



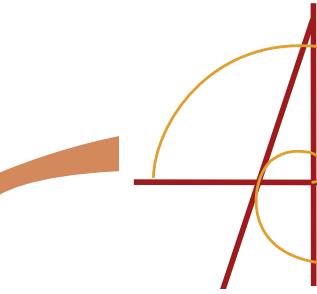
# ARCHIMÈDE N°5

ARCHÉOLOGIE ET HISTOIRE ANCIENNE

2018

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REVUE  
**ARCHIMÈDE**

ARCHÉOLOGIE ET HISTOIRE ANCIENNE

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Archéologie  
Préhistoire  
Protohistoire  
Antiquité  
Antiquité gréco-romaine  
Proche-Orient antique  
Égyptologie  
Moyen Âge

Proche-Orient  
Moyen-Orient  
Monde méditerranéen  
Europe méditerranéenne  
Europe occidentale  
France  
Italie  
Grèce

Balkans  
Archéozoologie  
Papyrologie  
Études coptes  
Byzance  
Illustration scientifique médiévale  
Études byzantines

# ARCHIMÈDE N°5

ARCHÉOLOGIE ET HISTOIRE ANCIENNE

2018

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## DOSSIER HUMOEROTICA

### HUMOUR ET ÉROTISME DANS L'ANTIQUITÉ GRECQUE ET ROMAINE

#### INTRODUCTION AU DOSSIER

#### RÉSUMÉ

Ce dossier propose une réflexion sur la façon dont l'humour peut, dans différentes performances culturelles, impliquer le genre et l'érotisme, et ainsi révéler des normes et des valeurs propres aux mondes grec et romain. En historicisant à la fois la notion de « rire » et de « sexualité », et en étant particulièrement sensibles au contexte concret de performance des différentes pratiques culturelles, les auteurs de ce dossier développent des analyses nouvelles à partir de documents variés (images et vaisselle de banquet, comédie attique, procès, dialogue socratique mis en scène, épigramme romaine,

fiction en prose). Le néologisme *Humoerotica* joue avec le lien que l'on fait souvent – et de façon anachronique – entre homoérotisme et Antiquité : il s'agit par ce clin d'œil humoristique d'affirmer une volonté de recourir à des catégories heuristiques fluides pour explorer un territoire « d'avant la sexualité », bien moins familier qu'on ne le pense souvent.

#### KEYWORDS

Humour,  
rire,  
sexualité,  
genre,  
érotisme,  
céramique attique,  
Aristophane,  
Eschine,  
Xénophon,  
Socrate,  
Martial,  
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This issue examines ways in which humor can, in different cultural contexts, be bound up with gender and eroticism, and thus reveal norms and values specific to the Greek and Roman worlds. By historicizing both “laughter” and “sexuality”, and being particularly sensitive to the physical performance contexts of various cultural practices, the authors develop new interpretations of a variety of sources (images on symposium pottery, Athenian comedy, courtroom oratory, Socratic dialogue, Latin epigram, prose fiction). The neologism *humoerotica*, which plays on the often anachronistic association of homoeroticism with antiquity, exemplifies our commitment to the use of fluid heuristic categories for exploring cultures “before sexuality” — a territory less familiar than is often supposed.

#### MOTS-CLÉS

Humor,  
laughter,  
sexuality,  
gender,  
eroticism,  
Attic pottery,  
Aristophanes,  
Aeschines,  
Xenophon,  
Socrates,  
Martial,  
Lucian.

De quoi riait-on dans l'Antiquité grecque et romaine ? Qu'est-ce qui faisait sourire subtilement ou s'esclaffer bruyamment ? Quel rire rassemblait ou, inversement, divisait ? Et surtout – car tel est l'objet de ce dossier – le sexe était-il, comme aujourd'hui, un bon sujet d'humour, de railleries ou de mots d'esprit ?

La pratique culturelle du rire chez les Anciens a fait l'objet d'un intérêt particulier chez les spécialistes de l'Antiquité au début du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, que ce soit dans le domaine de l'anthropologie culturelle, de l'histoire ou la philosophie [1]. Stephen Halliwell, dans son ouvrage publié en 2008, a étudié les diverses fonctions sociales de cette manifestation humaine et décrit les contextes où le rire venait construire une sociabilité, affiner une réflexion philosophique ou jouer avec les normes. Avant tout, il a mis en évidence la dimension « instable » de cette catégorie, celle d'un événement « volatil » et à l'interface subtile entre deux interprétations possibles d'une situation, pour les Grecs eux-mêmes [2], et de ce fait également incatégorisable pour les contemporains que nous sommes.

Cette caractéristique vient rappeler des éléments importants pour quiconque s'engage dans cette enquête. Tout d'abord, il est impossible de penser que les Grecs et les Romains percevaient ce que nous nommons « rire » ou « humour » comme relevant d'un même phénomène. De fait, l'objectif de l'enquête est de comprendre, sans présupposer une catégorie unifiée ou globalement homogène, les enjeux et les logiques grecques et romaines qui président à la perception et

à la catégorisation de diverses manifestations individuelles et collectives. Qu'il s'agisse d'un rire rituel et collectif lors d'une fête, de la réaction du public face à une comédie destinée à remporter un concours, d'un sous-entendu humoristiquement elliptique dans un dialogue philosophique ou encore d'un bon mot lancé lors d'un banquet, l'anthropologue de l'Antiquité cherche à identifier les contextes propres où se produit cette pratique culturelle, sans présupposer anachroniquement qu'il existe un lien anhistorique et universel entre ces manifestations du « rire » que les documents antiques nous permettent de deviner.

Pour aller plus loin encore dans la prudence à laquelle nous incitent ces études anthropologiques, le chercheur doit, en l'absence de commentaires *par les Anciens eux-mêmes*, s'abstenir d'inférer une lecture comique d'une image ou d'une scène quand le contexte ne permet pas de savoir dans quels termes les Anciens décrivaient la réaction qu'elle suscitait. Même lorsqu'apparaît un terme appartenant explicitement à un champ lexical identifié comme lié à celui du rire [3], cette prudence méthodologique porte l'antiquisant à ne pas généraliser une interprétation produite à partir d'un document précis et à ne pas l'appliquer, par analogie, à d'autres contextes. Résister à la tentation de vouloir rire avec les Anciens : rien d'évident, donc, dans cette enquête aux apparences joyeuses et drôles.

Les choses se complexifient davantage encore lorsqu'on ajoute un deuxième élément à la réflexion : le sexe. La question du genre, de la

[1] Voir en particulier les contributions, riches et variées, de l'imposant volume collectif dirigé par Marie-Laurence Desclos (DESCLOS 2000), l'étude approfondie de Stephen Halliwell consacrée à la Grèce (HALLIWELL 2008, ainsi que 1991), l'étude de John Clarke sur les représentations visuelles romaines (CLARKE 2007) ou encore, tout récemment, les chapitres consacrés à l'antiquité classique dans ALEXIOU & CAIRNS 2017 ou dans BRIAND, DUBEL, & EISSEN 2017. De nombreux

volumes collectifs intègrent des chapitres consacrés au rire, à l'humour et au comique, et cette note ne prétend aucunement à l'exhaustivité. Il s'agit simplement, par ce choix de publications, de mettre en évidence la place que ce thème a pris dans les travaux récents sur la culture grecque et romaine.

[2] HALLIWELL 2008, p. 1-50, particulièrement p. 18-19.

[3] Voir par exemple les termes relevés par Stephen Halliwell dans l'annexe 1 (HALLIWELL 2008, p. 520-529).

sexualité et de l'érotisme a en effet ceci de commun avec la question du rire et de l'humour antiques qu'elle se formule à partir de catégories instables, demandant à être réinterprétées dans chaque contexte particulier : le sexe, pas plus que l'humour, ne relève d'une évidence universelle et anhistorique. Comme l'ont mis au jour des chercheurs américains à partir de la fin des années 1980, en particulier David Halperin et John Winkler [4], les termes de notre questionnement – qu'il s'agisse de désir, d'identité, de pratiques sexuelles – s'appuient en grande partie sur des catégories contemporaines ne recouvrant qu'imparfaitement ou que très partiellement les pratiques érotiques antiques [5]. Tel comportement nous semble comiquement efféminé, mais était-il perçu, par les Anciens, comme une déviance de genre caractérisant définitivement la personne ? Telle relation érotique est aujourd'hui moquée, mais était-elle hors norme pour les Anciens ? Les risques d'anachronismes sont particulièrement importants dans un domaine où, comme l'a montré Michel Foucault, adviennent des logiques de normes, de vérité ou de définition de soi dans le contexte d'un biopouvoir totalement étranger au régime des *aphrodisia* antiques [6]. Dans une société *before sexuality* [7], les identités personnelles et les perceptions des pratiques sexuelles se déclinent selon des logiques fort différentes des nôtres, des logiques qui nous échappent souvent : la conscience de ce champ inconnu que nous tentons de défricher doit l'emporter sur la volonté de continuer à raisonner et à percevoir les comportements antiques selon une binarité de genre, d'une part, et selon un découpage des pratiques par l'opposition hétérosexualité/homosexualité, d'autre part [8]. De virulents débats ont agité le domaine

des *Classics* à la fin du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle sur ces thèmes, et le présent dossier se place résolument dans une perspective post-*Sexuality Wars*, telle que l'a présentée Kirk Ormand dans un chapitre du récent *Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities* [9]. Ce nouveau paysage scientifique des études sur la sexualité antique a été décrit et analysé par Ruby Blondell et Kirk Ormand, dans l'introduction à l'ouvrage collectif *Ancient Sex. New Essays* [10], et par Sandra Boehringer et Michel Briand dans un dossier intitulé « Questions de genre et de sexualité dans l'Antiquité grecque et romaine [11] ».

Ajoutons au caractère particulièrement « instable » des domaines du rire et de l'érotisme, l'incertitude dans laquelle se trouve le chercheur confronté à des documents antiques de natures variées, qui, avant d'être textes ou images, sont des traces de performances culturelles d'un monde où la littérature n'existe pas [12], où le chant, la parole, l'image et l'écrit ont des valeurs différentes de ce qu'ils ont aujourd'hui [13], et qui, à leur tour, requièrent des outils d'analyse appropriés. Ces outils sont ceux de l'ethnopoéticien, dont la démarche consiste en l'étude « des performances poético-musicales dans leur complexité esthétique et leurs langages multiples : paroles, vocalisations, mélodie, musique instrumentale, gestuelle du corps, danse, parcours et création d'espace et de temps ; [celles-ci] constituent des événements sociaux et culturels qui mettent en relation les participants entre eux et avec le monde où ils vivent [14] ». C'est cette « mise en relation » des individus, propre à chaque performance, qui intéresse l'anthropologue de l'Antiquité lorsqu'il doit comprendre les normes et les usages des différentes situations dont les documents eux-mêmes sont un élément [15]. Cette réflexion sur la

[4] HALPERIN 1990 et 2002 ; WINKLER 2005 (1990).

[5] HALPERIN 2000 (1990), p. 29-63.

[6] FOUCAULT 1976-1984. Voir également DAVIDSON 1987 pour une analyse du moment contemporain où « émerge » la sexualité, une étude qui vient rappeler à l'antiquisant la nécessité épistémologique de postuler un monde d'*« avant la sexualité »*.

[7] Cette expression est empruntée à l'ouvrage pionnier : HALPERIN, WINKLER & ZEITLIN 1990 (tr. fr. à paraître prochainement).

[8] Sur la sexualité antique selon une approche non essentialiste, voir en particulier CALAME 1996 ; WILLIAMS 1999, PARKER 2001 ; DUPONT & ÉLOI 2001 ; BOEHRINGER 2007 ; MASTERSON, RABINOWITZ & ROBSON 2015 ; BLONDELL & ORMAND 2015. Les trois dernières décennies ont vu se multiplier des articles et des ouvrages sur les questions d'érotisme et de sexualité, et il est bien évidemment impossible de donner ici une bibliographie représentative de tous les champs explorés.

[9] ORMAND 2014.

[10] BLONDELL & ORMAND 2014.

[11] BOEHRINGER & BRIAND 2012. Voir également les articles du récent ouvrage collectif BOEHRINGER & LORENZINI 2017 autour de Foucault, l'Antiquité et la sexualité.

[12] Sur l'inexistence d'un régime de littérature telle que le décrit Jacques Rancière (RANCIÈRE 2007), l'ouvrage de Florence Dupont, *L'invention de la littérature. De l'ivresse grecque au livre latin* (DUPONT 1994).

[13] Cf. les nombreux travaux de Claude Calame sur la dimension pragmatique des énoncés antiques qui nous sont parvenus, et en particulier CALAME 2000.

[14] C'est ainsi que Florence Dupont définit le travail de l'ethnopoéticien (DUPONT 2010).

[15] Sur la démarche transculturelle de l'anthropologue de l'Antiquité, voir CALAME 2002.



Figure 1

Pélikè attique à figures rouges, attribuée au Peintre de Hasselmann, 440-430 av. J.-C.  
© Trustees British Museum.

Le débat s'en trouve relancé sur les rapports entre l'image et la pratique discursive, une question propre à l'Antiquité et dont le traitement diffère complètement à l'époque contemporaine. Sans discours antique sur cette image, il est difficile de comprendre ce que l'image représente exactement (simple scène d'humour sexuel ou élément d'un rituel connu des Anciens et ici mis en scène avec humour ?). Dans un chapitre consacré aux fêtes de femmes, John Winkler postulait la possibilité d'un lien d'*« équation culturelle »* avec la pratique des jardins d'Adonis, mais sans y voir une référence réaliste aux pratiques rituelles (comme d'autres l'ont fait [16]). La lecture « huméroïtique » de cette image ne peut qu'être une hypothèse, malgré l'effet comique évident pour nous, modernes, de la représentation de cette femme arrosant soigneusement ces plantes-phallus dressées si dépendantes de ses soins attentifs.

Rire, sexe et performance culturelle, trois objets « flous [17] » sont mobilisés dans ce dossier intitulé humoristiquement *Humeroerotica* et c'est le croisement de ces axes de réflexion qui en constitue l'originalité : non pas, comme c'est le cas dans les études sur le rire antique, une analyse du rire qui prendrait en compte érotisme et satire sexuelle parmi d'autres objets, mais une approche de ce thème par des chercheuses et des chercheurs spécialistes des questions d'érotisme antique et conscients de la dimension historique de la sexualité et des pratiques discursives [18]. Dans cette optique, les auteurs de ce dossier se proposent de mener une enquête sur la façon dont l'humour peut,

nature de la performance est nécessaire pour distinguer les régularités, détecter les décalages ou les transgressions, pour, enfin, percevoir les effets d'humour et de comique.

L'exemple d'une pélikè attique exposée au British Museum attribuée au peintre de Hasselmann (**fig. 1**) illustre le croisement des trois domaines que l'enquête traverse : nous ne pouvons dire avec certitude la nature de l'effet comique ou humoristique de cette image, en l'absence d'information claire sur l'usage concret de ce récipient (cette pélikè servait-elle à verser du liquide lors d'un banquet ou était-elle un objet d'offrandes ou de dépôt ?).

[16] WINKLER 2005 (1990), p. 385-386. Cette image a suscité de nombreuses interprétations, que nous ne pouvons synthétiser ici. En citant cet exemple, il s'agit simplement de rappeler l'immensité de ce domaine inconnu dans lequel s'aventure l'anthropologue-explorateur. Pour cette métaphore et une « invitation au voyage », voir DUPONT 1996, p. 7.

[17] Sur l'intérêt des « ensembles flous » et du recours

à des « catégories solubles » dans la démarche de l'anthropologue, voir DUPONT p. 12-13.

[18] Le thème du sexe associé à l'humour n'est évidemment pas nouveau. Le présent dossier s'attache à ajouter à l'enquête une interrogation sur l'effet de la pratique discursive elle-même ainsi que les acquis des récents travaux portant sur le genre et la sexualité dans l'Antiquité.

dans différentes performances culturelles, impliquer le genre et l'érotisme et, de ce fait, révéler des normes et des valeurs propres aux mondes grec et romain. Les pratiques discursives où sexe et humour s'intriquent et se co-construisent sont particulièrement variées : images et vaisselle de banquet (Marina Haworth), comédie sur la scène athénienne (James Robson et Carmen Damour), procès sous tension (Deborah Kamen), dialogue socratique mis en scène (Yvonne Rösch), épigramme romaine, qui donne à lire et à voir (Eugène O'Connor et Sandra Boehringer) et enfin invention en prose par Lucien, maître en hybridité et en fluidité de genre (Michel Briand).

C'est en 2015 à la Nouvelle-Orléans que s'est tenu le *panel* intitulé *Humoerotica*, organisé par Ruby Blondell et Kathryn Topper pour le *Lambda Classical Caucus*, à l'occasion du congrès annuel de l'*American Philological Association* (désormais nommée la *Society for Classical Studies*). Certains auteurs de ce dossier y participèrent (Marina Hayworth, Deborah Kamen, Eugène O'Connor, Sandra Boehringer), et cette rencontre fut à l'origine d'échanges amicaux et scientifiques durant les années qui suivirent. Ce dossier est le résultat de ce travail collectif qui s'est élargi à d'autres chercheurs, travaillant dans le même esprit [19].

Le néologisme *Humoerotica* est un jeu de mot adressé aux lecteurs – trop – habitués à entendre parler d'« homoérotisme » antique sans dimension heuristique. Ce terme d'homoérotisme, de formation contemporaine malgré ses étymons grecs, est révélateur de la tentation classificatoire des élans érotiques de notre siècle (homo vs. hétéro). L'invention d'un terme phoniquement proche, *humoerotica*, est un clin d'œil épistémologique autant que ludique par lequel nous réaffirmons notre préférence pour l'usage de catégories heuristiques fluides, instables, propres à laisser apparaître les catégories indigènes, elles aussi fluides, au fur et à mesure que nous avançons en terre étrangère. Tels des explorateurs, nous sommes avides de découvrir, non pas les origines illusoires de notre civilisation occidentale (notre humour, notre identité ou notre sexualité), mais les spécificités culturelles des Grecs et de Romains dans leur passionnante étrangeté. ■

[19] L'atelier « Genre, sexe, sexualité dans le monde grec et romain » au sein de l'association française EFIGieS (Étudiants et jeunes chercheur-e-s en études féministes, genre et sexualité) a constitué, durant dix ans, un lieu de rencontre et l'occasion d'échanges fructueux qui a favorisé plusieurs collaborations scientifiques.

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## THE WOLFISH LOVER: THE DOG AS A COMIC METAPHOR IN HOMOEROTIC SYMPOSIUM POTTERY

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the image of the pet dog on Greek red-figure pottery from the late archaic and early classical periods. At least half of the representations depict the dogs accompanying boys and men in the gymnasium, often in homoerotic scenarios. The article suggests that rather than being ancillary figures, contributing to a sense of realism in the background setting, the dogs themselves are visual metaphors for the *erastēs*, adding an element of humor and tension to the scenes. In the absence of a depiction of an *erastēs*, a dog may be shown as a comic metonymic stand-in for the pursuing lover. These images are varied and multi-layered, with polyvalent meanings. Considering the representations of dogs within the context of the humorously and erotically charged symposium helps us to understand the function and meaning of the dog as a visual joke referring to the comically aggressive or foolish *erastēs*.

### KEYWORDS

Greek painted pottery,  
gymnasium,  
symposium,  
athletes,  
dog,  
wolf,  
pederasty,  
homoeroticism.

Cette étude aborde les représentations du chien sur les vases à figures rouges, de la fin de l'époque archaïque au début de l'époque classique. Au moins sur la moitié d'entre elles le chien accompagne des hommes adultes et de jeunes garçons qui se rendent au gymnase, et souvent selon une mise en scène homoérotique. On propose l'interprétation suivante : loin d'être une figure secondaire contribuant, en arrière-plan, au réalisme de la scène, les chiens sont, en eux-mêmes, des métaphores des amants, et leur présence ajoute une touche d'humour et de tension érotique à la scène. Dans les images où l'*erastēs* n'est pas représenté, le chien peut être placé à cet endroit comme un double métonymique et comique de l'amant chassant son aimé. Ces représentations sont variées et multiples, avec des significations polysémiques. L'étude de la représentation des chiens dans un contexte plein d'humour et d'érotisme qu'est le banquet permet de mettre au jour la fonction et la signification du chien, un jeu/une plaisanterie visuelle renvoyant à l'*erastēs*, si comiquement agressif ou éconduit.

### MOTS-CLÉS

Céramique grecque,  
gymnase,  
banquets,  
athlètes,  
chien,  
loup,  
pédérastie,  
homoérotisme.

Article accepté après évaluation par deux experts selon le principe du double anonymat

In late archaic and early classical red-figure sympotic pottery, homoerotic images of young athletes surrounded by older men in the gymnasium are very common. Often accompanying the human subjects in the gymnasium is another figure: the pet dog. A rough statistical analysis from the Beazley Archive shows that dogs are represented on over 400 red-figure vases. At least half of these are depicted with athletes in the gymnasium, or otherwise accompanying boys or men, sometimes in explicit scenes of "courtship" [1]. Despite their prevalence on Greek pottery, however, dogs have been underrepresented in scholarship, and when mentioned, have simply been read as illustrations of everyday life, perhaps because our own cultural associations with "man's best friend" are so strong that we view the images through our own cultural assumptions. The temptation is to see these gymnasium scenes as documentary accounts, perhaps associating them with the matter-of-fact descriptions like Arrian's, who mentions that his dog "escorts me to the gymnasium, and sits by while I am exercising" [2]. The imagery on Greek painted pottery, however, is not factual evidence, but rather imaginary scenes in which fantasies and humor are given form [3]. This paper will show that the concept of the dog in ancient Greece was multi-faceted, symbolic, and often highly comedic. In fact, the dog could be used as a visual metaphor for the *erastēs* himself (the generally older male lover of a younger boy) and the images of these seemingly innocent domestic canines were used in a

particularly rich way to generate humor during the symposium [4]. Indeed, animal scenes in general have been recognized as metaphorical and not just ornamental filler [5], and in light of the textual and visual evidence, the images of dogs, in erotic contexts especially, deserve closer examination.

The painted sympotic pottery of the late sixth and early fifth centuries BCE must be understood within the Greek pederastic context. The scenes under examination here depict the gymnasium, and were viewed in the symposium, the two most important loci for homoerotic interaction in the Athenian world [6]. Understanding the images portrayed, and their subversion of the norms, or adherence to them, requires an understanding of the cultural conventions surrounding pederastic practice. Furthermore, it must be understood that the homoeroticism of gymnasium imagery on symposium vessels, like the representations of dogs, does not provide a documentary realism, or necessarily offer a description of historical practice; rather the images play with the expectations regarding social standards in multiple ways. The approach this study takes is based on the fundamental concept that the viewers of these symposium vessels would have normative expectations of pederastic behavior in mind, so that the subversion or exaggeration of them in the images would read as comic. The association of the *erastēs* with either the dangerous hunting dog or the mawkish lap dog could lampoon embarrassing and improper behavior of an *erastēs* towards his *erômenos* [7].

[1] In general Beazley Archive searches, "dog" is combined with "athlete" 12 times. But this is a low number, since many athletic scenes are often not marked as such in the archive. For example, there are 126 instances of "dog and youth", and many of these boys may be athletes. "Dog and strigil" also appears at least 21 times.

[2] Arrian, *On Hunting*, 5. PHILLIPS & WILLCOCK 1999: 97.

[3] FERRARI 2003, PARKER 2015, SCHNAPP 1989.

[4] It is necessary to remark upon the convention of referring to these figures as the "*erastēs*" and "*erômenos*". The assignment of these labels to the imagery is a modern scholarly creation. It is unknown how the ancient Greeks themselves would have referred to these figures.

[5] EDLUND 1980.

[6] "The *palaistra* is one of the several iconographic

markers in the Attic pederastic scenes that indicate the importance of pederastic activities to the visual construction of Athenian aristocratic society. This setting underscores the agonistic nature of gift giving and courtship, which were designed to enhance the status of both *erastai* and *eromenoi*. We have also noted that a majority of the pederastic depictions occur on drinking paraphernalia affiliated with the *symposion*, an aristocratic institution. *Kalos* inscriptions addressed to beautiful aristocratic youths, the walking sticks on which the *erastai* lean, and the mantles casually thrown over the shoulders of *erastai* have also been cited as aristocratic markers." BARRINGER 2001: 85.

[7] The mocking of bad pederastic behaviour in Attic comedy also singles out the tropes of the aggressive lecher, or the persistent hopeful *erastēs*. SHAPIRO 2015: 190, 194-195.

In the images, the *erômenos* is recognized by his depiction as erotically beautiful and in the ideal age class: a post-pubescent youth who has not yet grown a beard [8]. This is indicated by developed musculature and a smooth face. Often these ideally depicted boys are also shown as smaller than the bearded males nearby, though this use of scale is less consistent in the corpus of Greek pottery than their general appearance is. When pot painters found it necessary to emphasize the perfection of an *erômenos'* age, they would also include the detail of the *ioulos*, the beginning of beard growth on the cheeks [9]. The *erastê*s figure is usually likewise clearly marked. In clearly indicated gymnasium scenes, the younger boys are the practicing athletes, and shown nude, whereas the *erastê*s figures are bearded men who are cloaked and often carrying a walking stick, an indication that they are merely visiting the gymnasium, not participating in exercises themselves [10].

The abundance of eroticized athletic images on symposium vessels encouraged and normalized the sexualization of youths in general [11]. These images also functioned to feed the desire for young beautiful protégés by helping to create a demand. Jacques Lacan's theories of the relationship between desire and demand can serve to explain the logistics of this process [12]. The upper age limit of the *erômenos* creates the inevitability of loss for the *erastê*s. The relationship has a culturally prescribed ending, in which the *erômenos* becomes a fully enfranchised citizen, and then becomes an *erastê* to his own *erômenos*. Therefore, the brevity of the relationship creates the

eventual feeling of lack, which in turn creates the demand for the next *erômenos* [13]. To add to the already limited availability of the *erômenos*, those of ephebe age will be forced to remove themselves from their "*Männerbund*" for a good part of their final year of their military training, which would, according to Lacan's theories, intensify the desire felt by the *erastê*s [14]. Desire for the young athlete is also maintained by the fixation upon sympotic images, creating a fantasy of the desired youths. Representations of young, beautiful boys, shown in the symposium would stimulate and further the older men's interest in the relationship, with all the responsibilities it entailed [15].

It is well documented that the behavior of both parties during pederastic courtship had prescribed ideals [16]. The *erastê*s is the pursuer, and the *erômenos* is the pursued. We understand from texts that the "boy" should be disciplined and modest, and conduct himself with the utmost *aidôs* and *sôphrosunê* (shame and moderation) [17]. Therefore, young athletes would be the most desired of potential *erômeno*i, since their disciplined training requires these qualities, while their ongoing exercises suggest their physical beauty [18]. In such an asymmetrical relationship, however, these expected behaviors, are fraught with complications and tensions. The boundaries in question offer too many points of slippage for anyone to be completely above reproach. Transgressions are possible at every turn. Fisher notes that though the philosophical ideal of the pederastic relationship stressed the value of a reciprocal, mutual admiration of the minds, the expectation

[8] Up to the age of 20, approximately, though individuals vary in their maturation rate. MOLLER 1987: 750.

[9] *Hêtê* is estimated to be a two year period around the age of 16–18. FERRARI 2002: 133, 135, and FERRARI 1993: 104.

[10] While the age class markers are used in other scenes without erotic undertones, in the sexually charged contexts of the gymnasium and symposium, the eroticism is implicit.

[11] Shapiro argues convincingly that the eroticization of young men would have been expected and common, not just among elites, but city-wide. SHAPIRO 2015.

[12] Lacan's ideas of the fantasy of desire for the Other, and the demand for fulfillment, which is exacerbated by the feelings of lack, or stress of loss, fit the complexities of normative pederastic courtship as we understand it very well. LACAN 1966: 231.

[13] "Most of all, *hêtê* is fleeting, encompassing the brief span of time between the first appearance of down on the boy's face and the growth of a proper beard." FERRARI 2002: 133.

[14] On the *Männerbund*, see BREMMER 1990: 135, and FERRARI 2002: 113.

[15] On the civic duty of the pederastic relationship and

the role of the *erastê*s as a mentor, see FERRARI 2002: 148, BREMMER 1990: 137, CAIRNS 1993: 170.

[16] These are monitored largely by public apprehensions of the behavior of both parties. One's reputation would rest upon this perception. HALPERIN 1990: 93–97. COHEN, D 1991: 196, 198. LEAR & CANTARELLA 2008: 192. BOEHRINGER & CACIAGLI 2015: 29–39.

[17] Although our understanding of these norms derives from texts such as Aristophanes' *The Clouds* and Aeschines' *Against Timarchus*, there are also conventional iconographic ways to depict these behaviors, e.g. by showing a youth draped and veiled to convey *aidôs* (FERRARI 1990: 190 and *passim*), or even with his foreskin ligatured, to indicate that he is sexually unavailable (see below), or of course by the manner in which he interacts with the *erastê*s. Dover documents several examples of boys refusing the attentions of older men, DOVER 1978: 92. Cairns also discusses the importance of *aidôs* for boys at the symposium, CAIRNS 1993: 168, and the physical signs of *aidôs*: CAIRNS 1993: 6.

[18] The pinnacle of youthful beauty and athletic achievement is found in the person of Autolykos, in whose honor Xenophon's symposium was held. The *aidôs* and *sôphrosunê* of the young athletic victor are explicitly praised, and his beauty became the topic of the conversation for the night.



Figure 1

Pederastic courting scene in which a dog mimics the actions and intentions of the *erastēs*. Athenian black-figure amphora, c. 540 B.C. Attributed to Group E.

BA 301064\*, ABF 134.30, Vatican City, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano 352.  
Drawing: Michelle Ranta, 2017.

that physical desire would be fulfilled on some level was also present [19]. However, though the norms dictate that an *erastēs* was expected to be rather persistent and full of desire, the potential to be made ridiculous by failing to win his choice of *erômenos* was a constant concern, for he must be seen as pursuing the youth for high-minded reasons, not just sexual gratification. This paper deals with some of the ways in which humorous dog imagery addresses these concerns with biting hilarity, while referring to the social tensions possible during the symposium [20].

So, what role do the depictions of dogs play in what we will call pederastic courting scenes? They are portrayed in a myriad of ways, sometimes symbolically, and sometimes adding sexual humor to the episode. On a black-figure amphora in the Vatican, we see two

dogs amongst men who are shown to be engaged in different erotic behaviors: bringing each other love-gifts, using the stereotypical “up and down” seduction gesture, and even reaching for a young man’s posterior (**fig. 1**). The dogs in this scene, when mentioned by scholars at all, are said to connect the *erastai* to the hunt [21]. The hunt is indeed an important dimension of the dog’s metaphorical role, but these images are more than mere tools used to set the scene. The iconography may contain many associations at once, and while the hunt connection would have been immediately understood, the actions of the dogs in the scene deserve notice.

Upon closer examination, it is clear that dogs add a level of humor and diversion to the scene. The dogs seem to be mirroring their human counterparts: the one with the center couple not only puts its nose directly to the genitals of the *erômenos*, the younger man, but its tail arches up to “goose” the *erastēs* alongside him, just as the *erômenos* is being “goosed” by the man behind him. Not only that, but its tail is directly level with and pointed in the same direction as the penis of the man behind him, towards the rear end of the other man, perhaps hinting at that man’s latent desires. The dog to the left seems to have similarly lascivious intentions, poking its nose up to the buttocks of the man in front of him. These dogs are clearly not merely attendants in the scene, but full participants, humorously doubling the actions of the men. At the same time, they also provide a commentary on the erotic wishes of the men who may be refraining from the action themselves out of *aidōs*. Furthermore, we know from expressions like κυνόδεσμος, among others, that one of the slang terms for the male member was κύων (dog) [22]. It is therefore possible that these canine companions also are a visual pun, giving their actions in this scene an added element of hilarity.

The cultural association of pederastic courtship with the hunting of wild game has received much scholarly attention in recent years [23]. The metaphor of the

[19] Fisher cites Plato’s *Phaedrus*, and both Xenophon’s and Plato’s *Symposium* (Plato 184d-185c) in FISHER 2008: 189, and also SHAPIRO 2015: 178.

[20] While humor may relieve social stress, it may also exacerbate it, as Halliwell shows. STEPHENSON 1951. HALLIWELL 1991: 286-287. HALLIWELL 2008: 127, 151.

[21] The hunt as a metaphorical understanding is covered extensively, especially in SCHNAPP 1989, 1997. BARRINGER 2001. LEAR & CANTARELLA 2008: 115. The metaphor, however, is not always to be read in a straightforward way: “The relationship, however, is actually more complex and ambiguous, [than the *erastēs* always being the metaphorical hunter and the *erômenos* the hunted] involving a vacillating exchange of power between the

older *erastēs*, who holds social status, and the *erômenos*, who, by virtue of the desire that he inspires in the *erastēs*, possesses power.” BARRINGER 2001: 70.

[22] Lilja shows that “κύων” can mean penis or dildo, citing anonymous poets as well as Aristophanes: *Lysistrata* (158) and *Knights* (1029). LILJA 1976: 71-72. “κύων, dog, usually stands for the male member”, HENDERSON 1991: 127. “An example from *Phrynicos* (85; A 13) is typical: kynodesmai are “the things with which the Athenians tied up their private parts when they stripped, because they called the penis a dog”. MILLER 2004: 12.

[23] BARRINGER 2001: 85-89, SCHNAPP 1989: 79-81, and DOVER 1989: 87f.



Figure 2

A symposiast strokes a hare under his *klinē* while singing "O most beautiful boy". Interior tondo of an Athenian red-figure kylix, c. 490 B.C.

BA 9534\*, Athens, National Museum 1357.

Drawing: Michelle Ranta, 2017.

hunt in general has been well documented and shown to have been widespread in Greece throughout the archaic and early classical periods [24]. In literature, *erastai* are also closely associated with hunters. The correlation of the *erastēs* with the hunting dog may help clarify some of the subtext in scenes that otherwise seem deceptively straightforward. Barringer notices that hunt scenes are often juxtaposed with pederastic encounters, especially in images of dogs chasing hares [25]. A black-figure lekythos in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston illustrates

how these ideas are visually correlated [26]. The parallels between hunting and pederastic courting, and the association between the animals and the men seem relatively clear. The upper register features a bearded *erastēs* on the left seducing a younger *erōmenos* on the right. The *erastēs* is also accompanied by his hunting dog, who looks up admiringly at the *erōmenos*, mirroring the *erastēs'* actions [27]. This triad is flanked by other potential *erastai* bearing gifts. On the side, a dog chases a hare into a trap, just as the *erastēs* seduces the boy.

Comparing the boy, or *erōmenos*, to a hare seems to have been common in the visual repertoire [28]. This association has been noted as an important part of the idea of hunting as a metaphor for pederastic courting, and is central to this image, from a kylix in Athens (fig. 2) [29]. While the idea of a direct visual metaphor (the image of the hare standing in for the *erōmenos*) has been suggested, scholars disagree as to whether we should read the imagery as a metonym [30]. I would argue, however, not only that this is possible, but that the images of dogs, as well as hares, may be read as symbolic stand-ins, and as such, become an integral part of the scene's narrative at the same time, with compacted, multiple meanings. Thus, the gaze of the lover itself upon the beloved has been equaled to the hunter pursuing the hunted. Often the dogs on red-figured pottery are looking up at the young athletes in admiration and expectation, subjecting them to their gaze, much as the potential *erastēs* does. "Meleager calls the eyes of those who are desirous of falling in love with a young boy παίδων κύνες, because their eyes eagerly hunt for an object of love." [31].

The ambiguity and metaphorical complexity of the imagery on vases was part of its appeal, as Richard Neer has shown [32]. In this particular example,

[24] DOVER 1989: 87, SCHNAPP 1989: 71-87.

[25] BARRINGER 2001: 83.

[26] BA 300851\*, ABF 92, Boston, MA, Museum of Fine Arts 08.291.

[27] The question of whether the dogs in these scenes should be interpreted as love-gifts deserves some comment. Kilmer suggests that the dog was a common love-gift (KILMER 1993a: 47). There is textual evidence that dogs could be among the gifts offered by a potential *erastēs* to an *erōmenos*. These examples, however, are both meant to signify extreme extravagance and in all likelihood such gifts were not very common. Barringer explains that gifts are most often either cocks or game animals, and notes that "the presentation of animal gifts to the beloved" are "usually held in the arms or out to the recipient". BARRINGER 2001: 73. Dogs on Attic pottery are never presented this way, or even shown to be clearly "presented as a gift" at all. Koch-Harnack is also dubious: "Hunde als Geschenk auf Vasenbildern lassen sich nur vermuten, und ebenso spekulativ müssen leider auch die

literarisch überlieferten Pferdepräsente bleiben." KOCH-HARNACK 1983: 63.

[28] SCHNAPP 1989: 85.

[29] KOCH-HARNACK 1983: 88, PARKER 2015: 78, TOPPER 2012: 138, BARRINGER 2001: 77, LEAR & CANTARELLA 2008: 34. Barringer has an extensive discussion of pederastic courtship as a metaphor for hunting, but it seems clear not just that the idea applies to courtship in general, but that the roles can be applied more specifically to the participants themselves.

[30] Barringer touches on this idea, particularly regarding the hare, in passing (BARRINGER 2001: 103), but Lear & Cantarella disagree (LEAR & CANTARELLA 2008: 34).

[31] LILJA 1976: 123. Meleager IV, 12, 92, *Greek Anthology*, (Loeb Classical Library 67).

[32] "At their best, Attic vase-paintings are lavish, complex, and shifting. They insist on their own objecthood, their own brute physical opacity; they resist critical tactics that would render them transparent." NEER 2002: 184.

we see a man at a symposium, in his prime as an *erastēs*, reclining and apparently singing the following, written in retrograde script emanating from his mouth: OPAIDONKALLISTE, ("O Most Beautiful of Boys"), while he strokes a hare crouched under his *klinē*. This scene can be read in several ways. The first is the most simple, in which we see the desirous *erastēs*, thinking about his object of affection, and the hare below may simply be a love-gift he has yet to offer the boy. But the hare also reminds us of the hunt, and the equivalence of the *erastēs* with the hunter; and therefore the *erômenos* is the hunted, as the hare was before it had been caught. Consequently, the viewer is also reminded of the *erastēs'* wish to pursue the boy and keep him as his *erômenos*, which further links the idea of the boy to the hare. Moreover, the words of the symposiast directly associate his touching of the hare with his desire for his *erômenos*, making the hare a clear stand-in for the *erômenos* himself. At the same time, however, as one continues to examine the image, there is a wistful humor at play in the dissonance between the concrete metaphor and the boy's absence.

We can also see this complicated image-play at work in a cup tondo by the Panaitios Painter (fig. 3). We see a long-limbed, muscular hare running up the ground line of the tondo. Behind it is a similarly leggy boy, with hands outstretched in the "sprinter" pose. The painter has also cleverly put him in a crouching position, his height contained by the frame, which makes his arms and legs pinwheel in what appears to almost be the "*knielaufen*" formula, which in earlier archaic art signified flying. This young athlete is indeed fast, and could evade the swiftest hunter. The association of the boy with the hare in flying gallop is clear. The hare is the boy, the boy is the hare. Similarly, in the "hunt as pederastic courtship" metaphor, the animals' relationship to the humans is metonymic [33].

This metaphor of *erastēs*-as-hunting dog and *erômenos*-as-hare was so common that even simple chase scenes could imply such personification. Small oil containers such as *askoi* often carry animal chase scenes, such as the one by the Pan Painter in Oxford, which features a hound on one side chasing a hare (both in full flying gallop) into a net on the other side [34]. This neat capture of a wild hare may not be



Figure 3

An athlete sprints alongside a hare.

Interior tondo of an Athenian red-figure kylix, c. 520-500 B.C. Attributed to the Panaitios Painter. BA 203239\*, ARV2 1592, formerly London, British Museum E46, now in Leipzig, Antikenmuseum d. Universität Leipzig.

Drawing: Michelle Ranta, 2017.

simply a hunting scene, as it seems on the surface. It implicitly carries pederastic meaning, for not only are live hares caught this way so that they may be given to *erômenoī* as love gifts, but these animals may be seen as stand-ins for the *erastēs* and the *erômenos* themselves. The hound, as the amorous *erastēs*, leaps forward towards the hare, who flees as the *erômenos* was expected to do at the initial stages of courtship [35]. Seen in this light, the entrapment of the hare may be a humorous indication of the inevitability of the *erastēs* winning the affections of the youth.

The prevalence of dogs in athletic and courting scenes is thus metaphorically significant. This idea seems to have been part of the discourse of pederasty, as shown by the proverb in Plato's *Phaedrus*: "as the wolves love lambs, so the *erastai* love boys" (ώς λύκοι ἄρνας ἀγαπῶσιν, ώς παῖδα φιλοῦσιν ἐραστά) [36]. Henderson also notes that a "gaping wolf" (λύκος κεχηνώς)

[33] For other examples which directly relate *erastai* to dogs and *erômenoī* to hares in erotic contexts see BA 7479\*, Paris, Musée du Louvre F85BIS, and BA 200100\*, ARV2 20, Gotha, Schlossmuseum 48, and BA 203813\*, ARV2 280.18, 362.21, Mykonos, Archaeological Museum 7.

[34] BA 7414\*, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1979.20.

[35] DOVER 1989: 83.

[36] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 241c-d. Cf. an *askos* in Munich, which has a chase scene similar to the hound and hare described above, but actually depicts a wolf chasing a ram. BA 5751\*, Antikensammlungen: 2543, HOFFMANN 1977: Pl. 1. 5.

is a proverbial expression for a pederast [37]. In these expressions an element of danger is injected into the relationship, which encourages the younger participant to be reserved, in order to protect himself. This perhaps is part of the implicit education of the boys, since it places the burden of chastity upon the younger participants. The older men are encouraged to pursue the boys so that these *erômenoi* may themselves learn the power of restraint, the better to become a stable member of the citizen body, while the older men, spurred on by their socially encouraged desire and

love for the boys, nurture and teach them. Comparing the *erômenos* to a lamb about to be ravaged by a wolf, and the *erastês* to the devouring canine, is a warning as well as a joke. The same is implied by some of these vase paintings. Of course, the images under discussion show pet dogs, not wolves *per se*, but the devouring canine as rapacious *erastês* applies to dogs as well, if we can judge from Greek literary conventions. As Saara Lilja notes: “the dog in old myths and in the Homeric epics may have sometimes been identified with the wolf”, and “λύσσα as etymologically akin to λύκος would suit a rabid dog’s wolf-like behavior.” [38]. Furthermore, as Lonsdale has remarked, “the dog is not far removed from his wild cousins, the wolf and jackal. Certain breeds of dogs were believed to contain wild blood. The Laconian hound had no less than seven alleged sires: lion, tiger, civet, cat, fox, jackal, and wolf.” [39] Note too that a term of abuse, κυνώπις (“dog-face”) can signify shamelessness, in particular, sexual intemperance. [40]

An even more explicit example of the dog as *erastês* and the *erômenos* as hunted may be found on a squat lekythos attributed to the Bowdoin Painter – a shape similar to the prototypical athletic oil jar, the aryballos, and most likely used by young athletes in the gymnasium (fig. 4). It depicts a hound with a figure of Eros in pursuit of a youth, who runs away rapidly [41]. As the boy runs full speed to the right, he turns around towards his pursuers and reaches his right arm back in a gesture of supplication. Sourvinou-Inwood has remarked that this pose is a trope that occurs in heterosexual pursuits [42]. She refers to the motif as the “fleeing woman”, although this pose clearly exists in the pederastic repertoire as well [43]. There may be a connection of this formulaic image to the hunt metaphor, assuming the fleeing hare may stand in for the pursued. Hull, in describing a hare hunt, notes that often the hare, after leaping sideways to get away from the hounds, “turns and looks back to see if the hounds can figure out what she has done.” [44] In this composition, Eros flies towards the boy, holding out a garland as a gift [45]. The hound gives chase,



[37] “A humorous reference to Spartan pederasty”, HENDERSON 1991: 211.

[38] LILJA 1976: 21. This is also discussed at length by Franco, who points out that there was indeed anxiety about the thin line between the pet dog and the savage wolf, FRANCO 2014: 30. See also CALDER 2011: 68-69.

[39] LONSDALE 1979: 151.

