

Donald Sells

PARODY, POLITICS AND
THE POPULACE IN GREEK
OLD COMEDY

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Donald Sells

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Abbreviations

Bernabé	Bernabé, A. (1987), <i>Poetae Epici Graeci: Testimonia et Fragmenta Pars I</i> , Leipzig: Teubner.
GMT	Goodwin, W. W. (1889), <i>Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb</i> , London: Macmillan and Co.
KA	Kassel, R. and C. Austin (1983-2001), <i>Poetae Comici Graeci</i> , Vols 1–8, Berlin: De Gruyter.
KPS	Krumeich, R., N. Pechstein and B. Seidensticker, eds (1999), <i>Das griechische Satyrspiel</i> , Darmstadt: WBG.
LIMC	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> , (1981–1999), 8 vols, Zurich and Munich: Artemis & Winkler.
Perry	Perry, B.E. (1952), <i>Aesopica</i> , Vol. 1, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
PhV	Trendall, A.D. (1967), <i>Phlyax Vases</i> , 2nd edn, London: University of London.
PMG	Page, D.L. (1962), <i>Poetae Melici Graeci</i> , Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Radt	Radt, S. (1985), <i>Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta</i> , Vol. 3: Aeschylus, Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. Radt, S. (1977), <i>Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta</i> , Vol. 4: Sophocles, Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
RFVAp	Trendall, A.D. and A. Cambitoglou (1978), <i>The Red-Figure Vases of Apulia</i> , Oxford: Oxford University Press.
RFVAp suppl.	Trendall, A.D. and A. Cambitoglou (1991), <i>Second Supplement to the Red-Figure Vases of Apulia</i> , i, London: University of London.

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Introduction

I. Studying parody in Old Comedy

There is currently no study devoted solely to the performance of parody and literary appropriation in Greek Old Comedy. This is odd given parody's pervasiveness in the contemporary world and its role as a mainstay of enduring, perennially successful comedy. Shows such as *Monty Python*, *Saturday Night Live*, *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, films like *Airplane!*, *The Naked Gun* and *Hot Fuzz*, and before them, satirical magazines like *Punch*, *Mad* and *Private Eye* have earned critical acclaim and devoted fanbases by producing parodies now enshrined in the annals of popular culture. The wide readership of *The Onion* proves that churning out perceptive and clever parody for public consumption is a successful business model in media. Twenty-first-century parody is a powerful means of political, social and cultural criticism in the western world, stoking righteous anger, endangering political careers, occasionally ruining lives, and exposing its creators to threatened and actual violence.¹

Unfortunately, we know very little about the real-world impact of parody in fifth-century Greek comedy on Athenian society. Nevertheless, scholars continue to study important aspects of this timeless phenomenon of popular culture on its own terms. Since Peter Rau's fundamental 1967 study of Aristophanic paratragedy, *Paratragödia*, several monographs, a few volumes of conference proceedings, and a number of articles have been devoted to parody – mostly paratragedy – in Old Comedy.² Given current levels of interest in theatre, the *chorêgia*, music, acting and other interconnected dramatic topics,³ a comprehensive study of the verbal and visual dimensions of significant literary and visual evidence for parody and appropriation would be a mammoth undertaking. The aim of this book is more modest, a study of Old Comedy's parody and literary appropriation of the prestige genres of fifth-century performance culture – tragedy, satyr play and lyric – as a means of raising the public profile of the individual poet and the genre as a whole.

In the most significant contribution to the subject since Rau's book, Silk's reassessment of Rau's methodology in his 1993 article 'Aristophanic Paratragedy' provided an important way forward in the study of this dynamic part of the comic repertoire. Notwithstanding its exhaustive philological analysis of tropes and scenes, and occasional judgments on the strategy and spirit of parody, *Paratragödia* rarely applies its many categorical distinctions to meaningful analyses of comedy.⁴ Silk's more sensitive reading distinguishes the different levels and tones of paratragic language that tended to get lost in Rau's work but, in fact, represent the rewards of reading parody in its own context and with the necessary stylistic nuance. Moreover, since Rau focuses only on lyric poetry of a paratragic kind – this is perhaps only fair given his specific focus – the significant corpus of parodied lyric calls out for study as a comic target in its own right. The strictly textual and linguistic focus of both Rau and Silk – a restriction the latter acknowledges up front – naturally excludes important evidence of parody in performance preserved in contemporary vase painting. Finally, there are still very few analyses of comedy's parody of satyr play, which the comic poets exploited to diversify and defamiliarize their imaginative and political content less explicitly and with more subtlety.⁵

Apart from texts, the iconography of Attic and South Italian vase painting and plastic art preserves a store of extant evidence for late fifth-century and early fourth-century parody. Important studies of such theatre-related material remind us of something easily forgotten in our text-centred discipline: that parody in performance is a visual experience and had a distinctive impact on audiences. Recognizably parodic iconography of this kind preserves valuable testimony for the performative mechanisms of such parody, balancing and occasionally supplementing our textual evidence. Its thematic and narrative evidence reveals the concepts driving such mechanisms, counterfactual experiments, and unparalleled cross-generic scenarios. This study's integration of theatre-related vase paintings with literary evidence thus presents a fuller and more comprehensive picture of fifth-century comic appropriation.

II. Expectations, seriousness and society

The varieties of Aristophanic paratragedy show that the appropriation of other poetic forms cannot easily be reduced to one common, single mechanism or effect. I have already used several terms – 'parody', 'paratragedy', 'appropriation' etc. – to describe the topic. Throughout this investigation, I adhere to, and occasionally

expand, Silk's definitions of different forms of paratragedy: 'paratragedy' is an umbrella term that includes parody, which is an essentially negative, subversive appropriation of tragedy as well as other kinds of appropriation.⁶ All appropriation of tragedy by comedy is paratragic, though not all instances of paratragedy are parodic. Paratragedy can vary in style and spirit, as do the other 'para-' narratives with which Old Comedy appropriates its two other poetic rivals in fifth-century performance culture, satyr play and lyric. More neutral terms like 'appropriation' and 'adaptation' denote forms of paratragedy, parasatyrism and paralyric that seemingly lack parody's subversive intent.

