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Epideixis versus elenchus:

The epirrhetic agon and the politics of Aristophanes' *Frogs*

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Abstract: This paper proposes a particular interpretation of the epirrhetic agon between Euripides and Aeschylus in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, namely that Euripides' epirrhetic constitutes a rhetorical display (*epideixis*), whereas Aeschylus' involves a question-and-answer approach with elements that resemble the Socratic elenchus. This interpretation is then employed toward a broader understanding of the politics of this play, including the final judgment of Dionysus. I argue that Euripides is consistently depicted as a disruptive force in the life of the community in both cultural and political terms, so that his eventual rejection signifies concern for communal cohesion in a time of crisis for Athens.

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1. Introduction

The contest of Aeschylus and Euripides in Aristophanes' *Frogs* is an exciting and relatively early instance of ancient literary criticism,¹ and, moreover, presents us with a battle between two antithetical cultural *exempla*. To an important degree, the images of the two poets function as "comic vehicles" and depict tensions of the Athenian society toward the end of the fifth century. A prominent aspect of this lies in the antithesis between traditional poetic and social values and the rise of "new learning". In this context, it has often been noticed that the character of Aeschylus has been given the role of the champion of tradition, whereas the character of Euripides is related to new intellectuals and new politicians.² On the level of poetic diction, this antithesis is realized through the presentation of Aeschylus as a poet whose poetic instinct produces poetry in an unmediated manner, and who shoots his lyrics directly into his audience's hearts,³ whereas Euripides is a "bookish" poet, obsessed with verbal clarity and the logical articulation of speech; he polishes his word and processes his thoughts in detail, so his poetry is the result of labor.⁴

In this context, I propose a particular interpretation of the epirrhematic agon between Euripides and Aeschylus in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (895-1098), namely that Euripides' epirrheme is presented as a rhetorical display (an *epideixis*), whereas Aeschylus' involves a question-and-answer approach with elements that resemble the Socratic elenchus.⁵ In what follows, I intend to demonstrate how each character conducts his part of the agon in a markedly different manner, and how this manner is related to the cultural paradigm each represents in the play. I will further argue that

¹ On the origins of literary criticism from Homer onward see Pfeiffer 1986, ch.1; Ford 2002: 5-17.

² For this broader cultural approach see the pioneering studies of Segal 1961 (esp. 216-7, 223) and Whitman 1964 (esp. 233); more recently Konstan 1986: 305-307, Reckford 1987 (esp. 430-31) and Willi 2002 for a political interpretation of the contest and the judgment of Dionysus. Hubbard 1991: 207-9 and 211-19 on the political parabasis and the contestants as embodiments of different cultural phases is especially insightful. Also Vaio 1985: 98; Schmidt 1998; Ford 2002: 281-2. Finally, on Aristophanes' self-positioning with respect to tragedy, see Silk 2000, ch. 2, where he argues that comedy and tragedy are not opposites, rather comedy is "something wider altogether" (62); this fact permits comedy to make such a use of its "sibling" as we see in the *Frogs* (pace Heiden 1991 who sees Aristophanes' disposition towards tragedy as straightforwardly contentious).

³ See esp. Woodbury 1988. Havelock 1980 presented Aeschylus as a possessed, instinctive and oral poet in a somewhat extreme manner, but his thesis gains support from Lada-Richards' observations (1999: 305) on Aeschylus as influenced by his *thumos* (994) or *splagkhna* (844, 1006) and see esp. ch.6 on the Dionysiac Aeschylus. On Aeschylus as an angry, epic Achilles versus Euripides as the "scheming" Odysseus in the *Frogs*, see Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004: 108-9.

⁴ See esp. Willi 2003: 87-94, who argues that the vocabulary used by Euripides underlines his sophistication, although it is not yet, strictly speaking, technical vocabulary of literary criticism. On the "bookish" Euripides see notably lines 943, 1409 with Walsh 1984, esp. 88-90 on clarity: "Euripides' special concern is for clarity of the relation of words to things;" also Steiner 1994: 209-12; Slater 2002: 198 (on 918, 927). On the antithesis between Aeschylus and Euripides see esp. Havelock 1980: 102; cf. Walsh 1984: 86. Hunter 2003: 231 mentions the Aristophanic Euripides in his discussion of *akribeia* in Theocritus 7; on Aristophanes foreshadowing or influencing Hellenistic criticism see Clayman 1977; O'Sullivan 1992, esp. I.2, IV; Cameron 1995: 328-31.

