Myth-Making in Aristophanes Innovation and Evolution in Attic Comedy

Myth-Making in Aristophanes Innovation and Evolution in Attic Comedy

By

Effie Zagari

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Myth-Making in Aristophanes Innovation and Evolution in Attic Comedy

By Effie Zagari

This book first published 2024

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-0364-1112-1
ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-1113-8

To my loving parents

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This volume is the culmination of many years of dedicated effort, in the course of which I was privileged to receive the invaluable recommendations of various scholars. Since this book is based on my doctoral thesis, I would like to start by thanking my supervisor Prof. Peter Kruschwitz for his continuous support throughout the entire process leading up to the thesis submission. Subsequently, I am deeply grateful to my examiners, Prof. Barbara Goff and Isabel Ruffell. Their meticulous feedback significantly contributed to the refinement of this work. The publication of this book would not have been possible without the insightful comments of Prof. Athina Papachrysostomou, whose expertise was instrumental in ensuring the accuracy and quality of this publication. Last but not least, special thanks are due to my parents, Andreas and Maria, who supported me financially and emotionally throughout this challenging journey.

1

INTRODUCTION: DISIECTI MEMBRA POETAE: THE FRAGMENTS OF ARISTOPHANES BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATION

Aristophanes is a towering figure in the history of ancient drama. The extant plays seem to transmit a coherent picture of the comic genius drawing up to a more or less monolithic image of the poet. The poet Aristophanes, as we may infer from the content of the plays, appeared as a defender of the polis and the demos. He was the caustic commentator on the Athenians' daily pressing problems. The social and political life of his city is the main focus within the extant comedies.[1] This impression is well-justified and supported until we take a look at the fragments. The fragments reveal that the nature of the Aristophanic corpus is much more nuanced and complex than the picture that emerges from the complete comedies. The fragmentary plays of this book belong to a very different type of Aristophanic creation

[1] E.g. Matthew Farmer and Jeremy Lefkowitz, eds., A Companion to Aristophanes (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2024); Ralph Rosen and Helene Foley, eds., Aristophanes and Politics: New Studies (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020); Michael Vickers, Aristophanes and Alcibiades: Echoes of Contemporary History in Athenian Comedy (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015); Sommerstein, Alan. "The Politics of Greek Comedy". In The Cambridge Companion to Greek Comedy, ed. Martin Revermann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 291-305; Isabel Ruffell, Politics and Anti-Realism in Athenian Old Comedy: The Art of the Impossible (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); John Zumbrunnen, "Fantasy, Irony, and Economic Justice in Aristophanes' Assemblywomen and Wealth," The American Political Science Review 100, No. 3 (August 2006): 319-333; Ian Storey, "Poets, Politicians and Perverts: Personal Humour in Aristophanes," Classics Ireland 5, (1998): 85-134; Gregory Dobrov, ed., The City as Comedy: Society and Representation in Athenian Drama (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Douglas MacDowell, Aristophanes and Athens: An Introduction to the Plays (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Malcolm Heath, Political Comedy in Aristophanes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987).

(and creativity), revealing the dynamics of an ever-evolving genre within a rapidly changing political order. Aristophanes experiments and engages with tragedy and parody more extensively than the instances found incorporated in his extant plays. That said, one cannot help but recognise the significant chunks of parody that exist in the extant plays such as *Acharnians*, *Peace*, *Thesmophoriazusae*, and *Frogs.* In these cases the general scenario remains original despite the clear presence of parodic scenes. This practice is more frequently adopted in Middle Comedy, rather than Old Comedy.[2] Another intriguing aspect of the plays examined in this study is their non-Athenian setting, as well as the apparent focus on domestic issues around which these plays may have been construed. These elements are also frequently encountered in Middle and New Comedy.

The mechanics of this Aristophanic achievement will be the primary topic of this book; in other words, one of the main issues in this study will be the ways in which Aristophanes could have turned a tragedy into a comedy, adopting a non-Athenian, domestic setting, and exploring the ramifications of such a practice within the larger context of the dramatic tradition. The current study focuses on the analysis of four plays in a way that has not been adopted by any of the existing editions of the comic fragments, which are mostly commentaries. The key accomplishment of this work is the reconstruction and analysis of these intriguing plays in a meticulous manner, offering suggestions and alternatives on matters of plot and characters. Dating, nature, content, characters, and plot reconstruction are aspects that are investigated in great detail (in some cases more than others, depending on the information available). The level of depth in the analysis of these plays, the observations that sprung from it, and what they add to our knowledge with regards to the work of Aristophanes are the main contributions of this book.

1.1 Working with fragments: methodological issues, risks, and problems

This section will outline the methodology employed and the challenges that one may encounter when working with fragments. A fragmentary play is a broken piece of art, a jigsaw puzzle, so to speak, of which we have been

[2] There are, of course, other interesting examples such as Strattis [Christian Orth, Strattis, Die Fragmente: Ein Kommentar (Berlin: Verlag Antike, 2009)], but for the purpose of this study focus will remain on Aristophanes. Further on Strattis and his parodies see chap. 2 in Matthew Farmer, Tragedy on the Comic Stage (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

unable to recover every piece. This incompleteness leaves ample room for various readings and interpretations, even regarding the plot.[3] A fragment can be perceived as a piece of a shattered vase, a ruined painting, or a piece of a puzzle. As in every puzzle, what matters is what is depicted on each piece; for example, if it is the middle part of a thigh, we would be fortunate to recognise that that is what it is, but if it is the mouth, then we are in the fortunate position to locate the lower end of the face, talk about the size of the lips, their colour and possibly draw some conclusions regarding the rest of the face and how it would be affected by the shape of the mouth. On the other hand, in the case of a vase, what would matter most is the size of the broken piece we have at hand. The bigger the piece the more of the original vase we have. In fragmentary literature, both the size and content of a fragment matter,[4] as we shall see further on in our discussion.