[40] LILJA 1976: 22 (Agamemnon, abused by Achilles *Iliad*, 1. 159), and LONSDALE 1979: 152: “In a moral sense the dog is turned into a shameful reproach for sexual intemperance.” See also FRANCO 2014: 86-89.

[41] DOVER 1989: 87-88.

[42] SOURVINOU-INWOOD 1987: 131-153.

[43] SOURVINOU-INWOOD 1987: 136-137.

[44] Hull seems to be describing animal behavior he has personally witnessed. While I hesitate to read any symbolic imagery in a naturalistic, positivist way, the fleeing motif does seem to replicate his descriptions. HULL 1964: 73-74.

[45] The garland is commonly offered as a love gift. DOVER 1989: 92-93.



Figure 5

An *erastēs* on the prowl.

Interior tondo of an Athenian red-figure kylix, c. 480 B.C. Attributed to the Dokimasia Painter. BA 204493\*, ARV2 412.11, 1651, Ferrara, Museo Nazionale di Spina T931A.

Drawing: Michelle Ranta.

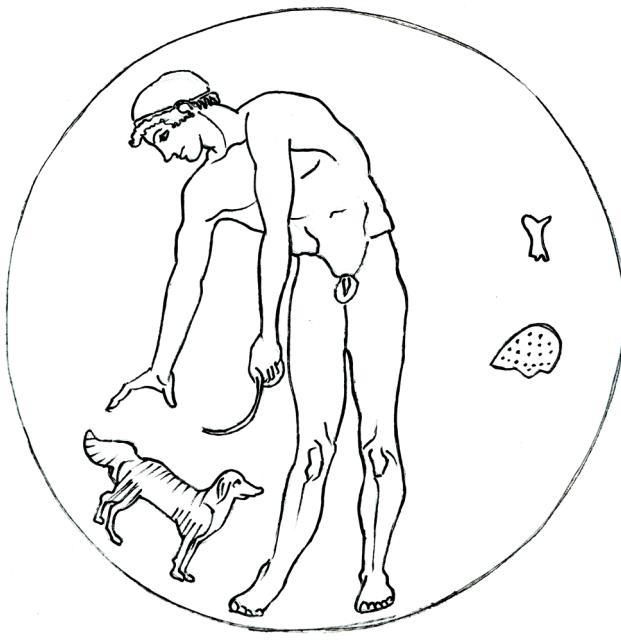


Figure 6

An athlete offers a fluffy Maltese dog the oil from his body. Labeled "Kalos Lykos" (Lykos/the wolf is beautiful). Interior tondo of an Athenian red-figure kylix, c. 470 B.C. Attributed to the Manner of the Tarquinia Painter. BA 211513\*, ARV2 1596.21, 872.23, Firenze, Museo Archeologico Etrusco 4220.

Drawing: Michelle Ranta, 2017.

looking up at the youth. Sourvinou-Inwood notes that images such as these suggest that the actions performed by the other figures are done so under the power of Eros [46]. The idea that the *erastēs* is pursuing the youth in the guise of a hunting dog is sharpened by the fact that Eros parallels the dog's actions in the composition. The dog must be a stand-in for the *erastēs* here, but the boy is then also a hare, behaving like one being chased (he turns his head to look back), while performing the formulaic gesture of the target in a love pursuit [47].

As previously noted, the gymnasium setting is a typical place for aristocratic pederastic courtship. A cup by the Dokimasia Painter shows a gymnasium scene on the exterior, and a complementary scene on the interior of the cup: an elegant *erastēs* type stands in the center of the tondo, accompanied by an enormous Laconian hound (fig. 5) [48]. This associates the man with the wolfish hunting dog, but a further detail brings this idea home: the dog's hindquarters are hidden behind the *erastēs*, but his tail protrudes from behind the man. The tail is exactly in line with the man's own rear end, and it appears as though the tail belongs to the man himself. The man would appear to be a hound-dog, on the prowl for young boys in the

gymnasium. The symposiast, admiring the athletes in training on the exterior, would find the wolfish lover at the bottom of his cup. This lampoons the drinker's own possible inclinations, the joke either serving as a warning on how not to behave, or a confirmation of the symposiast's already untoward desires [49].

In gymnasium grooming scenes we often have the *erastēs* as dog, looking to be fed by the boys (fig. 6). Dogs, present during the boys' strigiling, stare up at them with rapt attention, shamefully begging like a sexually intemperate "κυνώπης" (dog-eyed) *erastēs*. Often, as here, the young athlete offers the dog the excess olive oil after it has been scraped from

[46] SOURVINOU-INWOOD 1987: 132.

[47] There are other examples that offer support for the hypothesis that dogs and hares can be iconographically interchangeable with the *erastēs* and the *erōmenos* with Eros making the intention explicit. See BA 275164\*, ARV2 1643.58BIS, Lawrence, KS, University of Kansas, Wilcox Museum, N. 510, and also BA 207614\*, ARV2 653.4, Paris, Musée du Louvre 6211.

[48] See also BA 200982\*, ARV2 117.4, 1577, St Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum 664.

[49] Shapiro calls the gymnasium voyeurs "a species of athletics-pest", SHAPIRO 2015: 195.

his body after his exercises [50]. These scenes are usually interpreted as reflecting normal occurrences in everyday life. As we have seen, however, the idea of the simple genre scene in ancient Greek art has rightly been called into question, and I would argue that these cases represent visual humor based on a common pun, in that the dog could be seen as equivalent to the *erastēs* [51]. Therefore, these scenes could be read as a comic take on the practice of potential *erastai* waiting around the gymnasium to lecherously watch the naked youths practice their events [52]. The dogs, as a metaphor for the *erastēs*, also hang around the gymnasium waiting for the boys. These scenes are not merely anecdotes of daily life, but also an inside joke on the lifestyle of the *erastēs*, begging for a scrap of the beautiful boy's attention. Dogs had multiple meanings in Greek culture, from vicious and savage to the most loyal and helpful. In some cases the dog represents the desperate, fawning individual [53]. This kind of mockery of the often rather sad position of the potential *erastēs* is well known from Aristophanes' *Clouds*. Pet dogs were fed only scraps and bread used for wiping grease away from one's hands after eating [54]. Dogs in literature are often described as scavengers [55]. So, in these grooming scenes, with the dog literally feeding off the scraps of oil from the boy's body, there could be quite an erotic undercurrent of both the delectability of the *erômenos*, but also the hunger of the wolf-like dog. If the *erastēs* is the dog, however, then the boy is equated with the hare, as the hunted *erômenos*, whom the dog, i.e. the *erastēs*, desires to ravage.

The comic danger of the dog/*erastēs* slipping into wolf-like behavior is emphasized on several pots in which young athletes grooming are accompanied by *kalos* inscriptions that state simply "LYKOS KALOS",

or "the wolf is beautiful". While the purpose of *kalos* inscriptions is still debated, many have been shown to underscore jokes in the images or have some other direct relationship to the scene [56]. *Kalos* inscriptions indeed seem to have a multitude of meanings, to judge from the contexts in which they are found [57]. As Niall Slater shows, the traditional interpretation of *kalos* inscriptions, which assumes that the name refers to the most sought-after boy of the day, is simplistic, and does not serve us well. He stresses the sympoietic play and the performative nature of the *kalos* inscriptions [58]. Many varied ironic and humorous uses of *kalos* inscriptions are documented, including the aryballos by Phintias which addresses the viewer directly in the vocative "*o pai kale*" [59]. Moreover, while the name Lykos was quite common in Greece, we must not overlook the comic potential in naming-puns, which are found throughout the corpus of Aristophanes.

This is the case with the cup tondo discussed earlier (fig. 6), which is inscribed "ΛΥΚΟΣ ΚΑΛΟΣ". Here the boy gestures towards the small dog awaiting the excess oil from the strigil after scraping. A sponge hangs on the wall behind him. The inscription would seem to refer to the animal, rather than the boy, since the dog is a major component of the composition [60]. The direct link between the "ΛΥΚΟΣ ΚΑΛΟΣ" inscription and the pet dog on this cup gives weight to the ideas that the slang term for pederast, λύκος, is indeed connected to the pet dogs present in gymnasium scenes. But here, the idea that the "wolfish pederast is beautiful" is juxtaposed not with a hunting hound, but with a very different type of dog: a small, fluffy, gentle breed [61]. This creates a humorous and unexpected contrast between the idea of the dangerous hunter and the mawkish lapdog that the

[50] For other young athletes strigiling with attendant dogs, see also BA 203991\*, ARV2 376.93, Boston, MA, Museum of Fine Arts, 01.8038, and BA 202005\*, ARV2 210.187, München, Antikensammlung 2453, and BA 3997\*, ARV2 377.99, Bruxelles, Musées Royaux R350, and BA 207322\*, ARV2 1562, 631.39, Boston, MA, Museum of Fine Arts, 13.191 (among many others). See also: PEVNICK 2014: 160-161.

[51] FERRARI, 2003: 37-54.

[52] Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 971-983. The speaker of these lines, the Just Argument, reveals himself to be a rather an old lecher himself, by describing the boys' nether regions a bit too zealously.

[53] Pindar, in *Pythian* 2, lines 82-84 contrasts the sycophantic "tail-wagger" σαίνων, to the brave, direct wolf. LILJA 1976: 51.

[54] HULL 1964: 47.

[55] LILJA 1976: 17 and *passim*.

[56] FERRARI 2002: 19-20.

[57] SLATER 1999: 143-161, *passim*.

[58] Slater posits that the usual interpretation of an *erastēs* requesting the potter to "name-check" his beloved is not a sufficient explanation for the corpus of "love-names" that exists. Perhaps the pottery is not as straightforward as the *kalos* names found in other contexts. "What I am suggesting is that the degree of their proliferation on late archaic vases exceeds anything we can plausibly ascribe to a simple desire of an *erastēs* to communicate with an *erômenos*. Moreover, their placement on vases demands that they, like other inscriptions, be read out by those using them, especially in the symposium." SLATER 1999: 158.

[59] SLATER 1999: 153.

[60] ESPOSITO & TOMMASO 1993: 69, and PEVNICK 2014: 160.

[61] It is most likely a Maltese the pampered breed favored by small children, FRANCO 2014: 25, 195.



Figure 7

A young athlete holds a hare, athletic equipment surrounds him. Labeled "Lykos kalos". Interior tondo of an Athenian red-figure kylix, c. 490 B.C. Attributed to Onesimos.

BA 203376\*, ARV2 1595, 328.122, Kassel, Staatliche Museen Kassel, Antikensammlung ALG58.

Drawing: Michelle Ranta, 2017.

*erastēs* is in danger of becoming, if he loses dignity in the pursuit of a boy (which, to be sure, would not be *kalos*). While the fierce hunting dog seems to be the prototypical visual metaphor for the *erastēs*, the harmless-looking Maltese might also carry this connotation for added comedy. The joke would be quite savage, in imagining the reversal of the proper Athenian man, who in his role as *erastēs* is reduced to a hopeful little lapdog to his *erōmenos*, "tail-wagging" and "dog-eyed" [62]. Aeschines speaks of "the hunters of such young men as are easily trapped" (Τοὺς τῶν νέων, ὅσοι ῥαδίως ἀλίσκονται, θηρευτὰς ὄντας) [63]. In images like these, the association of the *erastēs* with the tame, hopeful, admiring dog plays on these metaphorical connections, by twisting

the image of the predatory canine into the dependent one [64].

Another instance of the *kalos* inscription functioning as part of the pederastic joke occurs on a cup by Onesimos: in this image, a robed young man holds a hare by the back legs and the ears (fig. 7). The boy (as a potential *erōmenos*) is linked metaphorically to the hare, and in this image they are also correlated visually. The hunting metaphor, always potentially present in a pederastic context, is activated by the mention of the wolf in the *kalos* inscription. In the background is a selection of athletic equipment setting the scene as the gymnasium, and the viewer supplies the narrative details. The boy seems to have just finished cleaning up after exercising and has been given a hare by some unseen *erastēs*, the position filled by the viewer, the symposiast using the cup. François Lissarrague notes that *kalos* inscriptions may link the represented world with the world of the viewer through the performance of the text [65]. This *kalos* inscription therefore refers to the unseen *erastēs* "ΛΥΚΟΣ ΚΑΛΟΣ", the pederast pursuing the boy in the gymnasium. Put into context, the metaphorical joke involving the viewer comes to light. The viewer himself is the proverbial wolfish lover being referred to in the inscription, which, read aloud during the symposium as the drinker discovers the image at the bottom of his cup, would produce much amusement. The holder of the cup would be compelled to perform his own comic "roast", at his own expense.

In the right context, the image of the dog and the pederast (*λύκος*), would be conceptually linked in the appropriate milieu, such as the symposium. Indeed, a series of curious cups in the shape of a dog's head from around the 480s helps us to locate the context of this metaphor solidly in the symposium (fig. 8) [66]. The jovial, humorous and casual role-playing that occurred during a symposium enables us to understand the use of these unusual vessels. The atmosphere of sexual tension could be lightened by jokes and games. When drinking from a dog cup such as this one, as the symposiast tilts the cup upwards to access the wine inside, the cup covers his face, creating a dog mask [67]. The drinker thus becomes a dog, with all of its humorous and lascivious connotations. The other symposiasts

[62] σαινω, fawning, tail-wagging, κυνωπις, dog-eyed, shameful, lascivious.

[63] Aeschines, *Against Timarchus*, 1, 195, ADAMS 1919, translation. BARRINGER 2001: 88.

[64] Other examples of the Maltese in pederastic contexts include BA 203815\*, ARV2 362.24 Berlin, Antikensammlung F2178 and BA 214094\*, ARV2 1005.4, London, British Museum E 315.

[65] LISSARRAGUE 1999: 367.

[66] These dog shaped plastic vases seem to have been very popular: there are five in existence by the Brygos Painter alone.

[67] This phenomenon seems to have been first noticed by John Boardman: BOARDMAN 1976: 288. The "otherness" of these identities has been documented by François Lissarrague: LISSARRAGUE 1995: 6. Also: EBBINGHAUS 2008: 147-153.



Figure 8

Plastic Athenian red-figure cup in the shape of a hunting dog's head, c. 480 B.C. Attributed to the Manner of the Brygos Painter. BA 9998\*, Aléria, Musée Archéologique 67.467, 2170A. © Wikimedia Commons.

might laugh, imagining the reference to *erastai*, or perhaps the more puerile references to male genitalia [68]. With the drinker masked as a dog, the other symposiasts are cast in the role of the hunted, the *erômenos*. This may also invert the status of some of the party-goers, causing a comic role reversal.

The rim of this cup is decorated with three symposiasts, reclining, drinking, and playing music. These images are self-referential, linking the context for the use of the cup with the cup itself. The symposiast with the barbiton lyre looks out at the viewer with a frontal face (fig. 9). This may indicate that he is intoxicated, or otherwise in an altered state [69]. The mask-like appearance of this symposiast also relates to the function of the cup, mirroring the use of the dog face as a mask, and the altered states it represents. Literary sources offer several connections between drunkenness and dogs: "A gentle man who gets enraged when drunk" may be compared to "λυσσομανές τι κακόν", which alludes to a rabid dog" [70]. In Aristophanes' *Wasps*, during the trial of the dog, an anecdote about a drunken dog is presented: "One night Aesop was going out to supper. A drunken bitch had the impudence to bark near him." (Αἴσωπον ἀπὸ δείπνου βαδίζονθ' ἐσπέρας θρασεῖα καὶ μεθύση τις ύλάκτει κύων) [71]. The word "dog" is used here as a term of abuse, indicating sexual shamelessness [72]. These connections among dogs, drunkenness, and unrestrained sexuality are not unrelated to this style of drinking cup, for before one can make use of the mask function, all the wine must be drained from the cup, making the



Figure 9

A symposiast reclines while playing a lyre. Detail of rim of Fig. 8. © Wikimedia Commons.

drinker a canine gluttonous drunk [73]. But humor and pathos come into play when we notice the manner in which the dog is depicted: he is the ideal Laconian hunting hound, but is shown with ears drawn back and a mournful expression, just another love-struck dog-eyed *erastēs* watching a young athlete with wistful longing. He has become a sycophantic tail-wagger, hopeful for some boy's attention [74].

A cup by the Triptolemos Painter with young men and dogs on the exterior has an intriguing and rare interior tondo (fig. 10). It depicts a nude boy, identified as an athlete in training by his sponge, aryballos, and strigil hanging in the background. He holds a walking stick in his right hand, and touches the back of a dog with his left. The dog is energetically biting his upper thigh. The boy wears a red fillet and his infibulated penis is central to the composition. His *ioulos* facial hair marks him as of a particularly desirable age [75]. Although

[68] See above, on the term κύνοδεσμε, which equates the penis with "dog". This humorous ambiguity is also found in literature. LILJA 1976: 123.

[69] KORSHAK 1987.

[70] LILJA 1976: 120-121. Kallios, IV, 11, 232, translated by PATON 1916.

[71] *Wasps*, 1401-1402. Transl. O'Neill.

[72] LILJA 1976: 75.

[73] "Dog gluttons" are also mentioned in Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 923.

[74] Pindar, in *Pythian* 2, 82-84 directly contrasts the sycophantic "tail-wagger" σαινών, to the brave wolf.

[75] FERRARI 2002: 134-136.



◀ Figure 10

A dog violently bites the thigh of a young athlete while defecating.

Interior tondo of an Athenian red-figure kylix, c. 480 B.C.  
Attributed to the Triptolemos Painter.

Interior. BA 8843\*, last confirmed seen on the New York art market, Sotheby's, 1990. Image courtesy of Sotheby's (*Sotheby's, The Nelson Bunker Hunt Collection: Highly Important Greek Vases and the William Herbert Hunt Collection: Highly Important Greek, Roman and Etruscan Bronzes, New York, 19.6.1990* (New York, 1990): Lot 11. *Sotheby's, The Nelson Bunker Hunt Collection: Highly Important Greek Vases and the William Herbert Hunt Collection: Highly Important Greek, Roman and Etruscan Bronzes, New York, 19.6.1990* (New York, 1990): Lot 11).



◀ Figure 11

A well-behaved dog demonstrates the importance of reciprocal affection.

Exterior of fig. 10. Image courtesy of Sotheby's.

the dog bites into him vigorously, even appearing to have drawn blood, the boy seems unperturbed. His reaching towards the dog could be read either as mild restraint or a simple stroking gesture. This strange scene is exceptional in the corpus of extant Greek pottery.

The scenes on this remarkable cup have been interpreted as a "dog training school", with some even going so far as to suggest that they reflect a progression in training: the dog on the interior is in the beginning stages of his training, and on the exterior, the same dog has become successfully trained (fig. 11) [76]. It seems clear, however, that the scenes are humorous metaphors involving the complex relationship between a pursuing *erastēs* and reluctant *erōmenos*. If we accept that the dog is often a stand-in metaphor for the *erastēs* himself, in the complicated image and word play of the symposium, then we can read these scenes very differently.

One of the comedic aspects of the tondo is the contrast between the calm, restrained athlete and ravaging dog, which is highlighted by his penis ligature, or κυνόδεσμος, literally "dog leash". This so-called "infibulation" was an important practice for athletes, not as any kind of protection for the genitals, but rather as a marker of sexual abstinence during training [77]. The containment of desire had far-reaching implications for the ideal citizen in the classical period, as Winkler, among others, has shown [78]. The consummate citizen would be the master of self-control. If not, one was on a slippery slope to being labeled

[76] This was argued in the Sotheby's catalogue: *The Nelson Bunker Hunt Collection*, New York, 19.6. 1990. But I agree with Seth Pevnick that a narrative progression is not necessary. PEVNICK 2014: 156.

[77] SWEET 1985: 48.

[78] WINKLER 1990: 57 and *passim*.

a κίναιδος, or a licentious, profligate man. Scanlon's thorough and erudite study examines the textual evidence for sexual abstinence as a historical practice. He concludes that it was "widespread as early as the fifth century B.C. and inspired philosophers and others to cite such athletes as models of self-control" [79]. For the athletes and their spectators, the practical effect of this idea was that the activities of the athlete in training were further erotically charged. As Golden puts it, "if the abstinence reportedly observed by some athletes during their preparations for competition was widespread", then "the place of sex among the pleasures of a carousing victor must have been especially prominent" [80]. The symposium would be the primary locus for this, as symposia often followed athletic games, and were frequently held to honor a victor, like the one Xenophon describes.

With the practice of infibulation indicating sexual abstinence and restraint, and being expressed provocatively in Greek as κυνόδεσμος, the dog in the scene being held by the boy may signify something more than merely a dog-training session. It is possible that the scene represents the power and control the *erômenos* has over the sexual relationship. His ligatured foreskin (leashed dog) may be the metaphor that is the punch line of the scene, for while he is the picture of *sôphrosunê*, the dog (*erastês*) needs to be put on a leash! [81] With the young athlete signaling his sexual unavailability during training, and the dog ravaging the top of his thigh – the very location of intercrural sex – this is an inversion of the more typical scenes of letting the dog lick scraps from the strigil [82]. This dog-cum-*erastês* is not content with small favours and has indeed become a "κύων λυσοτηρί�", a wolfish, rabid, mad dog [83].

But though he is bleeding, the boy seems unmoved. If this scene is meant literally, then this a non-realistic reaction is puzzling. In fact, however, it demonstrates the ideal *erômenos*: completely in control, prioritizing his athletic training and education by adhering to

the ideal of sexual abstinence, but also rejecting the aggressive advances of *erastai* with kindness. The interplay of power and control between *erastês* and *erômenos* is often fodder for iconography, and here there is a definite reversal of the usual position of the helpless hare, unavoidably running into the trap of the skillful hunter. Here instead, we see an unsuccessful hunter who has completely lost control.

The dog even appears to be defecating as he ravages the boy's thigh, adding yet another level of shamefulness [84]. Depictions of symposiasts relieving themselves, elsewhere in the corpus of Greek pottery, seem to suggest the dangers of drinking to excess, as a comic warning to those partaking from the vessels on which they are shown [85]. One cup in Boston depicts a symposiast wiping himself after relieving himself, comically placed on the inside of the cup, as a warning after the fact not to overindulge [86]. Another cup in Brussels shows a boy of ideal *erômenos* age on another interior cup tondo, squatting and both urinating and defecating [87]. Some of these images also combine lack of sexual control with the other bodily functions. Such behaviors are associated with dogs, since they will transgress the taboos of coprophilia as well as being intemperate enough to mate in public [88]. A black-figure cup in Boston by the Amasis Painter makes this connection very clear: the exterior of the kylix shows two bearded men, vigorously masturbating, while under the handles next to each man's head, is a squatting dog defecating [89]. The actions of the *erastês*-age men and the hound dogs are bound together in their shamelessness. These comparanda attest to the meaning proposed here: that the dog biting the thigh of the youth is a metonym for the sexually intemperate, shamelessly drunk, untoward *erastês*. It is a humorous portrait of how not to behave when approaching a young man.

The exterior of the same cup shows a gymnasium scene with boys at various stages of grooming: one getting dressed in a cloak with a woven design on the

[79] SCANLON 2002: 230.

[80] GOLDEN 1998: 75.

[81] This was independently noticed by Pevnick: "the painter has created a visual pun in which the unleashed dog attacks the 'leashed' youth". PEVNICK 2014: 156.

[82] For the importance of the eroticization of the thigh, see PARKER 2015: 31-54.

[83] For a discussion of actual biting dogs, see CALDER 2011: 70-71.

[84] Pevnick calls this combination of violence and "simultaneous defecation" "unparalleled". PEVNICK 2014: 156. In his discussion of defecating dogs, Pevnick is convinced that they are comic in black-figure (p. 157), but seems unconvinced of the humor on the Triptolemos Painter cup (p. 158).

[85] SCHÄFER 1997: 56-7. Also see Plato, *Gorgias* 494B, which compares the life of a bird that excretes excessively with that of a sexually intemperate κίναιδος.

[86] BA 201586\*, ARV2 174.22, Boston, MA, Museum of Fine Arts 08.31B. This image adds further humour by also showing the man with a limp, comically large penis.

[87] BA 201545\*, ARV2 169.7, Brussels, Musées Royaux R259. MITCHELL 2009: 90-91

[88] FRANCO 2014: 14, 191. Henderson notes that scatophagous humor can refer to anal intercourse in Greek comedy. HENDERSON 1991: 192.

[89] BA 310515\*. ABV 157.86, Boston, MA, Museum of Fine Arts 10.651. MITCHELL 2009: 44.

edge, another with an aryballos strapped to his arm, and another with a strigil. The other side shows two boys with walking sticks, again clearly in a gymnasium, as there is a grooming kit and strigil in the background. They are interacting with a well-behaving hunting dog, who stands with elegant posture and offers a paw to the boy on the right. There is a definite contrast with the dog depicted on the interior. Seen in a metaphorical sense, it may be read as humorous dating advice: how to seduce a *erômenos*. If these dogs represent the *erastês* as the wolf, to whom the *erômenos* is a lamb, then these scenes are a witty take on the power struggles of the pederastic relationship. While the *erastês* introduces the *erômenos* into Athenian society, and guides him in the practices of citizenry, the images on this cup show a comedic reversal of the educational relationship. In these scenes, the boys tame and train the wayward dogs, alluding to the ideal of the *erômenos*' self-restraint in the courting stage of the pederastic relationship [90]. The potential *erômenos* was expected to withhold his affections from the *erastês*, and tame his over-arduous gestures. The metaphor of the *erastês*-as-dog allows the pot painter to create humorous scenarios that play with and subvert these cultural ideals. Here, the *erômenos* is shown as the powerful member of the relationship, the *erastês* is reduced to a slobbering, "gaping wolf" (*λύκος κεχηνώσ*).

This study demonstrates a few of the many ways in which the image of the dog can be used for humorous effect on symposium pottery. The visual pun of the *erastês* metonymically depicted as a dog lends itself to multiple comedic uses. There is role-reversal, mocking, sexual and scatological humor, as well as irony. The setting of gymnasium in which many of these scenes occur is ideal for what Mitchell calls "situation comedy", since the open competition for young men's attentions could lead to tension [91]. Considering these images were employed during the symposium, where the erotically agonistic atmosphere continued, the images could provide a locus of discussion and laughter. Personal connections to the images could be drawn, or alternatively, the imagery could be used as a deflection from social pressures. The dog, as a figure of both invective and affection, along with its associations with both danger and ribald humor, provided additional entertainment and meaning to the sympotic iconography of the late archaic and early classical periods. ■

[90] The message here, is not unlike the ideals put forth in Phaedrus' speech in Plato's *Symposium* 178b-180c, in which he suggests that the desire to avoid looking shameful to one's beloved is a force that holds everyone in society accountable.

[91] MITCHELL 2009: 35. For mocking and sexual rivalry, see HALLIWELL 1991: 286.

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## WHORING, GAPPING AND HIDING MEAT: THE HUMOUR OF MALE-ON-MALE SEXUAL INSULTS IN ARISTOPHANES' KNIGHTS

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### ABSTRACT

This article looks at the obscene and scurrilous humour of Aristophanes' *Knights* with a view to examining how its main protagonists are characterized sexually. Through an examination of how the Sausage-Seller and Paphlagon are presented in terms of both sexual insertiveness and receptiveness – both anal and oral – I seek to challenge views of the play which cast Paphlagon as the more sexually aggressive of the two. Rather, the contention of the article is that the Sausage-Seller's aggression is expressed both through the direct nature of his sexual threats and the shameless ways in which he flaunts his whorishness and oral and anal receptiveness. In contrast, Paphlagon-Cleon's sexual character largely emerges through metaphors, allegations, innuendos and jokes made at his expense.

### KEYWORDS

Aristophanes,  
*Knights*,  
obscenity,  
humour,  
jokes,  
homoeroticism/"homosexuality",  
penetration,  
insertiveness,  
receptiveness,  
prostitution,  
Henderson.

Cet article propose une étude de l'humour obscène et grossier des *Cavaliers* d'Aristophane et une analyse de la façon dont les personnages principaux sont caractérisés du point de vue de leurs pratiques sexuelles. En examinant la façon dont Aristophane présente le Marchand de saucisses et le Paphlagonien en termes de sexualité insertive et réceptive – à la fois anale et orale – je souhaite remettre en question l'interprétation de la pièce qui fait du Paphlagonien le personnage le plus agressif sexuellement des deux. Cet article montre en effet que l'agressivité du Marchand de saucisses est visible à la fois par le caractère direct de ses menaces sexuelles et l'indécence avec laquelle il exhibe son plaisir à vendre son corps et à se laisser pénétrer par l'anus et la bouche. Dans le cas du Paphlagonien/Cléon, en revanche, le spectateur n'entrevoit sa dimension sexuelle qu'à travers des métaphores, des accusations, des sous-entendus et des plaisanteries faites à ses dépens.

### MOTS-CLÉS

Aristophane,  
*Cavaliers*,  
obscénité,  
rire,  
plaisanteries,  
homoérotisme / « homosexualité »,  
pénétration,  
insertivité,  
réceptivité,  
prostitution,  
Henderson.

Article accepté après évaluation par deux experts selon le principe du double anonymat

If we are to believe the claims made by Aristophanes, *Knights* broke important new ground in the genre of Old Comedy when it was staged at the Lenaean Games in 424 BCE [1]. In the *parabasis* of *Clouds* (first produced the following year, 423 BCE, but subsequently revised between 418 and 416 BCE), the chorus makes a series of assertions about the innovative nature of *Knights*, elements of which, they say – most prominently its sustained attack on a single political figure – have since been shamelessly copied by other comic playwrights such as Eupolis and Hermippus [2]. Whatever the status of these claims about originality and plagiarism, certainly *Knights'* relentlessly hostile focus on Paphlagon – a thinly veiled caricature of Cleon, Aristophanes' favourite comic target in the 420s – is unique in our surviving plays [3]. Unappealing elements of this Paphlagonian slave's character continue to be revealed throughout the play, much of the action of which is taken up with a contest (or, rather, a series of contests) between Paphlagon-Cleon, the current “leader” of Athens, and a new

pretender to this title, the Sausage-Seller [4]. The competition between the two men at times amounts to a struggle to prove which man is the better friend (*φίλος*) and lover (*έραστής*) of Paphlagon's master, Demos (i.e. ‘The People’ of Athens) [5]. But at other times it is a race to the bottom [6], the conceit being that “the leadership of the people is no longer a job for an educated man or one of good qualities, but for one who's ignorant and foul” [7]. *Knights* is thus a play of pandering, wheedling and flattering on the part of Paphlagon and the Sausage-Seller as they vie to prove their dedication to Demos. But it is also a play of shameless deeds, scurrilous allegations and scandalous admissions, many of which involve the sexual realm.

A further unique feature of *Knights* is the male-on-male orientation of the play's sexual humour. This is a fact already noted by Henderson in his analysis of the obscene language of *Knights* in *The Maculate Muse*, where he suggests that the prevalence of “homosexual and scatological” obscenities is intimately connected to the “attack and exposure”

[1] Thanks are due to Sandra Boehringer and the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful corrections and insightful suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper.

[2] Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 553-559. Note that the pillorying of political figures was unknown in Old Comedy before 424 BCE, of course. Pericles was famously the butt of humour in a number of Cratinus' plays, for example, though his attacks plausibly took a somewhat different form from the sustained *ad hominem* attack on Cleon in *Knights*: see STOREY 2011a: 236.

[3] While claims to innovation and disparagement of rivals are something of a commonplace in Old Comedy (see, esp., WRIGHT 2012: 70-99), Aristophanes' central point may well be valid here, namely that he innovated in making a single politician the central target of a play's attack. The first example of such a comedy by another poet seems to be Eupolis' *Maricas* (staged in 421 BCE: see STOREY 2011b: 148-151), which is singled out as derivative of *Knights* at *Clouds*, 554. As CASSIO 1985: 38, and STOREY 2011b: 150, both note, the surviving fragments of this play suggest various parallels with *Knights*, not least the casting of a politician, Hyperbolus, in the role of a foreign slave (cf. SOMMERSTEIN 1982,

*ad loc.* on *Clouds*, 554). It is noteworthy that Eupolis appears to have responded to Aristophanes' allegations of plagiarism by claiming to have played a role in the composition of *Knights* (fr. 89), although this may simply amount to a counter-claim that Aristophanes plagiarized him (thus SOMMERSTEIN 1980: 51-53). On the rivalry between Aristophanes and Cleon, see LAFARGUE 2013: 21-26.

[4] As outlined by BROCK 1986, who also articulates a number of the play's inconsistencies and paradoxes, e.g. discrepancies in the characterization of both the Sausage-Seller and Demos, and the “grand alliance” (21) between the base Sausage-Seller and the noble Knights.

[5] SCHOLTZ 2004 and YATES 2005. At *Knights*, 42, this character is explicitly referred to as “Demos of the Pnyx”, i.e. “The People” of Athens as constituted as a political body at the city's Assembly.

[6] Or as SILK 2000: 336, puts it, an “extravagant exercise in competitive odiousness”.

[7] Aristophanes, *Knights*: 191-192. Translations from *Knights* are those of SOMMERSTEIN 1981: the Greek text of his edition is also used throughout.

of Paphlagon-Cleon (as well as the Sausage-Seller) [8]. Henderson further states that, when it comes to obscenity, *Knights* is almost devoid of what he terms “heterosexual language” since, unlike so many other Aristophanic plays, it fails to “celebrate peace and unfettered fertility” [9]. In contrast to “heterosexual” (i.e. heteroerotic) obscenity, then, which can be employed in Aristophanes’ plays not only for the purposes of attack and deflation but also to promote a buoyant and celebratory mood, “homosexual” (i.e. homoerotic) obscenities find a narrower, characteristically “negative” set of uses [10]. And in *Knights* this includes adding an element of spice and bite to a number of the play’s scurrilous jokes.

In this article I do not seek to challenge Henderson’s basic premise that male-on-male obscenities – and the sexual humour they help to create – are overwhelmingly used with a hostile force in *Knights*: that much seems indisputable. Rather, I aim to examine a further claim of Henderson’s, namely that while Paphlagon-Cleon is presented as someone who plays both the receptive and insertive role in male-on-male sex – “as both pathic and *paedicator*, the aggressor in homosexual contact” – the Sausage-Seller is presented as playing only the receptive role and as sexually unaggressive (“he is not an aggressor like Cleon; he is not a *paedicator*”) [11]. Henderson’s reading of the play is certainly engaging, casting as it does both men in the role of willing “bottoms” in the city, but Paphlagon alone – in his capacity as an aggressive “top” – in the role of a sexual and social manipulator. Yet we might note here that Henderson’s reading unquestioningly equates anal insertiveness with both sexual assertiveness and political power and, furthermore, risks making Paphlagon the “winner” of a contest which he in fact loses [12]. Nor does Henderson’s reading do full justice to the evidence, I suggest. For example, it relies heavily

on what is arguably a tendentious interpretation of a short exchange between Paphlagon and the Sausage-Seller (*Knights*, 962–964), and also fails to take into account the fact that the Sausage-Seller, too, is capable of threatening his rival with anal penetration.

In the discussion that follows, I shall take a fresh look at the obscene and scurrilous humour of the play with a view to re-visiting the question of how its main protagonists are characterized sexually. In my analysis I will examine the ways in which the Sausage-Seller and Paphlagon are presented first in terms of sexual receptiveness (i.e. as penetrated), then in terms of sexual insertiveness (i.e. as penetrators) – both anally and orally – in a series of risqué jokes. To anticipate my conclusions, this discussion will indeed show differences in the ways in which Paphlagon and Sausage-Seller are aligned with sexual receptiveness and insertiveness. But the key distinction between the two rivals, I suggest, is that the Sausage-Seller is more prone to making outrageous threats and shameful admissions than his rival, whereas Paphlagon-Cleon’s sexual character largely emerges through metaphors, allegations, innuendos and jokes made at his expense.

## THE PENETRATING HUMOUR OF KNIGHTS

As has long been recognized, *Knights* forms part of a rich tradition of texts from Classical Athens that contain sexual insults aimed at politicians, portraying them as former prostitutes and/or as playing the receptive role in homoerotic sexual acts [13]. But in the comic world of *Knights*, where the two central figures compete in baseness, we find not just slurs against political opponents, but also frank admissions of wrongdoing – such as Sausage-Seller’s open confession towards the end of the play to having prostituted himself in his youth.

[8] HENDERSON 1991: 67. For an overview of the uses of the nature and function of obscene expression in Aristophanes, see HENDERSON 1991: 30–107, and ROBSON 2009: 120–140.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.* In this article I avoid using the terms “homosexual” and “heterosexual” (except in quotations) since, as many scholars have been at pains to point out, these are essentially modern categories which map poorly on to ancient conceptions of sexual behaviour: see, e.g. FOUCAULT 1985: 3–6 and 187–193, HALPERIN 1990: 15–40, WINKLER 1990: 4, and WILLIAMS 1999: 4–9.

[11] HENDERSON 1991: 68, followed by SCHOLTZ 2004: 264.

[12] Henderson is thus something of a “social constructionist” *avant la lettre* in the vein of HALPERIN 1990 and WINKLER 1990 (as, indeed, is DOVER 2016 [1978]: 100–109, “dominant and subordinate roles”). For a brief overview of social constructionism (with its “penetration = power” model) and its critics, see MASTERTON & ROBSON 2016: 17–20.

[13] HEATH 1997: 232–233, usefully maps a fuller set of parallels between the “unpleasant characteristics” attributed to Paphlagon-Cleon in *Knights* and those ascribed to statesmen such as Demosthenes by their opponents in fourth-century oratory, which include sexual depravity.

Sommerstein translates:

Paphlagon: When you were approaching manhood, what trade did you practise?

Sausage-Seller: I sold sausages ... and also sometimes sold myself (*βινεσκόμην*: lit. "I was fucked"). [14]

This is hardly the first time in *Knights* that we have had hints of the Sausage-Seller's capacity for anal receptiveness, however. Most prominently, there is a lengthy humorous sequence earlier in the play where the Sausage-Seller reports some of his shameless youthful exploits.

Sausage-Seller: And, oh yeah, there are other pranks of mine, when I was a boy. I used to trick the butchers by saying this sort of thing: "Look, boys, don't you see? The new season; a swallow!" And they'd look up, and in the meantime I'd steal some of their meat (*κρέας*) ... And nobody saw me doing it. But if ever any of them did, I'd hide the stuff up my crutch (*τὰ κοχώνα*) and swear innocence by the gods. So that one of the politicians said, when he saw me doing that, "It's certain as certain can be that this boy will one day hold the stewardship of the people".

Demosthenes: He guessed well. But it's obvious what led him to that conclusion: the fact that you perjured yourself after committing a robbery, and that you had someone's meat (*κρέας*) up your arse (*πρωκτός*). [15]

One of the noteworthy features of this passage is the way in which the slave, Demosthenes [16], immediately presents a potted summary of the joke, simultaneously extending the humorous moment (with the help, we note, of a climactic obscenity: *πρωκτός*) whilst also "explaining" the joke for anyone in the audience who failed to get it the first time. An indication of the joke's thematic importance in the play – and also, perhaps, of the fact that Aristophanes was particularly proud of it

– is that it is mentioned again just a few lines later (482-484).

A further joke that underscores the Sausage-Seller's anal receptiveness is his much-quoted retort to Paphlagon's boastful claim to have Demos/The People of Athens in his sway. Using an otherwise unattested – but perhaps proverbial – expression [17], Paphlagon brags:

Paphlagon: And what is more, by Zeus, with my wizardry I can make Demos expand and contract at my pleasure. [18]

To which his adversary replies:

Sausage-Seller: Even my arsehole (*πρωκτός*) knows that trick. [19]

Anal receptiveness may not be explicit in this joke, but mention of the Sausage-Seller's anus is nevertheless suggestive, with the process of expansion and contraction plausibly evoking anal intercourse. Indeed, the line might even be understood as the vulgar boast of a male prostitute – a claim that, with the control he has over his sphincter muscle, he can more easily accommodate and all the better satisfy his clients [20].

One final joke to mention in connection with the Sausage-Seller's anal receptiveness comes from the prologue of the play. The slave, Demosthenes, has just hailed the Sausage-Seller as a new saviour for the city (*σωτήρ*: 149), and outlines for him the potential benefits that power will bring. At the end of the list, we find a typically Aristophanic example of humour relying on a surprise, obscene item.

Demosthenes: Do you see all the serried ranks of this assembled host? [meaning the audience]

Sausage-Seller: Yes.

Demosthenes: Of all these you shall be the paramount chief (*ἀρχέλας*), chief too of the market, the harbours and the Pnyx. You'll trample on Council and trim back the generals; you'll chain, you'll imprison, you'll ... suck cocks (*λαϊκάσεις*) in the Prytaneum.

(*Knights*, 163-167)

This joke once again links the Sausage-seller to receptive sexual acts – this time oral rather than anal. But, of course, these lines do not only serve to cast the Sausage-Seller as a potential fellator. Implicit here is the notion that the current "chief" of Athens, Paphlagon, engages in this practice, too.

[14] *Knights*, 1242-1243.

[15] *Knights*, 417-428.

[16] Neither slave is named in the text, but they are traditionally identified as Demosthenes and Nicias (see, e.g., SOMMERSTEIN 1981: 3).

[17] Thus SOMMERSTEIN 1981 *ad loc.*

[18] *Knights*, 719-720.

[19] *Knights*, 721.

[20] Cf. Paphlagon's "gaping" anus: see below.

So much for the Sausage-Seller's oral and anal receptiveness: this would-be "leader" of Athens is a self-confessed prostitute who has previously hidden meat up his crutch, boasts about his ability to control his anal sphincter muscle and whose future leadership of Athens will potentially see him orally service Athens' Prytaneis. But what of Athens' current "leader"? Paphlagon may not confess to being sexually penetrated as openly as the Sausage-Seller, but he is nevertheless regularly associated with anal receptiveness. For instance, Paphlagon's "arse" (*πρωκτός*) is mentioned twice in connection with the play's theme of "gaping" (a concept which evokes the open-mouthed gullibility of the common people of Athens as well as the propensity of the city's leaders to play the receptive role in anal sex) [21]. The first example of this comes at line 78 during Demosthenes' brief portrait of the mighty and all-seeing Paphlagon. Here a weak pun on "Chaonians" (a tribe living in the region of Epirus) is employed in order to evoke the idea of *χάος*, "a gaping void" (cf. *χάσκω*, "to gape") [22]. Sommerstein translates:

Demosthenes: But there's nothing can elude Paphlagon's eyes. That man watches over everything. He stands with one leg in Pylos and the other in the Assembly, with his feet this far apart; so that his arse (*πρωκτός*) is right in Chasmos (*ἐν Χάοσιν*), his hands in Extortia, and his mind in Larcenadae. [23]

The physical nature of this description, including the reference to Paphlagon's feet being "this far apart", would presumably have been accompanied by some stage business on the part of the actor playing Demosthenes, thus further underscoring the notion of Paphlagon's anal receptiveness and his chasm-like anus.

[21] Both senses are no doubt drawn on at *Knights*: 1262-1263, where Sausage-Seller tells Demos that "you will agree you've never seen a man who was a better friend than me to the city of the ... Open-Mouthenians (*Κεχηναίων*)": the suggestion is that the Sausage-Seller's "gaping" arse demonstrates his solidarity with the "open-mouthed" Athenians. See also WOHL 2002: 80-92 and WORMAN 2015, who discusses the ways in which "sex at the ass end, talk and the feminine" (225) regularly coalesce both in Old Comic abuse and in the negative characterization of individuals in oratory. Crucially, WORMAN 2015 sees male-on-male sexual insults aimed at political figures primarily as metaphors "invoked to mock pandering, among other things, in male arenas such as the Assembly and the Prytaneum".

[22] Aristophanes also puns on *ἐν Αἰτωλοῖς* ("amongst the Aetolians"), cf. *αἰτέω*, "ask for, demand, beg", and *ἐν*

The references to gaping continue. Later in the play, Paphlagon is spoken of as a pig undergoing inspection – but rather than his open mouth, it is his "gaping" (*κεχήνοτος*) anus that Demosthenes imagines examining.

Demosthenes: And, by Zeus, we'll shove a peg in his mouth as the butchers do, then pull out his tongue and take a good and proper look at him, there with his gaping ... arse (*πρωκτός*), to see if he's measly. [24]

A further joke at 876-880 sees Paphlagon boasting of eliminating "buggers" (*βινούμενοι*) from Athens' citizen rolls – an act that the Sausage-Seller immediately characterizes as "arse snooping" (*πρωκτοτηρεῖν*) undertaken for the purpose of banishing future rivals. The conceit here – namely that the city's leaders are characteristically drawn from the ranks of those who have a history of anal receptiveness (either as prostitutes and/or as *erōmenoi*) – would further suggest, of course, that Paphlagon, too, is a "bugger".