⁵ Generally on the epirrhematic agon see Gelzer 1960: 100-1.

the depiction of the two contestants as analyzed in this paper should be taken into consideration to explain the controversial interpretive question of Dionysus' final judgment in favor of Aeschylus.

1. The epirrhematic agon

Starting with Euripides' epirrheme, I suggest that there exist two stylistic features that make it a special case in terms of both what we find elsewhere in extant Aristophanes and what we find in Aeschylus' antepirrheme to follow. The first feature is its distinctive structure. Euripides starts with an introduction and explains what he is going to say and in which order (907-10):

καὶ μὴν ἑμαυτὸν μὲν γε, τὴν ποίησιν οἷός εἰμι,
ἐν τοῖσιν ὑστάτοις φράσω· τοῦτον δὲ πρῶτ' ἐλέγξω,
ὡς ἦν ἀλαζδὼν καὶ φέναξ οἷοις τε τοὺς θεατὰς
ἐξηπάτα μώρους λαβῶν παρὰ Φρυνίχῳ τραφέντας.

Very well, as for myself, the kind of poet
I am, I will tell you in my final remarks;
but first I'll expose my opponent for the
charlatan and quack that he was, and by
what means he hoodwinked his
audiences, whom he took over from
Phrynichus already trained to be morons.⁶

This part of his speech functions as what Aristotle will later call a *prothesis* or *prooimion* (*Rhet.* 3.13), i.e., a statement as to what will follow.⁷ Although it is not uncommon that an epirrhematic speech in Aristophanes should begin with a *prothesis*,⁸ this is the only *prothesis* in Aristophanes that does not give a general idea of the *main argument*, but instead calls attention to the *structure*. Euripides in his *prothesis* announces that he will attack Aeschylus first and refer to himself last, which is what he does. I will now go on to describe the structure of the main body of his speech, which I summarize in the following table:

⁶ Text and translation taken from Henderson 2002 (with very few modifications).

⁷ τὸ μὲν οὖν ἀναγκαϊότατον ἔργον τοῦ προοιμίου καὶ ἴδιον τοῦτο, δηλῶσαι τί ἐστὶν τὸ τέλος οὗ ἕνεκα ὁ λόγος. (The most necessary and particular function of the *prooimion* is this: to make clear what the end on account of which the speech [is being given] is). See also Lausberg 1998:136.

⁸ Gelzer 1960 sees a *prothesis* in all the speeches of the *Clouds* (88-90), the *Wasps* (91) and the *Wealth* (98-9).

I. Aeschylus' faults

- 911 **πρότιστα** μὲν γὰρ ἓνα τιν' ἄν καθίσειεν ἐγκαλύψας (...). (A)
- 923-4 **κάπειτ'** ἐπειδὴ ταῦτα ληρήσειε (...) ῥήματ' ἄν βόεια δώδεκ' εἶπεν, (...). (B)

II. Euripides' achievements

- 939-41 ἀλλ' ὡς παρέλαβον τὴν τέχνην παρὰ σοῦ τὸ πρῶτον εὐθύς (...) ἴσχυα (...).
- 944 **εἶτ'** ἀνέτρεφον μονωδίαις (...). (B')
- 945 **εἶτ'** οὐκ ἐλήρουν (...).
- 948 **ἔπειτ'** ἀπὸ τῶν πρώτων ἐπῶν παρήκ' ἄν οὐδέν' ἀργόν, (...). (A')
- 954 **ἔπειτα** τουτουσι λαλεῖν ἐδίδαζα (C)

