

The Boys from Cydathenaeum

ARISTOPHANES VERSUS CLEON AGAIN

*Edith Hall**Introduction: Demagogues Ancient and Modern*

This essay reconsiders Cleon and his representation in Aristophanes' *Knights*. In that play, Nicias and Demosthenes, slaves of the elderly male Demos, recruit a sausage-seller to vie with their fellow slave Cleon, described as Paphlagonian, to secure Demos' support. Although neglected today, *Knights* was enjoyed by its original audience; it was awarded first prize at the Athenian Lenaea in 424.¹

Accessing the "real" Cleon has been rendered impossible by the uncritical reproduction of contemporary caricatures of Cleon as a screaming warmonger, most extensively in *Knights*, but also in *Wasps* (422), *Peace* (421, produced the spring after Cleon's death), and Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War.² But by reassessing accounts of Cleon, and in particular by reading *Knights* from the perspective of one of his supporters, or at least a citizen less adamantly opposed to him than our surviving witnesses, we can catch a glimpse of a different, more likable Cleon. We can also see that the comedic version of Athenian democracy staged in *Knights*, a response to the new political climate of Athens after the plague and the

1. All of the dates in this essay pertaining to ancient Greece are BCE; all of the dates pertaining to texts from and events in Britain and nearby areas are CE.

2. My argument here is similar to that made in a very short but brilliant essay by Morley (1997).

death of Pericles, can be understood as the most radical in ancient—and most modern—literature.³

Cleon has stood little chance in the court of transhistorical public opinion, in no small part because he was labeled a “demagogue,” a word that is hardly ever used neutrally, in English at least. The earliest instance of the compounded stems *dem-* and *agog-* in surviving Greek literature occurs at *Knights* 191, although without an adverse nuance. One of Demos’ slaves, Demosthenes, describes to the Sausage-Seller the new qualifications for δημαγωγία, “being a people-leader”:

ἡ δημαγωγία γὰρ οὐ πρὸς μουσικοῦ
ἔτ’ ἐστὶν ἀνδρὸς οὐδὲ χρηστοῦ τοὺς τρόπους,
ἀλλ’ εἰς ἀμαθῆ καὶ βδελυρόν.

Leading the people is no longer a job for the educated
or well-mannered man,
but for the ignorant rascal.⁴

Thucydides also calls Cleon a demagogue in his sentence introducing Cleon’s role in the Pylos/Sphacteria episode, although it is uncertain whether the term in itself has a negative force: Cleon was a “*demos*-leader at that time exercising the greatest influence on the masses” (ἀνὴρ δημαγωγὸς κατ’ ἐκεῖνον τὸν χρόνον ὧν καὶ τῷ πλήθει πιθανώτατος, 4.21.3).

In English Renaissance and Jacobean texts until the Civil War, the term dispassionately describes leaders of popular factions within ancient republics, but the beheading of Charles I in January 1649 irrevocably changed its meaning.⁵ In Charles’ purported spiritual autobiography, the *Eikon Basilike*, published in February 1649, ten days after his execution, he writes that everyone knows who aroused the people against him:

Who were the chief Demagogues and Patrones of Tumults, to send
for them, to flatter and embolden them, to direct and tune their

3. This essay draws on scholarship from several of fields in which Paul Cartledge has conducted pioneering research: Athenian theater in its social context, historiography, Sparta, Classical reception, the English Civil War, and above all the history of democracy.

4. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of passages from Greek authors found in this essay are my own.

5. *Oxford English Dictionary* s.v. “demagogue” §1.

clamorous importunities, some men yet living are too conscious to pretend ignorance.⁶

Milton saw what this Royalist propaganda had done to the term *demagogue*. His response, *Eikonoklastes*, published the following autumn, commented as follows:

Setting aside the affrightment of this Goblin word; for the King by his leave, cannot coine English as he could Money, to be current (and tis belev'd this wording was above his known stile and Orthographie, and accuses the whole composure to be conscious of some other Author) yet if the people were sent for, emboldn'd and directed by those Demagogues, who, saving his Greek, were good Patriots, and by his own confession Men of some repute for parts and pietie, it helps well to assure us there was both urgent cause, and the less danger of thir comming.⁷

The “Goblin word” *demagogue* has been used, says Milton, to scare the reader. The “demagogues” were patriotic and honorable. But the word *demagogue*, he points out, has not previously been in regular use and thus is evidence, since Charles I avoided arcane diction, that the author of the *Eikon Basilike* cannot have been the king himself.⁸

Despite Milton’s protest, the word, with pejorative associations, became standard currency in English thenceforward. This in turn affected the way historians read ancient Greek. So, through a toxic, uncritical reading of Thucydides and Aristophanes, Cleon became not the archetypal leader of the people, but the archetypal “patron of tumult,” or what Don Marquis sardonically described as “any person with whom we disagree as to which gang should mismanage the country.”⁹ Word-searching digitized

6. King Charles I 1649, 18.

7. Milton 1649, 36.

8. The author of *Eikon Basilike* is widely believed to have been John Gauden, Bishop of Worcester. For a full and lucid discussion of the controversy surrounding the text’s authorship, with further bibliography, see Madan 1950, 126–63.

9. Quoted in Anthony 1962, 354. Given Thucydides’ use of the term *demagogue* to characterize Cleon and his unremittingly negative portrayal of Cleon, it is possible that the author of *Eikon Basilike* took the idea for using *demagogue* in this highly pejorative fashion from Thucydides. As Milton points out, it was strikingly unusual to use the word in that fashion, and Thucydides was widely read in conservative political circles, both in England and on

newspapers from the eighteenth century CE onward produces a catalogue of alleged “demagogues” in the contemptuous sense, on all points of the political spectrum: Charles James Fox and Tom Paine, Robespierre and Boulanger, Gerry Adams and Ian Paisley, Adolf Hitler and Arthur Scargill.

