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Competitive Vocal Performance in Aristophanes' *Knights*

Drama is often our best evidence for the actual performative practice of ancient oratory. Aristophanes' smash hit of 424 BCE, *Hippéis* or *Knights*, provides the most immediate picture we possess of the way in which Athenian orators confronted one another verbally in the Assembly, even if that picture is versified and comically distorted. Rhetors often debated, not in long set-piece orations, but in rapid-fire spontaneous or semi-spontaneous exchanges, punctuated by the audience's noisy responses or *thorubos*, as elucidated in a famous article by Victor Bers.¹ The text of *Knights* contains fascinating information about the Athenian political soundscape—the live aural experience of Athenian democratic political debates and their assessment by different social strata constituting the demos.

Knights is the sole surviving ancient Greek play of which the *central* topic is political rhetoric and its relationship to the democratic government of Athens. Scholars have of course acknowledged that scrutiny of the vocal performance of public speakers was a concern of Old Comedy, in *Acharnians*, and *Ecclesiazusae* as well as *Knights*. Some have been interested in the analogies Aristophanes suggests in order to illustrate the nature of the *agon* specifically in *Knights* – it is framed not only an athletics event but a sea-battle, a struggle between elements during a thunderstorm, or a cooking contest.² Yet commentators on *Knights* have routinely downplayed the centrality of the theme of the demagogues' actual voices. They have preferred to focus on their rhetorical strategies and the relationship of these to the ideological agendas of different factions on the post-Periclean political scene; these strategies and agendas are then customarily illustrated from Thucydides.³

But there is, I think, much more we can learn from *Knights*. Aristophanes subjects the agonistic political debates of the mid-420s to a rigorous analysis. It encompasses form (one-or-two-sentence-long addresses and castigations of the opponent or the demos, replete with imperatives and interrogatives). It encompasses content – Cleon's alleged strategies of controlling the men of Athens through self-promotion, threats, flattery, offers of rewards, and the recitation of oracles. But even without the added dimension of live performance by virtuoso

1 Bers 1985; see also Hall 2006, 353–392.

2 For a perceptive discussion of the play's metaphors and politics, see Tsoumpra 2012.

3 Woodhead 1960; Edmunds 1987; Lind 1990; Atkinson 1992; Lafargue 2013; Burns 2014.

comedians, it is clear from the transmitted text that the most important running joke is the vocal quality – especially the immense volume, *megalophōnia* – as part of the delivery style of Cleon and his processed-meat-selling Nemesis from the agora, the Sausage-Seller. Aristophanes gave his actors internal cues to the vocal fireworks he required by the wide range of linguistic terms for ‘bawling’ and ‘shouting down’ (*kataboē*, *phōnē miarē*), many of which are associated with the inarticulate noises made by animals, used to describe the actual sounds they make (*kraugē* and *krazein* (suggestive of dogs and ravens), *gruzein* (used elsewhere of pigs and dogs), *lalein* (elsewhere used of frogs and birds), *thrulein* (elsewhere used of frogs) and *larungizein* (elsewhere used of crows). The actors’ command of variations in timbre and tonality must have been considerable.

Most of the play consists of adversarial word-fights between Paphlagon, who is of course a thinly disguised Cleon, and the Sausage-Seller. The setting of the play, on the Pnyx Hill, the open-air venue for Assembly oratory, consists of separate rounds in a blistering agon of vituperation between Paphlagon and the Sausage-Seller whom Nicias and Demosthenes persuade to challenge Cleon’s supremacy. As the chorus of Knights says to Paphlagon, ‘victory in yelling’ also means victory overall (276). And at the end of the comedy, the victorious Sausage-Seller is named Agorakritos, ‘Pick of the Agora’, since he is the best at the speech-acts which gave the *agora*, or ‘place to speak’, its name. The Pnyx Hill word-fights take place outside the home of the personified Demos, and may indeed be understood as in some sense comic versions of the debates which took place in the Assembly. Another debate between the same two demagogues takes place offstage in the Council, and this is described in a long speech by the Sausage-Seller which includes *oratio recta* delivered both by himself and by his rival.

