

WHEN IS A BIRD NOT A BIRD?

F. E. ROMER

The Johns Hopkins University

Commentators on Aristophanes' *Birds*, lines 670–74, may be losing some of the fun in staging Euelpides' sudden passion for the nightingale. His lust and Pisthetaerus' savvy wariness demand to be played against Procne's physical appearance on stage; and the vivid description of her begs for a laugh. The breadth of the *visual* joke, however, depending as it does on the simplicity of Procne's costume, has often been overlooked by ancient and modern commentators.

- Πι. ὅσον δ' ἔχει τὸν χρυσόν, ὥσπερ παρθένος.
Εὐ. ἐγὼ μὲν αὐτὴν κἄν φιλήσαί μοι δοκῶ.
Πι. ἀλλ' ὦ κακόδαιμον ῥύγχος ὀβελίσκοιν ἔχει.
Εὐ. ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ὦδ' ἔν νῆ Δί' ἀπολέψαντα χρή
ἀπὸ τῆς κεφαλῆς τὸ λέμμα κἄθ' οὕτω φιλεῖν. (670–74)

To be sure, the most influential description of the nightingale's appearance comes from two scholia. The first states simply, *ἔταιρίδιον πρόσεισι, τὰ ἄλλα μὲν κεκαλλωπισμένον, τὴν δὲ κεφαλὴν ὄρνιθος ἔχον ὡς ἀηδόνας*. The second shows less sensitivity to Aristophanes' language and glosses *ἀπολέψαντα . . . τὸ λέμμα* as occurring *ἀντὶ τοῦ ἀφελόντα τὸ προσωπεῖον*.¹ Although a superficial reading of our passage from the *Birds* yields as much information, the scholiasts' deductions have generally satisfied their spiritual descendants, our scholarly and school commentators. In the nineteenth century, for example, C. C. Felton spoke of an actor whose mask imitated the beak of a bird; for T. Kock the piper was "halb eine Nachtigall, halb wie ein 'goldgeschmücktes Mädchen' herausgeputzt," and she put aside her mask, with beak of real spits, to play the pipes.² Much more recently C. F. Russo solved the problem this

¹ W. Dindorf, *Scholia Graeca in Aristophanis Comoedias* 1 (Leipzig 1822) 449–50, *ad* 667 and 673 respectively; for the scholia, one may also see J. W. White, *The Scholia of the Aves of Aristophanes* (Boston and London 1914) 131, *ad* 667 and 673.

² C. C. Felton, *The Birds of Aristophanes* (Cambridge 1849) 165, *ad* 674; T. Kock, *Ausgewählte Komödien des Aristophanes* 4 (Berlin 1876²) 37, *ad* 663, 674. On the mask, cf. the scholium *ad* 673 cited above; also W. W. Merry, *Aristophanes, The Birds*, Part 2 (Oxford 1889) 39, *ad* 674; W. C. Green, *The Birds of Aristophanes* (Cambridge 1894) 127, *ad* 667; and B. B. Rogers, *The Birds of Aristophanes* (London 1906) 86–87, *ad* 665 and 672, although he also adds wings to her costuming.

way: "Evelpide le darebbe volentieri un bacio, ma l'Usignuolo ha naturalmente una maschera beccuta; e allora Evelpide sfila via la maschera (cfr. 671-674). Così la bella aulista è in grado di suonare più agevolmente lo strumento. . . ." ³ And finally, K. J. Dover has remarked, "Evidently the nightingale-piper who plays in accompaniment to the chorus has a beak too, for a reference is made to her beaked mask when Euelpides thinks of kissing her." ⁴ The gymnastic dexterity required to play the usual double-pipes through a beaked mask speaks for itself: if a beaked mask, then it was removed for playing the instrument. Aristophanes makes no reference, in fact, to any mask *per se* but only to the nightingale's *ρύγχος ὀβελίσκων* and to *τὸ λέμμα* which is *ὥσπερ ῥόν*. ⁵ Although the nightingale certainly appeared with the "head of a bird" as the scholiast knew, a mask is not the only way to achieve this effect.