In this book, the reader will witness the combination of the two aforementioned methods. Building upon the excellent existing editions of the fragments as an initial guide, a still under-researched aspect of the Aristophanic corpus, found only in some of his fragmentary plays and hinted in the extant plays, will be brought into the centre of attention. The all-too-familiar image of the comic playwright is that of an ingenious, creative, amusing, politically engaged poet, constantly alluding to the rest of ancient Greek literature, mainly the genre of tragedy, who produced comedies for the sake of the common good, offering beneficial advice to the polis and its citizens. The majority of the extant plays take their title from their chorus;[5] some of them represent abstract personified concepts,[6] often presenting women as protagonists. However, only one of them is named after the heroine Lysistrata, an imaginary woman, who, with the help of other women, conveys a powerful anti-war message to the audience. However, is this all we have from Aristophanes? Do these plays indeed represent a good sample of his entire body of work and illuminate the trends of the time? Bakola, without underestimating the value of Aristophanes' extant plays, argues against this and notes the idea that the evidence from the extant plays

[3] Martin West, Textual Criticism and Editorial Technique Applicable to Greek and Latin Texts (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1973).

[4] For more information on the nature of a fragment and how this can activate our imagination see Gumbrecht, Hans. "Eat your fragment: about imagination and the restitution of texts". In Collecting Fragments - Fragmente Sammeln, ed. Glenn Most (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 319-327.

[5] *Clouds*, *Frogs*, *Wasps*, *Birds*, *Acharnians*, *Knights*, *Ecclesiazusae*, *Thesmophoriazusae.*

[6] *Peace*, *Wealth.*

is hardly enough to offer a comprehensive view of 5th c. Comedy.[7] This is true not only with regards to the work of other comic poets such as Cratinus, but also Aristophanes himself; inter alia the purpose of the present study is to illustrate the reasons behind this.

As far as the quantity of the Aristophanic fragments that have survived is concerned, we have not been as fortunate as with Menander or Euripides. Nevertheless, we possess more fragments from Aristophanes than from any other playwright of Old Comedy. The problematic aspect of the large number of fragments is that, in most cases, quite brief segments are preserved, quoted in the works of other ancient authors, i.e. they are embedded fragments. However, we have been more fortunate regarding the quality, namely the content, of the fragments in many cases. Quite a few of them, albeit brief, have proven to be very informative and useful, offering insights into the plot, characters, language, and overall picture of Aristophanes' multifaceted work throughout his productive period.

Unfortunately, not every fragment contributes to the plot, and many of them consist only of a single word. While this might seem peculiar, it is understandable when we consider that nothing more than a single word would interest a lexicographer, for example. In the case of the embedded fragments, we are not only dealing with Aristophanes' intentions but mainly with the intentions of the author who decided to quote the comic poet. Authors often quote other writers in order to support their argument and to engage with the existing scholarship. When a scholar delves into fragmentary works, the first challenge they face is what to include. Should we include every little piece of information found – whether we can make something out of it? Whether it is relevant or not? Or if we can put it into a wider context? As West points out, "when an editor wishes to publish only selected fragments, he must include testimonia – not biographical statements about the author or aesthetic judgements on his work, but everything that helps to compensate for the loss of the work by supplying evidence about its form or contents".[8]

Taking that principle into consideration, when dealing with embedded fragments, it is true that the exploration of their textual context is crucial for understanding the meaning of words or phrases and their implications,

[7] Emmanuela Bakola, Cratinus and the Art of Comedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 7.

[8] West, Textual Criticism and Editorial Technique Applicable to Greek and Latin Texts, 96. Although here the main point is about editing fragments rather than reconstructing plays, his approach is important because the kind of evidence that West deems useful can help not only regarding the plot, but also the broader understanding of an author's work.

which can often be obscure in Comedy. For example, fragments that come from ancient dictionaries offer little help regarding the context; on the other hand, they enable us to interpret the term more accurately. Conversely, authors like Athenaeus quote significant chunks, providing valuable context. Whatever the type a source may be, it is essential to bear in mind the authors' purposes and perspectives that influence their choice of fragments and their physical environment in the host-text, which in turn may also have an impact on our interpretation and its limitations.[9] Papachrysostomou outlined all these limitations regarding Athenaeus as a source in detail. Athenaeus most likely had accessibility to many sources personally, which is undoubtedly important, albeit not enough alone to securely deem him an authentic and trustworthy source.[10]

However, when the content of the fragments does not shed light on the play's plot, commentators face the challenge of the extent of freedom that there can be regarding their conjecture. However, one need not be discouraged by the above; we should examine each fragment as meticulously as possible and reach one or more conclusions based on the evidence and on our knowledge around the poet, genre, and intertextual influences. Even if those conclusions cannot be definitive and absolute, as it is the case with the alternative interpretations offered in this book with regard to the four plays, it is still important to propose different options, based on the available evidence. Then, we can explore those options further and we can discuss the different ways that a play's scenario might have unfolded, especially when adapting a tragic scenario into comedy.

It is true that the fragments offer a unique freedom, but, like every unlimited freedom, it can be dangerous. Limits will have to be imposed to the freedom of a scholar and their imagination regarding the extent of the assumptions that will unavoidably be made when one seeks the truth hidden in the fragments. Grafton, discussing the approach to *Fragmenta Historicorum Grecorum*, argues that "the honest historical scholar must report only what the sources yielded about the past, not what he and his

[9] Cf. Bakola, Cratinus and the Art of Comedy, 10; Glenn Most, Collecting Fragments = Fragmentesammeln (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997: vi-vii; West, Textual Criticism and Editorial Technique Applicable to Greek and Latin Texts, 18.
[10] Athina Papachrysostomou, Six Comic Poets: A Commentary on Selected Fragments of Middle Comedy (Tübingen: Narr, 2008), 16-17; Athina Papachrysostomou, Ephippus: Introduction, Translation, Commentary (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021), 12-13 (with further bibliography); cf. S. Douglas Olson, Broken Laughter: Select Fragments of Greek Comedy (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 29-30.

