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*What is a Greek Source
on the Early English Stage?
Fifteen New Essays*

Edited by Silvia Bigliuzzi and Tania Demetriou



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PART 3
THEATREGRAMS

Hermaphroditical Authority: *Epicene* and The Aristophanic Chorus¹

TOM HARRISON

Abstract

Ben Jonson used a number of ‘formal choruses’ in his comedies, which he deployed to guide and chide audience opinion and reaction. Group behaviour and response are two of Jonson’s abiding interests, and consequently his plays contain even more numerous examples of informal choric groupings who watch, comment on, and judge the actions of others. This paper argues that the Collegiate ladies of *Epicene* are one of these informal choric groupings, and that their status and action within the play aligns them specifically to the Aristophanic chorus. I argue, however, that the ladies’ Aristophanic links are not consistent, and the comparison is one of ‘family resemblance’ rather than precise copy. Jonson’s selective approach to the Collegiates’ Aristophanic forbears offers an insight into his general approach to classical models, which served as ‘guides, not commanders’ to his own dramaturgical strategies and were effective because of their continuing relevance to the playwright’s own age.

KEYWORDS: Ben Jonson; Aristophanes; Chorus; theatregrams

Ben Jonson, like other humanistically-trained playwrights of his age, wrote plays according to the creative principles of *imitatio* – the creation of new material based on direct or indirect reference to sources – and *contaminatio* – the blending of different sources to create a new composite. The clearest example of this practice in Jonson’s work can be seen in his 1597 play *The Case Is Altered*, a contamination of two plays by Plautus (*Captivi* and *Aulularia*) that

¹ Unless otherwise acknowledged, all citations of Jonson’s texts are from Jonson 2012. All citations of Greek text are from Aristophanes 1998; translations are my own, with reference to Sommerstein and MacDowell’s commentaries (Aristophanes 1983 and Aristophanes 1971). My thanks to Daniel Squire for his assistance with the Greek, and to Rachel White for her comments – any errors that remain are my own. A further discussion of elements of this essay are in Harrison 2023.

imitates specific elements from both sources, sometimes through close translation of the Plautine originals, sometimes through looser reimaginings. The Plautine elements are familiar – the capture of two sons in war, a miser’s jealous guarding of his gold and his daughter – but Jonson gives them an early modern spin: the war is fought between France and Milan; the miser loses not just his gold but his daughter through marriage, and this marriage helps to heal the rift between the play’s opposing forces. It is a work that puts into practice Jonson’s later claim that the ancients should act as “guides, not commanders” (*Discoveries*, 1.98) – a phrase that, appropriately enough, derives from Seneca the Younger (*Ep.* 33). In *The Case Is Altered* Jonson takes inspiration from his Plautine sources but updates and enriches the material for his contemporary audience. It is this relationship with his classical guides that would be one of the most consistent elements of his creative practice.

Jonson’s dramatic strategy – which I have elsewhere called his “contaminative dramaturgy” (Harrison 2023) – was idiosyncratic in its focus on classical texts. The general principle of contamination was also central to early modern performance-making, which was dependent on the rapid exchange, interaction, and combination of performative and textual elements. Louise George Clubb’s idea of the “theatregram” is a useful heuristic for understanding the elements that were utilised in these contaminative exchanges (Clubb 1989). Theatregrams are mobile dramaturgical units that were transferred between the work of playwrights, theatre-makers and performers and across geo-political and linguistic boundaries, a process that reflects the trans-national, collaborative and hybridised nature of early modern theatre. Clubb’s schema includes the “theatregram of person”, which refers to identifiable, ‘stock’ characters; “theatregram of association”, groupings of characters in recurring relationships; “theatregrams of motion”, familiar verbal and kinetic exchanges generated by individual and multiple characters; and “theatregrams of design”, broader patterns of plot and action (Clubb 1989, 8-10). Clubb sees theatregrams operating within a range of scripted and non-scripted drama, but they are most clearly imagined with reference to the *commedia dell’arte*, which as a semi-improvisatory form relied on identifiable stock characters, episodes, and settings: person theatregrams equate to

the *maschere* ('masks') that identify the *commedia's* key characters; association theatregrams to recognisable character pairings, such as the patriarchal Pantalone with servants like the cunning Pedrolino or the clownish Arlecchino; motion theatregrams to *lazzi* and other pieces of business that a *commedia* actor had in their repertoire, including set speeches, songs, and dances; finally, design theatregrams to the super-structure of the scenario and the sub-structure of individual scenes, both of which offer patterns of action within which performers could work.

Thinking about theatregrams from the perspective of the *commedia dell'arte* is a helpful reminder that these elements of performance are flexible rather than fixed – for example, *maschere* were constantly adapting to new performers and contexts, and *commedia* troupes had their own variations on generally-recognised *lazzi* and scenarios. But the theatregram's curious status of being mobile yet stable creates a problem: if theatregrams can travel great distances and be applied to new contexts, for how long do they remain recognisable? In other words, how much of a particular dramaturgical element can be altered, misinterpreted, or contaminated before it stops being the thing that has inspired it? To take as an example the person theatregram of the 'braggart soldier' – a character that can be traced back to Greek Old Comedy and Atellan farces, through to Pyrgopolynices in Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*, and whose Renaissance incarnations include Shakespeare's Falstaff and the Capitano of the *commedia dell'arte* – how much 'braggartness' and 'soldieriness' of that character can be lost or adapted before it becomes something different entirely?

Clubb's theatregram of person is perhaps the most susceptible to change, as it is with characters that differences are most apparent. I have found Ludwig Wittgenstein's idea of "family resemblance" a useful model for addressing the person theatregram's curious property of being simultaneously rigid and malleable. Wittgenstein originally used this model to describe a group of things not identified by a fixed set of features but by "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail" (Wittgenstein 2001, § 67, 66). Family resemblance imagines things as constituting a field, a constellation, a set of similarities rather than as a binary – so a

braggart soldier is ‘more’ or ‘less’ of a relation to another rather than ‘is’ or ‘is not’ a member of that character family. The idea that creative borrowings can be thought of as ‘more’ or ‘less’ than the thing they are borrowing from is of use when thinking about Jonson’s approach to sources: he never adopts models wholesale, but instead combines them with other elements to create new performance types, a process that Alessandro Grilli and Francesco Morosi describe as an “intertwining of literary genres and codes” (Grilli and Morosi 2023, 141). It is a notion also appropriate to the whole idea of the theatregram which, as Robert Henke puts it, always becomes “culturally and locally inflected” when they are moved to new contexts (2008, 2), and are therefore always capable of change.

This chapter argues that Jonson’s choral groupings bear a family resemblance to the choruses of the Old Comic playwright Aristophanes. Jonson’s interest in the chorus is another expression of what Helen Ostovich sees as his abiding interest in group behaviour and response (1986), and his plays contain numerous examples of informal choric groupings who watch, comment on, and judge the actions of others (Happé 2003). Jonson’s understanding of the chorus is a *contaminatio* of Greek, Roman, and English elements. As has been highlighted by Silvia Bigliuzzi, ideas concerning the chorus in the early modern period had both classical and native English precedents, with uncertainties about the plurality or singularity of ancient choric figures merging with a native tradition of sole prologue and epilogue speakers, leading ultimately to a transformation “of the idea of choral plurality of classical ascendancy into a new oxymoronic idea of choric singularity” (Bigliuzzi 2015, 104). As Bigliuzzi’s chapter in this volume attests, early modern ideas about classical dramaturgy were influenced by the strong presence of Seneca in print and in classically-inspired neo-Latin and vernacular drama; Euripides also exerted a competing influence, with observers using both playwrights as exemplars to establish similarities and differences in Greek and Roman dramaturgies. A result of these Senecan and Euripidean tussles for tragic supremacy was that no consensus ever emerged in the early modern period of what a classically-inspired chorus should ‘look’ or ‘sound’ like, although print and stage traditions frequently returned to the idea

of this grouping being in some way discrete from their play's main action, a return that indicates a particularly Senecan influence.

Like many of his contemporaries, Jonson appears to have viewed the chorus through a Latinate lens, influenced in particular by the writings of Seneca, Horace, and their commentators. Jonson's *Horace His Art of Poetry* – a translation of Horace's *Ars Poetica* – speaks of the “choir” who must take “An actor's parts, and office too” but also “sing / Between the acts” of topics that “fitly 'grees” with the action they frame (*Art*, 276-9). This translation reflects the early modern assumption that the chorus should be separate from the play's main action and yet have an intrinsic relation to it;¹ and, indeed, Jonson puts these notions into practice in his tragedy *Catiline* (1611). The Chorus are a group of citizens living in Rome during the Catilinarian conspiracies of 63-62 BC, and they close acts 1-4 with meditations on the corruption of contemporary Rome, a prayer to the gods for good governors, a recognition that Catiline is a growing threat to the state, and a final acknowledgement of the difficulties faced by magistrates that could apply just as well to Jonson's contemporary moment as his ancient setting. Although the Chorus' numbers are never clarified they are clearly imagined as a collective: they speak consistently in plural first person, with an increase in pronoun usage in each act marking a transition in their role from sententious proclaimers of the existential threats faced by the state from tyranny, to a group that recognise their own culpability in Rome's woes and the danger they now face.² As in Seneca's plays the Chorus also interacts with other characters, and their appearance in 3.1 to mark Cicero's election to the consulship represents the play's wider concern with the ‘commonwealth’ and its manipulation by the powerful. The Chorus' support for the newly-anointed Cicero shows how the ruling class is dependent on the members of that commonwealth: Cicero, whose denunciation of Catiline famously established him as a champion of the Republic,

1 See Bigliuzzi's chapter in this volume for a discussion of Thomas Drant's 1567 translation of this section.

2 First-person plural pronoun usage increases significantly from act to act: 2 usages in act 1 (1.1.531-90); 2 usages in act 2 (2.1.363-406); 7 usages in act 3 (3.5.45-80); 19 usages in act 4 (4.4.20-71).

is sneeringly referred to by Caesar as one of the “Popular men”, who “must create strange monsters and then quell ’em, / To make their arts seem something” (*Cat.*, 3.1.96-7). No doubt Catiline, whose conspiracy would have wrested control of Rome from the Senate with the aid of the dispossessed poor and the disaffected rich, is just the sort of “strange monster” that a Republican like Cicero should quell. Cicero’s veiled allusion to “turbulent practices” (3.1.51) afflicting the commonwealth suggests the dangers of mass conspiracy; we should remember that ‘turbulent’ derives from the Latin ‘turba’ (‘crowd’), which hints that even a conspirator like Jonson’s Catiline, a man whose loyalties are ultimately patrician over plebeian, must placate the mob to a degree. As with their ancient (and particularly Senecan) models, Jonson’s Chorus are direct commentators on the play’s action and its relevance to the audience, but their own actions within the body of the play pass indirect commentary on the authority they possess as a collective.