The election of Donald Trump to the US presidency in 2016 may further alter the way use the term *demagogue*.¹⁰ But this essay was written earlier, in response to the death on March 11, 2014, of Bob Crow, the highly effective English activist. As general secretary of the Rail Maritime and Transport Union from 2002, he increased the membership by 40%. By leading industrial actions he was responsible for the pay of London tube drivers rising to £52,000, then twice the national average wage. As a result, he was vilified across most of the media.

Any historian two and a half millennia hence, with access to only two sources on Crow, might easily conclude that he was a corrupt, venal, unprincipled, self-aggrandizing politician with an aggressive personal manner, strident voice, vulgar lifestyle, and repellent personal appearance. Consider, for example, the following passage, from an article published in 2014 in *The Sun* and headlined “Hypocrite Crow’s stolen a council house from poor”:

He is an infamous trade union firebrand—living it up on £135,000-a-year salary and expenses. But, despite this lavish income, he lives in a taxpayer-funded London council house. . . Bob Crow’s train strike was pure economic vandalism. It left us £200 million poorer, say business experts. Every penny wasted. . . Britain is a small island but a great one. We can build a solid economic recovery, make work pay, and give our children a decent start in life. But it means standing up to these trade union bullies and jobwreckers. Ending the something for nothing culture. Scrapping the hypocrisy

the European continent, in the second quarter of the seventeenth century. The members of those circles identified with what they perceived as Thucydides’ elitist bias. The key text in popularizing Thucydides’ portrait of Athenian demagogues was Hugo Grotius’ *De jure belli ac pacis* (Paris: Nicolas Buon, 1625). On this aspect of Thucydides’ reception, see Warren 2015, 143–5. Some of Aristophanes’ comedies had been brought to the attention of the Stuart court by the popularity of the plays of Ben Jonson (see Gum 1969), but *Knights* and *Wasps* were not much read at this time.

10. Jones 2016, published immediately after the election, draws on Aristophanes to discuss Trump.

of taxpayer-funded handouts for Bob Crow and his cronies. Trade union bosses have betrayed working people in this country—plain and simple.¹¹

Ten years earlier, *The Daily Express* contributed to the creation of the cartoon image of Crow and his garish lifestyle in an article headlined “Crow and Cronies’ Boozy GBP 4,200 Bill”:

The union leader planning a series of rail strikes which would bring Britain’s network to a standstill ran up a GBP 4,200 hotel bill on a boozy night out with regional officials, it emerged yesterday.

Bob Crow and 14 colleagues from the Rail Maritime and Transport Union (RMT) racked up the bill on union expenses during a weekend conference at a country house hotel which left fellow guests complaining about their rowdy behaviour and use of foul language.

The union bosses left their members to pick up the tab after enjoying a riotous night out during an RMT regional officials’ conference at the Corse Lawn House country hotel in Gloucestershire. During their one night stay they quaffed 14 bottles of wine at GBP 16.20 a time and dined on rack of lamb in a private dining room.

The next morning, as the shop stewards boasted about their hangovers, managers at the hotel apologised to other guests for the behaviour of the union officials.¹²

Crow was also attacked for his “bull-neck,” heavy build, and recreational tastes (football and sunbathing on package holidays), as though these were of relevance to his performance as elected leader of his union. The future historian would have no idea of the respect and affection in which Crow was held not only by the members of the RMT and, more broadly, of the Trades Union Congress (a federation of trade unions in England and Wales), but also across much of the working class and left-leaning sector of the middle class in Britain.

11. *The Sun* of February 9, 2014, pg. 14.

12. *The Daily Express* of May 24, 2004, pg. 8.

Thucydides' Portrayal of Cleon

What does this have to do with Cleon? Thucydides' Cleon is portrayed in precisely the same terms as the Bob Crow of the *The Sun* and *The Daily Express*; he is corrupt, mercenary, incompetent, loudmouthed, and uncultured.¹³ Thucydides' bitterness against Cleon is not inconsistent with the tradition that he held the demagogue responsible for his own exile.¹⁴

Cleon is first introduced by name as the man who had proposed the execution of the Mytileneans after the failure of their oligarchic and pro-Spartan revolt and attempt to interfere with the pro-Athenian policies of Methymna, the second city of Lesbos. Thucydides says the Athenians had begun to think the proposal excessive and "cruel" (ὠμόν, 3.36.4), even though he admits that at the second Assembly there was much expression of opinion on *both* sides. It is at this point that we meet Cleon, "the most violent of the citizens and at that time wielding by far the most influence with the *demos*" (βιαιότατος τῶν πολιτῶν τῷ τε δήμῳ παρά πολὺ ἐν τῷ τότε πιθανώτατος, 3.36.6). Thucydides' Cleon delivers a speech in which he throws down his gauntlet to the *demos*—if a democracy wants to run an empire, it must behave accordingly, with appropriate shows of strength toward those who oppose or subvert it. He loses the debate, but the success of his policy in the series of events at Pylos and Sphacteria, which strengthened the Athenians' hand against Sparta immeasurably, brought prestige to the man whom Thucydides says was a "*demos*-leader at that time exercising the greatest influence on the masses" (ἀνήρ δημαγωγὸς κατ' ἐκεῖνον τὸν χρόνον ὧν καὶ τῷ πλήθει πιθανώτατος, 4.21.3). Yet Thucydides' account everywhere implies that the military success was due to Demosthenes' military skills, while Cleon, allegedly motivated by vaunting ambition, was incompetent and irresponsible.

Cleon's Thracian expedition of the summer of 422 (Thucydides 5.3) concluded successfully, and even Thucydides fails to impute poor judgement to him here. Some of the Thracian city-states were in revolt, and Brasidas had taken others. Cleon arrived with 1,200 hoplites and seized control of Torone, which had revolted to the Spartans. The women

13. One other contemporary source, similarly hostile, is the statement, attributed by Aelian *Varia Historia* 10.17 to the arch-antidemocrat Critias (DK 88 B 45), that Cleon had begun his career in debt and ended it leaving a fortune of fifty talents. See Connor 1992 (1971), 151–2 with n. 31 and the skepticism with which Dorey (1956) treats this "evidence" for Cleon's corruption.