readers would like to find there".[11] This is an approach not free from subjectivity and personal argument and thus open to criticism.[12] Indeed, this is the safest path, particularly for a historical document, where imagination and creativity should be strictly refrained. The interesting point about fragments, whether literary or not, is the great potential they provide for their editor to be as creative as possible. The more fragmentary a work is, the higher the level of creativity there might be. Scholars who have worked on commentaries have always pointed out the dangers and risks involved in this type of philological work. Their significant remarks have led to the principles of textual criticism and edition, which are essential for maintaining the necessary scientific approach.[13]

The reliability of sources is another potential hazard. There have been cases where a fragment has been falsely attributed to a play or where it is rather ambiguous whether a fragment belongs to one play or another. In addition, the manuscripts that have completely or partially survived and their copies often contain errors that can distort the truth or render the text illegible. Textual transmission can be tricky, and the interference of the scribe or the editor sometimes only adds to the problem. Personal taste, background, literary and other knowledge as well as personal experience are all factors that can affect our judgment and attitude toward fragments. Whether textual criticism is a weapon and a shield against such interpolations still remains to be answered. Even then, when one tries to be as objective as possible, is it really feasible to leave our opinion aside regarding the text's form and meaning? The truth is that in order to investigate the ideas expressed in the text, it is necessary to keep in mind that there are severe limitations. In many cases, the discovery of the author's background, habits as well as the moral beliefs of the contemporary society is an impossible task. All these elements can only be inferred to a very limited extent, although one may argue that such an investigation can yield fruitful conclusions and discoveries, which would not have been possible

[11] Grafton, Anthony. "Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum: Fragments of Some Lost Enterprises". In Collecting Fragments - Fragmente Sammeln, ed. Glenn Most (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 124.

[12] See below pp. 7-8.

[13] Cf. Papachrysostomou, Six Comic Poets: A Commentary on Selected Fragments of Middle Comedy, 23-27; Ioanna Karamanou, Euripides, Danae and Dictys: Introduction, Text and Commentary (München: Saur, 2006), xviii-xxi; Bakola, Cratinus and the Art of Comedy, 9-10. On fragmentation in Greek Comedy, see Papachrysostomou, Athina. "πλῆθος ὅσον ἰχθύων...ἐπὶ πινάκων ἀργυρῶν (Ath. Deipn. 6.224b): A Different Kettle of Fish". In Fragmentation in Ancient Greek Literature, eds. Anna Lamari, Franco Montanari, Anna Novokhatko (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2020), 611-639.

otherwise.[14] The question then is whether the outcome of an edited fragment should be considered a new version of the surviving piece or an absolutely new creation. This question is constantly present when one attempts to reconstruct the broken pieces of a "glorious past". This is another project that aims not only to revive the past and investigate an under-researched area but also to demonstrate that classical research and philology still have, and will always have, a very good reason to exist.

One of the most fascinating such areas, worthy of further research, is the genre of classical drama, specifically Comedy, which was a very sophisticated means of transmitting and disseminating ideas. Aristophanes is one of its most renowned representatives.[15] Therefore, quite justifiably he has received tremendous attention from very skilled and professional scholars in antiquity and in the modern era. His extant plays, in particular, have undergone thorough analysis over the years, with numerous ongoing research projects dedicated to exploring them further.[16]

As discussed earlier, it is important to acknowledge the inherent subjectivity involved in this endeavour. Even though one may argue that we should solely rely on the sources and what they have preserved,[17] being subjective is unavoidable, when one attempts to interpret a source and explore possibilities, based on this interpretation. Every interpreter views the plays and their fragments through their own lens, and, consequently, one cannot be sure of its certainty, but rather of its uncertainty. Here perhaps lies the fascinating element and beauty of attempting to reconstruct lost plays. To counterbalance this subjectivity, the discourse in the present study will represent alternative approaches and elucidate how decisions were taken and certain suggestions were put forward.

The potential difficulties and dangers that one may face when dealing with fragmentary works are many. Since the fragment is by definition isolated from its original context, a close reading that meticulously examines the surviving words is imperative; the bigger picture can only emerge as a result of an analysis of the details. In addition, the fragmentary nature of the text presents a significant risk, as it allows for more than one possible interpretation. In the following, there is a discussion on different ways

[14] West, Textual Criticism and Editorial Technique Applicable to Greek and Latin Texts, 8.
[15] Probably due to the fact that the only plays of Old Comedy that have survived in a complete form belong to him.
[16] For a comprehensive bibliography on Aristophanes' extant plays see Θεόδωρος Παππᾶς, Ἀριστοφάνης: Ὁ Ποιητὴς καὶ τὸ Ἔργο του (Ἀθήνα: Gutenberg, 2016).
[17] Cf. pp. 5-6.

around these problems, although it is often impossible to completely eliminate the problem.

There are numerous reasons why it is worth investing time in something as uncertain and broken as Aristophanes' fragmentary plays, rather than only looking into the works that have survived in a complete state and therefore offer a comprehensive understanding of the content and context. Not everyone would agree with this and a severe polemic against plot reconstruction has been expressed in the past. One of the most notable examples is Olson's famous position that "systematic examination of the fragments of the preserved comedies in Athenaeus makes clear that reconstruction of the plots of lost comedies is almost inevitably doomed to failure by the poverty of our sources, on the one hand, and by the unrepresentative nature of the material preserved for us, on the other."[18] Although he does leave some room for doubt in his phrasing ("almost"), he is clearly sceptical towards such attempts.

While I do share his concerns about the intractability of the sources and the material available, which is indeed scarce in the case of Aristophanes too, I still believe that attempting a plot reconstruction in certain cases is worth our while. The over-reliance on Athenaeus is of course problematic, given his one-sided approach and potential omissions of crucial material for understanding a plot. This need not mean that the material encountered in every source will present the same difficulties. Especially when the hypothesis or the general context is known (such as a play being a parody of another), then there is at least a somewhat firmer ground on which certain plot elements can be recovered and more can be suggested based on the evidence. The researcher ought to scrutinize all the evidence carefully and suggest possible interpretations. As it is the case with every lost play, one can never be certain of these suggestions, which on the other hand will be supported by as many pieces of evidence as possible, whether intertextual or historical. As a result and as we shall see in this book, while a complete plot reconstruction may be unattainable, progress can still be made by identifying and understanding certain elements, thereby enriching our knowledge. Therefore, efforts to reconstruct plot elements of lost plays are definitely significant and not necessarily doomed to failure.

