

# CATHARSIS AND DREAM-INTERPRETATION IN ARISTOPHANES' *WASPS*

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This paper takes as its point of departure two peculiarities of Aristophanes' *Wasps* which critics have largely ignored.<sup>1</sup> One is the prominence given to dreaming and dream-interpreting in the prologue; the other is a significant play on the words *καθαίρειν* and *καθαρός* in the parabasis and elsewhere. I want to show that both of these features are important and that they illustrate the nature and meaning of Aristophanes' comedy.

Of the two, the *catharsis* motif is more immediately connected with the plot of *The Wasps*. It first occurs in Xanthias' report of how Bdelycleon tried to cure his father's jury-mania (115-24):

καὶ πρῶτα μὲν λόγοισι παραμυθούμενος  
ἀνέπειθεν αὐτὸν μὴ φορεῖν τριβώνιον  
μηδ' ἐξιέναι θύραζ'· ὁ δ' οὐκ ἐπείθετο.  
εἴτ' αὐτὸν ἀπέλου κακάθαιρ'· ὁ δ' οὐ μάλα.

<sup>1</sup> Most general treatments of *The Wasps* have focused on Aristophanes' satirical treatment of Cleon and the jury courts, the artistry of the dog trial scene, and the nature and significance of the wasp chorus; exceptions are C. H. Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964) 143-66, who emphasizes generational conflict and *nomos* vs. *physis*; and J. Vaio, "Aristophanes' *Wasps*. The Relevance of the Final Scenes," *GRBS* 12 (1971) 335-51, who brings out the structural unity of the play, especially the close relation of the early and late scenes. My own view comes closest to that briefly expressed by D. Parker in the introduction to his *Wasps* translation (Ann Arbor 1962). I have relied heavily on *Aristophanes Wasps*, ed. with introd. and comm. by D. M. MacDowell (Oxford 1971).

For a thoughtful commentary on *Wasps* 1-53, see now G. Paduano, *Il giudice giudicato* (Bologna 1974) 49-70. His comments on joke and dream, as elsewhere on Philocleon, madness, and juries, complement my own in several important respects. On the technique of Aristophanes' slave prologues, see P. Händel, *Formen und Darstellungsweisen in der aristophanischen Komödie* (Heidelberg 1963) 185-89.

μετὰ τοῦτ' ἐκορυβάντιζ'. ὁ δ' αὐτῷ τυμπάνῳ  
 ἄξας ἐδίκασεν εἰς τὸ Καινὸν ἐμπεσών.  
 ὅτε δῆτα ταύταις ταῖς τελεταῖς οὐκ ὠφέλει,  
 διέπλευσεν εἰς Αἴγιναν· εἶτα ξυλλαβὼν  
 νύκτωρ κατέκλινεν αὐτὸν εἰς Ἀσκληπιοῦ.  
 ὁ δ' ἀνεφάνη κνεφαῖος ἐπὶ τῇ κιγκλίδι.

After (a) persuasion failed,<sup>2</sup> Bdelycleon tried three other forms of psychotherapy. (b) He “cleansed” his father. The term is highly ambiguous. It refers most likely to a traditional rite of purification by which defilements were cast out; the healing ceremony presumably included a ritual bath. But this catharsis-and-washing treatment failed. Later on, and more pertinently than he realizes, Bdelycleon will refer to his father as the proverbial “ass-hole you can’t get clean.”

After that wash-out came (c) the Corybantic treatment. Although this attempt is not explicitly labeled as a catharsis, mention of the “drum” reminds us of how, in the Corybantic rite, repressed emotions were liberated through exciting musical rhythms. Since, by this means, a person’s special psychological ailment revealed itself for diagnosis, and an appropriate remedy could be discovered, including religious sacrifice and prayer to the appropriate divinity, Plato classifies this rite as cathartic: it belongs, that is, to the type of “healing madness” which, under Dionysus’ general patronage, drives out actual insanity. That is why Aristophanes has Xanthias combine (c) with (b) under the common heading of *τελεταί*, “ceremonies” or “rites” of purification. Both provide religious and psychological healing, as also does (d), the forced incubation of Philocleon in the temple of Asclepius at Aegina: dream therapy this time under the auspices of Apolline religion.

We shall not succeed in differentiating Bdelycleon’s efforts more precisely. They shade off into each other; they share various elements of purification, purgation, and emotional release; and they belong together as “therapy” and “catharsis” much as today, for all their differences, we might lump together an encounter group experience, psychiatry on the couch, the sacrament of Confession, and participation in a large rock music festival. In *The Wasps*, these attempts at

<sup>2</sup> Significantly, the term *ἀναπειθῆναι* is first used to denote bribery: a cock has allegedly been bribed to awaken Philocleon late (line 101). Thus the other meaning, “to persuade someone to change his mind,” is shadowed at 116 and elsewhere by the notion of bribery. At 784 the two ideas most closely coincide.

psychotherapy also share a common result. They all fail. From emotional treatments, as from the more rational "therapy of the word," Philocleon rebounds into the jury court; indeed, the more effort is made to restrain or change him, the more extraordinarily he springs back. The prologue thus introduces the central theme of *The Wasps*, which is, depending on our perspective, either "the failure of therapy" or "Philocleon's escape."

Yet this same failure, or triumph, is related significantly to Aristophanes' own comic purposes by his use of the words *καθαίρειν* and *καθαρός*. The wasp leader, speaking for Aristophanes, begins the parabasis by asking the audience to pay attention "if you love something *καθαρόν*." He means a good clean comedy unpolluted by worn-out vulgarities. The term then submerges for almost thirty lines in which Aristophanes criticizes his audience for having done him wrong. Despite his multiple benefactions, some surreptitious<sup>3</sup> (much as a ventriloquist speaks through other people's bellies) and some open (*φανερῶς*), on his own responsibility; despite the fact that he was not puffed up by his enormous successes, but demonstrated high moral conduct and never prostituted his Muse for private (sexual) ends; and despite, finally, his consistent bravery in attacking in various plays no ordinary people but a certain appalling and hideous and ferocious monster, not to mention lesser "shivers and fevers" that preyed on ordinary folk: still Aristophanes' audience betrayed him, they let him down (1043-45):

τοῖόνδ' εὐρόντες ἀλεξίκακον τῆς χώρας τῇσδε καθαρτὴν  
 πέρυσιν καταπρούδοτε καινοτάτας σπείραντ' αὐτὸν διανοίας,  
 ἄς ὑπὸ τοῦ μὴ γινῶναι καθαρῶς ὑμεῖς ἐποίησατ' ἀναλδεῖς.

And yet it [*The Clouds* of 423] was an excellent play. By Dionysus, it was! Those who failed to "get it" then should be ashamed of themselves—not the playwright, whom the "clever people" commend for his unusually daring effort. What remains is for the audience to make amends by cherishing (*θεραπεύετε*) original poets in the future; that way, if they store up their clever ideas, the clothing of the Athenians will smell sweetly of—cleverness all the year long.

<sup>3</sup> Aristophanes means that he "helped" other comic poets compose their plays: see H. Weber, *Aristophanische Studien* (Leipzig 1908) 137-40; but this introduces the broader conception of Aristophanes as a public "helper" like Heracles.

I have paraphrased at length because the anapests as a whole constitute a complex definition of *καθαίρειν* and *καθαρός* as Aristophanes means us to understand them. Most obviously, he compares his services as *ἀλεξίκακος* and *καθαρτής* to those of Heracles "cleansing" Greece of monsters. With "Heraclean temper," Aristophanes faced up to a monster that combined the worst features of many horrible creatures, including the Hydra and the dog Cerberus (more about dogs elsewhere); he did not cower, did not stoop to—taking bribes, but fought, and still fights, for his ungrateful public. All this self-praise was traditional and expected. Aristophanes must have enjoyed posing as a champion, a hero, and a National Asset, much as Picasso in his later years liked to portray himself in such various and splendid roles as hero, warrior, Olympic victor, lover, and bullfighter. What is new and subtle is the way Aristophanes combines the political claim, to be a public benefactor, with the literary one, to be writing a new, improved, clever, and daring sort of comedy whose success depends on the audience "getting it clearly" (*γινῶναι καθαρῶς*). Combine the two ideas, and Aristophanes is offering his comedy to the public both as "good clean fun" and as healing therapy—claims, to be sure, which must be evaluated in terms of *The Wasps* taken as a whole (for the parabasis occupies an ironic position *within* the play's development). But this raises the next question. What relation, if any, exists between Bdelycleon's attempts to cure his father and Aristophanes' attempts to improve Athens and the Athenian theatre?