Right at the beginning, we get two indicators of order (*πρότιστα* 911, *κάπειτα* 923) marking two accusations against Aeschylus: He started his plays with the protagonist sitting in silence (A). When he did use words, they were bombastic and nonsensical (B). Next, we get four indicators of order (*εὐθύς* 939, *εἶτα* 944, *εἶτα* 945, *ἔπειτα* 948). These mark Euripides' own achievements, which are simultaneously the remedies of the Aeschylean faults just mentioned. The first two achievements he mentions are the counterparts of the latter Aeschylean defect (B): He put drama on a diet and made it slender and elegant (B'). The last two achievements are the counterparts of the former defect (A): He started his plays with a proper prologue and had all the characters talking (A'). What we have here then is a structure of the type ABB'A'. Euripides caps it up with an element C which is introduced, again, with *ἔπειτα* in 954; He claims that he “taught those [i.e. the spectators] how to speak,” something that the incomprehensible and bombastic (960-2) Aeschylus could never have done. In all, this epirrheme is neatly organized and carefully structured from beginning to end in order to drive its point home.

The second feature I wish to draw attention to is that Euripides mostly abstains from dialogue. He takes no account of more than half of the comments that are interrupting his speech, an instance almost unique in the extant epirrhemes of Aristophanes,⁹ which should prompt us to ask why he is not reacting when provoked, and, importantly, how we are to imagine this situation on stage. The pattern of Euripides' reactions is again summarized in the following table. We can see that he

⁹ In other Aristophanic instances (an index of all formal agones is in Gelzer 1960: xiii), we come across either epirrhemes that take interactive form, often comprising short uninterrupted speeches (notably the two agones in the *Knights*; the first antepirrheme of the first agone and part of the antepirrheme of the second in the *Clouds*; the first agone in the *Wasps*; the first agone in the *Birds*; the agones in the *Lysistrata*, *Ecclesiazusae* and *Wealth*) or virtually uninterrupted speeches – if there is any interruption, it is intended by the proper speaker or there is almost always reaction to it (the first epirrheme of the first and second agone, and part of the antepirrheme of the second in the *Clouds*; the second agone of the *Wasps*). The only other instance where a speaker is constantly being interrupted and ignores it is Peisthetairos in the second agone of the *Birds*, where he tries to persuade the chorus while Euripides keeps lowering the tone with bomolochic jokes—this case is quite different though, because these two are allies, see Dunbar 1995: 317.

only engages briefly at the end of part A (917-22) and once at the end of part A' (951), whereas he ignores comments six times:¹⁰

Lines where Euripides is interrupted and...

...reacts	...does not react	Part of the speech
		A
917-18	914	
919		
922		
		B
	926	
		B'
		A'
	948	
	952	
951		
		C
	954-55	
	959	

I propose that both these features of the epirrheme point to the same answer: The character of Euripides is presented as being committed to delivering the speech he has already essentially prepared and therefore refuses to digress. I maintain that this suggestion is verifiable in several ways. In the context of the play itself, we know that Euripides has already held a display speech (*epideixis*) off-stage in order to gain the support of the masses in Hades: This incident constitutes the setting of the on-stage contest (771-78):¹¹

ὄτε δὴ κατῆλθ' Εὐριπίδης, **ἐπεδείκνυτο**
 τοῖς λωποδύταις καὶ τοῖσι βαλλαντιοτόμοις
 (...)
 κάπειτ' ἐπαρθεὶς ἀντελάβετο τοῦ θρόνου,
 ἴν' Αἰσχύλος καθῆστο.

When Euripides came down here, he started giving recitals for the muggers and purse-snatchers (...) and he was inspired to claim the chair that Aeschylus was occupying.

An *epideixis* at that time and place was the process by which sophists advertised their skills, delivering speeches which they had to some extent prepared—and a sophist would often give many performances of the same speech.¹² Since it is by means of one such display that Euripides has already succeeded in persuading the crowd that he is better than Aeschylus, the spectators can infer that in his attempt to

¹⁰ Euripides also reacts in 937, but without digressing from the structure he committed himself to in his *prothesis*; instead, he takes advantage of the interruption to move forward with his arguments.

¹¹ On *epideixis* here see Woodbury 1986: 242.

