

# PERSUASION AND THE ARISTOPHANIC AGON

TIMOTHY LONG

*Indiana University*

Ever since Thaddaeus Zielinski first traced the form of the epirrhematic agon through the comedies of Aristophanes, it has been constantly, if tacitly, assumed that this typical form of dramatic debate led to an understanding between the principals.<sup>1</sup> The complicated parallelism of the introductory odes, the encouragements to speak, the continuous exposition by one antagonist, the interrogation by the second, and the verbal acrobatics at the conclusion of each section have been taken as producing an oratorical system which becomes an instrument of persuasion. Koch presents the view: "In acht der erhaltenen Komödien begegnen uns formal charakteristische Szenen, in denen der Gedanke des Stückes oder doch ein wesentlicher Bestandteil davon, durch ein Streitgespräch oder durch allmähliches Überzeugen des Gegners die Oberhand gewinnt."<sup>2</sup> The most recent, and most extensive, commentator on the form, Thomas Gelzer, goes further. He extends his investigation of the agon beyond the questions of metrical divisions and formal construction to a consideration of its position within the play and finds that the agon is a part of a *diallage*, or scene of compromise, whose four elements are *Streit*, *Abmachungen über ein Schiedsgericht*, *Verhandlung*, and *Urteil*.<sup>3</sup> Since the scene of compromise

<sup>1</sup> *Die Gliederung der altattischen Komödie* (Leipzig 1885) is the classic analysis of the nature and function of the agon in comedy.

<sup>2</sup> K. D. Koch, *Wesen und Struktur des komischen Themas bei Aristophanes* (diss. Kiel 1953) 142.

<sup>3</sup> T. Gelzer, *Der epirrhematische Agon bei Aristophanes* (Munich 1960) 48. His analysis has met with restrained approval from W. J. W. Koster, "Th. Gelzer, Der Epirrhematische Agon bei Aristophanes," *Mn* 14 (1961) 253-58 and K. J. Dover, *Gn* 33 (1961) 120-22. D. M. Jones, "The Agon in Aristophanes," *CR* 11 (1961) 118-20 is much cooler. H. J. Newiger, "Gelzer, Der epirrhematische Agon bei Aristophanes," *GG4* 207 (1965) 40 comes closer to my opinion: "Wir möchten meinen dass dort, wo Gelzer das Diallage-Schema erkennt, einfach immer der Konflikt, den alle Komödien haben, vorliegt."

is one which leads to a judgment on the question debated, one expects the *diallage* to have some effect upon the progress of the piece, that it will be in some way an organic part of an integral dramatic whole.

I would approach the problem differently. The agon is a scene of debate, and since it is a debate and not a fight one can expect that the victor, in winning, will persuade his opponent. The chorus sometimes speaks of persuasion in the odes before speeches,<sup>4</sup> and persuasion can be as real as it is necessary in Aristophanes. The Sausage-seller in the *Equites* must be convinced of his destiny before the play can proceed beyond the preliminaries of the prologue. Lysistrata must convince the women of the feasibility of sexual abstinence before they will determine upon a course of Panhellenic frigidity. Dicaeopolis succeeds in persuading at least half of the war-mongering Acharnian chorus that his individualistic pacifism is honorable. Praxagora proves to the other women that the condition of the city will be improved when the women govern. Wealth, in the *Plutus*, must be convinced that the restoration of his sight will not bring upon his head the wrath of Zeus.

These are all cases of persuasion with a dramatic effect, but none is an agon. The action has proceeded to a certain point from which it can only progress through the use of a comic dialectic. Once the arguments supporting the side of the protagonist are adduced there is a real change of heart on the part of the other figures, whether it leads to vocal approval or cooperative action, and the change of heart becomes an operative dramatic force in the remainder of the piece. The paradox in the use of the agon in Aristophanes is not that he goes out of his way to introduce the agon—with or without a *diallage*—but that, having introduced a form eminently adapted to persuasion, he never allows the outcome of the agon to dictate the course of the action in the rest of the play. I am, of course, not speaking of those agons which immediately follow the parodos and are not properly scenes of debate but of confrontation. They have slapstick, not rhetoric, for their purpose, and so are properly dubbed by Mazon *scènes de bataille*.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of the first agons in the *Equites* (303–456), *Vespae* (334–402), and *Aves* (327–99) is fun and threat, not argument. The form of the

<sup>4</sup> *Av.* 460–61, *Lys.* 484–85.