The oratorical power of Cleon of the central Athenian deme of Cydathenaeum – a deme he shared with Aristophanes – was legendary in his own day. This is to judge not only from Aristophanes but the explicit remarks of Thucydides that he was ‘the most violent of the citizens and at that time wielding by far the most influence with the *dēmos*’ (βιαιότατος τῶν πολιτῶν τῷ τε δῆμῳ παρὰ πολὺ ἐν τῷ τότε πιθανώτατος, 2.36.6). But since we don’t have a single word of any speech that we can be sure exactly reflects anything actually said by Cleon, it is difficult to appreciate what made his rhetoric such an influential – indeed instrumental – factor in Athenian politics. Elsewhere, in a Festschrift for Paul Cartledge, I publish an article arguing that scholars since antiquity have been far too swift to adopt, uncritically, the judgement of Cleon as a man, democrat and indeed general passed on him by Thucydides and Aristophanes.⁴ The historian

⁴ Hall 2018; Morley 1997 made a similar argument, albeit much more briefly.

and the comic poet both seem to have loathed him both as an individual and as a representative of the poorer Athenian masses. There is, however, one piece of evidence that Cleon was actually admired and popular amongst respectable Athenian families as well as by the roughest segment of the urban poor. A speech by one Mantitheus in a fourth-century inheritance dispute, claiming that his mother had indeed had a dowry, argues as follows ([Dem.] 40.24):

...my mother is shown to have been first given in marriage to 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 won greater renown than any other man in the state; so it was not fitting that the son of that famous man should wed my mother without a dowry...

This alternative view of Cleon needs keeping in mind if we are not to adopt without some scepticism the biased view of his opponents. The absence of vilification of Cleon in Plato's works may also be telling.⁵ In this article, however, I am less interested in whether Aristophanes and Thucydides were right about Cleon's malign social, moral and behavioural influence on Athenian politics, and more interested in whether *Knights* can help us to understand a little better the nature and impact of his rhetorical performances. Are there any distinctive traits or qualities to his language or rhetorical style? Are there any clues as to the precise constituents of his delivery which made it seem both violent and persuasive?

First, a clue from the other play in which a character with a speaking – or barking – part is transparently Cleon *manqué*, and that is *Wasps*. Two years after the success of *Knights*, which won Aristophanes his first solo success and really made his name and reputation, he returned to the Cleon theme with a view to repeating his triumph. I like to call Cleon in *Wasps* 'the Cur of Cydathenaeum' in order to retain the alliteration in the Greek of ὁ Κυδαθηναεὺς κύων. This alliteration of 'k' sounds is not conveyed in English by calling him a 'hound' or 'dog'. The Cur of Cydathenaeum is prosecuting the other dog, Labes, for theft. When Bdelycleon asks if the prosecuting dog is in attendance, the Cleon-cur simply says/barks 'au, au.' For Bdelycleon this is quite enough proof: 'πάρεστιν οὗτος', is his response, delivered presumably in a knowing way calling attention to the precise form of words – or barking noises – Cleon had made. Philocleon then interjects, 'ἕτερος οὗτος αὖ Λάβης.', allowing the Philocleon actor as well as the dog-actor to render the word 'au'. This seems to me to be a running joke about a particular verbal quirk of Cleon's – the indignant *au*, 'yet *again*', which it is easy to see, or rather hear, could be pronounced in a way that likened it to the noise of a dog howling.

5 Calder 1961; Anderson 2005; Monoson 2014.

Bearing this passage in *Wasps* in mind, the first altercation between Paphlagon and the Sausage-Seller in *Knights* can, I believe be illuminated. The Paphlagonian repeats the question, ‘Won't you let me speak?’, οὐκ αὖ μ' ἔάσεις? at both 336 and 338; both times the Sausage-seller jumps in, interrupts him, breaking even his iambic trimeter off with the use of aggressive *antilabe*.