¹² See Thomas 2003: 173-82.

persuade Dionysus on the same subject he is making the same points or at any rate performing a version of the speech he has already been launching. The careful arrangement of Euripides' epirrheme also serves to signify this connection, since, to quote Harvey Yunis, "arrangement—what a speaker says first, what second, what in conclusion, and so forth—was a feature of sophistic instruction that especially piqued Plato and Aristotle."¹³

Furthermore, the present interpretation of the Aristophanic depiction is also in line with the poetic art of the actual Euripides, whose *agōnes* are defined by formalism.¹⁴ The situation in the *Frogs*, essentially judicial, with two contestants stating their cases before a judge, is reminiscent of the often forensic-like procedure of the Euripidean *agon*.¹⁵ Even the fact that Euripides, having instigated the contest in the first place (771-80), speaks first is in line with the rule that "the plaintiff or claimant speaks first," applicable both in court and in Euripides' actual tragedies.¹⁶

I have thus far argued for a dense web of connotations, both intratextual and cultural, support the interpretation that, in the epirrheme, Euripides is presented as delivering a structured, prepared *epideixis*. But, I suggest, the means by which the peculiarity of Euripides' performance becomes definitely evident is the sharp contrast with the antepirrheme, which belongs to Aeschylus and which we now need to examine. Let us look at its opening lines and see how Aeschylus tries to overturn his opponent's claim to be the better poet (1008-15):

Αἰ. ἀπόκριναί μοι, τίνος οὔνεκα χρή θαυμάζειν ἄνδρα ποιητήν;
 Εὐ. δεξιότητος καὶ νουθεσίας, ὅτι βελτίους τε ποιούμεν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν.
 Αἰ. ταῦτ' οὖν εἰ μὴ πεποίηκας,
 ἀλλ' ἐκ χρηστῶν καὶ γενναίων μοχθηροτέρους ἀπέδειξας,
 τί παθεῖν φησεῖς ἄξιός εἶναι;
 Δι. τεθνάναι· μὴ τοῦτον ἐρώτα.
 Αἰ. σκέψαι τοίνυν οἴους αὐτοὺς παρ' ἐμοῦ παρεδέξατο πρῶτον,
 εἰ γενναίους καὶ τετραπήγεις, καὶ μὴ διαδρασιπολίτας, (...).

Ae. For what qualities should a poet be admired?

Eu. Skill and good counsel, and because we make people better members of their communities.

Ae. And if you haven't done this, but rather turned good, upstanding people into obvious scoundrels, what punishment would you say you deserve?

Di. Death! You needn't ask *him*!

Ae. Then just consider what they were like when he took them over from me, noble six-footers and not the civic shirkers, (...).

¹³ Yunis 1998: 232.

¹⁴ On the exceptional formalism of the Euripidean *agon* (as opposed to that of Aeschylus and Sophocles) see Lloyd 1992: 1-13, 19-36; also 13-14 on a comparison of the *Eumenides* to the Euripidean model.

¹⁵ On the parallelism between the Euripidean *agon* and trials see Lloyd 1992: 13-15.

¹⁶ Lloyd 1992: 17.

Before voicing specific accusations, like Euripides, Aeschylus looks for the very basic hallmark, the one logical criterion, the fulfillment of which conclusively renders a poet good. He states his question on the most general terms and, instead of answering it himself, he *elicits* the answer from his opponent, so that the emerging criterion will be accepted by both contestants and will recommend itself as objective. In effect, they now afford a proper *definition* of the good poet. Aeschylus is therefore able to *test* Euripides' claim. Schematically, this may be presented as follows: Euripides has claimed: "I am the better poet;" they then agreed that "the task of the poet is to make the citizens better;" Aeschylus checkmated his opponent by claiming: "citizens were better in my times and are worse now."¹⁷ If the second and third statements are true, the first one has to be false, and Aeschylus should, therefore, be considered the better poet.¹⁸