<sup>5</sup> P. Mazon, *Essai sur la composition des comédies d'Aristophane* (Paris 1904).

agon is truncated, usually, so that only opposition and not communication results. This leaves for consideration as a form of argumentation the agons in the *Lysistrata* (467-607), *Ranae* (895-1098), *Ecclesiazusae* (571-709), and *Plutus* (489-618), both agons in the *Nubes* (949-1104 and 1345-1451), and the second agons in the *Equites* (756-940), *Vespae* (526-724), and *Aves* (451-626).

Zielinski, describing the agon and tracing the form through the eleven comedies, and Gelzer, attempting to analyze its elements and functions in more detail, both chose to describe the agon by example, and both chose the second agon of the *Vespae* because it has all of the formal elements of the antistrophic construction. I would like to begin with the same agon since the question of persuasive effectiveness seems clear in this case. The point debated is whether or not the jurors of Athens live the life of a king. If the answer is affirmative, then Philocleon should continue an *habitué* of the court, playing his role of petty tyrant over litigants; if, on the other hand, the jurors are in fact the impoverished dupes of the demagogues, as his son Bdelycleon contends, then he should abandon his daily routine for different sport.

The loyalties of the chorus are as clearly drawn at the beginning of the agon (526-47) as they are at the beginning of Dicaeopolis' defense of his action in the *Acharnenses*. Philocleon is, just for the moment, little more than an extension of the chorus, and the representative of liberal radicalism, Bdelycleon, must hold his position against totally unified opposition. With unflagging confidence Philocleon delivers his defense of the debated proposition, arguing the positive with a speech modeled roughly on the passage of the jurors' day, from rising in the morning to returning home in the evening (548-630). His speech convinces the other jurors of what they already know, that their cause is just. They announce in the antistrophe that they have never heard anything so marvelous, and threaten the rebuttal speaker with octogenarian wrath (631-47). Bdelycleon answers with the confidence of the self-sufficient technical analyst. His reply (649-724) is a logical construct of economic investigation and chauvinistic fantasy. If the jurors think that they are well off under the demagogues, they need only calculate what they receive as their allowance, compare it with the income from Athens' vast empire, and see that they are not the beneficiaries of the system. He contrasts their present sorry condition with

a mythical utopia he outlines in which each city supports twenty jurors, and out of gratitude for the comparative relief does it royally, enabling the jurors to live in the fashion to which they have a right to be accustomed.

The chorus is persuaded. With a tone of astonishment they acknowledge in an ode after the agon that perhaps it is best to listen to both sides of an argument before reaching a decision, and they recognize that Bdelycleon has their interests at heart (725–28). They encourage Philocleon to follow his father's advice and wish that they had a relative who could excogitate a plan for them like the one Bdelycleon promises to abide by for his own father (729–742). Philocleon is silent. This the chorus interprets as shame at his previous madness which has made him oblivious to his son's goodwill and disobedient to his well intentioned requests; now he has been persuaded by the young's man's antepirrhema and will change his life-style to one acceptable to Bdelycleon (743–49). They are wrong. Philocleon is shattered, but unpersuaded. His old heart still longs for the court and the chance to catch demagogues like Cleon at malfeasance (749–59). Bdelycleon deserts rhetoric and resorts to pleading, which brings the indignant answer that death alone will prevent Philocleon from being a juror (760–63).

Bdelycleon has an inspiration. In a new scene (764 ff.) he explains that it will not be necessary for Philocleon to give up the life of a juror, only to change the locale. He can stay comfortably at home and adjudicate any little questions that need settling around the house. Eventually, Philocleon finds this new suggestion to his liking and climaxes his judicial career as a domestic Rhadamanthus. This is not the result of the agon; neither is it precisely what Bdelycleon had hoped to accomplish. It is, instead, the result of a separate scene following the agon in which the son, frustrated by the failure of his formal argument, introduces a completely new inspiration that governs the course of action in the rest of the comedy. Bdelycleon has won his point in the agon, but obstinacy is his father's forte. Neither an agon nor a scene of pleading can completely cleanse him of the mad desire to participate in the processes of litigiousness. The promise of concrete comforts can, however, somewhat ameliorate it.

