

## THE POLITICS OF ARISTOPHANES' *WASPS*

DAVID KONSTAN

Wesleyan University

My purpose in this paper is to show how Aristophanes' *Wasps* is political. I shall argue that the complex of traits by which the major characters and the chorus are constructed, and which enables the movement of the plot, expresses a specific political conception of the role of the courts in Athens. I shall not seek to determine, in the first instance, whether chance jokes or remarks may betray the author's own voice or opinions. Rather, I propose to show that a political or ideological perspective on the court system is implicit in the basic narrative and dramatic strategies—what may be called the deep structure—of the *Wasps*.

It has frequently been observed that the *Wasps* falls into two parts. The initial action is built in a straightforward way upon the formula of containment: all else having failed, Bdelycleon has locked his father in the house and placed slaves to guard him, while Philocleon makes various attempts to escape.<sup>1</sup> The situation lends itself to farce, which Aristophanes varies with choral song and the formal debate of the *agôn*. The containment pattern is a vehicle for the characterization of Philocleon and his son. Philocleon's passion for the courts—to begin with him—is represented as something quite different from the motivation of any other comic protagonist in Aristophanes. Philocleon is introduced to the audience as suffering from a strange disease (*noson allokoton nosei*, 71), a description that is fixed by repetition; toward the end of the play (though in another context) he is called downright mad (*manias archê*, 1486).<sup>2</sup> The idea of sickness or insanity is reinforced by the suggestion at the very beginning of the play that the being within the house is some kind of dangerous beast or monster (*knôdalon*, 4). As for the nature of Philocleon's desire,

<sup>1</sup> Citations of the *Wasps* are according to the text of Douglas M. MacDowell, ed., *Aristophanes Wasps* (Oxford 1971), unless otherwise indicated. On this kind of jack-in-the-box farce, see MacDowell ad vv. 139–229, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to the passages noted in the text, cf., on disease: 77, 80, 87, 114, 651; on madness: 744. See also K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (Berkeley 1972) 127; Lutz Lenz, "Komik und Kritik in Aristophanes' 'Wespen'," *Hermes* 108 (1980) 39–40.

it is described as a form of *erôs*, the strongest term in Greek for an obstinate and unruly passion (89, 753), and the term *philêliastês* is coined to name it (88). It is clear what Aristophanes is depicting here: an obsession.

Among the surviving plays of Aristophanes, then, the *Wasps* presents us with a unique instance of a type to which we can anachronistically apply the Renaissance label of a humor.<sup>3</sup> It may be worth reflecting that the humor had a special function in a kind of comedy that was self-consciously satirical, for it is by its satirical spirit, I believe, that the *Wasps*, and two other Aristophanic comedies written about the same time as the *Wasps* (*Knights*, 424; *Clouds*, 423), are set off from what we may call the utopian comedies.<sup>4</sup> It is the narrow single-mindedness of a passion that marks the humor. A desire for peace and plenty, or for the restoration of civic and poetic decorum, as in the *Frogs*, however intense, will not yield a humor unless it is represented as a pure obsession, detached, in the last analysis, from the acknowledged public value of its goal. Aristophanes ordinarily chose not to make such motives the subject of his comedy. That he did so in respect to a passion for the law courts is an indication of his intentions.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> In English Renaissance comedy, the figure of the humor is examined exhaustively in Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* (1598), and *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599); "comedies of humours" are those "in which each character is a type dominated by a ruling passion or obsession," Michael Jamieson, "Introduction," *Ben Jonson: Three Comedies* (Harmondsworth 1966) 10. Jonson labelled his early plays, in which the type of the humor was paramount, "comical satires."

<sup>4</sup> Broadly speaking, I classify as utopian comedies the *Acharnians*, *Peace*, *Birds*, *Lysistrata*, *Ecclesiazusae*, and *Frogs*. For the idea, see Jean Claude Carrière, *Le Carnaval et la politique: une introduction à la comédie grecque*, *Annales littéraires de l'université de Besançon* 212 (Paris 1979) 85–110; Paul Händel, *Formen und Darstellungsweisen in der aristophanischen Komödie* (Heidelberg 1963) 226–27; Karl Reinhardt, "Aristophanes und Athen," *Europäische Revue* 14 (1938) 754–67 = *Tradition und Geist: Gesammelte Essays zur Dichtung* (Göttingen 1960) 257–73, esp. 263–65; F. Richter, *Die Frösche und der Typ der aristophanischen Komödie* (Diss. Frankfurt 1933).

<sup>5</sup> In different ways, Ernst-Richard Schwinge, "Kritik und Komik: Gedanken zu Aristophanes' Wespen," in *Dialogos: Für Harald Patzer zum 65. Geburtstag*, edd. Justus Cobet, Rüdiger Leimbach, and Ada B. Neschke-Hentschke (Wiesbaden 1975) 35–47, and Klaus-Dietrich Koch, *Kritische Idee und Komisches Thema: Untersuchungen zur Dramaturgie und zum Ethos der Aristophanischen Komödie* (Bremen 1965) 74–79 = *Jahrbuch der Wittheit zu Bremen* 9 (1965) 118–23, have raised the question of the relationship between the critical or satirical thrust of Aristophanic drama, and the autonomous comic elements in the plays. Schwinge, with special reference to the *Wasps*, locates the division between the two moods or moments in the structure of the play, which proceeds, by way of a paratragic conversion on the part of Philocleon, from a political critique of the jury system to the exemplification of a bomolochus type, now reduced to an isolated and purely private figure. The crucial shift occurs in the *agôn*; after that, Bdelycleon can indulge his father's passion, now reduced to a "Privattick," with the mock-trial in his own home (see esp. pp. 41–42).

With Philocleon cast as a humor or obsessional character, the antagonistic role of the son who confines him to his house is correspondingly enhanced. In Aristophanic comedy, there is commonly a generalized resistance to the hero's ambition for peace or prosperity, but it is usually diffused over several characters, some of whom yield to persuasion, while others are laughed off after a brief appearance: generals, informers, sycophants, and the like. In the utopian comedies, there is no single opponent matched with the protagonist, and even the *Knights* and the *Clouds* lack the well-defined pair of antagonists that we have in the persons of Philocleon and Bdelycleon in the *Wasps*. The names themselves, rather like the father and son pair Demipho and Antipho in Terence's *Phormio*, couple the two as complementary agents.