Obviously, my account of Aeschylus' tactic evokes a specific kind of discourse, namely the Socratic elenchus;¹⁹ Aeschylus' counter-attack markedly involves the fundamental process of arriving at a *definition* through *maieutic* and afterwards *testing* against it the relevant claims made before.²⁰ Turning our attention to the rest of the antepirrheme, we see that the process of elenchus continues, as Euripides tries to employ it: He spots a fallacy in Aeschylus' argument; Euripides cannot refuse the fact that his times produced weaker citizens. He cannot, therefore, claim that he was a good poet on these grounds, but he can still claim to be a better one than Aeschylus, because the relation between Aeschylus' dramas and the brave citizens of the old times may be incidental. Euripides, therefore, challenges him to prove that the relation is in fact causal (1019-20). Aeschylus defends his poetry with claims that suffer comic debasement, but are left standing at the end.²¹ Euripides fails to deliver any decisive blows. After the final judgment of Dionysus in favor of Aeschylus, the Chorus praises the senior tragedian for his ability to educate the people and produce better citizens, which was his original claim (1482-90 and perhaps 1530; also Pluto in 1500-1503).

At this point we have gone through the respective tactics of the two tragedians in the contest of the *Frogs* and seen how they compare. In the case of Euripides' epirrheme, I argue that the character of this tragedian is presented as delivering a speech he has prepared and trying to stay within this framework despite interruptions, without engaging with his opponent. The structure of the speech itself and the use of the term *epideixis* in the text link the speech with the intellectual developments of

¹⁷ Cf. e.g. the speech of the Just Word in the *Clouds* (parodic though it may be) or the parodos of the *Ecclesiazusae* (289-310).

¹⁸ In analyzing this antepirrheme Gelzer 1960: 94-6 describes it as "syllogistisch."

¹⁹ Young 2006: 58 for a definition: "the *elenchus* ... [may be characterized] simply as an argument in which an interlocutor's original claim is rejected when it is seen to be inconsistent with other things that the interlocutor believes." See also *ibid.* 60-1; and esp. Vlastos 1983; Robinson 1953 is standard.

²⁰ On the "definition" see Benson 1990. On *maieutic* Sedley 2004, esp. 33-7.

²¹ In fact, this epirrheme almost never loses its dialogical character, and Euripides takes up the role of *tester* in 1052-3, 1058, 1062, 1064 as well; but Aeschylus, as he introduced it successfully, also faces it successfully.

those times. In the case of the antepirrheme, Aeschylus opens up the board for discussion, as it were, and chooses to engage directly with his opponent. I interpreted his approach in terms that are normally used to describe the Socratic elenchus. But I assert neither that the audience would have been able to identify Aeschylus' tactic as Socratic nor that Aristophanes intended this. I drew attention to the similarities between Aeschylus' tactic and the Socratic elenchus in order to draw attention to the similarity of the reactions of Aristophanes and Socrates/ Plato to the same cultural and political developments: Aristophanes in the *Frogs*, as often Plato (mainly in the *Protagoras*, the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*), present us with the theme of the prepared rhetorician versus the *sophos* or philosopher who uses a purely oral technique to substantiate his claims.²²

Another possible indicator of the issue of oral strategy vs. prepared speech is the reference to *aporia* in *Frogs* 1007, when Aeschylus explains that he will participate in the debate in order to not be charged with *aporein*. Of course, this may remind us of Socratic *aporia*, but it is actually not used here in the same way as in Plato. A Platonic dialogue may end in *aporia* (the case of some early dialogues), or start from *aporia*, as is the definition in the *Theaetetus*. In the latter, *aporia* is presented as at first caused and afterwards overcome through interaction with Socrates.²³ Rather, the *aporia*-theme provides an interesting parallel with Alcidamas who, in his treatise *Against Those Who Write Written Speeches* constantly refers to the risk that the intellectual who does not prepare speeches runs, i.e. looking insufficient compared to his prepared competitor. Gorgias and Prodicus seem to also have taken sides with respect to this divide, the former being an exponent of oral argumentation as opposed to the latter.²⁴ Whether such significance can be attributed to *aporein* or not, it is crucial to note that the tension between prepared speeches and *ad hoc* argumentation was a significant issue in late 5th and 4th Athens and one with important cultural implications. Hence, a few words on the broader cultural and historical background are in order in order to appreciate the *Frogs*' significance.

