

The Parodos of Aristophanes' *Wasps*

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Recent criticism has attempted to rehabilitate the evaluation of the construction of Aristophanes' *Wasps*.<sup>1</sup> The great difficulty in defending the quality of the play is the relationship of the first part with its theme of "juryitis" to the second with its attempts to reeducate Philokleon. This essay, however, confines itself to the parodos and is concerned both with a recent suggestion regarding the text which has gained limited acceptance and with demonstrating a dramatic connection between the parodos and the remainder of the first half of the comedy.

The parodos can be divided into four sections. In the first (230-247) the chorus gradually assembles as the koryphaios, accompanied by his son, singles out individual colleagues and urges them to greater speed.<sup>2</sup> It is

<sup>1</sup> U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, "Über die Wespen," *SPAW* (1911), 472 (= *Kleine Schriften*, [1935], i, 298), and A. Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature* (New York, 1966), 435, are among the severest critics. P. Mazon, *Essai sur la Composition des Comédies d'Aristophane* (Paris, 1904), 80, is the most enthusiastic of the older critics. Among more recent favorable critics are C. H. Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero* (Cambridge, 1964), 156-161; L. Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes* (New York and London, 1966), 132-35; D. M. MacDowell, *Aristophanes: Wasps* (Oxford, 1971), 4-7; T. Gelzer, "Aristophanes," *RE*, Sup. 12 (1971), 1449, 27 ff.; J. Vaio, "Aristophanes' Wasps: The Relevance of the Final Scenes," *GRBS*, 12 (1971), 335-351.

<sup>2</sup> Grammatical peculiarities, e.g. 230 and 233, repeated commands and supposed logical disjunctions, as between 239 and 240, 258 and 259, were interpreted at the end of the last century as indications of conversational exchange between individual members of the chorus. Cf. F. Bamberger, *De carminibus Aeschyleis a partibus chori cantatis* (Marburg, 1832); R. Arnoldt, *De choro Aristophanis quaestiones scaenicae* (diss. Königsberg, 1868), 11 ff., and *Die Chorpartien bei Aristophanes* (Leipzig, 1873), 7 ff.; C. Muff, *Über den Vortrag der chorischen Partien bei Aristophanes* (Halle, 1872); G. Hermann, "De choro Vesparum Aristophanis," *Opuscula*, viii (Leipzig, 1877), 253-267; F. G. Allison, "A Proposed Redistribution of Parts in the Parodos of the *Vespaee*," *AJPh*, 1 (1880), 402-9; C. Robert, "Zu Aristophanes Wespen," *Hermes*, 44 (1909), 159-160. Wilamowitz, *SPAW*, 486, n. 1,

still dark as the chorus enters and so the son of the koryphaios carries a lamp to light the way. In the second section (248–272) the chorus leader tells his son to trim the lamp. The boy does this clumsily and is scolded and struck by his father. The lad threatens to desert his father and leave him to stumble on his way in the dark if he does not stop his abuse. The father swears he can punish anyone he pleases, and then, in an ironic double-take, he slips in the mud. That mishap occasions a meteorological excursus. He ends his reflections by marveling at Philokleon's absence and calls on his fellow jurors to summon their colleague from the house. The third section (273–290) is the first song of the assembled chorus. They speculate on what may be keeping as dependable and formidable a juror as Philokleon from joining them and then tempt him to participate in the prosecution of another traitor. In the fourth section (291–315) the son asks his father for a present, to which the father at first agrees but then—learning that the son wants *ισχάδες*—refuses.<sup>3</sup> When the son protests that he will no longer accompany his father, the koryphaios reminds the boy that he must support a family of three with his juror's dole. The parodos ends in a paratragic threnody. The son asks his father if the family can buy dinner if the courts do not sit. The father can't guarantee it, and the son answers with a lament from Euripides' *Theseus*, undercut by his father.