In updating an old version of this play in German, H.-J. Newiger and P. Rau noted that "Prokne tritt auf als Flötenspiele, nackt und reich mit Gold geschmückt mit einer Vogelmaske," and they also added significantly that "den Schnabel bildet die Doppelflöte." ⁶ In other words her bird's mask was beakless, and the beak was simulated by the *auloi*. This explanation points in the right direction, whether the piper on stage was authentic or a mime. Newiger and Rau did not speculate further; but if the musical instrument could represent the nightingale's beak, then a mask, even the beakless one Newiger and Rau imagine, becomes unnecessary. Another explanation is required.

³ C. F. Russo, *Aristofane, autore di teatro* (Florence 1962) 246; but this suggestion reads more easily than it could be staged. Cf. now G. A. H. Chapman (below, note 7).

⁴ *Aristophanic Comedy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1972) 144. I thank Professor Dover for his comments *per epistulas*, but we are at the point of agreeing to disagree. Playing an instrument through a beaked mask better suits a single pipe than the more usual double-pipes; and even if the single pipe could be played adequately by a piper wearing a beaked mask, the visual joke, in my estimation, would still be spoiled.

⁵ *ρύγχος* occurs five other times in this play (lines 348, 364, 479, 1138, 1155) and always with the primary meaning of beak. *ὀβελίσκων* here shows Pisthetaerus' confusion and excitement and recalls the defensive measures he had urged against the attack of the chorus (lines 359-60, 388-92).

⁶ *Antike Komödien* (Munich, undated) 321, a revised edition of L. Seeger's translation (Frankfurt a. M. 1845-1848) and annotated by Newiger and Rau. Seeger's original version was unavailable to me, but a footnote in an earlier revival of his translation (H. Fischer and W. Schmid, *Aristophanes Werke* 2 [Stuttgart and Berlin 1910] 174) refers lines 673-74 to *die Maske*. G. Cupaiuolo, *Aristofane, gli Uccelli* (Naples 1914) 87, *ad* 672 and 674, and S. Pellini, *Aristofane, gli Uccelli* (Milan 1925) 104-5, *ad* 672 and 674, both refer *ρύγχος ὀβελίσκων* to the double-pipes and *τὸ λέμμα* to the mask. Even so innovative a translator as William Arrowsmith, *Aristophanes, Three Comedies: The Birds, The Clouds, The Wasps* (Ann Arbor 1969) 49, translates *τὸ λέμμα* as mask and adds the following stage directions: "A lovely well-rounded young flutegirl shyly appears. She is dressed in the rich gold-encrusted robes of a young Athenian matron of high birth. On her head she wears the mask of the Nightingale." To be fair, I have since persuaded him in conversation that the present interpretation is preferable.

Our passage derives a good part of its humor from the physical appearance of the piper (or piper-mime) even without a mask but with her instrument.⁷ Since the *auloi* approximate the beaks of other bird actors like the hoopoe and his servant, the phrase ἀπολέψαντα . . . ἀπὸ τῆς κεφαλῆς τὸ λέμμα should be limited to Euelpides' lusty ambition and should not motivate the putting aside of a mask before the nightingale-piper can perform on her instrument.⁸ To reach Procne's human lips which he desperately wants to kiss, Euelpides will have to remove the spit-like *auloi* (ρύγχος ὀβελίσκου) which he conceives as joined to a mask-like wrap around her head. Euelpides is expecting to tear off not a proper mask but the headwrap or cheekpieces (φορβεία) associated with playing the double-pipes. The *phorbeia* fits like the shell of an egg⁹ and better suits