Let me defer this question for now in order to introduce a second theme, of dreaming and dream-interpreting, which is closely related to the themes of comic meaning and comic catharsis. The dream section (lines 1–53) is usually treated as *captatio benevolentiae* and passed over quickly. In MacDowell's words, "The chief function of this passage is to provide a string of jokes to get the audience warmed up." True enough: the prologue scenes seduce the audience, as usual, into a relaxed and attentive frame of mind: this is familiar fun, and the more relaxing because it *is* familiar. We notice that this year Aristophanes takes special pains to keep the audience on his side. At the same time, however, his joking points to a series of important affinities between dreaming and dream-interpreting on the one hand and jokes and

comedy on the other.<sup>4</sup> Both involve psychic relaxation; both introduce us to a nonsense world of absurd and fantastic combinations and transformations; and both, when rightly understood, produce in us *a healing catharsis, a clarification through release, and a series of ultimately joyful recognitions*. But this is to anticipate much. Let us begin with the obvious preliminary: with relaxation.

The two weary slaves guarding Philocleon nod off and dream. Through relaxation not just the slaves, but the audience with them, pass over a bridge from everyday anxieties to the world of transforming fantasy. Hence the appropriateness of the joke, *φυλακὴν καταλύειν*, which Parker translates, "I'm studyin'. How to Relieve the Watch. One easy lesson." The word *φυλακή*, which will recur, suggests both the "guard duty" which the slaves elude through sleep and the "watchfulness" of our waking consciousness, that tiresome policeman from whose Argus-like supervision we are delivered in sleep—and also in comedy. The slaves guide us, succumbing to a "sleep from Sabazios." They have been drinking, of course: it is like the prologue of *The Knights*, where two slaves (generals) turn from defeatist thoughts of suicide to the happier, escapist joys of drinking, which lead in turn to new confidence and hope and to the oracle-stealing plan which sets the plot in motion. Hope thus mobilizes will, and wine is the Dionysian sacrament of hope. Similarly, by the gift of Sabazios, the slaves in *The Wasps* fall asleep and dream, and their dreams, which are also jokes, begin the catharsis-movement of the play.

In the first discussion, of Xanthias' eagle-and-snake dream, the idea of *relieving anxiety* is prominent. In this dream, an eagle flies into the

<sup>4</sup> I am much indebted to Freud's theory of the parallel formation of dreams and jokes, with superficial absurdity, pivoting of meanings through word play, techniques of condensation, displacement, and substitute-formation, and masking and disguise. On dreams in antiquity and Greek attitudes towards them, see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Boston 1957) 102–34; the theory and practice of dream-interpretation is discussed and exemplified in *Artemidori Daldiani Onirocriticon Libri V*, ed. R. A. Pack (Leipzig 1963); a good translation with notes is that of R. White, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Park Ridge, N.J., 1975). Three important conclusions for Aristophanes may be drawn from Artemidorus' dream book and probably read back into the fifth century B.C. without anachronism: first, that many dreams arouse anxiety and dread because of their baffling form and uncanny nature; second, that some dreams are significant, foretelling the future, and not just rehashing the day's "residue;" and third, that their "allegorical" (i.e., riddling or symbolic) form can be deciphered by a good *ὄνειροκριτής*.



of Sosias that follows is more complex and more significant, for it concerns the "hull" ship of state. Sosias has dreamed of an assembly of sheep on the Pnyx, each with its mantle and staff; they were being harangued by a monstrous whale. The audience will be ready for political satire; they are accustomed to the use of comic "likenings" as a basic form of insult; a series of hints (*δημηγορεῖν*, *πανδοκεύτρια*, *φωνήν*) leads unmistakably—especially if one knows Aristophanes and remembers *The Knights*—to the identification of the whale as the corrupt, bellowing demagogue Cleon; and to drive the point home, Xanthias anticipates the audience's happy recognition ("He's talking about *Cleon*!") by an indirection or disguise so transparent that it can *only* point to Cleon: "Ugh. Don't say it! Your dream stinks horribly of rotten leather." The allusion is a comic trademark. Leather goes with the tanner Cleon just as chervil goes with Euripides' greengrocer mother. It is a symbol that the audience cannot fail to grasp. By now, without being told explicitly, they have "gotten" the joke and interpreted the dream. Next, the riddling image of the whale-monster "weighing beef-fat" is interpreted by Xanthias as a word play, on *ἴστη δῆμόν / δῆμον διυστάναι*, = "to weigh the beef-fat" / "split the people." Again the underlying concern, this time about political disunity at Athens, has been transformed by means of a word-play into an absurd dream-image. Since this joke is familiar from *The Knights*,<sup>7</sup> the audience can enjoy the relief of discovering the usual sort of satire on Cleon beneath the new fantasy disguise, much as Sosias, alarmed by the strangeness of his confused dream, is relieved and reassured by Xanthias' interpretations. They get the joke, solve the riddle, interpret the dream, and receive the catharsis, at one and the same time—the slaves helping each other by turns, and the audience as they collaborate with Aristophanes.

The same holds for the next dream fragment, added for separate analysis. Theoros sits on the ground beside Cleon; he has a crow's head (*κεφαλήν κόρακος ἔχων*). This time, the dream gives its own punning answer in the lisping words of Alcibiades:

"ὀλᾶς; Θέωλος τὴν κεφαλὴν κόλακος ἔχει."

<sup>7</sup> See *Knights* 41 for the pun on *δῆμος* = "fat" and *δῆμος* = "people." MacDowell, *ad loc.*, points out that in *Knights* 817–18 Cleon is accused of splitting Athens, promoting class warfare.

It is a beautifully round-about way of scoring an obvious point against Theoros, one of Cleon's creatures. But Sosias is still anxious because of the peculiar (ἀλλόκοτον) dream-transformation; he needs further reassurance, and he gets it. It is a *very good dream*, says Xanthias, for (49-51):

ἄνθρωπος ὦν εἴτ' ἐγένετ' ἐξαίφνης κόραξ·  
οὐκουν ἐναργές τοῦτο συμβαλεῖν, ὅτι  
ἀρβεῖς ἀφ' ἡμῶν ἐς κόρακας οἰχέσεται;

The joke is an obvious one: "To Hell with Theoros!" At this point, it seems that Aristophanes has used the dream-machinery as a device for entertaining his audience with a string of witty jokes against the usual people (Cleonymus, Cleon, Theoros). This is true: Aristophanes is warming to larger political themes, and he is entertaining the audience and putting them in a happy and receptive mood; yet the connections which he implies in this scene between jokes and dreams and comedy are significant for our understanding of *The Wasps* as a whole and of Aristophanic comedy generally. We see, first, that jokes and dreams share a common mechanism of disguise and discovery, build-up and resolution, absurd surface appearance and revelation of some latent idea or meaning. Freud has given us psychological insight into the connections here intimated by Aristophanes; he has illuminated the role of the unconscious in jokes, as in dreams, though without by any means exhausting the nature and meaning of these relations. Secondly, Aristophanes connects the interpreting of dreams and "getting" of jokes with the raising and alleviation of anxiety. When Sosias concludes that he should pay his two obols and retain the services of that fine dream-interpreter,<sup>8</sup> Xanthias, Aristophanes may be laughing at a well known type of fraud. The two-bit dream-interpreter belongs with the oracle-monger and other itinerant fortune-tellers. Yet there seem to have been a few serious psychiatrists in Aristophanes' time who attempted to relieve people's anxieties and to help them lead happier lives through counseling them and interpreting their dreams;<sup>9</sup> and at

<sup>8</sup> I believe that Aristophanes is making a playful but significant connection between ὑποκρινόμενον, "interpreting dreams" (this use goes back to Homer), and the actor, ὑποκριτής, who "interprets" a play's action (see *Wasps* 1279).

