ τοὺς πρωκτοὺς ὁμονύμως ἐξηκέστους ἔλεγον.*

[25] Cf. Ar. *Ach.* 716, where Alcibiades is described by implication as εὐρύπρωκτος.

[26] The technique involved is akin to that of the Slanderer in Thphr. *Char.* 28.2. Aristotle happily calls such names τυχόντα ὀνόματα: *Poet.* 1451[b]. See further, M. Vickers, *Pericles on Stage: Political Comedy in Aristophanes' Early Plays* (Austin, Tex., in press).

[27] On the date see M. Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty to the Sovereignty of Law : Law, Society and Politics in Fifth-Century Athens* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986), 182, n, 23.

or non-aristocratic targets were those 'who sought to set themselves above the people' ([Xen.] *Ath. pol.* 2.18). Such persons, and not the individuals who are mentioned along the way, are properly the κωμῳδουμένοι ('those who are satirized'). Far from it being 'surprising'[28] that Alcibiades is apparently absent from comedy in general and from *Birds* in particular, it would instead be surprising to find him mentioned 'by name' any more than he is.[29] But given Alcibiades' pivotal role in the events of 415–414, it would be even more surprising if he were not somehow present in *Birds*. That he was thus represented is apparent both from a reading of the play as a political allegory (Aristophanes is said to have been among those who practised symbolic satire after 415) (Tzetz. XIAi 99–100 [Koster]), and from the testimony of Libanius, writing centuries later: 'What play did not include [Alcibiades] among the cast of characters? Eupolis, Aristophanes, did they not show him on the stage? It is to him that comedy owed its success' (Lib. *fr.* 50ß [5.644.5–7]).

Much of what is implied or imputed is at the level of gossip or tittle-tattle, and much may well never have actually occurred in real life. Some incidents or conceits in any case had their origins in the exaggerations of comic writers—frequently grounds for dismissing elements of the anecdotal tradition out of hand, but in the present context all to the good. But while the historicity of material surviving in the anecdotal tradition that is exploited here may be open to question, the historical significance of the fact that such things were said, joked about, or even believed, should not be overlooked. As G. M. Young once observed: 'the real, central theme of History is not what happened, but what people felt about it when it was happening.'[30] And the role of gossip in a 'shame-honour' culture such as that of ancient Athens should not be underestimated. If gossip did indeed 'play with reputations',[31] how much more effectively could this be achieved on the comic stage. If 'talk dragged details of men's private lives into the public arena for inspection and condemnation',[32] writers of comedy will have capitalized on the fact. In a society which 'lacked organized news media',[33] the comic theatre will have served as an effective means of dissecting and disseminating rumour and gossip. Tales of Alcibiades' belligerence thus may well have been exaggerated; Spartan institutions may well have been misunderstood by outsiders. Nothing need be 'true', but—like the Chancellor's cheap cigarettes and champagne—have simply served as the basis for comic treatment.

Süvern and Brumoy on Birds

What was Süvern's explanation of *Birds*? Put briefly, his case was that the Chorus represent the Athenian populace, and that in the characterization of Peisthetaerus elements of Gorgias were laid over those of Alcibiades. But Süvern's analysis is far

[28] G. M. A. de Ste. Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London, 1972), 361; M. Heath, *Political Comedy in Aristophanes. Hypomnemata* 87 (Göttingen, 1987), 34; Halliwell (n. 11), 60–61; cf. G. F. Hertzberg, *Alkibiades. Der Staatsman und Feldherr* (Halle, 1853), 15.

[29] For the relatively few specific references, see R. F. Moorton, 'Aristophanes on Alcibiades', *GRBS* 29 (1988), 345–59.

[30] G. M. Young, cited in S. Marcus, *The Other Victorians* (London, 1966), 111. Cf. B. Strauss, '*Oikos/polis*: towards a theory of athenian paternal ideology 450–399 B.C., in *Classica et Mediaevalia* 40 (1990), 122: 'The truth of [the anecdotes about Alcibiades' youthful adventures] hardly matters; much more important is that Alcibiades elicited them.'

[31] P. M. Spacks, *Gossip* (New York, 1985), 4; cf. V. Hunter, (1990), 'Gossip and the politics of reputation in classical athens', *Phoenix* 44 (1990), 299–325.

[32] Hunter (n. 32), 322.

[33] J. Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens* (Princeton, 1989), 148.

more subtle than this, for he is even willing to grant the fundamental soundness of Schlegel's view of *Birds* as 'The most innocent buffoonery or farce, touching upon all subjects, gods as well as men, but without entering deeply into any, like a fanciful fairy-tale',[34] taking such an interpretation as 'proof of the fine construction and masterly perfection of the piece'.[35] Only to go so far, however, would be to overlook any 'deep design' the poet may have had—of a kind apparent, according to Süvern, in *Clouds*.[36]

Süvern's explanation has much in its favour, but it is because there are so many loose ends that it failed to persuade posterity. Any Gorgian overtones to the character of Peisthetaerus can be put down to the fact that Alcibiades came under the Sicilian sophist's spell; Plato made much the same point in setting his satirical dialogue *Gorgias* in the house of the Alcibiadean Callicles.[37] While the chorus of Birds might well display many features of the Athenian populace, they are quite specifically marked out as something else. It was, of course, forbidden 'to lampoon or defame' the Athenian *dēmos*, on the stage ([Xen.] *Ath. pol.* 2.18), which is why any criticism would have had to be guarded. Where Süvern went seriously wrong, however, was in dismissing any connection between the foundation of Cloudcuckooland and the fortification of Decelea in Attica by the Spartans. This possibility had been alluded to in one of the medieval plot-summaries (*Arg. Av.* 1 Coulon), and was taken for granted by many. Since Decelea was not thus fortified until several months after the performance of *Birds*, the equation was (wrongly) considered by Süvern to fall down.[38]

Süvern is about as far back as most modern scholars are prepared to look.[39] There was, however, an important study devoted to the 'allegorical comedy' that Süvern's misjudgement concerning Decelea led him to reject. An observation concerning the Spartan setting of *Birds* made in the seventeenth century by Jacques Le Paulmier de Grentemesnil was taken up in 1730 by the Jesuit Pierre Brumoy who developed it at considerable length.[40] Le Paulmier thought that *Birds* was written not long after Alcibiades' flight into exile, when he was active at Sparta in encouraging the Lacedaemonians to fortify Decelea. He believed that Aristophanes was attempting to persuade the Athenians to discontinue the Sicilian campaign 'by intimating... by means of Cloudcuckooland... the disasters which the Spartans were going to inflict on Athens and Attica, if Decelea were to be fortified in their neighbourhood according to Alcibiades' advice'.[41] Whether or not this was Aristophanes' motivation (and we must never lose sight of the fact that his primary concern was to win the dramatic prize), Le Paulmier's brief plot-summary is wholly accurate.