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strongly opposed this "*Chorzersplitterung*." The phenomena which had led Hermann to derive this theory were not so inconsequential as Wilamowitz would have us believe. They are now explained by maintaining that the chorus does not come into the orchestra as a group but instead slowly assembles there. P. Haendel, *Formen und Darstellungsweisen in der Aristophanischen Komödie* (Heidelberg, 1963), 35: "Die Orchester ist also nicht der Ort des Einzugs, genau genommen, sondern der Ort der Versammlung des Chors, der sich allmählich formiert." See also E. Roos, *Die tragische Orchestik im Zerrbild der altattischen Komödie* (Stockholm, 1951), 151–52.

<sup>3</sup> Wilamowitz' paraphrase of 291–294 (*SPAW*, 489) represents the unquestioned interpretation of translators and commentators: "Vater, willst du mir wohl was kaufen?" "Gern, wohl Murmeln?" "Nein, Feigen schmeckt süsser." The boy's answer (*ἤδιον γὰρ*) can hardly be an acceptable reason for preference if the suggestion made by the father is a set of dice. Where the reading *ἀστράγαλος* now stands in our text, there was once the accusative plural of the word for some item of food neither so expensive nor sweet as *ισχάδες*. One logical candidate is the last meaning of *ἀστράγαλος* in Liddell and Scott: a leguminous vegetable. Dioscorides, *De Re Medica* 3, 61, offers ten possibilities for the plant, beginning with *ἀστράγαλος*: οἱ δὲ *ισχάδες*. Hesychius Alexandrinus, *Lexicon*, ed. K. Latte (Copenhagen, 1963), s.v. *ἀστραγαλή*, offers another word which would fit: *ἀστραγαλή*: ἡ τῆς *ἱριως* *ρίζα*. Theophrastus, *HP*, 1, 73, describes the root: *ἰδία τῆς* *ρίζης φύσις καὶ δύναμις τῆς ἰνδικῆς συκῆς*. MacDowell, 175, remarks that the devastation of Attica must have made figs a rarity: "All the same, the fact that the old juror regards them as an expensive luxury is a sign that he is very poor indeed." Either the juror volunteers his son a cheap substitute for *ισχάδες*, or else Aristophanes is playing a pun on the more usual meaning of *ἀστράγαλος*.

The scene concludes as Philokleon leans out his window and addresses his companions.

The separation of the two dialogues between the father and his son has long been regarded as disturbing.<sup>4</sup> Srebrny has suggested a transposition of verses which would produce one connected dialogue between the two.<sup>5</sup> He maintains that originally the second dialogue between the father and son (291-315) followed immediately upon the meteorological discussion ending at 265, forming one extended conversation. At the end of the dialogue came the remaining tetrameters (266-272) which urge the chorus to call Philokleon from the house. The chorus then sang its invitation to Philokleon to join it (273-290), which was followed immediately by Philokleon's answer (316 ff.). The effect of this alteration is to make the action of the parodos more direct. The chorus enters, there is a continuous conversation between the father and son, the chorus calls its companion from his house, but he answers that he cannot join them. Now this suggested change has found formal support. Russo has pointed out that a metrical pattern typical of Aristophanes' parodoi results from the proposed rearrangement.<sup>6</sup> He observes that in the parodoi of the *Peace* (301-336) and of the *Wealth* (253-289) Aristophanes uses consecutive pairs of "moduli" of eighteen tetrameters. If Srebrny's suggestion is adopted, a somewhat similar pattern will be formed by the tetrameters of 230-247 and 248-265. MacDowell, in his edition of the *Wasps*, does not rearrange the verses of the parodos, but he admits that he was sorely tempted by Srebrny's suggestion and Russo's corroboration.<sup>7</sup>