What else can we learn about Cleon and Assembly debates in the mid-420s from the text of *Knights*? That the dominant theme is to be voices is established at the outset. The two slaves representing Demosthenes and Nicias begin the action with paratragic rendition of sounds of misery – ἰατταταιᾶς τῶν κακῶν, ἰατταταῖ. (line 1, Demosthenes); they are in such a plight, oppressed by their new head slave Paphlagon, that Demosthenes suggests that they sob to the tune of the Olympian nome. Together they do so, ‘μυμῦ μυμῦ μυμῦ μυμῦ μυμῦ μυμῦ’ (10). Within a few lines they have decided to ‘tell the spectators’ about their plight (τὸ πρᾶγμα τοῖς θεαταῖσιν), in a formula sometimes used by men presenting themselves as victims in the lawcourts.

Demosthenes’ account of the Paphlagon’s arrival at Demos’ house (40–72) begins by telling us that Demos is himself brutal, bad-tempered and half-deaf (ὑπόκωφον), a sure cue that there is to be a great deal of multi-decibel shouting in the play. The Paphlagonian leather-tanner whom Demos has recently purchased as a slave is a scoundrel and, in a wonderful superlative adjective, called ‘most slanderous’ (45, διαβολώτατόν). The *type* of speeches which he makes, laying foul allegations against other people, is thus already established. We then have a list of verbs describing his various ways of speaking to Demos, in the asyndeton beloved of orators desirous of emotional emphasis (47–49; see Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.12.14):

ὁ βυρσοπαφλαγών, ὑποπεσὼν τὸν δεσπότην
ἤκαλλ' ἐθώπευ' ἐκολάκευ' ἐξηπάτα
κοσκυλματίοις ἄκροισι τοιαυτὶ λέγων:

The leather-man grovels before the master;
he acts like a fawning dog, cajoles him, flatters him and cons him
with little leather titbits...

These verbs are fascinating: *aikallein* means to fawn or wheedle but has an association particularly with dogs. This plays into the popular characterisation of Cleon as the Cur of Cydathenaeum which he will become two years later in *Wasps*. Certainly, the canine theme returns in the first confrontation between Cleon and the Sausage vendor in *Knights* 415–416, when Cleon accuses his rival of eating pieces of bread

...ὥσπερ κύων; ὦ παμπόνηρε πῶς οὔν
κυνὸς βορὰν σιτούμενος μαχεῖ σὺ κυνοκεφάλῳ;

...like a dog! Ah! wretch! you have the nature of a dog and you dare to fight a dog-headed
ape?

Demosthenes' next verb in asyndeton, *thōpeuein* (fawn, flatter, soothe or wheedle), is also sometimes used of dogs or of humans patting horses to calm them down. *kolakeuein* simply means, 'to be a flatterer', and the last phrase, 'he deceives him with little leather-scraps' introduces the analogy, which will recur in the play, between fraudulent practises used by leather manufacturers and those used by statesman and orators.

Next, however, 'Demosthenes' quotes the Paphlagonian in *oratio recta*, meaning that this comic actor provides the first of what are going to be several impersonations of Cleon's speaking style in the play by different characters. The sort of thing that Cleon says to Demos is this (50–51):

ὦ Δῆμε λοῦσαι πρῶτον ἐκδικάσας μίαν,
ἐνθοῦ ῥόφησον ἔντραγ' ἔχε τριώβολον.

Dear Demos, first try just one case and then
stuff yourself, slurp, eat dessert—take three obols.

Cleon-as-impersonated-by-Demosthenes apostrophises Demos formally, and then himself uses that asyndeton to describe the insertion, gobbling up and devouring of the three obols' worth of food which he will earn by trying a single case. He wards off other orators with a leather strap and sings oracles to him (ἄδει δὲ χρησμούς), before piling up false allegations against the other members of the household, who are whipped. Now Demosthenes once again uses direct speech to impersonate what Paphlagon says (67–68):

ὁρᾶτε τὸν Ὑλαν δι' ἐμὲ μαστιγούμενον;
εἰ μὴ μ' ἀναπέισετ', ἀποθανεῖσθε τήμερον.

You see how I have had Hylas beaten!
Do what I say or die at once!