Brumoy's *Le théâtre des grecs* was a series of translations of Greek tragedies and comedies accompanied by commentaries. The first edition appeared in 1730, and the second (which was the only one available to me) in 1780. Brumoy's account and

[34] Süvern (1835), 2. [35] Süvern (1835), 2.

[36] Süvern (1835), 4–5. On *Clouds* see now: M. Vickers, 'Alcibiades in Cloudedoverland', in *Nomodeiktes: Greek Studies in Honor of Martin Ostwald*, J. Farrell and R. Rosen (edd.), (Ann Arbor, 1993), 603–18.

[37] On Alcibiades in the *Gorgias*, see O. Apelt, *Platonische Aufsätze* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1912), overlooked by E. R. Dodds, *Plato Gorgias* (Oxford, 1959); M. Vickers, 'Alcibiades and Critias in the *Gorgias*: Plato's "fine satire"', *DHA* 20/2 (1994), 85–112.

[38] Süvern (1835), 6.

[39] E.g. Dunbar (n. 3), 4. Even H. Newiger's review of political approaches to *Birds* does not discuss earlier work: 'Gedanken zu Aristophanes' Vögeln', *'Αρετῆς μνήμη· ἀφιέρωμα "εἰς μνήμην" τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου 'Ι. Βουρβέρη* (Athens, 1983), 47–57.

[40] 'M. Paulmier a trouvé avant moi cette explication de la comédie allégorique: mais il n'en dit qu'un mot...' Brumoy (1780), 12.152. [41] Le Paulmier (1668), 750.

interpretation of the plot of *Birds* is to be found in the second half of vol. 12 of the later edition.[42] Although Süvern refers to Brumoy's account, he cannot have read it very carefully, for he makes clear what the medieval plot summary does not, namely that it was Alcibiades' *proposals* for Decelea, rather than the actual implementation of the plan, that Aristophanes had in mind. Brumoy begins by quoting several chapters in Plutarch's and Cornelius Nepos' lives of Alcibiades, and lays particular stress on Plutarch's remarks on Decelea:[43]

> ...as soon as he left Thurii, [Alcibiades] fled to the Peloponnese, where, terrified at the violence of his enemies, he determined to abandon his country, and sent to Sparta demanding a safe asylum, on the strength of a promise that he would do the Spartans more good than he had in time past done them harm. The Spartans agreed to his request, and invited him to come. On his arrival, he at once effected one important matter, by stirring up the dilatory Spartans to send Gylippus at once to Syracuse with reinforcements for that city, to destroy the Athenian army in Sicily. Next, he brought them to declare war against the Athenians themselves; while his third and most terrible blow to Athens was his causing the Spartans to fortify Decelea, which did more to ruin Athens than any other measure throughout the war.

'All this passage is remarkable', Brumoy says, 'and especially the last words, which form the basis of the comedy'. His conclusion is that *Birds* was produced at the moment when 'the scheme to fortify Decelea was on the point of being carried out'. He did not cite Thucydides, but could usefully have done so, for the historian has Alcibiades outlining the scheme soon after the latter's arrival at Sparta in 415.[44]

Süvern rightly observes that Brumoy's interpretation would have made the chorus of birds into Spartans (he wanted to see them as Athenians *tout court*), but where he falters is to argue that this 'is quite at variance with all the characteristics attributed to them in the piece'.[45] Again, Süvern dismisses Brumoy's case too hastily, for the latter gives persuasive arguments in favour of a Spartan setting and of the Spartan status of some of the characters. Notably, Peisthetaerus is Alcibiades in exile at Sparta, afraid of the Salaminian galley (147, 1204), the ship that had come to collect him from Sicily.[46] The reference to Lepreum in Elis (149–51) recalls Alcibiades' sojourn in Elis before travelling to Sparta,[47] where there is no need of a purse ('A Sparte l'état étoit riche, non les particuliers').[48] The characterization of the Spartans as birds is appropriate in that the Spartans were regarded by the Greeks as a race apart, on account of their rude and somewhat savage customs;[49] the simple diet of the birds (160) recalls the sobriety of the Spartan cuisine (ibid., 160). The birds' lack of education (470) refers to the Spartans' preference for the cultivation of the body over the mind (ibid., 175; cf. Thuc. 1.84.3). The Hoopoe is intended for Agis, the Spartan king,[50] and the 'galanteries' that Peisthetaerus pays to Procne are an allusion to the attentions Alcibiades paid to Timaea, Agis' queen, whom he made pregnant (ibid., 184). 'You who were once kings' (466) alludes to the Spartans' traditional role as leaders of Greece until the Athenians disputed their position (ibid., 174), and the evils to which the birds are subjected: chased into temples, caught by a hundred kinds of

[42] Brumoy (1780), 12.138–219.

[43] Plut. *Alc.* 23.1–2; Nepos *Alc.* 4; Brumoy (1780), 12.143–51.

[44] Thuc. 6.91.6. On the relative neglect of Thucydides in eighteenth-century France, see M. Mat-Hasquin, *Voltaire et l'antiquité grecque* (Oxford, 1981), 225. P. -Ch. Levesque, *Histoire de Thucydide, fils d'Olorus, traduite du grec* (Paris, 1795) was the first influential French translation. Contrast Le Paulmier (1668), who cites Thucydides where appropriate.

[45] Süvern (1835), 6.

[46] Brumoy (1780), 12.159 and 201.

[47] Ibid., 160, citing Nepos *Alc.* 4. Better, perhaps to cite Lepreum in the context of Alcibiades' involvement in the anti-Spartan alliance of 421–420 B.C.: Thuc. 5.31, 34, 47.

[48] Brumoy (1780), 12.160; add. Thuc. 6.91.6–7.

[49] Brumoy (1780), 12.155.

[50] Brumoy (1780), 12.157.

stratagems, and even cooked and dressed with various sauces, are an allegorical account of the treatment meted out to the Spartans in recent years. Their liberator, however, will be Peisthetaerus, or rather, Alcibiades (ibid., 177).

The important point for Brumoy, however, is that the project to build Cloudcuckooland is the basis for what was to be the fortification of Decelea. 'Fix yourselves in enemy territory' (164–70), which is what Alcibiades said to the Spartans (ibid., 160). Lines 187–91 make this clear (ibid., 164): if Decelea were to be fortified, it would be for them the same as Boeotia barring the Athenians' passage to Delphi. Brumoy only comes adrift towards the end of his discussion when he wants to see the various divinities Aristophanes mentions as masks for temporal powers in Greece. He is also on uncertain ground when it comes to the interpretation of the play as a whole. He admits that 'l'allégorie n'est pas aisée à diviner' (ibid., 216), but states his belief that Aristophanes clearly wants to persuade the Athenians that it is in their interest to make an honourable peace, and that they can only do so by ceding with good grace to the Spartans the primacy that they have possessed from time immemorial. While this conclusion is questionable, Brumoy's observations on the way in which *Birds* is permeated with Spartan, and Decelean, imagery are sound, and should never have been discarded. The following remarks simply elaborate upon the insights of Le Paulmier and Brumoy.[51]