The objections are more forceful. The chief factor which held MacDowell back from adopting Srebrny's suggestion in his edition was metrical. Verses 230-247 are catalectic iambic tetrameters, but 248-272 are *ἀσυνάρτητα Εὐριπίδεια*, or syncopated catalectic iambic tetrameters. Unlike the pairs of eighteen tetrameters in the *Wealth* and the *Peace*, the two sections in the *Wasps* would be in different meters. In the end, MacDowell elects to consider the syncopated verses as a unit and not to divide them into two sections.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See E. Brentano, *Untersuchungen über das griechische Drama* (Frankfurt, 1871), 178, and J. van Leeuwen, *Aristophanis Vespa* (Leiden, 1893), *ad loc.*

<sup>5</sup> S. Srebrny, "Aristophanea," *Eos*, 50 (1959/60), 44-45, independently of van Leeuwen.

<sup>6</sup> C. F. Russo, "Le Vespe Spaginate e un Modulo di Tetrametri 18 × 2," *Belfagor*, 23 (1968), 317-24.

<sup>7</sup> MacDowell, 169. F. Perusino, *Il Tetrametro Giambico Catalettico* (Rome, 1968), 35, n. 1, accepts Srebrny's and Russo's suggestion.

<sup>8</sup> On the syncopated iambic tetrameter catalectic see *Hephaestionis Enchiridion*, ed. M. Conzbruch (Leipzig, 1906), 53, 5-11; A. Rossbach and R. Westphal, *Metrik der Griechen* (Leipzig, 1867), 203; Wilamowitz, *Griechische Verskunst* (Berlin, 1921), 231.

That is a commendable decision, but there are other reasons as well for retaining the text as transmitted. Philokleon's answer to the chorus is difficult to reconcile to this interpretation (*φίλοι, τήκομαι μὲν πάλαι . . .*, 316-317). Πάλαι is disastrous for Srebrny's argument. Philokleon has in fact heard the chorus and has been listening, and there is evidence in the text that he does not answer when he first hears himself being called. Moreover, this is consistent with the dramaturgy of the parodos in Aristophanes. As has been mentioned, the great virtue of the proposed change would be that the action of the parodos would become more direct; however, the action of the Aristophanic parodos is often neither logical nor direct. In the *Acharnians*, the chorus enters at 240 and declares its intention to attack the man who would betray his city and strike a separate treaty (235), but when Dikaiopolis actually appears (241), the chorus postpones its attack and lies in ambush until 280, while its enemy's family conducts its procession. Similarly, the chorus in the *Wealth* comes on the scene to be informed by Kario that his master is going to restore the sight of *Wealth* (257-289), but then the theme of the play is interrupted by the kind of interlude that is typical in the action of the parodos. Kario and the chorus alternate in verses of a parody first of Kyklops and his goats, then of Kirke and her man-swine (290-321). After that episode, the chorus returns to the theme of wealth for a few lines (322-334) before Blepsidemos enters. It follows that we should not expect one course of action to be carried straight through the parodos. Instead, the entry of the chorus and the father's conversation with his son may well be interrupted and taken up again, the call of Philokleon from his house may, by parallel with other models, at first remain unanswered and only yield results after some delay.

More important than these metrical and dramaturgic considerations is the question whether the parodos has any function in the play other than that of supplying an entrance for the chorus and a choral interlude to separate the prologue from the first agon. Wilamowitz' opinion still holds

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J. W. White, *The Verse of Greek Comedy* (London, 1912), 231, nn. 1 and 2, lists nine examples. O. Schroeder, *Aristophanis Cantica* (Leipzig, 1909), gave in addition *Ach.* 1210, now discounted. I would suggest adding to White's examples *Clouds* 1114 and 1212, *Birds* 635, and *Peace* 1023. MacDowell is correct in keeping the verses as a unit. These verses represent by far the bulk of the examples of this meter in all of Aristophanes. The most unusual feature of *Wasps* 248-272 is that here we have twenty-five of these syncopated meters uninterrupted, one after another, and in a dialogue. The longest other single passage in this meter is *Frogs* 441-444, with only four verses. Verses 248-272 should be regarded as a unique metrical phenomenon, and on these grounds be allowed to remain a unit.