Catiline is a notable instance of the classically-inspired tragic chorus on the early modern stage, but Jonson also uses several “formal choruses” in his comedies, which he deployed to guide and chide audience reaction, provide a sort of inter-act commentary on the play itself, and to an extent represent the watching spectators (Savage 1971). Again, a particularly Latinate interpretation of the chorus seems evident. In *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599), for example, the playwright-surrogate Asper invites his two companions Mitis and Cordatus to sit onstage as “censors” to the action that follows (*EMO*, Ind.152), with the names of these two figures (‘Mitis’: ‘soft’; ‘Cordatus’: ‘wise’) representing opposing ends of the spectrum of audience response. In later plays Jonson’s choruses are more formally relegated to the interstices of the action, and are more closely allied to the audience: the Gossips of *The Staple of News* (1626) and the gentleman pairing of Probee and Damplay in *The Magnetic Lady* (1632) are portrayed as, respectively, “persons of quality” (*Staple*, Ind.7) and a “pair of public persons” (*Mag. Lady*, Ind.14) who might be expected to attend the Blackfriars theatre, the venue where these plays premiered; both groups comment on their play’s action at the close of each act, with the latter pairing specifically termed a ‘Chorus’. The trio of commentators in *Every Man Out of His Humour* are also referred to as a ‘Grex’, a Latin term

often used in reference to a crowd or troupe,³ and connected explicitly by Jonson to the chorus (*EMO*, Ind.233). The Induction of *Every Man Out* contains a potted history of the development of “*comœdia*”, which “was at first nothing but a simple and continued satire, sung by one only person” (Ind.242-3), but developed in complexity and subtlety across generations of playwrights. Even Aristophanes, whose plays are claimed to be “absolute and fully perfected”, had to give way to “Menander, Philemon, Cecilius, Plautus, and the rest”, all of whom contributed their own innovations to the genre, including that they “utterly excluded the chorus” (Ind. 246-50). This summary of comedy’s development places the Greek playwrights as dramatic forbears in a long line of succession that has continued into Jonson’s own day – when, he argues, playwrights “should enjoy the same *licentia*, or free power, to illustrate and heighten our invention as they did’ (Ind. 253-4) – and toes a standard line in Renaissance literary theory. But, to return to Jonson’s Horatian translation once more, *licentia* has its limits, for the “licence” is “fit to be restrained by law”, and as a result the Old Comic chorus, notably described in the singular, “held his peace, / His power of foully hurting made to cease” (*Art*, 368-70). As Colin Burrow highlights in his edition of Jonson’s *Art of Poetry*, the description of the Chorus “foully hurting” is a misreading of Horace’s “Turpiter obticuit” (“fell silent, to its shame”, l.370n). Despite Jonson’s apparent error, the change reflects a general unease regarding the chorus’ reputation for personal satire that could no longer be upheld in the early modern period.

Jonson wrote in a theatrical context that neither fully understood nor needed a chorus but which – influenced in particular by the literary, critical, and dramatic legacies of Seneca and Horace – simultaneously recognised the group’s performative potential while holding concerns about its licentiousness, specifically in its comic incarnation. Bigliuzzi suggests that in the early modern period the dramatic capabilities of the chorus became “dislodged” from the chorus, and a more inchoate form of “chorality” was distributed across characters, so that early modern dramatists retained some of the chorus’ effects without their obvious presence (Bigliuzzi

3 Cf. Plautus: *Asin.*, 942-7; *Cist.*, 782-7; *Epid.*, 732-3; *Pers.*, 858; *Poen.*, 1422.

2015, 104). I argue that the Collegiate ladies of *Epicene* (1609-10) are one of these informal choric groupings, and that – despite the domination in the Renaissance imagination of the chorus from the classical Senecan and native English tradition – their status and action within the play aligns them specifically to the Aristophanic chorus. I suggest, however, that the ladies’ Aristophanic links are not consistent, and the comparison is one of “family resemblance” rather than precise copy. The breaking apart of theatregrams associated with the chorus is a way of understanding how this was achieved in practice, and also that Jonson took advantage of the possibilities offered by the ‘informal’ chorus, retaining the chorus’ capacity for “fouly hurting” while avoiding dramatic structures that were no longer appropriate in his own theatrical context.

I will illustrate Jonson’s Aristophanic connections with specific reference to *Wasps* – a play that, aside from containing a good example of the Aristophanic chorus, also appears to be one with which the later playwright was familiar.⁴ As was typical with Jonson’s contaminative dramaturgy he has not imitated all aspects of the Aristophanic chorus in his depiction of the Collegiate ladies, but it is in their collective association, their aggression, and their identification with the watching audience that we might trace the features of their Old Comic ancestors. Jonson’s selective approach to the Collegiates’ Aristophanic forbears offers an insight into his general approach to classical models, which were “guides, not commanders” to his own dramaturgical strategies and effective because of their continuing relevance to the his own age. Like Aristophanes, Jonson seems ambivalent about the power of the crowd, and this ambivalence is communicated through the presentation of choric groupings as categorically indistinct, potentially violent, and prone to crucial misapprehensions.

⁴ 5.4 of *The Staple of News* features the miserly Pennyboy Senior’s putting his dogs to a “cross-interr’gatory” (5.4.37) about their bad behaviour, an episode similar to the trial of Philocleon’s dogs in *Wasps* (891-1008). Both scenes are a *reductio ad absurdum* of their human characters’ obsessions – for Pennyboy Senior it is money, for Philocleon it is lawcourts. For further discussion of the Jonson-Aristophanes dog trial scenes, see Morosi in this volume.

Wasps and the Aristophanic Chorus

In this first section I consider the Aristophanic chorus using Clubb's terminology, imagining this grouping as a set of interrelated theatregrams that operate within the key formal structures of *parodos*, *agon*, and *parabasis*, which I here regard as theatregrams of design.⁵ No two Aristophanic choruses, or indeed plays, are exactly alike, but enough similarities remain for us to make some generalised comments, and to illustrate how the use of theatregrams contributes to the choruses' quality of similarity and difference.⁶

The chorus was one of the most consistent elements in Aristophanic comedy, as this grouping was of fundamental importance to their plays' performance and structure. In contrast to the professional actors who performed as named characters, the twenty-four strong comic chorus was likely comprised of *epheboi*, members of the Athenian citizenry aged between eighteen to twenty, and their importance is suggested by the fact that the plays' financial backers are referred to as *choregoi*, indicating that it was the chorus rather than the play that was being sponsored (Hughes 2012, 87-9). Composed of Athenian performers, the choral group was a bridge between the imagined world of their playwrights and the real world of the audience, a bridge most clearly formalised in the *parabaseis*, when the chorus stepped out of the dramatic action and addressed the audience directly, frequently making appeals for their playwrights' success or connecting the onstage action with real-life analogues. In *Wasps*, for example, the chorus points to Aristophanes not hiding behind pseudonyms but *φανερώς ἤδη κινδυνεύων καθ' ἑαυτόν* ("running the risk openly on his own"; *Wasps*, 1021) in standing up to Athens' foes – including one of its leading politicians, Cleon, who in earlier plays such as *Knights* had been portrayed as a violent demagogue. However, in a likely

5 For a description of the formal structures of Aristophanic comedy, see Sommerstein 1980, 8-11. Sommerstein highlights that these structures were not "rigid" (11) – some plays contain elements in a different order, while some repeat or miss others entirely – but they are regular enough to give Aristophanic comedy an identifiable pattern.

6 For a structural overview of Aristophanes' extant plays, see Pickard-Cambridge 1962, 194-212.

reference to the poor reception of *Clouds*, which was awarded third prize in the City Dionysia of 423, the chorus claims that the audience had not rewarded Aristophanes' bravery in the previous dramatic competition: *πέρυσιν καταπρούδοτε καινοτάτας σπείραντ' αὐτὸν διανοίας, / ἄν ὑπὸ τοῦ μὴ γνῶναι καθαρώς ὑμεῖς ἐποιήσατ' ἀναλδεῖς*; ("last year you let him down, he having sown his newest ideas, which you made feeble because you did not understand them clearly"; 1044-5). In their rejection of Aristophanes' previous play, the audience are depicted as ungrateful and ignorant, an idea enforced by a closing metaphor that likens playwriting to chariot-racing: *ὁ δὲ ποιητῆς οὐδὲν χείρων παρὰ τοῖσι σοφοῖς νενόμισται, / εἰ παρελαύνων τοὺς ἀντιπάλους τὴν ἐπίνοιαν ξυνέτριψεν* ("the poet is no worse regarded by the wise, if racing by his competitors he crashed his invention"; 1049-50). It is a prime instance of the Aristophanic chorus attacking while it defends: the playwright concedes that his previous work "crashed" (*ξυνέτριψεν*) because he was unable to control its power, but that concession also insists on how far ahead of his dramatic rivals – and by extension, his audience – he was before he did so.