⁷ A discussion here about whether the part was played by the ordinary αὐλητής or the more exceptional αὐλητρίς is not strictly relevant. In either case appropriate costuming would convey the femininity and beauty of the nightingale-piper, and whoever played the part could be elegantly costumed as an αὐλητρίς. (I pass over here questions of female nudity on the stage; but cf. Newiger and Rau's *nackt* [above, note 6] and perhaps Henderson's suggestion [below, note 14] as well.) C. W. Dearden, *The Stage of Aristophanes* (London 1976) 185, note 39, cites *IG XII 9*, 207, 21 from Eretria and the so-called Pronomus vase to suggest the great expense of hiring two trained professional musicians and to reinforce his idea (72) that the normal piper played the nightingale's role in accompanying the hoopoe's song at lines 209–22 and 227–62. I agree, but it may be objected that the production of the *Birds* was unusually lavish and hence costly and that these circumstances might obviate the considerations of cost-accounting in having a second authentic piper. Let me be clear, however, that at lines 209ff. no nightingale seems to have appeared on stage and the ordinary piper seems to have conveyed the impression of the nightingale only through a special tune on the double-pipes. Despite the scholium to line 673, the ordinary piper certainly should not have left the *thymelê* at this time; and Aristophanes could still effect surprise by bringing the same piper, a second piper, or a piper-mime on stage and into the action at line 670. The difficulties of staging the first use of the piper (lines 209ff.) are intelligently discussed by Dearden (72, 106–7). He appears to think that this scene works more smoothly if the piper is wearing a piper's usual finery rather than a bird's costume (107); but he elsewhere acknowledges that the external evidence of vase paintings, though hardly decisive here, would allow the possibility of a bird's costume for the piper (120). G. A. H. Chapman, "Dramatic Illusion in Aristophanes," *AJP* 104 (1983) 12–13, discusses the costume of the nightingale-piper, but does not notice the problem we are investigating. B. B. Rogers (above, note 2) perhaps implies the presence of two authentic pipers in the later scene at line 670. T. B. L. Webster, however, in *The Greek Chorus* (London 1970) 188, makes the felicitous suggestion that offstage in this later scene the ordinary piper played the nightingale's tune while onstage a costumed mime pretended to pipe. Webster does not discuss the actual costuming of this piper-mime, but I rather like the idea of having one (cf. below, note 10). My present argument suffices whether the nightingale was represented on stage by the ordinary piper, a second piper, or a piper-mime.

⁸ οὕτω φιλεῖν should mean "to kiss her once the shell is peeled off" and not "to kiss her like this" (cf. Rogers [above, note 2] 87, *ad* 674) since the nightingale-piper gives no indication of being kissed, and she certainly does not lay aside her *phorbeia* or *auloi* (both of which she will need at line 676).

⁹ Linking *lemma* with the *phorbeia* may be traced to F. Wieseler early in the nineteenth century—so F. H. M. Blaydes, *Aristophanis Comoediae* 4 (Halis Saxonum 1882)

Aristophanes' language than does the mask suggested in our second scholion (above, p. 135). Aristophanes has compared the spit-like projection of the instrument to other birds' beaks, the shell-like cheekpieces to their masks; and our attention is drawn again to ordinary theatrical equipment as so often in old comedy. Euelpides imagines that if he should remove the *phorbeia*, the pipes which he perceives as an extension of the headgear and which obstruct his anticipated kiss will go with it. The nightingale-piper's only resemblance to a bird is illusory.¹⁰

This sense of her costume evolves directly out of the earlier use of the nightingale in the play. Previously, when urged to awaken his wife, the hoopoe, apparently singing *a cappella*, had called out to her (lines 209–22). Offstage her reply was indicated by a tune on the pipes (cf. lines 223–24);¹¹ this song identifies the nightingale and remains characteristic of her throughout the play. The hoopoe had never asked her to appear but only to accompany him with the song from her divine bill (διὰ θείου στόματος θρηγνέῖς, line 211). Her beak and song are essential to the nightingale; and when she finally enters (line 666), her unique proboscis will have to be shown. Her beak has three requirements: it must characterize her as a bird, identify her by the nightingale-song, and not otherwise interfere with the description of her as a young Athenian woman.¹²