Other agons require additional scenes before any decision is reached

by the judge. In the second agon of the *Equites* the question is whether it is the scurrilous Paphlagonian or the unconscionable Sausage-seller who really has the good of the aged Demos at heart. Demos, like Philocleon, is an unreconstructed supporter of the demagogues, and he gives his loyalty without reserve to the party whom he takes to be his champion, the Paphlagonian. Almost the entire play, to the point of dramatic exhaustion, is devoted to wheedling Demos into favoring the Sausage-seller.<sup>6</sup> The Sausage-seller prepares for the agon by giving an indirect report of his encounter with his opponent before the assembly (624–82). He and Cleon exchange threats and curses for a while, until Demos arrives to judge the agon, and assume the role of *bômolochos*.<sup>7</sup> The chorus warns the Sausage-seller that he is up against a shifty character and advises him that his best course is to attack first (756–62). He does just that. Unlike other participants in agons, whose remarks during the epirrhema are merely to give the appearance of dialogue, the Sausage-seller usurps the podium (763–822). He continuously interrupts until even Demos begins to take notice and compliment his attitudes (786–87). By the end of the epirrhema the Sausage-seller has so stolen the stage that he, instead of Cleon, delivers the *pnigos* (823–35).

Demos is charmed with the newcomer and Cleon cannot silence him, though he also begins a policy of earnest interruption during his opponent's antepirrhema (843–910). Demos is gradually drawn into the argument and shows that his attitude has begun to change. The little gifts which the Sausage-seller gives him begin to take their toll, a pair of shoes (873–74), a new coat (884–86). Cleon begins to see through the ridiculous tricks with which he is being undone, but too

<sup>6</sup> B. Keil, "Über Eupolis Demen und Aristophanes Ritter," *NAWG* (1912) 256 describes the preliminaries to the agon as "fast nur mit Flegeleien und Zoten ausgefüllt." Defenders of the artistic merits of the play are at pains to justify the transitions from argument to argument, as A. Kirchoff, "Zu Aristophanes," *Hermes* 13 (1878) 287–97. M. Pohle, "Aristophanes' Ritter," *NAWG* (1952) 119 remarks: "Ein wenig mag dabei mitgespielt haben, dass er das Stück dehnen musste, damit es die erwartete Länge erreichte."

<sup>7</sup> On the role of the *bômolochos* in the agon, and in particularly of Demos, see W. Süß, *De personarum antiquae comoediae Atticae usu atque origine* (Bonn 1905) 68–70, H. J. Newiger, "Demos als Handelnde Person" in *Metapher und Allegorie* (Munich 1957) 33–49 and M. Landfesten, *Die Ritter des Aristophanes* (Amsterdam 1967) 48–78.

late; by 892 Demos can no longer abide his odor. The Sausage-seller has gained a favorable hearing.

He has, however, not won the battle. The question debated is still considered undecided at the end of the agon, either because of Demos' vacillation or Cleon's doggedness. The inquiry continues through a succession of scenes, first the contest of oracles (997-1110) and then the plying of Demos with a variety of treats and comforts (1151-1228). Cleon remains only long enough to assure himself that his undoing corresponds to the oracle he has been given, then flees. He concedes in line 1252; the agon has ended 300 lines before. The agon constitutes nothing more than one short scene in the matrix of abuse and debate constituting the play's action and is, in itself, completely indecisive.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, a decision on the point argued in the agon is postponed in the *Ranae*. The question debated is whether Aeschylus or Euripides deserves the throne of tragedy, and, by corollary, should be taken back to the world of the living by Dionysus. Dionysus, who is to be the judge, is much like Demos in his prejudice and favoritism for one party in the debate. Also like Demos, he plays the role of *bômolochos*.<sup>9</sup> His interjections share equally in idiocy and earnestness, with the latter gradually gaining the upper hand in the end of the confrontation. Euripides speaks first, and Dionysus seems hardly to have been changed by the end of the epirrhema (905-70), though a few times his interruptions are less flattering toward his favorite than we might have expected, as in 916-17. After the antikatakeusmos Aeschylus delivers his defense, which, typically for the agon, is not so much a speech as an interrogation of the previous speaker (1004-76). Dionysus continues his string of characteristically inane interruptions. He is still essentially neutral, but when the subject of the *Septem* arises he criticizes Aeschylus for having made the Thebans too brave (1023-24). His remarks continue to reflect indecision and doubt through the antipnigos (1077-98). He supplies a conclusion for Aeschylus' argument just as he did for Euripides' and one quite as full of quandary and confusion.