2. The *Frogs* in context: The intellectual milieu and the Aristophanic corpus

Rhetoric as a self-conscious art makes its definite appearance in the fourth century, nurtured by the conditions of late-fifth-century democracy and a long-standing

²² In *Protagoras* 329b1-5, Socrates asks Protagoras not to use lengthy speeches, if he wants his attention (see McCabe 2006: 41; Thomas 2003: 178). A similar contrast between rhetoric and the question-and-answer form appears twice in the *Gorgias* (447b9-c4 and 448d1-449c8, see Benson 2006: 86; Kahn 1996: 303) and conspicuously in the *Phaedrus* (see Thomas 2003: 167-8).

²³ See *Tht.* 150b-151d, esp. 151a-b with see Sedley 2004, esp. 8-13 on Socrates as the *maia* who induces the pains of *aporia*, which are in fact a necessary part of the process; and Sedley 2004: 34 on *aporia*. Cf. *Meno* 80a-84c.

²⁴ See O'Sullivan 1996: 121-7.

interest in the manipulation of verbal resources.²⁵ The way many politicians, as e.g. Cleon, in post-Periclean Athens took pains to distance themselves from modes of argumentation that betrayed elitist learning and preparation shows that such a trend was emerging at the time.²⁶ In the judicial field, the last quarter or so of the fifth-century saw the birth of a new profession: the speech-writer.²⁷ And this takes us to the issue of the “literate revolution” that was then underway and is related to the birth of rhetoric.²⁸ The diffusion of the written word provided the means for further sophistication on the part of the sophist as an instructor or of the public speaker in general, and made texts an item for sale in the case of the speech-writers, and again the sophists, who circulated the texts of their *epideixeis*, as well as their *technai*.²⁹

According to the present interpretation as well as the work of several scholars,³⁰ the *Frogs* is one of the earliest texts that reflect this issue. It is striking how little interest Aristophanes’ older comedies that deal in some way with “new learning” show in parodying prepared speech, e.g. the *Knights* and *Clouds*.³¹ In the former, the Sausage-seller and Paphlagon seek to top each other in an *exchange* of arguments, not through prepared speeches, although this option did exist: Paphlagon explicitly scorns it in 346-50. In the *Clouds*, Strepsiades does not want to learn how to deliver speeches; instead, he refutes his creditors through *ad hoc* argumentation; and the Unjust Word takes apart the arguments of the Just Word just after listening to them, because he affords the technique of dismantling them on the spot. In the *Frogs*, on the other hand, it is clear that we have entered a new era: Aristophanes presents us the character of Euripides who comes *prepared* and speaks first, while he has already held an *epideixis* on the same subject.

The related phenomenon of the rise of literacy also progressively becomes evident in Aristophanes’ comedies in a similar fashion. There might or might not, for instance, be a mere mention, and a positive one, to books in *Wasps*.³² Nevertheless, the striking fact is that books are not at all mentioned in the *Clouds*. They are, however, very much so already in the *Birds*.³³ In the *Frogs*, Euripides’ bookishness is stressed both at the beginning and the end of the contest.³⁴ And straight after the

²⁵ Yunis 1998: 223-32, esp. 231-2.

²⁶ See Wallace 1998: 218-22; Hesk 2000: 209-15 on this trend the mistrust it created in 4th c. Athens.

²⁷ Antiphon, the first *logographos*, must have worked at this time; for information and references on the issue of his identity see Wallace 1998: 216-17; Woodruff 2006: 38 n.2.

²⁸ On the rise of the literate culture in mid-5th-mid-4th century Athens see Thomas 1992: 13-14, in brief; 1989: ch.1.1;1.2, in extenso; also Harris 1989, chs. 3 and 4. Esp. with refer to the *Frogs*, Woodbury 1976. On the effect of this evolution on schooling see Robb 1994: 174-97, with Ford 2002: 195 n.27; Morgan 1999: 50-1.

²⁹ See Thomas 2003, esp. 180; on the *technai* also Yunis 1998: 226.

³⁰ See n. 4 above.

³¹ See Yunis 1998: 231, who notes that the *Clouds* stands at the beginning of this development.

³² Ford 2002: 194 interprets *Wasps* 1051 this way. Other Aristophanic passages that allude to literacy, without, however, conveying any sense of cultural tension abide (see e.g. Slater 1996: 102 n.10).