The motivation behind this study stems from two key aspects inherent in fragmentary works, particularly within the genre of Comedy. The first one is exactly the same as when we are working on complete dramas.

[18] Olson, S. Douglas. "Athenaeus' Aristophanes and the Problem of Reconstructing Lost Comedies". In Fragmente einer Geschichte der Griechischen Komödie – Fragmentary History of Greek Comedy, eds. Stylianos Chronopoulos and Christian Orth (Heidelberg: Verlag Antike, 2015), 35-65.

A play is not by definition of inferior significance simply because it has not been fully preserved. Philologists investigate and analyse fragments today because they have been proven to be as important as any extant play. In some cases, fragments have been our only resolution in order to discover and define the literature of a specific era or a specific author, offering valuable insights into the contemporary history and society. Had we not attempted to work on fragmentary pieces, the whole work of writers such as Cratinus[19] or Eupolis,[20] who are equally important as Aristophanes, would have been dismissed, let alone whole periods of literary creation, such as what we call today Middle Comedy, which has survived only in a fragmentary form.

Out of hundreds of plays which were written and staged, to-date we have only eleven complete works by Aristophanes and one by Menander. The rest of the corpus is entirely lost or has survived in fragments, through quotations in other ancient authors or on Egyptian papyrus scraps. While some fragments consist of only a couple of words, others offer more substantial insights regarding the themes, patterns, and developments of ancient Comedy. The goal of Athenian Comedy was to impress the audience in an amusing way and win the final prize.[21] What was important about Comedy is the fact that it reflected the sociopolitical life as well as the literary tradition of its time.[22]

Finally, the second reason for undertaking the said endeavour is related to the unique nature of the fragments and the charming sense of mystery they evoke. Exploring these fragments is akin to embarking on a journey of discovery, delving into the unknown and uncovering glimpses of ancient

[19] Francesco, Bianchi, Cratino: Introduzione e Testimonianze (Heidelberg: Verlag Antike, 2017); Francesco Bianchi, Cratino, Archilochoi - Empipramenoi (frr. 1-68): Introduzione, Traduzione, Commento (Heidelberg: Verlag Antike, 2016).

[20] S. Douglas Olson, Eupolis, Testimonia and Aiges - Demoi (frr. 1-146): Introduction, Translation, Commentary (Heidelberg: Verlag Antike, 2017); S. Douglas Olson, Eupolis, Heilotes - Chrysoun genos: Translation and Commentary (Heidelberg: Verlag Antike, 2016).

[21] Cf. Henderson, Jeffrey. "The Demos and the Comic Competition". In Nothing to Do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in its Social Context, eds. John Winkler and Froma Zeitlin (Princeton, N. J. and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1990), 271-313; Sommerstein, Alan. "The Theatre Audience and the Demos". In La Comedia Griega y su Influencia en la Literature Española, ed. Juan Lopez Ferez, (Madrid: Ediciones Clásicas, 1998), 43-62. Although the desire to win prizes has been questioned by Matthew Wright, The Comedian as Critic: Greek Old Comedy and Poetics (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2012).

[22] Olson, Broken Laughter: Select Fragments of Greek Comedy, 1.

wit and wisdom. Therefore, the fragments present a mystery that would attract any human being, even more so a classicist.

1.2 The fragments of Aristophanes' comedies: The *status quaestionis*

The endeavour to unlock the full potential of what might be hiding within the fragmentary works of every genre, including Comedy, has become a major trend in classical scholarship over the past few decades. The content of works of poets that we only knew by name has successfully been reconstructed, thanks to the outstanding research performed by scholars who have published commentaries on poets from the genres of Old[23] and Middle Comedy.[24] The present volume is a significant contribution to this scholarship by providing a more detailed discussion of an intriguing aspect of the Aristophanic work which is encountered in the four fragmentary plays presented herein.

Aristophanes' fragments have attracted some attention from scholars, who have revolutionised classical studies throughout the past centuries.[25] Presently, there are few published editions of Aristophanes' fragmentary plays; some of them confine their analysis to an apparatus criticus, others attempt to interpret the content and context of the fragments, albeit briefly and not always convincingly, whereas others are traditional commentaries focusing mainly on the linguistic features. All these types of research have played a pivotal role in fostering a deeper understanding of the fragments, both individually and as components of a lost comic play. They have all been consulted with equal care and respect in this study, which focuses on the

[23] e.g. Ian Storey, Fragments of Old Comedy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), and Eupolis: Poet of Old Comedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Bakola, Cratinus and the Art of Comedy; Christian Orth, Strattis, Die Fragmente: Ein Kommentar (Berlin: Verlag Antike, 2009); Serena Pirrotta, Plato Comicus: Die Fragmentarischen Komodien. Ein Commentar, (Berlin: Verlag Antike, 2009); Olson, Broken Laughter: Select Fragments of Greek Comedy; Mario Telò, Eupolidis Demi (Firenze: F. Le Monnier, 2007).

[24] e.g. Papachrysostomou, Six Comic Poets: A Commentary on Selected Fragments of Middle Comedy; Richard Hunter, Eubulus: The Fragments (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); W. Geoffrey Arnott, Alexis: The Fragments: A Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[25] For an excellent literature review of the various older publications of comic fragments see Isabel Ruffell, "Comedy", The Journal of Hellenic Studies 132, (2012): 157-171. I will refer to the most recent scholarship in more detail in this chapter.

meticulous discussion of four plays, offering a fresh approach and analysis distinct from the existing editions.