Alcibiades and Peisthetaerus

First of all, the hero's name. This has caused editors a good deal of unnecessary embarrassment. Rogers is one of the few to have maintained that if *all* the relevant ancient testimonia conspire to call him Πεισθέταιρος, they probably do so because that is what Aristophanes wrote.[52] The name was probably meant to be ambiguous, if not polyvalent, combining the notions of 'persuasion' and 'seduction'. Although he had in the past won over many cities to friendship with Athens through his persuasive gifts (λογῷ πείσας), he had conspicuously failed to persuade (οὐκ ἐπείθεν) the Messenians to join the Athenians in Sicily (Thuc. 6.50.1), and the youthful Alcibiades had been notoriously πεισθείς ('seduced') by his admirers (Plut. *Alc.* 3.1; 6.1). There is a pun on ἑταῖροι ('partisans') and ἑταίραι ('prostitutes') as well:[53] not only was Alcibiades' membership of a ἑταιρία ('political club') well-known,[54] but he was notorious for consorting with prostitutes, 'foreign or Athenian' at Athens in the 420s (Plut. *Alc.* 8.4), and whoever was available behind the 'doors of prostitutes' at which 'he used to break in' at Sparta where he was currently in exile (Ath. 13.574*d*).

The reference to the *Salaminia* in lines 145–7 is taken by everyone to be a 'hidden' allusion to Alcibiades' recall in the previous summer. There are many more historical allusions in *Birds*, and so many of them are tied up in the characterization of Peisthetaerus that it is reasonable to assume that he effectively 'is' Alcibiades. Alcibiades' belligerence is well-attested. On one occasion, he boxed the ears of the trainer of a chorus of boys ([Andoc.] 4.20–21; Plut. *Alc.* 16.5); this may well lie behind the dithyrambic poet's reproach (1403) when Peisthetaerus begins to hit him, 'Is this the way you treated the chorus trainer?'? Peisthetaerus is in fact as free with his blows as was the historical Alcibiades who, it will be recalled, is on record as having bitten a wrestling opponent (Plut. *Alc.* 2.2) and also having beaten up a schoolmaster (Plut.

[51] They arrive at the same conclusion as my earlier paper, 'Alcibiades on stage: Aristophanes' *Birds*', *Historia* 36 (1989), 267–99, but using rather different evidence.

[52] B. B. Rogers, *The Birds of Aristophanes* (London, 1906), viii–x.

[53] Cf. the pun on ἑταιρῶν and ἑταίρων at Ath. 13.571*e*.

[54] Cf. Ostwald (n. 27), 537–50; O. Aurenche, *Les groupes d'Alcibiade, de Léogoras et de Teucros: remarques sur la vie politique athénienne en 415 avant J.C* (Paris, 1974).

Alc. 7.1), his future father-in-law Hipponicus (Plut. *Alc.* 8.1), and a servant (Plut. *Alc.* 3.2): Peisthetaerus has already beaten up the Soothsayer (990, cf. 985), Meton (1019), the *Episkopos* (1029–31), and the Statute-seller (1042–3). There is even a scene with a character called a *Patraloias*, or 'Father-beater', which if Alcibiades is in question, can only refer to his having hit Hipponicus before his marriage to Hipparete, as well as to the suspicion (voiced in the assembly) that he wished to kill his brother-in-law in order to lay his hands on the family fortune (Plut. *Alc.* 8.4; [Andoc.] 4.13–14). The Father-beater is attracted to the new city by its laws (1343–5), especially the one that allows one to strangle and bite one's father; this way he would gain a fortune (1352).

In 416, Alcibiades had successfully participated in the Olympic chariot event, entering seven teams, and being placed first, second, and fourth. The Chians provided feed for his horses. Alcibiades himself performed the sacrifice to Olympian Zeus, and gave a feast to the whole crowd.[55] The previous time this had occurred, the victor commissioned an epinician ode from Simonides. Alcibiades commissioned such an ode from Euripides, who obsequiously (and inaccurately) stated that his patron's horses came in first, second and third.[56] There is much in *Birds* that would seem to play upon Alcibiades' singular interests and experience, especially in the scenes involving the priest and the poet (864–957). The Chians are singled out as especially pleasing to Peisthetaerus (879–80); Chians had been especially generous to Alcibiades at Olympia. The priest is dismissed by Peisthetaerus, who says that he alone will perform the sacrifice (894); an action which is again reminiscent of Alcibiades' conduct at Olympia. The poet has long hair (911), and is dressed in a thin cloak which is full of holes. Euripides, Alcibiades' client, had long hair,[57] was regularly lampooned for dressing his characters in ragged clothing, and in composing an epinician ode for Alcibiades' Olympic victory, was following in the footsteps of Simonides.[58] The poet sings of chariot-racing in obsequious terms (924–30), comparing Peisthetaerus to Hiero of Syracuse who refounded Catana as Aetna in 475, and whose victories in the games were hymned by Simonides, Bacchylides, and Pindar. It was—significantly—at Catana that the *Salaminia* had recently called to fetch Alcibiades back to Athens (Thuc. 6.52.2–53.1). Instead of beating the poet, Peisthetaerus rewards him, albeit at someone else's expense (933–5, 946–8). This was again behaviour characteristic of Alcibiades; the winning horses at Olympia belonged to someone else, although 'Alcibiades took for himself the glory of the victory'.[59]

The months preceding the Athenian expedition to Sicily were occupied with the various parties involved attempting to get oracles favourable to their respective positions. 'The priesthood is said to have offered much opposition to the expedition. But Alcibiades had other diviners in his private service' (Plut. *Nic.* 13.1). The Soothsayer who is on stage from 959 to 990 may allude to Alcibiades' employment of such people a year or so earlier. His fee is certainly evocative of known Alcibiadean phenomena. He asks (973) for a ἱμάτιον καθαρόν ('a cloak free from taint or defilement'), and καινὰ πέδιλα ('new-fangled shoes'). Twenty-two of Alcibiades' ἱμάτια were sold at auction a few months before the performance of *Birds* among the property of those who were *not* free from taint or defilement—those who were accused of profaning the Eleusinian Mysteries.[60] Then, Alcibiades 'wore shoes of a

[55] Ath. 1.3*e*; Plut. *Alc.* 11.1–3; Thuc. 6.16.2; Isocr. 16.34.

[56] Ath. 1.3*e*; Plut. *Alc.* 11.1–3; Isocr. 16.34 ('third').

[57] G. M. A. Richter, *The Portraits of the Greeks* (London, 1965), 133–40, figs. 717–79.

[58] E.g. Ar. *Ach.* 410–70; *Nub.* 921; *Ran.* 842.

[59] Diod. 13.3; Plut. *Alc.* 12.3; Isocr. 16.