14. For a review of the evidence, see Lafargue 2013, 19–21.

and children were enslaved, the men taken captive and sent to Athens (5.3.2–4).

But Thucydides' prejudicial language comes back online in the run-up to the Battle of Amphipolis, which took place later in 422. One might bear in mind, in reading this section of Thucydides' narrative, that Amphipolis had immense strategic significance and that Thucydides himself had been exiled after Brasidas seized control of it in 424—when Thucydides was the Athenian general responsible for the security of the area. Thucydides thus had good reason to emphasize Brasidas' brilliance, which in turn nicely complemented his negative portrayal of Cleon.

Indeed, comparison with Brasidas' reputed brilliance makes it easy for Thucydides to cast Cleon in a poor light. The criticisms are skillfully placed via indirect discourse in the minds of his troops. Cleon advances, we are told, because he heard rumors that they were "aggrieved at the inactivity, and pondered the opposing leader's experience and nerve in comparison with the lack of expertise and the weakness of their own, and their own reluctance to leave home to accompany him" (5.7.2).

The battle itself is related in terms entirely favorable to the Spartans. Brasidas delivers rousing orations in direct speech whereas no such speech is given to Cleon. Brasidas is carried off the battlefield, wounded in action (5.10.8), to die soon afterward. Cleon, in contrast, is said to have had no intention of fighting personally and to have been killed by a local peltast while in flight (5.10.9). None of this is necessarily implausible, but even the most ingenious reader of Thucydides must question him when he earlier defines Cleon's (sole) motivation for opposing peace as fear of the restoration of calm because it would render his crimes and slanders more open to scrutiny (5.16.1).

Thucydides' consistently hostile portrayal of Cleon has been a major factor in the persistent habit of characterizing Cleon as a dangerous demagogue who was intensely disliked by much of the Athenian populace. It does not, however, require a great deal of sophisticated source criticism to perceive the strong biases present in Thucydides' account of Cleon's career. More interpretive subtlety is required in reading the portrayal of Cleon in Aristophanes' works.

Aristophanes and Cleon

Aristophanes and Cleon both came from the same deme. Cydathenaeum was the third largest deme, with a population of over 3,000. It was one of

the few lying within the city walls, and covered the heart of the city to the northwest of the Acropolis, including at least part of the agora.¹⁵

Cleon's father was Cleainetus, who ran a tanning business and must have had substantial resources, since in 460/59 he had been a victorious *choregos* in the dithyrambic competition (*IG II²* 2318 l. 34). Davies thinks that Cleon was probably born around 470, making him perhaps twenty-five years older than Aristophanes, who was born around 444.¹⁶ But beyond these data it becomes challenging to disentangle factual Cleon from fictional Cleon as presented in the ancient sources.

Cleon was a repeated target of Aristophanes' comic barbs. An extended critique of Cleon's policies formed part of the *Babylonians* (426), and conspicuous jokes against him appear in the *Acharnians* (425). Cleon features prominently in both the *Knights* (424) and *Wasps* (422); he is also the central character in the *epirrHEMA* of the *parabasis* of the *Clouds* (423),¹⁷ and Aristophanes boasts in the *Peace* (421) about fighting the Cleon-monster (ll. 261–73, 313–15).

There was, at least ostensibly, a strong current of antipathy between the poetic and political fellow demesmen. Cleon may have lodged a complaint against Aristophanes for abusing the Athenians in his *Babylonians* of 426, though we only have Aristophanes' comedic word for this (*Ach.* 370–84).¹⁸ Cleon may actually have used such abuse in a claim that Aristophanes should not have been enrolled in the Cydathenaeon deme and thus registered as an Athenian citizen. The ancient biography (usually called the *Vita*) of Aristophanes, in the context of Cleon's alleged prosecutions of Aristophanes, discusses the suggestion at *Acharnians* 634 that the comic poet came from or held property in Aegina (section 19). This passage is somewhat incoherent, but it claims that this is an allusion to one of the three separate occasions on which Aristophanes was accused of not being an Athenian citizen.¹⁹

Aristophanes' attacks on Cleon have been regularly taken as accurate reflections of Athenians' attitudes toward Cleon, but this interpretive

15. For a thorough discussion of the evidence relating to the boundaries of this deme, see Young 1951.

16. Davies 1971, 318–20.

17. Ceccarelli 2013, 90–5 discusses the possibility that there is also a reference in the *antepirrHEMA* (607–11) to a letter that Cleon sent to the Athenians bearing the good news from Sphacteria, beginning with the imperative *chairete*, also mentioned in Lucian's *A Slip of the Tongue in Greeting* 3 and the scholiast on *Clouds* 609a.

18. See further Atkinson 1992, 56–61 and Hesk 2000, 263–4.

19. The Greek text of the *Vita* is T1 in Kassel and Austin 1981; there is an English translation in Lefkowitz 1981, 169–72.

approach is ripe for reconsideration. To begin with, there is evidence in the ancient sources for the existence and persistence of a much more positive attitude toward Cleon. The speaker of Demosthenes' *Against Boeotus 2* cites with a pride a family connection by marriage to Cleon. His mother's first husband had been Cleomedon:

whose father Cleon, we are told, commanded troops among whom were your ancestors, and captured alive a large number of Lacedaemonians in Pylos, and was held in higher esteem than any other man in the state (μάλιστα πάντων ἐν τῇ πόλει εὐδοκιμησῆαι); so it was not fitting that the son of that famous man should wed my mother without a dowry. (40.25, trans. A. Murray, modified)

Cleon's victory at Pylos was still famous a lifetime later; his reputation was excellent. In the same vein, Aristotle tells us in passing that it was a popular idea, expressed by children, that freedmen, if asked to whom they would choose to entrust their affairs, would automatically answer "Cleon" (*Rhet.* 3.1408b25).