<sup>9</sup> The earliest psychiatrists we hear of are Lysimachos, a grandson of Aristides, who made a living by charging fees, and Antiphon (the sophist?), who set up a sort of clinic,



the least, Aristophanes' jokes show that he was interested in the idea, and probably in some specific methods, of *psychiatric healing*.

What is more certain is that the dreaming and dream-interpreting of the prologue is closely connected with the later plot of *The Wasps* and with the poet's intention in writing it; for Xanthias, our dream-interpreter, also guides the expectations of the audience. What will this play be? On the one hand, nothing too "big" (*mega*) for them; on the other hand, no tired clowning, no "*Mega-rian*" vulgarity, but (64-66):

ἀλλ' ἔστιν ἡμῖν λογίδιον γνώμην ἔχον,  
ὑμῶν μὲν αὐτῶν οὐχὶ δεξιώτερον,  
κωμωδίας δὲ φορτικῆς σοφώτερον.

What is a *λογίδιον γνώμην ἔχον*? The phrase suggests something like a fable with a point or moral: and since this "little story" will not (like *The Clouds*?) be "more clever" than the audience, they are evidently expected to get the point, or *γνώμη*; contrast their previous failure, depicted in the parabasis, to "get the point" of *The Clouds* and hence to receive the appropriate comic catharsis (1043-45, quoted above). As though to forestall a repetition of that disaster, Aristophanes has Xanthias take the audience with him step by careful step: he tells them that the father of his *sleeping* master has a *peculiar* disease which they can only *get* and *interpret* correctly with his guidance (71-73):

νόσον γὰρ ὁ πατήρ ἀλλόκοτον αὐτοῦ νοσεῖ,  
ἦν οὐδ' ἂν εἰς γνοίῃ ποτ' οὐδὲ ξυμβάλοι,  
εἰ μὴ πυθοῖθ' ἡμῶν· ἐπεὶ τοπάζετε.

Although the guessing-game which follows provides more *captatio benevolentiae* as well as a pretext for a new string of personal jokes, it also connects dream-interpreting with watching and grasping comic action. The implication, I think, is that the main action of *The Wasps* will resemble a dream, in its peculiar and absurd formations and transformations, but that if it is rightly received, like a dream that is rightly interpreted, it will give great pleasure and great healing.

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listened to dreams, and helped people deal with troublesome emotions. They had many antecedents: see P. Lain Entralgo, *The Therapy of the Word in Classical Antiquity*, trans. by L. J. Rather and J. M. Sharp (New Haven 1970), chs. 1 and 2; see esp. pp. 101-07, on Antiphon and Democritus.

After this transitional section, Xanthias introduces us to the comic plot: first, to Philocleon's manic obsession with the jury court; then, to the various forms of therapy attempted, but without success, by Bdelycleon. The last of these, incubation in Asclepius' temple, nicely connects our scenes: for had it worked, it would probably have done so by means of a healing dream. In a dream or dreamlike vision Asclepius himself might have come, his ministers or health-giving snakes might have appeared, or in some way or other, a health-giving prescription might have been revealed to the sick man's relaxed and open mind. Yet it seems that this effort at psychotherapy failed with Philocleon, as the others had previously, and as (to anticipate) Bdelycleon's subsequent, most imaginative efforts must also fail. But what of Aristophanes' own similar attempt? Will he succeed where Bdelycleon fails? Will his audience get the point this time and receive the healing catharsis? The answer, I want to suggest, is ambiguous. Insofar as Aristophanes, like Bdelycleon, tries to manipulate and control his audience, or simply to reform them, he is bound to fail. Yet this very failure provides a still better catharsis, a deeper, more comic recognition, and—to pursue our analogy—something like the best, most hopeful interpretation of a very significant dream.

*Attempts at catharsis: Bdelycleon and Philocleon*

The play's chief pattern is of constraint and escape. It appears twice in the prologue: in Xanthias' report of Bdelycleon's therapeutic efforts and their resounding failure, and in the wild scene of Jack-in-the-box farce, in which Philocleon keeps popping out of his house by door or window or roof, while Bdelycleon and the slaves shove him back inside. We should remember this basic struggle during the three major scenes that follow, namely:

- (i) a paramilitary contest between Philocleon's guards and the wasp-chorus of old jurors who came to his rescue but are repulsed; this leads to
- (ii) the Agon, a formal debate or contest in persuasion between Philocleon and Bdelycleon, ending in the son's victory; this leads in turn to his presentation of the jurycourt-at-home, including

- (iii) the trial of the dog. This is at once a satirical skit, an exercise in play therapy, and an indirect struggle between father and son which ends, once again, in Philocleon's discomfiture and defeat.

In reviewing these scenes, we should maintain a multiple perspective. First, we should ask: what does Bdelycleon teach his father? How true is it, and how effective? Second: we should observe Bdelycleon's own character and methods, and ask, does he fight (reeducate) fairly? The answer, to anticipate, is clearly no; and this is related to key issues of freedom vs. control and even democracy vs. tyranny (or oligarchy). And third: we should pay special attention to Philocleon's emotional reactions, his identity crisis. I shall assume in the following discussion that our sympathies are divided, as Aristophanes intended them to be, between the sensible but spoilsport son who is basically parental and the demented but terribly vital father who is often childish. Comic heroes frequently evoke such divided response: Falstaff, for example; or perhaps Mr. Toad, in *The Wind in the Willows*, when he tricks Ratty, escapes from house-confinement, and runs off to steal a motor car. We find ourselves necessarily on both sides of the recurrent game.

(i) Most of the key issues of *The Wasps* are first spelled out between the siege-relieving operation and the formal debate. Bdelycleon wants, he says, to induce Philocleon to change his "earlyrisinginformerlaw-suitlaborious" habits for a better, more comfortable lifestyle. This his father rejects.<sup>10</sup> Bdelycleon also says that his father has been deceived and wrongly "habituated" by people who use him for their purposes; with "new instruction," he will recognize his mistakes and embark on a new, better life. The question here raised, whether Philocleon is a king or a slave, managing or duped, comes so close to the issues of *The Knights* that we may anticipate a definite answer: Philocleon is deluded and used by the demagogues. So the Agon will show. But the earlier scene also raises the question whether Bdelycleon is an anti-democratic conspirator. The chorus are paranoid, of course: we are meant to laugh at those people who see a conspiracy behind every vegetable stall

<sup>10</sup> *Wasps* 508-11 is programmatic. Philocleon won't take "bird's milk" (fantastic luxury and comfort) in exchange for his jury life.

or brothel; yet there is a grain of truth in their suspicions. Even more important is the issue raised by the wasp-jurors at 540–45: are old men worth anything? Or are they just hollow shells? Aristophanes has portrayed his chorus as weak, weary, ordinary old men living mainly on memories. They look to Philocleon as their hero because he is the roughest, toughest of them all—or rather has been, because at present he is pining away like a lovesick girl in a Euripidean tragedy.<sup>11</sup> The parody is marvellous fun—Philocleon as Danae in her tower, or as Stheneboia. It looks forward to the great paratragic scenes of *The Thesmophoriazusae*. But it also shows how much Philocleon's jurymania is an erotic passion and the very heart of his vitality and feeling of identity. Without it, he must grow sick, must look toward death—although of course comic heroes never die like lovesick heroines, nor do they fade away. They always bounce back. The attempts of the chorus to revive Philocleon's spirits through song, dance, and encouragement, point to the larger healing power of comedy itself, which goes well beyond anything Bdelycleon can offer. But this is anticipating. Let us consider the Agon.