Silk's categories of paratragedy provide a useful model to which further qualifications are added in my investigation of the verbal and visual evidence of performance in the following chapters. I consider this evidence along two primary conceptual axes. An example of intergeneric engagement is understood along a latitudinal spectrum in 'mechanical' terms, i.e., the linguistic and visual expression of comic engagement. A second, vertical axis measures the broader subtext informing the parody or appropriation, that is, its level of political, social and cultural engagement, e.g., high, medium, low or zero. These measures can only ever be approximate, of course, and readers should understand them generally as guidelines. Paratragedy, parasatyrism and paralyric fall along a continuum that extends from a brief and ephemeral evocation with little or no deeper subtext to, at the other extreme, sustained appropriation of genre that meshes with a larger thematic focus.⁷ At one pole, the more straightforward and concrete one, comedy stages awkward and humorous meetings, i.e., 'collisions' between the comic context and the norms or codes (e.g., verbal, visual, ethical) of a second, alien genre that is evoked. At the other pole belong implicit appropriations of genre of a more subtle kind.⁸ For example, though collision may be lacking or understated in the purely linguistic terms of a given parody, it might find expression in the juxtaposition of that linguistic register and the physical disposition of the comic speaker, e.g., in his or her ugliness, gesture, conduct and even given dramatic situation. In fact, most of my departures from Silk's thinking are driven by my consideration of these broader performative and political parameters as legitimate evidence of parody.

A general overview of the mechanical and contextual scales in practice should clarify my meaning. Small-scale parody is typically modest in aim: producing a laugh that is quickly forgotten because it is generally inconsequential for scene and plot. Swift designates these 'low-level' allusions in her analysis of lyric in tragedy, i.e., superficial resonances of another genre that range from a reference in which 'genre is almost entirely effaced' to one that is, at most, slightly provocative

in effect. In Old Comedy, this might be a generically marked exclamation that momentarily elevates linguistic register, an absurd juxtaposition of rarefied and trivial diction, or a swift repurposing of a memorable line in banal terms. A good low-level example – and one that Silk also adduces – is the Sausage-Seller’s abrupt apostrophe in his *agôn* with the Paphlagonian in *Knights* (424 BCE):⁹

Πα. λαβέ νυν πλακοῦντος πίονος παρ’ ἐμοῦ τόμον.

Αλ. παρ’ ἐμοῦ δ’ ὅλον γε τὸν πλακοῦντα τουτονί.

Πα. ἀλλ’ οὐ λαγῶν ἔξεις ὁπόθεν δῶς· ἀλλ’ ἐγώ.

Αλ. οἴμοι, πόθεν λαγῶά μοι γενήσεται;

ὦ θυμέ, νυνὶ βωμολόχον ἔξευρέ τι.

Pa: Now have a slice of cheesecake, from me.

Sa: Have this whole cake, my compliments!

Pa: Well, you don’t have a good source of hare to give him. But I do!

Sa: Oh god! Where am I going to get hare’s meat!

Heart! Find some tomfoolery!¹⁰

Eq. 1190–1194

As Silk writes, this moment exhibits the collision of mutually exclusive ‘stylistic habitats, tragic and less than tragic.’¹¹ The Sausage-Seller’s distress is not exactly inappropriate to the absurd terms on which the contest proceeds, the competitive bribery for the favour of the senile, boorish master ‘Demos’. But the distinctly tragic exclamation (οἴμοι) and apostrophe (ὦ θυμέ) are clearly high style and clash with the everyday comic victual, hare’s meat, and the distinctly prosaic νυνὶ and βωμολόχος.¹² There is an absurd collocation of linguistic registers and (almost certainly) gestures, if we can assume that the verbal was accentuated with some kind of supplementary comic code, gesture or even pitch.¹³ *Knights* 1194 simply tries to provoke a momentary laugh and subverts no specific model.

When developed into a longer sequence and contextualized differently, this brief paratragic bit by the Sausage-Seller can have greater significance to the comedy as a whole. Again, Swift’s classes of tragic allusion to lyric poetry are useful. Higher-level allusions connect to a play’s larger narrative, reinforcing its themes straightforwardly or ironically.¹⁴ One example is Aristophanes’ parody (855–919) of Euripides’ *Helen* (412 BCE) in *Thesmophoriazusae* (411 BCE). Unmasked as a male intruder of the all-female Thesmophoria and subsequently confined to the stage-altar as a suppliant, the hapless Inlaw imitates the heroine of Euripides’ ‘new’ (850) *Helen* of the previous year, who similarly took refuge on an altar in Egypt under threat of rape. Like Helen, Inlaw hopes to be rescued.

Aristophanes' distortion of the model compresses and combines three distinct episodes, Helen's opening monologue (Eur. *Hel.* 1–67), the unexpected arrival of Teucer from Troy (*Hel.* 68–166), and the ostentatiously delayed recognition between Helen and the shipwrecked Menelaus (*Hel.* 528–596). Inlaw's truncated performance (Ar. *Thesm.* 855–857) quotes (with some comic distortion) merely the first three lines of the heroine's opening speech and thereafter only sporadically (862=*Hel.* 22; 864–865=*Hel.* 52–53; 866=*Hel.* 49). Aristophanes' occlusion of the speech's uniquely Euripidean genealogies and account of the war (859–860; cf. *Hel.* 4–21) infuses a sense of absurdity into the scene. Apart from the occasional bathetic (μελανοσυρμαῖον, 857) and comic vocabulary (προσέρχεται, 867; αἰκάλλει, 869),¹⁵ Inlaw's language maintains a tolerable level of tragic dignity without significant collision, although his pastiche of quotations from multiple tragic characters is amusing. Collision is rather identifiable in Inlaw's interaction with his exasperated female captor, Critylla, whose banal responses show she is both ignorant of and uninterested in the performance. The sophistication of this paratragedy increases with Euripides' eventual entrance dressed as Menelaus, and his participation shows how comic adaptation is designed with audience cognition in mind. After Inlaw prepares the audience for the arrival of 'Menelaus' (οὐμὸς Μενέλεως οὐδέπω προσέρχεται, 867), the character Euripides makes his entry dressed in the mask and ragged costume of the shipwrecked Menelaus while delivering the lines of a different Euripidean character:¹⁶

Ευ. τίς τῶνδ' ἐρυμνῶν δωμάτων ἔχει κράτος,
 ὅστις ξένους δέξαιτο ποντίῳ σάλῳ
 καμόντας ἐν χειμῶνι καὶ ναυαγίαις;
 Κη. Πρωτέως τὰδ' ἐστὶ μέλαθρα.
 Κρ. ποίου Πρωτέως,
 ὃ τρισκακόδαιμον; ψεύδεται νῆ τῷ θεῷ,
 ἐπεὶ τέθηκε Πρωτέας ἔτη δέκα.