The absence of vilification of Cleon in Plato's works may also be telling. When Socrates delivers to Callicles his critique of imperialist policies and politicians in Plato's *Gorgias* (515e–19d), he uses language similar to that employed by Thucydides in his criticism of Cleon. But the leaders he is discussing are "Pericles and Cimon and Miltiades and Themistocles" (515d). Pericles made the citizens worse than they were, that is, he "corrupted" them (διαφθαρήναι), by starting the system of payment for government service, so that they became idle, cowardly, talkative, and avaricious. He was prosecuted toward the end of his life as being a rogue (ὡς πονηροῦ ὄντος). Socrates compares him to a herdsman who makes his herd wilder, more unjust, and worse (ἀγριωτέρους, ἀδικωτέρους τε καὶ χείρους). Cimon was ostracized in order that the Athenians "would not have to hear his voice for ten years" (ἵνα αὐτοῦ δέκα ἐτῶν μὴ ἀκούσειαν τῆς φωνῆς). All four men complied with the desire of the people rather than diverting them in ways that would have been good for them; they provided them with ships and walls and arsenals and many other things of that kind. Socrates compares such politicians with sophists and rhetoricians, but never mentions Cleon.²⁰

20. It is possible that Plato does not follow Thucydides in attacking Cleon, despite the correspondence of their caricature with the type of politician he is describing, because Socrates respected Cleon and was loyal to his memory (Anderson 2005 and Monoson 2014). In the

Another issue to bear in mind is that Cleon, as a prominent political figure, represented an obvious butt of Aristophanes' comedy, and as a result the jokes made at Cleon's expense do not necessarily reflect a consistently hostile attitude, either on the part of Aristophanes or on the part of the Athenian populace. Indeed, only weeks after the first production of the *Knights*, Cleon was elected to the board of ten generals.²¹

All of the preceding considerations suggest that caution is called for when reading Aristophanic portrayals of Cleon, particularly those plays in which Cleon figures most prominently, the *Knights* and *Wasps*. In the *Wasps*, despite Xanthias' claim that the play is not going to "make mince-meat" out of Cleon again (62–3), Aristophanes exposes some of the funnier consequences of the democratic jury system and especially of the juror pay for which Cleon is held responsible. It may be true that in 426/5 Cleon raised the pay to a little over a living wage of two obols (*Wasps* 684), but Aristophanes takes care *not* to remind his audience that the *dikastikon* had been the brainchild of Pericles.²² Cleon himself is represented by the dog that prosecutes another dog, Labes, for stealing a Sicilian cheese. (Labes stands for Laches, the commander of the first, unsuccessful Athenian expedition to Sicily.) Cleon is also compared with a rapacious whale and a squealing pig (35–6).

But the play's star is Philocleon, the type of ordinary Athenian who has gained most from Cleon's policies. The play's chorus is also the only one in Aristophanes' extant corpus of work whose identity is defined psephologically—that is, by membership of the radical democratic sector of the Athenian citizenry—rather than by association with a particular deme (*Acharnians*), an upper class (*Knights*), a cosmic element (*Clouds*), an occupation (the farmers of *Peace*), a species of fauna (*Birds*, *Frogs*), a festival chorus (*Frogs*), or the female sex. There is therefore promising

summer of 422, Socrates went on Cleon's successful campaign to retrieve Athens' imperial territories in Chalcidice and Thrace (Thucydides 5.2–3). Socrates stood in the battle lines at Amphipolis, as he says in the *Apology* (28e). A sense that association with Cleon was distasteful has even made a few scholars insist that Socrates did not mean *the* Battle of Amphipolis (Calder 1961).

21. The chorus of *Clouds*, produced the following year, recalls to the audience that Aristophanes had produced *Knights* "when you were about to elect as general the god-forsaken tanner Paphlagon . . . but you elected him regardless!" (581–7). The election of generals took place in early spring, soon after the Lenaea festival.

22. [Aristotle] *Ath. Pol.* 27.3–4. See further Sing 2010, 1. On the exchange value of the wage, see Markle 1985.

potential for reading *Wasps* as more complimentary than has usually been believed to both Cleon and the poorer segment of the Athenian *demos*.²³

What about the *Knights*? This play was a glorious personal triumph for Aristophanes, since, as he states in its *parabasis*, the production was his first “solo” outing as comic poet, being the first for which he had “requested a chorus” in his own name (512–14). He did less well when he ostensibly abandoned the Cleon theme with *Clouds* the following year, shortly after the victory at Sphacteria. This may have influenced Aristophanes’ decision to return to Cleon with *Wasps* in 422, although this time he did not win first prize. His boasting about how he had fought the Cleon-monster in his *Peace* of 421 (261–73, 313–15) may have been felt unseemly after Cleon’s death at Amphipolis; that otherwise poetic and thoughtful comedy did not win first prize either.²⁴

The ancient success of *Knight* contrasts with its unpopularity today. It is now one of the least performed, read, and appreciated ancient Greek comedies. Barrett in his Penguin translation called it “an embarrassing failure.”²⁵ But the Athenians would not have agreed. It made Aristophanes’ career.

The premiere of the play must have been a thrilling event for real-life Cleon-lovers and Cleon-haters alike. Cleon was physically present. The Sausage-Seller is to be the opponent of “Paphlagon here,” says the Demosthenes-slave (*houtosi*, 203). And a later exchange suggests that the spectating Cleon is pointed out again. Paphlagon supports a threat by swearing an oath by his own right to sit in a front seat at the theater, *prohedria* (702); the Sausage-Seller replies, “Up your *prohedria*! I’m going to make sure I see you having to watch from the very back row!” (ἰδοῦ προεδρίαν: οἶον ὄψομαι σ’ ἐγὼ / ἐκ τῆς προεδρίας ἔσχατον θεώμενον, 703–4).