(ii) The *argument* works out so clearly in Bdelycleon's favor that people tend to ignore his trickiness and the psychological crisis of his father. From the first, Philocleon makes himself vulnerable as he reveals his childish infatuation and megalomania. He lives and thrives in court; enjoys himself there, as at a musical or dramatic performance; relishes his power over rich defendants who fear and flatter him; gains erotic thrills; finds increased respect, comfort, and independence at home: in sum, he feels like Zeus as he lightens and thunders! The statement is wildly exaggerated. It also shows, as the portrayal of Demos in *The Knights* did earlier, the importance of private feelings behind the facade of public behavior and policy.

Rebuttal comes easily enough. Bdelycleon uses a few simple statistics, as politicians will, to show how his father is deceived and manipulated by the politicians: how they enjoy the real power and the

<sup>11</sup> For tragic parody, see P. Rau, *Paratragodia* (Munich 1967) 150–52 (on Philocleon's monodic lament) and 152–55 (on tragic silence preceding an outburst of grief); also F. D. Harvey, "Sick Humour: Aristophanic Parody of a Euripidean Motif," *Mnemosyne* 24 (1971) 362–65.

big bribes, while Philocleon is kept poor and dependent like a slave or *savage-tempered watchdog*. The point is well taken—and it is Cleon who is mainly pointed at. Yet Aristophanes equally means us to observe the rhetorical skills and sophistries that Bdelycleon uses. He makes notes carefully. He knows how to project the right *ethos* of good will, how to mitigate anger in his audience, how to increase their pity. Thus he begins by asking "Daddy dear" to relax his frowning brow. He uses a tricky first person plural, asking his father to consider "what *we* get now." Cleverly, too, he diverts Philocleon's anger into indignation at the politicians who have tricked him, at the officials who order him around, and—ultimately—at Cleon. He also bribes Philocleon with a fantasy picture of the riches he ought to enjoy, and with the promise of the real comforts and pleasures he will enjoy under his son's management once he agrees to give up the jury courts and stay at home.

At the same time, we watch Philocleon's violent reactions to the argument. He is "stirred to his depths" by the revelations; his mind is "drawn over;" he doesn't know "what is happening" to him. As the argument proceeds, a strange numbness is "poured over" his hand; he can no longer hold up his sword; he is *μαλθακός*: soft, weak, sick. The joke rests on the identification of voting tablet and sword; it also raises the issue of sexual potency, to which I shall return. Once more Philocleon plays the tragic lover, frustrated and despondent. "Where is my soul?" he asks. This is tragic parody with a point, for Philocleon's identity is in question.<sup>12</sup> But his deep anxiety is diverted, as Bdelycleon wished, into anger at Cleon. The angry outburst, "I wish I could catch Cleon red-handed," *κλέπτοντα Κλέωνα λάβοιμι*, introduces (and punningly summarizes) the subsequent scene, of the dog's trial.

(iii) I shall not analyze this much-discussed scene in detail. It combines a wish-fulfilment fantasy, of the jury-court at home, with some acute satire directed at the conduct of political trials in general and the repulsive tactics of Cleon in particular. Like Philocleon, the audience

<sup>12</sup> Compare *Clouds* 719, where Strepsiades' soul (as well as shoe) has been lost or mislaid or else stolen by Socrates, who traffics in souls and ghosts.

are made to see that "Labes" (Laches), who stole some "Sicilian cheese," is a great deal less guilty than the greedy Dog (Cleon) who prosecutes him—for not having produced the customary bribe.<sup>13</sup> This does not mean that the indictment is false. On the contrary: our attention is drawn to all the tricks of judicial pleading which unscrupulous lawyers use to get their clients off. We are also made aware of how much Bdelycleon stage-manages the entire trial. Not only does he act as presiding judge and even "lawmaker" (*thesmothetês*); when things look bad, he intervenes as counsel for the defense; he uses every trick in the book to play on the jury's pity; he even introduces Labes' little whining puppies; and then, when all else fails, he simply tricks Philocleon into casting his decisive vote into the Urn of Acquittal instead of Condemnation. This final deception sums up the whole pattern of manipulation and control used by Bdelycleon—in the interest, naturally, of his father's return to sanity and good judgment.

Indeed, before the trial scene began, Bdelycleon's prayer to Apollo made his intentions clear enough (875–84). He wants to remove toughness, anger, bitterness; in their place he hopes to induce tenderness, kindness, pity. Although these are ordinary rhetorical aims, Bdelycleon's language and movements suggest that he is acting as a doctor or wizard or a *magic cook* ready to perform a saving transformation. There are significant parallels between his prayer and Socrates' invocation of his cloud divinities in the fraudulent *phrontisterion* in *The Clouds*; still more, between Bdelycleon's terms of surgery and cooking and the key dramatic metaphor of rhetoric as cooking in *The Knights*, culminating in the magical re-cooking of Demos into his former self. Just so, Bdelycleon hopes to transform his father's character through the magical cooking of play therapy and psychodrama—a hope which, as we shall see, is intimately connected with Aristophanes' own aims and methods as a comic poet.

But again: if we watch Philocleon's reactions, we observe that this particular therapy kills more than cures. Once again, the old man is

<sup>13</sup> On the actual trial of Laches (probably in 425 B.C.) and its relation to the play, see U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, "Über die Wespen des Aristophanes" (1911), repr. in *Kleine Schriften I* (Berlin 1971) 284–99, esp. 284–85 and 297. Wilamowitz argues that this trial became the "kernel" of the *Wasps* but that Aristophanes' interest shifted from it to the jury system itself. For further discussion, see G. Mastromarco, *Storia di una Commedia di Atene* (Florence 1974).

overcome, weakened, "made soft." This is largely a joke—what a disaster for Philocleon to pity a defendant, let alone acquit one!—but there is real pathos in his words just before he faints: "So then, I am nothing." Earlier he pretended like Odysseus to be *Outis*, "Nobody;" now he has lost his identity. It is a kind of death. His last words too are pathetic, as he gives in to Bdelycleon's renewed offer of a comfortable retirement: "All right, if that's what you think best." He has given up. His resignation comes very close to tragedy, like Falstaff's famous lines after his great hopes are disappointed: "Master Shallow, I owe you a thousand pounds." Although the chorus proceed into their usual "Go ye rejoicing" song, we are left with the impression more of failure than of success—of a therapy that has led to a loss of self, a psychological death.

*Failure of Catharsis: Aristophanes and Bdelycleon*

Precisely at this point the actors withdraw and the chorus-leader voices Aristophanes' claims to be a heroic *καθαρτής*. The timing of these remarks makes some connection between Bdelycleon's use of therapy and Aristophanes' comic catharsis inevitable. Have there been earlier hints of such a connection?

In the Agon, Philocleon described the various ways in which defendants bribed and humored him and worked upon his pity. Some flattered him; some bewailed their "poverty;" while others used funny stories (566-67):

οἱ δὲ λέγουσιν μύθους ἡμῖν, οἱ δ' Αἰσώπου τι γέλοιον·  
οἱ δὲ σκώπτουσ', ἔν' ἐγὼ γελάσω καὶ τὸν θυμὸν καταθῶμαι.

Whether they tell stories or a funny fable of Aesop, or just make jokes, their aim is consistent. They want to make Philocleon feel pleasure and laugh so that he will "lay down his temper." And if that form of *anapeithein* (a word combining the ideas of persuasion and bribery) doesn't work, they can always resort to sheer pathos, bringing in their bleating kids. The parallelism is striking. Make Philocleon laugh or cry, and you will have banished his angry mood. Later on, Philocleon tells of his pleasure when gifted defendants recite a tragic speech or play on the pipes for his entertainment. The point is satirical. It seems, the courtroom rivals the theatre as a place of entertainment; we shall

see more of this in the dog's trial. But isn't Aristophanes doing what those guilty defendants do: isn't he making them laugh in order to teach them the desired lesson and perform the desired catharsis of their feelings? Certainly, many passages from Aristophanes' plays, and especially from *The Peace*, suggest that he means to bring the audience to a cheerful frame of mind in which they will recover the natural perspective, of country, peace, and celebration, in which right attitudes can be maintained, right decisions worked out. If this were all, then our "good humor man" would be a supermanipulator and persuader. But is it all? Let us reserve judgment; and let us also remember that Aristophanes himself has provided the evidence linking him with Bdelycleon. And he continues to provide it.