Here we are once again in the realm of jokes made at Paphlagon's expense, but there is also at least one moment in the play where Paphlagon might be said to characterize himself as a prostitute. When emphasizing his good service to the city in a prayer to Athena which opens the "Assembly" section of the rivals' competition, Paphlagon aligns himself not just with the dead politician and general Lysicles, but also with two of Athens' most famous courtesans [25].

Paphlagon: I pray to our Lady Athena, sovereign of the city, that if I have been the worthiest of all servants of the Athenian people (next to Lysicles, Cynna and Salabaccho) ... [26]

Kλωπιδῶν ("in Clopidae": a small settlement in Attica), cf. κλώψ, "thief". See also ROSEN 1988: 66.

[23] *Knights*, 74-79.

[24] *Knights*, 375-381.

[25] Cynna (*Κύννα*) is a name used elsewhere by Aristophanes to refer to Cleon (*Wasps*, 1032 = *Peace*, 755). While possibly conjuring up the politician's own name (*Κλέων*), it also plays on Cleon's self-definition as "watchdog of the people" (*κύων*, "dog": cf. *Wasps*, 893-1008) as well as evoking the Dog Star with its supposedly harmful rays (see SOMMERSTEIN 1983 on *Wasps*: 1032 *ad loc.* and AUSTIN & OLSON 2004 on *Peace*, 755 *ad loc.*). Salabaccho's name is also mentioned at *Thesmophoriazusae*: 805, where she is briefly compared to the politician Cleophon.

[26] *Knights*, 763-765.

These lines hardly amount to a direct admission of involvement in prostitution to rival that of the Sausage-Seller, however. Rather, what we have here is an example of an Aristophanic joke technique whereby characters undercut or incriminate themselves in something resembling a comic aside [27]. In short, while Paphlagon is regularly associated with anal receptiveness (as well as a “gaping” πρωκτός), this is done through a series of jokes, smears and a casual aside. When it comes to brazen admissions of anal (and oral) receptiveness, the Sausage-Seller beats Paphlagon hands down [28].

But what about Paphlagon as penetrator as well as penetrated? Henderson’s reading of the play puts Paphlagon’s capacity for aggressive, sexual penetration at its heart, equating it with his domination of Athens; or put simply, Paphlagon is “an oppressor (bugger) of the people” [29] (compare the seemingly domineering, ithyphallic individual in **fig.1**). Certainly there is plenty of material in the play to support the idea of Paphlagon as a domineering force who harasses his political opponents, subjugates Demos and keeps the people of Athens under his thumb [30]. But, importantly, when it comes to anal sex, there are at best a handful of places where Paphlagon is clearly cast in an insertive role [31].

At the heart of Henderson’s analysis is his reading of a brief exchange between Paphlagon and the Sausage-Seller. This comes at the point in the play when the two are about to cite oracles in support of their respective claims to be Athens’ rightful leader – as a prelude to which, each man warns Demos of the consequences of trusting the other.

Paphlagon: Huh! If you believe him, you’re destined to end up as a leather bottle (μολγός).

Sausage-Seller: And if you believe him, you’re destined to end up with a cock skinned back to the root (ψωλός ... μέχρι τοῦ μυρρίνου). [32]

What do these references to a “leather bottle” and foreskinless penis (ψωλός) signify? Unlike Henderson, the play’s most recent commentator, Sommerstein, does not appear to see any sexual symbolism in μολγός. Rather, he equates the leather bottle with being “flayed alive” (a punishment that a tanner such as Paphlagon-Cleon is well positioned to inflict, of course), while also detecting (most appropriately, given the context) “an allusion to two famous oracles (Plutarch, *Life of Theseus* 24.5) comparing Athens to a skin bottle floating in the sea” – an allusion which appears to



Figure 1

The Eurymedon vase: a red-figure oenochoe, attributed to the circle of the Triptolemos painter; Attica, c.460 BCE. A man, naked except for a short cloak, holds his erect penis in his right hand and approaches a Persian archer who is bent at the hips and looks out towards the viewer. The wording on the vase reads Εύρυμέδον εἰμ[ι] κυβα[] ἔστεκα, ‘I am Eurymedon, I stand bent over’.

Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg. № inv. 1981.173 (public domain).

[27] DOVER 1973: 59-60.

[28] Or as HENDERSON 1991: 68, puts it: “whereas Cleon never admits the vice of which the other characters accuse him, the Sausage-Seller proudly proclaims it”. It is noteworthy, too, that at the end of the play, Paphlagon is banished to the city gates of Athens, where he is destined to “exchange foul language with the prostitutes” (*Knights*, 1400).

[29] HENDERSON 1991: 68.

[30] Though, of course, as a panderer Cleon subjugates himself to Demos, too. The very first account that Demosthenes gives of Paphlagon in the prologue (*Knights*, 43-72) provides a programmatic summary of a number of his character traits: here we learn that he fawns over his master, takes credit for gifts to Demos that other men have prepared, and makes false accusations and threats against his fellow slaves.

[31] Notwithstanding the fact that Cleon (and the Sausage-Seller) are also cast in the roles of *anterastai*: see Conclusions (below).

[32] *Knights*, 962-964.

recur in three further Aristophanic fragments, too (frs 103 KA (*Farmers*), 308 KA (*Heroes*), and 933 KA (*Dubia*) [33]. As for ψωλός, this is an obscene word denoting a penis with a retracted foreskin, thus indicating either an erect or circumcised male member [34]. Sommerstein understands ψωλός in the second sense here – “a cock skinned back to the root”, glossing the phrase as “an exaggerated expression for ‘circumcised’, this being regarded ... here ... [as] a fate worth than death” [35]. But why should Aristophanes make a connection between Paphlagon and circumcision? Sommerstein offers no explanation, but an answer can be found easily enough, I think. It is a something of a commonplace of political rhetoric in Classical Athens to allege that rivals are of foreign descent [36]. And since circumcision is a characteristically barbarian practice, this reference could therefore plausibly be said to spring from Paphlagon-Cleon’s characterization as a foreigner in *Knights*: a Paphlagonian slave who has usurped citizen status.

Henderson has a different take on these lines. For him, Demos is being warned by each man not to emulate his opponent in case he should come to resemble him both sexually and politically. In the case of the Sausage-Seller this would entail him becoming a μολγός, a flayed “leather bottle”, or as Henderson understands this “well-worn anally”, i.e. sexually penetrated and, by analogy, politically subjugated [37]. But in the case of Paphlagon, the risk is the opposite, namely that Demos would become an extreme version of a ψωλός, “a totally aggressive pederast, all hard-on”, i.e. sexually

and politically domineering. Henderson’s understanding of the exchange is ingenious, to be sure, but it also raises a number of questions, not least whether there is enough differentiation elsewhere in the play between Paphlagon as penetrator and Sausage-Seller as penetrated for this reading to be compelling [38]. And, there is the question, too, as to whether audience members would have caught the allusion to anal penetration in what is a fast moving scene [39]. Certainly, we are a far cry from the repetition and reinforcement of the “hiding the meat” joke that we saw earlier. If Henderson is right the contrast between the Sausage-Seller as an anally receptive μολγός and Paphlagon as a sexually insertive ψωλός is thematically important in *Knights*, it is an allusion that not all of Aristophanes’ audience may have grasped from this exchange.

The only other line in the play that Henderson seems to adduce to support the idea of Paphlagon “violating his victims sexually” is *Knights* 263 [40]. This comes at the end of a passage in which the chorus alleges that Paphlagon uses heavy handed tactics to extort money from individuals. They say to him [41]:

Chorus: ... you eat up the public funds before the lot has fallen on you, and pick off the outgoing magistrates like figs (ἀποσυχάζεις), pressing (πιέζων) them to see which of them is green or ripe or not yet ripe. Yes, and you seek out any private citizen who’s a silly lamb, rich and not wicked and frightened of public affairs, and if

[33] As SOMMERSTEIN 1981 points out, in each of these fragments (as in *Knights*), Aristophanes also chooses the vulgar μολγός over the more standard ἀσκός to denote the bottle.

[34] Instructively, HENDERSON 1991: 110, seems to be of the view that ψωλή/ψωλός and cognates routinely indicate sexual arousal (rather than circumcision). Cf. SOMMERSTEIN 1987 and DUNBAR 1995 on *Birds*, 507 *ad loc.* (an admittedly challenging passage, however, comprising a series of complex puns). At *Wealth*, 267, it certainly seems unlikely that Ploutos is being described as sexually aroused (on which see SOMMERSTEIN 2001 *ad loc.*).

[35] SOMMERSTEIN 1981.

[36] See, e.g. HEATH 1997: 232-3.

[37] HENDERSON 1991: 212, claims that μολγός “was a *Schimpfwort* [insulting term] in comedy similar to καταπύγων” which, as he points out (212, n. 16), the Suda glosses as μοχθηρός (μ 1191)). While I would suggest that neither of the passages he cites to support his understanding of μολγός (frs 308 and 933 KA) requires the word to be read in this light, a sexual meaning is admittedly possible. Henderson’s

interpretation of μολγός is explicitly supported by SCHOLTZ 2004: 273, n. 33.

[38] Indeed, playing devil’s advocate – while still reading these lines in a sexual light – one could also challenge the whole basis of Henderson’s logic here, i.e. that Demos is being warned by each man *not to emulate* his opponent. If each man is instead thought of as warning of the *consequences of his opponent’s victory*, then it is the Sausage-Seller who will potentially turn Demos into a μολγός (by penetrating him) and Paphlagon who will turn him into a ψωλός (by demanding constant penetration).

[39] And also, indeed, whether they would have readily made an equation between these sexual acts and notions of social and political domination and submission. There is, admittedly, always the possibility that stage action was used to bring out some or all of the resonances that Henderson suggests.

[40] HENDERSON 1991: 68.

[41] On the allusion to a citizen living in the Chersonese, see SOMMERSTEIN 1981 *ad loc.*, whose best guess is that Aristophanes has in mind a “merchant, perhaps in the corn trade”.

you discover one of [the citizens] who's a simple (κεχηνότα: lit. "open-mouthed, gaping") fellow minding his own business, you bring him home from the Chersonese, take him round the waist with slanders, hook his leg, then twist back his shoulder and plant your foot on him. [42]

Presumably, Henderson's reading of these lines is largely built on the sexual metaphors involving "figs" and "pressing" which are to be found at the beginning of this choral ode, i.e. the accusation that Paphlagon picks off public officials like figs (ἀποσυχάζεις) and squeezes (πιέζων) them [43]. Indeed, *Knights*, 258-260 can be seen as lending support to Henderson's view of Paphlagon as a sexual aggressor of sorts, since he is arguably being portrayed here – albeit, we note, in metaphorical language – as a man who intimidates public officials sexually and exploits them financially. Whether Henderson is right to read the wrestling imagery at *Knights* 263 in a sexual light is perhaps more of a moot point, however. To be sure, wrestling and sexually imagery are intertwined elsewhere in Aristophanes – in heteroerotic contexts, at least, such as *Acharnians*, 271-275 (where Dicaeopolis imagines sexually assaulting the slave-girl, Thratta) and *Peace*, 894-898 (where Theoria is envisaged as being wrestled and used as a sexual plaything by the city's Council) [44], but at the end of this passage Aristophanes does not appear to be presenting Paphlagon as someone whose physical bullying extends to sexual assault [45].

A further significant passage of *Knights* when it comes to Paphlagon's sexual characterization – one that Henderson curiously overlooks – comes from a feisty exchange earlier in the play. Paphlagon, who has just been deriding the Sausage-Seller's oratorical abilities, goes on to stake his own claim to oratorical prowess. This involves boasting about

his ability to gain influence over his enemies even after engaging in gluttony and drunkenness. In the course of this boast, he uses the unusual verb κασαλβάζω. Sommerstein translates:

Paphlagon: Do you compare any man alive to me? I'll swallow down hot slices of tunny, and then drink a jugful of neat wine to follow, and straight away I'll screw (κασαλβάσω) the generals (τοὺς ... στρατηγούς) at Pylos. [46]

Quite what κασαλβάζω signifies is not straightforward to determine – and, indeed, may not have been immediately clear to Aristophanes' audience, either [47]. It is cognate with nouns such as κασαλβάς, "prostitute" and κασαυρεῖον, "brothel" [48], the only other occurrence of this verb coming in a fragment of the comic poet Hermippus (iambic fr. 5) [49] where it seems simply to evoke the idea of "acting like a prostitute" – or as LSJ [50] quaintly puts it "behave like a strumpet". So might the use of this verb in *Knights* similarly suggest whorish behaviour on the part of Paphlagon: that is to say, sexual licentiousness to match the extraordinary greed and over-indulgence that he brags about in respect of food and wine? [51] Maybe. But this reading does present some challenges. First, is the problem of accommodating the accusative, τοὺς ... στρατηγούς ("behave whorishly in respect of the generals"?). And second, is that the context demands the added idea of gaining influence or control (perhaps possible if, by "behaving whorishly", Paphlagon is to be thought of as having the generals in his thrall, e.g. as satisfied or infatuated clients?). But there is also an alternative way to understand this verb. LSJ suggests a separate meaning for *Knights*, 355 which accommodates

[42] *Knights*, 259-263.

[43] On ἀποσυχάζω as a sexual metaphor, see TAILLARDAT 1965: 76, and HENDERSON 1991: 117-118. On πιέζω, see HENDERSON 1991: 176. In his discussion of these lines, ROSEN 1988: 68, takes the view that there is "little doubt that the poet's intention was to elicit admiration for his clever obscenity rather than serious outrage at Cleon in particular."

[44] See GARCÍA ROMERO 1995, esp. : 67-73, and ROBSON 2015: 317-322.

[45] Wrestling imagery is used (in a non-sexual way) elsewhere in the play, too, e.g. *Knights*, 387-388 and 490-492.

[46] *Knights*, 353-355.

[47] While this verb may have been in common usage,

its scarcity in surviving literature (only two occurrences; both in comedy) suggests otherwise and plausibly marks it out as a comic coinage. The fact that LSJ provides two competing definitions for κασαλβάζω (one for each occurrence) might further imply that its meaning is malleable and/or not wholly fixed.

[48] Thus providing a further association between Paphlagon and prostitution (on which see WOHL 2002: 90). See also HENDERSON 1991: 212-213, who suggests a possible connection between these cognates and κασῆς, "skin" or "hide" (cf. Latin *scortum*).

[49] Quoted by the scholiast to Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 1164.

[50] LIDDELL & SCOTT 1996.

[51] NEIL 1901 *ad loc.* comments that the quantities of food and drink mentioned are "Gargantuan".

the use of a direct object with the verb – the equally quaint “abuse … in strumpet fashion” – which renders a sense closer to Sommerstein’s “screw” (“treat the generals like whores”?) [52]. If LSJ is right, then we can finally lay claim to an instance of Paphlagon boasting about his capacity to act as a sexual penetrator [53].

So much for Paphlagon-Cleon as a sexual penetrator: what about his rival? The Sausage-Seller is characterized as an anal penetrator less than Paphlagon, to be sure, but there is nevertheless one clear and unambiguous penetrative threat that he makes. This comes in the midst of a vibrant passage of “combative capping” and draws on language appropriate to his profession in order to add a splash of comic colour [54].

Paphlagon: I'll leap on the Council and give it a violent shaking.

Sausage-Seller: And I'll stuff ( $\betaυνήσω$ ) your arse ( $\piρωκτός$ ) like a sausage skin.

Paphlagon: And I'll drag you out of doors by the buttocks ( $\piγγή$ ), head downwards. [55]

Characteristically of such passages in *Knights*, mutual threats continue to be exchanged between the two, with Paphlagon-Cleon at one point adopting metaphors taken from his realm of expertise: tanning and leather working. Whilst there are no further direct threats of penetration, some of the men's lines can nevertheless be read with a sexual subtext [56].

Paphlagon: Your hide will be stretched in the tanning-bench.

Sausage-Seller: I'll flay you into a thief's hold-all.

Paphlagon: You'll be spread out and pegged to the ground.

[52] SOMMERSTEIN 1981 *ad loc.* Sommerstein makes it clear in his commentary how he has understood the verb: “English too can use this sexual metaphor as an alternative to others such as ‘overwhelm’ or ‘put to flight’”. WOHL 2002: 90, ingeniously combines the two meanings of the verb offered by LSJ when she suggests that Paphlagon “abuses the generals at Pylos by calling out to them like a prostitute calling for customers”. In this, she is apparently following the lead of ROGERS 1910: 51, whose curious translation of *Knights*, 355, has Paphlagon “... with scurrilous abuse the Pylian generals smutch [i.e. “smudge”]”.

[53] Bound up in this image may also be the idea that Cleon was the only “man” capable of resolving the Pylos issue, in contrast to the other generals who emerged from the episode as impotent subordinates to be equated

Sausage-Seller: I'll make mincemeat of out you... (*Knights*, 369-372)

What is noteworthy in this exchange is that Paphlagon-Cleon expresses himself in metaphorical language (which the Sausage-Seller then adopts, too, eventually steering the discourse away from metaphors taken from tanning and towards those based on his own profession of sausage making). But significantly, Paphlagon makes no direct sexual threat to match that of his rival.

There is one further example in the play of the Sausage-Seller using obscenity to underscore the notion of Paphlagon's penetration. Soon after the two protagonists have emerged with their respective collections of oracles, the Sausage-Seller hurls a devastating aside at his adversary, instructing him to self-fellate.

Sausage-Seller: He can go suck himself! ( $\tauὸ πέος οὐτοσὶ δάκοι$ , lit. ‘Let this man here bite his (?) cock’). [57]

Here again the Sausage-Seller conjures up the notion of Paphlagon being penetrated – this time orally – and does so using wholly non-euphemistic language.

## CONCLUSIONS

While the discussion in this article has focused on direct sexual references in *Knights*, much more can be said about the erotics of the play, of course. After all, one of the central conceits that helps to frame the action of *Knights* is the idea of orators as competing lovers (*anterastaī*) of Demos/The People [58], a fascinating dynamic that has been

with “whores”. However this line is to be understood, it is noteworthy both that it seems to carry the idea of gaining and/or displaying power over one's enemies and that this is expressed in sexual terms.

[54] On “combative capping” in *Knights*, see HESK 2007: 141-150.

[55] *Knights*, 363-365.

[56] HESK 2007: 148, certainly reads Paphlagon's lines in a sexual light, stating that in this passage “Cleon is more than happy to adopt the role of a homosexual rapist in his zeal to cap the threats of his opponent.”

[57] *Knights*, 1010.

[58] A notion which is articulated most clearly at *Knights*, 732-736.

productively explored by Yates and Scholtz [59]. Significantly for the current discussion, Scholtz sees as implicit in the notion of Paphlagon and the Sausage-Seller as *erastai* (i.e. “admirers” or “lovers”) of Demos the idea that they are also both his “would-be ‘buggerers’” [60] – which in turn serves as an important reminder that the erotic identities of the characters in *Knights* are shaped by more than the obscene and scurrilous jokes that have formed the basis of the present discussion [61].

But to return once more to those scurrilous jokes, what this brief study of *Knights* reveals is that, while Sausage-Seller and Paphlagon-Cleon are both characterized as engaging in receptive (as well as insertive) anal sex, there is an instructive distinction between the ways in which the sexual excesses of the two men are revealed. Paphlagon’s sexuality is largely exposed in a series of smears, allegations and jokes made at his expense and is frequently couched in metaphorical language. In contrast, the Sausage-Seller openly declares his past as a prostitute, tells anecdotes at his own expense and boldly threatens his rival with sexual penetration. Importantly, it is not just the Sausage-Seller’s penetrative threats that are more direct than those of his rival: he actively – even “aggressively” one might say – flaunts his whorishness and anal receptiveness. As befits the man who will be the ultimate winner of what is, in large part, a contest of baseness, the Sausage-Seller is simply the more outrageous and shameless of the two. He is not only an aggressive “top” but also an assertive and outspoken “bottom”.

The Sausage-Seller’s brazenness ultimately justifies his victory, but it also has interesting implications for how we might regard the two men.

In short, Paphlagon emerges as the more restrained and less brazen of the two – albeit in the context of a competition where all manner of shamelessness is revealed. But while the potential to view Paphlagon-Cleon as the lesser of two evils could potentially be considered a weakness in the design of *Knights*, there are nonetheless clear pay-offs to the way in which Aristophanes has plotted his play. The Sausage-Seller is a creation that allows Aristophanes to expose Paphlagon’s excesses on the one hand and to magnify them on the other, by representing in an exaggerated, comic form the extreme behaviours of which politicians in general, and Cleon in particular, are allegedly capable. A further benefit, of course, is that the Sausage-Seller’s success in outdoing his rival in baseness allows for the dramatically satisfying defeat of Paphlagon at the end of the play and his subsequent banishment to the city gates to ply his rival’s lowly trade [62]. ■

[59] SCHOLTZ 2004 and YATES 2005; see also LANDFESTER 1967: 50-60. Scholtz’s discussion of the play is particularly useful in exposing a number of tensions inherent in the conceit of the political rivals’ erotic-cum-pederastic courtship of Demos, and skilfully explores the cultural context of this theme as well as its consequences for how we read the play. He is, however, perhaps reductive when he claims that “[p]ederasty presupposes an *erōmenos* (beloved) subordinate to his *erastēs* (lover)” (SCHOLTZ 2004: 274; cf. 277-278 where his discussion of *erōs* is more nuanced). See also VILLACÈQUE 2013: 241-243.

[60] SCHOLTZ 2004: 265; an idea repeated at 280 and 287.

[61] The character of Demos is of particular interest in this regard: cast in the role an *erōmenos*, an object of erotic pursuit, for most of *Knights*, at the end of the play his rejuvenation sees him enjoy the attentions of both a sexually available boy and the beautiful Spondai (*Knights*, 1384-1386, and 1390-1395).

[62] *Knights*, 1397-1399.

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## DE QUI SE MOQUE-T-ON ? LES TRAVESTITIS SUR LA SCÈNE DE L'ASSEMBLÉE DES FEMMES D'ARISTOPHANE

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### RÉSUMÉ

À la différence d'œuvres contemporaines de travestissement (les films *Some like it hot* ou *Tootsie*), l'*Assemblée des femmes* d'Aristophane ne tourne pas en dérision le « mauvais genre » de ses protagonistes. Qualifiés aujourd'hui de « femmes », ces personnages de comédie assumaient en réalité un statut bien particulier dans le contexte anti-

tique de performance, celui d'épouses de citoyens : les moqueries sexuelles et l'humour de la pièce jouaient avant tout sur les normes concernant non pas d'anachroniques « identités de sexe », mais les hiérarchies sociopolitiques.

Unlike various modern works representing cross-dressing (*Some like it hot*, *Tootsie*), Aristophanes' *Assembly Of Women* does not mock the « gender failure » of its characters. Though characterized today as « women », these comedic characters had in fact a more specific status in an ancient performance context, namely that of citizens' wives. The humour and sexual jokes in this comedy play primarily with norms not of anachronistic "sexual identities" but of socio-political hierarchies.

### KEYWORDS

Aristophane,  
*Assemblée des femmes*,  
genre,  
humour,  
hiérarchie sociopolitique.

### MOTS-CLÉS

Aristophane,  
*Assembly of Women*,  
gender,  
humour,  
socio-political hierarchy.

Article accepté après évaluation par deux experts selon le principe du double anonymat

Aux V<sup>e</sup> et IV<sup>e</sup> siècles av. J.-C., les Athéniens offraient à Dionysos cet acte parfois considéré comme trivial et peu sérieux : le rire, ou plutôt, les rires de la cité [1]. En 392, pour honorer la divinité la cité attique sélectionne Aristophane au concours de comédie des Lénées. Il y met en scène l'*Assemblée des femmes*, où la représentation de la prise de pouvoir d'épouses athéniennes à l'Assemblée donne lieu à de nombreuses railleries qualifiées aujourd'hui de « sexuelles » : touffes axillaires mal taillées, orateurs lubriques et citoyens soumis aux désirs des épouses voire des veuves. D'un point de vue contemporain, la présence dans cette dystopie politique de scènes humoristiques « sexuelles » a fait conclure, peut-être trop rapidement, que l'enjeu de cette pièce était d'affirmer la bêtise des femmes, et l'« effémination » de certains hommes de pouvoir athéniens [2]. Il s'agit tout d'abord de rappeler que les statuts des femmes en Grèce ancienne étaient trop divers et hétérogènes (épouse, jeune fille, esclave, étrangère) pour

que des notions aussi généralisantes que celles de « femme » et « d'effémination » aient un sens [3]. Les travaux de Michel Foucault [4], puis ceux de Judith Butler [5] dans le champ contemporain, ont par ailleurs mis en avant la dimension idéologique et historique de la partition entre « hommes » et « femmes », entre « masculin » ou « viril » et « féminin » [6].

Pour comprendre l'humour érotique mis en scène par Aristophane, il convient d'interpréter la pièce dans son contexte de performance, selon les outils d'analyse développés par Claude Calame et Florence Dupont [7]. Ce contexte nous permet de comprendre que, si Aristophane met bien en scène l'infériorité sociale des personnages « féminins » (qui sont, rappelons-le, des épouses de citoyens, et non leurs filles, des étrangères de passage ou leurs esclaves), cette infériorité constitue le ressort comique mais non la cible de la critique « aristophanesque ». C'est cette fonction de l'humour que notre étude va s'attacher à étudier.

[1] Je souhaite adresser mes chaleureux remerciements à Claude Calame et Véronique Mehl pour leur lecture attentive et leurs précieux conseils. Je remercie aussi Sandra Boehringer pour son « vivifiant » suivi pendant l'écriture de la première version de ce texte. J'ai présenté certains aspects de cette réflexion lors d'une séance d'EFIgieS-Antiquité en 2016, et je suis reconnaissante à ses participant-e-s pour leurs questions et leurs remarques.

[2] C'est le cas des lectures de SAID 1979 ; SCHMITT-PANTEL 1992, p. 228-230. Pour ces deux chercheuses la cité d'Athènes présentée par Aristophane est pervertie par des hommes efféminés, qui se laissent entraîner passivement par le *misthos*. Ainsi, l'orientation politique prise par Athènes trouverait sa conclusion logique dans une gynécocratie où femmes et biens seraient partagés. À propos de ce système politique fictionnel, Suzanne Said écrit : « Cette innovation radicale et absurde s'inscrit en effet dans le droit fil de la tradition d'un peuple connu pour son goût des innovations et des idées folles. Et la forme même que prend cette innovation, le pouvoir des femmes, est dictée par l'évolution d'un état où les vrais hommes ont été écartés au profit des efféminés, où la parole politique a fait place à un bavardage peu viril. » (SAID 1979, p. 35).

[3] Pour approfondir ce point, voir BOEHRINGER & SEBILLOTTE-CUCHET 2011, qui précisent par ailleurs que la définition du mot « femme » n'est pas neutre, car prise dans des représentations politiques, culturelles et sociales très contemporaines (BOEHRINGER & SEBILLOTTE-CUCHET, 2011, p. 14).

[4] FOUCAULT 1976b et 1984.

[5] BUTLER 1990.

[6] Foucault a comparé la codification des pratiques sexuelles antiques au régime de genre contemporain où la différence des sexes, voire l'identité personnelle, est en partie pensée par rapport au sexe du partenaire : « La sexualité, bien plus qu'un élément de l'individu qui serait rejeté hors de lui, est constitutive de ce lien qu'on oblige les gens à nouer avec leur identité sous la forme de la subjectivité » FOUCAULT 1978, p. 522-531. Judith Butler analyse plus précisément le lien entre le sexe du partenaire désiré et l'identité genrée établie aujourd'hui. En reprenant la célèbre phrase de M. Wittig « Les lesbiennes ne sont pas des femmes », elle explique comment, pour être femme, il faut désirer mais aussi être désirable pour les hommes et inversement. « Le genre ne peut dénoter une unité de l'expérience, du sexe, du genre et du désir, que lorsque le sexe est compris comme ce qui nécessite d'une certaine manière le genre et le désir [...] le désir étant hétérosexuel et se différenciant donc dans un rapport d'opposition à l'autre genre qui est son objet. La cohérence interne ou l'unité de chaque genre – homme ou femme requiert ainsi une hétérosexualité qui soit un rapport stable et simultanément d'opposition. » BUTLER 2005, p. 93-93.

[7] CALAME 2000 et plus particulièrement 2005. DUPONT 2001. Voir aussi leur ouvrage collectif dirigé avec des anthropologues : CALAME et al. (dir.) 2010.

*L'Assemblée des femmes* est une des onze pièces complètes d'Aristophane (sur les quarante-quatre qu'il aurait composées). Ces œuvres, avec une composition de Ménandre [8] constituent les seules transcriptions complètes de « comédies » antiques. Pour étudier, aujourd'hui, ces comédies, il est nécessaire de prendre en considération leurs conditions de performance. Elles étaient composées pour le concours de comédie qui avait lieu durant des festivals de théâtre [9], qui présentaient une importante dimension civique puisqu'ils mobilisaient une grande partie de la cité et de ses magistrats [10]. Le concours comique opposait cinq poètes, tous chargés d'écrire et de mettre en scène une pièce humoristique, et celle qui avait déclenché la plus grande hilarité l'emportait [11]. Le théâtre grec antique s'est par ailleurs constitué à partir des compositions chantées et dansées par un chœur, auxquelles ont été progressivement intercalés des dialogues parlés (et toujours joués par des acteurs masculins) [12]. Au cours du temps, les dialogues des acteurs prennent de plus en plus d'importance dans la structure dramatique, comme en témoigne *l'Assemblée des femmes*, qui date du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle. D'un point de vue à la fois esthétique et anthropologique, l'objectif comique de ces textes et l'utilisation de techniques humoristiques encore employées aujourd'hui peuvent donner l'impression qu'il est facile de comprendre ce qui fait rire dans ces pièces. Les expressions très imagées, les jeux sur la sonorité des mots, ceux avec les contrepoints, contrastes, rapprochement, etc., apparaissent encore dans de nombreuses œuvres contemporaines dans un but similaire. Cette impression de familiarité est rapidement dissipée après une étude attentive des représentations et des normes auxquelles recourt Aristophane et la façon dont il les mobilise pour déclencher l'hilarité.

La réception des œuvres d'Aristophane est un paramètre essentiel pour comprendre la logique comique de ses vers. Les plaisanteries jouent souvent avec le contexte d'énonciation civique et

religieux : les comédies d'Aristophane représentent et déforment des événements ou des problèmes issus de l'actualité politique, mais elles sont surtout très réputées pour les caricatures qu'elles offrent des hommes politiques ou des personnages en vue de la cité [13]. Les railleries d'Aristophane, aujourd'hui réduites à leur trace textuelle, s'intégreraient à un rituel qui visait à moquer la communauté civique.

Cet élément est très important pour la compréhension des deux extraits de *l'Assemblée des femmes* étudiées dans cet article pour leurs plaisanteries « sexuelles ». Dans le premier (98-114), les moqueries sont formulées par Praxagora : elle suggère qu'un politicien très en vue, Agyrrhios, n'est pas un citoyen authentique, qu'il fut un temps où il était une *gunê*. Puis, elle s'attaque aux jeunes orateurs politiciens de la cité : s'ils parlent si bien en public c'est parce qu'ils passent leur temps à se faire secouer. Ces moqueries sont tirées de la première scène de la pièce, les épouses ont préparé les costumes qui leur serviront à passer pour des citoyens à l'Assemblée, et il ne leur reste plus qu'à trouver le discours qui leur permettra de prendre le pouvoir. Les pics de Praxagora contre Agyrrhios et les orateurs servent, dans la logique fictionnelle de la pièce, à encourager les épouses à aller prendre la parole à l'Assemblée. Le deuxième groupe de plaisanteries (457-471) étudié dans cet article est tiré de la scène suivante, qui suit le départ des épouses à l'Assemblée. La prise de pouvoir en elle-même n'est pas représentée, mais elle est expliquée par un citoyen, Chrémès qui en a été témoin, au mari de Praxagora, Blépyros. Ce dernier se demande avec inquiétude si, suite à la prise de pouvoir des épouses, les citoyens devront les « baiser » contraints et forcés, une question qui perturbe moins Chrémès.

Ces deux passages que nous commenterons plus précisément jouent sur le travestissement genre des personnages (épouses en citoyens, citoyens en épouses) et sur l'évocation suivis ensuite dans

[8] À ces textes s'ajoute un grand nombre de fragments de la seconde moitié du V<sup>e</sup> siècle des deux dramaturges déjà cités ainsi que ceux de Cratinos, Phrynicos et Eupolis.

[9] Il existait deux grands festivals de théâtre : les Lénennes qui se tenaient en hiver, et les Dionysies, au début du printemps. Il existait, en dehors de l'épreuve comique, trois autres types de compétitions théâtrales : concours de tragédies, drames satyriques et dithyrambes. Sur ce point voir MORETTI 2001, p. 31.

[10] Sur l'organisation et le déroulement des concours voir MORETTI 2001 ; FISHER 2008.

[11] Les poètes devaient proposer une pièce inédite pour chaque concours, qui n'était jouée que dans le cadre de ce concours et n'était pas destinée à être rejouée. Sur ce point, voir DOVER 1972, p. 1-12.

[12] Sur l'importance du chant du chœur et sur la non pertinence des interprétations « psychologiques » des personnages, voir DUPONT 2001 et CALAME 2005 et 2017.

[13] Sur la question du rire ritualisé, voir le chapitre « Ritual Laughter » dans HALLIWELL 2008, p. 155-206.

la pièce d'une mise en scène de rapports sexuels non consentis. À première vue, on serait tenté de rapprocher ces jeux comiques de ceux présents dans *Some Like It Hot* (pour le travestissement), et *C'est arrivé près de chez vous*, concernant les « viols » (l'anachronisme de ce terme sera néanmoins débattu dans la démonstration [14]). À la différence de ces réalisations contemporaines, les jeux de travestissements et de viols ne sont pas seulement drôles en soi, par la transgression des tabous sociaux qu'ils impliquent. Ils s'intègrent aussi à la trame humoristique qui régit l'ensemble de la pièce : la prise de pouvoir des épouses et le bouleversement de la hiérarchie sociopolitique de la cité. Les plaisanteries sexuelles, à la différence de celles mobilisant les odeurs, la nourriture ou la scatophilie, jouent d'ailleurs surtout sur l'enjeu du rapport (bien souvent inégalitaire) entre les personnages, et ce qu'ils représentent socialement les uns par rapport aux autres.

Pour comprendre ce dernier élément, le paramètre statutaire est rajouté ici aux questions posées par ce dossier concernant les liens entre humour et sexualité dans l'antiquité. Aristophane donne en effet à ses personnages des caractéristiques sociales et politiques mais le recours à de multiples travestissements rend difficile une identification précise et distincte de leur statut. Pour cette raison, nous utiliserons les termes de marqueurs et d'attributs statutaires qui désignent les éléments des costumes, des gestes ou des dialogues présentant une signification sociale qui positionne le personnage dans la hiérarchie de la cité athénienne. Les personnages endosseront des attributs variés qui peuvent changer au cours de l'intrigue. Cette étude s'interrogera sur les visées comiques et politiques qu'Aristophane poursuit lorsqu'il crée ces protagonistes travestis et hybrides

Il s'agit dans cette réflexion de proposer un double cheminement : montrer d'une part que les attaques qui visent apparemment des personnages « féminins » sont dirigées surtout vers d'autres individus

ou groupes sociaux, et formuler d'autre part une hypothèse concernant les rapports entre humour, sexualité et hiérarchie sociale.

## POUR BIEN PÉRORER, SE FAIRE GÉNÉREUSEMENT « TROMBONER »

Dans la première partie de la comédie, les spectateurs assistent à l'arrivée progressive des épouses autour de Praxagora, la meneuse du groupe. La scène se déroule tôt le matin, car les épouses préparent leur intrusion à l'Assemblée. Afin d'y entrer sans être découvertes, elles ont pris des vêtements (manteaux, cannes, chaussures [15]) à leurs maris, ont confectionné des barbes, se sont laissé pousser des poils [16] et ont tenté de se faire bronzer [17]. Par-dessus le costume d'épouse enfilé, hors scène, par les acteurs masculins (très probablement constitué de postiches de fesses et de seins) se rajoutent donc sur scène, devant les spectateurs, les accessoires pris par les épouses afin de se faire passer pour des citoyens [18]. Il s'agit d'imaginer qu'à une « base » de travestissement, qui précède le déroulement de la pièce et crée l'univers fictionnel, s'ajoute celui des épouses en citoyens. Il est d'ailleurs possible que les commentaires pleins d'humour des personnes d'épouses concernant l'élaboration et la préparation de leur costume de citoyens sur scène jouaient aussi avec le travestissement premier des acteurs, créant une forme d'ironie métathéâtrale.

Après avoir vérifié et décrit leur tenue et leur corps (fictionnels), le personnage de Praxagora rappelle qu'il faut aussi préparer les discours à l'Assemblée, et, pour encourager ses comparses à prendre la parole, elle les compare aux jeunes orateurs, mais surtout à Agyrrhios, un politicien très en vue qui aurait réintroduit, au cours de la décennie 390, le *misthos*, une forme de rétribution monétaire obtenue contre la participation à une charge civique [19]. Cet extrait constitue une des

[14] *Some Like It Hot*, 1959, réalisé par Billy Wilder, et *C'est arrivé près de chez vous*, 1992, réalisé par Remy Belvaux et André Bonzel. Pour mémoire, dans cette fiction imitant les codes du documentaire, des journalistes suivent un criminel dans la préparation et la réalisation de ses meurtres comme s'il ne faisait qu'un métier comme les autres. Dans une scène assez crue, le spectateur est invité à rire du viol suivi du meurtre d'un couple.

[15] *Assemblée des femmes*, 20-45.

[16] *Assemblée des femmes*, 60-67.

[17] *Assemblée des femmes*, 62-64.

[18] Le statut et le genre fictifs des personnages étaient en effet rendus manifestes à l'ensemble des spectateurs par les costumes grotesques, et les personnages féminins d'épouses étaient peut-être aussi repérables par un dessin noir au niveau du pubis sur le maillot des acteurs. Sur ce point, voir SAID 1987 ; PIQUEUX 2006 ; WEBSTER 1949.

[19] Les enjeux du *misthos* seront expliqués plus précisément plus loin dans l'article. Concernant le rôle particulier d'Agyrrhios dans sa réinstauration, voir Aristote, *Constitution d'Athènes*, 41, 3 et SOMMERSTEIN 1998, p. 147 et 154.

sept occurrences de moquerie d'Aristophane contre cette personnalité publique [20] :

Praxagora : Et quand nous étalerons nos barbes, que nous allons attacher, qui donc là-bas en nous voyant ne nous prendrait pour des hommes ? Agyrrhios toujours avec la barbe de Pronomos, [fait [21]] illusion. Pourtant auparavant il était femme ; et maintenant, vois-tu, il exerce les plus hautes fonctions dans l'État. [...]

Première femme : Et comment une troupe au cœur faible de femmes parlera-t-elle au peuple ?

Prax. : Le mieux du monde, sans doute. Car on dit que ceux des jeunes gens qui se font le plus secouer sont aussi les plus habiles parleurs. Or c'est là notre fait, par une heureuse chance [22].

Comment expliquer ce lien établi par Praxagora entre le corps travesti des épouses et celui d'Agyrrhios, d'une part, et, d'autre part, entre la prise de parole politique de ces épouses et celle des jeunes orateurs qui aiment se faire « tromboner [23] » ? Comment interpréter le rapprochement qu'opère Aristophane entre les épouses de la comédie et les hommes politiques en vue du début du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle ?

Comme cela a été évoqué dans l'introduction, les hypothèses proposées concernant cet extrait (et la pièce en général) expliquaient que la comparaison humoristique de Praxagora s'opérait par rapport au féminin : Agyrrhios et les jeunes orateurs seraient condamnés pour leur « effémination ». Pour rappel, les statuts des femmes en Grèce ancienne se situaient de part et d'autre de démarcations sociales prioritaires par rapport au genre (libre/esclave) et ils étaient trop divers (épouse, jeune fille, esclave, étrangère), pour que des notions aussi généralisantes que celles de « femme » et d'« effémination » aient un sens [24]. Ce n'est donc pas sur le plan d'un anachronique « féminin » que le rapprochement (inapproprié et ironique) entre *gunaiques*

et hommes politiques s'opère. Ceci est d'autant plus visible dans le cadre des comédies d'Aristophane que les épouses de citoyens sont les seuls protagonistes « féminins » à avoir des rôles clés et à faire entendre des opinions politiques sur la situation d'Athènes (aussi peu cohérentes puissent-elles paraître). Leur mise en scène les rapproche donc plus de personnages de citoyens masculins libres (comme les campagnards ou les artisans) et les distingue très nettement des autres statuts « féminins » apparaissant dans les pièces d'Aristophane (prostituées, jeunes filles) [25]. Les personnages de *gunaiques* ne sont pas pensés comme des représentants « des femmes » ou de la féminité.

## DE JEUNES ET BEAUX PARLEURS TROP SECOUÉS

Pour revenir à l'extrait et aux plaisanteries de Praxagora, les orateurs sont d'abord moqués par l'utilisation d'un verbe comique outrancier, *σποδέιν*, qui signifie « battre » avant tout et que V. H. Debidour traduit par « *tromboner* [26] ». « Pilonner », plus contemporain, retranscrit aussi les dénotations sexuelle et violente. Praxagora déclare que les jeunes orateurs parlent terriblement (*δεινοτάτους*), avec toute l'ironie que le terme présente, parce qu'ils se font « *tromboner* », discréditant et leur corps et leur parole. La plaisanterie s'appuie sur l'idée qu'un nombre trop important de rapports sexuels implique un manque de maîtrise de soi et une inaptitude à l'exercice de la gouvernance politique [27]. Ce mauvais comportement sexuel n'est pas condamné pour sa nature féminine ou féminisante, il est critiqué en tant que tel. D'ailleurs le manque de maîtrise de soi et de dignité n'est pas uniquement associé aux *gunaiques* dans le théâtre d'Aristophane [28].

D'autre part, dans un deuxième temps, Praxagora compare les pratiques de ces jeunes gens à celles

[20] Sur ce point, voir SOMMERSTEIN 2001, p. 146-147, VETTA 1989, p. 153.

[21] Les traductions sont celles de VAN DAELE 1930, à partir du texte établi par Victor Coulon. Dans cet extrait, H. Van Daele traduit *λανθάνω*, conjugué au parfait, avec le passé composé, mais nous lui préférions le présent, pour les raisons données dans cette partie.

[22] *Assemblée des femmes*, 98-114 ; trad. H. Van Daele.

[23] Selon la traduction moins formelle et plus humoristique de DEBIDOUR 1966.

[24] Voir en particulier le volume collectif BOEHRINGER & SEBILLOTTE-CUCHET 2013 ainsi que SEBILLOTTE-CUCHET 2016.

[25] Les jeunes filles et les prostituées n'ont que de rares rôles de figuration. Sur ce point, voir HENDERSON 1987, p. 107.

[26] Dans la traduction de DEBIDOUR 1966, p. 380.

[27] Sur ce point voir FOUCAULT 1984 ; WINKLER 2005, p. 95-142 et HALPERIN 2000, p. 121-143.

[28] Dans *Les Cavaliers*, il est sous-entendu que le Paphlagonien et le Marchand de saucisses ont des rapports anaux trop fréquents, voire qu'ils se prostituent, mais aucune plaisanterie ne traite ces personnages de « femmes » ou ne présente des termes appartenant au lexique du féminin (167, 765, 1241-1242). Voir l'article de James Robson dans ce même dossier.

des épouses, et la stratégie comique consiste précisément à rapporter les épouses aux orateurs plutôt que l'inverse. Praxagora n'utilise aucun terme appartenant au lexique du féminin (comme θῆλυς), mais le terme ἡμῖν renvoie aux personnages mis en scène (animés par des acteurs masculins et dont le statut *artificiel* était évident). La plaisanterie présente aussi une forte connotation ironique : Praxagora s'imagine que, parce que ces jeunes orateurs ont des habitudes sexuelles similaires aux leurs, les épouses réussiront à discouvrir à l'Assemblée. Quoi qu'il en soit, le cœur de la plaisanterie se situe dans le discrédit des orateurs, la deuxième partie de la phrase constituant un contrepoint comique.

Les plaisanteries des vers 98 à 104 concernent plus précisément Agyrrhios. Cette boutade de l'*Assemblée des femmes* est toutefois la seule où le politicien est traité de *gunê* et c'est aussi la seule piquée connotée sexuellement [29].