As one might expect, the *Knights* has typically been understood as a harsh critique of Cleon’s personality, politics, and policies. Here again, however, things are not necessarily as they appear at first glance. By uncritically adopting Thucydides’ obviously biased assessment of Cleon, as even

23. I hope to pursue this in a forthcoming book on Aristophanic comedy.

24. See further Hall 2006, 321–52.

25. Barrett 2003, 25–6.

recent readers of *Knights* as political theater continue to do,²⁶ we forget that Cleon's supporters may not only have felt that *demagogos* was an honorable title,²⁷ but also, if any of their views had survived for us to read, might have told a very different story. It is, therefore, worthwhile to reread the *Knights* without prejudices imported from Thucydides and from perhaps insufficiently critical interpretations of the *Wasps*.

Cleon in the Knights: Defeated and Reborn

The *Knights* is set at the house of an old man named Demos. Opposite the door is a rock that will later be used to represent the Pnyx. Demos is from the outset presented as an idiot, and the action begins with two unnamed slaves, understood in antiquity to represent the generals Nicias and Demosthenes,²⁸ who complain about how Demos' new slave, the "Paphlagonian," is running the household. Paphlagon—who is transparently Cleon but whose soubriquet associates him both with a barbarian country in the Persian Empire and with overheated rhetoric—has been terrorizing the other slaves, while ingratiating himself with Demos.²⁹ The slaves are desperate to oust him; when they raid his secret collection of oracles, they discover that he is fated to be replaced by a sausage-seller. The first in the line of leaders prophesied by the oracle is a chandler (129–30), whom the scholiast *ad loc.* identifies as Eucrates. The second to take up the reins of power will be a sheep-dealer (132)—Lysicles, who in an unprecedented move had apparently in 428 imposed a property tax to fund the Caria expedition, in the course of which he lost his life (Thuc. 3.19.1). The third would be the tanner Cleon (136). But he would be replaced in turn by a sausage-seller (148).

By chance, of course, a sausage-seller appears (150). He is initially reluctant to become involved in politics, since he is aware that he is crude and borderline illiterate (188–9). The slave-generals, however, explain that

26. Burns 2014.

27. Finley 1962, the canonical article on the Athenian concept of the demagogue, rather overstates the frequency with which the term was used by ancient authors, as Lane 2012 shows.

28. Hypothesis to *Knights* A3 lines 6–7.

29. Paphlagonia was a territory in central Anatolia on the Black Sea coast; the Greek verb παφλάζω means "seethe" or "boil" and is used of the sea, boiling liquids, and metaphorically of emotions (LSJ s.v.).

these are perfect qualifications for prominence in contemporary politics—it is only unfortunate that he knows how to read at all—and the Sausage-Seller agrees to help them. Paphlagon is reluctant to be dislodged. But the Sausage-Seller finds support in the chorus, aristocratic Athenian Knights, who declare their hostility to Paphlagon and everything for which he stands (247–72).

Most of the remainder of the play consists of a series of contests in shouting, boasting, threatening, and oracle consultation, in which the Sausage-Seller and Paphlagon each try to show that they will serve their master Demos better than their rival. Ultimately, Demos realizes that he has been cheated by Paphlagon and chooses the Sausage-Seller as his new steward (1259–60). Paphlagon is expelled to the city gates, where he is to practice the Sausage-Seller's profession and quarrel with prostitutes (1397–1401). It abruptly emerges that Demos is less of a fool than he has pretended. The Sausage-Seller, despite being originally a greater rascal even than the Paphlagonian, is also his new master's savior. Demos is accordingly restored to the magnificence of his youth, as Athens returns to its lost heyday at the time of the Persian invasions (1321–34).

The finale consists of a startling interchange as Demos, rejuvenated and dressed in the old-fashioned clothes of a Marathonomach, forges a New Deal with the Sausage-Seller, now renamed Agorakritos. Demos proposes that Agorakritos should refrain from listening to flattery from orators in the Assembly and choosing self-interested policies (raising state pay) over policies expedient for state security and the empire (equipping triremes). Demos will no longer allow himself to be persuaded, under the threat of no jury pay, into convicting people if they vote the “wrong” way as far as the politician is concerned. Demos will make sure that the rowers are paid promptly. Demos will stop hoplites getting their names transferred from less desirable lists onto others and will reinstate the Thirty Years' Peace (1356–83). To put it bluntly, Demos, with Agorakritos' encouragement, will resolutely pursue the rights of the thetes over the higher classes. And (more comically) Demos will stop youths becoming prematurely involved in politics and make them go hunting instead. The play closes with Demos and Agorakritos jointly entering the *prytaneion* to sit as equals together.

By means of the play, the “external” comic Cydathenaeon, Aristophanes, has temporarily defeated the “external” political Cydathenaeon, Cleon, in terms of displaying his utility to the people—the Demos, the thetes, the rowers, the jurors. Moreover, Aristophanes' invented jokester and internal hero (also, as a product of the agora, a Cydathenaeon), a citizen of the

lowest class, has been elevated to the office of beloved senior statesman. It turns out that this promotion is deserved, given the good sense and class loyalty of his political advice.

The Sausage-Seller defeats Cleon/Paphlagon for six reasons. First, he succeeds in making his overall self-characterization conspiratorial, knowing, and collusive with the audience, Demos, and the chorus, while isolating Paphlagon, who has chosen indignation as his primary register. Second, the Sausage-Seller takes the initiative (he is the first to introduce new agonistic strategies involving clothes or bodily care procedures). Third, he repeatedly employs brutal bathos to puncture high-flown language. Fourth, he is given all the scatological jokes, vital instruments in achieving that bathos.³⁰ Fifth, Aristophanes writes for him a dazzling piece of *autoschediasmos*, with his spontaneous invention of the oracles of Glanis (1000–50).