These two lines consists of nicely balanced end-rhymed *isocola*, with alliteration of ‘h’ and ‘m’ sounds and chiasmus in the first line; note also the Gorgianic chiasmus and play on *anapeiset’/apothaneisthe*) in the internal near-rhyme of the second.⁶

Paphlagon appears at the time of the *parodos*. Pursued by the Knights, he calls for aid from his elderly heliastic supporters, ‘whom I feed by bawling both just and unjust things, come to my aid!’—an imperative (255–257):

ὦ γέροντες ἠλιασταί, φράτερες τριωβόλου,
οὐς ἐγὼ βόσκω κεκραγῶς καὶ δίκαια κἀδिका,
παραβοηθεῖθ’, ὡς ὑπ’ ἀνδρῶν τύπτομαι ξυνωμοτῶν.

The third line here begins with the imperative *paraboetheith’*, and Paphlagon does seem to be fond of imperatives and apostrophes with an explosive ‘p’ sound at the beginning, for example (ὦ πόλις καὶ δῆμ’ ὑφ’ οἴων θηρίων γαστριζομαι, 273).

The first confrontation with the Sausage-Seller soon breaks down into single-line stichomythia. Paphlagon/Cleon implies that he always made sure he spoke first (340), and another that he would actually gloat about his pre-eminence in the art of speaking by demanding to know why his interlocutors *dared* to speak to his face (341); this demand includes the strong and indignant phrase *pros tōn theōn* (plural, ‘by the gods’). There is also a hint at metarhetoric. Cleon in Thucydides, in the Mytilenean debate, notoriously discusses the citizens’ responses to *other* speakers (3.37–38). In *Knights* his metarhetoric takes the form of making fun of his rival’s incompetence as a speaker (344–352);

ἰδοὺ λέγειν. καλῶς γ’ ἂν οὖν σὺ πρᾶγμα προσπεσόν σοι
ὠμοσπάρρακτον παραλαβὼν μεταχειρίσαιο χρηστῶς.
ἀλλ’ οἴσθ’ ὅπερ πεπονθέναι δοκεῖς; ὅπερ τὸ πλῆθος.
εἴ που δικίδιον εἶπας εὖ κατὰ ξένου μετοίκου,
τὴν νύκτα θρυλῶν καὶ λαλῶν ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς σεαυτῶ,
ὔδωρ τε πίνων κάπιδεικνὺς τοὺς φίλους τ’ ἀνίων,
ῥου δυνατὸς εἶναι λέγειν. ὦ μῶρε τῆς ἀνοίας.

Look at him talk! For sure, if some business opportunity fell your way, you’d really know how to grab it, take it to pieces and eat it alive! Do you realise what’s happened to you? Just like everyone else. Let’s say you’ve got some trivial lawsuit against a resident alien. Did you croak and squawk it all night to yourself in the streets, drinking only water, showing it off and boring your friends? And you reckon that qualifies you as an orator? You stupid idiot.

⁶ On the Gorgianic features of Paphlagon’s speech, see also Gurd 2016, 51–53.

This attack also contains an accumulation of direct questions to his rival – triple *hypophora*. We can also note that there are two lines with long *omega* plus *n* sounds proliferating, as Paphlagon/Cleon himself impersonates the sausage-seller in rehearsal:

τὴν νύκτα θρυλῶν καὶ λαλῶν ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς σεαυτῶ,
ὔδωρ τε πίνων κάπιδεικνὺς τοὺς φίλους τ' ἀνίων,,

Did you murmur and mutter it all night long in the streets,
drinking water and boring your friends by showing it off to them...?

Other features of the Paphlagonian's script in the first confrontation include an abundance of threats in the future tense in antilabe (368–374), and of Gorgianic rhyming final syllables – isoteleuton – for singsong emphasis (395–396):

οὐ δέδοιχ' ὑμᾶς, ἔως ἂν ζῆ τὸ βουλευτήριον
καὶ τὸ τοῦ δήμου πρόσωπον μακκοῦ καθήμενον.

I'm not afraid of you as long as there is still the Council there
and the people sit gaping stupidly there.

Paphlagon/Cleon enjoys strong metaphors and similes concerning his own powers, at 429–431 likening himself to a great storm unleashed against his opponents:

ἐγὼ σε παύσω τοῦ θράσους, οἶμαι δὲ μάλλον ἄμφω.
ἔξεμι γάρ σοι λαμπρὸς ἦδη καὶ μέγας καθιείς,
ὁμοῦ ταραττων τὴν τε γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλατταν εἰκῆ.