### AGYRRHIOS LE TRAVESTITI, MODÈLE DES GUNAIKES REBELLES

Voyons à présent la première réplique de Praxagora de l'extrait cité plus haut. Pour commencer, la logique grammaticale de la phrase ne permet pas de dire avec une absolue certitude qu'Agyrrhios est ou était une *gunê*. Praxagora déclare d'abord qu'Agyrrhios « fait illusion », « passe inaperçu » (λέληθε), sous-entendant qu'il serait une *gunê* cachée. Le verbe est au parfait (désignant un actuel stable, résultat d'une action passée). La dissimulation serait ici l'état stable résultant de l'apparition de la barbe. Prise séparément cette phrase pourrait confirmer l'hypothèse (anachronique) d'un manque de virilité d'Agyrrhios, qu'il réussirait à dissimuler à l'Assemblée grâce à une barbe. Pourtant, il est dit, dans la phrase suivante, que ce n'est qu'« auparavant » qu'Agyrrhios « était femme » (γυνή), ce qui signifie qu'il ne l'est plus, que cet état « dévirilisé » est révolu. Le changement de temps du parfait à l'imparfait est donc absurde si le commentateur cherche impérativement à mettre en évidence un genre figé du politicien et à caractériser l'ensemble de son comportement dans la perspective d'une « effémination ». Le passage du

parfait à l'imparfait pour la description d'Agyrrhios est en revanche cohérent s'il est envisagé dans la perspective des objectifs fictionnels de l'argumentation de Praxagora : encourager les épouses concernant leur projet, les rassurer sur l'efficacité de la barbe et les exhorter à s'exprimer en public. Le verbe λέληθε est utilisé par rapport aux épouses pour confirmer l'acte de dissimulation qu'elles s'apprennent à commettre et justifier l'utilisation de fausses barbes : si Agyrrhios a réussi à se faire passer pour un citoyen grâce à sa barbe, pourquoi pas les épouses ? Et si Aristophane tourne en dérision le politicien en l'insérant comme exemple dans la démonstration de Praxagora, la raillerie porte moins sur son « mauvais genre » que sur ses capacités politiques. Ceci apparaît plus nettement dans la deuxième plaisanterie (« Pourtant auparavant il était femme ; et maintenant, vois-tu, il exerce les plus hautes fonctions dans l'État. »). Si *gunê* est une qualification insultante pour Agyrrhios, c'est surtout parce que Praxagora l'assimile à un statut social inférieur, statut qui en outre ne reconnaît pas la capacité à participer activement aux institutions politiques, d'où la seconde partie du vers. Cette moquerie, même si elle vise à humilier Agyrrhios, est pensée elle aussi par rapport à l'intrigue et aux personnages des épouses qui s'apprennent à remettre en cause leur statut en enfriagnant la règle primordiale qui le constitue : l'exclusion de l'Assemblée et des institutions politiques en générale. Ces plaisanteries présentent un double objectif comique : elles tournent ironiquement en ridicule Praxagora et dénonce l'incompétence voire l'indignité politique d'Agyrrhios.

Dans les deux plaisanteries de cette scène d'ouverture, c'est au travers du corps et de la parole des épouses que sont discrédiés le corps et la parole des orateurs et d'Agyrrhios. Dans ce moment clé du travestissement des épouses (où il n'est plus seulement question du costume de citoyen, mais de sa façon de discouvrir), elles rapportent leur situation à celle de politiciens influents. Le port de barbe des épouses devient ainsi le reflet de celui d'Agyrrhios. L'absence de maîtrise, de *sôphrosunê*, des *gunaiques* et leurs discours délétères font quant à eux écho à la licence sexuelle et à la parole intempestive des orateurs. Il s'agit aussi de s'imaginer que lorsque les *gunaiques* font ces plaisanteries elles sont mises en scène à côté de manteaux, de cannes et de barbes, les attributs scéniques du personnage de citoyen. Or les accessoires du costume sont essentiels pour distinguer clairement le statut social des personnages sur la scène athénienne. Si les

[29] Aristophane emploie l'expression πράττειν τὰ μέγιστα, qui signifie couramment gérer des affaires importantes, mais peut aussi s'employer pour parler d'un rapport sexuel comme dans Théocrite, *Idylles*, II, 143.

*gunaiques* ne portent pas de faux phallus, la mise en scène donne tout de même à voir un brouillage quant à leur statut. L'assimilation par les dialogues d'Agyrrhios et des orateurs aux *gunaiques* est ainsi d'autant plus troublante. Les personnages présents sur scène ne sont plus tout à fait identifiables, ils pourraient aussi bien être des épouses travestis en citoyens que des citoyens travestis en épouses. Par des effets de miroir, les plaisanteries sur Agyrrhios et les orateurs au cœur d'une scène de travestissement permettent aux spectateurs d'imaginer que ces derniers pourraient en fait être des épouses déguisées en citoyens. Ainsi, la mise en scène et les plaisanteries du dialogue visent à représenter des caricatures d'Agyrrhios et des hommes politiques, qui sont en quelque sorte travestis en épouses. Mais si l'infériorité sociopolitique des épouses et de ces politiciens ne tient pas à leur mauvais comportement genre mais à leur indignité politique, quels sont, dans *l'Assemblée des femmes*, les idées, comportements et discours qui constituent cette indignité politique ?

Dans cette scène d'*incipit*, avant de se comparer à des politiciens, une épouse déclare vouloir apporter de la laine à l'Assemblée pour la carder [30]. Quant à Praxagora, dans son discours destiné à convaincre les citoyens de laisser le pouvoir aux épouses, elle fait l'éloge des compétences domestiques des épouses [31] (pour la cuisine, la gestion de l'argent, l'attention aux enfants, etc.). Nous savons que la question du *misthos*, cette rétribution pécuniaire perçue par les citoyens lorsqu'ils participaient à une assemblée athénienne, était à nouveau d'actualité lors de l'écriture de *l'Assemblée des femmes* [32]. Suzanne Saïd et Pauline Schmitt-Pantel ont très justement avancé l'idée que la pièce dans son ensemble était structurée par une critique de ce dispositif [33]. Il y est représenté comme une cause de désordre politique, notamment dans l'articulation de l'*oikos*, c'est-à-dire de la maisonnée, un espace familial, et des institutions politiques.

Cette scène d'ouverture montre par exemple de façon très concrète l'interférence des intérêts familiaux privés et économiques dans la sphère de l'Assemblée, mais de nombreuses autres scènes de la pièce critiquent cette interférence sur laquelle nous nous pencherons plus précisément dans la partie suivante.

Dans la scène qui suit le départ des épouses pour */ekklesia*, le personnage masculin Blépyros associe la perception du *misthos*, l'abandon des charges civiques et politiques par les citoyens et... les rapports sexuels qu'ils devront avoir contraints et forcés avec leurs épouses. L'association de ces thématiques n'est pas due aux hasards des dialogues : comment cette allusion au « viol [34] » codifie-t-elle le grotesque ? À partir de quelles normes sociales et politiques est-elle construite ? Quelle critique adresse-t-elle à la politique athénienne de l'époque ?

## SOUVERAINETÉ POLITIQUE ET INITIATIVE SEXUELLE, OU : POUR CHOISIR QUAND COPULER, ATTENTION D'ALLER VOTER

La scène étudiée dans cette deuxième étape de notre démonstration succède à celle du départ des épouses pour l'Assemblée. Leur prise de pouvoir sur la cité d'Athènes n'est pas représentée sur scène, mais elle est restituée au cours d'un dialogue entre un certain Chrémès – qui a assisté à la délibération – et Blépyros, le mari de Praxagora, qui, pour sa part ne s'est pas présenté à l'Assemblée. La scène commence avec le réveil de Blépyros : il est pris d'une subite crise de colique et, privé de ses vêtements par Praxagora, il se voit obligé d'enfiler la chemise de nuit et les sandales de son épouse pour sortir. C'est dans une position scatologique accroupie et dans un accoutrement ridicule que Chrémès surprend son comparse, ce qui ne l'empêche pas

[30] *Assemblée des femmes*, 88.

[31] *Assemblée des femmes*, 214-240

[32] La mistrophorie instaurée par Périclès en 480-470 avait été abolie en 411 (Aristote, *Constitution d'Athènes*, 41, 3). Elle avait été remise en place une quinzaine d'années plus tôt par Agyrrhios. Sur ce point voir Aristote, *Constitution d'Athènes*, 41, 3 ; SOMMERSTEIN 1998, p. 147 et 154 ; HANSEN 1979, p. 14-19. Sur ce sujet, nous nous référons principalement aux travaux suivants : l'article de référence est celui de Hansen qui donne un aperçu synthétique et précis de l'institution du *misthos* aux V<sup>e</sup> et IV<sup>e</sup> siècles ; P. Gauthier (GAUTHIER 1993, p.

250) propose des hypothèses très intéressantes quant aux motifs de l'instauration de cette rétribution ; l'analyse sémantique proposée par E. Will (WILL 1975, p. 429) est très utile par rapport au problème de l'acception « salariale » du *misthos* ; enfin, MARKLE 2004, dresse un bilan historiographique complet, et propose par ailleurs une étude économique de la valeur du *misthos* par rapport au pouvoir d'achat de l'époque.

[33] Voir note 2.

[34] La notion est mise entre guillemets car elle est anachronique. La définition qui lui est donnée pour cet article est précisée plus tard.

d'entamer la conversation au sujet de la séance au cours de laquelle fut votée la prise de pouvoir des *gunaiques*.

Dans le premier temps du dialogue (397-398) entre Blépyros et Chrémès, ce dernier regrette de ne pas avoir touché la rétribution monétaire du *misthos*, et de ne pouvoir ainsi se payer un panier de nourriture. Il rapporte ensuite les différents discours tenus à l'Assemblée, pour finir par citer celui d'un beau jeune homme (Praxagora en fait) en faveur d'une prise de pouvoir des *gunaiques*, applaudi par un groupe de citoyens très blancs (les *gunaiques* travesties). Blépyros acquiesce vivement à tous les arguments du jeune homme rapportés par Chrémès. Lorsqu'il apprend que les propositions de transfert du pouvoir aux *gunaiques* ont effectivement été approuvées à l'*ekklesia*, Blépyros, aidé par Chrémès, réalise une liste des devoirs dont il sera déchargé grâce au changement de gouvernement. Il se réjouit alors de ne plus aller au tribunal [35], de devoir subvenir aux besoins de sa maisonnée, ou de se lever tôt pour aller à l'Assemblée. Il finit toutefois par réaliser que si les *gunaiques* prennent le pouvoir, elles pourront désormais forcer leur mari ... « à les baiser ».

Blé. : Une chose à craindre pour les gens de notre âge, c'est qu'ayant pris les rênes du gouvernement, elles n'auront ensuite nous contraindre de force...

Chré. : À quoi faire ?

Blé. : À les baiser. Et si nous ne pouvons pas elles ne nous donneront pas à déjeuner [36].

Chré. : Eh bien, toi, par Zeus, exécute-toi : tu déjeuneras et baiseras tout ensemble.

Blé. : La contrainte est très désagréable [37].

L'enchaînement des informations dans le dialogue montre clairement que c'est parce qu'ils renoncent à l'exercice de leur souveraineté politique que les citoyens perdent leur prérogative sur l'initiative

sexuelle. L'enjeu de plaisanterie (460-461) est de critiquer le *misthos*, remis en place au cours de la décennie 390 par Agyrrhios pour la présence à l'*ekklesia* et à la *boulè* [38] : Blépyros et Chrémès associent la participation au tribunal à la prise en charge de la maisonnée et le premier se réjouit de ne plus avoir ces deux responsabilités, ce qui lui permettra de dormir le matin. Ces vers se réfèrent implicitement au *misthos* puisqu'il fallait arriver tôt pour le toucher [39]. Blépyros n'est donc pas intéressé par la discussion politique en tant que telle mais par la rémunération qui y est associée. Sur ce dernier point, Mogens Herman Hansen réfute l'idée selon laquelle les citoyens auraient eu tendance à déserter l'Assemblée car les effectifs dépendaient surtout de l'importance des sujets de débat [40]. Le *misthos* permettait en fait de sécuriser un nombre stable de citoyens en toute circonstance dans les institutions démocratiques, d'autant que la communauté civique s'était fortement réduite à la fin du V<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Comme Aristophane, Xénophon, Platon et Aristote [41] dénoncent cette forme de salaire indigne des citoyens, et source de corruption de l'esprit civique, puisqu'elle supposerait que les citoyens sont plus motivés par l'argent que par le bien public ou la justice. Mais, à la différence de ces textes, le registre humoristique de la critique d'Aristophane lui donne un aspect ludique et l'apparence de l'évidence (pourquoi discuter et argumenter sur ce sujet dont on ne peut que rire).

La construction du dialogue suggère que Blépyros ne fréquente les assemblées démocratiques que pour subvenir aux besoins les plus élémentaires de sa maisonnée, son *oikos* (ce qui était concrètement impossible au vu du montant de quelques oboles du *misthos* [42]). τρέφω, le verbe utilisé par Blépyros pour parler de son rôle de chef de famille [43], a toujours une connotation négative dans l'œuvre d'Aristophane lorsqu'il est employé pour parler

[35] Assemblée des femmes, 460-463.

[36] Nous choisissons, comme Debidour et Sommerstein, d'attribuer cette réplique à Blépyros, dans la mesure où c'est Blépyros qui développe les tenants et les aboutissants des problèmes du viol dans le reste de la scène.

[37] Assemblée des femmes, 457-471 ; trad. H. Van Daele.

[38] Voir note 32.

[39] Selon GAUTHIER 1993, le *misthos* ne servait pas à faire venir les pauvres mais à encourager les citoyens à être ponctuels pour le vote des lois qui se déroulait en première partie de séance.

[40] GAUTHIER 1993, p. 249.

[41] Aristote, Constitution d'Athènes, 41, 3 ; Platon, Gorgias, 515e ; Xénophon, Mémorables, 3, 7, 6.

[42] Le *misthos* ne représentait qu'environ la moitié du salaire journalier d'un artisan. Pour approfondir cette question, voir l'étude fouillée de MARKLE 2004.

[43] Selon E. Bénéniste, ce terme a la valeur originelle de « favoriser (par des soins appropriés) le développement de ce qui est soumis à la croissance », et présente de nombreux dérivés relatifs au fait de nourrir (comme τροφός, « nourricier » ou τροφεύς « nourrisseur ») ce développement pouvant avoir un sens à la fois concret et familier. BÉNÉNISTE 1966, p. 252-253.

d'une personne ou d'un groupe. Il dénonce alors une éducation ratée ou réduite à la seule subsistance aux besoins alimentaires [44]. Le verbe est par ailleurs employé à quatre reprises pour parler du gavage du peuple [45]. Ce choix particulier montre donc Blépyros comme un mauvais *kurios* [46] (chef de famille) qui réduit sa charge éminente de représentant et d'intendant de l'*oikos* au seul approvisionnement alimentaire. Le rôle de *kurios* que devaient assumer les citoyens dépassait en effet largement la simple subsistance aux besoins des membres de la maisonnée : il devait s'assurer du bon comportement de ses dépendants (qu'ils soient libres, comme son épouse, ou esclaves), représenter l'*oikos* dans les institutions judiciaires s'il était attaqué ou à l'Assemblée pour les affaires politiques [47].

De ce point de vue, nous voudrions revenir sur les analyses de Suzanne Saïd [48] en partie reprises par Pauline Schmitt-Pantel [49] et Cécile Corbel-Morana [50] qui voient dans le gouvernement des *gunaiques* une victoire de l'*oikos*, envisagé comme un espace intérieur régi par l'économique, sur la sphère politique et publique. Ce dialogue ainsi que d'autres scènes de la comédie indiquent pourtant que l'*oikos* présente aussi une dimension publique et politique essentielle à Athènes. Un grand nombre de chercheurs et chercheuses s'accordent aujourd'hui sur l'idée que l'*oikos* constitue une cellule à la fois familiale et politique fondamentale pour la cité athénienne [51], envisagée comme un regroupement de familles [52]. C'est le citoyen libre qui a la charge de faire la liaison entre l'*oikos* et l'Assemblée ; or Blépyros se contente ici de nourrir les siens, mais ne les représente pas dans les institutions démocratiques [53]. Le dialogue entre Chrémès

et Blépyros montre par ailleurs que le *misthos* ne pervertit pas seulement le fonctionnement des institutions démocratiques, mais qu'il touche aussi à l'*oikos* dans sa dimension publique. Ainsi, la première scène de travestissement des *gunaiques* ne montre de l'*oikos* que ses dimensions mercantiles, ouvrières et orientées vers la seule conservation de la vie (carder la laine, habiller, nourrir et se soucier des enfants, gérer l'intendance, surveiller les esclaves [54]). En soi, ces idées n'étaient sans doute pas négatives – Aristophane n'ignorait pas la nécessité de manger et d'assurer la survie de la descendance. Mais l'incongruité manifeste de la présence des *gunaiques* à l'Assemblée montre que le maintien de la vie ne doit pas devenir prioritaire par rapport à des questions qui réclameraient une vision plus large de la cité, vision que doivent en théorie assumer les citoyens *kurioi* à l'Assemblée comme dans leur maisonnée [55].

Le statut de *gunê* permet de jouer avec la hiérarchie entre le politique et l'économique dans la mesure où, à la différence des esclaves qui assument aussi des charges d'intendance et de gestion de l'*oikos* [56], les épouses sont en quelque sorte associées à la vie politique par le biais de leur mari [57]. Les marqueurs sociaux choisis par Aristophane pour caractériser ses personnages de *gunaiques* sont avant tout pensés par rapport à la critique du *misthos*, et non pour proposer un portrait de l'épouse athénienne typique. Il en est de même pour le personnage de Blépyros qui incarne principalement la perversion de l'esprit civique des citoyens (c'est lui qui a les réflexions les plus enjouées concernant les changements politiques d'Athènes). En tant que citoyen, c'est à lui que revient le devoir de maintenir le rôle politique de

[44] *Acharniens*, 1025 ; *Cavaliers*, 293, 333 ; *Nuées*, 1158, 1208 ; *Guêpes*, 476-477, 736, 928, 1004, 1133 ; *Oiseaux*, 322, 1367, 1356-1357 ; *Thesmophories*, 456 ; *Grenouilles*, 910 ; *Ploutos*, 173, 1156. Lorsque τρέφειν est accompagné et précisé par des termes relatifs à l'éducation aristocratique, comme la palestre, le terme n'a pas de connotation négative. Voir : *Nuées*, 986 ; *Grenouilles*, 729.

[45] *Cavaliers*, 799, 1136 ; *Nuées*, 937 ; *Lysistrata*, 640.

[46] Sur la définition du κύπος, voir entre autres HUNTER 1994, p. 10.

[47] Voir HUNTER 1994, p. 9-42.

[48] SAID 1979, pour qui l'Assemblée des femmes traite de la victoire du féminin apolitique, bavard, domestique et gestionnaire.

[49] SCHMITT-PANTEL 1992, p. 228-230.

[50] CORBEL-MORANA 2012, p. 63.

[51] Sur ce point voir COHEN 2001 : comme les citoyens évitaient autant qu'ils le pouvaient les activités économiques, ils déléguait les tâches de commerce à leurs épouses et aux esclaves. R. Omitowoju explique pour sa part que dans les procès pour violence sexuelle, la victime n'est jamais isolée individuellement, car au travers d'elle, c'est l'intégrité de l'ensemble de la maisonnée qui est attaquée (OMITOWOJU 2002). Voir aussi HUNTER 1994, p. 9-42, PATTERSON 1994, p. 199.

[52] WOLFF 1961, p. 93 ; TODD 1993, p. 206 ; COHEN 2001, p. 104.

[53] Sur ce point, voir HUNTER 1994, p. 9.

[54] *Assemblée des femmes*, 211-212, 216, 221, 223, 226, 227 et 232-235.

[55] HUNTER, 1994, p. 9-13.

[56] Sur ce point, voir COHEN 2001.

[57] Sur ce point, voir le vers 550.

*l'oikos* en dominant les considérations, voire les appétits mercantiles. Vaincu par son désir de sommeil, il n'assure plus le maintien de l'ordre politique dans sa cité. Cette perversion est exprimée de façon plus provocante dans la seconde partie de l'extrait du dialogue entre Chrémès et Blépyros où les deux personnages prévoient avec résignation qu'ils devront avoir des rapports sexuels avec leurs épouses contraints et forcés par ces dernières.

### STATUT DE CITOYEN, SOUVERAINETÉ POLITIQUE ET INITIATIVE SEXUELLE

L'anticipation résignée de Blépyros concernant les rapports sexuels contraints qu'il devra avoir avec son épouse pourrait aujourd'hui encore susciter l'hilarité pour sa représentation ironique d'un acte considéré de nos jours comme intolérable et punissable par la loi. Il convient toutefois de rappeler que la violence sexuelle n'est pas, dans l'Athènes antique, pensée, codifiée et punie comme c'est le cas de nos jours [58]. Aristophane joue ainsi sur l'intégrité du corps des citoyens afin de poursuivre sa critique du *misthos* de façon divertissante et non sentencieuse.

Tout d'abord, la violence sexuelle fictive que devraient subir les citoyens n'apparaît pas *ex nihilo* dans le dialogue entre Chrémès et Blépyros, mais elle est présentée comme le résultat direct de l'abandon de leur souveraineté politique par les citoyens. Blépyros énonce l'imminence de cette violence à la première personne du pluriel – il n'exprime pas la contrainte pour lui-même, mais pour l'ensemble des citoyens. Il n'est donc pas question du consentement individuel de Blépyros ou de son potentiel désir sexuel à l'égard de sa femme ou des *gunaikes*. Cette articulation entre les changements politiques et le corps se comprend par rapport à la codification de la violence par les Grecs, qui la formulent et la reconnaissent en fonction du statut social des personnes impliquées.

Cette question a fait l'objet d'une riche étude par Rosanna Omitowoju dans *Rape and Politics of Consent in Classical Athens* [59]. Le terme de viol, en tant qu'acte sexuel non consenti par l'une des parties impliquées dans le rapport, n'a pas d'équivalent dans l'Antiquité [60]. L'idée même de consentement individuel n'existe pas en tant que telle, et ce n'est donc pas par rapport à ce critère que les Grecs codifient les actes sexuels offensants, illégitimes ou violents, ce qui ne signifie pas qu'ils n'en reconnaissaient aucun, mais ils étaient jugés à

l'aune de critères différents. L'analyse des termes avec lesquels les Grecs qualifient des actes sexuels violents, ūþpis (outrage, sévices) et βία (emploi violent de la force), met au jour les critères d'évaluation et de reconnaissance de ces actes. "Yþpis et βία ne servent pas uniquement à parler de violences d'ordre sexuel (la catégorie du sexuel étant postérieure d'un point de vue historique [61]) mais caractérisent toute action qui humilie, contraint, violente une personne ou un groupe, que cette action soit physique, morale ou politique. Par ailleurs même si dans les faits, tous les habitants d'Athènes pouvaient potentiellement subir des formes de violence, le statut de la personne violentée conditionnait la reconnaissance de l'infliction du tort [62]. Ainsi, les esclaves pouvaient légalement être punis physiquement ou torturés [63], mais si un citoyen était seulement touché ou bousculé il pouvait se plaindre d'ūþpis [64]. Aristophane emploie seulement βία, plus neutre qu'ūþpis [65] pour désigner un acte réalisé contre les désirs ou les intentions d'une autre personne, sans que cela soit vraiment dommageable (à la différence d'ūþpis qui indique souvent une atteinte grave). Pour le commentaire qui suit, le terme de « viol » sera employé dans une perspective grecque, sans présupposer le critère du consentement, mais seulement en tant qu'acte sexuel illégitime ou violent reconnu comme tel et désigné par βία.

Dans l'extrait du dialogue entre Chrémès et Blépyros (« Une chose à craindre pour les gens de notre âge, c'est qu'ayant pris les rênes du gouvernement, elles n'auront ensuite nous contraindre de

[58] Pour une bibliographie et synthèse des enjeux méthodologiques de la question de la violence sexuelle étudiée au prisme du genre (*gender*), voir BOEHRINGER 2016.

[59] OMITOWOJU 2002.

[60] OMITOWOJU 2002, p. 28.

[61] FOUCAULT 1976b, « Périodisation », p. 152-173.

[62] OMITOWOJU 2002, p. 28.

[63] OMITOWOJU 2002, p. 57-61 aborde rapidement la question de la torture de l'esclave d'Euphilète, et propose une bibliographie plus large dans la note 26.

[64] WINKLER 2005, p. 101.

[65] Le terme d'ūþpis qualifie des actes très offensants, commis avec la volonté affichée d'humilier la personne en tant que telle ainsi que le groupe dont elle dépend. Lorsque la personne agressée est une épouse de citoyen, c'est surtout l'humiliation de sa famille qui est prise en compte. Selon Rosanna Omitowoju, βία signifie : « physical force or strength in a positive way or in the dative : in despite of ». Sur ce point voir OMITOWOJU 2002, p. 39 et 52.

force...[...]à les baiser ! ») Aristophane utilise βία de façon idiomatique avec la préposition πρὸς [66] et dans un sens ouvertement sexuel [67] : il est accompagné du verbe κινεῖν [68], et la référence au repas du midi (ἀριστᾶς) constituerait aussi une allusion ambiguë à un acte sexuel oral [69]. La dimension corporelle de la contrainte des *gunaiques* est par ailleurs renforcée par le verbe ἀναγκάζειν qui a le sens de forcer voire torturer. Cette mise en scène de la contrainte sexuelle reste très humoristique : ce n'est pas le mot très fort δύβηπις qui est employé, et Blépyros semble anticiper son viol avec une sorte de mécontentement résigné. Il est intéressant de noter que les citoyens ne sont pas contraints sexuellement en étant pénétrés (analogiquement, en utilisant par exemple des objets). Ils sont forcés de κινεῖν (« baiser ») ou de réaliser ce qui semble avoir été un cunnilingus [70], et leur assujettissement corporel ne se manifeste donc pas par leur pénétration, ou par une forme de passivité sexuelle, mais par l'absence de décision sur la tenue du rapport.

Ce que perdent involontairement les citoyens dans cette pièce, c'est l'initiative du rapport sexuel, conséquence de l'abandon, lui volontaire, de leur devoir d'initiative politique. Les rapports sexuels étant codifiés à l'époque par les normes qui structuraient la hiérarchie sociopolitique, le recours métaphorique et fictif au « sexuel » permet à Aristophane d'exprimer sa critique du *misthos* de façon divertissante, en jouant la légèreté. Le dramaturge ne critique pas les normes étudiées précédemment ; au contraire, il les présente comme nécessaires au bon fonctionnement de la cité. Le *misthos* constitue une atteinte potentielle à l'esprit politique des citoyens (qui ne doit pas être corrompu par des considérations économiques), et la corruption du civisme pourrait mettre en danger l'ordre hiérarchisé de la cité. Ce dialogue constituerait une exhortation adressée aux citoyens à maintenir leur éthique politique. Ici, le costume de *gunê* porté par Blépyros ne sert pas à montrer son caractère efféminé, mais son statut fictif permet d'isoler et

grossir des comportements mercantiles mis en lien avec la dissolution des intérêts politiques.

## CONCLUSION

Les personnages de *gunaiques* servent moins à critiquer « la féminité » (une catégorie idéologique qui n'existe pas en Grèce ancienne) qu'à symboliser certains intérêts de l'*oikos* (les rôles d'intendance et de gestion économique), et ce, pour servir l'objectif comique d'Aristophane. Le dramaturge a choisi le statut d'épouse dans cette pièce car il occupe une position intermédiaire dans la hiérarchie socio-politique. Dans la réalité athénienne des V<sup>e</sup> et IV<sup>e</sup> siècles, les *gunaiques* ne sont pas les seules à assumer les charges économiques de l'*oikos*, mais elles occupent par rapport à la sphère politique une place particulière : si elles sont exclues des institutions, elles ne sont pas totalement privées de droit de participation à la vie politique [71]. Leur simple mise en scène dans une attitude de rébellion politique dit d'ailleurs quelque chose de leurs priviléges civiques.

C'est à cause de cette position intermédiaire que les épouses peuvent assumer une prise de parole politique intempestive et sans grande légitimité. Cette prise de parole est ponctuellement comparée à celle d'Agyrrhios et des orateurs, qui, selon ces rapprochements railleur, doivent leur manque de civisme à leur éthique corporelle défectueuse. Les plaisanteries sexuelles donnent une expression métaphorique et ludique à une critique politique. Les jeux de travestissements attaquent les décisions et les orientations politiques d'Athènes concernant notamment le *misthos* dont ils radicalisent et caricaturent les dangers. Comme le montre le tournant dystopique que prend la pièce, la collusion entre l'économie et le politique représentée par les caricatures de *gunaiques* doit absolument être condamnée.

À la différence de plusieurs pièces d'Aristophane, où les personnages politiques critiqués sont

[66] L'expression πρὸς βίαν apparaît à sept reprises dans les œuvres complètes d'Aristophane (*Acharniens*, 73 ; *Guêpes*, 443, 1080 ; *Lysistrata*, 163 ; *Grenouilles*, 1457 ; *Assemblée*, 467, 471), mais elle ne présente un sens sexuel que dans *Lysistrata* et l'*Assemblée des femmes*.

[67] *Assemblée des femmes*, 466-469 : τὰς ἥνιας / ἔπειτ' ἀναγκάζωσι πρὸς βίαν // Xp. τί δρᾶν Βλ. κινεῖν ἔαυτάς.

[68] Le verbe κινεῖν veut d'abord dire agiter, mais il

présente aussi le sens sexuel et vulgaire de « baiser ». Sur ce point voir HENDERSON 1975, p. 35, 64, 77, 151-53, 186, 209, 214, 218.

[69] HENDERSON 1975, p. 186.

[70] Pour HENDERSON 1975, p. 186, ce vers est une allusion au cunnilingus, mais SOMMERSTEIN 1998, p. 180-181, conteste cette interprétation et propose de voir une plaisanterie sur l'auto-fellation.

[71] Voir entre autres SEBILLOTTE-CUCHET 2016.

directement caricaturés sur scène (comme Cléon, alias Paphlagonien, dans *Les Cavaliers* ou Socrate dans *Les Nués*) et présentés comme des responsables de la corruption d'Athènes, les attaques de l'*Assemblée des femmes* ne sont pas majoritairement tournées contre Agyrrhios. Dans cette comédie, les critiques sont portées par le groupe des *gunaikes* qui fonctionne de façon plutôt homogène. Des différences sociales apparaissent entre les épouses mais leurs motivations et leurs ambitions sont les mêmes. Praxagora se distingue par rapport à son rôle de chef, mais ses prises de parole ne se voient opposer aucune contradiction, et le groupe des épouses partage sa ligne politique. La mise en scène de *gunaikes* mécontentes de la démocratie et qui décident de s'introduire à l'*Assemblée* grimées en *andres* montre que la corruption n'est pas le fait d'une seule personne. Si Agyrrhios ou les jeunes orateurs sont plus particulièrement visés par Praxagora, c'est la totalité des citoyens qui se voit attaquée puis privée de son gouvernement. Par ailleurs, Blépyros est lui aussi très peu caractérisé socialement (on ignore son niveau d'éducation, son origine géographique, et son statut professionnel). Les travestissements de L'*Assemblée* exploitent une ligne de démarcation légale plus générale clairement établie entre les citoyens et leurs épouses. L'utilisation du statut d'épouse (par la position intermédiaire qu'il occupe entre politique et économique) par Aristophane lui permet donc de moquer l'ensemble du corps civique pour sa perception du *misthos*, et non quelques politiciens influents (comme dans *Les Cavaliers* par exemple). La différence des sexes est ici artificielle : elle ne tient qu'à des costumes et des masques portés par des acteurs qui étaient tous des citoyens, ce dont les spectateurs devaient être conscients. La mise en scène de cette différence sert donc principalement à parler d'une corruption plus généralisée des citoyens et de leur statut d'acteurs politiques.

Si ce sont les citoyens et leur éthique politique potentiellement corrompue qui constituent l'enjeu de la pièce, pourquoi ne pas les avoir représentés directement sur la scène ? Pourquoi mettre en scène des *gunaikes* pour critiquer la perception du *misthos* par les citoyens ? Pour répondre à cette

question, il convient d'imaginer l'effet qu'aurait eu la mise en scène de citoyens *choisisant* de déléguer leur pouvoir aux épouses ou aux esclaves. Leur faiblesse semblerait plus profonde, et ils ne paraîtraient pas capables *essentiellement* de dépasser leurs intérêts individuels et de réaliser ce que l'effort de devenir de bons citoyens. Une telle pièce montrerait une corruption bien plus grave et sérieuse du civisme des *andres*. En faisant endosser la responsabilité de la corruption de l'esprit civique aux *gunaikes* dans l'*Assemblée*, Aristophane préserve non les citoyens réels, mais le modèle du citoyen exemplaire. Les attributs sociaux fictifs des *gunaikes* offrent par ailleurs la possibilité de sélectionner et de grossir les éléments par lesquels sont discrédités les politiciens et/ou la communauté civique, ainsi que de localiser le rire sur certains comportements sexuels et alimentaires. Le travestissement permet d'assimiler les individus ou le groupe visé à des pratiques répréhensibles sans atteindre directement à l'intégralité du corps des citoyens (même Blépyros, lorsqu'il évoque son viol, porte le caraco de sa femme), et donc sans désacraliser frontalement l'idéal de l'acteur politique viril maître de lui-même et de ses passions [72].

Si le statut de citoyen est préservé symboliquement, il n'en est pas de même de celui d'épouse qui endosse la violence symbolique du rire causé par les plaisanteries sexuelles. La représentation d'épouses dans des situations avilissantes est autorisée par leur position intermédiaire par rapport à la sphère politique : l'épouse est associée à la sphère politique par le mariage avec un citoyen, mais elle reste exclue des institutions et occupe une position d'infériorité par rapport à son mari. Une épouse n'est pas directement en position de commandement politique. Le travestissement social et les plaisanteries « sexuelles », qui jouent sur les liens entre épouses et citoyens (qu'ils soient hiérarchiques ou de similarité) permettent ainsi de rire de façon détournée d'un groupe social sans atteindre au modèle de citoyen, qui constitue sa supériorité et sa capacité à gouverner. ■

[72] Sur ce point, voir FOUCAULT 1984 et WINKLER 1990.

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## THE CONSEQUENCES OF LAUGHTER IN AESCHINES' *AGAINST TIMARCHOS*

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### ABSTRACT

In Aeschines' *Against Timarchos*, the orator tells the jury about occasions on which sexual innuendos uttered by or about Timarchos provoked laughter in the Assembly (Aeschines, *Against Timarchos*, 80-84). Arguing that the Assembly's laughter not

only affirmed Timarchos' reputation but also drowned out his voice, I demonstrate that Aeschines coopts this laughter in order to reinforce the civic silence that was Timarchos' due as a male prostitute. That is, the laughter was made "consequential," in that it ultimately contributed to Timarchos' conviction and disenfranchisement (*atimia*).

### KEYWORDS

Male prostitution,  
double entendre,  
homoeroticism,  
consequential laughter,  
silence,  
*atimia*.

Dans son *Contre Timarque*, l'orateur Eschine raconte au jury les moments où Timarque a provoqué le rire de l'Assemblée en raison de sous-entendus sexuels dans ses propos ou dans les propos le concernant (*Contre Timarque*, 80-84). Après avoir montré que le rire de l'Assemblée non seulement contribue à renforcer la réputation de Timarque mais vient également parler à sa place, cet article met en évidence la façon dont Eschine utilise ce rire pour souligner le silence civique, seule « parole » que mérite Timarque en tant que prostitué. Par conséquent, ce rire a des effets concrets et contribue, en définitive, à la condamnation de Timarque et à sa déchéance civique (*atimia*).

### MOTS-CLÉS

Prostitution masculine,  
équivoque,  
homoérotisme,  
rire et effet du rire,  
silence,  
*atimia*.

Article accepté après évaluation par deux experts selon le principe du double anonymat

In his speech *Against Timarchos* [1], Aeschines charges the defendant Timarchos with having spoken in the Assembly despite being a male prostitute. About halfway through the speech, there is a peculiar passage in which Aeschines tells the jury about a handful of words, uttered by or about Timarchos, that on previous occasions had provoked laughter in the Assembly (Aeschines I, 80-85). In this article, I first explore why these words were so funny, drawing on the observation that they are double entendres connoting homoeroticism [2] – what we might call “humoerotic” language. I explore, secondly, what the immediate effect of the Assembly’s laughter was, and thirdly, how Aeschines co-opted this laughter and its effects in the service of Timarchos’ conviction. Ultimately, I argue this laughter was what Stephen Halliwell calls “consequential” – that is, it had the consequence of bringing pain, shame, or harm on its target beyond the laughter’s immediate context [3].

But first, some background on the speech is in order. In 346 BCE, an Athenian embassy, including both Demosthenes and Aeschines, was sent to Philip of Macedon to discuss the terms of a peace treaty. When the ambassadors returned to Athens, they presented the Athenian people with the terms of the agreement, and the Athenians adopted what was known as the Peace of Philokrates, named after the main negotiator of the treaty. A second embassy, with the same men, was then sent to Macedon in order for Philip to ratify the treaty. When this second embassy returned, Demosthenes, supported by his friend Timarchos, brought charges against Aeschines for misconduct on the embassy. In 345 BCE, Aeschines, in order to delay the impending trial against him, brought against Timarchos a *dokimasia*

*rhētorōn* (“examination of orators”) [4], alleging (among other things) that Timarchos had been a prostitute and was therefore automatically excluded from speaking in front of the Assembly. Aeschines ultimately won his case against Timarchos, rendering Timarchos disenfranchised (*atimos*), and buying Aeschines some time to prepare his defense [5].

## WHAT’S SO FUNNY?

It was in the midst of this serious case about disenfranchisement (*atimia*) that Aeschines told his stories about the Assembly’s laughter. In order to determine why he did this – and what effects it had – it is necessary to figure out what made the Assembly laugh.

In the first instance, Aeschines says that the year Timarchos was on the Boule (347/346 BCE), whenever he spoke in the Assembly [6], mentioning “the repair of ‘walls’ or of a ‘tower,’ or that someone ‘was led off’ (*apegeto*) somewhere, immediately you shouted and laughed, and you yourselves said the name (*epōnumian*) of the deeds you know he committed” (I, 80). What did Timarchos likely mean here? In speaking of walls and towers, he was referring, presumably, to a need to repair the city’s defensive structures, possibly in anticipation of war with Philip [7]. And in talking about people being “led off”, he may have been referring to the arrest of traitors, since *apagō* is a technical term for arrest [8].

But clearly the subject of defensive walls and towers, and the arrest of traitors, was not what made the audience holler with laughter. As has been suggested by others, Timarchos’ seemingly

[1] Henceforth I will refer to this speech as Aeschines I.

[2] On the double entendres in this passage, see, e.g., DE BRUYN 1995: 147-148, FISHER 2001 *ad loc.*

[3] HALLIWELL 1991: 282. On “consequential laughter,” see HALLIWELL 1991, HALLIWELL 2008. (HALLIWELL briefly discusses this passage of Aeschines I in 1991: 293 and 2008: 236.)

[4] On the *dokimasia rhētorōn*, with special attention to Aeschines I, see FEYEL 2009: 198-207.

[5] On *atimia*, see KAMEN 2013: ch. 7. On *atimia* for male prostitutes, see HALPERIN 1990 and WALLACE 1998.

[6] There are multiple textual difficulties here. DILTS’ edition (1997) reads ὅταν οὗτοσὶ ἀναβῆ ἐπὶ τὸ βῆμα ἐν τῷ δήμῳ καὶ [ἢ βουλῇ] ὅτε ἐβούλευε πέρυσιν.

[7] FISHER 2001 *ad loc.*

[8] FISHER 2001 *ad loc.* For *apagō* as “arrest,” see LIDDELL-SCOTT-JONES [= LSJ] IV.

innocuous words must have had a humorous double meaning. Building upon commentators and translators of this text, I will demonstrate that what made these words laughable was their sexual connotations [9].

First, the walls, towers, and arrests. The areas around city walls were popular places for sexual encounters, especially with prostitutes [10]. Thus in Aristophanes' *Knights*, the Sausage Seller says that he sells sausages – and sometimes sex – at the gates of the city walls (1242, 1247), a spot where female prostitutes (*pornai*) are also found (1400, 1401). Towers, like walls, were also spots for sex, and of course towers also had phallic connotations, as they do now [11]. And finally, *apagô*, in addition to meaning "arrest", also had the secondary sense of "lead off for sexual purposes" [12]. Athenaeus relates a story that Sophocles led off (*apegage*) a pretty boy outside the city walls to have sex with him (*The Learned Banqueters*, XIII, 604d). Not only is the verb *apagô* used here, but this is another example of the sexual activity that took place around city walls. It is unclear if this boy was a prostitute, but he did steal Sophocles' cloak after their rendezvous (604e).

These words, then, all of which call to mind semi-illicit sex, caused the people to shout, laugh, and say the "name" of Timarchos' deeds. In order to maintain the appearance of propriety [13], Aeschines does not spell out here what exactly this "name" is, but his choice of the word *epônumpia* is significant. A little later in the speech, Aeschines uses the same word when he says that Homer "hides the love [of Patroklos and Achilles] and the name (*epônumpian*) of their friendship" (I, 142). Not quite "the love that dare not speak its name," but that seems to be the gist.

Aeschines also uses the word *epônumpia* repeatedly of Demosthenes' nickname Bat(t)alos (I, 126, 131, 164; *On the Embassy*, 99), which with two taus can be translated as something like "Babbler," with one tau, "Bumsy" [14]. According to Aeschines, Demosthenes earned this *epônumpia* not from his childhood stammering (as Demosthenes himself claimed), but from his lack of *andreia* or masculinity (*anandria*), his shamelessness (*aischrourgia*), and especially his gender deviance [15] (*kinaidia*) (I, 131; *On the Embassy*, 99). *Epônumpia* is also used by Aeschines three times, in quick succession, in reference to the names of places where Timarchos allegedly sold his body for sex [16]. I would argue, then, that by using the word *epônumpia* in I, 80 – a word which (at least in this speech) is charged with homoeroticism – Aeschines can discreetly suggest what the people said without spelling it out: namely, that Timarchos is a male prostitute (*pornos*). In fact, Aeschines confirms this nickname later in the speech by quoting the jury's hypothetical response to a mention of Timarchos: "Which Timarchos? The *pornos*?" (I, 130) [17]. Once again, however, Aeschines manages to avoid uttering the name in his own voice.

Following this, Aeschines claims, in good rhetorical fashion, that he could tell many more stories about things that happened in the past, but instead he will focus on something that transpired at a particular Assembly meeting, the one that prompted him to make a proclamation (*epangelia*) challenging Timarchos to a *dokimasia rhêtôrôn* (I, 81). At this Assembly meeting, the council of the Areopagos happened to be present to weigh in on a resolution put forth by Timarchos [18]. While we do not know the exact substance of the proposal – it had

[9] Cf. ADAMS 1919: 67 n. 2, CAREY 2000: 51 n. 86, who suggest that the meaning of these double entendres is lost on modern readers.

[10] HALPERIN 1990: 91; DAVIDSON 1997: 80 (suggesting that "walls" and "tower" might connote specifically the area of the Kerameikos); FISHER 2001 (on "walls" and "tower").

[11] Cf. ADAMS 1919: 67 n. 2, who suggests that "tower" here connotes women's apartments.

[12] ADAMS 1919: 67 n. 2; FISHER 2001 *ad loc.*; cf. LSJ I.3.

[13] Aeschines repeatedly says that he does not want to use bad language: see, e.g., I, 38, 70. On propriety in the orators, see CAREY 1999; cf. MINER 2015.

[14] "Bumsy" is DOVER's formulation (1978: 75). The kinaidic meaning of Batalos derives either from a certain effeminate *aulos*-player named Batalos or from a slang term for anus. See further FISHER 2001 *ad I*, 126, KAMEN 2014, and SAPSFORD 2017: 82-87.

[15] For the *kinaidios* as a gender deviant, see WINKLER 1990: 46-47.

[16] Aeschines says that Demosthenes demanded that he provide the name (*epônumpias*) of every lodging where Timarchos allegedly offered sexual services. Aeschines replies that a lodging does not give its name (*epônumpias*) to its inhabitants; instead, inhabitants give the name (*epônumpias*) of their pursuits to the lodging (I, 123).