Eur. Who, holding sway in these walled abodes,
 would welcome strangers worn down in the storm
 and shipwreck of the rolling sea?

In. These are the roofs of Proteus.

Kr. 'Proteus' indeed,
 you bastard! He's lying, by the twain, since Proteas
 has been dead ten years!

Thesm. 871–876

Euripides' lines are borrowed (in part) from Salaminian Teucer (68), whose arrival in Egypt as an exile actually precedes that of Menelaus in the Euripidean original. Given the recent performance of *Helen*, these lines were probably familiar to at least some in the audience. The next two lines appended to the hero's high-style introductory statement and describing the condition of the castaway Menelaus (cf. *Hel.* 400–401, 408–410) would have made the reference clearer to the audience. The same is true of his immediate encounter with Critylla, here playing the part of the tragedy's abusive Egyptian female porter, whom tragic Menelaus had the misfortune to encounter.

Different kinds of collision occur: in the juxtaposition of speech taken from multiple roles and in the heroes' paratragic responses to the comic Critylla, although not strictly in the linguistic content of statements by individual characters. Critylla's abrupt interjection (ποίου Πρωτέως) in the line's final third rhythmically conveys the collision of the heroes' dignified script and her banal perspective. Such audible discrepancies of register would have been apparent to most (if not all) spectators, but those with greater poetic competence may have recognized the compression of multiple characters into Euripides' one role.

This passage anticipates the primary target of this parody, namely the ostentatiously drawn-out recognition scene of Menelaus and Helen (*Hel.* 541–659), which was initially deferred (*Hel.* 567–596) to great dramatic effect in Euripides' play.¹⁷ In response to *Helen*'s pervasive thematic interest in the differences of appearance and reality,¹⁸ Aristophanes focuses his recognition through his heroes' struggle to effect the recognition of each other while facing Critylla's opposition in his version of the scene. This mid-level parody ultimately meshes with *Thesmophoriazusae*'s larger thematic concern with the unintended consequences of Euripidean tragedy's representation (or misrepresentation) of gender and identity.¹⁹ The parody's cogent expression of the distinctive social and cultural interests of Aristophanes' play thus demonstrates a 'high' level of engagement with its larger comic context.

The different strategies of *Knights* and *Thesmophoriazusae* offer a sense of the range of complexity and diversity that comic parody and appropriation might take. The variety of linguistic, physical and visual codes present in just these two examples justifies the holistic approach adopted in this study. By expanding the terms in which paratragedy, parasatyrism and paralyricism can be understood, I occasionally draw conclusions different from, but not always at odds with, those of Rau and Silk. For example, although he does not analyse this specific passage, I suspect that Silk, who focuses exclusively on linguistic codes, would characterize much of Inlaw and Euripides' performance of *Helen* in

Thesmophoriazusae as paratragic but without collision, and possibly as non-parodic, at least until the unquestionably subversive obscenity of the eventual climactic recognition (*Thesm.* 912–916). I, by contrast, see parodic collision in Aristophanes' combination of statements made by different characters in the original text into the speech of single comic character. Collision occurs not within the language of a single character but in the juxtaposition of various codes in performance: the tragic language clashes with the accompanying visuals of the padded and grotesque comic costume, the characters' lowbrow predicament, and the generically cronish blocking figure of comedy. Critylla's objections repeatedly underscore the incompatibility of tragedy and comedy's ethical worlds.

We might think of comic appropriation at the broadest, macro level as play- rather than scene-specific and shaping the comic plot as a whole. No extant comedy quite fulfills this, although surviving titles certainly attest to such full-scale appropriations. Cratinus's *Eumenides* probably adapted the homonymous Aeschylean tragedy of 458,²⁰ and lost comic versions of *Phoenissai* by Aristophanes (see fr. 570) and Strattis (fr. 46–53) seemingly parodied Euripides' tragedy (408 BCE) of the same title. The play-based, pseudo-biographical frame of *Thesmophoriazusae* approaches this level with its infiltration and escape subplots that are modelled on successful productions of this plot type in Euripides' *Iphigenia Among the Taurians* (414–412 BCE) and *Helen* (412). The parasatyrlic but fragmentary *Dionysalexandros* of Cratinus is also a candidate for macro-appropriation if its chorus was composed of satyrs, as is now believed.²¹

One final strategy deserves mention. Comedy sometimes evokes not specific texts, but whole genres through tonal and structural appropriation, i.e., modal representations of distinct, often abbreviated, generic signals. As I discuss in Chapter 3's study of satyr play, Aristophanes evokes tragedy (e.g., in language, action, thought) in his *Clouds* without including the formal structures of a specific model.²² Modality, admittedly harder to identify with certainty than explicit paratragedy or parasatyrism, is in fact a common appropriative strategy that echoes the styles and tropes of generic models but rarely specific texts.²³ Swift's lucid study of tragedy's appropriation of the verbal and thematic features of lyric poetry documents tragic choruses' use of the form to shape the moral and aesthetic character of plays. Modes in comedy similarly manipulate audience expectation to affect the mood of a scene or episode and temporarily transcend the comic present. Chapter 3 marshals the extant evidence for comedy's use of satyr play along such lines.