The first critical edition and a reference work I would like to mention is the Kassel-Austin edition of the fragments of Greek comic poets, which is a most useful gift to classicists worldwide and a great heritage to the next generation of philologists.[26] The first volume was published in 1983 and it is a collection of Greek comic fragments. It is comprised of eight volumes organised alphabetically, starting with a volume on *Doric comedy, mimes, phlyaces* and finishing with a volume that includes all the adespota fragments. Aristophanes is placed in the third volume, where the fragments are organised in plays, accompanied by an exemplary, comprehensive apparatus criticus, elucidating the transmitted form of the ancient text, the majority of which are embedded fragments. Rudolf Kassel and Colin Austin organised the fragments and thus facilitated their study to a considerable extent.

While this edition stood as the most systematically arranged compilation of comic fragments at the time, it was not the first. Kassel-Austin signalled a significant advancement after the obsolete editions of comic Greek fragments by Augustus Meineke,[27] Theodor Kock[28], and Georg Kaibel,[29] which were incomplete, outdated, and occasionally contained wrongly assigned fragments. However, their dated work does not render these editions irrelevant or useless. In many cases, for the interpretation of the fragments, comments that accompanied the fragments were illuminating to the context and the plot of the play.

The aforementioned 19th c. editions, alongside Edmonds' edition in 1957, belong to the group of works on fragments that go beyond a linguistic approach and an apparatus criticus. They translate and comment (extensively in some cases) on other (non-linguistic) aspects of the fragments, a practice

[26] Rudolf Kassel and Colin Austin, Poetae Comici Graeci (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1984). Cf. Jeffrey Rusten, "Review of Poetae Comici Graeci Vol I; Dorische Posse," Bryn Mawr Classical Review (2001); S. Douglas Olson, "Review of R. Kassel and C. Austin (eds.), Poetae Comici Graeci. VI (2): Menander: Testimonia et Fragmenta apud Scriptores Servata," The Classical Journal 96, (2001): 442-445; Richard Hunter, "Book Review of Poetae Comici Graeci, Vol. V: Damoxenus - Magnes," Classical Review 88, No.1 (April 1988): 14-15; Nigel Wilson, "Review of Poetae Comici Graeci, IV: Aristophon - Crobylus," Classical Review 34, No. 2 (October 1984): 178-180.

[27] Augustus Meineke, Fragmenta Comicorum Graecorum (Berlin: G. Reimeri, 1839-1857).

[28] Theodor Kock, Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta (Leipsig: B.G. Teubner, 1880-1888).

[29] Georg Kaibel, Comicorum Graecorum Fragmenta (Berlin: Weidmann, 1899).

scarcely employed by Kassel-Austin or even Henderson's more recent Loeb edition.[30] The Loeb edition of Aristophanes' fragments follows closely and relies on the Kassel-Austin edition while also offering an English translation and very brief comments on the content/context of a fragment/play. It serves as a valuable resource for those interested in studying the Aristophanic fragments, both attributed and unattributed, with an apparatus criticus, an English translation, and a useful foreword for each play, introducing the content, intertextual allusions, and overall significance.

However, more progress has been made since the Loeb edition with two rather dissimilar works. In 2011, Rusten's collection of selected[31] Greek comic fragments was released. Although this study also had Kassel-Austin as a guide, adopts a format that is more "user-friendly" to a non-specialist. It provides English translations of the testimonia and fragments with very brief comments on the content and metre. Additionally, Rusten has included illustrations as data, which can also be found in Webster and others.[32] An informative introduction precedes, discussing Athenian Comedy and its history, and (what could be deemed more important) the sources of the fragments.

Four years after Rusten's publication, a very modern Italian edition of the Aristophanic fragments emerged, the result of the work of a highly competent team of classicists. Matteo Pellegrino's edition, published in 2015, enriched the contemporary scholarship with an informative volume that offers a well-organised and updated edition, building upon all the previous ones. Pellegrino's contribution provides new insights, particularly regarding the context of the fragments. The volume has the structure of an expanded Loeb edition, so to speak, and bears closer resemblance to the 19th c. editions with a translation and comments (sometimes occupying a whole page only for a single fragment). Pellegrino analyses each fragment and play using different approaches separately and in combination in order to achieve an optimum result. His volume also delves into textual and contextual issues.

---

[30] Jeffrey Henderson, Aristophanes: Fragments (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[31] Jeffrey Rusten, ed., The Birth of Comedy: Texts, Documents, and Art from Athenian Comic Competitions, 486-280 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 2-3, explains that he deliberately excluded fragments which he suggests are better studied in the original language since they pose linguistic problems as well as those that are written in a difficult language and there is no translation that would do them justice.

[32] Thomas Webster, Monuments Illustrating Old and Middle Comedy (London: Institute of Classsical Studies, 1978); Thomas Webster, Monuments Illustrating New Comedy (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 1969); Arthur Trendall, Phlyax Vases (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 1967).

It should be noted that it is particularly useful for those who are mostly interested in the intertextuality between the Aristophanic fragments and classical literature. In addition, his analysis on the papyrus fragments is also praiseworthy.[33]

Last but not least, the most recent and comprehensive edition of the Greek comic fragments stems from the ongoing project "Commentary on Fragments of Greek Comedy", based at the University of Freiburg, funded and supervised by the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. In this project, a plethora of classicists collaborated under the lead of Professor Bernhard Zimmermann in order to produce a commentary on the Greek comic fragments accompanied by a translation, thus contributing greatly to our knowledge of the history of classical Greek literature.[34] Non-English, detailed commentaries on the four plays of the book have been published[35] and provided philologists with a comprehensive understanding of various aspects of the fragmentary plays, including metrical, linguistic, transmission, and interpretation issues. The volumes present a lengthy, analytical discussion, which would be a great tool for a philologist or a classicist with an expertise in Greek Comedy.

The present volume, although not a commentary of this sort, is very much indebted to all the aforementioned commentaries and editions of the Aristophanic fragments. The foundations of the present book were laid by the meticulous linguistic edition of the text and the intertextual references identified. What this volume contributes is the further examination of the text in combination with these intertextual references, which were more closely and more extensively analysed and compared. The present study aims to enrich the multilateral approach that a play requires, especially when the material is fragmentary and a vast number of possibilities are available.