as the standard position on this point: "Die Parodos, die freilich mit der Handlung so wenig zu tun hat wie mit dem Wespenkostüm des Chores, ist ein Kleinod aristophanischer Kunst. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

The clue to this relationship lies in the use of the young boys who accompany the chorus during their entrance.<sup>10</sup> There are many choruses of old men in Aristophanes, but this is the only one which needs the assistance of juveniles. I should like to suggest that the use of the sons to escort their fathers creates a comic symbol of the central thrust and inspiration behind the play. At the midpoint of his career Aristophanes played with the theme of adult education. The comic paradox of the *Wasps* consists in the fact that it is the son who reforms and then instructs his father, the son who sees clearly the evils to which his father is blind, and the parodos is a concrete analogue for this central improbability. The physical infirmity of the jurors and their inability to find their own way represent both the results of and the reasons for the abuse which they receive from the demagogues, and their need for guides reflects their abject dependence and reliance. The sons of the chorus are attempting the same difficult task as Bdelykleon: to lead and guide their fathers. Their age, however, does not permit them Bdelykleon's more forceful actions in his attempts to aid Philokleon. For the imagery of the play, the important element in the entrance of the chorus is not the old men's speed but their misdirection, and the attempts of their sons to convert it.

This is in direct contradiction to the interpretation put on the character of the boys by Wilamowitz. He views them not as faithful guides who stay with the old men despite cantankerous refusals and beatings, but as scamps bent on mischief who deceive their fathers. Tangled in the manuscript difficulties around *βόρβορος* (259) and the problem of the meteorological ramblings which follow, he decides that the son has simply played the father for a fool once again: "Vortrefflich wie der Junge dem Alten bloss

<sup>9</sup> Wilamowitz, *SPAW*, 314-315.

<sup>10</sup> K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (London, 1972), 124 and 134, remarks that the use of boy singers and juvenile parts was a popular practice of drama in the 420s. C. Beer, *Über die Zahl der Schauspieler bei Aristophanes* (Leipzig, 1844), 49-50, suggested that there were only three boys, and identified them with the sons of Karkinios who appear at the end of the play. Wilamowitz, *SPAW*, 476, n. 1, drew attention to the fact that they are sent away later, ostensibly to fetch Kleon, but in fact to take away the cloaks which their fathers have shed. That seems to imply a larger number, and conjectures vary. J. Richter, *Aristophanis Vespae* (Berlin, 1858), 62: "sive tres sive quattuor sive quattuordecem"; Gelzer, 1450: "mindestens drei"; MacDowell, 19, vacillates; C. F. Russo, *Aristofane Autore di Teatro* (Florence, 1962), 197, offers a number and a reason for the boys' presence: "Questi fanciulli, che saranno almeno tre, hanno tecnicamente la funzione di animare la non aggressiva parodo dei vecchi coreuti."

einen Schabernack gespielt hat. . . ."<sup>11</sup> It is true that the son demonstrates boyish irresponsibility in the trimming of the lamp, but his father immediately reprimands him, showing that he, unlike Strepsiades, is slave to neither servant nor son. The son's threat to desert is idle, and a few lines later he warns his father of the mud on the street. Despite earcuffs, the refusal of their requests, and displays of magnificent nastiness by their fathers, the boys remain to lead them, until they are sent to fetch Kleon (409), their last dutifully performed act. This is not at all like another Aristophanic son, Pheidippides, who, when he threatens to leave his father, is as good as his word. Bdelykleon, Pheidippides, and these boys constitute the entire genus *filius* in Aristophanes, and if, as is the case with Pheidippides and the sons in the parodos, they irritate their fathers at one moment and come to their aid the next, and if their assistance ends as an annoyance, the fault lies not with them but is the outcome of their fathers' delusions.