Because no single theoretical model can adequately address both the stylistic codes and the topical subtexts of parody and appropriation in Old Comedy, the following chapters draw ideas from several methodologies in order to grapple with the complexities of the evidence as precisely as possible. To convey comedy's visual 'coding' of rival genres, i.e., the conscious appropriation of their visual features (e.g., costume, props, gesture, etc.), and its interpretive demands on theatre audiences, I make use of some tenets of performance studies and theatre semiotics.²⁴ Mastronarde has aptly compared genre in fifth-century drama to a moving target. To maintain a strong but flexible sense of the comic poets' manoeuvrings in and around these fluid generic frontiers of late fifth-century drama, I apply the relational approach championed by modern genre theory.²⁵ Alternatively the poetic program implied in the Aristophanic parody of *Telephus* in *Acharnians* – the topic of Chapter 1 – can be best apprehended through marketing theory. However, the most pragmatic methodological approach to Old Comedy's parody, and the one that orients the analyses of each chapter generally, considers the expectations that comic audiences brought to each performance of comedy.

In his brief introduction to comedy, Bevis puts his finger on the importance of expectation in successful comedy (specifically jokes), which invites audiences to reflect upon what they know or think they know: 'The surprise that accompanies getting a joke can prompt us to wonder about the expectations that were toyed with to get us there, and what these expectations may tell us about ourselves.'²⁶ This is especially true of parody and appropriation, whose success is contingent upon a spectator's ability to recognize, if only in the most rudimentary or intuitive way, that what s/he sees involves at least one 'text' in addition to the present one. For this reason, study of the textual and performative strategies of allusion in comedy must proceed with an awareness of and sensitivity to the audience's abilities and the circumstances of textual production. Since Old Comedy was public, a mass entertainment shaped according to the tastes of Athenian spectators, the general mechanisms of its humour must necessarily appeal to them and what they know. Whatever its intended effect – parodic, serious or a mixture – the success of appropriation lay in its ability to resonate, at some level, with a spectator's experience of festival performance. This experience informed the sense of expectation audiences then brought to subsequent performances.

This regard for comedy's audience drives the theoretical model that regularly, if generally, shapes my analyses of comedy, reader-response theory. Sometimes called 'theory of aesthetic response', reader-response theory was developed most

significantly by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser,²⁷ who argued that the aesthetic experience of a literary work is an active process by which a reader's apprehension of the text interacts with his/her previous reading experience. Jauss redefined literary history according to an abstract hermeneutic process by which a text achieves historicity (or 'eventful character'²⁸) through its reception as an aesthetic object by readers. Iser was chiefly occupied with the reading process itself, which he described as a 'dialectic of "protension" and retention, conveying a future horizon, yet to be occupied, along with a past (and continually fading) horizon already filled'.²⁹ For both thinkers, texts of significant aesthetic value compel readers to do a great deal of focusing and refocusing through the 'horizon of expectations' they bring to texts and develop through successive readings.³⁰ Initial pre-judgments generate a frame of reference within which what follows is interpreted and subsequently influences the original understanding by challenging or undermining it.

While the present study is neither a reader-response criticism of comedy nor concerned with the psychological particulars of the reading process, the theory's interest in the text's objective status and historicity is relevant to the approach taken here. The 'horizon of expectations' (*der Erwartungshorizont*) provides an important and useful animating principle for the textual analyses of Old Comedy in performance.³¹ Of course, as with any methodology, reader-response criticism has certain drawbacks.³² But the general value of Jauss and Iser's model of expectations to the study of both parody and drama is commonly recognized. One particularly relevant example is Rose's view of parody in the ancient Greek form, which describes Aristophanes and his contemporaries evoking the targeted text in order to prepare the reader (or spectator) for the comic incongruity of a second unexpected version.³³ Scholars of dramatic performance similarly evoke the horizon of expectations as a model for spectator cognition, i.e., the knowledge of texts and conventions acquired by a spectator through 'cultural preparation' from critics and/or acquaintances.³⁴

It is a commonplace observation that ancient Greek audiences were reasonably sensitive to distinctions of genre. Parody in spectacle and text elicits this kind of adjudication, first instilling a text or genre's conventions in the mind – conventions acquired through shared experience of dramatic, political, legal and religious institutions – before somehow deviating from them. It is by bearing these expectations in mind, at least approximately and provisionally, that one can understand in at least one sense how comedy engaged spectators 'seriously,' that is, raised questions about politics and other issues relevant to the spectators'

lives. The extent of comedy's 'seriousness' is one of the longstanding debates in the study of comedy and satire. For Old Comedy, this discussion emerged through early twentieth-century disagreement about the degree to which Aristophanic comedy expressed its author's political views, if at all. Responding to Gomme's famous scepticism of any coherent political partisanship in the comedies, the Oxford Marxist de Ste Croix attempted to demonstrate what he believed were Aristophanes' clear aristocratic sympathies, pointing out, moreover, the fallacy of assuming that humour precluded serious content.³⁵ The 'serious' position was boosted significantly by Henderson's influential argument for Old Comedy's unofficial but critical democratic function of vetting politicians and their policies for the Athenian *dêmos* through ridicule.³⁶ An implicit assumption of many analyses of the serious in Old Comedy is its political nature. Silk helpfully broadened the terms of the serious beyond purely political topics into the 'substantial', i.e., what engages the mind and specifically the imagination.³⁷ This definition accommodates any topic that could reasonably sustain the interest of an audience.

The wide popularity and vast sums of money used to finance Athenian festivals provide compelling reasons for seeing its performances as inherently relevant to the average Athenian and public life.³⁸ Comedy's appropriation of various performance types was imbued with the popular interests and concerns of the Athenian public and shaped by their day-to-day experience of the Assembly, the courts, religious ritual and conflict: Telephus's tragic rhetoric is cast as a speech in the Assembly (*Acharnians*); Trygaeus's project stems from the citizen's feeling of powerlessness to stop the war (*Peace*); the disruptions of Euripidean tragedy's controversial politics are measured by their impact on the average Athenian household (*Thesmophoriazusae*). If tragedy inflected myth through a complex of narrative forms that addressed contemporary cultural issues,³⁹ Old Comedy's (serious or ironic) appropriation and critique of rival poetic forms were undertaken by *infusing* those genres with its own cultural, political and aesthetic concerns. Politics – in the broadest possible sense, i.e., life in the polis – is a primary substrate of fifth-century comic appropriation. While early plays like Cratinus's *Dionysalexandros* and Aristophanes' *Acharnians* use parody to satirize Athenian governance and vice versa, Aristophanes uses social and cultural topics in increasingly intimate and personal settings to parody Euripidean tragedy. Such broad topicality was key to comedy's continued relevance. The next section outlines a more comprehensive explanation of appropriation as a function of the genre's natural drive to innovate in a highly competitive world.