While the function of the antagonist may vary, he will often, as in New Comedy, represent traditional values, or at least have the weight of social convention on his side. This is particularly true where the obstacle resides in a paternal figure who opposes an illegitimate or ill-considered union for his son.<sup>6</sup> It has been observed that Aristophanes, in the *Wasps*, reverses this formula: "The ethic which questioned the authority of custom-law and affirmed the necessity of fulfilling nature was ordinarily associated with the younger generation, while the old education aimed at instilling the values and behavior of tradition."<sup>7</sup> Aristophanes facilitates and embellishes this reversal through intimations of the old man's senility, in part evident in the comic inconsequentiality of his quips, or his silly posture underneath a donkey as he imitates Odysseus escaping from the Cyclops' cave.<sup>8</sup>

The reversal of roles, by which a sober son restrains an impulsive father, is further sanctioned by the legal circumstance that Philocleon has surrendered control of his household to his son (cf. 612–13), who is thus the master of the household slaves (67, 142), while Philocleon is their old or former master (442). Toward the end of the play, when he is drunk and feeling rejuvenated, Philocleon talks to the slave-girl he

<sup>6</sup> See David Korstan, *Roman Comedy* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1983) 117–18, 122.

<sup>7</sup> Cedric H. Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero*, Martin Classical Lectures 19 (Cambridge, Mass. 1964) 145.

<sup>8</sup> Whitman (above, note 7) 163 notes that Philocleon is "imagistically identified" with various animals, which, he says, "tend to be of the small, canny, and busy kind, except the dog, and they serve to characterize Philocleon from the point of view of *ponêria* and persistence." I would add that there is also an implicit suggestion of infantilism in the comparisons. There is perhaps, too, in the choice of wasps as the symbol of the dicasts, a suggestion of their social or political interest and solidarity; thus Plato, *Phaedo* 82A10–B8, remarks that those who have cultivated public and civic virtue (*tên dêmotikên kai politikên aretên*) in this life, albeit without philosophical understanding, return in the form of bees or wasps or ants, which Plato calls "political and domesticated" species (*politikon kai hêmêron genos*), or else as human beings.

has kidnapped "rather as a lovesick youth with a stern father talks in much later comedies."<sup>9</sup>

If you'll be nice to me now, as soon as my son's dead I'll redeem you from your owner, piglet, and have you as a concubine. As it is, I don't have control over my own money; I'm young, you see, and hedged in pretty strictly. It's my son who keeps an eye on me, and he's a hard man and a real skinflint into the bargain. That's why he's so afraid I'll go [to] the bad; I'm the only father he's got.

Philocleon takes his dependent legal status as license to behave childishly. Conventionally, it is adults who have a responsible position in the community, and are thus expected and inclined to represent and defend its norms. Young men, who follow desire in despite of law, are not yet full members of society, and are, accordingly, less inhibited by its rules. In New Comedy, where such youths flourish, it is presupposed that they some day will be. This temporal vector, by which the young must mature and assume their proper station in the community, conditions the nature of the tension between fathers and sons, and renders possible the anticipated resolution of the comic tension, which is expressed as a reconciliation between generations. Sons are, in the final analysis, heirs, who will, at the right time, come into their patrimony, a patrimony that includes and rests upon the rights and duties of the socialized adult.

Philocleon, in contrast to this new comic pattern, has no public status to grow into save that of retired gentleman of leisure, without responsibility in the political community. This is, I imagine, among the reasons why the play ends in an antinomian moment rather than in a resolution that affirms the social order. It also puts into question any interpretation of the play, such as Whitman's, that makes its theme education, for education should mean preparation for responsibility.<sup>10</sup> When the young discipline the old, it is not a matter of moral progress but a change of social order. We may observe that the instances in New Comedy of an errant *senex*, as in Plautus' *Asinaria*, *Casina*, or *Mercator*, are not really analogous to the *Wasps*, for there the amorous elder is restored to his proper station, and in each case, significantly, there is a wife to act *in loco parentis*.

As a juror, however, Philocleon retains an important measure of social authority, and, from one point of view, his son's efforts to dissoci-

<sup>9</sup> Dover (above, note 2) 122; the translation of verses 1351–59 that follows is Dover's. W. J. M. Starkie, *The Wasps of Aristophanes* (London 1897), quotes the scholiast ad 1355: *dis paides hoi gerontes*.

<sup>10</sup> Whitman (above, note 7) 144 followed by Vaio (below, note 23) 335 and Lenz (above, note 2) 32–43, who develops the theme most fully.

ate him from the courts may be construed as an attempt to make Philocleon's retirement complete and consistent. However generous Bdelycleon's intention to support his father may be, it wholly abolishes the old man's independence, and Philocleon is clear that he does not want that.<sup>11</sup> Dramatically, there is an implicit logic at work, according to which Philocleon, having given up the power over his own household and surrendered to the dominion of his son, becomes like an adolescent, wilful and subject to an arbitrary passion, and this very characterization corroborates the sense that Philocleon is unfit to perform the responsible duties of a juror. This logic has its roots in the ideological premise that the city-state is an association of heads of household, those who are, in Greek terms, *kyrioi* over their *oikos*, and that, accordingly, old men who have relinquished authority in domestic affairs are no longer suited to preside over affairs of state. Much of what seems silly or corrupt in the pleasures that Philocleon derives at court involves a childish desire for flattery (548–630) that transparently betrays the pathetic self-importance of the weak and helpless. Bdelycleon will expose his father's pretensions as a servile dependency upon Cleon and other demagogues, but it is important to recognize that his plan for Philocleon offers him only a change of masters, at least until the comedy takes a new direction in the concluding episodes.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, Bdelycleon does not think to suggest that younger men, or legally responsible householders, should take over the role of dicasts.<sup>13</sup> As a number of critics have pointed out, Bdelycleon does not expose the faults or inadequacies of the court system in order to recommend remedies, some of which, given the arguments he employs, might well run counter to views that may be plausibly attributed to Aristophanes himself, as in the matter of pay for jurors.<sup>14</sup> Thus, who will replace the old jurors once Bdelycleon persuades them to retire is no concern of his. Within the play, which to some extent undoubtedly reflects the social reality, the courts are treated as an old man's forum. As such, however, they are also represented as an institution of the relatively powerless, a powerlessness that is symbolized by a waning vigor of body and mind, but which also corresponds to an outmoded way of life characteristic, so Aristophanes suggests, of a generation whose time has passed.

<sup>11</sup> Bdelycleon's intentions: 736–40, 1004–6, cf. 478–79, 506, 720–24; Philocleon's refusal: 341, cf. 612–18.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. 784–85, where Philocleon consents to receiving his wages (*misthon*) from his son. On the Athenian attitude toward wages, see G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1981) 182–91; on surrender of *kyriotès*, see MacDowell ad 613.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Dover (above, note 2) 128.

<sup>14</sup> See Lenz (above, note 2) 25 for further discussion.

This opposition of generations, in a sense that is social rather than personal or archetypal, is presented through contrasting traits of character. While it is only in the case of Philocleon that his commitment to the courts is represented as an addiction or full-blown obsession (we shall consider the reasons for this presently), he shares the juror's temperament with the old men who make up the chorus of the *Wasps*. Their old-fashioned cast of mind is indicated by a preference for Phrynichus, and for traditional art forms in general, as well as by their disposition to reminisce about campaigns in the Persian war—Aristophanes' benchmark for the good old days—and other early campaigns.<sup>15</sup> But the testy combativeness of Philocleon and the chorus, their proud anger which is so intimidating to those who must plead their case before them, and a rough-and-ready ethic that can condone prankish thefts and candidly selfish behavior with no seeming awareness of the threat it might pose to civic solidarity, are also signs of the ancient code or style. A proper understanding of these traits will put the character of the jurors in a new perspective and dispel certain misapprehensions concerning Philocleon's nature as well.