Most strikingly of all, Bdelycleon steps out of character just before his rebuttal, merging momentarily with the comic poet (650-51):

χαλεπὸν μὲν καὶ δεινῆς γνώμης καὶ μείζονος ἢ 'πὶ τραγωδοῖς  
ἰάσασθαι νόσον ἀρχαίαν ἐν τῇ πόλει ἐντετοκυῖαν.

We might recall the way in which Dicaeopolis' speech in *The Acharnians* moved back and forth between different levels of meaning: between parody of Euripides' *Telephus*, the requirements of the comic plot, and the pleading of Aristophanes to his audience for peace and fair play. Thus Aristophanes speaks through Dicaeopolis who is "transparently" disguised as Telephus pretending to be a beggar. Very similarly, we have just heard, behind Bdelycleon, the voice of Aristophanes the would-be public therapist. The longtime, deeply ingrained disease of Philocleon merges with that of Athens. On the surface, Bdelycleon is uttering a rhetorical platitude: "I'm just not up to the demands of this extraordinary subject and occasion." But he also says more than he intends. He and the *τραγωδοί*,<sup>14</sup> the comic playwright and his troupe, are *not* up to performing the desired catharsis. Their *γνώμη*, their most intelligent planning, will not suffice.<sup>15</sup>

But we are jumping ahead. A number of parallels may be drawn first between Bdelycleon's tactics in his rebuttal and the comic tactics,

<sup>14</sup> On wine and drinking in *The Wasps*, and esp. on the *τρυξ* motif, see Vaio (above, note 1) 337-41. He points out that *νεοπλούτω τρυγί* in line 1309 suggests both the low "dregs" of society and the raw new energy of Philocleon.

<sup>15</sup> Compare *Wasps* 64 and 72, 1045, 1140, and esp. 1460, on people who "changed their ways through associating with the clever ideas" of others.



whether of Aristophanes or the Sausage-seller, which worked so effectively in *The Knights*. In that play, the Paphlagonian (Cleon) was beaten at his own game; he was outshouted, outdone in disgustingness, and outbribed: hence the sausage-seller wins the chance (now reversing himself into an aristocratic saviour) to take Demos in hand and to transform him, through magical cooking, into the vigorous Demos of old. This splendid accomplishment implies total victory for the comic poet working behind the scenes and for all his true and right values. Now it seems that in *The Wasps* Bdelycleon is pushing for a similar victory and reformation, and by similar means. Again, an infatuated old man (=the gullible Athenian public) must be disabused of his illusions; he must be shown how the politicians (notably Cleon) have manipulated and controlled and deceived him for their own purposes; and to do this, the enemy must be outbribed, beaten at their own game. In *The Knights*, this is done with sweaters and pillows and cakes; in *The Wasps*, by a fantastic evocation of imperial riches that should rightly be Philocleon's but in fact go mainly to the politicians and demagogues who manage him. Of course, Bdelycleon's promises of a comfortable retirement constitute a further bribe; so too does his wonderful jurycourt at home with its play therapy, its entertainment.

Enough was said earlier to suggest how Bdelycleon uses the dog trial as an entertainment- and substitution-bribe to give Philocleon satisfaction while actually keeping him indoors and out of trouble, and also as a psychodrama that will teach him to be kinder and more compassionate. There is much emphasis on the way he is made to weep with pity for the defendant and his helpless little whining puppies. He undergoes an emotional catharsis—although he blames it on the hot soup, and it is only temporary. On another level, the trial of the dog resembles the kind of fable which defendants used to tell in court to put the jury in a good humor. And on still another level, it resembles the plot of *The Wasps*, which was described earlier as a *λογίδιον γνώμην ἔχον*, a little story or fable with a point (or moral). The irony is complex but no more so than in *The Acharnians*: for here, as there, the poet includes in his play an exposure of his comic intentions and methods—there, educational; here, therapeutic ones—that were hidden behind the masks, the costumes, and the comic plot.

Let us assume Aristophanes' honesty, defer the question of his final

intentions, and move with the plot itself towards the wild reversal which utterly destroys any attempt (whether by Bdelycleon or by Aristophanes) at moral reformation and reeducation. Certainly, Bdelycleon tries: he dresses his father in new clothes, much as he would like to dress him in new, civilized, polite habits to consort with "gentlemen" at a party. It is an uproarious scene of trying to improve human nature. There are many borrowings from *The Clouds*, from scenes of Socrates trying to teach Strepsiades (who resisted with a kind of saving stupidity); and there are many ironies pointing to Bdelycleon's managerial tendencies, his resemblance to Cleon himself<sup>16</sup> (do you become like the enemy whose weapons you adopt?), and the essential bankruptcy of his bourgeois aims—to get his father into the country club. The metaphor of cooking recurs: Philocleon almost melts away in the furnace of his new clothes; he begs Bdelycleon to get a meathook ready to pull him out. So too, the idea of sleeping and dreaming: Philocleon is led to the "couch" and, as he says, given not a real feast but a "dream-dinner." But once again, it is the spring mechanism at work. The more Philocleon's nature is restrained, the more violently it will break forth. When Philocleon goes to the party, gets roaring drunk, makes an ass of himself, insults everybody, steals a flute girl, and comes reveling home with her, knocking things over on the way, stealing food, and beating up tradespeople—this is the break-out that we have somehow been expecting all along. For the son, it is utter disaster; for the father, a final escape from manipulation and control, yet with a fully appropriate excuse: "You *told* me I shouldn't think about lawsuits any more!"

Still another strong irony is the way the fable or funny story backfires. Bdelycleon had instructed his father in polite conversation (λόγους σεμνούς) befitting clever people (δεξιοί). His idea of civilized conversation includes edifying stories and anecdotes (provided, we might say, they get past the censor): and later on, when Philocleon worries rather prophetically that he might get drunk and offend people, his son reassures him: in polite society, you can always soothe ruffled feelings by means of a funny story or a fable (1256–61). Presumably,

<sup>16</sup> See *Wasps* 1224: καὶ δὴ γάρ εἰμ' ἐγὼ Κλέων; this is a way of lampooning Cleon but also a hint that Bdelycleon has, in a sense, become Cleon. See also the term Δημολογοκλέων in 342, with MacDowell's discussion ("an inferior Cleon"?).

if he took this advice, Philocleon would succeed like one of the defendants he described earlier, who brought the jury to a serviceable good humor. What actually happens is that Philocleon reverts when drunk to the most primitive types of humor. At the dinner party, he was splendidly vulgar; onstage, his "Aesopic" meanderings add insult to injury. As he raves on about Aesop and the Delphians and something about a beetle, his longsuffering son carries him bodily into the house—at which disastrous point the chorus sing a mocking little song praising Bdelycleon for his *cleverness* and his success—so far as it goes—in reforming his father's character and bringing him to a new and very civilized style of life.