288, ad 674. J. van Leeuwen, *Aristophanis Aves* (Leiden 1902) 107–8, ad 673sq., vehemently, and rather superciliously, rejected Wieseler's whole conception including the idea that ὀβελίσκουιν could possibly allude to the double-pipes! J. G. Droysen, *Aristophanes Werke* 2 (Leipzig 1881³) 54 mentions a *Vogelmaske* in the stage directions to his translation but qualifies his remark in note 1 there: "Sie hat die Flöte mit Gurten um den Mund gelegt, die er wie Eierschalen ablösen wird." Some translators appear unaware of the commentators' difficulty in this matter; cf. H. van Daele, *Aristophane* 3 (Paris 1958) 56 ("Procne paraît sous les traits d'une petite joueuse de flûte"); or R. H. Webb, cited from M. Hadas, ed., *The Complete Plays of Aristophanes* (New York 1962) 254 ("Enter an attractive young flutist"). The *phorbeia* may be seen on a number of monuments; but for convenience the reader is directed to M. Bieber, *History of the Greek and Roman Theater* [Princeton 1961²] 5, fig. 9, or E. Simon (C. E. Vafopoulou-Richardson, tr.), *The Ancient Theatre* (London and New York 1982) pl. 1. For further references pertaining to the *phorbeia*, see below, note 12.

¹⁰ Nor does the avian resemblance necessarily end here. Vigorous playing of the pipes and dancing might cause a piper's elbows to flap like wings, much as children simulate flying by hooking their thumbs in their armpits and working their elbows; and wings need not then be imagined as a part of her costume as Rogers thought (above, note 2). Piping was, in any case, characterized by pronounced movements of the player's head up and down; cf. the technical terms ἀνασπᾶν and κατασπᾶν as discussed by K. Schlesinger, *The Greek Aulos* (London 1939) 54–57. Vigor of the dimension I imagine, however, virtually requires a mimed nightingale-piper onstage (see above, note 7).

¹¹ The *parepigraphê* after line 222 is of uncertain origin but unlikely to be authorial.

¹² Two scholiasts (ad 667 and 670), considering no doubt the unsavory reputations of some *aulêtrides*, assume that Procne is here decked out like a *hetaera* (or *hetaeridion*, as one of them says too cutely). However that may be, we may suggest another comic (but literary) resonance: the *phorbeia* may even serve in a humorous way—and this is simply a guess—as a kind of comic beauty aid because it would reduce the swelling of the cheeks

Let us return to the context of our present passage. At this moment the perennial malcontents and would-be birds from Athens are ogling a female of the tribe they would join, for the nightingale has just entered (line 666) to sing with the chorus (cf. lines 658–60). With no raised consciousness (whatever else may be raised!), Euelpides' unabashedly sexual and anthropocentric language expresses his arousal (lines 668–69). At the very start of this passage Pisthetaerus' exclamation (line 670) gives the clue: "Wow, all that gold! Just like a real girl!" Procne is dressed like a girl playing the pipes.¹³ The visual disfigurement caused by the pipes and *phorbeia* is the only obstacle to her humanity (and human beauty) that Pisthetaerus and Euelpides see (lines 672–74). She holds the *auloi*, her