The chorus is also capable, through backhanded compliment, of influencing audience reaction:

*νῦν τὰ μέλλοντ' εὖ λέγεσθαι
μὴ πέση φαύλως χαμᾶζ', εὐλαβεῖσθε.
τοῦτο γὰρ σκαιῶν θεατῶν
ἐστι πάσχειν, κού πρὸς ὑμῶν.
(1011-4)*

[Now beware those good things about to be said / do not fall down carelessly on the ground, / for it is to stupid spectators / that this is likely to happen, but not becoming of you.]

Only "stupid spectators" (*σκαιῶν θεατῶν*) would be so obtuse as to misinterpret the "good things about to be said" (*τὰ μέλλοντ' εὖ λέγεσθαι*) in defence of Aristophanes in the *parabasis*. To avoid the charge the audience has no choice but to endorse the playwright's words – to be "the wise" (*σοφοῖς*) who admire his creative charioteering, even if it is occasionally reckless.

Through the *parabasis*, the chorus therefore acts as a mouthpiece for their playwright, attempting to cajole a positive response from

their audience through a mixture of flattery and harangue. The chorus' strange, contradictory qualities are also apparent within the fiction of their play world, and are frequently contrasted – through status, gender, and even species – to the young Athenian men who performed them. Out of the extant comedies, Aristophanic choruses include Greeks from Attica at large (*Acharnians*, *Peace*, *Wealth*), goddesses (*Clouds*), animals or part-animals (*Frogs*, *Wasps*, *Birds*), Dionysian initiates (*Frogs*), rich Athenian citizens (*Knights*), Athenian women (*Thesmophoriazousae*, *Ecclesiazusae*), and a mixed group of old men and women (*Lysistrata*). In *Wasps*, the chorus are a group of jurors who straddle biological categories, as they represent both old men and wasps: each possesses a “wasped-up waist” (διεσφηκωμένον; 1072) and a “sting” (ἐγκεντρίδος; 1073), but, as veterans of the wars with the Persians, they are also Ἀττικοὶ μόνου δικαίως ἐγγενεῖς αὐτόχθονες, / ἀνδρικότατον γένος καὶ πλείστα τήνδε τὴν πόλιν / ὠφελῆσαν ἐν μάχαισιν (“the only Athenians truly native, sprung from the land, / the most manly race and one which helped the polis / the most in battles”; 1076-8). Depicted as autochthonous warriors linked to an earlier age of Athenian heroism, the wasp-jurors therefore lay claim to respect, although their current employment implies a decline from their previous glories. As the portion of the Athenian citizenry with the most time on their hands, old men typically served as jurors in the law courts, their participation in this important legal role aided by a daily stipend which had been increased by Cleon, who was believed to have engineered this to ensure the successful conviction of his enemies. The chorus' wasp comparison therefore comes from their association with Cleon's antics, as well as their status as veterans of Athens' military exploits. In the *parabasis* of *Wasps* the Chorus Leader acknowledges the group's waspish qualities, but also claims that these qualities are inherently Athenian:

πολλαχοῦ σκοποῦντες ἡμᾶς εἰς ἅπανθ' εὐρήσεται
 τοὺς τρόπους καὶ τὴν δίαίταν σφηξίν ἐμφερεστάτους.
 πρῶτα μὲν γὰρ οὐδὲν ἡμῶν ζῶον ἠρεθισμένον
 μᾶλλον ὀξύθυμόν ἐστιν οὐδὲ δυσκολώτερον.
 εἶτα τᾶλλ' ὅμοια πάντα σφηξὶ μηχανώμεθα.
 ξυλλεγέντες γὰρ καθ' ἔσμούς ὡσπερ εἰς ἀνθρήνια

οἱ μὲν ἡμῶν οὐ̄περ ἄρχων, οἱ δὲ παρὰ τοὺς ἔνδεκα,
οἱ δ' ἐν ᾿Ωιδείῳ⁷ δικάζουσ', ὥδε πρὸς τοῖς τειχίσις
ξυμβεβυσμένοι πυκνόν, νεύοντες εἰς τὴν γῆν, μόλις
ὥσπερ οἱ σκώληκες ἐν τοῖς κυττάροις κινούμενοι.
ἔς τε τὴν ἄλλην δίαιτάν ἐσμεν εὐπορώτατοι·
πάντα γὰρ κεντοῦμεν ἄνδρα κάκπορίζομεν βίον.
(1101-13)

[Examining us in many ways, you will find that in all respects, / in our leanings and way of life, we most resemble wasps. / Firstly, no living thing, having been roused, / is more quick to anger than us, and is no harder to please. / Next, we contrive all other things just like wasps. For, gathered in swarms just like in a wasps' nest, / some of us judge where the archon is, some alongside the Eleven, / while some in the Odeum, crammed up tightly against the walls / like this, bending to the ground, hardly moving / like larvae in their cells. / While in the other way of life we are very resourceful, / for we sting every man and make a living.]

The presentation of the wasp-jurors is deeply ambivalent here. They may “sting every man” (πάντα . . . κεντοῦμεν ἄνδρα), but they are essential to the working of Athens' legal system, judging cases not only “where the archon is” (οὐ̄περ ἄρχων) and alongside the officials of the state prison (“the Eleven”: τοὺς ἔνδεκα), but also “in the Odeum” (ἐν ᾿Ωιδείῳ), a performance venue that, in an interesting echo to the action of *Wasps*, occasionally held trials. And, as the chorus has earlier reminded the audience, their bellicose nature has in large part contributed to Athens' current prosperity: they were a generation who τοιγαροῦν πολλὰς πόλεις Μήδων ἐλόντες / αἰτιώτατοι φέρεσθαι τὸν φόρον δεῦρ' / ἐσμέν, ὃν κλέπτουσιν οἱ νεώτεροι (“having seized / many cities from the Medes [i.e. Persians] / are most responsible for bringing the tribute here, / that the youth now steal”; 1098-1100). As unpleasant as many of their qualities may be, the implication is that they were essential to the establishment of Athens' prosperity, and vital to its continuing good order.

As in other Aristophanic comedies, the wasp-chorus do not begin the play onstage, but other characters often build up anticipation for

7 This is the spelling supplied by Henderson (Aristophanes 1998). The Hall and Geldart edition of *Wasps* (Aristophanes 1907) has ‘Odeum’ as ὠδείῳ.

their arrival by talking about their qualities, which are frequently aggressive. *Wasps* centres on Philocleon ('Love-Cleon') an old man who has been trapped inside his home by his son and his slaves to cure him of his unusual νόσον ("illness"; 87): φιληλιαστής ἐστὶν ὡς οὐδεὶς ἀνὴρ ("he is a lover of trials like no other man"; 88), which makes him desperate to sit in court. The play begins with Philocleon's attempts to escape house arrest through various schemes, including climbing out through the roof and sneaking out the front door, Odysseus-like, hanging to the underside of a sheep. As dawn approaches, his long-suffering son Bdelycleon ('Loathe-Cleon') realises his father may be rescued by his fellow jurors, who ἀπὸ μέσων νυκτῶν γε παρακαλοῦσ' αἰεὶ, / λύχνους ἔχοντες καὶ μινυρίζοντες μέλη / ἀρχαιομελισιδωνοφρυνιχῆρατα ("always call out to him, beginning in the middle of the night, / carrying lanterns and warbling old-Sidonian-sweet-songs by Phrynicus"; 218-20). When the slave Sosias, believing these old men do not sound so dangerous, responds that they will simply αὐτοὺς τοῖς λίθοις βαλλήσομεν ("hit them with stones"; 222) to drive them away, Bdelycleon highlights the men's unusual physical feature:

ἀλλ' ὦ πόνηρε τὸ γένος ἦν τις ὀργίση
 τὸ τῶν γερόντων, ἔσθ' ὅμοιον σφηκιᾶ.
 ἔχουσι γὰρ καὶ κέντρον ἐκ τῆς ὀσφύος
 ὀξύτατον, ᾧ κεντοῦσι, καὶ κεκραγότες
 πηδῶσι καὶ βάλλουσιν ὡσπερ φέψαλοι.
 (223-7)

[But, you idiot, if someone angers this gang / of old geezers, it is like a nest of wasps. / For they even have a most sharp stinger out of their backsides / with which they sting, and with a buzz / they leap up and strike like sparks.]

The initial description that suggests a group of peaceable old men μινυρίζοντες ("warbling") songs as they travel to fulfil their democratic duty is countered by Bdelycleon's reference to their waspish qualities; as we see with the wasp-jurors' own account of themselves, the way they are regarded by other characters is frequently ambivalent. The inter-generational antagonisms that Francesco Morosi, elsewhere in this volume, sees as central to

Aristophanic plot dynamics thus finds another outlet in Bdelycleon's concerns about how his father's contemporaries will regard his behaviour.