<sup>8</sup> Gelzer 49-50 "Der Demos fällt aber nur einen Vorentscheid (942-48). Das abschliessende Urteil folgt erst nach weiteren Verhandlungen."

<sup>9</sup> Süß 85.

To what degree the question is settled at the end of the agon and Euripides is defeated is a matter of debate. In the ode that follows the agon the chorus emphasizes the difficulty of reaching a decision (1099–1118). Radermacher sees Aeschylus as the winner (“im Grunde entschieden”), and the scenes following are the *βάσανος* of an *ἔλεγχος* which has found Euripides wanting.<sup>10</sup> Richter disagrees: “Der Kampf ist hier so viel und so wenig entschieden wie nach dem Epirrhema selbst der Agone sonst; er ist noch nicht endgültig entschieden, solange nicht alle Wege begangen sind.”<sup>11</sup> Drexler sees the debate as divided into two sections, one testing the *σοφία* and the other the *τέχνη* of the tragedians.<sup>12</sup> Gelzer remarks, without much explanation: “Aus besonderen Gründen schiebt aber Dionysos den Spruch noch hinaus.”<sup>13</sup> Whatever one’s interpretation, the fact remains that the scenes most important dramatically to Dionysus’ decision are played out after the agon—the ignorantly destructive scrutiny of the prologues (1119–1250), the maliciously rhapsodic parody of lyrics (1261–1364) and the last scene, after Pluto’s sobering intervention, in which Dionysus turns to the tragedians for political advice (1414–67). Euripides, at least, is surprised at the decision of tragedy’s tutelary divinity even after all of these supplementary scenes. Though it may be difficult to determine precisely what element in the debate has tipped the scales in favor of Aeschylus, it is certain that the comparatively dignified arguments of the agon lie half a theatrical hour in the past.<sup>14</sup>

There is yet another way in which the agon is used by Aristophanes. He employs it not for the sake of persuasion, even within the uncertain boundaries of dialectic in Greek comedy, but for demonstration. This use is, therefore, styled “epideictic.” The remarkable point here

<sup>10</sup> L. Radermacher, *Aristophanes’ Frösche* (Vienna 1922) 299–300.

<sup>11</sup> F. Richter, *Die Frösche und der Typ der aristophanischen Komödie* (Düren 1933) 15.

<sup>12</sup> H. Drexler, “Die Komposition der Frösche des Aristophanes,” *100 Jahresbericht der Schlesischen Gesellschaft für vaterländische Kultur* (1927) 12. My knowledge of the article, which is all but impossible to locate, comes from Wilamowitz, “Lese Früchte,” *Hermes* 64 (1929) 470 ff. Wilamowitz himself obtained the essay only through the kindness of the author.

<sup>13</sup> Gelzer 51.

<sup>14</sup> W. Süss, “Scheinbare und wirkliche Incongruenzen in den Dramen des Aristophanes,” *RhM* 97 (1954) 141 goes so far as to suggest “Die Schlussentscheidung erfolgt sogar recht unvermittelt, eigentlich nur in diesem Moment, weil der Dichter etwas müde geworden ist und endlich Schluss machen will.”

is that there is only one speaker, or that has always been seen as the remarkable point. To have one speaker in the form meant that there was no opposition in the argument and so nothing to be proved or decided. The more troubling observation is that even this style of agon is sometimes not in the natural position of a scene of persuasion within the plot. Praxagora's epirrhema in the *Ecclesiazusae* (583–689), arguing that the city will be better governed when the women govern, is given not when she attempts to warm the diffident feminine assembly to her ideas, but after female political hegemony has become a *fait accompli*. It is rather like Admetus and Pheres confronting one another on their proper course of action after Alcestis has died; not at all like Creon and Haemon who argue while Antigone can still be saved or lost.<sup>15</sup> The two men to whom Praxagora gives her speech are astonishingly openminded, when one thinks of the other referees of agons in Greek comedy. Their reaction to Praxagora's statement that the city will now be blessed indeed is one of polite surprise rather than ironclad opposition, as is seen in the delighted willingness to believe of 568. Praxagora promises that by the end of her speech the one man will bear witness to what she says, and the other will have nothing to say against her (569–70). Those two reactions, realized in 711 ff., are not so distant from the attitudes we see before the agon. As in all the debates of Old Comedy, the points and counter-points are not so persuasive that one could readily imagine two even only moderately opposed listeners being convinced by them. Neither need they be. The men have been caught, literally, abed, and must accept current events as history.<sup>16</sup>