The joke is on Bdelycleon, whose instruction and therapy have backfired. But it is equally on Aristophanes; hence, I think, the special emphasis on funny stories and fables that don't work out the way they should. We should remember that Aristophanes claimed to be a *καθαπτής* in both the social and the literary realm. We could say, he claimed to cleanse Athens of its faults and demons, and comedy of its tired vulgarities and ploys. And yet: just as the reformation of Philocleon explodes into ruins, failing very much like an experiment in a *fable*, where some creature reverts suddenly to its former nature, or some disguise is stripped off, or someone's attempt at a new way of life fails, prompting the moral, "Stick to your own trade" (or nature)<sup>17</sup>—at the same instant, Aristophanes' *Wasps* relapses into the old vulgarities which constitute the old self of Old Comedy. What Xanthias announced would be a "little story with a point," cleverer than most, but not too clever for the audience, turns into beating and screaming and running and knockabout farce and some wonderfully obscene by-play about a torch which is really a naked flute girl. Bdelycleon is knocked down, in a true-life boxing story; Aristophanes' chariot of reform crashes again. And we are glad. Shut up again in

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Wasps* 280, "Go boil a stone!", of Philocleon's resistance to persuasion and bribery; 603-04, the ass-hole that defies washing; 959 and 989, a defendant—and Philocleon—who "doesn't know how to play the harp;" 1431, "Stick to your own trade;" and 1450 ff., (it's hard to change human nature—or is it?). My student, Joseph Ewbank, who is writing a dissertation on fable and proverb in Aristophanes, has kindly referred me to the following fables in A. Hausrath, *Corpus Fabularum Aesopicarum* (Leipzig 1956-59): on the impossibility of changing your own nature, or that of others, nos. 50, 237, 93, and 109; on the idea, "Stick to your own trade," nos. 198, 99.

the house, the irresponsible Philocleon re-emerges finally to perform a joyful, drunken, and triumphant dance. "An impossible business, by Dionysus!" cries Xanthias the would-be warder. Precisely: it is an impossible business to reform human or Athenian nature; and (by Dionysus!) comedy in the end must be about human freedom, which now includes the freedom not to be re-educated or reformed or brainwashed or made the involuntary object of a catharsis—even a comic catharsis. The greater the constraint of attempted reform, the wilder the escape, the more manic the final dance. The old man is mad, and Athens is mad, and nothing can be done about it ("Drink hellebore!" cries the helpless Xanthias);<sup>18</sup> and if there is a victor in the end, it is the god of madness, Dionysus himself.

*Dream-interpretation and comic catharsis*

I want now to borrow the Aristophanic freedom to reverse myself and ask whether *The Wasps* does not offer a healing catharsis after all, albeit a different one from the kind we have been discussing. It is, after all, the nature of Dionysian religion to provide that temporary abandonment of self-possession that enables people to escape the greater insanity to which the self-willed rationalist like Pentheus may or must succumb. And although the wild ending of *The Wasps* is a tribute to Dionysus and a reaffirmation of the primitive and irrational, whether in human nature or in comedy, yet even Philocleon's clownish dancing and joking are planned by Aristophanes as part of the total play. A larger catharsis is intended and achieved, under the auspices of Apollo and Dionysus, than either Bdelycleon within the plot, or Aristophanes-as-Bdelycleon, might have desired or even imagined.

That is why it is time to return to the idea of dreaming and dream-interpretation which preceded the Bdelycleon-Philocleon plot, suggestively framing the comic action. In the prologue, Aristophanes set up important analogies between dreams and jokes or riddles, dream-interpretation and comedy. He also invited the audience to join his troupe in interpreting the play's action as if it were a strange yet favorable dream. They will get the point and the benefit of it, though

<sup>18</sup> Hellebore was a violent purge, newly discovered as a cure for madness (see MacDowell on 1489); Aristophanes' "catharsis" may thus revert to the simplest kind of physical "purging."

not without his guidance. This does *not* mean (for Aristophanes is often ironic about the audience's power of comprehension) that every symbol in the play will be allegorical and self-revealing and unequivocal, like the "sheep and whale" dream-fragment or Theoros with his crow's head; it *does* mean that this peculiar comedy will present its meanings in symbolic form, like a dream; that the audience are invited to try to understand these meanings; and that such understanding (again, as of a significant and favorable dream) will be accompanied by some kind of healing. Since this catharsis is different from that discussed earlier, I want to treat it as a series of *recognitions*, each one corresponding to a different kind of symbolic form or action. We shall move at once from simpler to more complex symbols—the dogs, the wasps, and "escape"—and from correspondingly simple to complex forms of recognition provided for the audience, though not necessarily fully grasped by them.

*The trial of the dog* combines absurdity with obvious allegorical meaning, much as Sosias' dream in the prologue did. There, a whale harangued an assembly of sheep, and close by sat the crow-headed man; here, one dog prosecutes another in domestic court, kitchen utensils and puppies appear, a cheese-grater takes the stand to give testimony, and a rooster (briefly mentioned in the text, but prominent on stage) crows from time to time to keep the jury awake. The scene has the peculiarity of a dream and much of the charm of fable or fairy-tale, but like Sosias' dream earlier, it serves the purposes of an easily recognizable satire on the jury system and especially on Cleon. The audience will take pleasure in "getting" the joke, seeing through the disguise (it is conceivable that "Dog" appeared with features of a Cleon portrait-mask combined with features of a dog), and appreciating the points thus scored against Cleon. The satire here remains transparent, the "symbolism" obvious, from beginning to end. Like Orwell's *Animal Farm*, it is a "little fable with a point."

Probably, too, the dog comparison was familiar and expected, however beautifully Aristophanes develops it here. Already in *The Knights* he had portrayed Cleon as a villainous dog. Perhaps Cleon had claimed in actuality to be the "watchdog" of the people, and this claim had struck Aristophanes' funny bone; certainly it is demolished in the counter-oracle produced by the sausage-seller (*Knights* 1030-34) about

a Cerberus which flatters the Athenian people—and licks up all the food when they aren't looking. It is possible that the word-play which Aristophanes exploits, between κύων ("dog") and Κλέων, had become a satirical commonplace in Athenian political life, rather like a cartoon. In *The Wasps*, Aristophanes goes further, making Κλέων a riddling amalgam of κύων and κλέπτω, "to steal:" thus his name is interpreted as "stealing dog," and Philocleon's angry wish,

κλέπτοντα Κλέωνα λάβοιμι,

contains in itself the essential elements of the dog trial: the stealing, Cleon, and also *Labe*s—the latter being an amalgam of the general Laches and the root λαβ-, "to get" or "grab."

Aristophanes clearly meant his audience to enjoy themselves following the clues which point to the poet's attack on Cleon.<sup>19</sup> He pretends, through Xanthias, to put them off the track, saying that he won't resort to the old ploy of chopping Cleon into mincemeat; but much of the fun of the play comes from the way Cleon keeps coming in, one way or another, like an unforgettable obsession. The dreams point to Cleon; the protagonists' names involve relations to Cleon; people keep mentioning Cleon; and sooner or later—sooner, if they are quick to pick up hints, but later in any event—the audience are provided with the happy recognition of Cleon and Laches behind the dog trial—the familiar beneath the absurd. Nobody in the audience will miss the point that Aristophanes is getting at Cleon, that in his view Cleon is much guiltier than Laches or anyone else who might be put on trial. (They probably *will* miss the further suggestion that most everybody steals at some point or other, that the jurymen and Philocleon have stolen, and that the whole courtroom is pervaded by the atmosphere of deception and fraud symbolized in the name of the clock, the κλειψύδρα or "water-stealer.") Again, the audience will appreciate Aristophanes' picture of himself in the parabasis, as Heracles struggling with a Cerberus-monster. It makes a nice political cartoon.<sup>20</sup> They will also catch the idea conveyed later on, that Aris-

<sup>19</sup> One way or another, Cleon comes in (sometimes with a "dog" or "dog-leash" joke) at *Wasps* 19, 34 ff., 62–63, 83, 133–34, 197, 231, 242, 342, 409 ff., 482–83, 596, 643, 704–05, 758–59, and 835 ff. (the dog trial); see also 1031 ff., 1220 ff., 1284–91, and 1401 ff.

<sup>20</sup> For an actual cartoon, a vase-painting which apparently depicts Cleon as a masturbating Sphinx against which the hero Oedipus (Brasidas?) bravely advances, see E. L. Brown, "Cleon caricatured on a Corinthian Cup," *JHS* 94 (1974) 166–70.

tophanes, though he pretended to submit, has taken a surprise vengeance on his enemy Cleon, as "the vinepole fooled the vine"—although as it turns out, the joke is also on Bdelycleon and on Aristophanes himself.