Certainly the most noticeable feature in the temperament of the dicasts is their sharp temper. The term *orgê*, which like the English word "temper" was more or less obsolete in the sense of temperament and normally connoted anger, is applied to them a dozen times or so, along with various synonymous expressions like *cholê* ("bile"), *menos*, and *thymos*.<sup>16</sup> Words or prefixes denoting acerbity, toughness, or plain irascibility testify to their harsh spirit, as do images of knitted brows, looking daggers (literally "mustard," *kardama*), eating one's heart out, barking outcries, and nettles.<sup>17</sup> I may appear to be belaboring the obvious: among

<sup>15</sup> Phrynichus (the tragedian): 219–20, 269–72, 1490, 1524 (on 1490, see E. K. Borthwick, "The Dances of Philocleon and the Sons of Carcinus in Aristophanes' *Wasps*," *CQ* n.s. 18 [1968] 44–45); traditional art forms: 318–19, 1479–81. Campaigns: cf. 236, where the action at Byzantium presumably evokes the Great War, especially in light of Xanthias' image of a Persian attack in 11–12; cf. also 355, the subjugation of Naxos, which occurred somewhere around 470 B.C.; 439, where Philocleon laments his defeat at the hands of barbarians (his slaves are the immediate reference, but I suspect there is an implicit historical allusion as well); the reference to Athens' role in repelling the barbarians at 1077–1101; note also the pun on the great king at 1124, Philocleon's suspicion of Persian attire in 1136–38, and Bdelycleon's reference to Marathon in 711.

<sup>16</sup> *Orgê* (including forms of the verb, *orgizô*): 223, 243, 404, 424, 425, 431, 560, 574, 646, 727, 883, 1083; *cholê*: 403; *menos*: 424; *thymos*: 567, 648.

<sup>17</sup> *Oxys*: 226 and 407, of the wasps' sting; compounded with *thymos*: 406, 455, 501; with *kardia*, 430; cf. also 471, 1082, 1105, 1367; *drimys*: 146, 277. Toughness: *prinôdês*, 383, cf. 877; *dyskolia*: 882, 942, 1105; cf. 1356. Knitted brows: 655; *blepontôn kardama*, 455; consuming oneself: 283–87, etc.; barking cries: 198, 226, 415, 1311, cf. 596 of Cleon; nettles: 884. In general, see the chapter on "La colère," in Jean Taillardat, *Les Images d'Aristophane: Études de langue et de style* (Paris 1962) esp. pp. 194–220; as Taillardat notes (p. 211, note 1), the *Wasps* furnishes a particularly large number of illustrations in this category.

the faults that Aristophanes castigates in the jurors is an uncompromising severity that takes delight in the sufferings of defendants and cares nothing for the justice of their cause. But this waspish disposition to anger is not an abstract moral flaw, nor may it be reduced entirely to an old man's crotchiness. For there is also an admirable aspect to *orgê*, a high-spirited capacity for indignation that has something of a hero's pride about it and compared with which an accommodating good nature could be a feeble and contemptible thing. Thus Aristophanes boasts of having an anger like that of Hercules that has enabled him from the beginning of his career to stand up against serious opponents like Cleon rather than prostituting his muse in petty jibes; MacDowell rightly glosses *orgê* here as spirit or courage.<sup>18</sup> Aristophanes made the same claim in the same words a year later in the parabasis of the *Peace*, where again the proper significance of *orgê* is, as Platnauer comments, "not 'anger,' but 'spirit,' 'courage'."<sup>19</sup> This is the kind of anger and sharpness with which the old dicasts, chewing their lips and stinging away, fought the Persians from their land (1082–90), and it is this same sharp and irritable spirit which, as they vaunt, they carry into the courtroom (1104–5). It is as though, in the parabasis, Aristophanes were doing a reprise of the vocabulary relating to wrath, in order to reveal its intimate connection with the virtues of the age of Marathon. The complement of this proud rage is fearlessness, as the old men say (1091). Slaves and demagogues are afraid in the *Wasps* (427, 715); Philocleon's crowning argument in defense of the juror's life is that everyone, even his own son, fears him, but he himself would die did he fear his son (628–30).<sup>20</sup>

Recognizing that the jurors' anger is part of a style of behavior that summons up an old-fashioned, rugged spontaneity and individualism may also help us to understand the very prominent role that theft plays in the *Wasps*. References to stealing occur nearly twenty times in the course of the play.<sup>21</sup> Dover includes theft in a kind of formal indictment of the character of Philocleon, and he confesses himself "astonished at the hidden strength of antinomian sentiment" which his sympathy and affection for the old reprobate imply.<sup>22</sup> Dover tentatively suggests that the sickness or insanity of Philocleon's desire for jury-service may be

<sup>18</sup> *Hêrakleous orgên*, 1030; MacDowell ad ioc.

<sup>19</sup> *Peace*, v. 752; M. Platnauer, *Aristophanes Peace* (Oxford 1964) ad loc. Cf. also *Lysistrata* 550 and 1113 (*orgôntas*), with Rogers' comment on the latter verse: "the word conveys no idea of anger," Benjamin Bickley Rogers, *The Lysistrata of Aristophanes* (London 1911).

<sup>20</sup> The ambivalent nature of the wasps' aggressiveness is brought out clearly and cogently by Lenz (above, note 2) 42–43.

<sup>21</sup> Verses 57, 238, 354, 357, 363, 449, 554, 556, 759, 928, 933, 953, 958, 1101, 1200–1201, 1227, 1345, 1369, 1447.

<sup>22</sup> Dover (above, note 2) 126–27.