Far from being an instrument of demonstration, the speech which Lysistrata gives in the form of an agon on behalf of herself and her

<sup>15</sup> H. Strohm, *Euripides: Interpretationen zur Dramatischen Form* (Munich 1957) 6, observes quite rightly that, when Pheres and Admetus argue the morality of the father refusing to die in his son's stead, the harm is already done. Likewise in the *Electra* (pp. 14–15): "Es kann nichts geändert, nichts mehr gebessert werden; es kann nur noch rückblickend das Geschehen im wahren Zusammenhang, d.h. dem der Dike, gesehen werden . . . Damit ist begründet, warum der Agon als solcher keine Folge hat, sie gar nicht haben soll." The tone is far too serious, but the analysis is essentially correct for the *Ecclesiazusae* as well.

<sup>16</sup> Gelzer 52: "Blepyros verzichtet in dieser Verhandlung auf eine Entgegnung und ist gleich überzeugt." It is difficult to see how one can speak of a "Verhandlung" in this case.



Friedanesque rebels has as its dramatic purpose not enlightenment but exacerbation. If an epideictic speech is to present the views of the playwright's protagonist with theatrical clarity and dramatic logic, there is still no rule that dictates right reason must be sweet reason. Earlier in the play the women called upon the goddess of persuasion to aid them (202-3), but her influence must wait until long after the agon to be felt. The proboulos comes on the stage the soul of calm amid the wreckage of the comic scene which is so common in Aristophanes (387), and it is to him Lysistrata must address her remarks. When she begins her *epirrhema* (484-529) his remarks seem innocent and inoffensive enough. They resemble the same sort of interjection from any other Aristophanic interlocutor, and this continues until about 500. After that he becomes nastier. He turns his gall upon one woman (506, 515) and in the *pnigos* (530-38) directs his angry attention back to the protagonist, who has calmly continued her exposition. The pattern in the *antepirrhema* (547-97) is similar. The proboulos' first remarks are mild as before (555, 559, 565, 566), and he even refrains from being too offensive toward the other woman, but by 571 he has grown argumentative again, and insulting. His remarks in 587 and 594 continue in this vein, until the *antipnigos* (598-607) leaves him smothered in hostility.<sup>17</sup> The rhetoric of confrontation, here disguised in the form of an agon, gains the upper hand against an ancient minion of the law, and Lysistrata's distaff adroitness at verbal frustration should be fair warning to the male opposition of what awaits them. But frustration is her only aim.

The birds' fervor is hot enough when they sense treason, and they intend to annihilate not only the latest anthropoid intruders, *Peisthetairus* and *Euelpides*, but that erstwhile human, the *Hoopoe*, as well. In the *Aves*, more than in any other comedy, Aristophanes needs an epideictic speech and gives it in the form of an agon (451-626).<sup>18</sup> The

<sup>17</sup> Gelzer 51: "Dann wird der Probule weggeschickt. Streit und Verhandlung gehen hier fast ineinander über; spezifische Abmachungen über ein Schiedsgericht kommen mit dem besiegten Probulen nicht zustande und so auch kein Schiedsspruch."

<sup>18</sup> T. Zielinski 112 thought that the epideictic agon was one of the notes of a *Märchenkomödie*: "In der Märchenkomödie war es dem Dichter bloss darum zu tun, die von ihm geschaffene Traumwelt und ihre Gesetze den Zuschauern zu erklären; daher haben wir hier einen überzeugten Gegner, der den Standpunkt des Dichters vertritt, und einen zweifelnden, aus dessen Mund das Publikum spricht."