[60] W. K. Pritchett, 'Attic stelai, Part II', *Hesperia* 25 (1956), 167–210; 'Five new fragments of the Attic stelai', *Hesperia* 30 (1961), 23–9; cf. Lewis (n. 21), 177–91.

striking pattern, which from him are called "Alcibiades"' (Satyr. *FHG* 3.160 *ap.* Ath. 12.534*c*).

Peisthetaerus' appearance as indicated by Aristophanes recalls various Alcibiadean characteristics. By line 806 he has been thoroughly naturalised as a Bird, and has had the hair (or rather feathers) of his head cut very short; Alcibiades at Sparta did the same (Plut. *Mor.* 52*e*; *Alc.* 23.3). Peisthetaerus is dressed as a swallow (1412), a bird whose twittering was called τραυλός in Greek, the same as Alcibiades' speech defect[61] according to which he pronounced κόραξ ('raven') as κόλαξ ('flatterer'). Peisthetaerus' new city is to be τι μέγα καὶ κλεινόν ('something big and famous'), phraseology which recalls: (i) the tendency towards μεγαλοπραγμοσύνην ('vast projects') (Plut. *Alc.* 6.4) of an Alcibiades who was μέγα δυναμένον ('threatening and influential') ([Andoc.] 4.11), and who had his eye on μεγάλων πραγμάτων ('a great career') (*POxy* 411, 20–22); (ii) Alcibiades' patronymic ὁ Κλεινίου ('son of Cleinias/Famous'), used by itself to designate Alcibiades;[62] and (iii) Alcibiades' descent from Megacles (Plut. *Alc.* 1.1), twice ostracized (presumably because he was suspected of having designs on tyranny) (*Ath. Pol.* 22.5; Lys. 14.39). This in turn recalls the fears expressed on the eve of the departure of the fleet for Sicily that Alcibiades himself was aiming at tyranny at Athens (Thuc. 6.15), a status which Peisthetaerus actually achieves in *Birds* (1708).

The Spartan setting

Brumoy gave some of the reasons for seeing the action of *Birds* occurring at Sparta. One of these was the fact that there was no need of a purse (157) in the land of the Birds.[63] While it is true that birds do not carry purses, it was the case that Spartan currency consisted of iron, 'so that ten minas' worth required a large store-room in the house, and a yoke of cattle to transport it'.[64] The observation follows a statement by the *Epops*, who is a figure of some authority, that life among the Birds is οὐκ ἄχαρις ἐπὶ τὴν τριβήν ('pleasant enough in the passing [of time]'). There would appear to be at least one Laconian reference here. The clue to the full significance of τριβήν is given by a scholiast who states that it is 'a metaphor from clothes made of good material which stand wear and tear a long time'. The clothing in question is the τρίβων, the short cloak that was proverbially associated with the Spartans.[65] 'Strangling' (ἄγχειν) figures large in the Father-beater scene (1348, 1352); it is also an issue at 1575 and 1578, where Heracles wants to strangle Peisthetaerus. Strangling was the normal form of capital punishment at Sparta.[66] In similar vein, it is worth noting that the name of the public prison at Sparta where malefactors were strangled

[61] Ar. *Ve.* 44–5; Archipp. *PCG* 48 *ap.* Plut. *Alc.* 1.8; see *LSJ* s.vv. τραυλίζω and τραυλός.

[62] E.g. Ar. *Ach.* 716; cf. Crit. 4.1.

[63] Brumoy (1780), 12.160.

[64] Plut. *Lyc.* 9.2; cf. B. Laum, *Das Eisengelt der Spartaner* (Braunsberg, 1925).

[65] Cf. Dem. 54.34; Plut. *Cleom.* 16; Plut. *Lyc.* 30.2. The Graces were greatly revered at Sparta (cf. ἄχαρις, 156): S. Wide, *Lakonische Kulte* (Leipzig, 1893), 210–14; Plutarch wittily describes the χάρις of Laconian speech at *Mor.* 511*a*.

[66] Plut. *Agis* 19.6, 20.1, 20.5. There are many references in the same scene to 'the νόμοι ("laws" or [equally] "melodies") of the Birds' (1345, 1346, 1347, 1349, 1353): it has been rightly said that 'Sparta more than any other city in Greece was ruled by law' (G. Proietti, *Xenophon's Sparta: an Introduction* [Leiden, 1987]), 110; cf. Pl. *Hp.Ma.* 283*e*). Indeed, the *nomoi* of the semi-legendary Lycurgus were considered to be immutable (Plut. *Lyc.* 13); Alcibiades by contrast was notable for his *paranomia*, his utter disrespect for any legal constraints at all ([Andoc.] 4.30; cf. Antisth. 34 Caizzi *ap.* Ath. 5.220*c*). The other meaning of *nomoi*—'melodies' has possible Spartan (and avian) resonances. Alcman, the quintessential Spartan poet (C. M. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry* [Oxford, 1961], 16ff.) who, incidentally, 'learned to sing from the partridges' (Alcm. 39 Page), made the claim that he knew 'the melodies of all the birds' (Alcm. 40 Page).

was the Δέχας ('the Receptacle') (Plut. *Agis* 19.6); there may be plays on this when Peisthetaerus is welcomed by the *Epops* and replies δεχόμεθα 'we are duly received' (646), when Peisthetaerus formally receives a golden crown and replies δέχομαι ('I accept') (1276); when the birds are enjoined to welcome (δέχεσθε) their tyrant to his opulent halls (1708) and to greet him (δέχεσθε) with marriage songs (1729).

Still on a violent note, blows were not only part of Alcibiades' public image, but also of that of Sparta. Helots, for example, were given a certain number of blows once a year lest they forget their unfree status (Myro *FGrH* 106 F 2 *ap.* Ath. 14.657*d*). The encouragement the Chorus give Peisthetaerus (1327) when he beats up the slave Manes at 1323 is perhaps to be seen in this light. Peisthetaerus' complaint, ὡς βλακικῶς διακονεῖς ('how sluggishly you serve!'), combines both Alcibiadean and Spartan allusions: βλακικῶς in the month of a Peisthetaerus who regularly pronounced *rho* as *lambda* might be understood as βρακικῶς ('club-like'), with a play on βράκαλον ('club'). Alcibiades had once beaten a servant to death with a club (Plut. *Alc.* 3.2). Then, διακονία ('service') is a word regularly used for servitude at Sparta: Thucydides (or his written source)[67] uses διακονίαις ('services') and διακόνων ('servants') in a sentence spoken by a Spartan slave (Thuc. 1.133). Spartan and Alcibiadean elements are intertwined in the previous couple of lines as well: the Graces (1320) refer (cf. 156 and n. 65) to major Spartan deities, while Ἡσυχία ('Peace') (1321) must refer both to the Spartan ideal of ἡσυχία extolled by Thucydides' Archidamus (Thuc. 1.83.3), and to the priestess called Hesychia who was produced in 415 by the opposition to Alcibiades' war-party in an attempt to stop the Sicilian campaign (Plut. *Nic.* 13.4; *Mor.* 403*b*). The ability to make several allusions at once is the very essence of wit, and it is a skill that we may safely assume Aristophanes to have possessed.