[17] On *pornos* as Timarchos' nickname, see FISHER 2001: 56-57 and *ad loc.*

[18] The Areopagos here seems to be functioning in an ad-hoc capacity. Some scholars believe (on the basis of this passage) that the Areopagos investigated infringements of building regulations, but WALLACE 1989: 120 (followed by FISHER 2001 *ad loc.*) argues that the superintendence of buildings was instead the job of the ten *astunomoi*. DE BRUYN 1995: 147-149 calls the involvement of the Areopagos here an extraordinary intervention, likely brought about at the Assembly's request.

something to do with “*oikēseis*” (houses) – it seems that Timarchos had proposed that the city deal with the deserted and falling-down houses on or around the Pnyx [19]. It is unclear how big a project this was going to be [20].

In any event, Aeschines tells the jury that an Areopagos member named Autolykos informed the Assembly that the Areopagos had rejected Timarchos’ proposal [21]. Autolykos then said to the people: “Don’t be surprised if Timarchos is more experienced in the desolate spots (*erēmias*) on the Pnyx than the Areopagos is” (I, 82). If we assume that this was a comment innocent of any double entendres [22], Autolykos was simply saying that Timarchos was experienced with the Pnyx – the meeting place of the Assembly – as someone who was actively engaged in politics [23]. And by “desolate spots”, he was presumably referring to those areas Timarchos proposed to redevelop. In fact, similar language is used by Xenophon in his *Ways and Means*, when he suggests that metics be allowed to build houses in Athens, since there are “many desolate spots (*erēma*) for houses and building sites (*oikopeda*) within the city walls” (II, 6) [24]. The Assembly, however, read sexual innuendos into Autolykos’ words. Aeschines says that everyone applauded and said that Autolykos spoke the truth, since Timarchos was indeed “experienced” with the deserted parts of the Pnyx – that is, places (again, like walls and towers) frequently used for sexual encounters [25].

But Autolykos’ double entendres did not stop there. Not understanding the reason for the people’s

uproar (or at least feigning not to), he next said that the Areopagos cut Timarchos some slack, allowing for the possibility that “perhaps Timarchos thought that in this quiet (*hēsuchiai*) there would be little expense for each of you” (I, 83). By this, Autolykos was likely referring to Timarchos’ suggestion that, during peacetime (a time of relative quiet), developments on the Pnyx would be easier for the state to afford [26]. But, as Aeschines tells the jurors, Autolykos provoked still greater uproar and laughter among the Assembly with the words “quiet” and “little expense” (I, 83). For the Assembly members, these words clearly had other connotations: “quiet” likely suggested desolate sexual meeting-places [27], and “little expense” called to mind the low cost of Timarchos’ sexual services [28]. In fact, the very mention of expense at all – coupled with the low price – might have connoted the cheapest of prostitutes in Athens: we might think, for example, of the *pornoi* and *pornai* whom literature records “bending over” for a measly three obols [29].

According to Aeschines, Autolykos next spoke of “building sites” (*oikopedōn*) [30] and “cisterns” (*lakkōn*), and once again the people were not able to contain themselves (I, 84). What Autolykos was presumably talking about – again, innocently (or not) – was the building sites and cisterns that needed to be cleared for the proposed redevelopment of the Pnyx. What did the people find so funny about this? The word *oikopeda* at first glance seems innocuous; it is the same word that we see, for example, in the Xenophon passage mentioned above. In this context, however, the word might

[19] For evidence that this was the content of Timarchos’ proposal, see the Scholia ad *Orationem in Timarchum*, 179 (commenting on Aeschines I, 81), along with DE BRUYN 1995: 148-149, CAREY 2000: 52 n. 88, and FISHER 2001 *ad loc.* DAVIDSON 1997: 306-307 says that *oikēseis* here connotes primitive (pre-urban) dwellings; but cf. FISHER 2001 *ad loc.* The word *oikēsis* also comes up twice in Aeschines I, 123.

[20] See FISHER 2001: 64, who says that it is unclear whether this was “merely a relatively minor tidying up of unsavoury areas on the fringes of the Pnyx, or the beginnings of what would become the major rebuilding of Pnyx III,” the latter of which likely took place in the 330s (ROTROFF 1996; see also FISHER 2001 *ad loc.*).

[21] Aeschines does not explain *why* Timarchos’ proposal was rejected, likely because it’s not germane to his argument.

[22] Cf. WINKLER 1990: 52, who argues that Autolykos “has it both ways” (i.e. playing it straight while also making deliberate double entendres).

[23] See CAREY 2000: 52 n. 90 and FISHER 2001 *ad loc.*

[24] Xenophon might even have had in mind proposals similar to that of Timarchos, since he uses some of the very same language we see in this passage.

[25] ADAMS 1919: 68 n. 2; DAVIDSON 1997: 79; CAREY 2000: 52 n. 90. Cf. the reputation of the Lykavettos Hill as a place for homoerotic trysts (Theopompos, PCG vii fr. 30). The slopes of Mount Hymettos may have been used for the same purpose (see LANGDON 2004: 205).

[26] ADAMS 1919: 69 n. 3; CAREY 2000: 52 n. 91.

[27] CAREY 2000: 52 n. 91; FISHER 2001 *ad loc.*; SPATHARAS 2006: 381. For this meaning of *hēsuchiai*, see LSJ II.

[28] CAREY 2000: 52 n. 91; FISHER 2001 *ad loc.*; SPATHARAS 2006: 381.

[29] On the commodification of the *pornē*, see DAVIDSON 1997 (especially ch. 4) and KURKE 1997. On the price of three obols for *kubda*, see Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters*, X, 442a and XIII, 580d.

[30] FISHER 2001 *ad loc.* renders this term as “building-plots, or uncompleted, or partially ruined or abandoned, buildings on a site”.

have been humorous for a number of reasons. First of all, it evoked an image of derelict buildings that were suitable for surreptitious sexual acts, including prostitution [31]. Secondly, in that the word referred to the foundations or “bottoms” of buildings, it had the potential to suggest other kinds of bottoms [32]. And thirdly, *oikopeda* may have been amusing for its auditory similarity to the word *orchipeda* (“testicles”) [33].

The sexual connotations of *lakkos*, on the other hand, are perhaps more obvious [34]: cisterns, with their wide openings for collecting rainwater, easily call to mind bodily orifices, especially large ones. In fact, *lakkos* and related words are often used with this sexual sense [35]. For example, Athenaeus describes a *hetaira* whose services were purchased by two men, one of whom insulted her by calling her “*lakkos*” (*The Learned Banqueters*, XIII, 585a) [36]. A related insult is *lakkoprôktos*, “cistern-assed,” with a sense similar to the more common adjective *euruprôktos*, “wide-assed”. In the case of Timarchos, then, the word *lakkos* likely called to mind wide-open anuses [37], and by association, Timarchos’ insatiable desire to be penetrated [38]. The word *lakkos* may have been additionally humorous because of its similarity to the word *lakkopeda*, meaning “scrota” [39]. This association might have been especially primed by the coupling of *lakkos* with *oiko-peda* in this passage.

## THE LAUGHTER AND ITS IMMEDIATE EFFECTS

We see, then, that the people in the Assembly laughed because all of these words connote sex

– and in particular, male homoeroticism and male prostitution. One effect of this laughter, if not necessarily its design, was to attest to, and thereby solidify, Timarchos’ sexual reputation [40]. Another likely effect was to shut Timarchos up. In fact, any kind of uproar (*thorubos*) [41], including (and perhaps especially) laughter, had the potential to quiet a speaker, whether in the Assembly or in the courts [42]. Sometimes this uproar was enough not only to momentarily silence a speaker, but even to remove him physically from the speaker’s platform (*bêma*).

For example, in Plato’s *Protagoras*, Socrates says that when someone speaks in the Assembly on a topic about which he isn’t knowledgeable, the people laugh at him and scorn him until, overcome by the uproar, he gives up trying – and, in some cases, the police-archers actually drag him from the platform (*aphelkusôsin*) or kick him out of the Assembly (*exarôntai*) (319c). In Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, we learn that when Plato’s brother Glaukon was a very young man (not yet twenty), he would routinely get up to speak in the Assembly, making a laughingstock of himself and getting dragged (*helkomenon*) from the speaker’s platform (III, 6, 1). And in a passage earlier in *Against Timarchos*, Aeschines says that there is no use trying to drive away (*ape-launein*) certain men from the *bêma*, since they have no sense of shame (I, 34).

We are never told that Timarchos was dragged from the speaker’s platform, but he was laughed at when he spoke of walls and towers, which likely shut him up at least temporarily. Moreover, Timarchos was sometimes silenced even when he wasn’t the one speaking. After the Assembly members laughed at Autolykos’ double entendres – and

[31] DAVIDSON 1997: 306; FISHER 2001 *ad loc.* On homoerotic encounters in the ruins of the Athenian general Kimon’s estate, see Kratinos, *PCG* iv fr. 160.

[32] CAREY 2000: 53 n. 92.

[33] ADAMS 1919: 71 n. 1; SPATHARAS 2006: 381. On *orchipeda*, see HENDERSON 1991: 124.

[34] As FISHER 2001 *ad loc.* notes, this is the most explicit sexual reference Aeschines makes in this passage.

[35] For some examples, see HENDERSON 1991: 210.

[36] See also OLSON 2010: 379: “I.e. because her vagina was so large and loose.”

[37] CAREY 2000: 53 n. 92.

[38] DAVIDSON 1997: 79; FISHER 2001 *ad loc.*; WORMAN 2008: 346.

[39] ADAMS 1919: 71 n. 1; SPATHARAS 2006: 381. *Lakkos* is also found as part of a compound adjective *lakkoscheas*, meaning “with hanging scrotum”.

[40] RYDBERG-COX 2000: 425-426; FISHER 2001 *ad I*, 80. See also the Scholia ad *Orationem in Timarchum*, 184 (commenting on Aeschines I, 83), which asserts that the people made a ruckus “suspecting that Timarchus was a *pornos*”.

[41] On *thorubos* in the courts, see BERS 1985, LANNI 1997; *thorubos* in the Assembly, see TACON 2001, VILLACÈQUE 2013: 268-277 and *passim*; in both, MONTIGLIO 2000: 144-151. On the important role of “citizen spectators” in democratic Athens (whether in the theater, courts, or Assembly), see VILLACÈQUE 2013.

[42] On laughter as a means of silencing one’s opponent, see SPATHARAS 2006. On *thorubos* more generally silencing a speaker, see BERS 1985: 9 and MONTIGLIO 2000: 148. For example, on one occasion when Demosthenes tried to speak in the Assembly, Aeschines and Philokrates apparently jeered at him, causing everyone to laugh and not to listen to him (Demosthenes, *On the False Embassy*, 23).

therefore (indirectly) at Timarchos himself – a man named Pyrrandros stepped forward and asked if the people were not ashamed to laugh in the presence of the Areopagos. Aeschines tells us that the people threw Pyrrandros out (*exeballete*), replying aggressively (*hubolambanontes*) [43] that they knew they shouldn't laugh, but that the truth was so strong, it prevailed over all rational calculations (I, 84). Effectively, then, the people did to Pyrrandros what they would have done to Timarchos if Timarchos had been speaking. That is, even though Timarchos was not the one personally dragged off the *bêma*, he was nonetheless silenced, in that all further discussion of his proposal was shut down.

## HUMOR AND ITS LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES

In addition to quieting Timarchos and confirming his reputation, the Assembly's laughter had consequences that went beyond these meetings, thanks in large part to Aeschines. What Aeschines manages to do in *Against Timarchos* is to coopt this earlier laughter in the service of his own larger, longer-term goals: namely, securing the *atimia* – and therefore the civic silencing – of Timarchos [44]. He does this in two main ways [45].

First, Aeschines introduces the Assembly's laughter as "evidence" for Timarchos' sexual reputation, saying "I take this [46] to be the testimony (*marturian memarturêsthai*) offered to you by the Athenian people, whom it is not good for you to convict of false witness (*pseudomarturiôn*)"

(I, 85). It should be pointed out that Aeschines had very little concrete evidence that Timarchos was a prostitute: he could find no witnesses who would testify either to hiring Timarchos for sex or to seeing Timarchos engaged in prostitution. In the face of this complete lack of testimony – and the defense's repeated insistence that Aeschines produce witnesses [47] – Aeschines found a clever solution: he framed the Assembly's laughter as the testimony of the demos, using the same language to describe it that one would use to introduce an actual deposition (e.g. *marturia*) [48]. He even says that questioning this "testimony" would be akin to charging someone with perjury, using the technical term for public lawsuits (*graphai*) for false testimony: namely, *pseudomarturiôn*. Technically, of course, the Assembly members could not be charged with perjury [49], but by presenting them as a "witness," their "testimony" is automatically granted extra weight [50].

Secondly, and somewhat paradoxically, in addition to presenting the Assembly's laughter as testimony for the jury to consider, he also conflates the current jurors with the Assembly members [51], employing a technique found throughout the orators [52]. He prefaces the stories of laughter by saying that he knows that, even if (in a hypothetical world) he had not been allowed to offer up an accusation (as he is now), the jurors still would have voted that Timarchos was a prostitute, "because you" – that is, you the jurors – "have spoken freely and told me" (I, 80). But when have they done this? According to Aeschines, it was when Timarchos spoke of walls and towers in the Assembly and "immediately you shouted (*eboate*)

[43] See KURKE 2013 on *hupolabô* (*ephê*) as a marker of aggressive speech.

[44] See also DAVIDSON 1997: 262–263; SPATHARAS 2006: 382. On *atimia* as civic silencing, see MONTIGLIO 2000: 116; ALLEN 2000: 230; HEATH 2005: 180.

[45] In addition, Aeschines' telling of these stories presumably made the jury laugh, thus "solidif[ying] the jurors' connection to him as a speaker promulgating social norms against a deviant who breaks them" (MINER 2015: 136).

[46] The verb Aeschines uses here is *hubolambanô*, perhaps linking himself to the Assembly members who replied aggressively to Pyrrandros (*hubolambanontes*, I, 84).

[47] E.g. Aeschines I, 71, 87, 119, 160.

[48] See also SPATHARAS 2006: 382: "Aeschines is here using a previous audience's laughter as a witness of Timarchus' disreputable life."

[49] On this point, see also FISHER 2001 *ad loc.*

[50] On the value of witness testimony in the Athenian courts, see, e.g., MIRHADY 2002. As MIRHADY points out, the demos (generally in the form of the jurors) is frequently called upon as a witness (2002: 264).

[51] On the conflation of the two in this speech, see FISHER 2001: 215. He points out (2001: 215–216, 222), however, that when convenient, Aeschines separates the two (e.g. in I, 85).

[52] A debate exists about how best to interpret these instances of conflation of jury and Assembly: HANSEN 1990: 220–221 argues that the two could be assimilated because of an overlap in personnel attending both (i.e. ordinary citizens); OBER 1996: 117–119 suggests that assimilation is possible because both the courts and the Assembly were understood by synecdoche to be parts of the whole citizen body; and WOLPERT 2003 reads assimilation as a rhetorical fiction that allowed the Athenians to imagine the demos' power as transcending time and space.

and laughed, and you yourselves (*autoi*) said the name of the deeds you know he committed" (I, 80) [53]. By using the second-person plural both of the present jurors and of the past Assembly, Aeschines links the two groups, suggesting, with the emphatic *autoi*, that the latter is equivalent to the former.

But the assimilation does not stop there. Throughout this passage, Aeschines continues to use the second-person plural to refer to the members of the Assembly, thus cementing the conflation between the two groups [54]. And when he is done telling the stories, he concludes by saying that it would be strange "if, on the one hand, you yourselves (*autoi*) shout (*boate*) the name of the deeds you know he committed when I say nothing, but on the other, when I do say something" – that is, now, in this court case – "you forget" (I, 85) [55]. The verbal similarities of the *men* clause in I, 85 to what Aeschines says in I, 80 are striking (*autoi*; the verb *boaō*; τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν τῶν ἔργων ὡν σύνιστε αὐτῷ) making a sort of ring composition around the stories, wherein the jury and Assembly members are one and the same. The *de* clause then brings the "you" back from the (past) Assembly into the world of the (present) jurors. At the same time, since the two groups are notionally the same, Aeschines can say, and does say, that it would be inconsistent for the jurors not to vote in the courtroom the way "they" did in the court of public opinion. ■

Through both of these strategies, then, Aeschines is able to harness, and make maximal use of, the Assembly's laughter. And to good effect: doing so helps him to convict Timarchos, thereby extending his opponent's silence from temporary to permanent. In fact, there are even reports that Timarchos hanged himself out of despair after losing his suit [56]. While this is unlikely to have been his literal fate, it does reflect the social death he experienced through his conviction. At least for Timarchos, then, humerotica had serious consequences [57]. ■

[53] εὐθὺς ἐβοᾶτε καὶ ἐγελᾶτε, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐλέγετε τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν τῶν ἔργων ὡν σύνιστε αὐτῷ.

[54] E.g., "You applauded" (I, 82), "not understanding your uproar" (I, 83), "uproar from you" (I, 83), "Pyrrandros came out to censure you" (I, 84), "you (emphatic: *humeis*) kicked him out" (I, 84).

[55] εἰ μηδὲν μὲν ἐμοῦ λέγοντος αὐτοὶ βοᾶτε τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν τῶν ἔργων ὡν σύνιστε τούτῳ, ἐμοῦ δὲ λέγοντος ἐπιλέλησθε.

[56] See Plutarch, *Moralia*, 480F. FISHER 2001: 22 n. 7 thinks that Plutarch's report is "a dramatic exaggeration" of Demosthenes' claim that Aeschines "removed" (*anēirēke*) and "destroyed" (*apôlesen*) his opponent (see Demosthenes, *On the False Embassy*, 2 and 285, respectively).

[57] I would like to thank the following for their comments and suggestions (all errors are of course my own): Ruby Blondell, Sandra Boehringer, Sarah Levin-Richardson, Tom Sapsford, Kate Topper, and the journal's two anonymous reviewers.

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## HUNTING HARES AND LOVERS: SOCRATES' PLAYFUL LESSON IN XENOPHON, *MEMORABILIA III, 11*

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### ABSTRACT

*Memorabilia III, 11* is a masterly example of Socrates' ability to combine seriousness with playfulness. By comparing Theodote's search for so-called "friends" with the hunt for hares (III, 11, 6–9), Socrates describes the heteroerotic matrix of the *hetaira*'s economics in terms usually associated with male-male relationships. To give Theodote a lesson on the ethical values of friendship (*philia*), he uses euphemistic language and constantly alternates (gender) roles, being either the philosopher and lover, or the object of desire. Socrates ultimately proves to be a perfect connoisseur of a *hetaira*'s expertises, witchcraft and alluring talk, easily outdoing the wealthy Theodote herself. By this means, *Memorabilia III, 11* offers a delightful picture both of Socratic teaching and of the erotic structure of Socratic philosophy.

### KEYWORDS

*Hetaira*,  
hunting,  
pederasty,  
gender,  
Socrates,  
Xenophon.

Le chapitre III, 11 des *Mémorables* est une magistrale illustration du talent de Socrate à allier sérieux et humour. En comparant avec une chasse aux lièvres la quête de « compagnons » par la courtisane Théodote (III, 11, 6–9), Socrate décrit le dispositif économique « hétéroérotique » de l'*hetaira* avec un lexique généralement associé au domaine des relations entre hommes. Pour faire comprendre à Théodote la valeur éthique de l'amitié (*philia*), il recourt à de nombreux euphémismes et alterne constamment les rôles de genre pour désigner soit le philosophe et l'amant, soit l'objet du désir. Socrate se révèle finalement être un parfait expert dans tout ce qui touche à la courtisane – ses savoirs, ses talents de magicienne, son discours enjôleur – surpassant même, avec aisance, la riche courtisane Théodote. Ce passage des *Mémorables* offre ainsi un splendide tableau de l'enseignement de Socrate et de la structure érotique de la philosophie socratique.

### MOTS-CLÉS

Courtisane,  
chasse,  
péderastie,  
genre,  
Socrate,  
Xénophon.

Article accepté après évaluation par deux experts selon le principe du double anonymat

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Xenophon's *Memorabilia* is committed to portraying Socrates as a teacher of ideal democratic citizenship [1]. Socrates engages in conversations with male representatives of Athenian society, like Critoboulos (e.g. II, 6) or Euthydemos (e.g. IV, 3), about topics such as the use of art (III, 10) and the welfare of the city (III, 6). In *Memorabilia* III, 11, however, Socrates meets Theodote, a famous *hetaira* (III, 11, 1-2) [2]:

At one time there was in Athens a beautiful woman named Theodote, who was ready to keep company with anyone who persuaded her (οἵς συνεῖναι τῷ πείθοντι). One of the bystanders mentioned her name, declaring that words failed him to describe the woman's beauty (κρεῖττον εἴη λόγου τὸ κάλλος τῆς γυναικός) ... "We had better go and see her," (ἰτέον ἀν εἴη θεασομένους) cried Socrates, "since of course what is beyond description can't be learned by hearsay." So off they went to Theodote's house, where they found her posing before a painter, and looked on (ἐθεάσαντο).

Since the dialogue takes its start from an erotic context, it comes as little surprise that the

unspeakable (physical) beauty of Theodote generates a conversation about attracting lovers. Commentators have argued about how the philosopher can be shown as a trustworthy teacher of Athenian citizens by talking about professional love affairs (III, 11, 7-14), and, what is more, by ultimately presenting himself as an arch-*hetaira* acquainted with the skills of witchcraft and alluring talk (III, 11, 15-18) [3]. A few, however, have recommended focusing on the satirical overtones in *Memorabilia* III, 11 [4].

More recent research has used the importance of ἔρως for Socratic philosophy to explain why Socrates deliberately disrupts gender roles and social hierarchy in his conversation with Theodote. While Goldhill, for example, stresses the dynamics of viewing within *Memorabilia* III, 11, Azoulay analyzes the system of reciprocity covered by the word χάρις in this very dialogue (and in Xenophon's œuvre as a whole) [5]. Both contributions are most valuable for reaching a better understanding of Xenophon's Socrates. Nevertheless, they pay virtually no attention to the fact that Socrates compares

[1] In Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I, 6, 15 it is emphasized that Socrates tried to make others good citizens. ERBSE 1961 (especially on p. 282 and 286f.) emphasized Socrates' utility as a key theme of the *Memorabilia*. Erbse is re-read critically by BANDINI & DORION 2000: CXCII-CCXL, here CCXVII: « Si Xénophon insiste tant sur la nécessité, pour l'homme, de rendre service à ses proches, à ses amis et à sa patrie, comment ne pas imaginer que c'est précisément cette progression de l'utilité, qui s'étend par cercles concentriques de l'individu à la cité tout entière, qu'il a voulu illustrer dans le cas de Socrate? » GRAY 2004, argues that Xenophon tried to present Socrates as « un adepte des valeurs démocratiques » (174).

[2] The *Memorabilia* is cited from MARCHANT 1971 [=1921]; the translation is freely adapted from MARCHANT 1923.

[3] DELATTE 1933: 151 states « l'on s'est indigné de

voir Socrate dans un rôle qui ne sied pas à un philosophe de son caractère » and points to earlier research on page 155. TILG 2004: 194f. gives a concise summary of the long-lasting debate over *Memorabilia* III, 11. In general, *hetairai* are not strangers to Socratic writings. In Plato's *Menexenus*, for example, Aspasia is mentioned as Pericles' teacher of rhetoric (235e5-6), and in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* she is recommended as a teacher for the newly-wed wife of Ischomachos (III, 14). Plato leaves no doubt that Aspasia's rhetorical power, or rather erotic persuasion, puts male authority and identity into question, and has to be considered dangerous. This is discussed by COVENTRY 1989.

[4] See e.g. DELATTE 1933: 151: « Certains traits ne s'expliquent que par une intention satirique ».

[5] See GOLDHILL 1998 and AZOULAY 2004.

a *hetaira*'s pursuit of lovers, her so-called "friends", to an exclusively male upper class activity, namely hunting (III, 11, 7):

"And do you advise me, then, to weave a trap of some sort (ὑφίνασθαι τι θήρατρον)?" "Of course not. Don't suppose you are going to hunt (θηράσειν) friends (φίλους), the most precious prey in the world (τὸ πλείστου ἄξιον ἄγρευμα), by such crude methods."

Hunting is one of Xenophon's favourite topics and a core capability for his idealized aristocratic males [6]. In *Memorabilia* III, 11, then, Socrates is playing on Theodote a pedagogical trick that rests upon aristocratic male ideals, rather than undermining his own status as a reliable teacher of ideal citizenship. He will succeed in winning Theodote over by integrating activities that are essential for the pedagogical purposes of male-male relationships (hunting and philosophy) into activities that define the heteroerotic relationships of a *hetaira*. Thus, III, 11 should be reconsidered as a comic interlude within the *Memorabilia*. This would be most appropriate to Xenophon's Socrates, since he is a self-styled master of erotics (II, 6, 28 ἵσως δ' ἀν τί σοι κάγω συλλαβεῖν ... ἔχοιμι διὰ τὸ ἐρωτικὸς εἶναι "Maybe, I myself, as an adept in love, can lend you a hand"), who balances seriousness and play (I, 3, 8 ἔπαιζεν ἀμα σπουδάζων "playfully being serious"). When Socrates, in *Memorabilia* III, 11, disguises his lesson about the real nature of friendship with erotic euphemisms, he chooses a code that is sure to gain Theodote's attention [7]. His subsequent role reversal should be appreciated not only as a playful performance of Socratic persuasive power, but also as a humorous mixing of male-female and male-male erotics for philosophical purposes [8].

[6] See DELEBECQUE 1970: 23: « La chasse figure ... au programme de l'éducation. »

[7] WEISSENBORN 1887: 132, n. 16 has already pointed to Socrates' erotic code, by which „er sich in seiner Ausdrucksweise den Anschauungen der Theodote eng anschließt“.

[8] Compare HENRY 1995: 46 who comments on Xenophon's treatment of Aspasia within his Socratic writings: "Xenophon's Aspasia scarcely transcends her position as secondary to the interests and requirements of men's discourse; Xenophon merely deploys "Aspasion" ideas in a new way, showing us a Socrates who appropriates attributes of the woman and of femininity to his own ends." HALPERIN 1990 draws a similar conclusion when he discusses why Socrates uses the mask of Diotima to teach about ἔρως (Plato, *Symposium*, 201d–212c).

## EROTIC DYNAMICS AND SOCRATES' LESSON ON ΦΙΛΙΑ

The dialogue between Socrates and Theodote highlights the erotic structure of Socratic philosophy [9]. Entering Theodote's house Socrates switches from the male roles of lover and philosopher to the female role of arch-*hetaira*. He gradually blends the structures of male-male and male-female erotic relationships in order to reshape Theodote's ideas about friendship. A crucial step towards this understanding of Socrates' lesson in III, 11 is the erotic power of viewing, which is prevalent in this dialogue from its very beginning, as Simon Goldhill has brilliantly analyzed [10].

*Memorabilia* III, 11 illustrates the male gaze fastening upon an object of desire: Socrates hears about Theodote (ἀκούσασί) and immediately decides to see her with his own eyes (ιτέον ἀν εἴη θεασομένους). His desire to see literally attracts him to her house (πορευθέντες πρὸς τὴν Θεοδότην) [11], where he finds Theodote exposed to the eyes of a painter (καταλαβόντες ζωγράφῳ τινὶ παρεστηκούσῃ). Visuality clearly dominates the opening scene. And visuality will stimulate the conversation between philosopher and *hetaira* (III, 11, 2–3). It will also be referred to at the dialogue's end, when Socrates and Theodote discuss who is going to visit whom (III, 11, 16–18). Thus, the erotic dynamics between viewer and viewed forms a sort of *Ringkomposition* for III, 11 [12].

When Socrates asks who owes χάρις, gratitude, he explicitly links the erotic dynamics of viewing to another integral part of an erotic relationship, i.e. the system of reciprocity:

"My friends, ought we to be more grateful to Theodote (ἡμᾶς δεῖ μᾶλλον Θεοδότῃ χάριν

[9] See O'CONNOR 1994 for the *Memorabilia*; for the Platonic Socrates see e.g. WURM 2008.

[10] GOLDHILL 1998.

[11] BANDINI & DORION 2011: 379f. hint at another reading of Socrates' motivation to go to Theodote's house: he is only motivated by his friend's assertion that Theodote's beauty is beyond expression because he wants to fight this hypothesis with his dialectical power. But I do not see why Socrates should not be curious to find out (καταμαθεῖν) whether or not his friend is right.

[12] GOLDHILL 1998: 108 links these dynamics to Xenophon's contemporary "culture of viewing, in which the roles, statuses, positions of the democratic actors were constantly being structured in and through the gaze of the citizens".

έχειν) for showing (έπέδειξεν) us her beauty, or she to us for looking at it (έθεασάμεθα)? Should she thank us (ταύτην ήμιν χάριν ἔκτεόν), if she profits more by showing it (ή ἐπίδειξις), or we her, if we profit more by looking (ή θέα)?” (III, 11, 2)

Socrates surely is aware of the male gaze at work, but he also knows that viewing can make subject and object interchange their position: When Socrates and his companions look (έθεασάμεθα) at Theodote's beautiful body, their gaze not only objectifies the woman who is being looked at, but also objectifies the gazing men, since Theodote, by exposing herself (έπέδειξεν) to their male gaze, voluntarily makes them the addressees of her bodily spectacle. Socrates thereby constructs the terms θέα and ἐπίδειξις as complementary, and stresses that viewing – in this case – is a double-sided system of power that is unlikely to be entered one-way only.

In Xenophon, χάρις is an indispensable feature of the politics of power in all areas of public life and the social hierarchy of citizens, encompassing both reciprocity and a mode of exchange [13]. Accordingly, *Memorabilia* III, 11 suggests that Socrates is trying hard to make Theodote (and his companions) consider her (and their) own status within the reciprocal system of Athenian society. The opening scene of III, 11 therefore is not only erotically charged by the male gaze but also politically charged by Theodote's voluntary exposition to this gaze [14].

## PHILOSOPHER AND HETAIRA: EXPERTS IN EUPHEMISTIC LANGUAGE

Since Davidson's *Courtesans and Fishcakes* (1997) Theodote's description of sex work has become famous [15]. Theodote encodes a *hetaira*'s modes of living and loving in terms of friendship

and presents. According to this, Davidson argues that Xenophon is referring to the core issue of the gift-exchange system within which the much debated relationship between a *hetaira* and her lover should be settled. Indeed, Theodote never openly sells sex for money. She rather wittily glosses over her sex business, by insisting that she makes her living through the good will of her male friends (φίλοι):

Πόθεν οὖν, ἔφη, τὰ ἐπιτήδεια ἔχεις; Έάν τις, ἔφη, φίλος μοι γενόμενος εῦ ποιεῖν ἐθέλῃ, οὗτός μοι βίος ἔστι.

“Then where do you get your supplies from?” “Whenever”, she said, “someone who has become my friend wants to do me a favour, this is how I make a living.” (III, 11, 4)

When Theodote speaks up, she – apparently unconsciously – disguises the world of ἔρως behind the central social relationship of the πόλις, namely friendship. By this means, she is portrayed not only as attractive but as discrete, too. Not a word about greed, the economic exploitation of clients, or sexual licentiousness [16] – well established prejudices against *hetairai* since archaic times [17].

Yet, Theodote is introduced into the text as a woman who is willing to spend time with anyone who persuades her: Γυναικὸς ... οἵας συνεῖναι τῷ πείθοντι. (III, 11, 1). The verbs συνεῖναι and πείθειν refer unmistakeably to the fields of ἔρως and πείθω. While πείθειν, to persuade, is primarily connected with ὥρτορικὴ τέχνη, the art of persuasion [18], συνεῖναι, to consort with, clearly refers to the erotic relationship between *hetairai* and their lovers. Granted, Theodote is neither here nor later explicitly called a ἔταίρα. But the facts that she is referred to by name, known for her beauty throughout Athens (III, 11, 1), and described in a way that exposes her luxury life-style are sufficient

[13] This is thoroughly argued by AZOULAY 2004; see esp. p. 281-326 on the importance of χάρις in matters of φιλία. On p. 371-427 he treats the interrelations between χάρις and ἔρως, arguing that « l'érôs ne serait qu'une sorte de *philia* amplifiée et exagérée, fondée sur une relation d'échange foncièrement asymétrique » (Azoulay 2004: 371).

[14] GOLDHILL 1998: 109-112 discusses *Memorabilia* III, 10 where the impact of art on the ethical formation of the audience is discussed at length and therefore functions as a kind of preparatory dialogue for III, 11.

[15] See DAVIDSON 1997: 120-129 on Theodote and p. 109-136 on the *hetaira* in general. This work is referred to by all subsequent contributions to scholarship on the

ancient *hetaira*, e.g. MCCLURE 2003 and most recently ROBSON 2013.

[16] Even her pose as a model for painters seems to have been decorous (III, 11, 1: καὶ ζωγράφους φύσαντος εἰσιέναι πρὸς αὐτὴν ἀπεικασμένους, οἷς ἐκείνην ἐπιδεικνύειν ἔσυτῆς ὅσα καλῶς ἔχοι “and [someone] added that artists visited her to paint her portrait, and she showed them as much as decency allowed”).

[17] See KURKE 1997: 140-142 and DAVIDSON 1997: 180 on these *topoi*.

[18] I will return to the erotic connotations of πείθειν below.

to characterize her as such [19]. Theodote seems to be a μεγαλόμισθος ἔταιρα, a courtesan with a huge income, since Socrates notes the costly clothes in which she is arrayed (όρῶν αὐτὴν τε πιλυτελῶς κεκοσμημένην), her mother's jewellery (μητέρα ἐν ... θεραπείᾳ), and the pretty slave girls (θεραπαίνας πολλὰς καὶ εὔειδεῖς) surrounding her (III, 11, 4). Furthermore, even Socrates is intrigued enough to enter her house in order to find out whether she really is that beautiful and how she can make a living from her beauty [20]. So, by using the word φίλος, 'friend', Theodote is glossing over her marginalized status as a *hetaira* and the fact that her so-called friends are lovers who will have to redeem her sexual favours [21].

But since Theodote never spells out the economic modalities she lives on, she also arouses (the reader's) suspicion. The vast Greek literary tradition revolving around *hetairai* characterizes these women as notorious manipulators and constant threat to the social status of their lovers:

The persuasive *hetaira*, seductive in both speech and body, embodied the strong association between erotic and political persuasion in the Greek imagination. For Aristophanes and Plato, the courtesan who speaks serves as metaphor for political corruption and social disorder. [22]

The importance of this first verbal exchange between philosopher and *hetaira* in *Memorabilia* III, 11 cannot be overstated: on the one hand, they introduce the topic of friendship, φιλία, into the dialogue; on the other hand, Theodote's euphemistic language paves the way for the humorous flavour of III, 11: from now on Socrates will use figurative language as well, albeit for another purpose. He uses it, rather, to disguise the philosophical values embedded in erotics, which are most valuable to the πόλις. He begins with the

metaphor of hunting, which he gradually develops into the metaphor of witchcraft.

### THE FEMALE VICES OF THE *HETAIRA*-SPIDER

When Theodote states that she lives off her so-called friends (III, 11, 4), Socrates takes the opportunity to start a dialectical reflection on friendship and the question of how to find and keep good friends. Although Theodote is obviously misrepresenting a pedagogically charged relationship between two men as analogous to her libidinous professional relationship to her male lovers [23], Socrates does not judge her for that. He silently accepts her euphemism and focuses on the question whether Theodote uses a special art, τέχνη, to attract her so-called friends (III, 11, 5–6):

"But," he went on, "do you trust to luck, waiting for friends to settle on you like flies, or have you some contrivance of your own (αὐτή τι μηχανᾶς)?" "How could I discover a contrivance (μηχανὴν) for that?" "Much more conveniently, I assure you, than the spiders (αἱ φάλαγγες) [24]. For you know how they hunt for a living (ἐκεῖναι θηρῶσι τὰ πρὸς τὸν βίον): they weave a thin web (ἀράχνια ... λεπτὰ ύφηνάμεναι) and feed (τροφῆ χρῶνται) on anything that gets into it."

Socrates first parallels the way the *hetaira* makes her living with a spider's hunting for food: θηρῶσι τὰ πρὸς τὸν βίον in III, 11, 6 picks up the expression of III, 11, 5 οὗτός (= τις ... φίλος μοι γενόμενος εὖ ποιεῖν έθέλη) μοι βίος ἔστι. The hunting spider thereby becomes the hunting *hetaira*, when Theodote is reminded of spiders, which weave fine webs, ἀράχνια ... λεπτὰ ύφηνάμεναι. Theodote seems to accept this metamorphosis into a *hetaira*-spider by asking: Καὶ ἐμοὶ οὖν ... συμβουλεύεις ύφηνασθαι τι θήρατρον; ("And do you advise me, then, to weave a trap of some sort?" III, 11, 7).

[19] AZOULAY 2004, for instance, calls Theodote « une professionnelle de la séduction » (404). BANDINI & DORION 2011: 378f. point out that it is necessary to interpret Theodote as a ἔταιρα and not a πόρην, because the latter is considered unable to make friends (see *Memorabilia* I, 6, 13).

[20] Athenaeus XIII.574f mentions a *hetaira* named Theodote, who consorted with Alcibiades. On Xenophon's intention to refer to a well known *hetaira* as sort of «rivale di Socrate» compare NARCY 2007: 58.

[21] The marginalized status of *hetairai* is stressed by e.g. HENRY 1985: 51 ("Menander's courtesans, ... barred from the *oikos*") and GILHULY 2006: 276.

[22] MCCLURE 1999: 23. Cf. also e.g. MCCLURE 2003: 49-50 and GLAZEBROOK 2011: 12.

[23] CHERNYAKHOVSKAYA 2014: 156 speaks of the καλοὶ κάγαθοί as the only persons who are capable of friendship in Xenophon: „nur diejenigen [sind] zur Freundschaft fähig, die die Tugend besitzen (und folglich nur enthaltsame und beherrschte Menschen), weil nur diese das Wissen vom Nützlichen haben“. See also NEITZEL 1981: 58 referring to II, 6, 14: „Freundschaft ... gibt es nur zwischen Guten“.

[24] According to LSJ ἡ φάλαγξ is – at least in comedy – an alternate term for the more common τὸ φαλάγγιον.

Two things should be kept in mind, when we think about Theodote as a spider. First, III, 11 is not the only instance in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* where spiders appear in an erotic context. Second, the comparison of women to animals is well established in ancient Greek tradition. Let us begin with the first point. Socrates has already used the metaphor of a hunting spider to convey the dangers of erotic attraction in *Memorabilia* I, 3, 13. There a spider's bite is compared to a kiss from an ἔρωμενος.

And do you think, you foolish fellow, that the fair inject nothing when they kiss (τοὺς δὲ καλοὺς οὐκ οἵει φιλοῦντας ἐνίέναι τι), just because you don't see it? Don't you know that this wild beast (θηρίον) called 'fair and young' (καλὸν καὶ ωραῖον) is more dangerous than the spider (τοσούτῳ δεινότερόν ἔστι τῶν φαλάγγιων) [25], seeing that it need not even come in contact, like the insect, but at any distance can inject (ἐνίησι τι) a maddening poison (ἔστε μαίνεσθαι ποιεῖν) into anyone who only looks at it?

When Socrates warns his interlocutors Critoboulos and Xenophon about the disastrous power that such a kiss – or even a look – can have on the lover's self-control, the venomous spider is used to clarify the relationship between male lovers [26]. In III, 11, however, Socrates transfers the metaphor of the spider from male-male erotics to female-male erotics. It is noteworthy that Xenophon mentions the insertion of poison in the context of homoerotic relationships, while he stresses the production of a hunting web in the context of the *hetaira*'s heteroerotic relationships. Although this seems to imply

two different ways of hunting, their result is just the same: The male lover is overpowered [27].

Socrates, however, is not only transferring an erotic metaphor. By comparing Theodote's way of living to the hunting skills of a weaving spider he also alludes to several restrictive gender stereotypes concerning women. Since archaic times a woman's carnal lust was commonly linked to the behaviour of irrational animals [28]. For present purposes Aeschylus' Clytemnestra is one of the most useful examples of this misogynistic type of metaphor. The excessive behaviour of the adulterous queen reaches its peak when she lures her husband Agamemnon into a deadly trap like a black widow (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1489–1492): Oh, oh! My king, my king ... you lie in this web of a (female) spider [29]. When the old men of Argos call Clytemnestra a spider they are obviously referring to this animal's hunting skills and thereby stressing Agamemnon's position as a victim of his wife, a target of her vices.

The image of the spider that hunts for food with a woven net also draws on the association of women with weaving [30]. The *Odyssey*, for example, contains several instances of weaving women, sometimes portraying the ideal woman dedicated to her female duties within a household, sometimes portraying the danger of women's alluring sexual power. While Penelope is meant to represent the ideal Homeric housewife (I, 356f.) [31], Circe (X, 220–223), Calypso (V, 57–62) and Helen (IV, 121–135) are all portrayed weaving, or at least surrounded by their wool-working tools, before they persuade and control men (sometimes with the help of magic potions). In the last three cases, weaving

[25] MARCHANT 1923 translates τὰ φαλάγγια as scorpions, although Aristotle (*Historia Animalium* 555b7–17) refers to τὸ φαλάγγιον as a species of ἄράχνη.

[26] Note LEAR 2014: 113 who underscores that "both [Xenophon and Plato] portray [Socrates] as participating in the ambient pederastic discourse for ironic, pedagogical purposes."

[27] Also Aristotle (*Historia Animalium* 623a27–623b5) distinguishes venomous spiders (φαλάγγιον) from non-venomous ones (ἄράχνιον), but he doesn't imply that biting is an exclusively male capacity. Interestingly, he states that it is the female (wolf) spider, who knows how to weave and hunt, while the male spider only takes a share in the prey. Pliny (*Naturalis Historia* XI, 28), on the contrary, suggests that preying is distributed according to gender: weaving for the female, hunting for the male.

[28] See esp. the famous iambic poem of Semonides (fr. 7), that LORAUX 1993: 99 judges "nothing more than the creation of a generalized metaphor for woman" and (110) a literary glimpse of "a contradictory unity of

disparate things, where the opposition between artifice and animality breaks down." Such a misogynistic view seems to have found its way into the representation of *hetairai* in animal-like postures on classical pottery (some of which KURKE 1997 discusses on pages 137–139) and might be reflected in sexual euphemisms like the "common meaning" of ἄππος as "lecherous woman" (HENDERSON 1975: 127).

[29] The translation is my own. The Greek original runs ιώ ιώ βασιλεῦ βασιλεῦ / ... κεῖσαι δ' ἄράχνης ἐν ὑφάσματι τῷδ' (MURRAY 1960 [= 1955]).

[30] AZOULAY 2004: 404 suggests that even the name Theodote might have alarmed an ancient (male) reader, because he might be reminded of the disastrous attractiveness of Pandora. The entrapping power of ἔρως is not a metaphor foreign to male(-male) erotic experience; e.g. Ibucus (fr. 6) talks of ἄπειρα δίκτυα Κύπριδος.

[31] Her seductive powers and tricks have not been overlooked, though. Cf. FELSON-RUBIN 1987.

and magic are “depicted as coercive” [32], and this cultural linkage between weaving and female power over men is also significant in Xenophon III, 11, since its final sections will speak of Socrates’ magical skill and its usefulness for the pursuit of friends [33].

Yet, it is not only the dangerous attractiveness of women but also their insatiable appetites that Socrates introduces by way of the hunting spider. A woman’s gluttony is a major anxiety for men, deeply rooted in the male perception of the female, as can be seen from another instance in Xenophon. In *Oeconomicus* VII, 6 Ischomachos, a wealthy and newly-wed landowner, is happy to tell Socrates that his young wife entered into his life already well trained in the most important female behaviour for their household (*οἶκος*):

Don’t you think it was adequate if she came to me knowing only how to take wool and produce a cloak (ἐπισταμένη ἔρια παραλαβοῦσα ιμάτιον ἀποδεῖξαι), and had seen how spinning tasks are allocated to the slaves? And besides, she had been very well trained (πεπαιδευμένη) to control her appetites (τά γε ἀμφὶ γαστέρα), Socrates,’ he said, ‘and I think that sort of training (παιδεύμα) is most important for man and woman alike (καὶ ἀνδρὶ καὶ γυναικί). [34]

Right after mentioning the τέχνη of wool work Ischomachos strikingly refers to the “matters of the stomach (γαστήρ)”, as one of those things that his wife has to keep under control [35]. He is not

only pleased to see that her parents trained her to regulate her appetites, but actually terms this carnal self-control one of the most important goods for the happiness of their common household.