genuine persuasion, however, occurs between the first agon, a *scène de bataille* which leaves the Hoopoe and his two visitors aligned against the birds, and the second, in a short scene in trochaics (354–86). While the two human interlopers cower under various pieces of *impedimenta* which they have brought along, the Hoopoe turns the mood of the feathered aborigines from murder to demurrer. The rage of even this assembled menagerie yields before a popinjay who will make them kings, and flock psychology prompts them to give Peisthetairus' plans a hearing. There is no question of changing the attitude of the birds in the agon. Peisthetairus never says a thing they would not love to hear. The epirrhema is devoted to a pseudo-mythological justification for the supremacy of the birds, the antepirrhema to a plan for regaining their lost position. That is exactly what is needed after the Hoopoe has warmed them to listening. When Peisthetairus speaks they no longer need to be persuaded; they want details.

The clearest demonstration of the ineffectiveness of the agon for persuading is a set of agons which are arranged as debates within the drama to settle a conflict in the plot, but whose outcomes are completely disregarded. Both of the agons in the *Nubes* are among these. In the first one Strepsiadēs and Socrates arrange that Pheidippides may drink directly from the source of rhetorical wisdom, in this play the vaporized forms of the chorus and their champion the Unjust Argument. The instructor's intent is that the argument should demonstrate for the juvenile and none too willing student the efficacy of the new style of argument.<sup>19</sup> Strictly taken, the agon is meant not to be a contest but a lesson: Pheidippides is to learn about the two arguments by hearing them debate one another.<sup>20</sup> Inevitably, the two arguments

<sup>19</sup> The questions revolving around the first agon of the *Nubes* have always been made the more troublesome by the difficulty of the re-editing of the play. Zielinski 24–51 and Gelzer 138–51 have devoted much energy toward finding the original form of the play and its agons. The point is of special significance because *Hypothesis* VI.11.12–15 tells us that it is precisely at this point that the play was changed. The scholiast remarks at 889 the clumsy transition from trimeter dialogue to dimeter anapests. K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes: Clouds* (Oxford 1968) xcii–xciii, proposes that the difficulty is caused by the fact that the same actor who played Socrates also played the role of one of the arguments, against H. Erbse, "Sokrates im Schatten der Aristophanischen Wolken," *Hermes* 82 (1954) 398. I have chosen to treat only the text as it stands, because the theories on the lost agon are too numerous and inconclusive.

<sup>20</sup> It seems to me that Gelzer 50 falls prey to the attitude of the two allegorical arguments when he writes: "Gegenstand des Streites ist die Schulerschaft des Pheidippides

enter in a scene of insults (888–948). In the epirrhema (952–1008) the Just Argument gives a fairly coherent, and naturally laudatory, exposition of the virtues of a *tempus actum*. The Unjust Argument forgoes a continuous speech and instead interrogates the previous speaker (1024–82). The Just Argument commits the tactical blunder of committing all to a single issue: the question of whether it is desirable to be a *εὐρύπρωκτος*. If he is defeated upon this ground he will be silent (1088). Defenders of the new form of argumentation have a fondness for the paradoxical side of an issue, and the Unjust Argument easily demonstrates that *εὐρύπρωκτία* is a social, political, and artistic virtue (1088–1104). The Just Argument is better than his word. He becomes an apostate to the opposition (1104). However, the Unjust Argument has less success with Strepsiades. The question now seems clear enough in which argument the boy should be trained, but wisdom is often concealed beneath ignorance in Aristophanes, and at the last moment Strepsiades says that Socrates should train the boy in both arguments, the one side of his mouth for law cases, the other for higher things (1105–13).

That Pheidippides has indeed been educated in both forms of argument is shown in the second agon. Strepsiades has found that he must pay a price for escaping his debts, in this case the violent rebellion of his son, who will now prove that it is right for sons to beat their fathers. The preparation for the agon is the excited entry of Strepsiades being whipped along by his son (1321 ff.). This leads to an argument, understandably, over whether the boy can justify his actions. Pheidippides offers his father his choice of weapons (1335–36), which means that he must have mastered both during his training in the phrontisterion. Strepsiades argues the traditional stance of reciprocity for paidotrophy in the epirrhema (1351–85). The chorus commiserates in the antode (1391–96). Pheidippides begins his defense (1399 ff.). It is exactly the schooling which his father insisted he have which enables him to refute the old man. He reduces the justification of the old law that fathers are not to suffer beatings at the hands of their children to nothing more than the rhetorical accomplishment of the man who