The chorus underline their importance through their first entrance in the *parodos*, a processional song during which the group move into the *orchestra* space via the entranceways (*eisodoi*) in the theatre. This entrance is often spectacular, marked by a shift in meter and enforced visually and aurally by the appearance of the twenty-four strong choric grouping into a playing space that had hitherto been occupied by a handful of actors. In *Wasps* the *parodos* portrays the aged wasp-jurors as a group past their prime: they enter slowly, their way lit by lanterns, and they are guided into the *orchestra* by several boys, who warn them of the stones that may trip their unsteady feet. The Chorus Leader addresses his fellows and laments that they are *πάρεσθ' ὁ δὴ λοιπὸν γ' ἔτ' ἐστίν, ἀππαπαῖ παπαιάξ, / ἦβης ἐκείνης, ἠνίκ' ἐν Βυζαντίῳ ξυνημεν / φρουροῦντ' ἐγὼ τε καὶ σύ* ("all that still remain here . . . / of those young men from the time when you and I were together in Byzantium"; 235-6), a reference that suggests these men are veterans of the capture of Byzantium from the Persians in 478, which would make them around eighty years old in 422, the year of *Wasps*' first performance (Aristophanes 1983, 236-7n). A group of war veterans who had fought against one of Athens' most dangerous enemies should be deserving of respect, but the play tempers such impressions by suggesting that they are in the pay of Cleon, and their civic service has now been channelled into a more sinister purpose:

ἀλλ' ἐγκονῶμεν, ὦνδρες, ὡς ἔσται Λάχητι νυνί
 σίμβλον δέ φασι χρημάτων ἔχειν ἅπαντες αὐτόν.
 χθές οὖν Κλέων ὁ κηδεμῶν ἡμῖν ἐφεῖτ' ἐν ὄρα
 ἦκειν ἔχοντας ἡμερῶν ὀργὴν τριῶν πονηρᾶν
 ἐπ' αὐτόν, ὡς κολωμένους ὧν ἠδίκησεν.
 (240-4)

[But let us be quick, o men, as Laches will get it now: / all say that he has a bee-hive of cash. / Yesterday therefore Cleon our protector ordered us / to come on time holding a three-day supply of nasty anger / against him, in order to punish him for what he did wrong.]

The speech endorses the earlier description of the wasp-jurors while clarifying it further. The power κολωμένους (“to punish”) with their ἡμερῶν ὀργὴν τριῶν πονηρὰν (“three-day supply of nasty anger”) – a reference to the jurors’ stipend – is connected here to Laches, an Athenian general whom the play suggests Cleon saw as a rival worthy of attack. But the wasp-jurors’ power is heavily circumscribed: they are in the pay of Cleon (ὁ κηδεμῶν ἡμῖν: “our protector”), and the suggestion that they have been recruited specifically to find Laches guilty implies that the defendant will not gain a fair trial. In this depiction the chorus thus invite two contradictory reactions: they are worthy of admiration for the sacrifices they have made in service to the *polis*, but also portrayed as in hock to a ruthless politician who uses them to persecute his enemies.

Following their entrance in the *parodos*, the Aristophanic chorus is frequently deployed to enhance the central struggle between their play’s protagonists, often focused on what William Arrowsmith terms the protagonists’ “Great Idea” (Arrowsmith 1973): the founding of a new city (*Birds*), a sex strike to avoid war (*Lysistrata*), the procurement of a private peace treaty (*Acharnians*). The “Great Idea” of *Wasps* is represented by Bdelycleon’s desire to cure his father’s love of trials by keeping him away from the law courts. The ὀργὴν . . . πονηρὰν (“nasty anger”) of the jurors is put to the test when, discovering Philocleon’s imprisonment in his own home, they threaten violence against Bdelycleon and his slaves:

ΞΑΝΘΙΑΣ Ἡράκλεις, καὶ κέντρ' ἔχουσιν. οὐχ ὄρᾱς, ὦ δέσποτα;
 ΒΔΕΛΥΚΛΕΩΝ οἷς γ' ἀπώλεσαν Φίλιππον ἐν δίκη τὸν Γοργίου.
 ΚΟΡΥΦΑΙΟΣ καὶ σέ γ' αὐτοῖς ἐξολοῦμεν. ἀλλ' ἅπας ἐπίστρεφε
 δεῦρο κἀξείρας τὸ κέντρον εἴτ' ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἴεσο,
 ξυσταλείς, εὐτακτος, ὀργῆς καὶ μένους ἐμπλήμενος,
 ὡς ἂν εὖ εἶδῃ τὸ λοιπὸν σμῆνος οἶον ὠργισεν.
 ΞΑΝΘΙΑΣ τοῦτο μέντοι δεινὸν ἤδη, νῆ Δί', εἰ μαχοῦμεθα.
 ὡς ἔγωγ' αὐτῶν ὀρῶν δέδοικα τὰς ἐγκεντρίδας.
 ΧΟΡΟΣ ἀλλ' ἀφίει τὸν ἄνδρ'· εἰ δὲ μή, φῆμι' ἐγὼ
 τὰς χελώνας μακαριεῖν σε τοῦ δέρματος.
 ΦΙΛΟΚΛΕΩΝ εἶά νυν, ὦ ξυνδικασταί, σφήκες ὄξυκάρδιοι,
 οἱ μὲν εἰς τὸν πρωκτὸν αὐτῶν εἰσπέτεσθ' ὠργισμένοι,
 οἱ δὲ τῶφθαλμῶ κύκλω κεντεῖτε καὶ τοὺς δακτύλους.
 (420-32)

[XANTHIAS Heracles, they actually carry sharp stingers! Do you not see them, master? // BDELYCLEON Yes, with these they obliterated Philippos son of Gorgias in a trial. // CHORUS LEADER And we will obliterate you with them! But everyone: about turn, / presenting stingers, then charge this man [Bdelycleon], / shoulder to shoulder, in ranks, filled with anger and force, / so he will know well henceforth what sort of wasp nest he provoked! // XANTHIAS This is now really terrible, by Zeus, if we fight. / How frightened I am, seeing those stingers of theirs! // CHORUS: But send forth the man [i.e. Philocleon]. If you do not, I declare that / you will think tortoises are blessed on account of their shells. // PHILOCLEON Come on now, fellow jury-men, sharp-hearted wasps: / one squadron, having been riled up, fly into his arsehole, / While the other sting all around his eye and his fingers.]

The κέντρον (“stingers”) that Bdelycleon had anticipated are on full display here, likely brandished as part of the chorus members’ costume, and the Chorus Leader’s appeal to the σφῆκες ὄξυκάρδιοι (“sharp-hearted wasps”) is couched in militaristic language that suggests their combative nature. The doddering old men of the *parodos* are still a force to be reckoned with, and in performance, one imagines that the twenty-four strong chorus, bearing down on Bdelycleon and his two slaves, would be an imposing sight.

As in other Aristophanic plays, the violence threatened by the chorus is diverted into a debate or contest (*agon*) between the protagonists. Philocleon and Bdelycleon agree that they will each present their arguments as to why the other is wrong:

ΒΔΕΛΥΚΛΕΩΝ νῆ Δί', εἰθίσθης γὰρ ἦδεσθαι τοιούτοις πράγμασιν.
 ἀλλ' ἐὰν σιγῶν ἀνάσχη καὶ μάθησ' ἀγὼ λέγω,
 ἀναδιδάξῃσιν οἷομαί σ' ὡς πάντα ταῦθ' ἀμαρτάνεις.
 (512-14)

[BDELYCLEON By Zeus, for you are accustomed to take pleasure in such acts. / But if you keep silent and learn what I say, / I predict I will teach you that you missed the mark on everything.]

The *agon* that follows is a battle of words rather than fists, and tellingly both father and son agree that the wasp-jurors should be judges of their τῆ διαίτη (“arbitration”; 524), a decision that

recognises not only their professional expertise but also the importance of their collective endorsement.⁸ The chorus address Philocleon, realising that his success reflects on themselves:

νῦν δὴ τὸν ἐκ θήμετέρου
 γυμνασίου λέγειν τι δεῖ
 καινόν, ὅπως φανήσῃ –

...

– μὴ κατὰ τὸν νεανίαν
 τόνδε λέγειν. ὀρθῶς γὰρ ὥς
 σοι μέγας ἐστὶν ἄγων
 καὶ περὶ τῶν ἀπάντων.
 εἰ γάρ, ὃ μὴ γένοιθ', οὗτός
 σε λέγων κρατήσῃ –

...

οὐκέτι πρεσβυτῶν ὄχλος
 χρήσιμος ἔστ' οὐδ' ἀκαρῆ:
 σκωπτόμενοι δ' ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς
 θαλλοφόροι καλούμεθ', ἀνωμοσιῶν
 κελύφη.

(526-8, 531-7, 540-5)

[Now then the man from our / Gymnasium [Philocleon] must say something / new, so that you [i.e. Philocleon] may appear – / . . . to not speak in the manner of this / young man [Bdelycleon]. For you see that / the debate facing you is a great one / and about everything. If, indeed – may this not happen – he / is able to defeat you / . . . / No longer is a crowd of old men / serviceable, not even a little bit. / We, being jeered at in the roads / are called olive-bearers, and / dried-up husks of oaths.]

The wasp-jurors thereafter respond to Bdelycleon's position that is, again, typical of the chorus' general pattern of initial resistance to and eventual acceptance of the protagonist's viewpoint. They meet Philocleon's opening argument – that jurors are all-powerful with

8 Although the *agon* is a common feature in Aristophanic comedy and the chorus act as witnesses to the victory of one of the agonists (always, with the exception of *Wealth*, the final speaker), it is worth noting with Sommerstein that *Wasps* contains “the only competitive *agon* in Ar[istophanes] in which the chorus act formally as judges”; Aristophanes 1983, 521n.

defendants, with prosecutors, and in their own homes (548-630) – with enthusiasm:

οὐπώποθ' οὕτω καθαρῶς
οὐδενὸς ἠκούσαμεν οὐδὲ
ξυνετῶς λέγοντος.

...