In sum, Socrates’ *hetaira*-spider is a creature charged with multiple negative associations revolving around the power of erotic attraction. By mixing the dangers of male-male erotics with the stereotyped threat of female power (ranging from lack of self-control to weaving) Socrates contributes to the image of Theodote as potentially vicious *hetaira*.

### THE MALE IDEAL OF HUNTING

In his next step, though, Socrates leaves behind the *hetaira*-spider. Neither the misogynistic undertones nor the sexually aggressive and objectifying power of the hunting spider are taken further into account. Instead, Socrates turns aside to his main topic, φιλία, with the help of the hunt for hares. The philosopher chooses a respectable male leisure activity that focuses on the physical fitness and intellectual flexibility of men, as prelude to his section on reciprocity – the heart of friendship.

Socrates refers to the skills of (male) hare hunters (III, 11, 7): οὐχ ὄρφς ὅτι καὶ τὸ μικροῦ ἄξιον, τοὺς λαγῶς, θηρῶντες πολλὰ τεχνάζουσιν; (“Don’t you notice that they use many tricks even for hunting something worth as little as a hare?”) The hunting of hares has been prepared for by the key words θηράω, θήρατρον and ἄγρευμα in the previous sentences (III, 11, 6–7), and Theodote is now compared to a male hunter, who needs a substitute for the hound in order to chase hares into his nets (III, 11, 9) [36]. The prey that is worth most of all (τὸ πλείστου ἄξιον ἄγρευμα III, 11, 7), namely friends, is no longer compared to food (τούτῳ τροφῇ χρῶνται III, 11, 6), an object of physical consumption. Moreover, the *hetaira*’s prey is not one that is easy to catch, like a fly (έάν τίς σοι φίλος ὕσπερ μυῖα πρόσπιτηται “waiting for friends to settle on you like flies” III, 11, 5). Friends are quick and clever, like hares, and they make their hunter develop skills comparable to obtaining speedy hounds (κύνας ταχείας παρασκευάζονται) or setting up nets (δίκτυα ίστασιν), before they can be caught (III, 11, 8).

Interestingly, Socrates once again uses a motif that appeared earlier in the context of male-male erotics: Hunting has already been compared to the pursuit of friends/lovers at *Memorabilia* II, 6 [37].

[32] McClure 1999: 83.

[33] See further below.

[34] Text and translation follow Pomeroy 1994.

[35] See the fine commentary on this passage by Pomeroy 1994: 271.

[36] τίνι οὖν, ἔφη, τοιούτῳ φίλους ἂν ἐγώ θηρώην; ‘Εάν νὴ Δί’, ἔφη, ἀντὶ κυνὸς κτήσῃ, ὅστις σοι … ἐμβάλῃ αὐτοὺς εἰς τὰ σὰ δίκτυα. “Then can I adapt this plan to the pursuit of friends?” “Of course you can, if for the hound you substitute someone who ... will contrive to chase them into your nets.” The hunting spider and the hare hunter are thus linked by the production and the use of a hunting net: Before reassuring Theodote of her hunting skills, Socrates points out that hare hunters, too, use nets to render their hunt effective (δίκτυα ίστασιν “they set up nets” III, 11, 8).

[37] On this dialogue see Neitzel 1981, who bases his fine interpretation of Socrates’ arguments on editorial aspects. Henry 1995: 46 emphasizes the almost seamless linkage of friendship and “male courtship” in II, 6. Bandini & Dorian 2011: 419f. list all thematic parallels between *Memorabilia* II, 6 and III, 11.

There, the motif occurred in a conversation between Critoboulos and Socrates about the ideals of citizenship and the welfare of the πόλις:

"When we have found a man who seems worthy of our friendship (ἀξιος φιλίας), how are we to set about making him our friend (πῶς χρὴ φίλον τοῦτον ποιεῖσθαι)?" "First we should seek guidance from the gods, whether they counsel us to make a friend of him." "And next? Supposing that we have chosen and the gods approve him, can you say how is he to be hunted (ἔχεις εἰπεῖν ὅπως οὗτος θηρατέος)?" "Surely not like a hare by swift pursuit, nor like birds by cunning, nor like enemies by force. It is no light task to capture (ἔλειν) a friend against his will (ἄκοντα ... φίλον)" (II, 6, 8–9).

This conversation leaves no doubt that friendship is a lesson to be taught by an experienced, older male citizen to a younger one. In this context it is important to remember that hunting is an activity of elite Greek male culture. As early as Odysseus' boar-hunt (*Odyssey* XIX, 392–466), hunting is mentioned as a crucial part of the socio-educative curriculum of young aristocrats [38]. Odysseus not only has to demonstrate his courage among a peer group of experienced male hunters, but he is also taking part in a *rite de passage* from childhood to manhood [39]. That hunting as a vital activity of manhood was not confined to archaic times is evident e.g. from Xenophon's repeated praise of hunting as an ideal aristocratic leisure activity [40].

Not only textual but also visual media hint at the popularity of the hunting theme in Greek (male) culture. A favourite motif on classical pottery is the so-called courtship scene between

male-male-lovers. In these the older ἔραστής is offering a hare (or similar gift) to his younger ἐρώμενος. For a long time it was argued that these items on sympotic vessels should be interpreted as presents offered in exchange for sexual favours [41]. Lately, however, counter-arguments have been growing stronger. Hares, wreaths and musical instruments may be interpreted as referring to "The Good Things in Life" for a male aristocrat [42]. Thus, these gifts symbolize precisely the aspects of life that an ἐρώμενος is introduced to by his ἔραστής [43]. Such scenes might explain why Socrates easily links hunting with pederasty while advising Critoboulos in *Memorabilia* II, 6 on how to find (and keep) good lovers/friends, since hunting is appropriate in a pedagogical context. Together with Xenophon's general interest in hunting and its pedagogical value, the erotic context of such courtship scenes invites us to see in *Memorabilia* III, 11 an analogy between Socrates teaching Theodote, the *hetaira*-spider, and an ἔραστής teaching his ἐρώμενος [44].

### TAMING THE HETAIRA

Socrates' transition from the female vices of the *hetaira*-spider to the male ideal of hunting is quite remarkable, as a privileged male activity is adapted to the world of female sexuality. How does this contribute to his lesson on friendship, which is devoted to Theodote, a *hetaira*? It seems that hare hunting is introduced as a means to tame the *hetaira*-spider. At this point it is worth remembering Anacreon's untamed filly (fr. 78 Gentili), in a poem displaying the dominating male gaze at a sexually uncontrolled woman. The *hetaira*-horse (Πῶλε Θηρηκίη) has to be tamed and civilized by a male

[38] See DELEBECQUE 1970: 5–9 on hunting as pedagogical activity in Greek thought, and more recently LEAR 2014: 109 on hunting as an esteemed elite activity.

[39] SCHNAPP 1985: 103 emphasizes this aspect. He also takes into account the homosocial and homoerotic meanings of hunting in Greek archaic and classical male culture – an argument that he pursues more fully in his monograph (SCHNAPP 1997).

[40] Note that hare hunting is described at length in *Cynegeticus* V–VIII (cf. DELEBECQUE 1970: 22: « 71,5 % du texte est accordé au lièvre ») and even appears in *Cyropaedia* I, 6, 40. BANDINI & DORION 2011: 199, n. 8, refer to the widespread metaphor of hunting in Xenophon and Plato alike.

[41] This view is summarized by PARKER 2015: 69–79. If we keep in mind that Theodote eagerly receives presents

from her friends to make ends meet (III, 11, 4), we might see a link between these courtship scenes and the exchange system of presents vs. sex on which a *hetaira* like Theodote lives.

[42] PARKER 2015: 104f.

[43] As LEAR 2014: 109 points out, in classical pottery hunting, athletics and symposia all convey the pedagogical purpose of pederasty. PARKER 2015: 73: "What we have is not a transcription or depiction of reality but a series of overlapping associations and metaphors: hunting overlaps with war, hunting overlaps with training, training overlaps with pederasty, and a series of analogic equivalences is set up."

[44] HENRY 1995: 49 also suggests reading Critoboulos and Theodote as parallel figures.

(aristocratic) rider (έπεμβάτης) [45]. While Kurke is convinced that the poem is a man's playful offer of a "more skilful 'ride'" [46], I think the *hetaira*'s licentiousness not only arouses desire in the man, but also invites him to display his dominance over female sexuality [47]. While the female horse is being observed grazing (βόσκει), lightly leaping (κοῦφά τε σκιρτῶσα) and playing (παίζεις), the male observer proposes to put on the bridle (καλῶς μὲν ἂν τοι τὸν χαλινὸν ἐμβάλοιμι), hold the reins (ἡνίας δ' ἔχων), and display his experience in horse-riding (δεξιὸν γὰρ ἵπποπείρην ... ἐπεμβάτην).

Quite similarly Socrates suggests taming the *hetaira*-spider in Xenophon, *Memorabilia* III, 11: He proceeds from the sexually active *hetaira*-spider, who dominates her male prey, to the reciprocal structure of real friendship, using the analogy of an activity that is vital for the male educative system of the πόλις. Socrates' method of obtaining male domination clearly differs from the exclusively physical one that the rider in Anacreon's poem suggests. Nevertheless, Socrates clings to the supremacy of an elder lover over a younger female beloved, albeit overwriting the structures of heteroerotic relationships with those of homoerotic ones: Theodote states that she makes her living (βίος) on the basis of φιλία. While she euphemistically conflates the receipt of tangible goods with so-called friendship, Socrates re-arranges the connection between βίος and φιλία and thereby stresses the emotional and philosophical profits of real friendship [48]. By using intertextual motifs and themes from male culture, Socrates constantly alludes to male-male erotics (almost promoting its priority) while educating

Theodote in how to improve her professional female-male erotic relationships.

### SOCRATES THE ARCH-HETAIRA

Up to this point in the dialogue, Socrates has been trying to guide a marginalized figure of society along his philosophical path. Much fun has been made of the naïve *hetaira* Theodote, who apparently is not aware of what is going on [49]. But Socrates too is a comic figure: The philosopher turns himself into an arch-*hetaira*, while nevertheless resisting erotic structures other than male-male.

In the final section of his lesson on how to hunt friends Socrates argues that real friendship necessarily has both emotional and erotic aspects [50]. Thus, the philosopher advises the *hetaira* to show herself sympathetic to the worries and joys of her friends, in order to provide pleasure for the ψυχή as well as the body (III, 11, 10). Additionally, he advises Theodote to vacillate between arousing their erotic appetite and satisfying it ("you must repay their favours (αὐτὴν ἀμείβεσθαι χαριζομένην) ... and prompt them by holding back (διαφεύγουσα)") in order to sustain the erotic attraction between her and her friends (III, 11, 12–14) [51]. In short, Socrates introduces the *hetaira* to the system of reciprocity encompassed by the word χάρις. Χάρις is a vital ingredient for both φιλία and ἔρως, since it guarantees strong and long-lasting friendships (III, 11, 12) [52].

Overwhelmed by Socrates' knowledge, the *hetaira* asks the philosopher to become her hunting companion (III, 11, 15): καὶ ἡ Θεοδότη, Τί οὖν οὐ σύ μοι, ἔφη, ω̄ Σώκρατες, ἐγένου συνθηρατής τῶν φίλων; ("Then, Socrates," exclaimed Theodote,

[45] The Thracian filly was already interpreted as a *hetaira* by the ancient commentator Herakleitos (KURKE 1997: 113).

[46] See KURKE 1997: 114. She also believes that this *hetaira* has the choice whether to go with a rider or to stay without one ("The poem evokes no moral disapproval of the woman's 'loose' behaviour), although "it is never in question that she is the horse and the male the rider" (119).

[47] In Anacreon's poem we may also note a shift from seeing (vv. 1–2) to speaking (vv. 3–4), which can be compared to the culture of viewing that pervades the first three sections of III, 11 and the shift into a dialectical mode from section 4 onwards. Interestingly, KURKE 1997: 114, n. 20 sees a resemblance between the unbridled filly and the coy Theodote of III, 11, 14.

[48] Compare CHERNYAKHOVSKAYA 2014: 164, who reflects on the several meanings of Socratic friendship (155–166).

[49] DELATTE 1933: 159: « Sa [= Socrates'] finesse et sa science étaient mieux mises en lumière, si elles s'opposaient à l'ignorance de la courtisane: c'est pourquoi Xénophon lui a donné une partenaire naïve à l'excès et sorte par-dessus le marché. » Similarly TILG 2004: 197 points out Socrates' „ironisch-überlegene Haltung“.

[50] Compare *Memorabilia* III, 11, 11: εὔεργεσίᾳ δὲ καὶ ἥδονῇ τὸ θηρίον τοῦτο ἀλώσιμόν τε καὶ παραμόνιμόν ἔστιν. ("it is kindness and pleasure that catch the creature and hold him fast.")

[51] Socrates uses the words λιμός, hunger, and δέομαι, to need, as well as, πλησμόνη, surfeit, to make his point.

[52] Compare AZOULAY 2004: 374, who states that Socrates teaches Theodote « un répertoire de l'échange élargi », namely « conjuguer la *charis* de l'âme à celle du corps ».

"why don't you become my partner in the hunt for friends?) [53]. Socrates, however, hesitates to render this service to Theodote, even though earlier he freely suggested helping Critoboulos with his hunt for his lovers/friends (II, 6, 35) ("I think you will find me a useful companion in the hunt (ἐπιτήδειον ... σύνθηρον) for good friends"). His prompt but kind hesitation to take over this same service for Theodote therefore seems strange.

In my opinion, this contrast prepares for the comic climax of III, 11. The reader has already been prepared for a climax (of whatever sort) by the repetition of several key words: πείθειν, μηχανάω and δέομαι were formerly used in describing Theodote and her way of living and loving. Now, Socrates uses these same words in order to instill a desire in Theodote to win over the philosopher as a (hunting) companion (III, 11, 15): 'Εάν γε νὴ Δι', ἔφη, πείθης με σύ. ... μηχανήσει, ἔάν τι μου δέη. ("By all means – if you persuade me. ... you will find a way, if you need me"). It is no longer Theodote who has to be persuaded to συνουσία, companionship (III, 11, 1), but Socrates himself. Socrates thus effectively leaves the role of the educational ἐραστής behind, this time overwriting homoerotics with heteroerotics: the philosopher proceeds to adopt the role of an arch-hetaira teaching a younger one [54].

At this point, Socrates quite unexpectedly leaves the field of homoerotics and shows off his knowledge of traditionally female τέχναι: witchcraft and alluring talk. When he imagines himself as

surrounded by φίλαι, girl-friends [55], and as attracting them with the help of magical devices such as φίλτρα (potions), ἐπωδάι (spells) [56], and the ὕγξ (the magic wheel), which he teaches them how to use, he presents himself as an experienced and highly esteemed arch-hetaira (III, 11, 16–18):

"I have girlfriends (φίλαι), who won't leave me day or night; they are learning potions (φίλτρα) from me and spells (ἐπωδάς). ... What do you think is the reason why Apollodoros here and Antisthenes never leave me? ... Believe me, that is not possible without many potions, spells, and magic wheels."

Socrates deliberately cloaks his philosophical lessons in activities associated with female (sexual) activities [57]. He still remains the older person, teaching younger ones, but he has switched gender roles [58].

*Memorabilia* III, 11 has often been read as showcase performance of Socrates' sexual self-control (ἐγκράτεια) [59]. This view is supported by the fact that he refuses to hand over his most powerful magical device, the ὕγξ, to Theodote (III, 11, 18): "I don't want to be drawn to you (ἔλκεσθαι πρὸς σὲ): I want you to come to me (πρὸς ἐμὲ πορεύεσθαι)." The ὕγξ probably has its most famous appearance in Greek literature in Theocritos' second idyll, where Simaetha, the witch, uses it to win back her ex-lover Daphnis. In his thorough commentary on this poem, Gow points out that, apart from its meaning as a magical device, the ὕγξ can be read as a symbol for desire [60]. This is significant for

[53] Since Socrates previously recommended her to find some substitute for a hunting dog (III, 11, 9: 'Εὰν νὴ Δι', ἔφη, ἀντὶ κυνὸς κτήσῃ, "if you substitute someone for the hound"), Theodote's question might be read as the first sign of success for Socrates' lesson – and, moreover, an admission of defeat by Theodote. BANDINI & DORION 2011, however, only refer to Theodote's words in III, 11, 18 (Ἀλλὰ πορεύσομαι "Oh, I'll come") as an « aveu de défaite ».

[54] Since the final sections of III, 11 develop from the question, how Socrates can be won as a hunting companion, and Socrates uses an erotic code most appropriate for *hetairai* (see below), I am not convinced by CHERNYAKHOVSKAYA 2014: 187 that he is trying hard to get rid of Theodote: „Sokrates hat den Zweck seines Besuchs schon erfüllt, deswegen hat er keine Lust mehr, das Gespräch weiter zu führen ... . Sokrates [versucht] Theodote loszuwerden“.

[55] It is widely agreed that these "girlfriends" are Socrates' male pupils/followers. See e.g. WEISSENBORN 1887: 132 („seine begeisterten Anhänger“), TILG 2004: 196. CHERNYAKHOVSKAYA 2014: 178–184, however, interprets them as Socrates' „Vergnügen an der

Selbstverbesserung“ (186), because she thinks it might be embarrassing if Socrates dared to call his aristocratic male pupils girlfriends.

[56] BANDINI & DORION 2011: 201, discussing *Memorabilia* II, 6, 10 explain φίλτρα as « bonnes actions dont on prend l'initiative en faveur de la personne dont on souhaite être aimé » and ἐπωδάι as « les éloges mérités que l'on adresse à la personne dont on cherche à se gagner l'amitié » (200).

[57] On *hetairai*, magic and gender role-reversal see FARAOONE 1999: 146–160 (on *Memorabilia* III, 11 see p. 157f.).

[58] I am neglecting another role reversal of Socrates, namely into an (elderly!) ἐρώμενος, in order to focus on his role as arch-hetaira. See, however, AZOULAY 2004: 372 on the question why Xenophon's male political or intellectual authorities deliberately choose the role of an ἐρώμενος: « c'est en suscitant le désir chez leurs subordonnés qu'ils exercent au mieux leur pouvoir. ».

[59] E.g. TILG 2004 and BANDINI & DORION 2000: CCXIII.

[60] GOW 1952: 41.

Xenophon's *Memorabilia* III, 11. If we take into account that ancient readers might have judged Simaetha a *hetaira* [61], it is even more surprising that Socrates refuses to indulge in erotic desire for the *hetaira* Theodote, but prefers using the ὕγεια to attract her instead. Most importantly, Socrates is successful: at the end of *Memorabilia* III, 11 Theodote is willing to visit the philosopher, instead of being visited by him. The *hetaira* becomes the one who has to persuade, she becomes the lover while Socrates becomes the one to be persuaded, i.e. the *hetaira* [62].

This is not the only passage in which Socrates takes on a role based on the economics of sex. In *Memorabilia* II, 6, 36 he has already indirectly talked about his excellence in μαστροπεία (pimping) [63], when he agreed to help Critoboulos find just lovers.

"I once heard Aspasia say that good matchmakers (τὰς ἀγαθὰς προμνηστρίδας) are successful in making marriages only when the good reports they carry to and fro are true; she would not praise lying matchmakers, for the victims of deception hate one another and the matchmaker (τὴν προμνησάμένην) too. I am convinced that this is sound (όρθως ἔχειν), and so I think it is not possible for me to say anything in your praise that I can't say truthfully."

We find here another example of the comparison of Socratic teaching to erotics, albeit in the context of male-male-relationships.

The art of a procress is important in another Socratic writing of Xenophon as well. Socrates praises himself as an adept procress (μάστροπος) in Xenophon's *Symposium* several times (II, 10 and IV, 56–60) and finally agrees to display his erotic skills in order to make Callias look more favorably upon the young Autolycos (VIII, 42–43). [64].

[61] Most recently pointed out by FARAONE 2002: 408.

[62] Compare also AZOULAY 2004: 405f., here: 405: « Socrate inverse le cours normal de la séduction. » Interestingly, SCHNAPP 1997 states that the god Eros is himself depicted in several roles on Greek pottery, ranging from seducer to playmate and hunter: « rien là qui excède les priviléges de l'amour » (424).

[63] BANDINI & DORION 2011: 231: « Il faut observer, en tout premier lieu, que Socrate ne se présente pas expressément, dans les *Mémorables* [Bandini & Dorion], comme un entremetteur ». They treat this professional business of Socrates and its diverging *termini technici* in Xenophon in detail on pages 230–238.

"I never fail to share my city's passion (τῇ πόλει συνεραστής) for naturally good men (ἀγαθῶν ... φύσει) who are also aiming ambitiously at excellence (τῆς ἀρετῆς φιλοτίμως ἐφιεμένων)." (42) Everyone else began to discuss what he had said, but Autolycos just gazed at Callias. Callias looked sideways at him and said, "Socrates, will you then be my pimp to the city (μαστροπεύσεις πρὸς τὴν πόλιν) so that I can go into politics and always have her favour? (43) "I will by Zeus," he said, "provided they see you cultivating excellence (σε ... ἀρετῆς ἐπιμελούμενον) for real and not just seeming to." [65]

Socrates' erotic lessons are devoted to the education of good citizens. Once again, he uses a motif in III, 11 that has already been well developed in a homoerotic context elsewhere in Xenophon's Socratic writings. In III, 11, however, the seductive techniques of female sexuality are used not only to humorously disguise the erotic structure of Socrates' philosophy, but most importantly as a guaranteed way to win Theodote's attention. Taming the *hetaira* obviously also means knowing what words (or rather metaphors) to choose.

Socrates thus encodes his lesson on φιλία in a language that successfully mixes alluring rhetoric and magical actions. Moreover, when he leaves it uncertain whether he will be willing to receive Theodote or not, he uses language that parodies not so much himself, but rather the *hetaira* [66]:

Ἄλλ’ ύποδέξομαι σε, ἔφη, ἂν μή τις φιλωτέρα σου ἔνδον ἦ.

"Oh, you shall be welcome — unless there's a dearer girl with me!"

Instead of being the victim of Theodote's oscillation between coyness and sexual availability, Socrates plays the erotic tricks he proposed to her

[64] HUSS 1999: 425f. observes that Socrates applies his erotics – displayed throughout book VIII – from section 37 onwards, to the relationship between Callias and Autolycos. It is noteworthy, besides, that the comic playwright Theophilus describes erotic songs of procresses as threads in fr. 11 (CAF): ἐμπλέκουσι τοῖς λίνοις αἱ μαστροποῖ ("The procresses entwine with threads."). Thereby Theophilus metaphorically points to the entrapping power of procresses and represents them as arch-hunters.

[65] Text and translation follow BOWEN 1998.

[66] III, 11, 18.

earlier on the *hetaira* herself [67]. The ending of *Memorabilia* III, 11 thus creates a Socrates, who resists both a *hetaira*'s erotic attractions and her seductive euphemisms concerning φιλία [68]. Although there is no sign that Theodote has changed her mind about friendship, or that she will interpret her relationship to lovers/friends according to Socrates' teaching on χάρις from now on, Socrates has raised her interest in his ideas. Since Theodote does not seem to realize that these lessons are not really about useful methods of hunting lovers, but about philosophy, there is a comic antithesis between Socrates and the *hetaira*, which keeps the philosopher in a superior position.

## COMIC RELIEF AND XENOPHON'S SOCRATES

What did Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, an apologetic Socratic writing, gain from including a conversation between a *hetaira* and Socrates? On the one hand, it was an easy way to portray Socrates as morally superior. On the other, the rhetorical superiority of a philosopher over a female character of a kind whose threat to men was well established in the comic literary tradition gave Xenophon an opportunity to emphasize Socrates' ability not to take himself too seriously.

Xenophon states elsewhere that Socratic pedagogy includes both serious and playful aspects. He opens his report on the drinking party at Callias' home with a reference to his own guiding principle of embracing both the σπουδή and the παιδιά of the philosopher (Xenophon, *Symposium* I, 1):

Ἄλλ’ ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ τῶν καλῶν κάγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν ἔργα οὐ μόνον τὰ μετὰ σπουδῆς πραττόμενα

ἀξιομνημόνευτα εἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἐν ταῖς παιδιάīς.

To my mind it is worthwhile to relate not only the serious acts of great and good men but also what they do in their lighter moods.

The whole party alternates between serious and humorous moments, such as the ἐρωτικὸς λόγος in book VIII and the comic relief of the erotic mime in book IX [69]. Xenophon leaves no doubt that it is Socrates who promotes this elegant equilibrium at the drinking party. The combination of seriousness and playfulness is a vital feature of Socrates' philosophical teaching in Xenophon, as Huss has pointed out [70]:

"Α καλὸς κάγαθός in Xenophon most characteristically not only talks and acts seriously (μετὰ σπουδῆς), but can also 'take a joke' ... Of course, this is true for Xenophon's Socrates who not only teaches in a serious manner, but also knows how to spice his lessons with humorous comparisons."

The *Memorabilia* likewise mentions this feature early on, when Socrates is discoursing on satiety during a drinking-party. In I, 3, 7 Xenophon repeats Socrates' felicitous comparison of insatiable co-guests to the comrades of Odysseus who were turned into swine by Circe's potion. Xenophon concludes τοιαῦτα μὲν περὶ τούτων ἔπαιξεν ἄμα σπουδάζων ("This was how he would talk on the subject, playfully being serious." I, 3, 8). *Memorabilia* III, 11, then, should be read as another performance of this Socratic feature [71]. One of the dialogue's key words (ἐπισκώπτω) seems to hint at this in section 16:

"Ah!" said Socrates, making fun (ἐπισκώπτων) of his own leisurely habits (ἀπραγμοσύνην), "it's not so easy for me to find time."

the term φιλία. She clearly does not have any emotional relationship in mind.

[69] Huss 1999 thoroughly treats the Socratic combination of σπουδή and παιδιά, e.g. p. 37, 65–67 and 438f.

[70] Huss 1999: 65 (my own translation). As far as I can see, only Chernyakhovskaya 2014: 191 has briefly touched on a possible connection between the opening words of Xenophon's *Symposium* and *Memorabilia* III, 11.

[71] ERBSE 1961: 280 hints at Socrates' „Leutseligkeit“ (affability) but misses the importance of this characteristic trait: "Dem Autor dürfte es lediglich darauf angekommen sein, die Leutseligkeit des Philosophen an einem eindrucksvoilen Beispiel aufzuweisen."

Additionally, in *Memorabilia* II, 6, 28 Socrates praised his ability to make himself attractive and to create a reciprocal relationship between himself and his pupils on the basis of ἔρως [72]. *Memorabilia* III, 11 turns out to be a convincing demonstration of this erotic power [73]. The metamorphosis of the philosopher into an arch-*hetaira* not only re-enacts the dialogue's disguised main topic, reciprocity, but highlights it through comic twists. If *hetairai* were traditionally seen as symbols of transgressing gender limits and symbols of social destabilization, it was presumably enjoyable to see Socrates, the master of erotics, successfully averting a threat to men and fighting off male anxieties. Witchcraft and alluring talk, sources of female vice, are turned against the source of lurking danger itself. By superimposing male τέχναι like hunting and philosophy on those female τέχναι, the philosopher finally entraps the spider in her own web. ■

[72] δεινῶς γάρ, ὃν ἂν ἐπιθυμήσω ἀνθρώπων, ὅλος ὄρμημαὶ ἐπίτόφιλῶν τε αὐτοὺς ἀντιφιλεῖσθαι ὑπ' αὐτῶν καὶ ποθῶν ἀντιποθεῖσθαι, καὶ ἐπιθυμῶν συνεῖναι καὶ ἀντεπιθυμεῖσθαι τῆς συνουσίας. ("For when I want to catch anyone it's surprising how I strain every nerve to have my love returned, my longing reciprocated by him, in my eagerness that he shall want me as much as I want him.")

[73] GOLDHILL 1998 and others like BANDINI & DORION 2011 point to the fact that the notoriously ugly Socrates is more attractive than the beautiful *hetaira*. Although in itself convincing, this argument is weakened by the fact that there is not the slightest allusion to Socrates' physiognomy in III, 11. Of course, the philosopher's ugliness, emphasized in the beauty contest of Xenophon, *Symposium*, V and e.g. Plato, *Symposium*, 215a-b, will have been a well known *topos* to Xenophon's readers. AZOULAY 2004: 407f., however, mentions the limits of Socrates' erotic power.

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## AROUSED BY LAUGHTER: MARTIAL'S PRIAPIC HUMOR

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### ABSTRACT

This essay explores Martial's Priapic humor, focusing on those epigrams featuring Priapic "space" and the acts of seeing and being seen, whose object is to arouse at times uncomfortable laughter. It follows, and is indebted to, recent classical scholarship on the act of reading as a form of erotic viewing and on the comic or lubricious possibilities of viewing others within domestic or public spaces. Martial offers himself, through his racy epigrams, as an object of titillation to his audience. Indeed, Martial's literary persona exposes himself for their pleasure and invites his readers, by reading his epigrams aloud, to take him into their mouths. This essay sheds further light on Martial's humorous and scabrous Priapic persona in order to illustrate the ludic as well as the sexual and gustatory features of the act of reading in an oral culture.

### KEYWORDS

Humor,  
Latin epigram,  
Martial,  
Priapus,  
oral reading,  
sexuality.

Cet article porte sur l'humour priapique de Martial et étudie en particulier les poèmes évoquant les « lieux » de cet humour, quand l'acte de voir ou d'être vu a pour objectif de susciter, au moment opportun, un rire embarrassé. Cette réflexion s'appuie sur les récents travaux de chercheurs qui ont mis en évidence la dimension érotique de la vision dans l'acte de lecture et ont étudié les dimensions comiques et lubriques de l'acte de voir autrui dans les espaces privés et publics. Martial s'offre lui-même, dans ses épigrammes salées, comme objet d'excitation pour son public. En effet, le personnage fictionnel de Martial se donne en spectacle pour le plaisir de ce public et invite ses lecteurs, par la lecture à voix haute de ses épigrammes, à « l'avoir en bouche ». Cette étude met au jour la dimension scabreuse et humoristique du personnage de Priape chez Martial afin de révéler combien le désir sexuel et le goût sont attachés à l'acte de lecture dans une société de l'oralité.

### MOTS-CLEFS

Épigramme latine,  
humour,  
lecture orale,  
Martial,  
Priape,  
sexualité.

Article accepté après évaluation par deux experts selon le principe du double anonymat

Martial is a poet of ubiquity: a tireless *viator* who traverses the streets, houses, arenas, public baths, and stews of Rome. Within the great metropolis, he encounters various social and sexual types whom he appraises in terms of either praise or censure. But Martial not only judges; as a composer of lascivious verse, he entices, inviting readers into his books of epigrams. He lifts the curtain, as it were, and invites them to witness what is described there, including humorous, often scabrous descriptions of vaginal and anal distortion, discharges, farts, and assorted bodily odors. More than this, Martial presents graphic images of sexuality and exposes himself, through his epigrams, to his readers. Indeed, in his desire to seduce others into reading his books, he positions himself at the center of his epigrams, as the ithyphallic guardian god Priapus places himself at the center of his garden as an object of sexual enticement.

In this essay, I explore Martial's Priapic humor, focusing, first, on his epigrams' visual appeal and their concern with the acts of seeing and being seen, for the ostensible purpose of arousing laughter. Indeed, as the speaker in *Epigrams* (hereinafter *Ep.*), I, 35 and elsewhere relates, this humor is not possible without a phallic thrust. The second feature that I shall discuss is the connection of oral reading with smells and tastes. This feature, too, serves Martial's phallic interests, including those epigrams castigating such socially disapproved practices as fellatio (e.g., *Ep.*, XI, 30) and irrumation (e.g., *Ep.*, II, 83). The Priapic penis is often made a "feeder" of hungry sexual orifices, be they mouths, vaginas, or

anuses. By offering his epigrams for reading aloud, Martial quite literally places himself in his readers' mouths and thereby "penetrates" them with his Priapic poems.

My essay serves in part as a sequel to earlier studies of Martial's Priapic persona as a restorer of order – order, that is, within the world of his epigrams, where the poet orders events according to the caprice of his own prejudices and desires [1]. It follows, and is indebted to, work published in the last two decades on reading as a form of consumption, erotic or otherwise [2], and on the comic or lubricious possibilities of viewing sexually explicit wall paintings within domestic and public spaces, such as communal baths [3]. It is indebted also to recent work on poetic autonomy and self-representation in Latin poetry, wherein the poet defines his/her work's aesthetic value and its relation to his audience [4], and on the gendered space of the Imperial Roman garden [5]. It owes a debt, finally, to work by Florence Dupont and others on the effects of sexually loaded language on readers and listeners [6].

In the prose preface to his first book of epigrams, in which he addresses his prospective readership, Martial draws a clear analogy between the "theater" of his poetry and the viewing of racy spectacles. If such censorious types as Cato do not wish to view them, they can stay away – or they can take a seat and watch the show: "Epigrams are written for those who habitually watch the *Floralia*. Let not Cato enter my theater, or if he does, let him watch" (*epigrammata illis scribuntur qui solent spectare Florales*.

[1] E.g., O'CONNOR 1998.

[2] SHARROCK 2002: 265-295; YOUNG 2015: 255-280; BETTINI 2008: 313-374. SHORT 2009: 111-123 and SHORT 2013: 247-275, have studied the alimentary metaphors Latin uses to denote speaking or hearing and, by extension, reading. Indeed, reading, hearing, and listening can themselves be gustatory experiences. Examples abound in various genres; for example, in Plautus, *Aulularia*, 537: *nimum lubenter edi sermonem tuum* ("I have too eagerly devoured your speech"), and in a letter by Cicero to Atticus (4, 11, 2): *voramus litteras* ("we devour your letters [in the reading]").

[3] CLARKE 2002: 265-295; also GUNDERSON 2003: 235-237. CLARKE 2007: 74-75, 91, 107. In his examination of wall paintings and other erotic art for visual clues about how Romans processed sexual humor within domestic and public spaces, Clarke argues convincingly that one of the chief purposes of ribald sexual imagery was to arouse laughter.

[4] ROMAN 2014: 301-321.

[5] VON STACKELBERG 2009: 70-72; VON STACKELBERG 2014: 395-426.

[6] DUPONT 1999: 120-152; DUPONT & ÉLOI 1994: 161-177; OLENDER 1991: 59-82.

*non intret Cato theatrum meum, aut si intraverit, spectet).* Being the principal player in the theater of his epigrams, Martial positions himself at center stage. He (often facetiously) describes his epigrams as low, throwaway things meant for light holiday reading, especially during the Saturnalia, a time of revelry and license. Further embodying their status as flimsy and disposable, Martial's books are available in inexpensive codex form. As he states in *Ep.*, II, 2, 4, "I can be held in one hand" (*me manus una capit*). They are, therefore, literary pieces confined to a small space, but which can be easily opened and perused. Given these emphases on confinement, access, and visibility, what better guise for Martial than the ithyphallic Priapus in his garden? This Priapic guise underscores the ludic and also the sexual features of the act of reading as viewing, particularly reading epigram as a form of voyeuristic and sensual pleasure, all within the confined space of a codex.

By way of background, I offer a broad review of Priapus' background and his role as a comic and lubricious male symbol, after which I shall concentrate on seven epigrams in particular [7]. The god traces his origins to the Troad, the city Lampsacus (modern Lapseki) being his chief cult center [8]. In myth he is named as the offspring of Dionysos and Aphrodite, who rejected her son, repelled by his grotesque appearance and hypertrophied genitals [9]. Hermes is also called the father of Priapus [10], since both Hermes and Priapus carry associations with boundaries.

Priapus entered Rome through contact with Orientalized Greek culture. Like Hermes, he became, in Hellenistic and Roman literature and cult, a guardian of travelers and the dead [11]. At Rome Priapus was most popularly depicted as a guardian of gardens, whose role was to keep thieves from entering and stealing the garden's goods. His common representation in painting and statuary is that of a free-standing ithyphallic figure, or else a herm in the manner of the ithyphallic Hermes. He sometimes wears a chiton beneath which his erect penis is clearly visible. Priapic statues could

be painted red or else have a reddened phallus; hence the god's common epithet "ruddy keeper of gardens" (*ruber hortorum custos*) [12]. Being the son of Aphrodite/Venus, Priapus had associations with fertility cults throughout Italy. But beyond their connection with fertility, Priapus' hypertrophied genitals occasioned amused glances. Indeed, the ubiquity of phallic objects, including lamps, statues, and wind chimes, betrays a somewhat lubricious interest in representing the generative male organ in novel and sometimes outlandish ways.

By the time Martial began writing, Priapus had become a popular literary character at Rome: he features, for example, in Horace's *Satires*, I, 8; the Tibullan corpus; the *Vergilian Appendix*; and Columella's *Res Rusticae*. The god's literary persona is most fully developed in the *Corpus Priapeorum* (hereinafter *CP*), an early Imperial collection of bawdy poems dedicated to Priapus. Here he is variously described as an ineffective guardian, lustful, boastful, and crude in his exposure of himself to passers-by and, by extension, to the reader. From his position at the center of his garden, where he adopts a hypermasculine stance, the god threatens potential intruders but also invites them in for sexual delectation or sexual punishment (often construed as the same thing). He makes exaggerated, often bogus claims about his own potency; conversely, his phallus is merely a wooden imitation of a penis, with no real life of its own [13].

Katharine von Stackelberg [14] discusses the Roman garden as a place of layered, complex meanings. Most relevant to the interpretation of the garden as a demarcated space are questions of access, status, and permeability, with great stress laid on "inside" versus "outside." In her own study, Amy Richlin [15], focusing on the god's role as guardian of boundaries, establishes Priapus' garden as a demarcated place from which the obscene or satiric poet, assuming a normative, aggressive male stance, may exclude stern moralists (e.g., Cato), but also entice matrons, virgins, boys, and pathics into the Priapic garden to be "punished" with oral, vaginal, or anal rape. As Richlin puts it:

[7] These are, in order of discussion, *Ep.*, VI, 60; III, 68; XI, 16; II, 51; I, 35; XI, 51; and XI, 18. All translations from the Latin are my own.

[8] *Lampsacenus* was a common epithet of Priapus (e.g. Athanasius, I, 30A; Pausanias, IX, 31, 2).

[9] HERTER 1932: 62 ff.; OLENDER 1991: 59-60.

[10] Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 160.

[11] *CIL VI*, 3708.

[12] Ovid, *Fasti*, VI, 333.

[13] See OLENDER 1991: 61: "Priape menace les passants avec son 'arme' à la fois terrifiante et dérisoire. Son phallus est cause d'effroi et de rire".

[14] von STACKELBERG 2009 : 68 et *passim*.

[15] RICHLIN 1983; 1992.

One minatory figure stands at the center of the whole complex of Roman sexual humor; he will be represented here by the god Priapus. The general stance of this figure is that of a threatening male. He is anxious to defend himself by adducing his strength, virility, and (in general) all traits that are considered normal – and this is the appeal of the joke teller to his audience, as if both are confirming and checking with each other that they are all right, despite the existence of abnormalities in other people. Hence the central persona or protagonist or narrator is a strong male of extreme virility, occasionally even ithyphallic (as in the Priapic poems) [16].

Appropriating this rugged he-man role, Martial in *Ep.*, X, 65, for example, contrasts his own body hair and unkempt locks with Charmenion's depilated body, elaborately curled hair, and high, feminine voice [17].

Priapus threatens potential intruders with violent sexual assault, but just as often he himself is the object of lewd fascination. The animated Priapic statue is in many ways an impish, foul-mouthed figure, rather like a wryly carved wooden dummy that is given voice and thereby assumes an often louche alter ego for the ventriloquist [18]. It is in this vein that Priapus operates – as a lubricious wooden totem, reducible to a swollen phallus that freely indulges in scatology and crude sexual language (*impudica verba*; *CP*, 8, 2); a god who dwells in a place from which shame has been routed (*pudore pulso*; *CP*, 14, 7); and a bogus *littérateur* who indulges in the very Roman practices of word play (*CP*, 67) [19] and false etymologies (*CP*, 68) [20]. At the same time, Priapus runs the risk of being "unmanned" and himself made a ridiculous

character: he boastfully compares himself to the major deities (*CP*, 9, 20); he overlooks a garden of no special distinction (*CP*, 14) [21]; he is flatulent (*Horace, Satires*, I, 8); he bungles his role of custodian and is even importuned by thieves (*CP*, 61, 66, 73). As Maurice Olander argues, Priapus' physical ugliness embodies a social ugliness, an *amorphia* that manifests itself in the god's shameless, outrageous behavior, so in contrast to the ideal of the virile adult male Roman citizen [22].

## SPACE AND EROTIC VIEWING

A central feature of Priapic poetry is its emphasis on a defined space, most often the confined space of an urban garden. The trope of the garden, in non-sexual as well as sexual contexts, enjoyed a long life in Latin agrarian and bucolic poetry. In Columella's *Res Rusticae*, X, for example, there is the recurring motif of the gardener as poet and the garden itself as poem. The world of the garden, being a place of order, is by necessity "enclosed" [23]. The maintenance of the enclosure requires a fence or hedge [24]. From the tidy and exclusive enclosure of his Priapic epigrams, therefore, Martial can ward off or else entice his audience into entering his books by offering them a forbidden pleasure. Indeed, space is integral to the Priapic poems generally, in that certain zones, whether gardens or otherwise, act as demarcated sites of sexual exposure [25]. The site of such exposure, such as a domestic interior or a bathhouse, may become a scene of ribald humor, with the hypertrophied penis literally straining against its narrow boundaries.

[16] RICHLIN 1992: 58. On the Roman sexual schema as phallocentric, see, e.g., Martial, *Ep.*, XI, 16; also PARKER 1997: 48. See as well the discussion by GUNDERSON 2003: 36-44. On Priapus as an apotropaic deity, see VON STACKELBERG 2014: 410.

[17] Such inveighing against the degeneracy of the contemporary Roman male was a stock feature of early Imperial declamation. For example, in *Controversiae*, I, pr.8-9, the elder Seneca complains about how the young men of his day have become effeminate and softened by luxury: they curl their hair, affect female voices, and depilate themselves.

[18] See BROWN 1998: 941 ff. on the uncanniness prompted by such lifeless objects, or *homunculi*, that become animated and assume an ersatz life of their own.

[19] See SULLIVAN 1989: 193. Sullivan (195) cites an example in Martial's Priapic epigram XI, 18 (discussed below), where the poet, complaining to his patron of the small size of his garden, wishes that the patron had provided a *prandium*, or meal, instead of a *praedium*, or spread.

[20] Cf. Martial, *Ep.*, XI, 19, in which the poet's penis (*mentula*) commits frequent solecisms.

[21] UDEN 2010: 211 discusses the *hortus Priapi* within the context of early Imperial urban gardens, more notable for providing pleasure than for sustaining produce. See note 51, below.

[22] OLENDER 1991: 63; see also DUPONT & ÉLOI 1994: 156. As a literary character, Priapus had long been exploited as a buffoon, a mockery of a more serious deity, even as he kept his minatory aspect. Clearly the Romans saw nothing puzzling in Priapus as a *reconciliatio oppositorum*, linked as he was in both myth and art with Hermaphroditus. See O'CONNOR 1989: 41; VON STACKELBERG 2014: 410.

[23] See O'CONNOR 1998: 198-201.

[24] Columella, *Res Rusticae*, X, 27-28. See also Vergil, *Georgics*, IV, 147, where the poet cannot discuss gardening further, as he is cut off by insufficient space.

[25] See WILLIAMS 2010: 100 for a discussion of the phallus as a marker of boundaries, including domestic thresholds.



Figure 1

Wall painting of Priapus weighing his phallus, House of the Vettii, Pompeii. Photo courtesy of Buzz Ferebee. © Jackie and Bob Dunn.  
[www.pompeiiinpictures.com](http://www.pompeiiinpictures.com)

Priapic statues and paintings were a common feature in domestic and public spaces and made expressly for the purpose of viewing. A wall painting of Priapus weighing his huge phallus on a scale is prominently displayed in the entryway of the House of the Vettii in Pompeii (fig. 1) [26]. In the entry hall of the house of Jupiter Fulminator, or Jove the Thunderer, at Ostia Antica, there is a black and white floor mosaic decorated with multiple winged phalli, whose purpose was ostensibly to ward off the evil eye. But surely such purportedly apotropaic images as these, placed as they were in high-traffic and therefore highly visible parts of the house, must have occasioned at least some bordello humor.