when the piper plays. The distended cheeks of a piper playing without *phorbeia* could not ordinarily be seen or appreciated by most of the audience; but I assume that literary in-jokes of a sort familiar to us should have occurred in antiquity as well. In his *Marsyas* (frag. 1 [Diehl], cited from Ath. 14.616E–F) Melanippides described how Athena, repulsed by the ugliness of her swollen cheeks, abandoned pipe-playing forever. J. Boardman, "Some Attic Fragments: Pot, Plaque, and Dithyramb," *JHS* 76 (1956) 18–20 discusses Marsyas and Melanippides and traces the various representations of Marsyas' legend in art back to Melanippides' dithyramb, "the only work dealing specifically with this subject of which we have evidence in this period" (i.e. before ca. 450 B.C.). Melanippides' work provoked his rivals in musical innovation (like Pherecrates and Democritus of Chios), various representational artists (whose work is cited by Boardman), and even one objector (Telestes of Selinus) to Athena's despair over pipe-playing. The moment of Athena's despair, preserved by Melanippides' frag. 1 and sculpted by Myron about mid-century, caused Telestes to abreact in a dithyramb of his own. In Telestes' *Argo*, the speaker of frag. 1 (Diehl; cited from Ath. 14.616F–617A) hotly rejects the entire story of Athena's despair; and on the pipes themselves cf. also the views expressed in a fragment of Telestes' *Asclepius* (frag. 2 [Diehl], cited from Ath. 14.617B). In any case, the swollen cheeks of a sensuous *aulêtis* playing without *phorbeia* are exaggerated in a vase painting ca. 410–400 B.C. (as noted by J. Chailley, *La Musique grecque antique* [Paris 1979] 64 and unnumbered illustration opposite that page). On the *phorbeia*, see also S. Michaelides, *The Music of Ancient Greece: An Encyclopaedia* (London 1978) 42–46 and pl. 1. To Michaelides' functions of the *phorbeia* should be added the common sense of A. A. Howard, "The Αὐλός or Tibia," *HSCP* 4 (1893) 29: "It has occurred to me that possibly this bandage was intended to serve still another purpose; that of holding the instruments to the mouth of the performer so that the hands might be left free to move up and down on the instruments, as would be necessary in turning the bands, and in opening and closing the finger-holes. Inasmuch as but one hand could be employed for each pipe, some such arrangement was highly desirable if not absolutely necessary and especially if the number of finger-holes was very great." Cf. also below, note 18.

¹³ We are reminded in different ways of the performers behind the roles as well as the human history of their mythological characters. Euelpides, for example, recalled the actor playing the hoopoe, who, Euelpides thought, got his feathers at the bird mart in the agora—presumably from its sweepings! Later the bizarre crow-piper, grotesquely equipped with his own *phorbeia* (ἐμπεφορβειωμένον, line 861) and probably played by a mime, burlesques the nightingale and her costume in our present scene. The audience routinely perceives, then, that all the birds shown in the play are portrayed by men and that, according to mythology, certain prominent birds, here played by men, originally had a human history as well.

identifying beak, in position and ready to play (as she will at line 676); and for this reason Euelpides, advancing lustily, is forcibly restrained from kissing her (above, note 8).¹⁴

One apparent objection to this interpretation comes with the singular of *aulos* in line 683 to designate the nightingale's song (καλλιβόαν κρέκουσ' / αὐλόν);¹⁵ but the objection in this highly metaphorical phrase is merely apparent and not real. "Ainsi constitué, le tuyau d'aulos se jouait rarement seul (*monaule*). Presque toujours, on le jouait par paires accolées (δίδυμοι αὐλοί, *auloi* doubles), au point que le simple nom d'aulos désignait fréquemment la paire tout en restant au singulier; les deux anches étaient introduites simultanément dans la bouche et chaque main tenait un tuyau, les deux éléments tantôt étant accolés, tantôt formant un angle de 45 degrés environ."¹⁶ In fact, *μόναυλος* may have occurred early to differentiate that instrument from the generic meaning of *aulos*, and we may find *monaulos* in this sense as early as Sophocles.¹⁷ *Aulos* in line 683