ὥς δ' ἐπὶ πάντ' ἐλήλυθεν
κούδεν παρηλθεν, ὥστ' ἔγωγ'
ἠῦξανόμην ἀκούων,
κάν μακάρων δικάζειν
αὐτὸς ἔδοξα νήσοις,
ἠδόμενος λέγοντι.
(631-3, 636-41)

[Never have we heard / anyone speaking so spotlessly or / smartly.
/ . . . / How he covered all the bases, / and neglected nothing, that /
I was puffed up while listening. / And I myself seemed to judge / on
the Isles of the Blessed, / delighting in him speaking.]

By contrast, the chorus are hostile to Bdelycleon as he prepares his response:

ΧΟΡΟΣ δεῖ δέ σε παντοίας πλέκειν
εἰς ἀπόφευξιν παλάμας·
τὴν γὰρ ἐμὴν ὀργὴν πεπᾶ-ναι
χαλεπὸν <νεανία>
μὴ πρὸς ἐμοῦ λέγοντι.

ΚΟΡΥΦΑΙΟΣ πρὸς ταῦτα μύλην ἀγαθὴν ὦρα ζητεῖν σοι
καὶ νεό-κοπτον,
ἦν μὴ τι λέγῃς, ἥτις δυνατὴ τὸν ἐμὸν θυμὸν κατερεῖξαι.
(644-9)

[CHORUS You must entwine all sorts / of methods to obtain acquittal. /
For it is hard <for a young man> to soften my anger, / if he does not
speak in my favour. // CHORUS LEADER Because of these things, it
is time for you to look for a good, newly-chiseled millstone / if you
don't say something of importance, which is capable of grinding
down my anger.]

But when Bdelycleon responds with a counter-argument – that jurors receive a pittance in comparison to the wealth of the *polis*, and they have been hoodwinked by politicians and officials (650-724) – their opinion changes:

ΚΟΡΥΦΑΙΟΣ ἦ που σοφὸς ἦν ὅστις ἔφασκεν· “πρὶν ἂν ἀμποῖν
 μῦθον ἀκούσης, οὐκ ἂν δικάσῃς.” σὺ γὰρ οὖν νῦν μοι νικᾶν
 πολλῶ δεδόκησαι·
 ὥστ’ ἤδη τὴν ὀργὴν χαλάσας τοὺς σκίπωνας καταβάλλω.
 ἀλλ’, ὦ τῆς ἡλικίας ἡμῖν τῆς αὐτῆς συνθιασῶτα,
 ΧΟΡΟΣ πιθοῦ πιθοῦ λόγοισι, μηδ’ ἄφρων γένη
 μηδ’ ἀτενῆς ἄγαν ἀτεράμων τ’ ἀνὴρ.
 εἴθ’ ὠφελὲν μοι κηδεμῶν ἢ ξυγγενῆς
 εἶναι τις ὅστις τοιαῦτ’ ἐνουθέτει.
 σοὶ δὲ νῦν τις θεῶν παρῶν ἐμφανῆς
 ξυλλαμβάνει τοῦ πράγματος,
 καὶ δῆλός ἐστιν εὖ ποιῶν·
 σὺ δὲ παρῶν δέχου.

(725-35)

[CHORUS LEADER Doubtless it was a wise man who said: “do not judge until you / have heard both sides of a story.” For in fact you now seem to me / to have won by a lot. Therefore, having softened my anger, we throw down our sticks. / [To Philocleon] But, o brother of our same time of life – // CHORUS Heed, heed the words, and don’t be senseless, / and don’t be too stubborn and too tough a man. / Would that I had a protector or family member / who could advise about such things. / Now one of the gods, being clearly at hand, / assists you in the matter, / and clearly serves you well. / Just be there, you, and accept the help!]

It is with the chorus’ endorsement that Philocleon’s attitude also alters, and his desire to sit in an Athenian court is replaced by a more comfortable domestic alternative – where he can preside over the prosecution of his dog and eat as much soup as he likes – and partying in his neighbourhood, where he behaves outrageously with no fear of reprisal. After the *agon* the wasp-chorus’ central role as characters within the world of the play shifts in and out of focus in the play’s two *parabaseis* (1009-121; 1264-91) – during which they extol their playwright’s virtues, remind the audience

of their responsibility, and reflect on their own waspish qualities – and following a small stasimon in which they note the change that Philocleon has undergone (1449-73) and a final choral address (1516-37), they depart the *orchestra* in the final *exodos*.

Table 1:
Aristophanic chorus theatregrams

Theatregram	Description
Person	Grouping of chorus as a ‘character’ with collective identity and behaviour
Association	Interactions with characters in the play
Association	Interactions with audience through <i>parabaseis</i>
Motion	Aggressive group movement, including in <i>parodos</i>
Motion/Design	Dance and song as part of performance
Motion/Design	Massed entry in <i>parodos</i>
Design	Delivery of <i>parabaseis</i>
Design	Involvement in and contribution to <i>agon[es]</i>

As the table above illustrates, the Aristophanic chorus is composed of a series of theatregrams that merge in different combinations across Aristophanes’ plays. By imagining the group as composed of characteristics represented by discrete theatregrams we can see that the chorus is a ‘family’ of theatregrams rather than a group possessing fixed characteristics, and that it is Aristophanes’ manipulation of the positioning and emphasis of these theatregrams in each of his plays that give his choruses both a general identity and local differences.

The wasp-chorus illustrate not just the essential structural function the chorus fulfils in Aristophanes’ plays, as represented by the theatregrams listed above, but also the general agonistic tone that animates the action. The threat of violence the chorus brings to the stage catalyses the stand-off between father and son, and their judgement that it is Bdelycleon rather than Philocleon who has carried the day marks a shift from familial hostility to acceptance.

Indeed, the transition from hostility to acceptance is a broader pattern in Aristophanic Old Comedy, which frequently focuses on the protagonists' aim to achieve their 'Great Ideas', with these attempts formally represented by the *agon*. It is worth repeating the importance of the *parodos*, *agon*, and *parabasis* to the structure of extant Aristophanic comedy, and the central role the chorus plays in each of these elements. Each of these design theatregrams produces dramatic conflict – chorus against characters, characters against characters, and chorus against audience – and might be imagined as representing a broader agonistic element in the context of the plays' first performance, where their place in competitions was determined by the extent to which they swayed the judges' opinions.

The categorical indeterminacy of the Aristophanic chorus is frequently literal and metaphorical. In *Wasps* the chorus are aggressive, opinionated, hasty, but both in their roles as jury members within the play and as real citizens in the context of performance they have a connection to the real Athens of their audience. The play makes a broader point about the limitations of a legal and political system that is heavily reliant on rhetorical manipulation and outright cheating. It is glimpsed in the play's absurd dog trial (891-1008), in which Philocleon's dog Labes is accused of eating cheese and – despite a rhetorically-sound defence that appeals to the *ethos* of the canine's past character, the *logos* of witness testimony, and the *pathos* of an appeal on behalf of Labes' puppies – he is ultimately acquitted only when Bdelycleon tricks his father into placing his vote in the wrong voting urn. Corruption is also glimpsed in the state at large: in the prologue the slave Sosias recounts a dream in which ἐν τῇ Πυκνί / ἐκκλησιάζειν πρόβατα συγκαθήμενα (“the sheep sat in session in the Pnyx”; 31-2), μούδοκει / δημηγορεῖν φάλλαινα πανδοκεύτρια, / ἔχουσα φωνὴν ἔμπερημένης ὕος (“expecting an all-consuming whale / to speak in the assembly for the sheep, / bearing the voice of a swollen pig”; 34-6). The πρόβατα (“sheep”) in Sosias' dream are clearly Athenian citizens – their possession of βακτηρίας . . . καὶ τριβώνια (“staves and . . . cloaks”; 33) evokes the dress of typical poor Athenians, as well as the stick-wielding wasp-jurors (Aristophanes 1971, 33n) – whereas the φάλλαινα πανδοκεύτρια (“all-consuming whale”) is Cleon, portrayed as interested in personal gain, who ἔχουσα τρυάνην /

ἴστη βόειον δημόν (“holding a pair of scales, / Started weighing out the fat of the land”; 39-40). Despite the gravity of the situation – Sosias sees the dream as *περὶ τῆς πόλεως . . . τοῦ σκάφους ὄλου* (“about the entire ship of state”; 29) – the Athenian sheep-citizens are portrayed as helpless in the face of a domineering politician like Cleon who *τὸν δῆμον ἡμῶν βούλεται διστάναι* (“wishes to separate the demos from us”; 41).⁹ As in the trial of Labes (whose name perhaps evokes the ‘Laches’ that the wasp-jurors had earlier been keen to convict?) Sosias’ dream suggests a legal and political context in which due processes can be upended by sleight of hand or force of personality.