I will stop your insolence, or rather the insolence of both of you. I will throw myself upon you like a terrible hurricane ravaging both land and sea at the will of its fury.

Here the chiasmus of *exeimi lampros ... megas kathieis* in the middle line, and especially the Gorgianic aural correspondence *tarratōn/thalattan* in the last line,⁷ are verse-like techniques to support and enhance the acoustic emphasis. Paphlagon/Cleon is here responding to 'both' the Sausage-Seller and the chorus. For the Knights have contracted the Cleon-bug and begun to speak like the famous orator themselves, with a tongue-twister of alliterative of *p*, *k* and *s* sounds, constituting a showstopping but untranslatable obscene proverb (428):

⁷ On the recurrence of the verb *tarrattein* in relation to Paphlagon, see Edmunds 1987.

ὅτι ἡ πῦρ κρείσσει θ' ἡρπακῶς καὶ κρέας ὁ πρῶκτος εἶχεν.

Perjury and thievery ensure that the anus gets fed.

Oaths, too, are frequent – the two exchange and build on the others – By Zeus!, By Poseidon! (338–339). In the first altercation alone, Paphlagon/Cleon swears by Zeus, Poseidon, Demeter and Heracles. He departs to denounce the Sausage-Seller to the Council, closing his aural performance with a triple anaphora of *kai* connecting the different charges he will lay against his opponent, after a pointed antithesis of the pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you (475–479):

ἐγὼ μὲν οἶν αὐτίκα μάλ' ἐς βουλήν ἰὼν
ὑμῶν ἀπάντων τὰς ξυνομοσίας ἐρῶ,
καὶ τὰς ξυνόδους τὰς νυκτερινὰς τὰς ἐν πόλει,
καὶ πάνθ' ἃ Μήδοις καὶ βασιλεῖ ξυνόμνυτε,
καὶ τὰκ Βοιωτῶν ταῦτα συντυροῦμενα.

I, then, will hurry to the Council to reveal everything
you've plotted against me:
 and your nightly conspiracies in the city,
 and your collaborations with the Medes and with the Great King,
 and your scavengings in Boeotia.
 It is exhausting but exhilarating to hear.

At 611 the Sausage-Seller returns from the Council. His report requires that he impersonate Cleon—or rather, impersonate the other actor's impersonation of Cleon (658–682). The actors playing three characters and the chorus have all now been required by the script to impersonate Cleon directly. The Sausage-Seller first uses a torrent of extravagant metaphors to describe Paphlagon/Cleon, who had reached the Council before him, ‘letting loose the storm, unchaining the lightning, crushing the Knights beneath huge mountains of calumnies heaped together and having all the air of truth’. Sausage-Seller responded by coming up with the good news of a price cut in anchovies. But the Paphlagonian counter-responded with a higher-value bribe which Sausage-Seller quotes in direct speech (654–656):

Men, I am now resolved
 in recognition of this happy event,
 to offer one hundred oxen to the goddess.

ἄνδρες, ἤδη μοι δοκεῖ
 ἐπὶ συμφοραῖς ἀγαθαῖσιν εἰσηγγεμέναις
 εὐαγγέλια θύειν ἑκατὸν βοῦς τῇ θεῷ.

Here we have jingling play on the stem *aggel-* and with the string of three feminine plural datives. But we get no more of Paphlagon/Cleon in the form of direct speech here – he is dragged from the rostrum, and the Sausage-Seller's anchovies prevail.