At first sight, the symbolism of the wasps seems as easy to interpret as that of the dogs.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Aristophanes talks about it explicitly, through the chorus-leader. He had just finished explaining how *The Clouds* was a fine play despite the audience's failure to appreciate it, to "get" its point; thus he compared himself to an ambitious chariot-driver who, in the effort to outreach his opponents (i.e., to write a comedy of ideas, not just tired slapstick) crashed and broke his—*idea* (ἐπίνοια). This time—and the contrast is pointed—the chorus say they will explain the "idea of the sting" (ἡ 'πίνοια τῆς ἐγκεντρύδος) so that even an ignorant person will understand it.<sup>22</sup> So the wasp-chorus comically explain their own symbolism, point by analogical point. They are (they explain) very courageous beings; when the barbarian came with fire and smoke to loot their hives, they flew out angrily, fought, stung, and conquered him. And still today, as jurors, they exhibit the same temper; they "swarm" into various courts; they provide a livelihood for themselves by "stinging" (= voting to

<sup>21</sup> The best general account of the wasps is still that of H. Weber (above, note 3) 127–66: the wasp traits are appropriate to irritable veterans and jurymen, but traits of bees (honey making, beehives) are freely added. See also H.-J. Newiger, *Metaphor und Allegorie* (Munich 1957) 74–80.

<sup>22</sup> According to Polydeukes 8.16, the ἐγκεντρύς was the stylus used by a juror to draw his penalty line. Although MacDowell finds this idea unsuitable, I think there is a suggestive equation of the stylus, the sword, the sting, and also the erect phallus (below, note 23). The pun is not central, but it constitutes a handy "proof" for the wasp-dicist equation.

The wasp costume of the chorus (not worn by Philocleon) and the wasp sting have been much discussed. The chorus were wasp-waisted; the "sting" projected from their hindquarters: see Wilamowitz (above, note 13) 302, and *Wasps* 225, "from the hip." Possibly the sting could be drawn forward through the legs and extended like an erect phallus (Wilamowitz 303). Newiger (above, note 21) 80 seems correct in thinking that the sting suggests the phallus, and *vice-versa* (see *Wasps* 1062, 1066 ff.); but the two need not be equivalent in fact, as Newiger tends to believe and C. Ruck strongly argues: "Euripides' Mother: Vegetables and the Phallos in Aristophanes," *Arion* 2 (1975) 13–57, esp. 32–40 and notes. Even if, as I believe, the chorus wore unobtrusive leather phalluses, the "stings" will still be phallic and the sexual meanings and issues advanced by Ruck and by Parker (above, note 1) will still be valid. The "sting" is a weapon of sexual as well as judicial aggression, and it symbolizes the potency which Bdelycleon would take away from his father.

condemn); and they resent those stingless drones who have no κέντρον<sup>23</sup> (i.e., never served in the army) yet share their privileges and their fee.

So far, the point is clear enough, despite Aristophanes' casual way of confusing wasp-traits with those of bees or hornets. The wasps are jurymen and veterans. Earlier, they pursued invaders with anger and spears; now they pursue defendants (and Aristophanes is playing, as often, on the literal and figurative meanings of διώκω and φεύγω) with the same anger, the stylus, and the voting tablet. Would the audience "get" the further implication that for these old men, jury duty is a kind of surrogate warfare? Probably not, or not very consciously: yet it is clearly important to Aristophanes that the aggressiveness which Bdelycleon has been trying to mitigate or exorcize is the very quality of temper that saved Athens in her time of peril. Even Aristophanes takes pride in his own Heracleian ὀργή. Wasps need their sting; we all need passion and power; and once more, when Bdelycleon introduces his father to a new life-style, he begins by removing his everyday jury coat which is *also* the coat that used to serve him so well in military campaigns. Take it away, like a hero's armor, and the old man's identity goes with it.

So far, the sting connotes aggressiveness and the jurymen's power. But that is not all. It seems clear that the sting is also a sexual symbol and that Aristophanes is teasing his audience by making this point obvious on stage without saying anything about it in his explanation. Sex is to be expected in Old Comedy, and sexual symbolism is appropriate in this dreamlike comedy; but how is it represented here, and what does it mean? Through most of *The Wasps*, the "sting" is prominent and the phallus is not.<sup>24</sup> The chorus of old jurymen are weak and tired; their sexual exploits lie back in the same remote past, now nostalgically viewed, as their military ones: yet when they are roused, they can still attack the enemy in military formation and with extended stings at the ready. "Erect stings!" they cry in their battle

<sup>23</sup> The κέντρον, a point or goad, is often identified with the phallus in Aristophanes' plays; see J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse* (New Haven 1975) 122 (but only applied very tentatively to *The Wasps*). A parallel sexual / military attack scene is *Clouds* 1297-1302. All this lends further point to the ἐγκεντρὶς joke (above, note 22) and to the characterization of our ec-centric hero.

<sup>24</sup> See above, note 22.



scene; "Attack the enemy in the rear!" However this scene was acted out—and it must have been hilariously funny—the stings in it evidently stand not just for anger, but for anger as a sexual surrogate. The phalluses of the wasp chorus remain coiled up innocuously, but their stings retain a vitality, a life of their own.

The same symbolism applies, though less obviously, to Philocleon. From the beginning, his jurymania was described in terms of erotic obsession, partly for the fun of parodying Euripides' lovesick heroines, but even more to indicate that for Philocleon, power is an aphrodisiac. His jury life provides him with that repeated thrill of potency that makes him feel most alive. Hence all those jokes about "mussel shells" or "unsealing the wills" of pretty heiresses.<sup>25</sup> If we go further, as I think we should, and interpret Philocleon's stonelike hardness as an expression of this inner feeling of sexual potency which his jury service provides, then we may also understand why Bdelycleon's attempts to "soften" his father make him feel impotent, sick, and old. Take away his sting and you take away his life. Of course, since this is comedy and not tragedy, Philocleon rebounds into sexual hybris, animal vitality. His "rope" may be old and rotten, as Bdelycleon insists it is; yet his revival and rejuvenation are sufficient, somehow, to cheer our hearts.

Did Aristophanes' audience "get" this fuller meaning of the sting? Probably not, any more than modern critics have: the wasp symbolism is hardly as transparent or as allegorical as that of the dogs. Yet Aristophanes, despite all his teasing, must have expected the *recognition* corresponding to the symbolism of the wasps and their stings to be available to his audience, as it is still available to us today. The point this time is more than satirical. It is a general truth about human nature. People, not least old people, require a sense of power and value; take that away, and they will not be happy, no matter how many substitute-comforts you may shower them with. In a way, therefore, Philocleon comes close to the great tragic heroes like Achilles and Ajax

<sup>25</sup> For explicit or metaphorical sexuality in the law courts, see *Wasps* 349, 573, 578, 583–89, and 850; compare 769–70 and also the parodies of Euripidean eroticism. I disagree with Henderson (above, note 23) 79 (cf. also p. 81), who considers this a minor use of obscenity, a characterizing but not thematic device.

(and Medea) in the way he cares, passionately cares about his τιμή. And his rebellion is ultimately right.<sup>26</sup> It is hard to say what the practical implications of such a recognition might be. It is even harder to deal with Philocleon the wasp than with Cleon the dog. The complex wasp symbolism points to a dilemma: what *can* we do, after all, about these terrible old men? Understand them better, perhaps; but the negative moral remains, that this is not an illness that comedy (or any other treatment) can easily cure.

Our third idea, of *escape*, is more metaphor than symbol; it is conveyed more in feeling and action than in words; yet it is crucial to the final and very positive interpretation which this dreamlike play requires. For although we have stressed Bdelycleon's failure, the play can more justly be entitled, "Philocleon's Escape." The basic pattern was played out in the slapstick scenes before and after the entrance of the chorus. Philocleon is shut up within the house and tries to escape, is pushed in, pops out again, and so forth. Similarly, Bdelycleon's efforts to re-educate and reform his father are attempts to confine him, to keep him in. Bdelycleon is a spoilsport and a jailer, though with the best intentions. Will the old man elude the "watch?" Will he make his escape somehow, like Odysseus from the Cyclops' cave? Again and again he is foiled; he seems to be "Outis" more than Odysseus; yet in the end he escapes, by the implied help of Dionysus the looser of bonds, into unregenerate animal nature and drunken revelry. It is a final dramatization of the idea ἀποφύγω, used throughout the play of defendants trying to "get off free," now transferred at the end to the runaway Philocleon himself. His final dance signifies happiness and victory, not unlike Alexander the Great's famous dream of a dancing satyr.