But if Aristophanes sees emotional appeal as problematic in the legal system he is not immune from using it in his own theatrical defence. In the play’s first *parabasis* the Chorus Leader reports that Aristophanes *ἀδικεῖσθαι γάρ φησιν πρότερος* (“says he was wronged first”; 1017) by his public, despite the fact that in his previous work *οὐδ’ . . . ἀνθρώποις φήσ’ ἐπιθέσθαι* (“he did not . . . attack men”; 1029) but rather he *θρασέως ξυστὰς εὐθύς ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς αὐτῷ τῷ καρχαρόδοντι* (“boldly joined battle straight from the beginning with the saw-toothed one himself [i.e. Cleon]”; 1031), and other *τοῖς ἠπιάλοις ἐπιχειρῆσαι πέρυσιν καὶ τοῖς πυρετοῖσιν* (“agues and boiling fevers”; 1038) that assail the body politic. Aristophanes is presented as a civic-minded playwright, but despite being a *τοιόνδ’ . . . ἀλεξίκακον τῆς χώρας τῆσδε καθαρτὴν* (“deliverer from evil such as this, a cleanser of this land”; 1043) the Chorus Leader scolds the audience that *καταπρούδοτε* (“last year you let him down”; 1044) by not recognising the quality of his previous play. In the onstage action of *Wasps* Bdelycleon succeeds because he can manipulate the chorus’ strong emotional state – commonly depicted as “anger” (cf. 223, 646, 727), a state shared by Philocleon (560, 574) – and his playwright – who is, crucially, depicted as attacking Athens’ enemies with *Ἡρακλέους ὀργὴν* (“Herculean anger”; 1030) – also appears aware of its benefits in his own context. Aristophanes portrays himself as a battler, one who is willing to fight for the little people despite dangers to

⁹ See Aristophanes 1971, 32n, where MacDowell notes that Aristophanes returns to this connection elsewhere: cf. *Cl.*, 1203; *Kn.*, 264; *Wasps*, 955.

himself, but who also expects to be rewarded in kind. *Wasps* won first prize at the Lenaia, and although it is impossible to know the precise reasons for his victory it is worth noting that this *parabasis* certainly attempts to influence public opinion in a manner that he satirises in the play.¹⁰

This examination of the function of the chorus in *Wasps* reveals a fact borne out by Aristophanic choruses in general: Aristophanes recognises the importance of public endorsement – as evidenced by the chorus’ role as witnesses to the protagonists’ victory in the *agon*, and in their metatheatrical function as cheerleaders for the playwright’s own victory in the dramatic competition – but he is also aware that the crowd are susceptible to misdirection, misinformation, and misunderstanding. Aristophanes’ ambivalence about the chorus is perhaps most aptly represented in their characterisation, for if the performers who comprised the Aristophanic chorus represented an important civic function, it is striking that the characters they portrayed were often not Athenian citizens, and frequently not even human. Part of the categorical distance between characters and performers may be due to Old Comedy’s likely origin in the *komos*, a form of ritualistic revelry where evidence suggests that revellers dressed as animals and – possibly – non-Athenian foreigners (Pickard-Cambridge 1962, 151-8). But if this distance is in part traditional to Old Comedy, Aristophanes also makes dramatic capital out of it: his choruses can be absurd, articulate positions that are contrary to Athenian orthodoxy, or – as in the case of *Wasps* – represent the best and worst qualities of the Athenian citizenry.

***Epicene* and the Jonsonian Chorus**

In this section I turn to *Epicene* and suggest that Jonson’s Collegiate ladies evoke some of the functional and thematic elements of the

¹⁰ Interestingly, the Chorus Leader’s monstrous description of Cleon and of Aristophanes’ defence of Athens (1030-7) is repeated almost exactly in *Peace* 752-9, which was performed in 421 BC after Cleon’s death. If this repetition in *Peace* is not due to an error in the text’s transmission, one wonders whether its reappearance was Aristophanes’ way of underlining that his victory over Cleon was now indisputable.

Aristophanic chorus, albeit in a very different dramatic context. Early modern playwrights worked in a theatrical *milieu* more clearly indebted to Latin than Greek drama, so gone are the formal design theatregrams of *parodos*, *agon*, and *parabasis*, the choral odes sung in intricate meters and accompanied by dancing, all of which were performed by a small number of actors and a large chorus in the large, open-air performance space of the Athenian theatre. Jonson's play instead follows a five-act structure – a structure based on an early modern understanding of ancient drama, and particularly prevalent in the indoor, hall playhouses – and was performed in a commercial context by 'boy' players, ranging in age from mid-teens to early twenties.¹¹ *Epicene* does not therefore echo Aristophanic comedy in any overt way. Where we do see Jonson's Aristophanic influence, however, is in his presentation of his Collegiate ladies as representatives of his society at large, and in his deployment of theatregrams that evoke the Old Comic chorus' movement, dominance of space, and involvement in a central struggle between the play's protagonists.

Jonson's *Epicene, or The Silent Woman* was first performed in the Whitefriars theatre, a small hall playhouse in the Whitefriars liberty of London that likely attracted, as with other hall playhouses of the time, a more socially-elite audience than found in the amphitheatres. Jonson's audience would have recognised the world of the play as their own: *Epicene* is set in their contemporary London, with familiar locations in the city's rising West End featuring prominently, and its cast of characters, drawn from the minor gentry and middling sort, may not have been too socially distinct from the audience that gathered to watch them. The plot works within the typical pattern of city comedy plays, but demonstrates that curious interleaving of Aristophanic and Menandrian New Comic elements that Morosi's essay in this volume identifies in Jonson's *The Staple of News*. At its heart, *Epicene* is a struggle between young and old that focuses on a tussle over marriage, with the twist being that it is not the play's young man (Dauphine Eugenie) who wishes to marry but his misanthropic uncle (Morose), and the wife this uncle

¹¹ For more on the boy actor in *Epicene* and other plays as a "rhetorical and theatrical construct", see Lamb 2008, 188-9.

weds (the Epicene of the title) turns out not to be a she but a he. In this broad outline of romantic intrigue we may already detect design theategrams derived from Italian and Latin New Comedy – specifically the pattern of two young lovers whose marriage is blocked by another, often a ‘senex’ (‘old man’) related to one of the pair. However, the changes the play makes to the basic pattern – it is a young woman and old man who are to marry, the blocking figure is young man, and the play concludes not with marriage but with divorce – shows Jonson’s characteristic manipulation of his source material.

Epicene is a play about London, and more specifically about a “polite society” of men and women for whom city life is more concerned with the exercise of “wit and taste” (Zucker 2004, 41) – and idle talk, “of pins and feathers and ladies and rushes and such things” (*Epicene*, 1.1.50) – than the pursuit of more serious business or political activities. The attractive vacuity of the urban experience is represented by a group of socially and financially independent women called the ladies Collegiate – Lady Haughty, Lady Centaur, and Mistress Dol Mavis, and a number of aspirants or “pretenders”, including Mistress Trusty and Mistress Otter – whose days are filled with social calls, sexual liaisons, and visits “to Bedlam, to the china houses, and to the Exchange” (4.3.19), those hubs of entertainment for the moneyed classes. The Collegiates take advantage of the enticements that city life has to offer, although their gender lends their activities a *frisson* of moral dubiousness not often ascribed to their male counterparts; Truewit, one of the play’s gallants, depicts them as “A new foundation . . . an order between courtiers and country madams that live from their husbands”, who “cry down or up what they like or dislike in a brain or a fashion with most masculine, or rather hermaphroditical, authority” (1.1.58-63). These women are unusually independent – Truewit notes they “live from their husbands” – and the description of their group as a “foundation”, an “order”, gives them an institutional identity one might more readily associate with male groups – indeed, the “most masculine, or rather hermaphroditical, authority” that they exercise hints that their behaviour is transgressive, even monstrous.¹² Such

12 For more on the Renaissance connection between hermaphroditism

a suggestion of transgression and monstrosity is carried over into the names of some of the Collegiates: the surname of Lady Haughty, the group's leader, reveals a characteristic frequently regarded as a male preserve; Lady Centaur evokes a chimera of human and animal from classical myth; and one of the Collegiates' applicants, Mistress Otter, is named after the creature regarded as "*animal amphibium*", at home on both land and water (1.4.20). The Collegiates' domineering behaviour over the course of the play – in which they impose on Morose and Epicene's wedding, seek to recruit additional members, and pursue Dauphine as a sexual conquest – all confirm their "masculine authority". No wonder, then, that Morose will later characterise these women as the "mankind generation" that have tormented him so heavily (5.4.17).

Although much of Jonson's play focuses on the home of the antisocial Morose, the Collegiates are a synecdoche for the society beyond its walls. In this they hold an affinity with the Aristophanic choruses who represent Athenians and the inhabitants of Attica more broadly and, like their Aristophanic counterparts, Jonson's Collegiates seem susceptible to the worst aspects of collective attitudes and behaviours. As Truewit will later tell Dauphine:

... all their actions are governed by crude opinion, without reason or cause. They know not why they do anything but as they are informed, believe, judge, praise, condemn, love, hate, and – in emulation of one another – do all these things alike. Only they have a natural inclination sways 'em generally to the worst when they are left to themselves. (4.6.54-9)

As in Aristophanic comedy, in which the audience are frequently given a sense of the chorus' attitude and behaviour before their arrival, the association between Collegiates and chorus comes even before the ladies have stepped onstage. In the first scene Clerimont's Boy describes the reception he receives when he visits Lady Haughty and her companions: "The gentlewomen play with me and throw me o'the bed, and carry me in to my lady, and she kisses me with her oiled face and puts a peruke o'my head and asks me an I

and monstrosity, see Rackin 1987, 29.

will wear her gown, and I say, 'No.' And then she hits me a blow o'the ear and calls me innocent, and lets me go." (1.1.10-14). Such behaviour illustrates the Collegiates' capacity to dominate younger males (Billing 2014), and Truewit's later claim to Morose that a "she-friend or cousin at the college" will "instruct" his new bride "in all the mysteries of writing letters, corrupting servants, taming spies" (2.2.75-7) voices a fear that the ladies could have an insidious influence on other women too. Their capacity for social judgement is also apparent: Clerimont claims to Epicene that she has only been invited to see Morose "o'purpose to be seen and laughed at by the lady of the college and her shadows" (2.3.6-7); later, he separately tells Daw and La Foole that each intends to use the Collegiates as witnesses to the others' social humiliation, the former by shutting La Foole out from a feast attended by the ladies, the latter by diverting the feast elsewhere to "frustrate your provision and stick a disgrace upon" Daw (3.3.41). Both claims are untrue, but they help to facilitate the appearance of the wedding breakfast at Morose's home, and to suggest the idea that the judgement of the Collegiate ladies – despite the misgivings of the play's male characters – is key to condoning or condemning one's social position.