III. Why is parody? Genes and genres

De Ste Croix's observation (1972: 357) that the serious 'message' of Aristophanes and his peers, however one defines it, was more likely to be welcomed by spectators if it was funny seems intuitively correct.⁴⁰ A precise explanation of parody's operation on the spectator's mind falls outside my present concerns. However, it is clear enough from the evidence that the comic poets fostered and maintained the relevance of their work by adapting their humour to their audiences' changing tastes (cf. *Ar. Eq.* 515–518). Because Athenian audiences exercised considerable administrative and creative power over the festivals, as both arbiters of the competitions and influencers of the festival judges' verdict,⁴¹ poets strove to accommodate their tastes through a process of 'feedback', as Roselli terms it.⁴² Poets' constant calibration of their style of humour and topics in response to spectators' reception of their and their rivals' comedy steered comic innovation. The ability of the individual poet to respond rapidly and creatively to the audience through innovation ultimately determines the life-cycle of the individual poet's career in a given genre in Athens.⁴³

Understanding the competitive dynamics of Old Comedy requires an awareness of the particular stakes of victory and defeat in the festival and how they differed from those of other theatrical traditions. The supply-and-demand economic model that governed rival playhouses in the Elizabethan era, for example, is not applicable to this tradition,⁴⁴ though Athenian drama was indeed a business in its own way.⁴⁵ Although official prizes of the latter half of the fifth century had insignificant monetary value, the prestige that accrued to the participants in a victorious production was valued in its considerable social capital.⁴⁶ Although theatrical culture spread beyond Athens and into foreign markets during the later fifth century, limited opportunities and high production costs at the most important occasions for drama in the Athenian Lenaea and Great Dionysia forced playwrights into intense competition for a limited number of slots.⁴⁷ Poets lucky enough to make the initial cut and earn the necessary public funding to stage their work then entered a competition pitting poet against poet, *chorêgos* against *chorêgos*, chorus against chorus, and eventually actors against actors and musicians against musicians.⁴⁸

Unlike its dramatic peers, comedy openly acknowledges this competitive dynamic in various ways: on the many occasions fictional comic characters channel the voice of the poet himself in the *parabasis* and almost certainly in institutionalized extra-dramatic moments. The *proagôn* of the Dionysia

introduced the cast and chorus to the public in the *ôdeion*; if victorious, the same participants gathered in the post-victory celebration; such victories were sometimes alluded to in subsequent performances by the same poet. To produce the kind of cutting-edge content that helped them stay relevant, poets drew from pools of options in the ever-expanding and always evolving repertoire of the genre. Appropriation was not just a proven method of innovation, it was a professional survival strategy that can provide insights into Old Comedy's evolution over the final third of the fifth century. This form of literary exchange reveals some of the more recondite features of the comic 'animal,' its biology, genes, tendencies, drives and modes of being.

The comic poet's brash and opportunistic self-promotion served his overriding aim of creating a successful career and lasting legacy in the form of either continuing prestige during his lifetime or for the benefit of his actual biological progeny. The aims of survival and replication, and the selfish disposition necessary for their achievement, were sought at the expense of his peers in comedy and other genres.⁴⁹ In these ways, his career resembled an organism struggling to survive in a quasi-Darwinian environment, much like the 'survival machine' of Dawkins's famous study.⁵⁰

My comparison of the competitive contexts of Athenian theatre and the natural world is not the first, and is in fact anticipated in the earliest extant systematic treatment of tragedy. Aristotle's *Poetics* also conceives drama's evolution as a biological process.⁵¹ However, the metaphorical comparison of comic and natural biology developed here has the advantage of a millennium's worth of advances in human understanding of biology and several decades of study of the economic and social dynamics of Greek drama. My understanding of the survival of comic ideas with reference to biological entities draws from Dawkins's discussion of survival and replication as the shared aims of both the gene and the 'meme,' Dawkins's term for a unit of cultural transmission. In the present discussion, I define the meme as a unit of comic content – a trope, theme, signature scene – that fixes itself in the public's consciousness. Successful comic memes, like their genetic counterparts, seek to exploit their natural environment for survival. The 'evolutionarily stable' set of traits in the gene pool at any given moment has much in common with an existing pool of memes in theatrical culture. The qualities conducive to the survival of replicating genes, which multiply and confer important advantages on the organisms carrying them, are similar for memes in Old Comedy: longevity, fecundity and copying fidelity.⁵² Like the gene, the meme strives to circulate itself as widely as possible in Athens's cultural ecosystem.

When a gene wins expression in an animal and that animal successfully reproduces, the gene spreads in the ecosystem. By spreading its memes into the mind of the theatre-going public, the successful comedy reproduces and gives rise to other performances of the same memes in a variety of forms and contexts: a quoted line in conversation; a song in the symposium; perhaps a reperformance of the whole comedy in a smaller venue, one of Attica's many rural Dionysia. The cumulative effect of this kind of public recognition surely increased the odds that a play would live on in the public's imagination and perhaps even help its author secure funding in subsequent festivals.