What kind of recognition goes with this dominant escape theme? This time, I think, it is a recognition less of the mind than of the heart: not satirical like the dog-allegory, nor thought-provoking like the wasps symbolism, but recognition as the *recovery* of an energy and hope which we once possessed, which (under various pressures) we had forgotten, and which, now rediscovered, promises a more confident

<sup>26</sup> On Philocleon's search for integrity, see Parker (above, note 1) 3; Whitman (above, note 1), esp. p. 150; Paduano (above, note 1) 28-35 and *passim*.

and vital way of life.<sup>27</sup> This rejuvenation movement is anticipated in the first ode of the parabasis (1060–70). Of old, say the chorus, they were valiant in dancing, in warfare, and in sex;<sup>28</sup> now these things pass and heads grow grey: *and yet* (key words in comedy) they *must* re-attain youthful vigor; for looking at today's effeminate youth, they feel surprisingly vigorous after all. This plea and affirmation is answered by the recovery of their champion, Philocleon. An ironic recovery, to be sure, as he plays the ardent lover wishing to escape the constraints of paternal domination—but the paradoxical truth is that Philocleon *is* more youthful, passionate, and energetic than his anxious son, who is old and crusty before his time. His recovery is the playwright's final healing gift to the chorus, who go out dancing, and behind them, to the Athenian people: for if Philocleon's defeat and disillusionment point to the need of accepting reality, as intelligent and sane people must accept it, yet Philocleon's successful rebellion and escape demonstrate the energy and erotic passion and hopefulness—those very Athenian traits—which make living in the real world not just tolerable, but deeply worthwhile.

If I am right, then Aristophanes has presented Athens after all with a healing catharsis. It has many features in common with the forms of psychotherapy attempted by Bdelycleon: the therapy of the word, the purification rites, the Corybantic music and dance, the Asclepian incubation. As *The Frogs* later attests, Aristophanes regarded the experience of producing or watching comedies as participation in a Dionysian rite; and it is above all Dionysus who presides over and guarantees the catharsis shaped by comedy: through the relaxation of tension, through the dream-like experience of a fluid world in which things turn into each other and the normal laws of scientific and critical thought are relaxed, and through the various recognitions, emotional as well as intellectual, which arise out of the experience of that transformed and transforming dream-world. Such a comic catharsis is a magnificent gift. What Aristophanes says in the parabasis is true. Yet his truthfulness is guaranteed by the way he exposes every single

<sup>27</sup> On this aspect of the comic catharsis, see K. Reckford, "Desire with Hope," *Ramus* 3 (1974) 41–69.

<sup>28</sup> In *Wasps* 1062, *κατ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο* refers to the phallus; so too perhaps do "those remnants" in *Wasps* 1066.

trace of fraud or deception or coercion, *even by himself*, that might accompany the desired catharsis. Bdelycleon is a shadow of Aristophanes: he is what Aristophanes either was, or might have been; for just as Bdelycleon, the would-be reformer, adopts his enemies' tricks and becomes like them in the end, so comedy itself could become manipulative, could use its devices of joke and fable and play for uncomic purposes of behavior modification and propaganda. The path to demagoguery is paved with good intentions. Yet in the end Aristophanes' play is non-coercive and it is honest: non-coercive like a dream which, on being rightly interpreted, brings out its own true story from our unconscious feelings and thoughts; and honest, because it includes the exposure of its own shadow side, its inherent dishonesty.

At the same time, *The Wasps* is a deeply democratic play: not only because it casts a vote against oligarchy, against turning over the management of affairs to clever people like Bdelycleon, or Aristophanes himself, but also because it reaffirms the fundamental unity of Old Comedy and of its audience. To be sure, the prologue and parabasis of this play seem to show a widening gap between Aristophanes' new comedy of ideas and the old vulgar farce, and also between the "clever people" in the audience who can "get" the poet's clever ideas and those others who do not—as with *The Clouds* the previous year. Such a division threatens unity, much as the Cleon-whale "divides the people" in Sosias' dream. But does Aristophanes accept this division? At first, he seems to; when he suggests that the audience are "clever" (δεξιοί) and so will be able, at least with his guidance, to follow the new comedy, he seems insultingly condescending; yet he gives enormous weight to the ridiculing of cleverness and clever people in the last part of *The Wasps*. The chorus make fun of Bdelycleon, who turns out to be rather silly after all. They also lampoon various "clever people" who turn out to be idiots and pervers—ingenious pervers, to be sure. Yet it would be wrong to read the end of *The Wasps* as an unequivocal rejection of intellect. The last scenes, vulgarity and all, belong to an integrated comedy which can appeal to its varied audience on several levels of thought and feeling at one and the same time. It brings many kinds of wholeness, many kinds of healing.

Let me suggest, finally, that the positive themes of escape and recovery for which I have been arguing in *The Wasps* can be found,

spelled out in much more explicit terms, in the next year's play. In *The Peace*, Athens returns to health, together with the rest of Hellas. The Athenian people have been sick with a war neurosis whose symptoms are suspiciousness, litigiousness, and bad temper generally; but now, restored to the blessings of peace, leisure, and the countryside, they recover their earlier good humor, their enjoyment of life, and the sane perspective that accompanies such enjoyment. Rejuvenation and reform thus go together in *The Peace* as they could not in *The Wasps*. The roughness of bad-tempered jurors will be sloughed off, to everybody's gain including their own; they will turn youthful again, sleek, and tender—but clearly with no loss of sexual potency! On careful study, *The Peace* is filled with motifs taken from *The Wasps* but inverted, much as *The Wasps* inverted so many motifs from *The Clouds*. Thus the magic cooking works this time: Peace will "compound better humors" in the Greek peoples and will "mix them together" in friendship as in a good sauce (996–99). (This is much nicer than the crazy salad which War makes of cities, using such ingredients as Sicilian cheese and Attic honey.) A "demon hard to purge" (1250: ὦ δυσκάθαρτε δαίμον) is transferred from the hero to a nuisance type, a scapegoat; for Trygaeus himself is not insane as people think but rather a master of that creative madness which by-passes the limits of feasibility and accomplishes what we all want done. This time, too, the fable works for progress. Trygaeus borrows something like Aesop's beetle (which we remember from Philocleon's drunken scene) and rides it in comic and fabulous fashion to Olympus. Conversely, the negative warnings that you can't change human nature so often found in fable and proverb are used this time by Trygaeus, with comic inversion, against the religious imposter who cited them as a necessary obstacle to peace. "You won't make the crab walk straight," proclaimed Hierocles; "you can't make the rough hedgehog smooth" (1083, 1086). And so Trygaeus, excluding Hierocles from the sacrificial feast, answers his protests with a firm reminder: "You won't make the rough hedgehog smooth" (1114).

It seems strange in retrospect that, although the crab proverb was never quoted in *The Wasps*, still that play ended with a dance of the "crabs," tiny spinning children of Carcinus the old king crab himself. It is a wonderful nonsense dance, delightful in its own right like the

lobster quadrille in *Alice* or Edward Lear's owl and pussycat dancing to the light of the moon. Could it also be a riddling dramatic embodiment of that same unmentioned proverb, "You won't make the crab walk straight?" That was the point: nobody, not even a comic poet, can straighten out Philocleon or the Athenian jury system or human nature itself. And yet: even if crabs won't walk straight, these crabs at least can evidently dance—and what could be more fun, or a better symbol of energy, excitement, and very hope, than their spinning dance?