Among contemporary studies on the fragments of Aristophanes, which do not only offer a commentary on the fragments but also include a discussion and an analysis of the themes that arise, one must mention

[33] For a review of the work see Effie Zagari, "Review of Aristofane: Frammenti," Classical Review 66, No. 2 (October 2016): 337-338.

[34] Many of the volumes are now published, including those that concern the plays of the book. For information on the Fragmenta Comica (FrC) volumes of the project see: http://www.komfrag.uni-freiburg.de.

[35] Christian Orth, Aristophanes, Aiolosikon I, II - Babylonioi (frr. 1-100): Übersetzung und Kommentar (Heidelberg: Verlag Antike, 2017), 9-93; Andreas Bagordo, Aristophanes Georgoi - Daidalos (fr. 101-204): Übersetzung und Kommentar (Göttingen: Verlag Antike, 2022), 126-144; Olimpia Imperio, Aristophanes Eirene II - Lemniai, fr. 305-391 (Göttingen: Verlag Antike, 2023), 227-269; Maria Torchio, Aristophanes Nephelai Protai - Proagon, fr. 392-486: Traduzione e Commento (Heidelberg: Verlag Antike, 2021), 234-253.

Carrière,[36] who offers a very brief introduction to the thirty-three lost comedies with a selection of translated fragments and comments. In his introduction, Carière divides the comedies into thematic categories, one of which is "Mythical subjects and paratragedies"; under this section are found the four plays of this book along with the *Danaids*, *Dionysus Shipwrecked*, *Dramas or Centaur*, *Dramas or Niobus*, *Lemnian Women*, and *Phoenician Women.*

Another significant work pertinent to this research is Casolari's[37] on mythical travesty in Greek Comedy, which offers an overview of mythical travesties in Old, Middle, and New Comedy. Of particular relevance is the sixth chapter under the title "Die Vorwegnahme einiger Motive der Neuen Komödie durch die Mythentravestie in der Mittleren Komödie", where she analyses the elements that bring *Cocalus* and *Aeolosicon* much closer to Middle and New Comedy. These elements will be thoroughly discussed in the last chapter of this book. Equally important for similar reasons are Rau's *Paratragodia*: *Untersuchung einer komischen Form des Aristophanes*[38] and Bakola, Prauscello, and Telò's *Greek Comedy and the Discourse of Genres*,[39] which discuss the phenomenon of parody in Aristophanes but focus primarily on specific scenes rather than the whole fragmentary plays that were composed as parodies.

Alan Sommerstein has contributed to the study of Aristophanic fragments in many ways. One example is his book titled *Talking about Laughter and other Studies in Greek Comedy*,[40] in which he discusses crucial issues that arise in the fragments such as Platonius' questionable

[36] Carrière, Jean-Claude. "L'Aristophane Perdu. Une Introduction aux Trente-Trois Comédies Disparues avec un Choix de Fragments Traduits et Commentés". In Le théâtre Grec Antique: la Comédie. Actes du 10ème Colloque dela Villa Kérylos à Beaulieu-sur-Mer, les 1er & 2 octobre 1999, (Paris: Publications de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 2000), 197-236.

[37] Federica Casolari, Die Mythentravestie in der Griechischen Komödie (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2003).

[38] Peter Rau, Paratragodia: Untersuchungeiner Komischen Form des Aristophanes (München: Beck, 1967).

[39] Bakola, Emmanuela, Prauscello, Lucia, and Telò, Mario, eds. Greek Comedy and the Discourse of Genres (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[40] Alan Sommerstein, Talking about Laughter and Other Studies in Greek Comedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

testimonium on *Aeolosicon*.[41] Moreover, Gil Fernández's[42] study could not be omitted from this section, particularly because of the importance of his chapters on the transmission of the text, the chronology of the comedies, and the very brief introductory note on each of the fragmentary plays.[43] It is a useful introduction before reading the fragments, which are excluded from his study. Finally, Oliver Taplin's *Comic Angels* collects and presents the vase paintings depicting scenes from Greek Comedy;[44] the visual representations of Greek Tragedy in Greek Comedy and his discussion on Greek theatrical productions in South Italy are particularly relevant to the present study.

There is, however, still a noticeable gap in the Aristophanic literature. While the fragments of each play may be scant, they provide a wealth of new information about Aristophanes' oeuvre, his time, and the comedic genre. What is particularly intriguing when reading these plays is the fact that among them there is hitherto neglected evidence for a different type of comedy that Aristophanes produced, which has not survived in any of the extant plays. Therefore, the four fragmentary plays covered in the present work represent this new type of Aristophanic comedy and this is ultimately the reason for why they were selected.[45]

What is still missing from the contemporary Aristophanic scholarship is a synthetic approach to the fragments that would give prominence to these

---

[41] One cannot disregard the many difficulties in Platonius' narrative about the change in the content and style of comedy, such as the fact that chorus had actually not lost its dramatic function. On the matter see Sidwell, Keith. "From Old to Middle to New? Aristotle's Poetics and the History of Athenian Comedy". In The Rivals of Aristophanes: Studies in Athenian Old Comedy, eds. John Wilkins and David Harvey (London: Duckworth, 2000), 248-249. I discuss this in chap. 4.1.

[42] Luis Gil Fernández, Aristófanes (Madrid: Gredos, 1996).

[43] The exact same section is also found in his De Aristófanes a Menandro (Madrid: Ediciones Clásicas, 2010).

[44] Oliver Taplin, Comic Angels: And other Approaches to Greek Drama through Vase-Paintings (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), makes a sustained argument of the so-called "phlyax vases" and the spread of Old Comedy; see also Trendall, Phlyax Vases, which is more of a reference work.