Despite my comparisons, I acknowledge the important differences between genes and comic memes. Comic competition does not begin at the cellular level, as for genes, which must overcome alleles to reach expression in the organism: comic memes compete with those from plays by other poets. In contrast to the enormous ecosystem of earth, the human brain is the natural environment in which units of comedy survive and replicate. Death for a meme, or its verse or play, did not mean the literal end of the poet's life in this competitive arena, of course. However, death is a common metaphor for describing the failure and obscurity of the comic poet whose memes lose potency. In a famous passage from the parabasis of *Knights*, Aristophanes describes a rival's popular decline in the striking terms of physical debilitation and emphasizes the importance of the memorable satirical trope – something we might label a meme but obviously not Aristophanes – for survival. Aristophanes contrasts the meteoric ascent of his thriving comedy with the decline of his elder rival, Cratinus.⁵³

εἶτα Κρατίνου μεμνημένος, ὃς πολλῶ ρεύσας ποτ' ἐπαίνῳ
 διὰ τῶν ἀφελῶν πεδίῳ ἔρρει, καὶ τῆς στάσεως παρασύρων
 ἐφόρει τὰς δρυὺς καὶ τὰς πλατάνους καὶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς προθελύμους·
 ἄσαι δ' οὐκ ἦν ἐν συμποσίῳ πλὴν 'Δωροῖ συκοπέδιλε'.
 καὶ 'τέκτονες εὐπαλάμων ὕμνων'· οὕτως ἦνθησεν ἐκεῖνος.
 νυνὶ δ' ὑμεῖς αὐτὸν ὀρῶντες παραληροῦντ' οὐκ ἐλεεῖτε,
 ἐκπιπτουσῶν τῶν ἡλέκτρων καὶ τοῦ τόνου οὐκέτ' ἐνόντος
 τῶν θ' ἁρμονιῶν διαχασκουσῶν· ἀλλὰ γέρων ὦν περιέρρει,
 ὥσπερ Κοννᾶς, 'στέφανον μὲν ἔχων αὖτον, δίψη δ' ἀπολωλώς'.

And then he recalled Cratinus, who once rode on your great praise
 and rushed through open plains, sweeping along oaks, plane trees,
 and enemies uprooted. And in the symposium nothing was sung
 except 'Fig-sandaled Goddess of Bribery' and 'Builders of Handy Hymns'.
 Just this way did he flourish. But now you see him out babbling with

his pegs falling out, his tuning gone, and his shape disjointed, and
 you don't pity him. And the old man wanders about, like Konnas,
 'wearing a withered crown and dying of thirst'.

Eq. 526–534

Cratinus's period of success is described in the language of a powerful natural event that imposed its will on the fields of comedy and politics. His popularity was once measured in the wide circulation of his memes, specifically his lyric poems. But now, Aristophanes claims, Cratinean poetry has declined like a failing body, which is itself likened to a broken instrument. The poet's babbling and aimless wandering express the meaningless, desultory effect of once-great poetry in the present. An instructive counterpoint to this decline is the overtly biological terms with which Aristophanes subsequently describes his own poetic success just slightly before this passage. His transformation into Athens's pre-eminent poet is metaphorically described as his successful courtship of comedy's prized mate, the feminized Κωμφοδοδιδασκαλία ('Comic Production'), whose romantic favours his comic predecessors had failed to sustain for very long (515–517).

Because Aristophanes is the only poet whose work survives complete from this period, this study inevitably focuses a great deal on him. Nevertheless, the sources collectively depict an explosion of imaginative creativity by several poets at Athens in the final third of the fifth century. This resembles a rapid evolutionary process kicked into high gear, as a dominant cohort of superior poets disseminated their ideas widely in Athenian festival culture at the expense of less successful poets, not unlike the way genes competing for limited resources thrive or decline in a gene pool. As in nature, intense competition streamlined that pool through a period of cumulative improvement that benefited the Athenian spectator above all, whose attentions had direct bearing on a poetic career's survival. One very important strategy for sustaining the comic organism's life was the growth and evolution of its repertoire through parody and appropriation, which efficiently maximized the resources of Athenian theatre culture and thereby amounted to what Dawkins defines as an *evolutionarily stable strategy* (ESS) of survival.⁵⁴ Tragedy, satyr play, lyric, Aesopic fable, ethnography, historiography and other genres provided raw material for perpetuating the career of a poet working within a field where innovation was a proven path to success. At least in fifth-century Athens, engaging and appropriating other texts was a logical way for a comic poet to maintain relevance.

Comic poets do, of course, parody and attack each other, though such comic intertextuality is not typically, as far as one can tell, woven into the deeper

structure of a play in the same way that Aristophanes tends to use tragedy.⁵⁵ An important exception to this tendency, Cratinus's *Pytinê* (423), illustrates the inherent risks of intrageneric (or 'interspecies') parody: comic poets could fight back directly and rapidly. Cratinus's response to Aristophanes' dismissive crack about his alcoholism in *Knights* (Σ Eq. 400), a full-scale allegorical comedy about his marriage to the personified 'Comedy' in *Pytinê*, decided this rivalry that had developed over years in favour of the older poet. In one sense, this illustration of the perpetual zero-sum conflict of comic competition aligns with competition in Dawkins's natural world. In the animal world, attacking a member of one's own species is not conducive to survival and replication because it is far safer to feed on weaker prey. As Dawkins explains, carnivorous animals that target their own species to supply dietary needs lack an evolutionarily stable strategy.⁵⁶ Lions seeking food rarely attack other lions because of the high costs of physical confrontation even for the victorious party, who risks being mauled and rendered vulnerable in a world of ubiquitous threats. The lion is better off attacking an antelope, an animal that may flee but not fight back.⁵⁷ While poets certainly fight one another, they (like lions) tend to exploit their natural advantage against weaker species by engaging in asymmetrical contests as much as possible. Aristophanes, at least, tends to do this also. Tragic and lyric poets, private citizens and individuals of marginal status are generally incapable of retaliating against comedy's superior resources, status and unique platform. In evolutionary terms, parody amounts to a form of one-sided interspecies conflict in a land of broad and varied opportunities, namely Athenian festival culture and its many forms of literary and political subject matter.⁵⁸ Athenian performance culture provided plenty of incentives for poets to look outside the fray of comedy when seeking to gain status.

The parody of other forms, thus defined as an offensive strategy of survival in the world of fifth-century Athenian performance culture, is sometimes less persuasively regarded as a defensive reaction to the gradual encroachment of other genres upon 'comic territory', as for example in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*.⁵⁹ The paratragedy of the latter comedy rather reflects competition over territory that was new to both genres and in the sole possession of neither,⁶⁰ especially if dramatic genre in the fifth century was as fluid as it seems to have been.⁶¹ Such content in the margins between genres has been usefully characterized by Conte as a place of *expectation* where new works or new content wait to be written and thus provide opportunities for increasing audience approval.⁶² In fact, some of Aristophanes' most intriguing challenges to tragedy's cultural influence are indirect and target seemingly quotidian content

that is less easily identifiable with a specific repertoire, such as aspects of daily life like sacrifice.⁶³ Aristophanes is especially sensitive to the potential value of such marginal content for positioning his own work. Moreover, by vigorously contesting this territory between itself and other poetic forms via parody and appropriation, Old Comedy can influence – or at least claim to influence – the range of dramatic possibilities open to other genres.