There is also a technical relationship between the parodos and the remainder of the play. The parodos supplies the concrete justification for the argument in the agon which Aristophanes supports. When Philokleon delivers his epirrhema (548-619) he uses as a general outline the passage of the juror's day, and attempts to prove that the juror lives a life fit for a king. The juror's greatest pleasures are contained in the last section of the speech (605-620), emphasized by the fact that Philokleon almost forgets them (οὐ γὰρ ἔπελελήσμη . . . , 605). His triumph is his family's welcome when he returns with his three obols. His daughter and wife kiss and feed him, and the reason for the warmth of their reception is the money he brings with him. Of this he will not be deprived. Bdelykleon's rebuttal (650-718) is a tissue of economic chauvinism. He disregards the earlier parts of his father's discourse and concentrates on this last section. He suggests that the old man compute the total income of the city and then compare the pittance which the jurors receive. The reason for the discrepancy is, of course, the same rapacious demagoguery which Philokleon himself supports. The son ends his speech with a picture of what the financial condition of the jurors could be.

<sup>11</sup> Wilamowitz, *SPAW*, 488. The same attitude is found in V. Coulon, *Aristophane* (Paris, 1948), I, xvi. The notion that the boy deceives his father derives from the fact that the Ravennas reads βόρβορος and the Venetus βάρβαρος. Hermann, 257, suggested that μάρμαρος was the correct original reading, and was supported by Wilamowitz. F. Nencini, "Appunti aristofaneschi," *SIFC*, I (1920), 106-107, puts forward a startling explanation for μάρμαρος, but one which can only be supported when the word πέλεθος is also present. R. Cantarella, *Aristophanis Comoediae* (Milan, 1954) and MacDowell both dismiss Hermann's conjecture. See also Srebrny, 42, n. 1; A. von Bamberg, *De Ravennate et Veneto Aristophanis codicibus* (Bonn, 1865), 32.

What we have in the parodos is the proof that Philokleon is deluded in his self-conception, and that Bdelykleon is correct.<sup>12</sup> The other jurors resemble Philokleon in all things save one: his apparent affluence, or at least his son's. From Philokleon's mouth we hear only once of financial hardship, in verse 171 when he says that he must take the mule to market and sell it because it is the first of the month and the bills are at hand. That is pure ruse, another trick for the advocate's menace to escape confinement. For dramatic purposes Aristophanes has had to make Philokleon unaware of the financial miseries which his colleagues suffer. Philokleon's conception of his own life and the actual life of the other jurors—the rhetorical construct and the economic reality—are as different as light and dark, Sybaris and Akharnai. A recent critic portrays the sons of the parodos as willing accomplices in their fathers' symbiosis with the demagogues.<sup>13</sup> But Philokleon's picture of his daughter's reaction to his return and his reception by his wife is illusory; the boy's complaint at the end of the parodos is the accurate portrayal of the familial condition. The parodos is the dramatic method by which Aristophanes underlines the economic folly of the litigious, and to do it requires a concrete picture vivid enough to overpower the self-aggrandizing misconception of Philokleon and his fellow fathers.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Aristophanes frequently arms his favored principal in the agon with corroborating evidence from the earlier action of the play. For example, in the *Knights* one of the servants tells the other that the Paphlagonian has stolen a tidbit called Pylos (54-57). Kleon is sure to throw that accomplishment, that is, the servant's, up in the face of the Sausage Seller in the agon, and he inevitably does (836-840). The force of his contention has already been destroyed by what the audience learns listening to the prologue.

<sup>13</sup> Strauss, 115-116: "Although the insufficient lighting as well as the gnawing hunger give rise to a heated exchange between one of the wasps and his son, father and son are at peace with each other. The ordinary old juryman and his son, in contradistinction to Philokleon and his son, need each other; the child would starve without his father's earning the juryman's pay, and the father would not be able to earn that pay without the help of the child carrying the lamp."

<sup>14</sup> Some of the material in this essay is from my dissertation *The Parodos and Agon of Aristophanes' Vespae* (Princeton, 1971).