Jonson's small Whitefriars stage could not hope to accommodate a group as physically imposing as the twenty-four strong comic chorus, but discussion of them prior to their arrival builds the Collegiates up to ominous proportions in the minds of other characters. In his earliest description of the Collegiates Truewit claims that they "every day gain to their college new probationer" (1.1.63-4); this claim proves to be true, as Mistresses Trusty and Otter both lobby to join their ranks and the ladies themselves pursue Epicene and Dauphine, the second of which they imagine as a sort of honorary member. What makes their first appearance more foreboding is that there is no clear indication of the group's size. Truewit tells Morose that "three or four fashionable ladies from the college" are coming to visit him, and he exaggerates the group further by claiming they are coming with a "train of minions and followers" (3.5.22-3). The suggestion of a "train" is indeed borne out in the subsequent action, as the Collegiates' appearance is accompanied not just by their hangers-on – the aspirants to the college, the two knights La Foole and Daw, and the three gallants as

fascinated onlookers – but also by an accompaniment of musicians, who invade Morose’s home with more noise and bodies in 3.7.

The ladies’ reputation certainly precedes them, for despite introducing them in act 1, a description of their preparations for the feast in act 2, and Mrs Otter’s deferential references to the “great ladies” and “my Lady Haughty” in act 3 (3.1.14; 3.2.51), it is not until 3.6 that they make their entrance. Their first appearance – when all four Collegiates enter, accompanied by their satellite, Daw – does not disappoint, as the group fill the stage space in a manner similar to the Aristophanic *parodos*:

[Enter] Daw, Haughty, Centaur, Mavis, Trusty.

DAW This way, madam.

MOROSE Oh, the sea breaks in upon me! Another flood! An inundation! I shall be o’erwhelmed with noise. It beats already at my shores. I feel an earthquake in myself for’t.

...

TRUEWIT [To Morose] Nay, sir, you must kiss the ladies; you must not go away now. They come toward you to seek you out.

HAUGHTY I’faith, Master Morose, would you steal a marriage thus, in the midst of so many friends, and not acquaint us? Well, I’ll kiss you, notwithstanding the justice of my quarrel. [To Epicene] You shall give me leave, mistress, to use a becoming familiarity with your husband. [She kisses Morose.]

(3.6.1-4, 15-20)

Morose’s comparison of the ladies’ entrance in catastrophic terms as a “flood”, “an inundation”, “an earthquake” suggests not only their imposing size but also the physical impact they bring to the scene. The Collegiates’ seemingly-elemental invasion of Morose’s home is accompanied by an invasion of personal space when Lady Haughty insists on kissing the unhappy husband. The domineering treatment that Clerimont’s Boy had earlier described is shown onstage when Haughty treats Morose with “becoming familiarity” by kissing him; the episode also echoes an earlier kiss that Morose gives to Epicene, which he gives in order “to print, on those divine lips, the seal of being mine” (2.5.66-7).

The Collegiates do not spend the rest of their time onstage like the Aristophanic chorus, but even when they leave they maintain

a conspicuous influence over the play's action. Having discovered that Epicene may be of more interest than they expected, Haughty declares "An she have wit, she shall be one of us . . . We'll make her a collegiate" (3.6.44-5) and the group withdraw offstage, "instructing her i'the college grammar" (4.1.21), some of which we glimpse when they appear onstage again in 4.3, discussing how Epicene should "manage" her husband (4.3.15). It is noteworthy that the ladies refer to Epicene at this point as "Morose" (4.3.11) a moment that – as with Haughty's imposition of a kiss on Morose – indicates that the Boy's earlier hint at the Collegiates' dominance over men is being realised onstage.

The Collegiates' most crucial function within the play is as witnesses to the social humiliation or elevation of the plays' other characters. This function is first seen onstage in the gulling of Daw and La Foole in 4.5, notably instigated on Dauphine's behalf in response to the ladies laughing at him "most comically [i.e. mockingly]" (4.5.6) and in an effort to make them "all in love with thee afore night" (4.1.109). After tricking La Foole and Daw into thinking that each seeks revenge for an insult from the other, the ladies are brought onstage as witnesses to a disguised Dauphine kicking Daw and tweaking La Foole's nose. The moment has its effect, for the Collegiates enter the next scene—according to a stage direction original to the 1616 folio, "*having discovered part of the past scene above*" (4.6.0.SD.3-4) – with Haughty complaining "how our judgements were imposed on by these adulterate knights" (4.6.1-2) and the ladies turning their attention to wooing Dauphine, wishing "to style him of our friendship and see him at the college" (4.6.49-50).

From their entrance, then, the play's action begins to revolve conspicuously around the Collegiate ladies, with the play's various factions all keen to capitalise on what is referred to as their "judgements". The gulling scene is imagined as a play-within-a-play: Truewit promises his two companions "a tragicomedy between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, Daw and La Foole", and he asks his friends to "be the chorus behind the arras, and whip out between the acts and speak" (4.5.25-7). Such an arrangement evokes Renaissance neo-Senecan drama, with the chorus as moralising frame to their play's action, although here the gallants present a debased version of the choric role, as their interest in Daw and La Foole's shaming is

far from ethical.¹³ In this scene the Collegiate ladies function more as audience members. It is worth noting that the ladies will be invited to see the “catastrophe” (4.5.190), a term defined in Evanthius’ *De Fabula* as “the reversal of affairs preparatory to the cheerful outcome; it reveals all by means of a discovery” (Evanthius, qtd in Herrick 1950, 59). Although the language evokes an understanding of dramatic structure derived from the Latin tradition, Clerimont clearly imagines the Collegiates’ judgement as a pivot in the playlet’s action, a moment where the ladies’ previous opinions are changed through the revelation of the two knights’ foolishness. The scene is prelude to a much more profound display of the Collegiates’ lack of judgement – the moment when they discover that Epicene is not, in fact, a woman – but in both instances we see a similar pattern to that found in Aristophanic comedy: a group bearing witness to a contest between different characters, and the result of that contest shifting their favour from one to the other.

As table 2 illustrates, the Jonsonian chorus shares some striking features with the Aristophanic chorus, features which may be imagined as discrete theatregrams of person, association, motion, and design. Despite the Collegiates’ lack of identity as a ‘formal’ chorus, and the absence of structural units like the *parodos*, *agon*, and *parabasis* in Jonson’s comedy (and indeed early modern comedy more generally), we can see that the ladies’ function echoes their Aristophanic equivalents. The most crucial omission of the Aristophanic chorus is the *parabasis*, but in this final section I argue that parabolic qualities can be glimpsed first in the identification between the Collegiate ladies and the watching audience, and secondly in the prologues which serve as a frame and a guide for audience interpretation.

13 We might also add that the gallants’ imagining of the episode as a play to which the two gulls are unwitting actors is an example of meta-performance, a dramatic quality that Grilli and Morosi see as present in both Aristophanes and Jonson, but which in the latter playwright’s work is a representation of how social situations and interactions can be parsed and manipulated by intellectually superior protagonists (Grilli and Morosi 2023, 137).

Table 2:
Comparison of theatregrams in Aristophanic and Jonsonian choruses.

Theatregram	Description of Aristophanic Chorus	Description of Jonsonian Collegiates
Person	Grouping of chorus as a 'character' with collective identity and behaviour	Grouping as 'ladies Collegiate' with collective identity and behaviour
Association	Interactions with characters in the play	Interactions with characters in the play
Association	Interactions with audience through <i>parabaseis</i>	N/A
Motion	Aggressive group movement, often in <i>parodos</i>	Collective movement when onstage. Actions perceived as aggressive by several characters
Motion / Design	Dance and song as part of performance	N/A
Motion / Design	Massed entry in <i>parodos</i>	Massed entry as a 'flood', an 'inundation' in 3.6
Design	Delivery of <i>parabaseis</i>	N/A
Design	Involvement in and contribution to <i>agon[es]</i>	Involvement in and contribution to gulling of Daw and La Foole, and to Dauphine's final revelation of Epicene

The Collegiate ladies do not maintain the parabolic quality of the Aristophanic chorus, but Jonson may have used another means to imply a connection between them and his audience. Truewit's claim

that the ladies act with a “masculine, or rather hermaphroditical, authority” highlights their transgressiveness, but also that their behaviour reflects both male and female characteristics. The same sort of liminal positioning is apparent in their social description as “an order *between* courtiers and country madams” (1.1.59-60; emphasis added), with the preposition implying social and locational difference (court and country) as well as gendered differences (a “madam” is female, but a “courtier” is less clear).

Similar to the “hermaphroditical” description of the Collegiate ladies, Jonson’s description of his audience defies easy categorization. According to Thomas K. Hubbard, paratextual material like prologues, inductions, and epilogues are the closest things to *parabaseis* in Jonson’s work (Hubbard 1993, 231-40), and indeed the first prologue to *Epicene*, which represents the play as a feast to which his audience have been invited as discerning guests, provides an Aristophanic bridge between the content of the play and the context of performance. The prologue’s description of who this play-feast might be “fit for” has a similar indeterminacy to the description of the Collegiate ladies:

The poet prays you, then, with better thought
 To sit, and, when his cates are all in brought,
 Though there be none far-fet, there will dear-bought
 Be fit for ladies: some for lords, knights, squires,
 Some for your waiting-wench and city-wires,
 Some for your men and daughters of Whitefriars.
 (Pro.19-24)

The guests cover a broad social range – from “waiting-wench” to “lords” – and the reference to “city wires” alludes to the sort of fashionable, urbane men and women that anticipate the Collegiate ladies themselves. Most telling, though, is Jonson’s imagined audience including the “men and daughters of Whitefriars”. As Richard Dutton highlights, this phrase may allude directly to Jonson’s audience – the men and women occupying the Whitefriars theatre – but could also carry an alternative meaning, referring to the inhabitants of the wider area: the Whitefriars liberty, which was itself “notorious for vice and crime” (Jonson 2003, Pro. 24n). When these ambiguities are considered, the prologue’s welcome takes on

a more cynical implication: if *everyone* is welcome then *anyone* is welcome, and the audience become less a congregation of ‘the better sort’ than a group that might contain any manner of individual.