As an intrinsically competitive poetic strategy,⁶⁴ parody therefore showcases poetic craft to raise a comic poet's profile and shape his public persona. As an effective contribution to public discourse – from which tragedy is precluded, it is implied – Aristophanes' appropriation of Euripides' *Telephus* in *Acharnians* is akin to the modern marketing strategy of product branding, that is, promoting a particular product by advertising. Aristophanes was hardly the only poet to do this. A fragment of Cratinus's *Pytinê* offers compelling evidence that his rivals did the same:⁶⁵

ἄναξ Ἄπολλον, τῶν ἐπῶν τοῦ ρεύματος.
 καναχοῦσι πηγαί· δωδεκάκρουνον <τὸ> στόμα,
 Ἴλισδος ἐν τῇ φάρυγι. τί ἂν εἴποιμ' <ἔτι>;
 εἰ μὴ γὰρ ἐπιβύσει τις αὐτοῦ τὸ στόμα,
 ἅπαντα ταῦτα κατακλύσει ποιήμασιν

Lord Apollo! What a flood of words,
 plashing springs! A mouth of twelve fountains!
 Like the Ilissus in his gullet! What can I say!?
 If someone doesn't plug his mouth,
 he'll overwhelm everything with his poetry!

Cratinus fr. 198

The scholiast who preserves the fragment explains that Cratinus's words here respond to Aristophanes' earlier parody of these same lines (of Cratinus) in a comedy that does not survive.⁶⁶ In other words, Cratinus's fragment reappropriates his own content that Aristophanes had earlier parodied. As an authentic specimen of Cratinus's own work, the fragment preserves the grand epic fashion in which he originally described his own poetic style, as inspired, powerful and transcendent. Whether or not such pretences to epic prestige can be taken seriously, comic poets use such grandiose statements to position themselves in a crowded, competitive field.

My use of the meme as a unit for measuring comedy's evolution is, to be clear, only a metaphor. But it is useful for conceptualizing the high-stakes competitive environment of the texts analysed in this study. To conclude this section, I will

elaborate this evolutionary metaphor. Parody enabled comedy to absorb material from a diversity of poetic forms and repurpose it in various ways, as shown in Section II above. The multiplicity of comedy's 'dietary' habits is a hyperactive and extreme form of the single manner of ingestion that characterizes most living organisms. Yet like most mammals, comedy is omnivorous: it appropriates poetic and cultural forms, and really any kind of content capable of extending its life cycle in the world of Athenian festivals. The greater success of the specific work targeted for parody, the greater value it has for supporting and enhancing that life and the prestige of the specific poet. Aristophanes' parody of Euripides' *Telephus* in *Acharnians* or his various contemporaries' satire of lyric are two examples. The ragged Telephus was a desirable target of parody because he was memorable to the public. As organisms benefit from the health of the organisms they prey upon, so did the comic poets benefit from the popular success of the texts they appropriate. Old Comedy's evolving strategies for rapidly exploiting the popular success of memes from other genres – in tragedy, satyr play and lyric – amount to a long-term survival strategy of ruthless efficiency. However, the upper limits of survival for the gene and the comic meme demonstrate important differences between the competitive worlds of biology and comedy. Over time, the capacity of a specific set of genes to occupy the pool intact gradually diminishes. The meme's contribution to human culture, by contrast, has the potential to live on indefinitely and, in a sense, immortally.

IV. General overview

While the following chapters hardly exhaust the evidence for fifth-century comedy's appropriation of tragedy, satyr play and lyric, they do address much of the important evidence. Chapter 1, 'Mysian Telephus and the Aristophanic Brand', argues that the paratragedy of *Acharnians* (425 BCE) defines in programmatic fashion the long-term value of both paratragedy and the Euripidean hero Telephus to Aristophanes' specific brand of comedy. As the earliest complete evidence for parody of tragedy, *Acharnians* is the natural starting point for addressing parody's engagement with expectations shaped by Athenian theatrical and cultural norms. Dicaeopolis's transformation from rustic hero to a paratragic agent walks audiences through the mechanics of the stylistic, visual and narrative appropriation of a recognizable hero of Euripides' alleged prop-oriented, banausic style. The chapter articulates the symbolic value

of Telephus for Aristophanes' new kind of self-consciously hybrid comedy, which he suggestively labels τρυγῳδία. The distinct cultural and generic hybridity of Telephus provides a template for Aristophanes' own aesthetically hybrid comedy and, moreover, advertises it as politically principled and similarly marginalized by its dramatic peers as low-status, much like the marginalization of the Euripidean Telephus.

The paratragic mechanisms of *Acharnians* furnish a conceptual basis upon which subsequent chapters build. The survey of visual evidence for parody in contemporary theatre-related Attic and South Italian vase painting (400–350 BCE) in Chapter 2 ('Visualizing the Comic') develops the visual and narrative terms of appropriation. While texts remain our most abundant evidence for comic appropriation, they are not our sole source for information about comedy's performative and narrative strategies. Most of the signature scenes analysed in this chapter likely show generic collision in the visual terms of actual performance. Such vases parallel and confirm analogous extant textual strategies of parody. The 'Würzburg Telephus', the 'Berlin Heracles' and the Lucanian 'Phaedra' furnish rare glimpses of the comic physicality of performed parody – its costumes, props and ugliness – and the visual strategies necessary for making cross-generic play understandable to the widest number of spectators. Moreover, these signature scenes are often designed to express the narrative and metonymic significance of the particular scene, and in some cases the production to which it belongs. They thus transcend their ceramic surface. Other vases engage the shared cultural knowledge of viewers in more sophisticated ways by altering key moments in traditional myth and humorously reversing expectations of recognizable stories. In my original readings of these vases, reversals of two of the most notorious episodes of the *Iliou Persis* ('Sack of Troy'), the Rape of Cassandra and the Death of Priam, reflect the kind of irreverent revisions of accepted traditions in which comedy revels. More importantly, as counterfactual exercises they offer fascinating visual testimony of Old Comedy's interest in a topic given serious attention by contemporary genres such as epic, tragedy and historiography: the obscure origins of significant historical events and chains of causality. The final vases – 'Getty Birds', 'Choregoi' and the 'New York Goose Play' – show Old Comedy's face-to-face engagement with tragedy and satyr play in actual performance and in unique and sometimes textually unparalleled ways. This contemporary visual evidence for the reception of Greek comedy reveals much about what consumers of comedy deemed memorable and significant.