Still on Spartan themes, it has not been noticed before that Plato's account of the visit paid by Hippias of Elis to Sparta touches on some of the themes of *Birds*. Hippias was as unwelcome a visitor to Sparta as is Meton in Cloudcuckooland. Meton wants to γεωμετρῆσαι ('measure out') the air (995); Hippias' Spartans did not want to hear about γεωμετρία (Pl. *Hp. Ma.* 285c). Meton's geometry is concerned with 'a city laid out in the form of a star, with straight rays flashing out in all directions' (1007–9). Peisthetaerus warns him that he may well be expelled, Spartan style (1012–13).[68] Hippias was probably not thus expelled, being protected by his status as an ambassador,[69] but it was 'the stars and movements in the sky', a topic he knew most about, that the Spartans could not stand (Pl. *Hp. Ma.* 285*c*). What the Spartans did appreciate was 'hearing about the genealogies of heroes and men... and the settlements (how cities were founded in ancient times), and in a word all ancient history' (Pl. *Hp. Ma.* 285*d* [trans. Woodruff]). This is precisely what Aristophanes gives in Peisthetaerus' persuasive history of the Birds' kingship (467–547) and in the 'ornithogony'[70] of the Parabasis, where the Birds describe their origins from the

[67] Cf. H. D. Westlake, *Studies in Thucydides and Greek History* (Bristol, 1989), 10; S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides* 1 (Oxford, 1991), 211. On Thucydides' careful choice of language, see e.g. D. P. Tompkins, 'Stylistic characterization in Thucydides: Nicias and Alcibiades', *YCS* 22 (1972), 181–214; E. Badian, *From Plataea to Potidaea: Studies in the History and Historiography of the Pentecontaetia* (Baltimore, 1993); E. D. Francis, 'Brachylogia laconica: Spartan speeches in Thucydides', *BICS* 38 (1991–93), 198–212.

[68] A reference to the ξενηλασία ('expulsion of foreigners') which the Spartan authorities carried out from time to time: Xen. *Lac.* 14.4.

[69] Pl. *Hp.Ma.* 283*b*; cf. 281*a*. That sophists were expelled from Sparta is clear from Chamaeleon *ap.* Ath. 13.611*a*.

[70] J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy* (New Haven, 1975), 83.

earliest times (685ff.). The *Hippias Major* has been described as 'the most forthrightly comic of all the works attributed to Plato',[71] and both *Acharnians* and *Clouds* have been suggested as possible models.[72] Perhaps *Birds* should be added to their number.

The Epops *as Ephor*

'Who βοῶν ('is shouting') for my master?' asks the Servant: an immediate Spartan reference in that it was Spartan custom 'not to knock on the outer doors, but to βοᾶν ('shout') from outside.[73] The Servant is a δοῦλος ('slave') (70), whose terms of service are summed up at 73 and 74 (διάκονον and διακόνου), recalling Thucydides' διακονίαις and διακόνων in the context of Spartan servitude (see p. 348, above). Sparta may have been a society in which the freeman was more a freeman than anywhere else, but it was a place where a slave was more a slave (Plut. *Lyc.* 28.11). The Servant describes how he performs the tasks his master sets him: τρέχω ('I run') (77, and again at 79). This brings the response that he must be a regular τροχίλος ('runner-bird')[74] (79, cf. 80). The stress laid on running is deliberate, and part of Aristophanes' Spartan scene-setting: even the most influential Spartans carried out magistrates' orders τρέχοντες ἀλλὰ μὴ βαδίζοντες ('running, not walking') (Xen. *Lac.* 8.2). The most powerful magistrates at Sparta, the *de facto* rulers,[75] were the Ephors, five annually elected Spartan officials before whom 'foreign envoys to Sparta were brought ... in the first instance,'[76] and *Epops* ('Hoopoe') plays on this. The word first occurs in the form τὸν ἔποφ' ὅς ... ('the hoopoe, who ...') (16), which puns on ἔφορος. Ἔποψ also plays on ἐποψάσθαι, a word used to describe the consumption of the soup for which Sparta was famous (Plut. *Lyc.* 12.7). 'Soup' is included in the *Epops*' diet at line 78.

The brusque and clipped language of both the *Epops* and his Servant recalls Plutarch's characterization of Laconian speech: 'although the speech of the Spartans seems short, yet it certainly reaches the point, and arrests the thought of the listener'.[77] 'Throw wide the wood, that I may issue forth!' Rogers translates the *Epops*' first line (92). If we are intended to be at Sparta, this is an appropriate image, for Spartan doors seem to have consisted in effect of lumps of wood. Lycurgus had enjoined that they should be made with the saw only (Plut. *Lyc.* 13.3), and Xenophon's said of the doors to Agesilaus' house: 'You might think they were the very doors that Aristodemus set with his own hands.'[78] Euelpides appropriately swears by Heracles on the *Epops*' appearance (93); Heracles was the legendary ancestor of both houses of Spartan kings (e.g. Hdt. 6.52; 7.204; 8.131), and late-fifth century Sparta was compared by Plutarch to the hero 'with his lion-skin and club'.[79]

The fundamentally Spartan nature of the Chorus of *Birds* is made clear at the end of the *Epops*' song. τοροτοροτοροτοροτίξ, he cries in order to attract their attention

[71] P. Woodruff, *Plato, Hippias Major* (Oxford, 1982), 108. The dramatic date is 'after 427 and ... during the peace of Nicias': A. E. Taylor, *Plato, the Man and his Work* (London, 1926), 29.

[72] Woodruff (n. 71), 100–101.

[73] Plut. *Mor.* 239*b*; cf. the Spartan system of voting βοῇ ('by shouting'): Thuc. 87.2.

[74] Tr. Sommerstein (n. 2), 25.

[75] H. Michell, *Sparta* (Cambridge, 1952), 123.

[76] A. Andrewes, 'The government of classical Sparta', in *Ancient History and its Institutions: Studies presented to Victor Ehrenberg on his 75th birthday* (Oxford, 1966), 13; cf. P. Cartledge, *Agesilaos and the Crisis of Sparta* (Baltimore, 1987), 128: 'the competence of the Ephors in foreign affairs was comprehensive'.

[77] Plut. *Lyc.* 19.2. For discussions of Spartan speeches in Attic Greek, see Francis (n. 67); D. P. Tompkins, 'Archidamus and the question of characterization in Thucydides', in Farrell and Rosen (n. 36), 99–111.

[78] Xen. *Ages.* 8.7.

[79] Plut. *Lyc.* 30.2; other reasons for seeing the Epops as a Spartan dignitary are discussed in Vickers (n. 26), Chapter 10.