¹⁴ Another possibility hidden in Aristophanes' language, if right, may also be used to support the present interpretation. After noting the slang connotations of *ἠδονίς* and *ἠδόνιον*, J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse* (New Haven and London 1975) 147 (cf. also 20) observes: "*ἠδών*, nightingale, in *Birds* seems to be an obscene pun on the bird-name of the hoopoe's wife (represented onstage by a flute-girl): at 207 Peisetaerus mischievously says εἰς τὴν λόχμην εἰσβαῖνε κἀνέγειρε τὴν ἠδόνα, 'Go into the thicket and rouse the bird' (see *λόχμη*, *βαίνειν*), and at 664 repeats the joke in slightly different form: ἐκβίβασον αὐτοῦ, πρὸς θεῶν, αὐτήν, ἵνα καὶ νῶ θεασώμεσθα τὴν ἠδόνα, 'Call her out here, by heaven, so we can see the bird!'" If Henderson is right, then Aristophanes straightforwardly directs us again to the staged nightingale's sexuality and to her essential humanity.

¹⁵ Lines 682–84 may be used otherwise as well, although, given the high degree of innovation in using *auloi* with the human voice in the late fifth century, we should be wary of any generalization based on a single instance. Nevertheless, A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens* (Oxford 1968²) 158 writes: "The use of the flute in the parabasis of comedy seems to be proved by Aristophanes' *Birds* 682–84 ἀλλ' ὦ καλλιβόαν κρέκουσ' / αὐλὸν φθέγμασιν ἡρινόϊς / ἄρχου τῶν ἀναπαίστων (schol. ad loc. *πολλάκις πρὸς αὐλὸν λέγουσι τὰς παραβάσεις*)."

¹⁶ J. Chailley (above, note 12) 63; and we may observe as well that the double-pipes enormously outnumber single-pipes on vase paintings. On the family of instruments classified under *aulos*, cf. Chailley 60–65 and S. Michaelides (above, note 12) 42–46; and see below, notes 17–18. I have taken care throughout to speak of pipes, pipers, and piping (though nothing could be done about the works of others whom I cite). K. Geiringer, *Instruments in the History of Western Music* (New York 1978³) 36, compares the *aulos* to the "shrill and strident shawm" (a primitive oboe) and suggests (81) that the habit of mistranslating *aulos* as flute perhaps originated with the popularity of the double-recorder in the Renaissance when musicians thought that instrument replicated the Greek *aulos* and Roman *tibia*. If this point needs driving home, the reader is recommended to the anecdote reported by C. Sachs, *The History of Musical Instruments* (New York 1940) 138. K. Schlesinger's encyclopaedic study of the *aulos* (above, note 10) is useful and informative but beyond my competence to judge in its entirety.

¹⁷ Frag. 221 (Nauck), cited from his Thamyra at Ath. 4.175E amid a discussion about the history and variety of *monauloi*. Scholars cannot agree whether *monaulos* should

should be taken, then, simply as the ordinary term reflecting how the double-pipes are made to sound.¹⁸

A secondary argument may also be brought to bear on our main point. At lines 451–52 the chorus of birds adequately describes the human condition: *δολερὸν μὲν αἰεὶ κατὰ πάντα δὴ τρόπον / πέφυκεν ἄνθρωπος*. That things are not always what they seem is an old literary theme and nowhere more prominent than in this play. Some incidents from the opening scene will make this clear. To all appearances Pisthetaerus and Euelpides are men, but they deny their humanity and claim birdhood (lines 64–68). Pisthetaerus humorously recognizes his companion as a “beastlet” (*δειλότατον . . . θηρίων*, line 87)—the same word used of the hoopoe (line 93) and his serving bird (line 69). Euelpides’ admiration for Pisthetaerus’ manliness (*ἀνδρείος*, line 91) emphasizes the artifice. For these rascals there is no being a bird but saying makes it so.