Indeed, the fending off of evil could itself be

effected by laughter. In his essay on the *apodyterium*, or dressing room, of the suburban baths at Pompeii, John R. Clarke [27] discusses the role of erotic images, from the refined to the outrageous, in arousing surprise and laughter within the context of bathing. The bathhouse being a place of exposure and, therefore, danger, phallic amulets worn on the body could serve an apotropaic purpose by warding off the evil eye. But,

[t]o judge from the surviving evidence, the most efficacious images were those that provoked laughter. Three private bath complexes of the late first century B.C.E. at Pompeii employ images of the ithyphallic *Aethiops* for comic – and apotropaic – effect. ... Their atypical body and skin types, as well as their huge, erect penises, made them perfectly unbecoming, and therefore funny, spectacles. Elsewhere we find the Lucky Hunchback, often equipped with a huge phallus, poised at danger points such as entrances to houses, to dispel the evil eye with laughter [28].

The bathhouse itself, being a place where attractive bodies were displayed and appraised, furnished a steady source of phallic humor. Petronius' *Satyricon* provides his audience with an extremely Priapic picture of the well-endowed Ascyltos, who is applauded at the public bath. The incident is recounted by the nauseous versifier and pederast Eumolpus:

And in another part a naked young man who had lost his clothes was demanding Giton with no less indignant shouts. As the youth mocked me as a madman with the most impudent imitations, a great crowd gathered around him with applause and the most awestruck admiration. For he had sexual organs of such enormous size (*inguinum pondus tam grande*) that you would think the man was simply an attachment to his penis (*laciniam fascini*). Oh, a man equal to the job! I think he begins yesterday and finishes tomorrow. He found assistance right away: a Roman knight rumored to be infamous wrapped a cloak around the wanderer and took him off home, I believe to enjoy (*uteretur*) such a great piece of good fortune by himself [29].

We may compare with this Martial, *Ep.*, IX, 33:

[26] This painting is discussed in full by KELLUM 2015: 199–224; see also CLARKE 2007: 184–189.

[27] CLARKE 2002; 2007.

[28] CLARKE 2002: 156. See further CLARKE 2007: 64–67.

[29] *Satyricon*, 92.

The bathhouse in which you hear applause,  
Flaccus,  
know that it's the one featuring Maro's cock [30].

In the opening epigram of his first book, Martial already boasts that he is "known throughout the world" (*toto notus in orbe*; I, 1, 3). By being universally read and recited, the poet is also widely viewed. In *Ep.*, VI, 60, Martial touts his universal popularity in terms that suggest surprise and/or outrage at the sudden exposure to a highly graphic sexual image of the sort that might be found on a domestic or bathhouse wall:

My city Rome praises, loves, sings my books.  
I'm on every lap, every hand holds me.  
Look, they're blushing, growing pale; they're  
open-mouthed, astounded, they hate me.

But this is what I want. Now my poems appeal to you.

Playing the Priapic role, Martial offers his racy epigrams as sources of titillation to, as well as physical objects to be handled by, his voyeuristic readers, who include supposedly chaste Roman matrons and upright male citizens. In *Ep.*, III, 68, Martial begins with a mock-modest warning to a pious matron not to venture beyond the female-oriented part of his book, for what lies beyond the barrier are the male-focused gymnasium, the public bath, and the poet's literal exposure:

Matron, up to this point my book has been written for you.

You ask for whom the interior part is written?  
It's for me.  
Here are the gymnasium, the baths, the stadium:  
withdraw.

We're taking off our clothes: avoid looking at men naked.  
From this point on, all shame cast aside after the wine and roses,  
Terpsichore, staggering, doesn't know what she is saying.

[30] *Audieris in quo, Flacce, balneo plausum,/Maronis illic esse mentulam scito.* See also Martial, *Ep.*, I, 96, featuring a man of sham morals, who "devours" with his eyes and with smacking lips the luscious, well-hung studs (*draucos*) at the public bath.

[31] SHARROCK 2002: 272.

[32] See GUNDERSON 2003: 178: "[T]he example of Lucretia was adduced to explain how Roman *mores* had always been principally concerned with chastity (*pudicitia*)". See also WILLIAMS 2010: 123.

[33] In *Ep.*, XI, 104, Martial's appeal to his wife to be more lascivious, he says that she may be a Lucretia by day, but a Lais at night (vv. 21-22). RICHLIN 1992: 62

In no ambiguous terms, but openly she names that thing  
which haughty Venus receives in spring, that thing  
which the bailiff has set up in the middle of his garden as custodian  
and which the upright virgin peeks at through the screen of her hand.  
If I know you well, already bored with a long book, you were putting it down,  
but now you are reading it all – with relish.

The male-oriented part of Martial's book has been cordoned off from the *matrona*. But at the same time she is invited to read, or rather view, the Priapic phallus – Martial in a state of undress. Like Priapus lying in wait for his "victims" to enter his garden, Martial lurks behind the screen for the woman to intrude. Alison Sharrock's comments on the genderedness of the reader are appropriate here [31], for Martial imposes a different standard for the female readers of his books. Here and elsewhere in the *Epigrams*, the woman breaks the rules: by acting not in accordance with her assigned gender role, she trespasses into forbidden territory, thereby risking danger. The poet goads the matron further by making the "barrier" eminently permeable and therefore easy to transgress.

*Ep.*, XI, 16, another warning to the pious female reader, this time features the legendary symbol of chastity, Lucretia, whose rape by Tarquin led to the downfall of the monarchy and the establishment of the Republic. As a Roman matron, Lucretia serves as the "normative" woman, in contrast to the dissolute Bassa, whom Martial calls a "fucker" (*fututor*) (*Ep.*, I, 90) [32]. Here Lucretia blushes in the presence of her kinsman, Brutus; however, once Brutus departs, she abandons all restraint to read Martial's book. By doing so, Lucretia is divested of her lofty matronly status and made just another randy female reader/voyeur, like the matron of *Ep.*, III, 68 [33]. But Martial engages in equal opportunity arousal: his

discusses Freudian *Herabsetzung*, that is, degradation of figures who are superior as part of the parody, caricature, and travesty of satire. In her essay on the sexuality of the Roman matron, WATSON 2005 similarly argues that "Martial holds up to ridicule the traditional concept of the asexual *matrona* ..." and "blurs the conventional distinction between *matrona* and *meretrix*" (70). Martial, states Watson, "advocates that wives act as *meretrices* within their marriage. Thus he redefines the concept of the *matrona* to include sexuality while retaining the concept of *pudicitia*" (70). This is in line with the relative freedom, sexual and otherwise, enjoyed by elite Roman women. See ROUSSELLE 1988: 75.

poems, he claims, will have the same “lubricating” effect on both sexes. The reading, and thus the viewing and consumption, of Martial’s Priapic verse will make even the most censorious male reader rampantly erect, his swollen penis pressing against his clothes (XI, 16, 5–6) [34], and will make even the most morally upright woman *uda*, or “wet” (XI, 16, 8). Similarly, *CP*, 8, also addressed to supposedly chaste matrons, describes the irresistible allure of an exposed penis made visible in the reading of the poem:

Chaste matrons, go far from here;  
it’s shameful for you to read dirty words.  
They care not a fig and go straight for them;  
matrons too, without a doubt, have a taste for it  
and look willingly at my big cock.

In Martial’s Priapic epigrams, emphasis is placed on reading as viewing, specifically, viewing as voyeurism, looking on things that are forbidden but which the voyeur, such as a reputedly chaste matron, may look at nonetheless, even if partially averting her gaze or half-holding her hand in front of her eyes.

By this action, the reader/viewer is made complicit in Martial’s act of seduction. However, such bath-house looking and appraisal carry distinct risks. Think again of Lucretia, who is for Martial an avid consumer of forbidden verses [35]. But as Martial’s readership knew, the Lucretia of history, having been raped and therefore sexually compromised, chose death over dishonor.

## IS IT BIG ENOUGH? TASTY ENOUGH?

The Priapic penis is not merely for looking, but also for tasting. In Martial, *Ep.*, XIV, 70 (*Priapus*

*silagineus*, or “Priapus made out of wheat”) the phallus is a literal comestible.

If you wish to be sated, you may eat our Priapus;  
though you nibble on genitalia, you will be  
pure [36].

The body parts belonging to those who lust after large penises, namely, anuses, vaginas, and mouths, are themselves Priapic spaces, liable to being grossly penetrated, distended, and soiled after being “fed” through frequent penile contact. *Ep.*, II, 51 features a certain Hyllus, who spends all his money on hugely endowed studs, even at the price of denying his stomach food and drink, thus rendering one body part empty and looking on with envy while the other is filled to bursting:

Although often a single coin remains in your  
coffer  
and worn smoother than your asshole, Hyllus,  
neither the baker nor the innkeeper will take it,  
but some well-hung stud.  
Your poor stomach witnesses (*spectat*) your ass-  
hole’s feast.  
That part goes hungry while the other’s  
gorged [37].

This feature of exaggerated size serves Martial’s phallic interests: penises that are large or oversized dominate the space that they inhabit. But, being an indiscriminate penetrator of often voracious sexual orifices, be they mouths, anuses, or vaginas in the classic *triporneia*, or threefold punishment [38], the Priapic penis itself risks becoming fouled by bodily fluids, including blood and excrement [39]. In turn, the constant reception of a penis can render the body cavity ugly, flaccid or distorted; as a result,

[34] See also Catullus, 32, 10–11: *nam pransus iaceo et satur supinus/pertundo tunicamque palliumque* (“now having dined I lie, and stuffed, supine, I’m poking through my tunic and my coverlet”).

[35] The character of Lucretia is indeed ambiguous; cf. her portrayal in Ovid’s *Fasti*, I and see KING 2006: 212: Lucretia is outwardly chaste but she conceals erotic desires.

[36] *Si vis esse satur, nostrum potes esse Priapum; / ipsa licet rodas inguina, purus eris.*

[37] Overeating generally was considered by Roman moralists a classic sign of profligate behavior (see CORBEILL 1996: 128). Martial turns this stricture on its head by emphasizing not the mouth (*os*) as the usual receptor of food, but rather the anus. The mouth itself, however, may be likened to a door (*os/ostium*) through which food passes, and therefore an exit from which words

issue. RICHLIN 1992: 148 adduces several examples from Latin invective that establish a relation between eating and depravity generally. See CORBEILL 1997: 102. See especially DUPONT & ÉLOI 1994: 182–185 on the voracity of the anus, mutilated by penile penetration and thus made in effect a greedy mouth. In their discussion of *Ep.*, II, 51, they call Hyllus’ feeding of his anus “une anti-nourriture”.

[38] See *Carmina Priapea*, 13: *Percidere, puer, moneo; futuere, puella;/barbatum furem tertia poena manet* (“I warn you, boy, you will have your ass split; girl, you will be fucked. A third punishment awaits the bearded thief”).

[39] E.g., *Carmina Priapea*, 46, 9–10: *fossas inguinis ut teram dolemque/cunni vermiculos scaturientes* (“so that I may wear down the ditch in your middle and drub the crawling maggots in your cunt”); *Carmina Priapea*, 68, 8: *et pediconum mentula merdalea est* (“and the bugger’s cock is caked with shit”).

the pathic may need to purge because his sphincter has been worn down by constant anal sex. The mouth in particular, if its narrow space is invaded by a thrusting penis, can smell like feces, whose exhalations, equivalent to farts, may make even good food foul and therefore inedible. For example, in *Ep.*, III, 17 the hot appetizers being passed around at table are refused once Sabidius has blown on them to cool them, since his foul breath has turned them into *merda*, or shit. (The implication is that Sabidius indulges in oral sex.)

The appropriateness of time and place for obscenity was not lost on the epigrammatist, which shows in the distribution of racy epigrams throughout his oeuvre. For example, fully one-third of Martial's book VII is satirical or sexual, since it was issued in December 92, Saturnalia time, which allowed for the loosening of traditional strictures. Book XI, which appeared in December 96, contains more obscene poems than any other book, once again allowing for Saturnalian license, but also rejoicing that the more liberal Nerva has assumed the imperial throne following the assassination of the intolerant and tyrannical Domitian. In *Ep.*, XI, 2, one of a series in which he announces the program for this book, Martial, says Stephen Hinds, "welcomes and eulogizes the new government of Nerva; and he associates Nervan liberalization with the programme which he announces for his book, a programme which will indeed dominate it: a new accession of obscenity and uninhibited bawdiness (i.e., uninhibited even for Martial), for which the poet claims specifically Saturnalian licence (XI, 2, 1-6)" [40]. Martial is quick to defend the normative use of obscenity in the service of humor by adducing, for example, in *Ep.*, I, 35, the approved custom of marriage: just as husbands with their wives, he, or rather, his poems, cannot please without a *mentula*. *Mentula*, the vulgar term for the penis, occurs forty-eight times in Martial (as compared to twenty-six times in the *Carmina Priapea*) [41]. He refers later in *Ep.*, I, 35 to the marriage song, or *thalassio*, a scurilous yet recognized part of the marriage ceremony, and also to the spring rites of the *Floralia*.

All these are occasions when what is normally forbidden may be openly looked at. Obscenity has its place; it is useful, and even necessary. Fittingly the same law (*lex*) is given to scabrous verse, that is, it

cannot please unless it titillates. Picking up on imperial legislation outlawing castration, Martial pleads: "please don't castrate my books" (*nec castrare velis meos libellos*; I, 35, 14). There is, the poet states, nothing more foul (*turpius*) than a gelded Priapus, for his books cannot please his readers without a *mentula* (*hi libelli ... non possunt sine mentula placere*; I, 35, 5). The *mentula*, then, the rampant male organ, is the very essence of Martial's Priapic humor [42]. Notably, in the Saturnalian Book XI, in which he wants to put on full display his phallic prowess, Martial banishes whatever lurks in the dark (*quidquid. ... in tenebris ... ite foras*; XI, 2, 4); that is, the pious moral posturing of a Cato or a Fabricius, which he separates from himself and his poetic agenda.

A particularly piquant example of a thrusting penis pinioned within narrow confines for exaggerated effect is *Ep.*, XI, 51, in which the penis of Titius is called a *columna*, or "column" [43]. In this epigram, notable for its brevity, Titius' columnar penis threatens to overwhelm his commodious bath. Thus it offers an outstanding example of Martial's Priapic humor and also his literary art.

From Titius extends a column (*columna*) as long  
as the one the girls of Lampsacus adore.  
Here, with none to disturb him, Titius  
bathes in his giant bathhouse (*thermis  
grandibus*).  
Nonetheless Titius bathes  
in a confined space.

Lampsacus here is a direct reference to Priapus, the city Lampsacus being his cult center. Titius is a *gentilicium* also used by Martial in *Ep.*, IV, 37, 2 and VI, 55, 5 [44]. The name Titius, along with Seius, occurs frequently in Roman law to suggest "an indefinite or fictional person, or a person referred to by way of illustration", as defined by *Black's Law Dictionary*. Titius is also a *nom parlant*, in that it sounds like *titus*, a vulgar Latin metaphor for "penis" [45]. Therefore, Titius, that is (if we accept the legal reminder), "Mr. John Doe", is also Mr. Prick, an especially appropriate appellation because he is so enormously endowed.

The word *columna* is significant, for, beyond its suggestion of exaggerated size to denote Titius' *mentula*

[40] HINDS 1998: 129.

[41] See ADAMS 1982: 9-12.

[42] See HALLETT 1996: 323.

[43] Cf. *Carmina Priapea*, 10, 8, where Priapus' prick is also called a *columna*.

[44] See KAY 1985: 179.

[45] ADAMS 1982: 32 and *passim*.

(which is linked with Lampsacus, and thus with the god Priapus), it denotes the column of a temple or other imposing public building. The grandeur implied by *columna* (think here of a grand Ionic or Corinthian affair) is further underscored below (v. 4) by *thermis grandibus*, normally denoting an enormous public bath, with an elegant, colonnaded portico. But here the words describe the lavish (and presumably expensive) private bath of Titius, which he alone occupies (and fills up completely with his penis). This reference to *thermae* as the place where Titius and his penis are located, is appropriate because, as illustrated by the examples from Petronius and Martial cited above, the bathhouse could be a scene of assignation and a place where well-endowed men were ogled and applauded. Likewise, the bathhouse furnished a site where erotic paintings could be displayed for amused looking and enjoyment. Titius, or Mr. John Doe, by contrast, has no real identity, because, unlike those well-hung worthies in the public bath, *he has no one to look at him*. That is, no one but the reader who may read and thus regard the scene of Titius and his gigantic penis for the purpose of arousing laughter.

The situation described here is, indeed, utterly farcical. *Thermis grandibus* is an exaggeration, just as the hypertrophied penis is an exaggeration [46]. Such a comic description “deflates” (in contrast to the penis’s ballooning size) any sense of power that may have been suggested by the bath or the gigantic male endowment. The *mentula* here is not an agent but rather a victim, an unwieldy pole shutting Titius in. Titius is a *mentula* but a *mentula* in a ridiculous, Priapic sense [47]. Titius’ huge, unwieldy “column” would make *any* space feel small, and it keeps getting bigger and bigger. With his penis described in such gargantuan terms, Titius is isolated in his bath, just as Priapus, rejected by his mother and

the community of greater deities, finds himself alone within the confines of his garden [48].

No less farcical in its emphasis on tight, confined space is *Ep.*, XI, 18, featuring a Priapic statue that has to be “halved” in order to fit within Martial’s garden’s tiny confines. This poem’s reliance on exaggeration, in this case exaggerated smallness, to make its point, addresses his stingy patron Lupus, who has given Martial a garden space no bigger than a window box. Therefore, despite its phallic guardian, the garden fails to provide enough to eat. The garden is in fact so small, says Martial, that a cicada could cover it with its wing; an ant could consume its contents in one day; a cucumber cannot lie straight; and, most tellingly, a Priapus would not have room for his hook or his *mentula* [49]. Like the distinctly phallic cucumber, therefore, Priapus’ member cannot swell in luxuriant fashion as it wants to do. From a purely social standpoint, Martial’s tiny garden fails as a status symbol [50]. Also, like the urban garden of Priapus, which is infertile and even sterile, Martial’s phallic garden, bursting against its meager confines, is unable to provide ample provender or effective sex [51].

Both *Ep.*, XI, 51 and XI, 18 illustrate Martial’s use of exaggeration in the service of humor. But what else can we say about Martial that makes his audience laugh? It may be the curt, witty, and finely drawn descriptions of his city, Rome, with its stews and public baths; the dreary dinner parties; his trudging around Rome to salute a mean patron; the poetasters who steal Martial’s verses and claim them as their own; the bawds, the bores, and finally those scabrous poems describing randy old women, pathics, fellators, and cunnilingitors. Indeed, it is this very bumping against the teeming humanity within the space of the city walls, with its outrageous sights and often unpleasant tastes and odors, as much as it is the obscene language, fit more for the toilet wall [52],

[46] See RICHLIN 1992: 61-62 for her discussion of hyperbole in satire as a mode of denigrating and thus ostracizing the target of criticism.

[47] Cf. Catullus, 115, 8: *Non homo, sed vero mentula magna minax* (“Not a man, but truly a great big threatening prick”).

[48] DUPONT & ÉLOI 1994: 188-189.

[49] Compare *Ep.*, VI, 72, in which a thief of extraordinary rapacity (*fur notae nimium rapacitatis*) enters a huge garden, but finding nothing else in it but a marble Priapus, steals the Priapus.

[50] See von STACKELBERG 2009: 11.

[51] See UDEN 2010: 211 on Columella, *Res Rusticae* X, 94-95: “Pliny’s [the Elder, *Historia Naturalis*] dire image of urbanites’ gardens, cultivated for pleasure not

produce, is thoroughly and farcically brought to life in the gardens of the *Carmina Priapea*, where produce is in desperately short supply and visitors go (if we are to believe Priapus) explicitly to satiate their lusts”. See, for example, the Priapic garden of *Carmina Priapea*, 51, enticing not for its poor produce, but because it offers the god’s phallic “punishment”. Relevant here, by contrast, is Columella, *Res Rusticae* I, pr.14-15, which praises the virtuous order of old-fashioned agriculture, for in requiring hard work it promoted manliness, in contrast to the rank effeminacy of contemporary Roman males.

[52] Cf. *Ep.*, XII, 61 where Martial responds to Ligurra’s fear and desire to be impugned in Martial’s epigrams: “Don’t worry. You’re not a worthy target. Seek rather some drunken bard who scribbles verselets to be read while taking a crap” (*[qui] scribit carmina quae legunt cacantes*, v. 10).

that accounts for the epigrams' salaciousness. It is that very quality of "wit" again, what the Romans called, using a gustatory metaphor, *sal et lepor*, that is, salt and wit, for without salt Martial's epigrams are *incondita*, or artless. Such a culinary reminder would be appropriate for a society used to reading aloud, often within the context of a *convivium*, or feast.

Martial's epigrams, claiming a universal appeal, embrace not only the high-born but also the prostitutes, buggers, and other low life of the imperial city. Being a seasoned denizen of the metropolis, he appropriates the bawling language of the Roman streets. Speech itself has a particular "flavor", sweet or salty, depending on the genre. Recommending his own epigrams, Martial states, for example, in *Ep.*, X, 4, 9-10, that the reader/auditor will not find in this book Gorgons or Harpies, which are the stuff of epic. Instead, he says, "my page tastes of humankind" (*hominem pagina nostra sapit*). In *Ep.*, XI, 90, 8, Martial addresses Chrestillus, who approves only of the bombastic poetry of old, "May I perish if you don't know what a *mentula* tastes like" (*dispeream ni scis mentula quid sapiat*). Martial establishes a nexus between, on the one hand, epigram with its "salty" taste, best expressed by the penis, specifically Martial's own penis, which entices and, like a delectable meal, should be tasted and enjoyed, and on the other, Martial's self-validation as a poet. Such an assertion may be related to the "tastes" of things one might find in a brothel or on some crowded urban thoroughfare; namely, other bodies that can be viewed, sampled, touched, or penetrated. These sensations relate well to Martial's many epigrams castigating those who indulge in sexual practices, particularly cunnilingus and fellatio, that can be construed as perverse forms of eating, that is, consuming rotten food that leaves the mouth dirty and the breath unpleasant. Martial's oral fixations include as well the sundry paltry gifts of bad food

and undrinkable wine (e.g., *Ep.*, X, 36), implacable toxins that further excite revulsion (and which may incidentally leave a bad taste in the mouth). Salt is at the heart of it: the spicy, well-seasoned point (e.g., *Ep.*, X, 4, 10) expressed in those poems which treat eating or devouring, whether by mouths, vaginas, or anuses.

## CONCLUSION: HUMOR AS A TOOL OF TITILLATION

Being familiar with human foibles and vices, Martial positions himself within his epigrams as the normative, controlling Roman male. As such, he may share with his audience a distinct distaste for men playing the passive sexual role, tribades, and randy women generally, who violate his sense of decorum [53]. At the same time, Martial, playing the Priapic role, is himself made an object of titillation. Even the most censorious of his epigrams share space with his bordello humor. For example, In *Ep.*, XI, 104, the poet, acting as the dominating husband, chastises a wife who behaves not like a proper Roman wife but more like a Vestal, who proffers not passionate kisses but dry pecks on the cheek; who does not compliantly offer herself for sex from behind or even give him a hand job. Martial inveighs against masturbation in *Ep.*, IX, 41 [54]. Indeed, he says, it is a great crime (*scelus ingens*), tantamount to castration. But the poem's final line, "what you waste, Ponticus, with your fingers is a human being" (*istud quod digitis, Pontice, perdis, homo est*), for all its avowed moral outrage, leaves the reader with a highly lubricious picture of semen dribbling over the hand.

Martial entices and at the same time mocks supposedly chaste matrons and passive adult males who are attracted by large penises, and who have a fondness for oral, vaginal, and anal sex, resulting in an unclean mouth and distorted body parts. His Priapic epigrams' emphasis on the visual appeal of the large penis, sometimes inflating like a balloon, can veer into the comic grotesque. In *Ep.*, XI, 51, as we saw, the enormous size of Titius' penis, called a *columna*, threatens to take over his entire bathhouse, leaving Titius confined and alone. Hypertrophied genitals may, therefore, join the list of deformities that include distended anal or vaginal apertures [55].

By exposing his own universally regarded penis, even if figuratively as part of his poetic program, and inviting his audience to view it, fondle it, and finally "take it in their mouths", Martial exploits the

[53] However, Martial, like other freeborn Roman males, was not averse to the delights of lovely young slave boys, as in *Ep.*, III, 65, describing Diadumenus' sweet breath and fragrant kisses, so in contrast to the excremental mouth of the adult male pathic.

[54] See SULLIVAN 1991: 42-43. The medical literature itself warned against excessive ejaculation, in both females and males. See, for example, Soranus, *Gynaecology*, I, 30-33 and also the discussion by ROUSSELLE 1988: 15.

[55] See *Ep.*, VI, 36, featuring Papylus, who has both a huge nose and a huge penis. As a result, every time he has an erection, he can smell it.

Roman custom of reading aloud as an act of oral consumption. Playing the role of a controlling Priapic male, he in effect irrumates his many readers by inserting his words in their mouths. Once invited into his phallic books, in which the poet “lifts the curtain”, his dedicated audience will not be able to take their eyes off him; indeed, they will continue to read to the point of climax. In this regard, they may be compared to the Phrygian servants in *Ep.*, XI, 104 who masturbate while watching from behind the door as Andromache (described as an *uxor*, or wife) rides Hector [56]. They must read on, licking their lips and fondling themselves as they do so. The consumers of Martial’s epigrams abandon all restraint.

Martial’s familiarity with a broad swath of humankind entitles him to be such an expositor of bawdy, phallic humor, an object of merriment and delectation for those he invites into his Priapic garden. His Priapic books tout themselves as avatars of unchecked testosterone; they feature as well less welcome markers of human animality which all,

both men and women, share, such as farts, bad breath, body odor, and defecation. It is as if the poet were saying (to borrow a line from Horace, *Satires* I, 1, 69-70): “Why are you laughing? With a change of name, the tale is being told about you” (*quid rides? mutato nomine de te/fabula narratur*). Thus Martial’s many readers, holding his codices in their hands, will be confronted, surprised, titillated, targeted, and aroused to the point of (possibly uncomfortable) laughter by the scabrous Priapic humor of the *Epigrams*. ■

[56] See HINDS 1998: 133-134, who notes that Martial alludes in *Ep.*, XI, 104, 13-14 to Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, II, 703-704, describing Antromache in bed with Hector. Ovid is hesitant to release salacious details, offering but a hint of the bedroom scene: *Conscius, ecce, duos accipit lectus amantes:/Ad thalami clusas, musa, resiste fores* (“Behold, the knowing bed has received the two lovers. Stop, Muse at the sealed chamber doors”). The vigorous voyeurs of Martial, *Ep.*, XI, 104, by contrast, “peep in and enjoy the action within in the most demonstrative and explicit way possible” (134).

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## NOT A FREAK BUT A JACK-IN-THE-BOX: PHILAENIS IN MARTIAL, *EPIGRAM VII, 67*

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### ABSTRACT

How are we to understand Martial's satirical and sexual epigrams? And, especially, how are we to perceive the humour in these caricatures, which are so coarse and violent? This essay focuses on a particular figure, that of the Philaenis character, a woman whom Martial twice characterises as a *tribas*. The character is portrayed as performing various types of activities (touching on sex, sports, and food). This study shows that a reading relying too heavily on moral considerations may keep us from perceiving an important aspect of Martial's humour. If, following the work of M. Foucault and D. Halperin, we take into account the appropriate categories for a society 'before sexuality', and stop focusing on sexuality, we can see right away that the character staged in this poem is in the first place a being

in *action*. Mechanical rhythm, awkward and socially inappropriate gestures: an analysis of laughter and humor adapted to the ancient context and combined with a historicizing approach to sexual categories allows us to perceive the poem as staging not a reversal (of sex or "sexual orientation") but a comic misappropriation of the societal norms of a (male) Roman citizen.

Comment comprendre les épigrammes satiriques et sexuelles de Martial ? Et surtout comment percevoir l'humour de ces caricatures si crues et si violentes ? Cette étude se concentrera sur une figure particulière, celle du personnage de Philaenis, une femme qui se trouve désignée à deux reprises par Martial par le terme de *tribas* et qui se livre à différents types d'activités (érotiques, sportives, alimentaires). Cet article montre qu'une lecture trop axée sur des considérations morales nous empêche de percevoir un aspect important de l'humour de Martial. Si, à la lumière des travaux de M. Foucault et D. Halperin, on prend en considération les catégories propres d'une société *before sexuality* et si l'on cesse de se focaliser sur les pratiques sexuelles, on constate tout d'abord que le personnage mis en scène dans ce poème est avant tout un être *en action*. Rythme mécanique, gestes maladroits et socialement inappropriés : une analyse du rire et de l'humour adaptée au contexte antique et combinée avec une historicisation des catégories sexuelles permet de percevoir la mise en scène, non pas d'une inversion (de genre ou d'"orientation sexuelle"), mais d'un détournement comique des normes de sociabilité du citoyen romain.

### KEYWORDS

Gender,  
sexuality,  
humor,  
body,  
homosexuality,  
lesbianism,  
*tribas*,  
sport.

### MOTS-CLÉS

Genre,  
sexualité,  
humour,  
corps,  
satire,  
homosexualité,  
lesbianisme,  
*tribas*,  
sport.

Article accepté après évaluation par deux experts selon le principe du double anonymat

There can be no doubt that Martial's epigrams were funny to the Romans, particularly when we consider what great care the poet took with his piquant final twists or "points". But what kind of humor is this exactly? And what roles do sex and eroticism play in the poem's comedy? This essay will focus on a specific epigram of Martial which has caused a lot of ink to flow among classicists: it has not only given rise to numerous interpretations – often contradictory and sometimes even absurd – but it has even made some contemporary readers laugh. But – and this is the question – is their laughter the same kind of laughter as that of the Romans [1]?

Before looking at the poem, it is crucial to raise a few points about method. The categories of sexuality current in our contemporary societies do not match Roman perceptions of erotic practices. Similarly, as numerous scholars have shown over the last three decades – with many following the path opened up by Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality* [2] – in societies "before sexuality" such practices were not assigned the same cultural and social functions as they are today [3]. Thanks to this work, the history of sexuality has become a fertile field of investigation; new aspects of ancient societies have become clear to us [4]. To posit societies "before sexuality" is to admit that what we perceive as sexuality is a "relatively recent and highly culture-specific [form] of erotic life" [5]: it does not correspond to the Greek

and Roman world of what, in an equally anachronistic fashion, one might refer to as "eroticism". This new way of apprehending sexuality, which breaks the thread that used to link ancient Greek pederasty and modern homosexuality and creates a conceptual gap between modern sexuality and erotic experience in antiquity [6], has opened up a new perspective on ancient societies: instead of looking for our modern categories in these contexts, subsequent scholarship attempts to identify the categories specific to each society and each period of antiquity, in which contemporary categories may be subdivided, distributed, or overlap. Thus, in Greece as in Rome, there is no equivalent of the modern notion of sexuality, as the set of discourses, norms and human practices involved in the personal and psychological construction of the individual, whose emergence during the 19th century was demonstrated by Michel Foucault and further elaborated by Arnold I. Davidson [7]. The set of practices that we group under the heading of "sexual" emerge from various cultural fields, and can be culturally tied to or integrated with areas that can seem, to a western scholar of the 21st century, very distant from what we now call "sexuality". This discovery renders obsolete any attempt to categorize ancient practices through the opposition between "homosexuality" and "heterosexuality", and any impulse to establish delimited and consistent "sexual norms" that would apply to all areas of human activity [8].

[1] I warmly thank Ruby Blondell, for her friendship, her sound advice, and for help with translating the text, and Kirk Ormand for his enthusiastic support. A big thank you to Marjolaine Fourton for her invaluable collaboration and her "artistic eye", which made a significant contribution in understanding the text, and to Thaïs Breton for her indispensable assistance and for editing the video.

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[2] FOUCault 1976 and 1984.

[3] For this concept, see the pioneering work of David Halperin, John Winkler & Froma Zeitlin entitled *Before*

*Sexuality. The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient World* (HALPERIN et alii 1990, French translation forthcoming from Epel).

[4] Among all the recent publications, see especially the collections by MASTERSON, RABINOWITZ & ROBSON 2015; BLONDELL & ORMAND 2015; HUBBARD 2014.

[5] HALPERIN 1990: 9.

[6] HALPERIN 1990.

[7] DAVIDSON 1987 and FOUCAULT 1976.

[8] In brief, the term *homosexuality*, which first emerged in 1869 in German with reference to men, took on, in the late nineteenth century, both psychological and clinical connotations. It was not initially used in opposition to heterosexuality, which, for its part, first emerged in 1892 (for a history of this concept, see KATZ 1995).

In societies “before sexuality” there is no “sexuality” producing a personal identity, nor are there moral rules that, within the framework of a biopolitics of the kind Foucault uncovered for contemporary societies, would manage populations, construct bodies and produce a shared “sexual morality”, integrated by individuals, subjectively productive and socially powerful.

Consequently, the humor of Greek or Latin discourses referring to practices that we associate with the field of eroticism cannot be interpreted according to contemporary standards of what is acceptable or not, what is appropriate or risqué, what is shameful or respectable, what is serious or inconsequential, what elicits laughter and what, conversely, arouses disapproval and condemnation [9]. Nor can such humor be viewed through the prism of what some, today, associate with varying degrees of pathology or psychopathology. Instead, our reading calls for a complete transcultural translation, historicizing the practices of laughter, the discursive practices of epigram in Roman culture, and the eroticism of a world “before sexuality” [10].

## PHILAENIS IN *EPIGRAM VII, 67*

The poem by Martial that concerns us dates very likely from 92 CE [11]. *Epigram VII, 67* portrays a female character who engages in various activities, especially sexual activities, and everything suggests that the description of her various postures is preparing – or rather not preparing, not if we are speaking in terms of surprise – for a final twist or “point” even funnier than what is described in the body of the poem [12]. Here is a translation [13]:

Philaenis the tribad butt-fucks little boys  
and, more raging than an erect husband,  
ploughs eleven young girls in a single day.  
With her clothes hoisted up, she also plays ball  
and, rubbing her body down with sand,  
from a confident arm swings weights  
that studs would find heavy.  
Now filthy from the dusty palaestra,  
she takes the beatings of a well-oiled gymnastics  
master.  
She doesn't recline or eat  
until she's vomited three liters of wine,  
and thinks she can carry on this way  
after wolfinng down sixteen meatballs.  
Then, when she's horny, she doesn't suck cocks  
– not manly enough, she thinks –  
but greedily devours young girls' groins.  
May the gods bring you to your senses, Philaenis,  
you who believe it manly to lick cunt!

Many modern commentators have thought that the poem's humor rests on the portrait of Philaenis as a *tribas* with a masculine body. They have seen in this character a physical portrayal of the active and masculine lesbian, a type of woman whose body is shaped by her sexual orientation [14]. According to such readings, it is precisely this embodiment of the butch and active woman – a woman who perceives herself as a man, a lesbian who transgresses gender roles, a freak whose behavior must be corrected – that would have elicited the laughter of Roman audiences [15]. Some have even seen in Martial's Philaenis the depiction of a ridiculous monster – a body distorted by its oversized clitoris [16]. Some of these readings similarly interpret the *cinaedi*

[9] See the demonstration by Eugene O'Connor, in this collection, on the necessity of locating the whole set of cultural practices (including reading), and not just sexuality, in their historical and social context.

[10] For Rome, see especially WILLIAMS 1990 and DUPONT & Éloi 2003.

[11] Book VII was dedicated to the Emperor Domitian. For the date and circumstances of composition, see GALÁN VIOQUE 2002: 1-8.

[12] The function of the “point” (or *sententia*) “is to produce surprise, for which the poet's entire art is what one could call an art of non-preparation: everything must be done to make sure the reader does not guess the idea with which the poem will conclude, whose essential value is to take him by surprise” (translated from MARTIN & GAILLARD 1990: 409).

[13] *Epigram VII, 67* translated by Anna Preger for this essay (the Latin is quoted below).

[14] Readings of Philaenis as a phallic and masculine lesbian are extremely common, and linked with the

interpretation of the *tribas* as suffering from a malformation of the clitoris that permits her to penetrate women and men; for a full bibliography on these interpretations see BOEHRINGER 2007: 333-335. For the most recent, see CLARKE 2007: 203-204, according to whom the poem evoked men's anxiety in face of emancipated women who dare to take power in various domains.

[15] The edition with commentary on book VII by GALÁN VIOQUE 2002 collects most of the discussions of the character's phallic nature, which Galán Vioque agrees with: the epigram is “a criticism of the disorderly life of a lesbian, whose sexuality and gluttony are unbridled. This is an example of the commonplace of ridiculing a phallic woman, a common character among the Roman novelists and in satire”. (GALÁN VIOQUE 2002: 382).

[16] Galán Vioque invokes the “unusually large clitoris” of Philaenis to explain in practical, concrete terms her sexual practices with *pueri*. He relies on the interpretation of HOWELL 1980: 298 and of SULLIVAN 1991: 206, who speak of the “phallic clitoris”.

and *pathici* of Martial's poems as homosexual men, arguing that it is their "inversion" that comes under attack in the poems and provides the crux of Martial's humor. These interpretations, based on the idea of sexual identity, tied to a "sexual orientation", are, in my opinion, anachronistic [17]. Certainly, this character is a parody of a kind of behavior, but in order to determine exactly what kind, it is necessary to take into account the full context in which this figure appears.

## THE CHARACTER OF PHILAENIS IN MARTIAL

Nine of Martial's epigrams are concerned with a character named Philaenis [18]. The accounts in the various epigrams do not combine to portray a real person, nor do they create a realistic portrayal of a fictitious character. Martial constructs his characters through "types" which, as various commentators have shown, refer to a group of multiple individuals afflicted with the same traits or demonstrating similar behavior [19]. We should not be looking for any kind of chronological or narrative verisimilitude here – for instance, in book IX, Philaenis is dead, yet in book XII she features once again, perfectly alive. Each trait evoked in a poem is a facet of this character type, and each trait is sufficient but not necessary. Accordingly, if we were to make a list of the facets that feature either in combination or separately in the epigrams bearing on Philaenis, we would find the following elements: ugliness, foul odor, crude language, old age, repellent physical appearance; she is also variously depicted as one-eyed, red-headed, or a *tribas*. This is not the place for detailed analysis of the full set of nine poems, but here is one example to give an idea of the character type:

[17] Note that the link between malformation of the clitoris and homosexual practice never appears in Greek or Latin medical texts. The treatise by Caelius Aurelianus, the first doctor to discuss sexual relations between women, dates from the 5th century CE – yet he does not mention any bodily difference of this kind. What ancient sources, and especially doctors, are describing, is hyper-sexual behavior (not "sexual orientation").

[18] *Epigrams* II, 33; IV, 65; VII, 67 and VII, 70; IX, 29, 40, 62; X, 22 and XII, 22.

[19] P. Laurens has shown that one of Martial's techniques consists of "the use of pseudonyms more or less systematically associated with fixed characters": the satire of Martial's epigrams is not "directed at individuals but against types" (translated from LAURENS 1965: 315).

[20] *Epigram* II, 33: *Cur non basio te, Philaeni? calva es.* / *Cur non basio te, Philaeni? rufa es.* / *Cur non basio*

Why do I not kiss you, Philaenis? Because you're bald.

Why do I not kiss you, Philaenis? Because you're red-headed.

Why do I not kiss you, Philaenis? Because you're one-eyed.

He who kisses that, Philaenis, sucks cock [20].

The set of traits that characterize Philaenis in these epigrams turn out to be the comic inverse, point by point, of the ideal portrait of the female beloved as it appears in Roman erotic elegy [21]. These traits do not belong to the character systematically and simultaneously; we cannot affirm that Philaenis *is always thus* – however, each element combines to build a coherent type, that of the anti-erotic woman.

## TRIBAS IN GREEK AND LATIN TEXTS

At this stage, it is important to clarify that it is not *because* Philaenis is a *tribas* that she is ugly or repulsive, or that her behavior is inappropriate; on the contrary, it is precisely *because* she embodies the character type of the anti-erotic woman that she is twice characterized as a *tribas* [22] – sexual relations between women not being an erotic theme for Roman men (unlike in contemporary western pornography, for example) [23]. The causal relationship has nothing to do with contemporary representations of sexual identity, whereby sexual identity – that famous "hidden truth" that Foucault speaks of – is seen to explain or justify an individual's behavior [24]. It is therefore anachronistic to read this satire as denouncing some kind of psychopathological deviance, and to think that its humor rests on the denunciation of a Philaenis who is "perverse" because she is homosexual [25].

*te, Philaeni? lusca es. / Haec qui basiat, o Philaeni, fellat.*

[21] On the qualities characterizing the beloved see VEYNE 1983.

[22] *Epigrams* VII, 67 and 70.

[23] On sex between women in ancient images see BOEHRINGER 2014: 143 *sq.*

[24] "Sexuality: the correlative of that slowly developed discursive practice which constitutes the *scientia sexualis*. The essential features of this sexuality are not the expression of a representation that is more or less distorted by ideology, or of a misunderstanding caused by taboos; they correspond to the functional requirements of a discourse that must produce its truth." (FOUCAULT 1976: 91, Eng. trans.: FOUCAULT 1978, 68).

[25] GALÁN VIOQUE 2002: 67 explains Philaenis' behavior by her "perverse sexual appetite".

In this analysis I have chosen *not* to translate *tribas*, in order to avoid any temptation to project contemporary categories onto the term (which often happens when scholars translate it as “lesbian” or “homosexual” [26]). Despite its Greek root (the verb *τριβεῖν*), the word is first attested in Latin. Around the same time as Martial, Phaedrus, author of the *Fables*, wrote about *tribades*, drawing a parallel between them and *cinaedi* [27]. Seneca the Elder used the word *tribades* to refer to two women together, caught in the act – a passage that, contrary to what has sometimes been claimed, does not afford the conclusion that “the” *tribas* refers to an active, masculine lesbian [28]. The following table shows subsequent occurrences of the word.

	Phaedrus and Seneca the Elder	<i>tribas</i>
1 <sup>st</sup> century CE	Martial	<i>tribas</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> century CE	Ptolemy	τριβάς
	Vettius Valens	τριβάς
	Lucian, Amores	τριβακή
3 <sup>rd</sup> century CE	(Tertullian)	(frictrix)
	Pomponius Porphyrio	<i>tribas</i>
	Manetho	τριβάς
4 <sup>th</sup> century CE	Hermes Trismegistus	fricatrix
5 <sup>th</sup> century CE	Caelius Aurelianus	<i>tribas</i>
	Hephaestion	τριβάς

Given the paucity of this evidence, we cannot rely on the context to elucidate Martial’s use of the term in this epigram. Still less can we deduce from these few uses that the *tribas* was, for the ancients, aggressive, psychologically deviant, or masculine. No more can we tell whether the term *tribas* is funny in itself.

## BUT WHO IS PHILAENIS ?

The particular choice of name is also noteworthy, for Philaenis is the name of a woman believed to have written an erotic handbook, a kind of self-help book on seduction, kissing and love-making techniques. Among the female authors to whose authorship an erotic manual or treatise is attributed (Astyanassa,

Botrys of Messana, or the famous Elephantis), Philaenis is the most often cited, and the only one for whom we have direct knowledge of passages from the work. The way she is mentioned in some ten sources, together with the few papyrus fragments of what is alleged to be her manual (*P. Oxy.* 2891 [29]), suggest that the work of Philaenis probably dated from the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and that it was especially well known in subsequent centuries, up to the imperial period. Thus, Aristotle [30] mentions the *poiēmata* of Philaenis, and the author’s name appears subsequently in a variety of contexts [31].

In Martial’s time, in the first century CE, an epigram in the *Carmina Priapea* mentions Philaenis. It does so

in a context that is both humorous and exceptionally derogatory to Priapus, with reference to the many and varied erotic positions described in the “manual” of which she was the author [32]:

There comes in addition to these things the sign of shamelessness, this obelisque erected by my lecherous limb. Right up to it, the *puello* – I nearly said her name! – is accustomed to come with the one who shags her (*cum suo futore*), and if she has not completed all the positions described by Philaenis (*tot figuris, quas Philaenis enarrat*), she leaves, still itching for it (*pruriosa*).