As in Aristophanic comedy the ‘between-ness’ of the Collegiates – a group who, we must remember, behave with “hermaphroditical authority” – may have reminded the audience of itself. Like the Collegiates, the original audience of *Epicene* occupied a similarly liminal space in Jacobean high society: their status as spectators in one of the hall playhouses suggests a degree of elitism and sophistication, but the Whitefriars was still a comparatively minor venue, its novelty and the notoriety of the area in which it was located meaning that it probably did not attract the same clientele as found at the Blackfriars. Perhaps its audience (male or female) saw something of themselves in the socially ambitious – but ultimately foolish and gauche – Collegiate ladies and gulled gentlemen that Jonson presents onstage.

This suspicion is strengthened by the fact that first-time audiences of *Epicene* are expected to be caught out by its closing *coup de théâtre*, just like their onstage counterparts. After securing Morose’s promise of restoring him to his inheritance if he will rid him of the suddenly-talkative Epicene, Dauphine whips off Epicene’s peruke to reveal that ‘she’ is in fact a disguised boy, and therefore the marriage is void. As Sonia Desai highlights, this moment is “orchestrated to call into question the entire sign system of gender in the theatre”, the removal of the wig “metaphorically remov[ing] the wigs from the other female characters on the stage whose gender identities are also called into question” (Desai 2020, 99). This is the second moment where the Collegiates are witnesses to an agonistic triumph of one character over another, although on this occasion the ladies – who in the gulling of Daw and La Foole had been vocal about the imposition against their “judgements” by the two “adulterate knights” – can only be stunned observers to this metatheatrical revelation of Epicene’s own gendered indeterminacy (Truewit remarks: “Madams, you are mute upon this new metamorphosis!”, 5.4.197). In their role as witnesses to and catalysts for the behaviour of others within the play, Mark A. Anderson sees the Collegiate ladies representing “the deception within society as well as the often deluded and deceived nature of

society” (Anderson 1970, 363). The women’s gullibility is a marker of a wider gullibility that has affected not just foolish men like Daw and La Foole but also the gallants Clerimont and Truewit; it is the lone plotter, Dauphine, rather than any group that triumphs by the play’s end. Even the watching audience – earlier flattered as possessing “cunning palates” (Pro.10) and apparently complicit with the gallants’ schemes – have been kept from Dauphine’s trick, and have found the convention of boys playing girls exploited for dramatic effect.

The play’s *denouement* encourages its audience to take heed that they reach their own judgements independently, not as part of the crowd. A second prologue acknowledges the potential for human failing, but also that such failings should confer a lesson rather than be taken personally:

The ends of all who for the scene do write
 Are, or should be, to profit and delight;
 And still’t hath been the praise of all the best times,
 So persons were not touched, to tax the crimes.
 (2 Pro.1-4)

This prologue – “Occasioned”, as its title notes, “by some person’s impertinent exception” to *Epicene*’s contents – echoes the Aristophanic *parabasis* through its emphasis on comedy as a social good. The conciliatory tone it strikes – that plays should follow the Horatian line of profit and delight, that comedy should punish the sin, not the sinner – is endorsed by Truewit, who does not condemn the ladies but rather warns them to “Take heed” of women-traducing men like Daw and La Foole (5.4.198), and that even Dauphine “will make a good visitant within this twelvemonth” (5.4.200-1; see Swann 1998, 302). Just like Aristophanes before him, Jonson recognises not only the important role that groups play in validating or condemning individual actions, but also that the members of these groups are no more likely to hold admirable or positive qualities than those they judge, and that there are lessons to be learned from their mistakes. Jonson’s audience are presented with onstage versions of themselves who could profit from the play’s lessons, and in Truewit they have a model for how they should respond to the sort of chastising trickery they have experienced themselves. And,

like Aristophanes' warning reference to σκαίων θεατῶν ("stupid spectators"), *Epicene's* parabolic prologues provide a framework for how audiences might imagine themselves as worthy guests at Jonson's feast.

Conclusion

It is in their manipulation of the tension between the collective and the individual and their distinction between the discerning and indiscriminate audience members that I see the closest convergence between Jonson and Aristophanes, and nowhere is this more clearly manifested than in their use of choral groups. Both playwrights believed in the didactic function of theatre: for Jonson, "poesy", including drama, was to "inform men in the best reason of living" (*Volpone*, Epistle 81-2), while Aristophanes referred to himself and his fellow playwrights as "komododidaskaloi" (cf. *Kn.* 507, *Peace* 734), a word that could be interpreted – and was, by Renaissance readers – as "comic teachers".¹⁴ In their focus on "Great Ideas" or purging individuals of personality imbalances or 'humours', both playwrights seem interested in using their plot as a 'cure' for social ills – represented in *Wasps* by Philocleon's trial-loving νόσος ("illness") and in *Epicene* by Morose's intense misanthropy. Jonson and Aristophanes trusted that their audiences had the capacity to behave and judge appropriately but realised it was not a given – to help them, they provided them with onstage analogues who could both flatter and offend, and frames like the prologue and the *parabasis* to guide their reactions further. Much modern criticism of *Epicene* has discussed its misogynistic elements, not only its central joke – the 'silent woman' of the title turns out to be a fiction because there is, according to a misogynist perspective common in the Renaissance, no such thing as a silent woman – but also its unflattering portrayal of the Collegiate ladies as acquisitive, promiscuous, domineering, overly-urbane (Rackin 1987; Helms 1989; Lyons 1989; Newman 1991; Lanier 1994). Conversely, others

¹⁴ On Jonson's misreading, via Daniel Heinsius, of διδάσκαλος, see Grilli in this volume.

have argued that the monstrous women of *Epicene* are equalled by the men, and rather than offering a critique of women Jonson instead exposes the vacuousness and cruelty of individuals and groups within his contemporary society – in other words, that the play is less a misogynistic satire than a satire on misogyny itself (Ostovich 1986, 119-21; Sanders 1998, 49-67; Swann 1998; Merrens 2000, 257-8). It is with this second critical group that this essay most closely aligns, for I see Jonson's women as only the most obvious manifestation of a broader social discordance within the play – a play in which, as Edward Partridge memorably pronounced, “nearly everyone . . . is epicene in some way” (1964, 162). Jonson and Aristophanes seem to share Truewit's conviction that crowds “do anything but as they are informed, believe, judge, praise, condemn, love, hate, and – in emulation of one another – do all these things alike”. But, as both playwrights demonstrate, they also recognise that a poorly-informed group has the capacity to change, and in their close identification with the watching audience they imply that these failings are human qualities that we all share.

I have found the “family resemblance” approach to Clubb's theatregram a useful way of thinking about how Jonson exploits elements of dramatic models without using them wholesale. What we imagine as the Aristophanic chorus is in fact a system of theatregrams, all potentially detachable from one another, and a dramatist can be selective in what they choose in order to create an analogue that bears the feature of its original. There are pragmatic reasons why Jonson may have done this: early modern English playwrights wrote their plays for markedly different performers and performance conditions to their Athenian forbears; equally, their audiences were no longer primed to recognise and respond to dramatic structures like the *parodos*, *agon*, and *parabasis* that Aristophanes deploys in his comedies. Jonson's selection of elements of the Aristophanic chorus that would still resonate with his Whitefriars audience is thus partly an act of dramaturgical expediency, but there are perhaps deeper ideological reasons behind this selection as well. From one perspective, the use of a choric group of Collegiate ladies as both objects of mockery and the means by which others are mocked is another instance of the Renaissance reception of Aristophanes-as-satirist (a phenomenon

observed in Grilli's essay). But the ambivalent presentation of the Collegiates also gets closer to Aristophanes' distinct ability to make his audience both laugh *at* and *with* the same characters, a quality often missing in Jonson's dramaturgy, which draws a sharp distinction between winners and losers based on an elitist notion of an individual's "poetical" and intellectual capacities (Grilli and Morosi 2023, 138). Jonson's "elitist" preference for the clever and performatively-astute protagonist was typically one that the ideologically "anti-elitist" Aristophanes was more inclined to view with suspicion (see Grilli in this volume), but in the figures of the Collegiate ladies we encounter a moment where Jonson and Aristophanes perhaps come into closer alignment.

If my reading is accurate, the Collegiate ladies provide another instance of how 'middle-phase' Jonson was moving from his earlier engagement with Aristophanes – which, as Grilli's essay demonstrates, is more concerned with the 'idea' of Aristophanes as refracted through Roman and early modern commentators – to a deeper exploitation of the Old Comic's plays as repositories of themes, codes, and dramatic structures (Grilli). I see Jonson's creative selection of Aristophanic theatregrams as another instance of his contaminative practice, which may be a practical way of explaining how Jonson was able to write in what Helen Ostovich calls "an Aristophanic mode" without being overly-beholden to specific elements of his forbear's plays (Ostovich 2001, 12). By adapting the chorus' formal elements and characteristics to suit the tastes and conventions of his own age, Jonson tapped into the chorus' capacity for social commentary while avoiding the more overt, and therefore dangerous, charge of "fouly hurting" that he inherited from the Horatian tradition.

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