The report of the Sausage-Seller reminds us of the *similarity* between the two rivals for Demos's affections. How far were the two actors' performances intended to *contrast* with or to *resemble* each other like an echo-chamber in a non-stop display of Girardian, mimetic violence in the vocal sphere? I suspect that the Sausage-Seller, at least initially before learning through combat with Paphlagon/Cleon, sounded like an uncouth, semi-literate tradesman hawking his wares in the marketplace. The question is whether Cleon, whose diction is of a higher register, more akin to tragic diction than his interlocutor's,⁸ was played as a reasonably well-educated middle-class man, who had adopted street language and manners in order to cosy up to the Piraeus thetes. The issue of the level of Cleon's education, combined with the tendency to associate Cleon as vocal performer with an animal or bird, provides Aristophanes with one of his better puns at the demagogue's expense: the chorus sing (985–996),

I also marvel at his pig's education (ὄμομοισία). His school-mates say he was always tuning his lyre to the Dorian mode and would learn no other; his music-master got angry and sent him away, saying, 'This one will only learn the Dorian because it is akin to bribery (Dōrodokisti)'.

But Cleon's rhetorical education, it seems, has been far from that of a pig's; his style is emotive and fluent and wordy and therefore could not be further from what was traditionally defined as the Doric style of Laconic speech.

Aristophanes suggests that Cleon's talismanic power as a speaker was inseparable from his Pnyx Hill performances. He loses the debate with the Sausage-Seller before the five-hundred-strong Council, under a roofed colonnade. But when it comes to addressing the thousands-strong Assembly, in the open air, the Sausage-Seller confesses he is terrified to go against Cleon (752–755).⁹ This may reflect the speaking styles which work in different venues. Cleon's volume will have triumphed in the Assembly but may have been less attractive in a venue more like a modern lecture hall. Many great outdoor orators fell by the wayside

⁸ See O'Sullivan 1992, a fine study proposing that in such Aristophanic speakers we can see the origins of Greek rhetorical theories of the several 'styles'.

⁹ McGlew 1996, 350, by incorrectly stating that the reported altercation took place in the Assembly, misunderstands this point.

with the invention of audio and video recordings in the late 19th and 20th centuries.

The long third altercation is won by the Sausage-Seller for six reasons. First, he succeeds in making his overall self-characterisation conspiratorial, knowing, and collusive with the audience, Demos and the chorus, while isolating Paphlagon who has chosen *indignatio* 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. Fifth, Aristophanes writes for him a dazzling piece of *autoschediasmos* with his spontaneous invention of the oracles of Glanis (1000–1050).

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 but by using Paphlagon’s 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 which 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 748–749, 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.
 Ἀλλαντοπώλης: ἀπονυχῶ σου τὰν πρυτανεῖω 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 which Paphlagon had smashed over the net at him.

In the event, of course, the fears of the Sausage-Seller about the Pnyx prove unfounded. One reason, I believe, is that he takes the focus off actual speechmaking by introducing the sub-competitions in providing clothing and toiletries. He never lets Paphlagon/Cleon get launched into a rhexis that lasts more than a line or two: he uses diversions of an inherently theatrical nature to disrupt the agonistic form. And here I would like to make one other suggestion. Cleon and Aris-

tophanes are in 424 BCE the two most famous men from Cydathenaeum in democratic Athens. One has made his name as an orator; the other is trying to establish his name as star comic dramatist. In the third altercation of *Knights*, we begin to see that the Sausage-Seller stands for comedy in opposition, as a literary genre, to political rhetoric—there is a sense in which Aristophanes himself lurks behind the Sausage-Seller. Comic theatre is staking a claim to be more use to the demos than politics itself. Cleon is enduring trial by comedy. Of course he *did* endure, and indeed survived it, was re-elected general a few months later, and rode high in the popularity stakes until his death at Amphipolis. But Aristophanes did very well out of it too. I have even wondered whether the two boys from Cydathenaeum weren't actually in secret league with one another to enhance each other's careers. Stranger relationships between politicians and theatre professionals have been known even in our own time.

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'.¹⁰ Aristophanes' polarising comic imagination has attributed to Paphlagon all the vices of which Cleon's enemies accused him, and to Agorakritos all the virtues which 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. *Knights* staged 'a fantastic journey that simultaneously lampooned and celebrated the Athenians and their democracy',¹¹ 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 (ἀκοῖς 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* he was sub-

¹⁰ Zumbrunnen 2004, 669, whose position reflects much German scholarship and is similar to that of Lind 1990, 211.

¹¹ McGlew 1996, 358.

jected 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 *euthuna* with flying colours.

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