(260), κικκαβαῦ κικκαβαῦ (261), followed by τοροτοροτοροτοροτορολιλιλίξ (262; cf. 267: τοροτὶξ τοροτίξ). It was the τορώτατος ('most alert') of the eirens (Spartan men aged between twenty and thirty)[80] who was to take charge of bands of boys in the absence of a Spartiate.[81] At 262, Euelpides cannot yet see any birds, even though he gawpingly gazes up to the heavens (ἐς τὸν οὐρανὸν βλέπων). This must allude to the periodical stargazing when 'the ephors select a clear and moonless night, and in silence sit and πρὸς οὐρανὸν ἀποβλέποντες ('watch the heavens') (Plut. *Agis* 11.4). If a shooting star was seen, the ephors 'decide that their kings have transgressed in their dealings with the gods, and suspend them from their office, until an oracle from Delphi or Olympia comes to the aid of kings thus found guilty' (Plut. *Agis* 11.5). This would also explain the oath by Apollo in line 262.

When the Chorus of Birds finally assemble, their first cries are full of Laconian 'repetition for the sake of emphasis'—in the modern sense of the word:[82] ποποποποποποποποπο ποῦ; (for ποῦ ['where']) (310), and τιτιτιτιτιτιτιτι τίνα (for τίνα ['what']) (315). Their language is laconic, even Laconian: ποῦ; πᾶ; πῶς φῃς; ('Where? How? What do you say?) (319). πᾶ is a Laconian form, elsewhere used by Aristophanes in the mouth of Lampito in *Lysistrata*.[83] The *Epops* tells them that πρεσβύτα δύο ('two ambassadors')[84] (320) have just arrived who are λεπτὼ λογιστὰ ('men of subtlest genius') (318). The Chorus want to have nothing to do with them. Again, we recall the ambassadorial journeys of the sophist Hippis of Elis (Pl. *Hp.Ma.* 283*b*; cf. 281*a*), and the difficulties he encountered in gaining a hearing at Sparta (Pl. *Hp.Ma.* 285*c*). Despite the *Epops*' telling the Birds not φοβηθῇς ('to be afraid') (323) (and we might note the existence of a Temple of Phobos next to the *ephoreion* at Sparta [Plut. Cleom. 9]), the Chorus are aghast, and make serious accusations about the *Epops*, their φίλος ('friend') who had fed beside them (cf. ὁμότροφα) (329–30); Spartans fed communally in φιλίτια ('dining halls').[85]

Peisthetaerus and Alcibiades at Sparta

Alcibiades' sojourn at Sparta was notorious on two counts: for the way he influenced Spartan policy in the conduct of the war, and for his supposed seduction and impregnation of the wife of one of the Spartan kings. There are echoes of the circumstances surrounding both of these exploits in *Birds*, as Brumoy rightly saw. Peisthetaerus insists on the Birds swearing an oath not to attack him (438–45); Alcibiades had been careful to extract an undertaking of immunity from the Spartans before he agreed to go to Lacedaemon (Thuc. 6.88.9). The speech which Peisthetaerus makes wins the Birds over, and they 'exult' (629) in his plan. The effect is remarkably similar to that achieved by the speech Thucydides makes Alcibiades deliver to the Spartans soon after his arrival in 414 (Thuc. 6.89–92). This speech παρώξυνε

[80] J. T. Hooker, *The Ancient Spartans* (London, 1980), 172; M. Clauss, *Sparta: Eine Einführung in seine Geschichte und Zivilisation* (Munich, 1983), 144, 150.

[81] [Xen.] *Lac.* 2.11. τορύνης and τορύνην at 78 and 79 probably play on the same idea.

[82] Francis (n. 67).

[83] Ar. *Lys.* 171; J. Henderson, *Aristophanes Lysistrata* (Oxford, 1987), xlviii.

[84] *LSJ* s.v. II; cf. ibid. III: 'at Sparta a political title, president...'

[85] Often confused with φιδίτιον (derived fron φείδοναι ['be sparing'], see *LSJ* s.v.): φιτίδιον may have been applied jokingly, Michell (n. 75), 282. ὁμότροφα (cf. 'τράφην, 322) may play on the Spartan institution of τρόφιμοι, about which little is known for certain. Ξένοι τρόφιμοι ('Spartan-raised foreigners') were to be prominent in the fourth century; see Cartledge (n. 76), 61, 253. The Birds' accusation that the *Epops* has broken ὅρκους ('oaths') (331–2) may relate to the immutability of the laws at Sparta (Xen. 15.7; Plut. *Mor.* 230f.) and to Spartan kings and ephors having to swear ὅρκους once a month (Plut. *Lyc.* 12).

('inflamed') and ἐξώρμησε ('aroused') the Lacedaemonians (Thuc. 6.88.10). There are similarities in detail between Aristophanes and Thucydides as well. Peisthetaerus takes some time getting to the point, but when he begins to describe the new city, his language comes to resemble that of Thucydides' Alcibiades. Daniel Tompkins (who first noted that Thucydides' Alcibiades tended to begin sentences with καί ['and']) has carefully analyzed the sentences in this speech and observes that while they are very long, '[their] low level of subordination makes [them] easy to interpret'.[86] Peisthetaerus announces his plan in a series of statements beginning with, or linked with, καί (550, 551, 554, 555). Few of the sentences in his (frequently interrupted) speech are short, and some are very long indeed (e.g. 25, 26, 29, 32, 25, 37, 31 words), and the longest comes at the end of another series of sentences beginning καί (555–560). While they all have a 'low level of complexity', their length presents a marked contrast to the sentences of, for example, the *Trochilos* and *Epops* earlier in the play which seemed to be laconic.

It takes some time for the Birds to accept their visitors, but when eventually they do so, it is the fact that Peisthetaerus is subtle, crafty and scheming (429–30) that actually wins them over. The encouragement of habits of deceit and cunning was a well known part of the Spartan educational system. Spartan boys were encouraged to 'play the deceiver' (Xen. *Lac.* 2.6–8), and it has been reasonably suggested that Xen. *Cyr.* 1.27ff. reflects Spartan practice: 'the man who proposes to [gain an advantage over an enemy] must be deceiving and cunning and deceitful, a thief and robber, overreaching the enemy at every point'.[87]

Not only is Peisthetaerus able to twist the leader of the Birds around his little finger (in principle, if not in detail, in the way in which Alcibiades must have persuaded the Spartan authorities to allow him to speak to the Spartan assembly), but he persuades the Chorus of Birds to swear an oath of loyalty to him. The Birds will provide their ῥώμη ('strength') for whatever might need to be done, but will leave the planning to Peisthetaerus (636–7). There is, moreover, to be no μελλονικιᾶν ('Nicias-like hesitation') (639). Again there are close parallels in Thucydides' phraseology: the Spartans had been intending to attack Athens, but were μέλλοντες ('hesitating'); they were however ἐπερρώσθησαν ('strengthened') by the speech of Alcibiades, 'when they heard all these points being urged by him who, as they thought, knew best. Accordingly they turned their thoughts to the fortification of Decelea' (Thuc. 6.93.1–2).