---

bei einem der Logoi (929–933, 938) . . . Strepsiades spricht für seinen Sohn das Urteil (1107–10).” That seems doubtful from what happens after the agon.

first preached it (1421-29). Justice follows rhetoric, and rhetoric now dictates that sons may beat their fathers. Unfortunately for the son, who wins every debating point of the agon handily, no argument can prevail against Strepsiades, especially when he has on his side the incontrovertible if idiosyncratic logic of plot-spinning in Greek comedy. When the son announces that he is prepared to prove the justice of beating his mother as well, that is too much for Strepsiades (1443). The fact that the son has quite clearly won the debate and that the logical capabilities of the father are very obviously not equal to his offspring's is no reason for Aristophanes to continue the action of the play along the lines suggested by the outcome of the agon. Force is the answer, and the son watches as his teacher and *alma mater* are incinerated. Curiosity prompted Strepsiades to hear his son out, and when he is displeased with what he learns he controverts it. This disturbs Gelzer.<sup>21</sup> But no compact has been struck here, no judge decided upon; there has been only the desire to see what perverted and twisted reasoning could justify a position so patently false.

A similar fate awaits the victor in the last agon of Aristophanes. Again the question is clear. Chremylus, in the *Plutus*, will restore the sight of Wealth, and barely having persuaded him to enter upon an incubation at the temple of Asclepias he is confronted with an even more preposterous allegorical figure: Poverty. She has come to demonstrate that she, not Wealth, is the cause of men's happiness, and if she does not succeed then Chremylus is free to do whatever he wants (467-71). Her arguments are presented in an agon, or, better, in half of one (487-600) in which they combine with those of the opposition. Chremylus argues that, the way things stand now, wanting to be an upright citizen is insane (489-506). Poverty answers that her opponents have not considered the consequences of their actions, do not understand that, without her, craft and trade would cease (507-16). Chremylus becomes frustrated with her infallible exposition and curses her (526). He tries misrepresentation, twisting poverty into beggary, but his opponent points out his unfairness (548). The proverb he adduces in defence of his position is dismissed with a topical slander

<sup>21</sup> Gelzer 50: "Schon hat Strepsiades sich als überzeugt erklärt (1427-1439); doch wie Pheidippides die Gültigkeit seiner These noch weiter ausdehnen will, macht Strepsiades der Sache ein gewaltsames Ende (1447-1451), so dass kein eigentliches Urteil folgt."

(549-50). His argument begins to weaken and Chremylus attempts a proof of the theorem by saying it louder. He fares worse in the rest of the debate and finally simply refuses to give in even though he has lost on every point. Poverty, having triumphed in the agon, is driven from the stage. Chremylus, in the middle of the wave of abuse ever ready to break from a comic protagonist's tongue, shouts after her a quite explicit description of what the winner of a debate in an agon of Aristophanes' may expect: οὐ γὰρ πείσεις, οὐδ' ἦν πείσῃς (600).

The persuasive effect of the agon in Aristophanes is minimal, its dramatic effect, in the sense of its ability to alter the course of action, almost nonexistent. From this analysis an observation about the nature of the speeches can be made. They exacerbate, they ridicule, they present the side of an argument cast aside by the course of the plot but admired by the poet. They do not cajole, persuade, or convince. Their purpose is less practical than that of an orator's speech and it is a mistake to allow one's conception of the nature of a speech in an epirrhema to be colored by the apparent function of the agon within the play. This is especially true for the three traditional categories of oratory: dicanic, symbouleutic, and epideictic.

The standard work on rhetoric in Aristophanes is Murphy's.<sup>22</sup> In assigning the speeches in Aristophanes to the three categories he found only four examples of dicanic rhetoric.<sup>23</sup> All the others he took to be symbouleutic. Epideictic examples were completely lacking. Burckhardt made the theoretical observation that epideictic could not be ruled out completely in the speeches.<sup>24</sup> Gelzer is almost surprised to find epideictic elements in the speeches of some agons ("Ihrem Inhalt nach kommen sogar auch fast ganz epideiktische Reden vor") and remarks in a footnote that examples of speeches with suitable topics for epideictic oratory would be the epirrhemas of the first agon of the *Nubes*, the second agon of the *Aves* and the agon of the *Ecclesiazusae*.<sup>25</sup> Burgess singles out the second agon of the *Vespae* and "the self praise of Poverty" in the *Plutus* as examples of παράδοξα ἐγκώμια, a form of

<sup>22</sup> C. T. Murphy, "Aristophanes and the Art of Rhetoric," *HSCP* 49 (1938) 69-113.