Aristophanes' signal that his offenses are in quite another category from the bravado of other comic heroes such as Dicaeopolis or Trygaeus in the *Acharnians* and the *Peace*.<sup>23</sup>

Philocleon indeed reminisces wistfully about the days when he could make away with some small spits, while now, as he adds, he is watched like a ferret that has stolen the meat (356–64). But the recollection is inspired by the chorus, who themselves think back fondly upon their youth when they stole a mixing bowl (236–38). Philocleon reminds his slave of his kindness when he caught him stealing grapes (448–50: the joke there is that he gave him a *good* beating), and claims that his bravest exploit was the theft of some vine-poles (1200–1201). He caps off these achievements by carrying off the flute girl from the drinking party to which his son had invited him (1345, 1369). But such escapades are clearly regarded, at least by the older generation, as proper to young men—in the scene with the flute girl, Philocleon thinks of himself as again youthful, as we have seen. Bdelycleon, by comparison, seems prematurely straitlaced. Their indulgent attitude toward petty expropriations, which they look upon as signs of a mettlesome temper, does not prevent either Philocleon or the chorus from feeling outrage at the kind of theft that results in large scale social inequities, once they become aware of it. Thus, after Philocleon is persuaded by his son that Cleon has systematically defrauded the dicasts, he would like the chance to condemn the man (758–59). The chorus is similarly resentful at the thought that young and unscrupulous men have cheated them out of the fruits of the empire acquired by their labors (1098–1101), and they are quite prepared to attack Laches for illegal accumulation of wealth (240–44). And yet, at the same time, Philocleon, by his own admission, is receptive to an appeal for sympathy by an embezzler of state funds on the grounds that he himself must at some time or other have shaved a bit off from provisions for his unit when he was in charge of mess funds (553–57). Here, perhaps, is the nub of the issue: not that Philocleon or the old jurors are scoundrels, but that their frank acceptance of the impulse to take what one can get is no longer an adequate ethic in a society where a developed state machinery and the financial resources of an empire are a basis of real class power for those who can control them.<sup>24</sup> Within

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 127. On the motif of theft, see also John Vaio, "Aristophanes' Wasps: The Relevance of the Final Scenes," *GRBS* 12 (1971) 343. As a caution against too high-minded a condemnation of stealing in comedy, we may note that theft, particularly of food, seems to have been a feature of certain cultic practices, and that there may have been certain gestures and dances in Old Comedy that represented such theft; see Lillian B. Lawler, *The Dance of the Ancient Greek Theater* (Iowa City 1974) 79–80.

<sup>24</sup> It is true that Bdelycleon, in exasperation, calls his father *ponêros* (192–93, 214; cf. 243) and even *miarôtatos* (397); also, the old man comically confesses to an urge for mischief (*kakon*, 322, 340; cf. 168).



the ideology projected by the play, the old men represent a way of life that receives a certain nostalgic respect but is fundamentally unsuited to the position of political power which their role as dicasts confers upon them, under social conditions that they cannot clearly comprehend or control. Having grown up at a time when there was no thought for rhetoric or sycophancy (1094–97), they are now easy prey for demagogues.

I am inclined also to read Philocleon's statement that as a young man he could, when on campaign, run away with impunity (357–59), not as a mark of cowardice, as Dover charges, but rather as an indication that a disposition to go where one pleased was not incompatible with the interests of the group in former times, when no one was posted to guard discipline. I am not for a moment suggesting, to be sure, that so sublime a harmony between private desires and communal needs actually obtained at the time of the Persian invasion, only that the image of such a harmony was available and effective in setting off perceived tensions in Aristophanes' own society. Within the world of the play, at any rate, there is no hint that Philocleon's military deportment is anything like Cleonymus', who is accused of abandoning his shield in battle (15–27, 822–23).<sup>25</sup>

There is a way, then, in which Philocleon and the jurors stand not for antinomianism or some abstract state of nature but for an anterior social order, however idealized and even falsified it may have come to be. The reversal of narrative paradigm by which a young man disciplines an old does not wholly invert the values that conventionally attach to *senes* and *adulescentes*, whereby the elder generation is the guardian of tradition while the younger is moved to passionate transgressions. Aristophanes' pattern is a complex one, in which Philocleon, however infantile, also represents an ethic and a tradition which are nevertheless contained or reduced by the action of the play.

If jurors in the *Wasps* are seen as aged and old-fashioned, they also, with the kind of overdetermination that is characteristic of all ideologically charged literature, represent the social class of poor free citizens.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Compare also the uninhibited attitude of the old men toward sex and pleasure in general, as indicated by the uses of the words *hêdonê* or *hêdomai*, e.g. 272, 510–12, 605, 641, 1534, 1667; cf. 1006. Elizabeth Carter has suggested to me that this aspect of the character of Philocleon may be compared with the trickster type represented by Odysseus, as opposed to the tragic model of Achillean heroism.

<sup>26</sup> For the theoretical presuppositions that are guiding my conception of the complex determination of the character of the chorus, Philocleon, and other figures in the *Wasps*, see Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, transl. Geoffrey Wall (London 1978): "What begs to be explained in the work is not that false simplicity which derives from the apparent unity of its meaning, but the presence of a relation, or an opposition, between elements of the exposition or levels of the composition, those disparities which point to a conflict of meaning. . . . The book is not the extension of a meaning; it is gener-

The dialogue during the parodos between the chorus and their young sons who lead them in makes their station abundantly evident: they worry about wasting lamp oil (251–53), consider dried figs an extravagance, consume their meager juror's pay on barley and firewood, and are at a loss how to provide dinner should the court not sit that day.<sup>27</sup> Mention of weather leads, as though by reflex, to thoughts of crops (264–65), which suggests that they are farmers. But in the main they think of themselves simply as the poor (*tois penesin*, 463; cf. 703), and Bdelycleon can even compare them to olive pickers, that is to say, day laborers or hired hands, the most despised form of labor, for their dependency upon wages (712). Consistent with their poverty, they see the rich as their natural antagonists, instantly suspecting Bdelycleon of collusion with the class of wealthy citizens subject to liturgies for the rigging of ships when they learn why he is confining his father (342–43).<sup>28</sup> In a similar vein, Philocleon sees among the great merits of jury duty the opportunity of contemning the rich, and his change of gear at the end of the play, when he has given up serving in the courts, marks him as having joined the wealthy set.<sup>29</sup> The chorus's repeated charge that Bdelycleon is aspiring to tyranny in attacking the jurors is a political expression of their sense of social identity cast in the contemporary formula of class conflict.<sup>30</sup> Bdelycleon effectively ridicules the accusation by observing that every vegetable dealer screams tyranny if one shops next door (488–507), but the point, though witty, reveals only that the chorus is mistaken about Bdelycleon's personal motives, which, he says, are to provide for his father's comfort (503–6). Aristophanes thereby genially finesses the fact that the dicasts, as poor people, see the courts as a bulwark of their democracy. This rousing of the chorus's political apprehensions, only to dissolve them through a comic turn of argument, is an artful evasion of the social issue.

---

ated from the incompatibility of several meanings, the strongest bond by which it is attached to reality, in a tense and ever-renewed confrontation" (79–80).

<sup>27</sup> Verses 293–316; cf. 1112–13, where their proud demeanor does not conceal the fact that they make their living in the courts.

<sup>28</sup> For the reading *νεών*, see MacDowell ad 343; Bentley's conjecture *νέων*, proposed independently by Fridericus Henricus Bothe, ed., *Aristophanis Comoediae*, vol. 2 (Leipzig 1845<sup>2</sup>) ad 355–56, remains attractive.

<sup>29</sup> Contemning the rich: 575–76, cf. 626; change of gear: 1168, 1171, 1309. Ad 1309, cf. Iulius Richter, ed., *Aristophanis Vespae* (Berlin 1858), and Vaio (above, note 23) 340.