Chapter 3 ('Members Only? Satyrism and Satire in Late Fifth-Century Comedy') expands upon the other, lesser-known dramatic genre appropriated

by comedy, satyr play. In contrast to the variety of styles with which Old Comedy engages tragedy in the evidence of Chapters 1 and 2, the idiosyncratic appropriation of quasi-comic satyr play tends toward the *modal* and formulaic. Aristophanes, Cratinus and still more poets whose works are insufficiently preserved applied a satyric mode to expand comedy's formal and material repertoire. Satyr play's panhellenic and apolitical myth could defamiliarize and repackage comic topicality of the Athenian here-and-now with aetiological significance. Cratinus's *Dionysalexandros* (429 BCE) and Aristophanes' *Peace* (421) evoke satyr play's conventional and highly accessible themes and tropes to represent often complicated and opaque events of the Peloponnesian War as the humorously simplistic misadventures of the primitive bestial satyr chorus. An extant hypothesis shows that Cratinus reduced the war's putative instigator, the Athenian statesman Pericles, to a lecherous Dionysus surrounded by the only satyr chorus known to inhabit a comedy with certainty. Building upon recent work by Bakola and Storey, my reading suggests some hitherto unrecognized lines of interpretation, most notably the evidence for seeing *Dionysalexandros*'s parasatyric Judgment of Paris as possibly influenced by the popular narrative of the adultery plot. In *Peace*, Aristophanes compares the Greek states, which obstructed the peace process before the eventual negotiation of the short-lived peace treaty of 421 BCE, to puerile, hedonistic satyrs. Rendering his chorus of Greek *poleis* satyric in physical and emotional comportment, Aristophanes sustains his parasatyric modality much longer than previous scholars recognize.⁶⁷ After a first, unsuccessful attempt to free the eponymous goddess from her underground prison raises expectations of the generic failure associated with the childish and incompetent satyrs, the panhellene chorus overturns them to stunning effect in the successful second attempt, which liberates Peace from captivity. Such evocations of satyr play's imagery and themes position comedy in festival culture vis-à-vis the adventures of the satyrs, who were traditionally regarded as Old Comedy's putatively quasi-comic, generic relatives.

The comparison of mortals to satyrs in such large-scale parasatyrism is found in smaller, trope-oriented examples that exploit audience familiarity with a different aspect of the satyr, his notorious sexual aggression. The final section of this chapter examines character-based allusions to the aggression of these ithyphallic monsters during their inevitable encounters with vulnerable mythological females, a commonplace, if sadistic, feature of the genre's humour. In *Birds* (414 BCE) and *Thesmophoriazusae* (411 BCE), Aristophanes uses this stylized aggressiveness and the satyr's immunity from consequence as a benchmark against which the agency of the comic hero can be gauged. The

hubris of these ‘rape threats’ and the high status of its victims inevitably raise expectations of the satyr’s divine prerogative to misbehave without consequence. This misdirection, however, characterizes the very different agency of the comic heroes in question and the very different outcomes they experience.

The paratragic program of *Acharnians*, the iconography of Attic and South Italian vase painting, and the parasatyrlic modes of *Dionysalexandros* and other comedies develop a conceptual frame for approaching the more varied and sophisticated applications of tragedy to the social, political and cultural dilemmas of Aristophanes’ *Peace* and *Thesmophoriazusae* (411) in two play-based studies that follow in the book. Four years after its introduction in *Acharnians*, *τρυγῶδία* drives a comic project over the whole of the plot of *Peace* (Chapter 4, ‘Poetic Failure and Comic Success in Aristophanes’ *Peace*). Like Dicaeopolis, the hero Trygaeus – ‘Man of *τρυγῶδία*’ – tires of the continued bloodshed of the Peloponnesian War and enacts a drastic plan to scale the heavens and confront the Olympians. The centrality of parody to Trygaeus’s comic project is hardly a new insight. Yet scholarship’s overwhelming focus on the hero at the expense of other aspects of his project, namely his beetle, has hindered efforts to understand the depth of social and cultural commentary of the play’s signature parodies. The cultural significance of Trygaeus’s dung-beetle in the parody of Euripides’ *Bellerophon* lies in its overwhelmingly popular cultural and ideological appeal as a low-status creature who succeeds where his generic and social superiors failed. The beetle’s successful transport of his master to Olympus programmatically performs, as did its parasatyrlic hauling-scene examined in the previous chapter, *Peace*’s overarching agenda of converting failures of other prose and poetic genres into its own success. Perhaps the most intriguing variation on the theme is a pair of moments from the alleged celebration sequence of the play’s second half, which remain unrecognized as evidence for Aristophanic generic experimentation. Trygaeus’s rehabilitation of civilized institutions of the polis – sacrifice and marriage – indirectly challenges tragedy by effacing two parts of its repertoire, perverted sacrifice and marriage, which symbolize violent social and cultural breakdown. Aristophanes’ reinvestment of sacrifice and marriage with their positive value as rituals of social cohesion challenges tragedy’s prerogative to the portrayal of such critical institutions in the theatre.

In Chapter 5 (‘Old Comedy and Lyric Poetry’), I investigate comedy’s relationship to its most generically diverse rival, lyric. Comic poets value the ‘classic’ lyric of Simonides, Pindar and others as a symbol of the culturally, socially and politically superior Athens of the Persian War era. Aristophanes, Eupolis and other comic poets evoke the declining popularity of this idealized