<sup>23</sup> *Nu.* 1353-90 and 1399-1451, *V.* 907-30 and 950-79.

<sup>24</sup> A. Burckhardt, *Spuren der athenischen Volksrede in der alten Komödie* (Basel 1924) 11.

<sup>25</sup> Gelzer 132 and note 3.

epideictic.<sup>26</sup> Though the scene may be a farcial court or council chamber, this does not mean that the agon is dicanic or symbouleutic. In purpose, if not in setting, all the agons in Aristophanes seem to have been used epideictically. They do not change the plot; rather they give clarity to the views of the author without particular regard for the dramatic effect of those views.

Though the audience could not have expected that the action would be much furthered or affected by the agon, it offered them other attractions. One of these was surely the delight in a hotly contested, but not necessarily productive, debate. The ode which begins the agon of the *Ranae* (895–904) is a paradigm example of the real expectations of the chorus, the representatives of the audience. Pure spectators, they revel only in the anticipation of the pyrotechnic rhetoric which shall soon start and mention nothing about a resolution of the conflict between Aeschylus and Euripides. They are more emotional than deliberative, more interested in the struggle than its outcome.

The essentially epideictic nature of the agon, its separation from the progress of the plot, offers the poet certain advantages. Dialectic can only hamper rhetoric. Freed in the agon from the natural restrictions of logical persuasion, Aristophanes can use part of it as a podium for the opposition. The role of the devil's advocate is probably as amusing as it is necessary for any accomplished playwright. In the agon, Aristophanes' amusement can be enjoyed in the perfect security that the opposition's arguments must ultimately be futile. Cleon, repulsive a figure as he is to Aristophanes, can be allowed to resist the new order through the entire agon; there is sufficient opportunity in the remainder of the play to expose his fraud. The Unjust Argument and Pheidippides, who presumably are not voices of the poet's true feelings, can be allowed to win their debates; they will be undone in the end. In the meantime Aristophanes can flaunt with impunity his own argumentative duplicity. If the plot should necessitate the temporary and begrudging defeat of the true Aristophanic position, represented, for example, by Poverty, security can become a solace. The defeat of the

<sup>26</sup> T. Burgess, *Epideictic Literature* (diss. Chicago 1902) 162–63. In a note he cites also the praise of women in the *Thesmophoriazusae* (785 ff.) and the "mock eulogy of the knights," *Equites* 595 ff.

poet's favorite is sweetened by the consolation that she has made the more telling points.

In addition, the major technique of ancient epideictic oratory, *auxêsis*, is wonderfully compatible with Aristophanic comedy.<sup>27</sup> *Auxêsis* calls upon the orator to conjure an imaginary object or state, desirable or abhorrent, for detrimental comparison with an opponent's proposal. Expansiveness and fantasy are integral elements of Aristophanes' imagination, and he uses them in his own style of *auxêsis*. The jurors' lot will never be as attractive as Bdelycleon's description of a possible circumstance, but his picture of guaranteed and generous support serves as a destructive yardstick for measuring his father's poor alternative. Youth was never as virtuous as the Just Argument contends, but his fanciful recollections are a diminishing glass through which Strepsiades is to see his rival's enticements. These two speeches and others like them in the Aristophanic agon are examples of the inexhaustibility of Aristophanes' imagination, and the nature of the agon and its lack of effect upon the plot offer the broadness of his invention harmless but engaging expression.

<sup>27</sup> W. Plöbst, *Die Auxesis (Amplificatio). Studien zu ihrer Entwicklung und Anwendung* (Munich 1911) 6-26, collects and discusses the traces of *auxêsis* from the end of the fifth century to Isocrates. V. Buchheit, *Untersuchungen zur Theorie des Genos Epideiktikon von Gorgias bis Aristoteles* (Munich 1960) 27-38, is a very sceptical interpretation. He urges, however, on page 26, that forms of *auxêsis* can be developed in literature, particularly in poetry, without a highly developed theoretical basis.