<sup>30</sup> 417, 464–70, 474, 487; cf. 342–45, 411–14. MacDowell, whose commentary on this as on other points characteristically depoliticizes Aristophanes' argument, remarks ad 345 on "the tendency in Athens during the Peloponnesian War to accuse a political opponent of 'conspiracy' or 'tyranny' with little or no justification," and cites a selection of passages; but the charges of tyranny and conspiracy were characteristically levelled by representatives of the *dēmos* against oligarchical groups; see Robert Alexander Neil, ed., *The Knights of Aristophanes* (Cambridge 1901) ad 235–36, Richter ad 417.

Bdelycleon's filial interest, by which the chorus's suspicions are deflated, points to a fundamental inconsistency in the characterization of the jurors, a kind of fissure in the text that is a mark of its ideological burden.<sup>31</sup> For all Philocleon's exemplary status as spokesman for the jurors' way of life and most acrid soul among them (277), he alone is not dependent upon the courts for his living. For him, jury service is merely a personal passion. His fanatical devotion to the juror's life may be represented as an obsession or humor precisely because another and, by universal consent, more comfortable life is open to him.<sup>32</sup> Philocleon's bond with the chorus is primarily sentimental, based on their common age and shared experiences of an earlier and idealized moment in Athenian history.<sup>33</sup> Practically, however, he is the retired head of a relatively opulent household and has access, through his son's connections, at least, to circles of considerable influence in the state. The dicast's life is at odds with Philocleon's social class.

By a sleight of hand that is proper to comedy, Philocleon's conversion from the rigors of the courts to the easy life that his son promises carries the chorus with it, even though for them there is no possibility of a comparable change in circumstances. They regard the *agôn* between Philocleon and Bdelycleon as a debate on ultimate social issues, upon the outcome of which their own fate will depend.<sup>34</sup> The debate itself is cleverly cast as an argument about power: Bdelycleon sets the terms, and Philocleon rises to the challenge (515–19). Philocleon makes his case essentially on the deference shown to jurors by men of all classes, but above all by the rich and powerful (553–58, 575, 592–602); as an afterthought he adds the domestic independence that he derives from his juror's pay (605–18). Philocleon's argument rests on his identification with the common people.<sup>35</sup> Bdelycleon's answer is that the jurors' authority, which they regard as royal (546, 549; cf. 587) and even god-like (571, 619), is illusory, because the pay that they receive represents only a small fraction of the state's revenues (656–718). To the extent

<sup>31</sup> Concerning the relationship between fissures, cuts, or inconsistencies in a text and ideology, the clearest exposition I know is that of James H. Kavanagh, "'Marks of Weakness': Ideology, Science, and Textual Criticism," *Praxis* 5 (1981) 23–38. I must emphasize that such fissures are not to be taken as faults or signs of bad craftsmanship; on the contrary, they are the places at which art reveals its operations.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. 1453–73; it may now be seen how the characterization of Philocleon as a humor is bound up with Aristophanes' strategy for resolving the narrative tension in the *Wasps*: it is the sign of Philocleon's isolation from the chorus of dicasts.

<sup>33</sup> Philocleon's tastes, for example his suspicion of wine and citharas (1253, 989; cf. 959), reflect simultaneously an old-fashioned ethic and a class hostility toward aristocratic symposia. The complex reference of such signifiers enables the cross-characterization of Philocleon.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. 535, *peri tôn hapaniôn*; also 518, 540–47.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. 593, *tou plêthous*; 594, *tôi dêmôi*.

that Philocleon's passion for the courts is a reflex of pure egotism, Bdelycleon's argument is telling, leaving aside the silly economics of his calculations.<sup>36</sup> As an address to class interests, moreover, Bdelycleon's rhetoric is effective in two ways: it undermines the confidence of the jurors in the men they have taken to be their leaders, and it suggests, by its display of mathematical computations—however dubious the reasoning may really be—that the strong and spontaneous emotions of the old men cannot protect them against the wiles of modern politicians. Throughout Philocleon's presentation, Bdelycleon had been taking notes with ostentatious deliberateness (529, 538, 559, 576), and his emphasis on careful calculation (656; cf. 745) exhibits the sort of mind needed to reckon with the demagogues.<sup>37</sup> Thus, persuaded of the futility of their judicial powers, the chorus wholeheartedly endorse Bdelycleon's offer to support his father, and go so far as to wish they had a relative who could offer such advice (731–32), not pausing to reflect that retirement from jury service will not solve the problem of their poverty. Later, when they observe the conveniences of Philocleon's private court at home, they pray Apollo to grant them all respite from wandering, and conclude that Bdelycleon is the best friend the common people have in his generation (869–73, 887–90). Indeed, after the *agôn* the class status of the chorus is quietly elided in favor of their identification as genuine Athenians of the old stripe (1060–1121).

Logically, as Lutz Lenz has observed, the chorus might have responded to Bdelycleon's argument by demanding an increase in the juror's daily fee; at all events, they might have contemplated using their legal role to control large-scale speculation.<sup>38</sup> It was surely not beyond Aristophanes to have staged the idea of all Athenians living in luxury off state income in one of his utopian comedies (compare, for example, the *Ecclesiazusae* or the *Wealth*), and Xenophon was to propose something of the sort in all seriousness in the middle of the following century (*Poroi*).<sup>39</sup> Given Aristophanes' generally critical attitude toward the courts, however, it is safe to say that he would not have looked to them for an instrument of utopian reform.<sup>40</sup> In the *Wasps*, the overdeter-

<sup>36</sup> On the sleight of hand in Bdelycleon's argument, see the sensible remarks of Dover (above, note 2), 129–30.

<sup>37</sup> Note also Philocleon's instinctive association of writing with doing harm, 960–61; Adolph Roemer, *Studien zu Aristophanes und den alten Erklärern Desselben*, Part 1 (Leipzig 1902) 104–5, asserts that there is a reference here to logographers.

<sup>38</sup> See Lenz (above, note 2) 25.

<sup>39</sup> On the *Wealth*, see David Konstan and Matthew Dillon, "The Ideology of Aristophanes' *Wealth*," *AJP* 102 (1981) 371–94; on the *Poroi*, M. M. Austin and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Economic and Social History of Ancient Greece*, transl. M. M. Austin (Berkeley 1977) 316–19.

<sup>40</sup> For passages in which Aristophanes in one way or another mocks the courts, see G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1972) 362, notes 8, 10.

mined status of the chorus—the conflation of class and generational characteristics—enables a semantic slide by which a problem of class tension is illusorily resolved by the prospect of comfortable retirement, even though this possibility can be realized by only one of the jurors, namely Philocleon. The *Wasps* thus raises the issue of class only to conjure it away by an image of individual withdrawal.