³³ On the reaction against the “bookish” elite in the *Birds* see Slater 1996: 100-105. See also also fr. 506 K-A (*Tagenistae*), which presents us with the model “books-sophists-corruption” that is also prevalent in the *Frogs*, with Thomas 1992: 19-20.

³⁴ 943, 1409 and see Havelock 1980 and Walsh 1984 as quoted above, nn.3-4.

epirrhetic agon, just when the three subsequent episodes are about to start, the first and last of which constitute parody of sophistic theory and practice,³⁵ the Chorus pronounce the famous sarcastic lines on the literacy of the spectators (1109-18).³⁶ In all, at the time of the *Clouds* formal verbal reasoning was already an emerging trend, but in 405 the teaching of verbal skills has advanced and now extends to preparation which involves the memorizing of a structure or an entire text.³⁷

3. The politics of the *Frogs* and the judgment of Dionysus

In order to better understand how the above conclusions affect the overall interpretation of the play, including, importantly, the judgment of Dionysus, we need to investigate their political implications. It has been argued thus far that Euripides is presented as delivering a prepared *epideixis* and hence as a representative of cutting-edge intellectual developments of that era. At the same time, many scholars have argued that he is presented as related to the new politicians mentioned in the parabasis of the *Frogs*.³⁸ A further element that has escaped commentary in scholarship thus far but, I will argue, is crucial for the understanding of the play, is the mention of Euripides as the instigator of *stasis* in 757-60:³⁹

Ξα. τίς οὗτος οὔνδον ἐστὶ θόρυβος καὶ βοή
 χῶ λαιδορησμός;
 Οἰ. Αἰσχύλου κερυπίδου.
 Ξα. ᾄ.
 Οἰ. πρᾶγμα, πρᾶγμα μέγα κεκίνηται, μέγα
 ἐν τοῖς νεκροῖσι καὶ στάσις πολλή πάνυ.

Xa. What is this noise and shout and arguing coming from inside?
 Ser. It comes from Aeschylus and Euripides
 Xa. Oh
 Ser. A great, great affair has been set to motion, an affair
 among the dead and very great *stasis*.

This mention deserves special attention, especially in a play presented in 405, i.e. after Athenian democracy has already suffered one coup as well as in a time of crisis regarding the war with Sparta. In fact, the Chorus mentions *stasis* already in the

³⁵ On the “battle of the prologues” see Segal 1970; Cavalli 1999: 100-2; cf. Rosen 2004. On the scales-contest see Habash 2002: 13.

³⁶ The books referred to may actually be anthologies, see Ford 2002: 196; the interpretation of these lines in Woodbury 1976: 351-7 is—justly—the most widely accepted; see also Nieddu 2004: 359-60.

³⁷ The revised version of the *Clouds* that we possess belongs to the years 419-417 according to Sommerstein 1982: 2 n.1; to 420-417 according to Dover 1968: lxxx.

³⁸ Hubbard 1991: 209-10; Padilla 1992: 378; Schmidt 1998: 84; Slater 2002: 193.

³⁹ The standard work on *stasis* in this period is Gehrke 1985, see esp. ch. 3; a brief account in Hansen 2006: 125-6. On the sophists and antidemocratic movements after 430 see Wallace 1998: 221-2.

parodos, as one of the “sins” whose bearers are excluded from their celebrations (354-60).⁴⁰

εὐφημεῖν χρὴ κάξιστασθαι τοῖς ἡμετέροισι χοροῖσιν,
ὅστις ἄπειρος τοιῶνδε λόγων ἢ γνώμην μὴ καθαρεύει
ἢ γενναίων ὄργια Μουσῶν μῆτ' εἶδεν μῆτ' ἐχόρευσεν,
...
ἢ στάσιν ἐχθρὰν μὴ καταλύει μηδ' εὐκόλος ἐστὶ πολίταις,
ἀλλ' ἀνεγείρει καὶ ῥιπίζει κερδῶν ἰδίων ἐπιθυμῶν,
...
τούτοις αὐδῶ καῦθις ἐπαυδῶ καῦθις τὸ τρίτον μάλ' ἐπαυδῶ
ἐξιστασθαι μύσταισι χοροῖς·

All be silent, and the following shall stand apart from our dances:
whoever is unfamiliar with such utterances as this, or harbors unclean
attitudes,
or has never beheld or danced in the rites of the noble Muses,
...
or forbears to resolve hateful factionalism and act peaceably toward other
citizens,
but forments and inflames it from desire for personal gain,
...
To these I proclaim, and proclaim again, and thrice proclaim: stand apart from the
initiates' dances.