[45] The argument here is that these plays are different to the extant plays of Aristophanes as they appear to be parodies of a whole tragedy or a burlesque of a specific myth. While the extant plays certainly contain these elements, their scenario is still original rather than being mostly based on a mythical or tragic subject. As far as earlier mythological burlesque is concerned, there is certainly a continuity of this tradition, but the scarcity of the Aristophanic fragments does not allow us to say more on the potential differences that may have existed between the four plays of the book and the mythological burlesque of earlier comedy.

aspects of the Aristophanic creation that are not outstanding in the extant plays. This constitutes a secondary objective of the present research, which focuses on Aristophanic parody. In the extant plays there are significant chunks of parody, although their scenario and plot are still an original idea. On the other hand, the selected fragmentary plays seem to have been composed as parodies of tragedies. The scales are reversed here and originality loses its power and space to the creative comic reproduction of a tragic play. However, this is not the only novel piece of information we can acquire from the fragments. They are cases in which Aristophanes uses themes and plots from Greek mythology to this extent. The research on how Aristophanes may have reworked ancient myths is a fascinating aspect of the fragments.[46]

Finally, an additional intriguing branch of this research emerged with the discovery of the interconnections between Aristophanes' so-called Old Comedy and the succeeding comic eras and sub-genres, i.e. the Middle and New Comedy. This is a very complex and fascinating topic that has also been hinted at in the extant plays and discussed in the scholarship,[47] but needs the contribution of a study of the fragments, whose approach includes such an analysis. The present study will facilitate future research on the "new" elements in the extant comedies in combination with the fragmentary ones, perhaps with particular attention to the plays that Aristophanes produced towards the end of his career in the 4th c. BC.

1.3 Parody in Aristophanes

There is a significant amount of scholarship on Aristophanic parody, particularly regarding the extant plays. Silk discusses Aristophanes' engagement with tragedy and especially with Euripides who was most appealing to him as an experimenter.[48] In his "Aristophanic Paratragedy",

[46] On ancient forms of myth reworkings see Martin Vöhler, Bernd Seidensticker, and Wolfgang Emmerich, eds., Mythenkorrekturen: Zu einer Paradoxalen Form der Mythenrezeption (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), and specifically on Greek tragedy in this context see Seidensticker's chapter.

[47] Cf. Heinz Nesselrath, Die Attische Mittlere Komödie: Ihre Stellung in der Antiken Literaturkritik und Literaturgeschichte (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), and Nesselrath, "Myth, Parody, and Comic Plots: The Birth of Gods and Middle Comedy." In Beyond Aristophanes: Transition and Diversity in Greek Comedy, ed. Gregory Dobrov (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995). A more extensive discussion of the scholarship on the topic is included in chap. 1.4.

[48] Michael Silk, Aristophanes and the Definition of Comedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For a very interesting discussion on Aristophanes'

he explores the ways in which Aristophanic paratragedy can be parodic and analyses the element of subversion used in it. He highlights the fact that although parody carries negative connotations, paratragedy does not. He draws parallels with modern parody, especially Mason's parody of Auden and Pound's parody of Housman and supports the argument that most of the Aristophanic cases of paratragedy are not parodic. For example, he argues that Aristophanes' use of *Telephus* makes the scene and the action richer, as generally does the co-existence of comic and tragic in the Aristophanic plays.[49] Indeed, in some cases Aristophanic paratragedy does not necessarily need to be parodic, although it is often the case that a paratragic scene is also parodic. For example, it seems to me that this could be the case with *Telephus* too and the way Euripides is presented in that scene in the *Acharnians*, which includes the element of ridicule with the implications regarding Euripides' lowly origins, rather than simply being a reference to Euripidean tragedy.

In any case, Telephus has proven to be a very rich and useful character for many reasons and from different aspects. Foley states that Aristophanes with the use of Telephus invites the audience to admire the tragic accent he is giving to his comedy, his "τρυγωιδία". In Foley's view, Telephus is the perfect character as he is not an exile and he is trying to find justice for past actions disguised into a beggar. Aristophanes found him suitable as he himself is also functioning as the advocate of comedy seeking justice for it through the words of Dicaeopolis (the similarities between these characters do not end here).[50] Dicaeopolis and Telephus are two characters connected in the *Acharnians*, and it seems that the use of Telephus is helping Dicaeopolis to reinforce his points.

From the point of view of both Silk and Foley, it seems that paratragedy can have a more important application and operation than parody, especially as far as the use of *Telephus* is concerned. However, I think that this

---

engagement with Euripides see also Rosanna Lauriola Aristofane Serio-Comico: Paideia e Geloion con una Lettura degli Acarnesi (Pisa: ETS, 2010); "Praeteritio, Mimesis and Parody: Synergistic Strands in the Fabric of Aristophanes' Comedies," AION 34, (2012): 63-94; "Aristophanes and Euripides, Once Again: From Hippolytus 345 to Knights 16-18," Prometheus 5, (2016): 71-95, who argues that Aristophanes, in his attempt to parody Euripides and create his owm comedy, is actually using the work of the parodised. In other words, he ridicules the tragedian by creatively copying him, which is part of his technique of *praeteritio*.

[49] Silk, Michael. "Aristophanic Paratragedy". In Tragedy, Comedy and the Polis: Papers from the Greek Drama Conference, Nottingham, 18-20 July 1990, ed. Alan Sommerstein (Bari: Levante Editori, 1993), 477-504.

[50] Helene Foley, "Tragedy and Politics in Aristophanes' Acharnians," The Journal of Hellenic Studies 108 (November 1988): 33-47.

significant role of paratragedy does not need to prevail over the parodic use when the two can co-exist in dramatic harmony. Goldhill focused on the parodic (mis)representation of the democratic institutions by Dicaeopolis in the *Acharnians* and the Euripidean disguise as a parodic reference to *Telephus*, as well as the parody of the value of tragic poetry and the competition between tragedians that we encounter in *Frogs*. He sees the Aristophanic world as "Upside Down", since parody goes hand in hand with comic inversion: "all fall under the general rubric of an inversion or distortion of an assumed model, set in a new context, for comic effect – a rubric that remains the starting point for definitions of parody". Goldhill discusses the double voice of parody and the intricate relationship between the parodist and the object of parody. He views parody as a licensed transgression and compares it with carnival. The recognition of parody and the various interpretations that can exist among different spectators are central in his research.[51] Indeed, in order for a mechanism of parody to be successful, the parodic model needs to be visible and comprehensible under the parodic disguise. The audience will need to be able to recognise the original so that the parody is clear and what they see has some meaning for them. Rose also comments on the audience's expectations and the contrasts (which are created on various levels between model and parodic result) that are supposed to be recognised in a parody. She argues that surprise and humour are closely related in this case.[52]