Under the post-Periclean Athenian democracy, however, such individual withdrawal itself had a political aspect. Donald Lateiner has recently pointed out that Aristophanes and Euripides “represent an important, if controversial, disinclination for politics that is clearly evident by the beginning of the Peloponnesian War.”<sup>41</sup> “Most rich men,” Lateiner notes, “rarely known as active democrats, find it useful to assert this quiet lack of involvement” (5). Lateiner quotes from a speech of Lysias (19.55): “For I have reached the age of thirty without ever having talked back to my father. No citizen has ever haled me into court. Although our house neighbors on the Agora, I have never even been seen near the law court or the Council’s hall before this suit fell on me” (7). The reasons for this superior modesty are again best given in Lateiner’s own words: “The democratization of Athens, the relaxation of traditional social and political constraints, the emergence of a new class of politicians—all movements dependent to some degree on the growth, success, and revenues of the Athenian empire—encouraged a retreat by the socially and economically advantaged class from the world of politics and political manoeuvring in the courts. . . . As the men of traditional status were deprived of their monopoly of political power, they came to devalue political participation.”<sup>42</sup> The lower classes, on the contrary, perceived the courts as a bulwark of popular rights, and not only because the very poor or decrepit might supplement their livelihood by the dicast’s fee of three obols a day. The chorus in the *Wasps* instinctively regard a critic of the jury system like Bdelycleon as an enemy of the people.<sup>43</sup> The chorus’s approbation of Philocleon’s withdrawal from the courts, which presents itself as the cure to his personal obsession, is on the social level an endorsement of a class alternative in political style.

Insofar as the chorus evokes a time of natural solidarity, when there was no need of courts, there is a specious identity of interests, or at least of point of view, between the old jurors and Bdelycleon, in his advocacy

<sup>41</sup> Donald Lateiner, “‘The Man Who Does Not Meddle in Politics’: A *Topos* in Lysias,” *CW* 76 (1982) 4.

<sup>42</sup> Lateiner (above, note 41) 11; see also W. R. Connor, *The New Politicians of Fifth-Century Athens* (Princeton 1971) 175–94, and Donald Lateiner, “An Analysis of Lysias’ Political Defense Speeches,” *RSA* 11 (1981) 151–52, 158.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. 473, *misodêmos*; 411, *misopolis*; contrast, after the chorus has been persuaded by Bdelycleon’s arguments, *ton dêmon philountos* 888–89, and *philopatris* 1465.

of withdrawal from judicial activities. That is to say, the genteel class could cloak its withdrawal from public life and encounters at law in an idealized memory of a time before the law, representing their class attitude as a gesture of pristine social harmony. Democratic litigiousness could be seen as the opposite both of early communality and of aristocratic aloofness, all the more easily to the extent that the upper classes succeeded in casting themselves as the bearers of traditional ways. The difference lies, of course, in the combative significance of the aristocratic denigration of the courts, and manifests itself in Bdelycleon's mastery of forensic rhetoric. Bdelycleon has no choice but to enter into a contest of persuasion in order to reveal the dangers inherent in persuasion itself; he must prove himself superior to Cleon and his sort at their own game. What distinguishes Bdelycleon from popular demagogues is the rationality that is assigned to his discourse by the terms of the play, which indeed announces itself as "a little argument that has judgment."<sup>44</sup>

In the parabasis, Aristophanes associates his own good judgment with his refusal to submit to pressure from any source (1027). The word for submit or obey is of course the middle form of the verb meaning to persuade; the chorus employs it twice of Philocleon, as they encourage him to yield to the arguments (*logoi*) of his son (729, 747). The idea that the chorus and even Philocleon can recognize the better argument should sanction their role as dicasts, save that Bdelycleon's reasoning is designed to subvert their commitment to the jury system. There is an ambivalence here concerning persuasion as a force for good and evil that is reminiscent of the *Clouds*, and which threatens ultimately to call into question the authority of reason itself.<sup>45</sup> While Aristophanes does not, to be sure, deconstruct his own discourse in so radical a fashion, there is perhaps a sign in the text of the failure of confidence in an authorizing logic or rationality in the fact that one of the words signifying persuasion, by which Philocleon the father acknowledges his submission to his son (*anapeithô*, 784), is employed also in the sense of "suborn" (101; cf. 278).<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *Logidion gnômên echon*, 64; see Kenneth Reckford, "Catharsis and Dream-Interpretation in Aristophanes' *Wasps*," *TAPA* 107 (1977) 291, 299, for discussion of this phrase.

<sup>45</sup> Note the almost magical effect on the chorus of Philocleon's argument, 636–41.

<sup>46</sup> The idea of deconstruction, and the irreducibility of ambiguous or contradictory terms, I take of course from the work of Jacques Derrida; a brief, accessible summary of his methods is Jonathan Culler, "Jacques Derrida," in John Sturrock, ed., *Structuralism and Since: From Lévi-Strauss to Derrida* (Oxford 1979). See also Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1982), esp. 180–225, for a more extended treatment. I should make it clear, however, that mine is a political appropriation of Derrida's approach, inasmuch as I hold the source of the tension around the concept of persuasion to lie in the class conflict over control of the means of persuasion, a struggle which, in its very nature, must resort to disguise.

When Bdelycleon perceives that his arguments in the *agôn*, which is itself a kind of trial, have convinced his father but still not freed him from his passion for jurying, he proposes to stage a trial at home, with a farcical mock-up of court paraphernalia. This introduces a brilliant bit of comic invention, in which a dog is accused of stealing a piece of Sicilian cheese. The scene has multiple functions within the play. It is a satirical enactment of the "prejudice and irresponsibility" of Athenian jurors, as Aristophanes saw them;<sup>47</sup> with transparent allegory, it caricatures a dispute between Cleon and Laches, a general close to the conservative leader Nicias, largely to the advantage of the latter; it serves a second and decisive defeat to Philocleon when he is tricked into voting for acquittal by a switch in ballot urns—an unpardonable violation of his principles that breaks his will.<sup>48</sup> We may observe also that it achieves Bdelycleon's original object of confining his father at home, a point emphasized by the contrast between the adverbs "here" (*enthade*, 765), that is, in the house, and "there" (*ekeise*, 765; *ekei*, 767, 770), in the actual court.<sup>49</sup> The entire conceit as such of a trial at home is thus thematically significant, for while it allows Philocleon a while longer to exercise his mania in a harmless way, and gives him a taste of the comforts his son can provide, it also dissociates Philocleon from the collective aspect of the jury system which is fundamental to its nature as an institution of the democracy, and, in effect, atomizes and domesticates the jurors.<sup>50</sup> The reduction of public life to the scope of the individual household realizes the kind of privatization affected by the class of which Bdelycleon is a symbol, a style available in an exemplary way to the well-to-do. The ideological equation of household and city-state, which in the utopian plays like the *Ecclesiazusae* could be exploited to express the essentially communal identity of the citizen body, is here deployed to dissolve the civic solidarity embodied in the judiciary institutions of the populace into the autarky felt and enjoyed by people of means, and part of the ideal to which all classes aspired. Philocleon even alludes to an oracle according to which everyone will have his own little court within his gate (799–804), a comment which, addressed as it

<sup>47</sup> MacDowell (above, note 1) 249 with apparent credence in the charge. It is interesting to observe, although there is no need to document, how frequently the charge of irresponsibility against Athenian jurors is accepted among commentators as valid. For a rare and salutary reminder of the anti-democratic bias of our sources, see A. H. M. Jones, "The Athenian Democracy and its Critics," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 9 (1953) 1–26 = *Athenian Democracy* (Oxford 1975) 41–72.