Paying attention to the latter passage helps us understand Euripides' role in the second half of the play. The Chorus leader bans individuals guilty of artistic and political crimes from their rites alike. On the political plane, banned are the individuals who do not put their efforts into warding off *stasis* (359), and who harm the city for personal profit (360; specific examples are enumerated in 361-66). On the artistic and at the same time the religious and broadly communal plane, banned are the ones who “have never seen and have not danced the rites of the noble Muses” (356).

The Chorus is thus a religious, political, theatrical and broadly communal chorus. This is also the only extant instance of a comic chorus that actually plays the role of a chorus inside the play. Furthermore, unlike most other choruses of extant comedies, this chorus sings for Athens, not for a particular segment of its population. And as the dead initiates of the Eleusinian mysteries, this chorus is diachronic. In their song, they are inviting everyone to their dances, as long as they have not betrayed in any way the community and what is sacred to it. The eligible ones will participate in chorality, which itself is a form of ritual enforcement of the communal element.

Moving forward to the beginning of the second part of the play, before the contest begins, Dionysus invites the two poets to offer their own prayers. Aeschylus does so piously (886-87), but Euripides indicates that he will pray to “other gods”, his

⁴⁰ See Ferrari 2000.

own “personal” gods (889-91). Given this context, then, the depiction of Euripides in the epirrhematic agon as analyzed in the rest of this paper can be seen to connect with the rest of the *Frogs*. In consistence with this, Dionysus in the end of the play chooses Aeschylus. After the judgment, the Chorus sings the praise of the winner and becomes his “escort” to the world above (1525), as they form a procession. They are also carrying torches (*ibid.*), which enforces the ritualistic staging of the end.

At the same time, the poet who distanced himself from the Chorus and the community from the first place, who instigated a *stasis* against the prevailing order and who employed a devious method of argumentation is excluded from the dances of the initiates. This completes the *Frogs*’ use of the figure of Euripides as an image of elitism, of forces that disrupt the cohesion of the community, and, in his association with *stasis*, as an allegory for the subversion of polity at large.

4. Conclusion

Aristophanes and Plato both experienced the era of the flourishing of the sophists, the emergence of “new learning,” and the birth of rhetoric. We know from other texts as well the kind of mistrust these new ways inspired, how they could be perceived as elitist and undemocratic, but also how deep an impact they had on Athenian society. In this context, it would be, of course, impossible to claim that Aristophanes projects himself as an intellectual ally with Socrates (in *Frogs* 1490 he in fact aligns Socrates with Euripides) and Plato certainly did not project his school as allied with poets. However, Aristophanes as well as Plato produced works that present a kind of alarm at the cultural developments just mentioned. Further, this alarm is presented by means of the same antithesis, namely between prepared speech and argumentation that is deployed on the spot according to the conditions at hand.

At the same time, the cultural tensions reflected in the *Frogs* cannot be constrained to the intellectual level. The *Frogs* is an example of the holistic way of approaching the life of the community that is characteristic of Aristophanes and of much of Greek thought. The identity of the character of Euripides as a sophist is inextricably related with his identity as a subversive politician who disrupts the prevailing order in order to promote his personal gains. This interpretation is particularly apt for a play written under the circumstances of 405 in Athens and reveals the *Frogs* as a play that, in all its comicality, essentially voices a concern for the cohesion of the community, a concern that is realized not only in the parabasis, in the notorious calling for the re-enfranchisement of individuals convicted for the coup of 411 who have repented,⁴¹ but also in the exclusion of people who currently represent this divisive mentality—and the figure of Euripides, justly or unjustly, is employed as a representative of those.

⁴¹ See McGlew 2002: 163-70 who does not see this as a partisan, oligarchic move, *pace* Sommerstein 1993.

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