The profanation of the Hyacynthia

Peisthetaerus also persuades the Birds that they are rightfully lords of the earth, and greater than the gods. He even persuades them to declare a Holy War against the Olympians (556), and they invent a long pedigree (685–722) to justify their usurpation. This is delivered in ἀναπαίστα ('anapaestic verse') to the sound of the *aulos*, and concludes with the especially defiant declaration that the Birds are themselves the 'prophetic Apollo'. The scene is a parody of the celebration of the Hyacynthia at Sparta, when 'boys... sing to the *aulos*... praising [Apollo] in ῥυθμῷ ἀναπαίστῳ ("anapaestic rhythm") (Ath. 4.139*e*). In thus parodying the Hyacinthia (or rather, having Peisthetaerus/Alcibiades cause the Spartans/Birds to do so), Aristophanes makes the Birds behave in a wholly impious and totally un-Spartan way, by employing the Hermogenes principle (Hermog. *Meth.* 34), taking to extremes the opposite of what the Spartans held most dear, namely respect for traditional

[86] Tompkins (n. 67), 212–13.

[87] Proietti (n. 66), 91.

religious values. It is Aristophanes' oblique allusion to Alcibiades' supposed involvement in the profanation of the Mysteries,[88] paralleled by Eupolis' having shown Alcibiades in the *Baptae* participating in the sacred orgies of the Thracian deity Cotytto.[89] How serious a departure from the traditional norm this parody is becomes clear when we recall that it was the Spartans who were late for Marathon because they could not depart until the moon was full (Hdt. 6.120); it was the Spartans who delayed sending an army against Mardonius in 479 because they were celebrating the Hyacynthia;[90] it was at Sparta that permanent officials known as πύθιοι were maintained whose task it was to consult the oracle at Delphi whenever a decision was required by the kings or the people (Hdt. 5.57; Xen. *Lac.* 15.5). To represent the Spartans as utterly impious on the Athenian stage must also be a criticism of their having given sanctuary to a person who had been subjected to the most severe religious sanctions within the legal armoury of the Athenian state. Their punishment is to be placed in the thrall of Alcibiades and to have their ancestral constitution—their 'alternative to tyranny'[91]—overthrown.

The seduction of Timaea

Another theme of *Birds* relates to Alcibiades' affair with Timaea, the wife of one of the Spartan kings. Plutarch suggests that the liaison began soon after Alcibiades' arrival at Sparta: 'He had not been there long, before he was suspected of having sexual intercourse with Timaea, the wife of Agis' (Plut. *Ages.* 3.1–2). Once again, the historicity of the affair does not concern us;[92] the fact is that the stories were told and widely believed at Athens. Duris of Samos (who himself claimed to be a descendant of Alcibiades [Plut. *Alc.* 32.2]) reported that Alcibiades 'stated that he did not seduce Timaea out of *hubris*, but φιλοτιμουμένον ("seeking after the honour") of placing his own descendants on the throne of Sparta'.[93] Duris' clever pun on Timaea's name (which means 'highly honoured') is worthy of note in the context of *Birds*, because Aristophanes puts a similar one in Peisthetaerus' mouth when he first sees the *Epops*' Nightingale: ὦ Ζεῦ πολυτίμητ' ('O greatly honoured Zeus'), he exclaims (667).

That this is a reference to Timaea is clear from the build-up in the previous few lines. The Chorus call upon the *Epops* to leave the Nightingale with them, ἐκβιβάσας ('having brought her out') so that they can play (cf. παίσωμεν) with her (659–60). Peisthetaerus asks him to bring her out (ἐκβίβασον) from the sedge[94] (662), a request that is repeated by Euelpides: (ἐκβίβασον) (663). This can only be a reference to the *bibasis*, a strenuous form of exercise in which Spartan girls jumped up and down,

[88] For others, see *Birds* 489–91, 1553–64, with C. A. P. Ruck, 'Mushrooms and philosophers', in R. G. Wasson, S. Kramisch, J. Ott, and C. A. P. Ruck, *Persephone's Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion* (New Haven, 1986), 151–78.

[89] D. Ambrosino, 'Aristoph. *Nub.* 46s. (Il matrimonio di Strepsiade e la democrazia ateniese)', *Museum Criticum* 21–22 (1986–87), 103, n. 28.

[90] Hdt. 9.7, 11; Idomenaeus *FGrH* 338 F 6 *ap.* Plut. *Arist.* 10.8–9.

[91] A. Andrewes, *The Greek Tyrants* (London, 1956), 66; on the undoubtedly tyrannical nature of Cloudcuckooland, see A. M. Bowie, *Aristophanes: Myth, Ritual and Comedy* (Cambridge, 1993), 170–71.

[92] For differing views: H. D. Westlake, 'Alcibiades, Agis, and Spartan policy', (1938), 34 (against); J. Hatzfeld, *Alcibiade: étude sur l'histoire d'Athènes à la fin du V^e siècle*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1951), 217–18; A. Schaeffer, 'Alkibiades und Lysander in Ionien,' *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft* 4 (1949/50), 295, n. 4; Cartledge (n. 76), 113 (for).

[93] Duris *FGrH* 76 F 69 *ap.* Plut *Ages.* 3.2; cf. *Alc.* 23.4; Ath. 12.535b.

[94] βουτόμου ('sedge') may refer to the marshy lake next to the royal palace at Sparta: Xen. *Lac.* 15.6, and p. 341, above.

kicking their buttocks with their heels.[95] They presumably did this naked: the 'processions, undressings and exercises' of Spartan maidens took place in the sight of young men as an incentive to marriage (Plut. *Lyc.* 15.1). A major Spartan festival was the *Gymnopaidiai* (from γυμνός ['naked'] and παίζειν ['play']; hence perhaps the Chorus's request to 'play' with the Nightingale, even though the festival in question was for males alone.[96] That the Nightingale was naked is clear both from the *Epops*' injunction to ἐπιδείκνυ ('reveal') herself (666), and from Peisthetaerus' remark (668) at how soft she is. Not only was ἐπιδείκνυμι used by Herodotus in describing Candaules' revelation of his wife's nakedness [Hdt. 1.11.5]), but it figures in an anecdote relating to a Spartan mother who upbraided her cowardly sons (who had fled from a battle) by asking them whether they intended to 'slink in here whence you came forth', by hitching up her skirt and ἐπιδείξασα ('displaying herself') (Plut. *Mor.* 241*b*). Unfortunately, the antiquity of the story is unknown. Nor do we know when the Spartan practice of 'stripping young girls before guests' (Ath. 13.566*e*) operated, but Athenian knowledge of it may have informed Aristophanes' conceit. It seems that Alcibiades did exploit 'in unsporting fashion the (to an Athenian) surprising availability of Spartan wives for extra-marital sex,'[97] and in making the *Epops* thus ingenuously display his wife's charms, Aristophanes draws graphic attention to Agis's cuckoldom, albeit Agis was king not Ephor.