<sup>48</sup> Verses 999–1002, 1008; cf. 973–74. On the metaphorical density of the scene, see also Newiger (above, note 18) 130.

<sup>49</sup> The contrasting particles are noted by MacDowell ad 765.

<sup>50</sup> This point is brought out very well by Schwinge (above, note 5) 41–42; cf. also Whitman (above, note 7) 155: "Formerly, as a judge Philocleon had been part of society, not, as he thought, the main driving gear, but only a cog; still, a part."

seems to the audience (Bdelycleon has dashed inside the house and the chorus is not engaged in the action at this point) and not especially witty in itself, perhaps refers to or parodies some prophecy in circulation just then.<sup>51</sup> For Philocleon, the idea of the commonwealth has been reduced to the individual, that is, himself, alone (cf. *tôi koinôi g', emoi*, 917).

If it is correct to see a political or social meaning in Philocleon's addiction to jury service—Bdelycleon himself refers to it as a disease inveterate in the city (651)—and to read the household trial as a figure for the domestication of a popular democratic institution and the contraction of civic consciousness, at least among the upper classes, to the perimeter of the household walls, then the victory of Bdelycleon's social ideals is already implicit in the trial scene itself. We may accordingly construe the trick of the voting urns by which Bdelycleon determines the verdict as an emblem of his new power. He has his father at home, where he wants him; as actual master of the house, he is in control there; the court as such is powerless, and Bdelycleon is in a position to decide the acquittal of Laches. Philocleon's breakdown, and the final cure of his jury mania, are, from a social point of view, simply by way of acknowledging this new state of affairs. What is more, the conversion of class allegiance implied in Philocleon's and the chorus's withdrawal from the public and collective role of jurors signals the transition to the final scenes of the play, in which Bdelycleon introduces his father into a vulgar travesty of aristocratic social life.

In a paper on Aristophanes' *Wasps* subtitled "The Relevance of the Final Scenes," John Vaio sets out several motifs that link what he identifies as the first and second parts of the play, that is, the sections before and after the great parabasis, which he informally labels "the dicastic and symposiac parts of the play."<sup>52</sup> Vaio indicates how references to costume, manners, riddles and wine, music and dance generate a contrast over the play between the humble lives of jurors and the symposia to which "a larger part of the social life of the nobles was devoted."<sup>53</sup> In the opening scene, for example, Philocleon's passion for jurying is opposed to infatuations with gambling, feasting, hospitality, and drinking that are the characteristic vices of the gentleman class, and Vaio suggests that the initial dialogue between Bdelycleon's slaves, who pose riddles and are drowsy with drink, may be seen as "a servile symposium in which one of the participants apes the practices of his bet-

<sup>51</sup> MacDowell ad 799 thinks it is wholly invented by Aristophanes, in this following the scholia, which also suggest that Philocleon is here speaking to himself; so, for example, W. C. Green, *Aristophanes: The Wasps* (Cambridge 1868) ad loc.

<sup>52</sup> Vaio (above, note 23), 335, note 1, and 342.

<sup>53</sup> Vaio, p. 339, quoting Victor Ehrenberg, *The People of Aristophanes, A Sociology of Old Attic Comedy* (New York 1961?) 102.



ters.”<sup>54</sup> Thomas Banks has sharpened the contrast: “The lawcourt and the symposium, on the level of plot, clearly represent opposing ways of life,” he affirms, adding that “each is an institution, a social convention, and therefore a creature of *nomos*.”<sup>55</sup> Banks maintains that “both institutions provide a means for settling disputes”; both, he says, “have their established procedures,” though the courts are of course public structures, “with formally legislated rules,” while symposia are private and governed by etiquette; both, in short, “have a common basis,” which is social form.<sup>56</sup> Banks concludes that Philocleon is alienated from both, and stands as a symbol of nature or *physis* against all claims of *nomos* or convention (p. 84). But the distancing of Philocleon from the “communal and social essence” of the lawcourts is not a mere function of Philocleon’s irrepressible character, his role as “natural man,” in Jeffrey Henderson’s phrase.<sup>57</sup> Rather, it is predicated on the real social distinction between Philocleon and the jurors of the chorus, and is engineered by Bdelycleon in such a way as to command the assent of the chorus itself. Philocleon is pried loose from the courts, and if Aristophanes then turns to satirizing the entertainments of the nouveaux riches, this is in large measure a means of exposing the social inferiority of Cleon and his friends, who are named among the symposiasts (1219–21).<sup>58</sup> Wealth and influence alone do not confer the status of gentleman.<sup>59</sup>

The caricature of the drinking party does score some hits against aristocratic abuses, such as an ostentatious affectation of foreign styles, including that of the Spartans (1136–66), and an inclination to treat lower class citizens in a violent or contemptuous manner. The charge of *hybris*, “assault,” is levelled four times at the inebriated Philocleon (1303, 1319, 1418, 1441). In part, this spoof on upper class arrogance

<sup>54</sup> Vaio, p. 338. On the meaning of *chrêstôn*, 80, as “well-born,” see Vaio, p. 339 and note 23, who convincingly refutes MacDowell’s suggestion that the term is socially neutral. After verse 76, there appears to be a lacuna, in which another vice beginning with *philo-* was mentioned. For a recent conjecture, see David Sider, “Aristophanes *Wasps* 74–77: The Missing Vice,” *CP* 70 (1975) 125–26 (*philarchos*).

<sup>55</sup> Thomas R. Banks, “The Ephemeral, the Perennial, and the Structure of Aristophanes’ *Wasps*,” *CB* 56 (1980) 82.

<sup>56</sup> Banks, pp. 82–83.

<sup>57</sup> Banks, p. 83; Jeffrey Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy* (New Haven 1975) 79. Cf. also Whitman (above, note 7) 157.