But sixth, and most important, he everywhere “out-Cleons” Cleon. He performs in exactly the same way as Paphlagon, but more successfully. Riposte after riposte flattens Paphlagon’s interventions by means of Paphlagon’s own techniques, thus hoisting Cleon with his own petard. This even extends to the aural shape of their respective utterances in stichomythia. A fascinating acoustic pattern entails the Sausage-Seller responding to Paphlagon in ways that acoustically mimic the total sound effect. This implies that the Sausage-Seller actor was using Cleonic tricks and exaggeration of the “real” Cleon-actor’s speech in order to win the argument. Thus at 748–9, when they exchange threats, Paphlagon says “I will drag out your entrails with my claws,” and the Sausage-Seller responds that he will claw away his meals in the *prytaneion*. In *Knights*, the threat in the first person singular future indicative has already become a standard way of opening a line. But listen to the noise correspondence:

Κλέων ἐξαρπάσομαί σου τοῖς ὄνυξι τάντερα.
 Ἄλλαντοπώλης ἀπονυχῶ σου τὰν πρυτανείῳ σιτία.

There are many other examples of these aural rallies, where the Sausage-Seller wins because his actual syntax and sounds echo back, harder and with *homoioteleuton*, the crashing noise of the volley that Paphlagon had smashed over the net at him.

30. See Osborne’s essay in this volume on the language used by the Sausage-Seller in joking about homoerotic activity.

Knights stages “a fantastic journey that simultaneously lampooned and celebrated the Athenians and their democracy,”³¹ but it is also a “Cleon-Fest.” Almost all the performers are required to impersonate Cleon, whose oratorical brilliance, with all the rich imagery, emotional power, and acoustic effects of which *Knights* suggests he was absolute master, must often have given his Pnyx audiences exactly their “pleasure in listening” to which the Thucydidean Cleon caustically refers (ἀκοῆς ἡδονῆ, 3.38.7). And its conclusion puts on the stage a lowlife leader, from the bottom rung of the ladder of Athenian citizen society: “I too, was bred in the agora,” he says with some pride when Paphlagon/Cleon challenges him to a face-off (293). Cleon’s commitment to the poorer citizens and effectiveness in pursuing their interests prompted the comic invention of a more perfect democracy than was ever actually achieved in Athens. In *Knights* Cleon was subjected to brutal trial by comedy, a prime instrument of accountability in that democracy, and with his subsequent election as general showed he had passed his comedic *euthyna*³² with flying colors.

In *Knights*, therefore, the man who defeats the Cleon-representative is an alternative comic avatar of Cleon himself. Although I agree with Zumbrunnen that *Knights* celebrates lower-class Athenians’ intelligence, it is too crude to say that it does so by showing “an ordinary citizen standing up to demagogues.”³³ Aristophanes’ polarizing comic imagination has attributed to Paphlagon all the vices of which Cleon’s enemies accused him, and to Agorakritos all the virtues that Cleon’s own supporters admired. In Agorakritos, Aristophanes’ experience of Cleon and the other non-aristocratic new politicians such as Lysicles allowed him to produce the most radical—even though fictional—political figure in ancient literature.³⁴

31. McGlew 1996, 358.

32. *Euthyna* was an official examination of conduct while in office that was required of magistrates in the Athenian democracy at the end of their term of service.

33. Zumbrunnen 2004, 669, whose position reflects much German scholarship and is similar to that of Lind 1990, 211.

34. It is precisely the fictional nature of Cleon reborn as Agorakritos that makes his radically democratic nature possible. A strand in Marxist aesthetics since the Austro-Czech Ernst Fischer’s *The Necessity of Art* (*Von der Notwendigkeit der Kunst* [1959]) has stressed art’s prophetic “utopian tendency.” This enables it to create, in the realm of the collective imagination, a more democratic and egalitarian society than is yet possible in reality. The procedure entails optimistic figuring of idealized relationships between citizens, rulers and ruled, as well as the erasure of the obstacles to a harmonious, leveled democracy.

Reception

A whole tradition of scholarship, summarized in a perceptive article by Tsoumpra,³⁵ has argued that Aristophanes “ironically” undermines the joy of the hyper-democratic ending of the *Knights*. I believe these interpretations have been motivated by fear of its radical implications and seek subtlety where there is little to be found. Art has not only taken revenge on reality, to paraphrase Flaubert, but produced a picture of a functioning relationship between the *demos* and a successful, ideal leader from its own nethermost social class. This has never yet been achieved in most modern democracies, and certainly not in Etonian-ruled Britain.

Cleon is therefore an ideal figure to think with when contemplating class-related distortions and erasures in the historical record. He has been silenced because his voice is, in the sources at our disposal, always ventriloquized by his contemporary detractors. Thucydides’ restatement of the speech Cleon gave in the second Mytilene debate may hold some truth, in particular with regard to the import and clarity of the argument, potency of the emotional appeal, and intimacy of his implied civic relationship with the men who made up the *demos*. But we may trust its veracity no further than that.