The parodic and/or paratragic engagement of Aristophanes with Euripides is present in various instances in his comedies, whether thematically or verbally. Zeitlin, who points out that paratragodia exists constantly in Aristophanes, explores the parody of four Euripidean tragedies (*Telephus, Palamedes, Helen, Andromeda*) in *Thesmophoriazusae*. Euripides appears as the impersonator of a parody of his tragedies and specifically the rescue-recognition plays. She defines parody as "the literary device which openly declares its status as an imitation with a difference".[53] *Thesmophoriazusae* is indeed a very rich in tragic parody play, especially in Euripidean parody. It is always fascinating to see how a tragic scene can be successfully transformed to fit into a comedy. For example, Diamantakou's work focuses on the recognition scene between Menelaus and Helen in Euripides' *Helen* and the

[51] Simon Goldhill, The Poet's Voice: Essays on Poetics and Greek Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 187-211.
[52] Margaret Rose, Parody, Ancient, Modern and Post-Modern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 33-34.
[53] Zeitlin, Froma. "Travesties of Gender and Genre". In Reflections of Women in Antiquity, ed. Helene Foley (New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1981), 176-181.

ways this was exploited in *Thesmophoriazusae* by Aristophanes one year later. She discusses the Aristophanic method of parody that will provoke laughter. Aristophanes reproduces and reuses significant portions of the Euripidean drama but re-assigned to different characters and given a different context, which will successfully lead to a comic result.[54] This is something that the present volume also aspires to achieve, but it is significantly harder when both the tragic model and the comedy are in a very fragmentary form, which is the case with the plays of the book.

Aristophanic parody operates on different levels and through various means. A parodic scene can be realised verbally as well as visibly in the course of a comic performance. Slater researches the metatheatrical devices/techniques in Aristophanic plays also through the use of parody of tragedies (especially Euripides'). For example, he explores the parody of Euripides in *Acharnians* from a metatheatrical aspect, also discussing the props that may have been used in order to make the parody recognisable to the audience when Euripides appears on the ekkyklema. Another notable example he employs comes from *Peace*, where Trygaeus using the mechane appears flying on a beetle. He argues that the use of the device on a first level parodies its tragic use (Euripides' *Bellerophon*), but it is a parody at the service of the comic plot, serving a higher, broader purpose than the pretentious tragedy. More parodic scenes from Euripidean drama follow such as *Palamedes*, *Helen*, and *Andromeda,* where the parody is realised on a verbal level too. *Frogs* has elements of a katabasis myth and contains numerous instances of literary parody, such as the mispronunciation of the protagonist of Euripides' *Orestes* in 408 (lines 303-4 in the comedy).[55]

Most of the studies on Aristophanic parody are informed by works on the theory of parody and the ways it operates in literature. For instance, P. von Möllendorff's work on the aesthetics of Old Comedy in relation to Bakhtin's theory is noteworthy. After discussing the significance of laughter, dialogue, and the idea of grotesque in Bakhtin, he looks at Aristophanes' extant plays exploring the same, specifically examining the mechanics of distortion in them. He delves into the complicated nature of laughter at the grotesque and

[54] Καίτη Διαμαντάκου, Περί Τραγωδίας και Τρυγωδίας (Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Παπαζήση, 2007), 177-183.

[55] Niall Slater, Spectator Politics: Metatheatre and Performance in Aristophanes (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). Although the mispronunciation of Hegelokhos might not be the most representative element, it is still an interesting instance of this type of parody.

the phenomenon of the carnivalisation of literature. Polyphony is another key element that is also investigated in relation to the Aristophanic theatre.[56]

One of the most important works on the mechanics of parody is certainly Bakhtin's study,[57] which focuses on the genre of novel, where stylistic parody of other genres plays a fundamental role. In his view, what he calls "the absolute past" of the world of epic is "contemporized" in parody and especially in travesty. Examples both from the ancient and the modern world, such as the *Batrachomyomachia* and *Don Quixote,* are employed. Bakhtin believes that every elevated genre had its parodic counterpart and also talks about the myths presented in Greek tragedy and satyr plays (written by the same author). He discusses cases of a parodised comic version of a hero such as Odysseus and Heracles and points out that parody is one of the essential structural components of Greek Comedy. The importance of polyglossia in parodic-travestying forms is stressed, as it is observed in Latin literature that engages with the Greek. It is argued that the parodic literature of the medieval era, which bloomed in times of holidays and festivals, is associated with the carnival. Parody is defined as an "intentional hybrid" which operates usually within a linguistic system that includes different kinds of languages, it is a "dialogized hybrid", as he calls it. Bakhtin also talks about Aristophanes and his comedy, in which he sees a cultic laughter as well as a cultic foundation and death as the central theme, accompanied by food, drink, and sex. He completely dismisses Aristophanes' contribution to the development of the genre of Comedy as insignificant and superficial but he does see the Aristophanic thread picked up by Rabelais and medieval parodic farce.

Indeed, parody imbues a work with a creative polyphony and frequently opens dialogues between different literary genres, such as Comedy and Tragedy. However, the fact that tragic burlesque gains prominence in the comic sub-genres after Aristophanes' time could mean that there was a level of contribution to the generic development from the part of Aristophanes as well as other authors of Greek Old Comedy. Although it remains uncertain to what extent the later comic poets were influenced by Aristophanes, it is still worth looking at the ways that the Aristophanic work might have contributed to the generic development. This is a topic that will be discussed throughout the book, particularly in the conclusion.

There are more scholars who engaged with and assessed Bakhtin's theory when discussing Aristophanic parody. Rose, in her discussion of

---

[56] Peter von Möllendorff, Grundlagen einer Ästhetik der Alten Komödie: Untersuchungen zu Aristophanes und Michail Bakhtin (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1995).
[57] Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays. Trans. Caryl Emerson, and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).