<sup>58</sup> The mention later (1301–2) of other, more conservative participants in the symposium widens the scope of the satire. This produces a certain appearance of even handedness in the play, which has sometimes been applauded as a sign that Aristophanes was above partisanship.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *kalos kagathos*, 1256; also Ste. Croix (above, note 40) 371–76 for full discussion of *kalokagathia* with relevant bibliography, and pp. 358–59 on Aristophanes’ use of political and moral terminology.

answers to the earlier critique of the democratic courts, though it is decidedly weaker insofar as it is a former dicast himself who is the most egregious offender. It falls to Bdelycleon to offer compensation to an outraged accuser (1419–20), who professes a respectable distaste for lawsuits (1426). Philocleon must again be hustled off into his house, while the chorus sings an amusing interlude on the wonderful transformation in his character (1450–73). There seems little reason to take this song, as MacDowell does, as an earnest comment on “Philokleon’s probable development in years to come.”<sup>60</sup> It simply marks the end of his jurying days, as Philocleon himself has testified (1335–40), his lawlessness constituting the final breach with the court system. The gay finale of the dancing contest (1497) sublimes Philocleon’s drunken escapades onto the plane of the Dionysian, and all tensions evaporate in the general hilarity.<sup>61</sup>

G. E. M. de Ste. Croix has argued vigorously that Aristophanes was politically a conservative in the mold of Cimon, and that “he used many of his plays, *even while they of course remained primarily comedies*, as vehicles for the expression of serious political views.”<sup>62</sup> With respect to the Athenian jury-courts, he suggests that Aristophanes saw “the whole system as a form of popular tyranny, and [was] out to discredit it by ridicule” (362). I agree. I have, however, advanced the discussion, I believe, from the citation of scenes and comments that are derogatory toward the courts (excellently summarized by Ste. Croix) to an analysis of how Aristophanes’ ideological stance conditions the inner structure of the play. In particular, I have attempted to show how the conflation of thematically loaded characteristics such as age, generation, class, and personal vagaries in Philocleon and other characters in the *Wasps*, embedded in an appropriate and original narrative matrix, works to generate by a process of association and semantic transference—a kind of semiotic catachresis, so to say—a dramatic denigration of the court system and a valorization of the upper class ideals of withdrawal and privatism. On this level, the argument of Dover, for example, that the mode of the *Wasps* is “moralizing, not politics,” and that “it belongs

<sup>60</sup> MacDowell (above, note 1) 319 ad 1450–73.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. the slave’s invocation of Dionysus at 1474, and the puns on *tryx*, “wine dregs,” at 1521 and 1537; see also Reckford (above, note 44) 302, 309–10. The motif of rejuvenation assists in the sense of festive renewal, as Whitman (above, note 7) 157–59, and others have remarked. A. H. Sommerstein, “Notes on Aristophanes’ *Wasps*,” *CQ* 27 (1977) 268, suggests that the gesture of the chorus in casting down their sticks at 727 might also symbolize their rejuvenation; I suspect it represents as well the dicasts’ submission to the arguments of Bdelycleon, and their implicit rejection of the juror’s life, since the staff, or *baktêria*, was *et senectutis et muneris iudicialis signum*, as Richter (above, note 29) 147 observes.

<sup>62</sup> Ste. Croix (above, note 40) 356; cf. also pp. 357–58, 370–71; endorsed by Jeffrey Henderson, “‘Lysistrate’: The Play and its Themes,” *YCS* 26 (1980) 189.

... within the tradition of didacticism directed not towards structural change but upon human attitudes and patterns of behaviour," falls short of the truth, for it is a judgment, however sophisticated, on the person of Philocleon, his mania and childish egotism, that ignores the complex ideological operation that has gone into producing that persona.<sup>63</sup> It is the business of the literary critic to dissolve the made unity and coherence of character and narrative form and bring to light the complex and contradictory elements that enter into their construction.<sup>64</sup> Such an analytical method lays bare the fundamentally conservative political idea that informs the *Wasps*.

But the effect of harmony or unity in a text, the success of its ideological strategies, also has a social basis. I should like to suggest that the collapse of class distinctions in the *Wasps*, which is latent in the initial presuppositions of the plot and carried through under the sign of persuasion, reflects on a certain level a genuine ideological solidarity among citizens of all classes in Athens. As a cultural ideal, this solidarity manifests itself as a common aspiration to autarky, and finds expression in the conception of the state as a union of autonomous households.<sup>65</sup> Socially, it is founded at least in part upon the status distinction between citizens rich or poor, on the one hand, all of whom bear the right to own property in land, and on the other hand, slaves or, to a lesser extent, resident aliens. There are several swipes at foreigners in the *Wasps* (cf. 82–84, 718, 1197, 1221), but the most telling lines are addressed by the chorus to a slave who has just emerged from the house in which the symposium is going on, having been beaten by the rampaging Philocleon: "What is it, boy? For it's right to call even an old man boy if he takes a beating" (1297–98). The equation between class and age group here is casually explicit: the slave's want of freedom leaves him forever in the dependent condition of the child.<sup>66</sup> Over against this kind of infantilization, citizens young and old are united as adults, with rights and responsibilities in the state. Philocleon's aggres-

<sup>63</sup> Dover (above, note 2) 131.

<sup>64</sup> It is in the broadly post-structuralist approach to unity as an effect rather than an aesthetic ideal that my own approach differs from the problematic inaugurated by Schwinge and Koch (above, note 5). See, for one statement of this approach, Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis 1983) 81: "There is absolutely no need to suppose that works of literature either do or should constitute harmonious wholes"; the point is that unity, on this view, is not normative.

<sup>65</sup> On the Athenian *oikos* and the ideal of autarky, see W. K. Lacey, *The Family in Classical Greece* (London 1968); 15–24; Ste. Croix (above, note 12) 116–17; Helene P. Foley, "The 'Female Intruder' Reconsidered: Women in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*," *CP* 77 (1982) 18–19.

<sup>66</sup> To be sure, *pais* was the common term of address to a slave, but here the content of the metaphor is laid bare: slaves are like children because they are vulnerable to corporal punishment without institutions of redress.

sion is fairly indiscriminate, and he knocks his own son down when he tries to take away his flute girl (1379–86), but violence against a fellow citizen was an actionable offense.<sup>67</sup> The text insists on persuasion as the means of inducing the chorus and the normally unbudgeable Philocleon to desert the courts.<sup>68</sup>

And yet, words prove effective only after the show of force by which Philocleon is prevented from leaving his home to attend the court sessions. By this recourse to violence, in the restraints placed upon Philocleon when argument would not avail, and by its profound ambivalence toward argument itself as a kind of charm and subversion, Aristophanes' *Wasps*—read politically—betrays the stubborn fact of class conflict within the citizen body of the Athenians.

<sup>67</sup> The offense is *hybris*; see MacDowell ad 1418.

<sup>68</sup> For persuasion, cf. 116, 278, 471–72, 513, 668, 697, 713, 729, 743, 746–49, 760–61, 763, 784, 974, 1470, and, in an ironic context, 568, 573, 586. See also R. G. Buxton, *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy: A Study of Peitho* (Cambridge 1982) 10–18, and Aristophanes *Frogs* 1395–96 for *peithô* as the lightest or most insubstantial of things.

Earlier versions of this paper were read at Connecticut College and at Bryn Mawr College. I wish to thank Elizabeth Carter, Michael Roberts, Ellen Rooney, Khachig Tölölyan, and the editor, as well as two anonymous referees of this journal, for their helpful comments.