In the absence of any surviving ancient defense of Cleon,³⁶ we can trace in an unusually clear way the collusion of classical scholarship with the class agenda of the ancient sources. Typical of the eighteenth-century descriptions is this by Gillies in a general history of ancient Greece:

A turbulent impetuous eloquence had raised the audacious profligacy of Cleon, from the lowest rank of life, to a high degree of authority in the Athenian assembly. The multitude were deceived with his artifices, and pleased with his frontless impudence, which they called boldness, and manly openness of character. His manners they approved, in proportion as they resembled their own; and the

35. Tsoumpra 2012.

36. The other poets of Old Comedy who were Aristophanes’ rivals may have held different opinions of Cleon, but there is sadly not enough evidence to draw the firm conclusion favored by Sidwell (2009, 120–1, 193–4, 342 etc.) that Cratinus moved in his *Nomoi* (427?) to active support of Cleon and is indeed the real-life figure who lies behind Philocleon in *Wasps*. Eupolis FF316.1 and 331 PCG, from his *Chrusoun Genos* of 426, refer to Cleon negatively.

worst of his vices found advocates among the dupes of his pretended patriotism.³⁷

Working under the influence of the French Revolution, two German scholars, the historian Arnold Heeren (who, between 1793 and 1808, wrote about ancient Greek constitutional history) and the classicist Franz Passow, both regarded Cleon as a prototype of the “bloodthirsty sans-culotte” who established a reign of terror.³⁸ Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813) felt that his own critique of the “demagogic” excesses on the Parisian political scene had been miraculously foreshadowed by Aristophanes’ *Knights* and *Acharnians*, of which he was the earliest German translator.³⁹

In English-language scholarship and translation, Aristophanes remained the preserve of dyed-in-the-wool conservatives throughout the Georgian and Victorian periods. The accessible translations that began to be produced in the late eighteenth century, by individuals such as John Wood Warter, Thomas Mitchell, and John Hookham Frere, reinforced the negative image of Cleon. They inherited that image from the indictment of Athenian democracy that they found in William Mitford’s *History of Greece* (1784–1810), and they perpetuated Mitford’s identification of the democracy with the dangerous reforms suggested by contemporary radicals.⁴⁰

Mitchell’s edition of *Frogs* (1839), with its notes in English, became a chief conduit through which Victorian males had access to that play at school and university. Its introduction stresses the problem presented to Athens by the demagogues, “the real deformity daily developing itself.”⁴¹ In a note ostensibly dealing with the political views of Aeschylus, Mitchell opportunistically inveighs against democracy as a political ideal; the volume was published just a few years after the great Reform Act of 1832, at a time when the Chartists’ appeal for universal male suffrage was attracting a prominent sector of the British middle class. Thucydides, Xenophon, Aristophanes, and Plato, says Mitchell, offer:

so complete a view of the effects of this form of government . . . in the two great questions of civil freedom and moral excellence, that it

37. Gillies 1786, 588.

38. Heeren 1821, vol. 3, 241–52; Passow 1843 (1819).

39. See Holtermann 2004, 61–90.

40. See further Turner 1981, 209; Hall 2007, 76–9.

41. Mitchell 1839, iii.

must be to sin with the eyes open, if any portion of the world allow men of small attainments, and not always the most upright principles, to precipitate it into such a form of government again.⁴²

Here Aristophanic commentary becomes a weapon in the war against advocates of universal suffrage.

The responses to Cleon changed neither inside nor outside the academy until the work of J. G. Droysen in the 1830s⁴³ and the appearance of Book 5 of George Grote's *History of Greece*—that is, the precise moment when Athenian democracy had begun to be an acceptable constitutional model.⁴⁴ Grote did not begin to publish his seminal twelve-volume history until 1846, but he had started work on it in the 1820s. His first publication was a pamphlet arguing for universal male suffrage, *Statement of the Question of Parliamentary Reform* (1821), and he served as a member of parliament in the government that brought in the Reform Act of 1832. His discussions of Cleon break new ground by emphasizing that we only have a partisan caricature and that in democracies the *demos* is sovereign.⁴⁵

Unsurprisingly, more traditional Classical scholars, in France as well as Germany and the English-speaking world, were outraged at these attempts at rehabilitating the archetypal demagogue.⁴⁶ Anyone whose politics were disliked could now be called a Cleon. In a typical example, an article in *The Times* in 1873 compares Daniel O'Connell, an Irish radical, with Cleon, as a demagogue of ribald tongue, when what the writer really objects to is O'Connell's commitment to Irish Republicanism.⁴⁷ The Bolshevik revolution in 1917 produced, in both in Britain and North America, a large number of comparisons to Cleon. Perhaps the most extended and virulent denunciation of Cleon ever published was the sixty-four-page diatribe published under the name "Eupolis" in 1918. This work is a thinly disguised attack on contemporary communists, socialists, and economic

42. Mitchell 1839, iv.

43. See Nippel 2008 and Kitzbichler 2011, especially pp. 70–6.

44. On this, see Saxonhouse 1993 and especially Whedbee 2004. For the impact of the increasing respect for Athenian democracy on the understanding and performance of theater related to Greek tragedy in Britain, see Hall and Macintosh 2005, 282–315.

45. See further Stray 1997.

46. See the references to French scholarship throughout Lafargue 2013.

47. *The Times* of April 12, 1873, pg. 6.

levelers the world over, which quotes extensively from both Thucydides and Aristophanes to support its reactionary arguments.⁴⁸

Even the most progressive playwrights, such as the American communist George Cram Cook, who with his wife Susan Glaspell founded the Provincetown Players, uncritically clung to the Thucydidean portrait of Cleon. *The Athenian Women*, which Cook wrote in 1917 and which was first performed in Greenwich Village, New York City, in 1918, is a substantial three-act drama set in Periclean Athens over the period 445–431. It draws extensively on Aristophanes, and indeed Cook, who had studied classics at both Harvard and Heidelberg, had founded the Provincetown Players with the intention of creating a politically engaged theater “for the people” along Classical Athenian lines. He had seen a production of *Lysistrata* in New York City in 1914, and wrote to Glaspell lamenting the lack of political theater in contemporary society, the lack of “freedom to deal with life in literature as frankly as Aristophanes.”⁴⁹