properly designate only a specifically *tibia*-like instrument (cf. Howard [above, note 12] 12–13); but this fragment perhaps suggests not. The tone from the pipes *may* be affected differently by playing them with or without *phorbeia*; cf. Soph. frag. 701 (Nauck) cited from an unnamed play by Cicero *ad Att.* 2.16.2 and in a slightly altered form by Longinus 3.2. W. How, *Cicero: Select Letters* 2 (Oxford 1926) 104, *ad loc.*, observes, “Skilled players of the long pipes usually wore a mouth band of leather to avoid any side loss of breath, and to enable them to get a softer, longer note”; and he bases his observation on an edition of a work not available to me, viz. W. Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* 1 (London 1891) 357b. (The edition of 1842 in our library is not so informative.) But Sachs (above, note 16) 139 warns that “we do not know whether such a difference of tone was caused by the size of the reed, the shape of the instrument or the mouth-band.” M. Pintacuda, *Interpretazioni musicali sul teatro de Aristofane* (Palermo 1982) is silent about this and all aspects of our present problem.

¹⁸ The functional analogy is to the bellows (*αἰλός* is cognate with *ἄημι*); the head’s bellows-like action may be enhanced by the help of the *phorbeia* (cf. Sachs [above, note 16] 138); and we recall the Greek for a smith’s bellows, *αἰλός ἐκ χαλκείου*. In another work, *A Short History of World Music* (revised and retitled edition, London 1956; reprint 1969) 36, Sachs clarifies the analogy to a bellows: “As far as we can see, one tube [of the double-pipes] played the melody, and the other, a sustained pedal note; that is, they acted as the chanter and the drone of what amounted to a Scotch bagpipe. The comparison is completed by the tight-fitting bandage around the cheeks of the piper, which shows that the Greeks, like oriental pipers, used the inflated mouth as a windbag to feed the two pipes independently of respiration and to hold the tone indefinitely.” J. Yudkin has expressed, *per litteras*, his own sense of this experience: “In eastern Europe, players of what I call the ‘shawm’ (a short double-reed instrument of plangent quality suitable for outdoor playing) puff their cheeks out like chipmunks, and practice a wonderful technique of ‘circular breathing,’ i.e. using the cheeks exactly as a bellows or perhaps more like the bag on a small bagpipe, to enable continuous performance. The small amount of air held as reservoir in the cheeks is pushed through the instrument by muscular pressure, *while* a quick breath is taken to replenish the supply. I don’t believe it has occurred to anyone, that if the *φορβεία* was rather elastic it might have been designed to facilitate this technique (though clearly the practical *desiderata* mentioned by A. A. Howard are certainly correct—I’ve tried playing one!).” For Howard’s views, see above, note 12.

For “real” birds the case is different: the beak makes the bird. The guide birds, purchased at the bird stalls in the Athenian agora, infuriate our heroes with their active beaks (lines 19, 25–26). Later the attack of the chorus will reenact this danger with greater terror (lines 344ff.). At the entrance of the hoopoe’s servant *trochilos*, his gaping maw startles the adventurers (line 61). Subsequently the hoopoe, otherwise unrecognizable in his moulting condition, could be picked out by his grotesque beak—as ugly, Aristophanes says, as the one Sophocles had stuck him with in the then familiar *Tereus* (lines 98–101). These are just a few examples occurring early in the play.

Throughout the *Birds* Aristophanes plays with the audience’s perception of dramatic reality. Either beaks or illusion may make birds of human beings. For there is no question of the birdness of the once human hoopoe, and both Pisthetaerus and Euelpides are about to be enrolled among the birds (they may or may not have birds’ masks after the parabasis). In the description of the nightingale-piper Aristophanes exploited physical features of ancient theater production for thematic purposes. Not a mask but the quality of a song from her pipes emphasizes the piper’s (or piper-mime’s) nightingale aspect; her costume is that of a well-dressed *αὐλητρίς*, no bird at all. Procne’s stage personality is then consistent throughout the play, and this consistency eliminates extra-textual conjectures about the piper’s mask and potential obstacles to her musical performance. The difficulty of metamorphosis is at the heart of our heroes’ dilemma. When is a human being, the opening scene asks, not a human being? The physical appearance of the nightingale-piper bemusedly challenges the audience, When is a bird not a bird?