Echoes of Brasidas

Peisthetaerus' orders at 837 have a Spartan flavour to them: the person to whom they are addressed[98] is told to παραδιακόνειν ('lend a hand'), but in the manner of a Spartan servant.[99] The rest of the passage is curiously reminiscent of what we know of Brasidas, perhaps the best known of all Spartan ephors, during his campaigns in Chalcidice. Aristophanes uses allusions to his exploits to adorn the passage where Peisthetaerus/Alcibiades begins seriously to throw his weight about. In 423 Brasidas had fortified Torone by building a new περιτείχισμα ('city wall') (Thuc. 5.2.4). In the same year he attempted to take Potidaea, attacking by night with a κλῖμαξ ('ladder') placed at the point that 'the guard carrying the κώδων ('bell') had just quitted', but was spotted before he could climb up and had to withdraw (Thuc. 4.135.1). Brasidas was to die in Amphipolis the following year (Thuc. 5.10.11). In *Birds*, Peisthetaerus' interlocutor is to help τοῖσι τειχίζουσι ('those who are building the walls') by fetching lime, stripping off and mixing mortar, and carrying a hod, by falling off the κλίμακος ('ladder'), by setting guards, by keeping the fire concealed (841), by running round κωδωνοφορῶν ('carrying a bell'), and by falling asleep there (842). 'Sleep' may additionally bear on the fate of the fifty Athenian hoplites who were disastrously caught asleep in the Agora at Torone by Brasidas in 424. But this is merely to skim to surface of the passage. We may have a picture here of Brasidas' 'personal leadership and example'[100] in joining in the building work. We certainly have an allusion to a famous Spartan institution in the injunction to τὸ πῦρ ἔγκρυπτ' ('conceal the fire') at 841. The *crypteia* provided a kind of paramilitary training for

[95] Poll. 4.102; cf. *Ar. Lys.* 82. The exercise was also employed by women who wished to procure an abortion (Hp. *Nat. Puer.* 13.2), and there may thus be an *emphatic* allusion to Timaea's being with child, ostensibly by Alcibiades, at the time *Birds* was performed.

[96] παίζειν may in addition reflect an Athenian view of the Spartan way of life: cf. Plut. *Arist.* 10.8 (cf. 10.9), where Spartans spend a festival in 'playing and idleness' (παίζειν καὶ ῥᾳθυμεῖν).

[97] Cartledge (n. 76), 113; cf. idem, 'Spartan wives: liberation or licence?' *CQ* n.s. 31 (1981), 84–105.

[98] Euelpides or the *Epops*; more likely the latter.

[99] See pp. 348, 349 above on διακονία.

[100] H. D. Westlake, *Individuals in Thucydides* (Cambridge, 1968), 163.

the future leaders of the Spartan police state.[101] Its precise functions are unknown (and Plutarch's view that it existed primarily to kill helots surreptitiously may be exaggerated [Plut. *Lyc.* 28.1–5]). Thucydides makes a similar play in speaking of τὸ κρυπτόν ('the secrecy') of the Spartan political system (Thuc. 5.68.2). 'Concealment of fire' must be ironic, for Spartans were not permitted to 'walk with a light ... so that they might accustom themselves to the dark' (Plut. *Lyc.* 12.14). κωδωνοφορῶν may, moreover, play on κωθωνοφορῶν—'carrying around κώθωνες', the characteristic Spartan drinking vessel.[102] That this activity was to be performed 'at the run' (cf. περίτρεχε, 842) recalls the fact that Spartan magistrates' orders were carried out 'running, not walking'.[103]

Eros and Alcibiades

One of the examples adduced by Plutarch to explain why the 'leading men' of Athens regarded Alcibiades' behaviour as 'tyrannical' was that Alcibiades had his shield 'not emblazoned with the ancestral bearings of his family, but with an Eros wielding a thunderbolt.'[104] Eros figures large in Alcibiadean imagery; Thucydides exploited the conceit in his *emphatic* character sketch of Alcibiades in 415,[105] as did Plato in his carefully contrived 'historical fiction',[106] the *Symposium*. If there is an Alcibiadean side to *Birds*, we might judge Aristophanes to have made good use of Alcibiades' 'trademark' in the Parabasis, where Eros is made out to be the ancestor of the Birds (695–703),[107] rather as Alcibiades wished to become the ancestor of a line of Spartan kings (see n. 93). By the end of the play, Peisthetaerus has won a bride and himself wields Zeus' thunderbolt, but this is the image of Eros on the Alcibiadean shield rather than an image of omnipotence. Eros actually attends the wedding, and the description of the love-god as ἀμφιθαλής ('flourishing on two sides') alludes to Alcibiades' propensity for double-dealing.[108] The Chorus claim that thunder and lightning now belong to Peisthetaerus (1745–54). These are not the easiest of Nature's gifts to control, and for Alcibiades to have placed a thunderbolt on his shield, for all that he was widely believed to be physically descended from Zeus and Eros,[109] was an act of the utmost *hubris*.

This paper has dealt with but one level of Aristophanes' allegory in *Birds*, others will be considered elsewhere.[110] Closer study of *Birds* in the context of the rich sources for Spartan history, especially Xenophon, Plutarch, Athenaeus—and Thucydides, should reveal many more Laconian references. Much remains to be done.

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[101] H. Jeanmaire, 'La kryptie lacédémonienne', *REG* 26 (1913), 121–50; P. Vidal-Naquet, *Le chasseur noir: formes de pensée et formes de societé dans le monde grec*, 2nd edn. (Paris, 1983), 161–4; Cartledge (n. 76), 31–2. [102] Cf. Ath. 11.483*b*: κώθων· Λακονικὸν ποτήριον.

[103] Xen. *Lac.* 8.2; and cf. βάδιζε at 837.

[104] Plut. *Alc.* 16.1; Ath. 12.534*e*. The possibility that Alcibiades' shield may only have existed on the stage (D. A. Russell, 'Plutarch, "Alcibiades" 1–16,' *PCPhS* 12 [1966], 45; R. J. Littmann, 'The loves of Alcibiades,' *TAPA* 101 [1970], 267–8) is no drawback, since such an image would have expressed the essential public image of the man.

[105] Thuc. 6.53.3–6.59; M. Vickers, 'Thucydides 6.53.3–59: not a "digression"', *DHA* 21 (1995), 193–200.

[106] P. H. von Blanckenhagen, 'Stage and actors in Plato's *Symposium*', *GRBS* 33 (1992), 62.

[107] On *eros* in *Birds* in general, see W. Arrowsmith, 'Aristophanes *Birds*: the fantasy politics of Eros', *Arion* 1 (1973), 119–67; Dobrov (n. 8), 210.

[108] Cf. ἐξαμφοτερίζοντα τὸν Ἀλκιβιάδην: Plut. *Alc.* 25.7.

[109] Via Salaminian Ajax; cf. Plut. *Alc.* 1.1.

[110] Vickers (n. 26) (where the considerable merits of B. R. Katz, 'The *Birds* of Aristophanes and politics', *Athenaeum* n.s. 54 [1976], 353–81 are also taken into account).