Cook’s *Athenian Women* includes among its cast not only Pericles and Aspasia but also Pheidias, Ictinus, Hermippus, Socrates, Lysicles, and Cleon. Their conversations revolve around an anachronistic issue, namely the degree to which progressive Americans should embrace the principles of the Bolshevik revolution. There is an official “Communist Party” led by the honest, impressive, and principled Lysicles, an “Oligarchist Party” led by Antiphon (the anti-democrat who was one of the masterminds of the 411 oligarchic coup), and an unnamed party led by Cleon. His character is drawn straight from Thucydides: he is cynical, coarse, and vindictive—a ruthless militarist obsessed with the narrow Athenian “national” interest. Cook’s Cleon thus echoes the sentiments of the most belligerent portion of the American population. The populist right wing had long agitated for the United States to enter World War I, their jingoistic fervor fueled by the destruction of the luxury Cunard liner *Lusitania* by a German torpedo. But Cleon may also reflect the horror of the Provincetown Players at the campaigns of William Joseph Simmons, who in 1915 had established the “second wave” of the Ku Klux Klan, headquartered in Georgia, under the name of “the Invisible Empire.” It officially promulgated a policy it called “Americanism”; its creed was as anti-Jewish as it was anti-African American, and was closely associated with D. W. Griffith’s racist silent

48. The author was actually Maximilian Muegge, a scholar of German and Serbian literature, convinced Nietzschean, and founding member of the Cambridge Eugenics Society.

49. Glaspell 2005 (1926), 249–50; see further Hall 2015.

movie *The Birth of a Nation* (1915, originally entitled *The Clansman*) that had inspired Simmons.⁵⁰

If the incipience of Fascism offered defenders of Bolshevism a new context into which to import Cleon, another simultaneous development was the occasional defender of Cleon appearing among conservatives advocating robust measures to secure the future of the British Empire. John Cobb Fossey, Professor of Medieval History at King's College, London, in his *Democracy and the British Empire* (1920), presents Cleon as anticipating his own Tory conviction that democracy and empire do not easily mix:

Few sayings of classical antiquity have attained a wider currency than the remark which Thucydides attributes to the arch-demagogue Cleon: "A democracy cannot manage an empire," and few sayings have been more fully justified by circumstances. For the Athenian democracy, sovereign over a wide maritime domain, had with reckless vacillation just revoked a resolution made and acted on only the day before. It is nothing to the point that the original resolution that all the adult males of rebel Mitylene [*sic*] should be put to death, and all the women and children sold as slaves was flagrantly monstrous and immoral. A humane philosopher, indeed, might have made it an additional charge against the impulsive *demos* that it had shown itself capable of malignant wickedness. But Cleon's point was that it did not know its own mind two days running; that its policy lacked that consistency and continuity which marked the conduct of affairs by autocrats and oligarchs; and that, however harmless constant oscillations might be in the administration of a city-state, they must speedily be fatal in the government of numerous and distant dependencies. The sequel justified the judgment of Cleon. He spoke in 427 B.C. Within a quarter of a century the Athenian Empire had vanished away, and Athens herself, paralysed by corruption and faction, had passed beneath the heel of the militant aristocracy of Sparta.⁵¹

50. See further Hall forthcoming. For a contrasting, conservative American classicist's denunciation of anti-plutocratic politicians as "demagogues" just after World War I, see Lofberg 1923.

51. Fossey 1920, 3–4.

The ideological struggle over Cleon continued throughout the twentieth century,⁵² although the uncritical reproduction of the Thucydidean verdict remained dominant. Classical scholars are still now split between those who judge Cleon according to his enemies' criteria and those who are more careful. They include Davies, who in *Democracy and Classical Greece* identifies several reasons why in Cleon's case we should not believe Thucydides,⁵³ and Ussher, who does not understand that wild hyperbole is a wellspring of comedy. He believes *Knights* to be unattractive because Aristophanes' view of Cleon was "unbalanced."⁵⁴

Many scholars cling to one aspect of the ancient prejudices while relinquishing others. Ehrenberg remains convinced that Cleon, although he may have contributed dynamism, owed the entire military success at Pylos and Sphacteria to Demosthenes:

Cleon knew what to do. He asked for, and was given, a force of light-armed troops, and he chose Demosthenes as his colleague. He had good luck as well. . . . Cleon's bold promise was fulfilled, thanks to his energy and Demosthenes' good generalship.⁵⁵

Grundy, on the other hand, concedes to Thucydides that Cleon had been a defective general and statesman while saying that he "had been unquestionably a clever and determined politician."⁵⁶

Yet most textbooks and vehicles that convey ancient history and politics to a public beyond the Academy continue to uncritically recycle and amplify the ancient prejudices:

Cleon of Athens . . . one of the most brutal demagogues the world has ever known, not only brought Athens' democracy to its knees, but also toppled a revered statesman, took over the Athenian government, came within a hair of executing a powerful playwright who dared challenge him, attempted the mass murder of the inhabitants of a vanquished island, launched reckless military expeditions. . .

52. See the sensible article by Woodhead 1960.

53. Davies 1993, 100–1.

54. Ussher 1979, 15.

55. Ehrenberg 1973, 282.

56. Grundy 1948, vol. 2, 175–6.

It is difficult to imagine a more exaggerated, inaccurate, and misleading verdict, and yet it is printed in a widely publicized 2009 book, *Demagogue: The Fight to Save Democracy from Its Worst Enemies*, by the respected attorney, academic, and former Democratic Mayor of Charlottesville, Michael Signer.⁵⁷

I hope I have shown that an analysis of the scholarly reception of Cleon, in conjunction with a more sensitive reading of Aristophanic comedy that consciously attempts to think about his qualities as an orator and the views of its original audiences, could enrich the public discussion of democracy. It would be good to turn back the clock to before Charles I's beheading, and promote a universal understanding of the distinction between the nonjudgmental term *demagogos* as “*demos*-leader” and “the affrightment” of this “Goblin word.”

Abbreviation

PCG R. Kassel and C. Austin, *Poetae Comici Graeci*

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⁵⁷ Signer 2009, 40–1.

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