In the lines preceding this passage, Priapus listed all his misfortunes, but the worst is this uselessly erect penis which makes him a bad *fututor* [33]. The

[26] We must remember that there is no term, in either Greek or Latin, equivalent to “homosexual” or “heterosexual” today, or any terms expressing what “gay” or “lesbian” means in our western societies.

[27] Phaedrus, *Fabulae*, IV, 16.

[28] Seneca, *Controversiae*, I, 2, 23. For references to the other occurrences of these words see BOEHRINGER 2007: 272-275.

[29] The text is edited in vol. 39 of the *P. Oxy* (Lobel 1972).

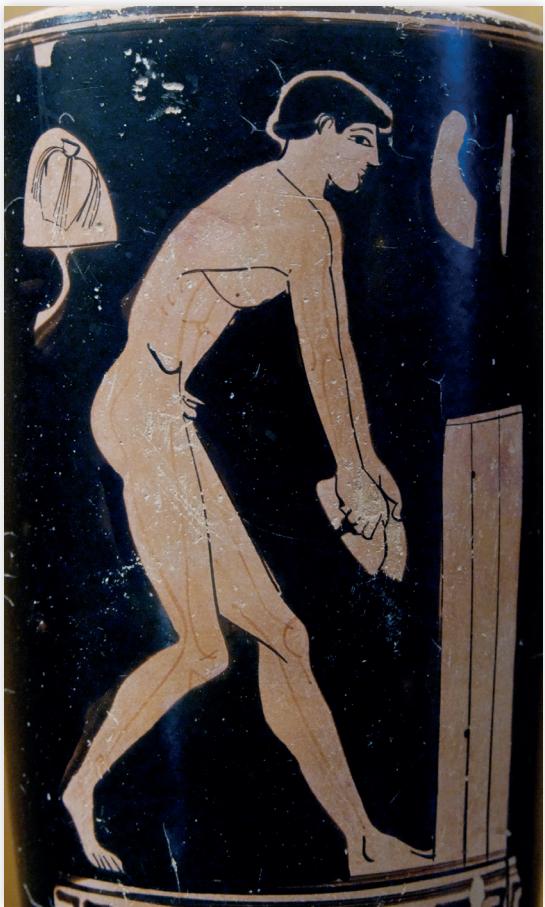
See BOEHRINGER 2015 for a bibliography of studies on Philaenis as author which follow this edition.

[30] Aristotle, *Divination in Sleep*, 464b.

[31] See the references in BOEHRINGER 2015.

[32] *Carmina Priapea*, 63, 13-18 (trans. Luc Arnault and Mark Masterson in BOEHRINGER 2015).

[33] On the sad sexuality of Priapus, see the preface to the French translation of the *Carmina Priapea* by F. Dupont and T. Éloi (DUPONT & ÉLOI 1994).



◀ Figure 1

Athlete holding weights and preparing to jump.  
Red figure lekythion, Bowdoin painter, 470-460 BCE,  
Palermo Regional Archeological Museum inv. 2135.  
Photo: Marie-Lan Nguyen. © Wikimedia Commons.

▼ Figure 2

Pancration: an umpire intervenes with a whip.  
Red figure kylix, Foundry painter, 490-480 BCE,  
Provenance: Vulci, Italy. British Museum, inv.  
GR 1850.3-2.2. © Trustees of the British Museum.



young woman is unsatisfied, and her sexual frustration arises from not having tried all the positions (*figurae*) described by Philaenis. The mention of Philaenis by name is not a reference to a particular prostitute or pimp: it refers to an organized discourse, [34] which has circulated with certain consequences for the familiarity of young women (*puellae*) with erotic practices and games. Finally, at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, Clement of Alexandria credited her work with inspiring paintings in which figures (*σχήματα*) of love were depicted in the same manner as the exploits of Heracles [35]. Martial's choice of name should therefore be taken into account in considering how to approach this poem's humor.

## A CHARACTER IN ACTION

We return now to the text, but should keep the link between physical and erotic exploits in mind for later. The first striking point is that the poem tells us

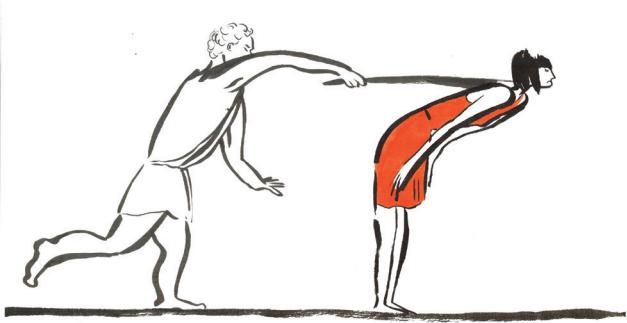
[34] Note the use of the verb *narrare* (ed. Parker 1988: *enarrat*; ed. Cazzaniga 1959: *narrat*).

[35] Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 4.61.2 (τὰ Φιλαινίδος σχήματα ὡς τὰ Ἡρακλέους ἀθλήματα).

nothing about Philaenis. Paradoxically, considering that the name could refer to a work or a well known figure, we know nothing about her life, age or status. Furthermore, we know nothing about her body, face or facial expressions. But we do know what she does: the seventeen lines of the epigram include seventeen verbs of which Philaenis is the subject, and fourteen of these are action verbs.

**Pedicat** pueros tribas Philaenis  
*Et tentigine saevior mariti*  
*Undenas dolat in die puellas.*  
*Harpasto quoque subligata ludit,*  
*Et flavescit haphe, gravesque draucis*  
*Halteras facili rotat lacerto,*  
*Et putri lutulenta de palaestra*  
*Uncti verbere vapulat magistri:*  
*Nec cenat prius aut recumbit ante,*  
*Quam septem vomuit meros deunces;*  
*Ad quos fas sibi tunc putat redire,*  
*Cum coloephia sedecim comedit.*  
*Post haec omnia cum libidinatur,*  
*Non fellat - putat hoc parum virile -,*  
*Sed plane medias vorat puellas.*  
*Di mentem tibi dent tuam, Philaeni,*  
*Cunnum lingere quae putas virile.*

If we stop focusing on sexual identity, we can see that the epigram consists of a long list of actions performed by a character with no distinctive features.



▼ Figure 3

21<sup>st</sup>-Century Philaenis, sequence 5. The character is balancing the weights and preparing to jump.

▲ Figure 4

1<sup>st</sup>-Century Philaenis, sequence 6. The character is hit by a gymnastics trainer.

◀ Figure 5

21<sup>st</sup>-Century Philaenis, sequence 3. The character plays *harpastum*, covered in dust.

Drawings: Marjolaine Fourton.

[36] "As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality...We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized...less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and feminine in oneself... The sodomite had been a temporary aberration, the homosexual was now a species" (FOUCAULT 1976: 59, Eng. trans. 1978: 43).

[37] This evidence dates from the 5th century BCE, but in so far as Martial, in this epigram, is referring to such practices with words derived from Greek, and in so far as the athletic practices he is describing originate in Greek culture, it is not anachronistic to think that his Roman audience would visualize the image of an athlete in this way. Moreover, studies in the field have shown that certain material objects and certain practices were still quite relevant in Martial's time (for a summary see LEE 2014), even though, as CORDIER 2005 has underlined (see below), the moral evaluation and social representation of certain practices had, of course, evolved (see the studies collected in CHRISTENSEN & KYLE 2014).

[38] This ball game involved two opposed teams. It is described by Athenaeus at *Deipnosophistae* I, 14F-15A. Martial is the only Roman author to mention it. GALÁN VÍOQUE 2002: 233 notes that in the poems where he does so it is a dusty business (using words derived from *pulvis*).

(All we are told, in three instances, is the contents of her thoughts (*putat*), whose absurdity is heavily hinted at.) Martial's audience is not being asked to imagine a character with a thick-set or distorted body, a representative of a *species* – to use Michel Foucault's expression in his famous *The Will to Knowledge*, in which he discusses the indiscrete anatomy of the homosexual [36]. What Martial presents, rather, are actions.

The use of specific detail (mentioning concrete objects, using adverbs to characterize gestures) creates an impression of these actions as rapid images, which the author provides for his audience to "see" in their imaginations. These are sometimes familiar images from Greek sporting activities, like vase-paintings showing an athlete jumping with weights (fig. 1) or an umpire intervening with his whip (fig. 2) [37].

Scenes representing *harpastum* players are also relevant. This was a violent game that entailed pushing the other players into the mêlée in order to catch the ball, which made the participants exceptionally dirty [38]. But the epigram superimposes on these familiar associations the image of an active woman, stringing together by herself all these actions. Here in a transcultural visual translation, is the string of images that the poem suggests (fig. 3-4-5)



Figure 6: a man, probably drunk, is about to throw up in a krater. He is assisted by a young slave who holds his head. Red figure kylix, Brygos painter, 500-470 BCE, National Museum of Denmark. Photo: Stefani Bolognini. © Wikimedia Commons.

But the images in Martial's epigram do not simply follow each other like a series of exercises that the athletes are to complete one after another, in a logical way, as if governed by the rules of a contest. Rather, the epigram's rapid succession of verbs does not give the audience enough time to "observe" a scene, presenting, instead, an accumulation of multifarious actions involving a variety of partners.

Traditional sporting activities are followed by images of the body in postures that are only rarely represented in images (vomiting, gluttony). It is true that Greek pottery sometimes represents people on the point of vomiting (**fig. 6**), but Martial's character is not so euphemistic (**fig. 7**).

Similarly, Martial's verses state unequivocally that Philaenis "devours young women's crotches" (*medias*



Figure 8: a satyr approaches the crotch of a maenad, who is probably asleep. Fragment of a red figure kylix by the Onesimos painter, 500-490 BCE, Musée du Louvre, G 258.

Drawing: Marjolaine Fourton.

*vorat puellas*, v. 15). But in images from Greek and Roman antiquity, scenes of cunnilingus are extremely rare. This scene of a satyr approaching a Maenad (**fig. 8**), for example, hints comically at this possibility, while the scenes on the walls of the baths at Pompeii, showing two women frolicking in a way that suggests oral sex, were only visible to the building's clients [39].

In this epigram, we see a series of heterogenous actions, which have no logical connection (whether it is a matter of sex, food, or sport), together with explicit mention of activities rarely seen in the images of the period.



[39] These recently discovered frescos from the 1st century CE (62-79) were found in 1985-1987, in exceptionally damaged condition, at the suburban baths of Pompeii near the Marine Gate. One of the seven numbered erotic vignettes shows two women together (*apodyterium*, V) and another a scene with four figures including one woman appearing to give cunnilingus to another (*apodyterium*, VII). Cf. CANTARELLA 1998 and CLARKE 2003, plates 13 et 15.

Figure 7: 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Philaenis, sequence 7. The character throws up, after drinking three liters of wine. Drawing: Marjolaine Fourton.

## A COMICAL RHYTHM

These actions, that I have just listed, are not only performed in succession, they are also repeated a number of times. Martial stresses plurals (*pueros*) and specifies the number of persons (*undenas pueras*: eleven, like the hendecasyllabic lines of the epigram) or huge quantities of food and drink (*septem seunces; coloechia sedecim*). These repeated actions seem to be strung together without any transition: activities related to sex, athletics, and food intertwine and follow one another in a hurried, excessive frenzy, which is far from the comportment of a civilized (male) citizen. Philaenis has sex excessively, dirties her body with dust, and eats the coarsest of foods, suitable for athletes (in contrast to the kinds of foods that would have been served to guests at an elaborate banquet).

Figure 9: Man Ray, set from the *Mr and Mrs Woodman* series, 1927.



[40] This word means "hew, carve (a piece of wood), polish". The sexual metaphor appears in Pomponius (*Atellanes*, 82) and later in Apuleius (*Métamorphoses*, IX, 7: a lover was "carving away at" (*dedolabat*) the wife of a man who was carving a vase). See ADAMS 1982: 147.

[41] The word *draucus* is difficult to translate since it appears nowhere except in Martial. Dupont and Éloi do not translate the term (they turn it into an antonomasia), but they think that it refers, perhaps, to a well hung

What is presented here is a picture of a character darting around in every direction, like an uncoordinated puppet. Vomiting precedes the ingestion of food, suggesting that it is all part of an ongoing, rapid cycle. In this epigram, the emphasis is not on the body or gender, but on pure action: one thinks of Man Ray's choice when he developed the series of photo-tableaux entitled *Mr and Mrs Woodman* (fig. 9): wooden puppets without specific traits to characterize a person or designate a sex.

If we were going to produce tableaux in the manner of Man Ray's *Mr and Mrs Woodman*, we would need to make at least eleven of them (in order to illustrate the behaviors indicated by all fourteen action verbs).

Tableau 1. Philaenis butt-fucking little boys (*pedicat*).

Tableau 2. Philaenis fucking eleven young girls (*dolat* [40]).

Tableau 3. Philaenis playing *harpastum* (*ludit*).

Tableau 4. Philaenis vigorously rubbing down her oiled body with sand – a common practice among wrestlers, to improve their grip (*flavescit*).

Tableau 5. Philaenis swinging weights to perform the long jump (*rotat*).

Tableau 6. Philaenis offering herself up to the trainer's blows (*vapulat*).

Tableau 7. Philaenis vomiting (*vomuit*).

Tableau 8. Philaenis settling down to eat, recumbent (*cenat, recumbit*).

Tableau 9. Philaenis wolfin down meatballs (*comedit*).

Tableau 10. Philaenis, in heat, in search of prey (*libidinatur*).

Tableau 11. Philaenis performing cunnilingus on young girls (*non fellat... sed vorat; lingere*).

Then go back to Tableau 1.

The comparison with Man Ray's non-sexed, non-individualized mannequins is interesting. As with Martial, the *Mr and Mrs Woodman* images draw our attention to actions as opposed to the individuals performing them. But there is a notable difference: the epigram presents a series of practices associated with the Greeks. Philaenis engages in sexual activities, eats and vomits, and exercises like the toughest of men (*drauci* [41]). It is important to note the large number

slave raised for sexual purposes (DUPONT & ÉLOI 2001: 173, n. 49). See in this connection WILLIAMS 1999: 88, n. 126, who translates *draucus* as "stud". In all five of Martial's epigrams where the term appears, *draucus* refers to someone whose penis is amazingly large and attracts attention. There is also, in two cases, a reference to his physical strength: he is the kind of person who trains in the palaestra and is seen at the baths.

of terms used in describing her that are formed from a Greek root: *tribas*, *paedicat*, *haphe*, *palaestra*, *harpastum*, *halter*, *coloephia* [42]. In this period, criticism was emerging at Rome [43] both of the expansion of gymnasiums in the city (a sign of laxity, as far back as Varro [44]) and Greek ideas about physical training (which, far from strengthening the individual, was considered by Romans to soften the body [45]).

This softening process should be understood in both a physical *and* a sexual sense in Martial: to become *mollis* is to give up one's body to pleasure at inappropriate times or places; it is to lack control of one's actions and their impact. The Roman concept of *mollitia* does *not* depend on contemporary criteria concerning activity as opposed to sexual passivity, or an opposition between penetrator and penetrated [46]. In Rome, the moral evaluation of sexual practices rested in the first place on the *modalities* of those practices. What is poorly regarded is extreme choices: hypersexuality, certainly, is despised and pilloried above all (e. g. to accumulate conquests shows a lack of self-control, an admission of civic weakness), but a citizen who proclaims the importance of chastity and rejects all luxury is not admired either, since complete austerity may be correlated with rejecting the behavior proper to a citizen in society [47]. In all these contexts, the notion of pleasure is to be understood as physical pleasure in general (without distinguishing sexuality from other bodily pleasures). What Romans are concerned with is the control of these practices and pleasures, and therefore the individual's understanding of the norms of masculine civic social life.

However, even this set of illustrations in the style of Man Ray would not adequately render the effect produced by the epigram and its fourteen actions, for there is also the rhythm suggested by the syntax. As I have tried to show, the poet's humor consists in delivering images of coarse, unsophisticated practices at breakneck speed, thus stripping the body of its

humanity even further, in a way that might evoke not only Man Ray's photos but perhaps also the marionette that Bergson describes in his *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*.

Only now does Philaen's error, her misconception, appear in its full scope. The epigram's final twist or "point" (16-17) generates a new reading of the series of actions by underlining the distance between the act and the intention behind it, between the act and the very idea of the act:

May the gods bring you to your senses [48],  
Philaen,  
you who believe it manly to lick cunt!

She is right, of course, in thinking that being a proper Roman *vir* is something that must be constantly proved (has she been reading Judith Butler?). But one also needs to grasp the subtler points involved in the construction of a *vir Romanus*. In order to be a *vir Romanus*, it is not enough to refrain from performing fellatio; one must also be capable of judging how to behave properly – and performing cunnilingus is the most serious mistake that exists in the moral and erotic grammar of the Romans [49]. This morality includes understanding the appropriate pace, measure, and timing of one's activities, plus knowing that "Greek-style" athletics soften the body, and that what Philaen perceives to be manly (oral sex) in fact makes her *mollissima*. Without such an understanding, there is no *mens* and there is no social manliness.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear that we have come a long way from reading Philaen as the prototype of a species, the embodiment of a psychopathology or sexual orientation. It is our contemporary gaze, informed by two centuries

[42] This is probably a very nutritious meatball. The word is rare, but also appears in Juvenal (*colyphia*, II, 53), in a passage that satirically echoes Martial's epigram. *Coloephium*, or *colyphium*, is probably a transcription of κωλυφίον, which derives from κῶλον (see CHANTRAIN, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, s.v.) and refers to a meat-based dish.

[43] See Pierre Cordier's detailed study of Roman nudity (CORDIER 2005: 313-345).

[44] Varro, *Res Rusticae*, II, pr. 3.

[45] See e.g. Lucan, *Bellum Civile*, VII, 270-272 in light of the analysis by CORDIER 2005: 320-321.

[46] In this regard, Craig Williams' decision to describe certain sexual activities as "insertive" or "receptive" is

particularly relevant, since it allows us to avoid certain anachronistic interpretations (WILLIAMS 1999).

[47] For this complex approach to *mollitia* and *impudicitia* see DUPONT & ÉLOI 2001, esp. 27 sq. In this respect, I distance myself from the slightly overschematic table proposed, among others, by Holt Parker (PARKER 2001), in his article "Anthropologie and sexuality for classicists", even while viewing his work in general as indispensable, especially his invaluable contribution to BLONDELL & ORMAND 2015.

[48] Epigram VII, 67, 16: *Di mentem tibi dent tuam, Philaeni*, where the word *mens* is the unexpected twist producing the final comic point.

[49] See for example the game of "sexual riddles" in Martial, *Epigram* II, 28.

of *scientia sexualis*, that has led scholars to frame and isolate a sphere (sexuality) and assign it causal significance, even though this sphere is in no way distinguished from other corporeal practices in the material at hand. Martial may not speak explicitly of Philaenis the author, but by using her name he is winking, in a learned and humorous way, at the fact that these are figures (*figurae, σχήματα*) of the kind she described in her book [50]. This is not, therefore, a satirical caricature of the homosexual woman, a monster or a freak. It is our artificial separation of sexual acts from other physical activities that has provided material for numerous anachronistic readings of this poem, preventing us from understanding the source of its humor. Far from producing a moralizing discourse about "homosexuality", far from implicitly promoting a "good sexuality", what the poet does, rather, is provoke laughter by setting the body in motion through a series of culturally incoherent acts whose rapid succession creates the absurd, the mechanical...and the comic.

Because it is so difficult to escape our modernity, I suggest, in conclusion, that we try to approach the question via another anachronistic filter (one that employs "controlled anachronism" [51]), which I believe will prove more effective – Bergson's analysis of laughter. According to Bergson's analysis of the comedy of situation in theatre, one form of the comic consists in "something mechanical" encrusted upon "something living" [52]. What elicits laughter is the actions' sheer absurdity and lack of logic, their being so completely out of phase and removed from any rational or human goal. I have already mentioned Bergson's use of the figure of the marionette. Elsewhere, he also appeals to the idea of the Jack-in-the-box (fig. 10). As Bergson describes it, "We have all played at one time with the clown that jumps out of its box. We flatten it, it pops back up. We push it lower, it jumps back higher. You crush it under its lid, and often that makes the whole thing leap out [53]." As this anachronistic and humorous video illustrates (fig. 11), Philaenis is in fact... Martial's Jack-in-the-box. ■



Figure 10

A Jack-in-the-box (children's toy).  
Drawing: Marjolaine Fourton.

[50] In addition to the *Carmina Priapea* and Clement of Alexandria (above), this motif also appears in Lucian, *Amores*, 28, in the form of the participle ἀσχημονοῦσα, which characterizes an action of Philaenis. The word is used by a character who is painting a terrifying picture of everything women are likely to descend to if they indulge in sex with each other. Everything is "dis-figured".

[51] For this expression and approach see LORAUX 1993.

[52] BERGSON [1900] 1959: 29 (Eng. trans. 1914).

[53] BERGSON [1900] 1959: 35 (Eng. trans. 1914).



Figure 11

Video "Not a Freak, but a Jack-in-the-box," directed by Sandra Boehringer; art by Marjolaine Fourton; editing by Thaïs Breton.

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## DES MŒURS SEXUELLES DES SÉLÉNITES (LUCIEN, *HISTOIRES VRAIES*, I, 22) : ENTRE SATIRE QUEER ET CONSTRUCTIONNISME INCARNÉ, LE SEXE QUI DONNE À RIRE ET À PENSER

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### RÉSUMÉ

Dans les *Histoires vraies* de Lucien de Samosate, les questions de genre et de sexualité jouent un rôle crucial, comme objets propres à provoquer le rire, tout en donnant à penser. On se concentre ici sur la description des mœurs des Sélénites (I. 22-25), comme dispositif parodique d'inspiration sceptique et cynique, fondé sur le sério-comique (*spoudogeloion*) et mettant en crise à la fois les discours d'enquête historique, d'anthropologie culturelle et physique et d'histoire naturelle, par le passage à la limite absurde que provoquent la fiction fantastique et les jeux de langage comiques et sophistiques qui la fondent. On observe ainsi une figure paradoxale du sophiste/philosophe Lucien, constructionniste, relativiste, postmoderne, qui ne manque pas de rappeler une approche queer, également attachée à l'hybridation, l'extravagance spectaculaire et la pensée critique. L'analyse s'achève par quelques exemples problématiques de réception moderne et contemporaine.

### MOTS-CLÉS

Genre,  
sexualité,  
reproduction,  
Lucien de Samosate,  
*Histoires vraies*,  
sério-comique,  
scepticisme,  
satire,  
queer,  
réception.

ne manque pas de rappeler une approche queer, également attachée à l'hybridation, l'extravagance spectaculaire et la pensée critique. L'analyse s'achève par quelques exemples problématiques de réception moderne et contemporaine.

In the *True Stories* of Lucian of Samosata, the issues of gender and sexuality are crucial, as they efficiently can provoke both laughter and thought. This study focuses on the description of the Selenites and their way of life (I. 22-25), as a parodic device inspired by Scepticism and Cynicism and based on seriocomic effects (*spoudogeloion*): it puts in a state of crisis historical inquiry, cultural and physical anthropology as well as natural sciences. This crisis is based on fantastic comic fiction and its typically sophistic language plays. Lucian here is paradoxically both a sophistic and philosophical figure, at the same time constructionist, relativist, postmodern: he might remind us of a queer perspective, simultaneously interested in hybridization, spectacular extravagance, and critical thinking. The study ends with some problematic examples of modern and contemporary reception.

### KEYWORDS

Gender,  
sexuality,  
reproduction,  
Lucian of Samosata,  
*True Stories*,  
seriocomic,  
scepticism,  
satire,  
queer,  
reception.

## POUR UNE POSSIBLE APPROCHE QUEER DES GENRES ET SEXUALITÉS ANTIQUES

Dans le cadre général des études sur le genre et la sexualité dans l'Antiquité, en particulier dans la fiction, cette analyse d'un épisode singulier des *Histoires vraies* de Lucien de Samosate, la description des mœurs sexuelles des habitants de la Lune (I, 22), s'inscrit dans une mouvance épistémologique et méthodologique qu'on qualifie de plus en plus souvent de *queer*. Pour une présentation synthétique de ce terme polysémique, à l'origine injurieux, « bizarre, tordu », à l'égard des personnes LGBT+, qui se le sont réapproprié dans un sens positif, afin de désigner un ensemble de pratiques et représentations, y compris artistiques et théoriques, constitutivement transdisciplinaires, on renvoie à la récente *Encyclopédie critique du genre. Corps, sexualité, rapports sociaux*, à l'article *Queer* [1] et à d'autres interrogeant « la chair des rapports sociaux » [2] » et des points utiles ici, tels que le genre comme performance et construction, la critique des bicatégorisations simples du type hétéro/homo et femme/homme, l'intersectionnalité genre/race/classe mais

aussi apparence physique/âge/santé. S'agissant des études dites classiques, en domaine franco-phone mais aussi anglophone, souvent des ouvrages importants, à visée scientifique, critique et pédagogique, ne se réfèrent pas aux études *queer* nommées comme telles, tout en étant proches, en termes de constructionnisme, relativisme et fluidité des catégories, générations critiques et multi-dimensionnalité des identités, dangers de l'essentialisme et de l'ethnocentrisme, ou intérêt pour une « pratique contrôlée de l'anachronisme » [3] et du « double écart comparatif » [4], en même temps que pour la dialectique entre actualité et inactualité, ou « intempestivité » [5] : il est vrai que le développement des études de genre a rencontré des oppositions institutionnelles, académiques et sociales vives, favorables à une certaine prudence terminologique, que l'analyse présentée devrait pouvoir plus aisément dépasser, désormais. On insiste aussi sur le fait que les antiquisants spécialistes des questions de genre et sexualité évoquent volontiers des cultures « d'avant la sexualité », pour lesquelles de nombreuses catégorisations modernes, souvent nées au XIX<sup>e</sup> ou XX<sup>e</sup> siècles, ne sont pas opératoires. Sans dire que

[1] Voir, dans RENNES (dir.) 2017, Maxime Cervulle et Nelly Quemener, « Queer », p. 529-538, ainsi que Keivan Djavadzadeh, « Culture populaire » (p. 183-191), Luca Greco et Stéphanie Kunert, « Drag et performance » (p. 222-231), Sébastien Chauvin et Arnaud Lerch, « Hétéro/homo » (p. 306-320), ou Anne Creissels, « Mythe/métamorphose » (p. 390-399). Dans cet ouvrage non exhaustif, qui relève des sciences sociales, les études littéraires (et la psychologie) sont peu présentes, mais les auteurs, comme il est habituel dans les études de genre, s'intéressent aux notions de discursivité, performativité, énonciation, subjectivation ou incorporation, pour lesquelles les études sur les littératures anciennes se sont révélées utiles : FOUCAULT 1984 s'intéressait, comme à des documents, aussi aux littératures grecques d'époque impériale, en particulier au roman grec, contemporain de Lucien, même s'il ne mettait pas en valeur leur dimension fictionnelle et comique. Voir aussi HOLMES 2012, en particulier « Butler and Beyond : the Future of Gender », p. 168-180 et « Conclusion », p. 181-183. Sur le style, les

objectifs et objets d'étude de la pensée critique *queer*, dans le domaine des arts, un bon exemple est MOINEAU 2016.

[2] p. 24.

[3] Voir LORAUX 2005 (1993).

[4] Sur la notion d'écart, voir aussi les activités de l'association *Antiquité Territoire des Écarts* (<https://labantique.hypotheses.org>).

[5] Sur le rapport antique / contemporain, voir BRIAND 2012, 2015, 2016. Sur des études de genre qui, sans souvent se référer explicitement à une théorie *queer*, s'en approchent, voir BOEHRINGER & SÉBILLOTTE (dir.), 2010, BOEHRINGER & BRIAND 2012, BOEHRINGER & LORENZINI 2016, ou HUBBARD (dir.) 2013 et MASTERTON, RABINOWITZ & ROBSON 2015. Sur le caractère crucial, y compris politiquement, de ce type de généalogie, voir NARBONNE 2016, chap. IV « Du scepticisme ancien à la tolérance moderne : l'héritage paradigmique de Lucien », p. 139-189.

la théorie et les pratiques queer seraient à situer « après la sexualité », on note qu'elles tentent de troubler ces mêmes catégorisations modernes et que donc une rencontre est possible ici, dans une perspective critique.

Mais on ira plus loin encore, en se référant à ce que, d'abord dans les études de réception, on peut appeler *queer classics*, par distinction à des *straight classics*, correspondant à une conception plus linéaire, parfois plus positiviste, de l'histoire de la littérature et de la philologie [6]. Deux aspects interdépendants peuvent entraîner la qualification de *queer* :

- dans la perspective d'un écart psychologique, éthique et social, « sexuel », une production culturelle ancienne, par le contenu thématique qui s'y trouve présenté et du style qui s'y déploie, par exemple avec un intérêt marqué pour les questions de genre et de sexualité non binaires, non conformes, hybrides, etc., et par son usage de spectaculaires effets rhétoriques et poétiques combinés avec un goût affirmé pour le mélange des genres discursifs et littéraires et la combinaison de lectures à la fois fortement empathique et critique. Lucien, notre auteur de fictions à la fois sensationnelles et cultivées, a pu être dit « postmoderne », à l'instar d'un Umberto Eco, sémioticien auteur de *best-sellers* [7], et, par certains aspects, son humour peut avoir quelque chose à voir avec la notion moderne d'« humour camp », indissociable du *queer*, une sorte de « *kitsch assumé* », très fréquent, entre autres, dans certains usages contemporains des références à l'Antiquité, par exemple dans la culture dite *pop* [8].

- dans la perspective d'un écart critique, la position du critique moderne analysant les productions

anciennes, qu'elles soient ainsi qualifiables ou non. Il s'agit d'un regard « de travers », combinant, comme chez Lucien, lecture immersive et distance critique, voire ironique, engagement et réflexivité, intérêt combiné pour le contexte de création des objets culturels étudiés (textes, images, concepts) et les enjeux de toutes les réceptions, réécritures, réélaborations, usages qu'ils ont connus. On s'approche ici d'un *postclassicisme* [9], par lequel la théorie critique contemporaine peut aider à revisiter le travail philologique, et inversement, et la relation entre antiquité et contemporanéité.

Dans les deux cas, objet et regard sur cet objet, la question du rapport entre rire et sexe dans l'Antiquité est cruciale, comme matériau ancien et catalyseur d'études classiques proprement contemporaines. Mais le rire étant susceptible d'analyses aussi constructionnistes, relativistes, dans le temps et l'espace, et transdisciplinaires que le genre et la sexualité, on a préféré se concentrer sur une modalité spécifique, dans un contexte singulier, chez Lucien de Samosate, représentatif de la culture antique d'époque impériale, lié à la Seconde Sophistique et au roman grec, et polygraphe virtuose doté d'un humour rhétorique, poétique et philosophique empreint de feinte et de paradoxe : ce type de texte n'est pas un pur document historique, si jamais d'ailleurs cela existe, ou plus exactement l'historien des idées et représentations culturelles, comme à plus forte raison l'historien de la littérature, devra tenir grand compte des dispositifs pragmatiques auxquels participe ce type d'énoncés, surtout quand ils relèvent, comme ici, d'une visée à la fois comique et sérieuse [10].

[6] MATZNER 2016, sur le dialogue entre antiquité impériale et postmodernité queer, dans les romans de José Luis de Juan (*Este latente mundo*, 1999, trad. fr. *Les souffles du monde*, 2001) et Jeremy Reed (*Boy Caesar*, 2004).

[7] Voir NI MHEALLAIGH 2014, *Lucian's Promethean poetics : hybridity, fiction and the postmodern*, p. 1-38, et *Conclusion. Fiction and the wonder-culture of the Roman empire*, p. 261-277, ainsi que LAMI & MALTONINI 1990, *Un antico postmoderno*, p. 1-35. On renvoie aussi à LÜTJE 2013, pour une définition de la postmodernité par l'ironie sceptique, teintée de mélancolie, à notre sens proche de ce qu'on trouve chez Lucien.

[8] Voir BRIAND à paraître 2018 et les activités du groupe Antiquipop (<http://antiquipop.hypotheses.org>).

[9] Voir par exemple le réseau *Postclassicisms* (<http://www.postclassicisms.org>).

[10] La littérature sur Lucien est trop riche pour être développée ici. On renvoie à BOMPATRE 2000 (1958) et à des recueils récents comme LIGOTA & PANIZZA 2007 (dont, pour notre étude, Mauro Bonazzi, « Luciano e lo scetticismo del suo tempo », p. 37-48 ; Baudouin Descharneux, « Lucien doit-il être rangé dans la boîte des philosophes

sceptiques ? », p. 63-71 ; Isabelle Gassino, « Par-delà toutes les frontières : le *pseudos* dans les *Histoires vraies* de Lucien », p. 87-98 ; et Karen Ni Mheallaigh, « The Game of the Name : Onymity and the Contract of Reading in Lucian », p. 121-132), ou plus ancien mais très utile comme BILLAULT 1993/1994 (dont, pour notre étude, Sandrine Dubel, « Dialogue et autoportrait. Les masques de Lucien », p. 19-26 ; Geneviève Husson, « Lucien philosophe du rire ou Pour ce que rire est le propre de l'homme », p. 177-184 ; Suzanne Saïd, « Lucien ethnographe », p. 149-170 ; et Jean Schneider, « Les scholies de Lucien et la tradition paroemiographique », p. 191-204). Par manque de place, on mentionne aussi des études précédentes, BRIAND 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2015a, 2016, 2017. Voir aussi EISSEN et BRIAND 2014 (dont Michel Briand, « La fiction qui pense en riant : avatars et paradoxes du *muthos* et du *pseudos* chez Lucien » ; Ariane Eissen, « Lucien, personnage de fictions lucianiques » ; Marie-Hélène Garelli, « La Danse de Lucien : défense d'une cause ou trait d'esprit ? » ; Jean-Philippe Guez, « Lucien, l'ivresse ou la gueule de bois » ; Sophie Rabau, « Pourquoi dit-on que Lucien est un auteur de Science-Fiction ? »), et BRIAND, DUBEL & EISSEN 2017.

## LE SPOUD(AI)OGELOION DE LUCIEN : LES ENJEUX PARADOXAUX DE L'EXTRAVAGANCE

En effet, la modalité comique la plus répandue dans les quatre-vingts œuvres attribuées à Lucien est celle, débattue, du *spoudogeloion* (ou *spoudaio-geloion*), comico-sérieux ou sério-comique [11]. D'origine cynique, ce registre discursif serait surtout efficace en situation de dialogue philosophique et typique du genre de la satire [12]. Lucien se dit en effet l'inventeur du dialogue comique comme genre autonome, hybridant dialogue socratique et comédie, carnavalesque et utopique, comme dans la comédie ancienne d'Aristophane, ou plus dramatique, éthique et sociale, comme dans la comédie nouvelle de Ménandre. Ce type de rire soutient la *parrhésia* ou « liberté de parler », caractérisant des personnages cyniques comme Diogène et Ménippe ou des multiples masques autofictionnels de Lucien [13], Loukinos, le Syrien, ou encore Parrhésiadès, le « Libre-parleur » [14]. On appréciera donc son ton volontairement provocateur par son intégration dans une pragmatique constante du double sens, de l'indécidabilité éthique, épistémique, aléthique. La préface des *Histoires vraies*, critique à l'égard des enquêtes historiographiques et géographiques d'Hérodote ou Ctésias, qualifiées de mensongères, s'achève sur une proclamation ambivalente, en forme de contrat métafictionnel [15] : après avoir dit son intention d'offrir un divertissement à la fois populaire et lettré, « un spectacle non sans Muses » (par. 2 θεωρίαν οὐκ ἄμουσον), Lucien signale que, sous « la bigarrure des fictions rapportées sous une forme convaincante et vraisemblable » (ψεύσματα ποικίλα πιθανῶς τε καὶ ἐναλήθως ἔξενηνόχαμεν), « chaque élément de ces histoires est une allusion, non sans

force comique » (καὶ τῶν ιστορουμένων ἔκαστον οὐκ ἀκωμωδήτως ἥνικται), d'abord à la tradition poétique, historique et philosophique. L'auteur de cette préface inouïe, en fait sérieuse, affirme enfin sa « liberté d'affabuler » (par. 4 τῆς ἐν τῷ μυθολογεῖν ἐλευθερίας), avant d'énoncer, comme preuve de son authentique honnêteté : « car vraiment sur ce seul point je serai véridique, en disant que je mens / je crée des fictions » (κανὸν γὰρ δὴ τοῦτο ἀληθεύσω λέγων ὅτι ψεύδομαι). Cela concerne aussi tout discours ou récit, du narrateur ou d'un personnage, sur les questions de genre et de sexualité. Au début de sa description des mœurs sélénites (I, 22), Lucien présente ainsi des καὶ παράδοξα, « d'étranges extravagances », et pour rendre l'idée de paradoxe, « contraire au sens commun », « absurde », à la fois figure de rhétorique et forme de raisonnement philosophique, on utilisera la notion d'« extravagance » [16], avec ses modalités spectaculaires, comiques et fantastiques, et le fait qu'on ait là, chez Aristophane comme chez Lucien, une « manière de penser », voire un « système de pensée » et un « mode d'écriture ». On ajoute qu'il s'agit de « penser en riant », et donc de « penser le genre et la sexualité en riant », en décrivant des fictions surprenantes, voire aberrantes, qui permettent, par écart, de mieux apprécier et critiquer des évidences contemporaines, du temps de Lucien comme du nôtre [17].

## SEXES, GENRES ET SEXUALITÉS : LE CAS-LIMITE DES SÉLÉNITES (I, 22)

Le premier livre des *Histoires vraies* est occupé par deux épisodes, le séjour sur la Lune, centré sur la guerre avec le royaume du Soleil puis sur une anthropologie des Sélénites, et le séjour à l'intérieur

[11] Voir HALLIWELL 2008, « Lucian and the laughter of life and death », p. 429-469, et « What made Cynics laugh ? », p. 372-387 ; BRANHAM 1989 et 2004 (rapprochant Lucien et Nietzsche, par leur goût pour le scepticisme et le cynisme, la mise en récit et en scène d'expériences de pensée philosophique et l'humour) ; dans une perspective littéraire et sociologique, ANDERSON 1976 ; et, plus lié à une pensée critique contemporaine, WHITMARSH 2011, chap. V « Satirizing Rome : Lucian », p. 247-293, et 230, chap. 15, « Imagine », p. 215-230. Sur le *spoudogeloion* en général, voir GIANGRANDE 1992, et, chez Aristophane, ERCOLANI 2002.

[12] Voir HELMER 2017.

[13] L'expression « masques » est empruntée à S. Dubel (BILLAULT 1993/1994, voir note précédente). Une partie de la théorie littéraire contemporaine voit en Lucien un des précurseurs, voire inventeurs, de l'autofiction, cf. COLONNA 2004 (« Lucien le Magnifique », p. 21-66 et

« L'autofiction fantastique », p. 75-92, avant les postures autofictionnelles dites biographique, spéculaire et intrusives).

[14] Sur la *parrhésia* chez Lucien, voir BRIAND 2016 (et l'avant propos « "Maintenant donc pour des mots vous allez me tuer?", Lucien de Samosate. Du blasphème en démocratie, par un détournement en Grèce ancienne », dans Céline Lageot & Fabien Marchadier (dir.), *Le blasphème dans une société démocratique*, Dalloz, Paris, 2016, p. 11-17) ; CAMEROTTO 1998 et surtout 2014 (chap. IV « Le virtù e la potenza della vista », p. 191-224, et V « La libertà e il dovere del dire », p. 225-283) ; et, dans toute l'Antiquité, SLUITER & ROSEN 2004, ainsi que, dans une perspective générale, FOUCAULT 2009.

[15] BRIAND 2005.

[16] JAY-ROBERT 2015.

[17] EISSEN & BRIAND 2014.

d'une baleine, aussi guerrier et ethnographique. Dans les deux cas, on assiste à un déplacement spatial propice à un écart de perspective, dans une intention sério-comique à la fois satirique et allégorique : la baleine a quelque chose de la Caverne de Platon [18]. Ce point de vue est décentré, parfois surplombant, pour le narrateur et le lecteur, comme dans les *Dialogues des morts*, une « littérature de l'ailleurs » qui aide, surtout par le rire, à prendre distance avec l'ici-bas, et à le critiquer, déconstruire ou du moins relativiser [19].

Voici le paragraphe principal (I, 22) relatant les coutumes des Sélénites en ce qui concerne le genre, le mariage et la reproduction, dans un style parodiant l'historiographie ethnographique d'Hérodote et Ctésias, la paradoxographie des récits de voyages au long cours à tendance utopique, comme les *Merveilles d'au-delà de Thulé* (Τὰς ὑπὲρ Θούλην ἄπιστα) d'Antoine Diogène (II<sup>e</sup> s.), ou encore des histoires naturelles d'inspiration aristotélicienne [20] :

[22] « Ce que durant mon séjour sur la Lune j'ai observé d'inouï et d'extraordinaire (κατενόησα καὶ παράδοξα), je veux vous en parler. D'abord, ce n'est pas de femmes qu'ils naissent (ἐκ γυναικῶν γεννᾶσθαι), mais des mâles (ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρρένων) : ils pratiquent le mariage entre mâles (γάμοις γὰρ τοῖς ἀρρεσὶ χρῶνται) et même le nom de femme ils ne le connaissent pas. Jusqu'à vingt-cinq ans, chacun y est épouse (γαμεῖται), et à partir de cet âge à son tour époux (γαμεῖ) : ils sont enceints non pas dans le bas-ventre mais dans le mollet (κύουσι δὲ οὐκ ἐν τῇ νηδύῃ, ἀλλ᾽ ἐν ταῖς γαστροκνημίαις, litt. « panse du bas de la jambe ») ; en effet, quand l'embryon prend, le mollet s'épaissit et un temps plus tard ils l'incisent pour l'en retirer mort et l'exposer au vent, la bouche ouverte, afin de lui rendre la vie. Il me semble que chez les Grecs de là est venu le nom *gastrocnémie*, parce que chez eux (les Sélénites) au lieu du ventre c'est là qu'on porte le rejeton (παρ' ἐκείνοις ἀντὶ γαστρὸς κυοφορεῖ). Mais je vais raconter quelque chose de plus fort encore : il y a chez eux une espèce

d'hommes, ceux qu'on appelle « Arborigènes » (*Dendrites*) [21]. Voici comment se fait leur genèse : on coupe le testicule droit d'un humain et on le plante en terre (φυτεύουσιν) ; de là un arbre pousse (ἀναφύεται), très haut, fait de chair, comme un phallus ; il a des branches et des feuilles et le fruit en est des glands d'une coudée de long (environ 0,44m). Quand ils sont bien mûrs, on les récolte et on les casse pour en extraire les humains. Mais ils ont des parties sexuelles (αἰδοῖα) postiches, certains en ivoire, d'autres, les pauvres, en bois, et c'est avec cela qu'ils font leurs saillies et s'accouplent avec leurs conjoints (όχεύουσι καὶ πλησιάζουσι τοῖς γαμέταις τοῖς ἔσυτῶν). »

Le comique repose ici sur des procédés conjoints structurant l'ensemble des *Histoires vraies* et relevant d'une grammaire transformationnelle qui subvertit les genres textuels parodiés :

- inversion, par exemple du rapport genré mâle/femelle, reporté sur une dissymétrie d'âge, rendue possible par le jeu des diathèses active et passive du verbe γαμῶ/γαμοῦμαι, qui ne présente pas en lui-même de spécifications formelles de genre : c'est le sujet syntaxique qui permet de préciser ce point et l'assimilation régulière entre sujet féminin et passif, dans le cadre du mariage, est ici troublée, puisqu'un sujet masculin jeune peut l'être du verbe au passif. Le jeu entre voix verbale et relation institutionnelle et sexuelle vise à faire rire, par son aspect contredoxique, mais il montre surtout que cette situation extravagante est autorisée par le langage et donc possible dans une réalité éloignée dans le temps et l'espace ou encore dans la fiction fantastique. Ce type de mariage peut être dit et donc pensé, mais fantastiquement.

- expansion et amplification, par exemple pour l'arbre-phallus et ses glands, longs d'une coudée. Cette figure comique et fantastique à la fois est fréquente dans les *Histoires vraies*, par exemple pour l'épisode du nid d'alcyon, au périmètre de soixante stades (près de onze kilomètres, II, 40) ou la description épique des batailles cosmiques entre les peuples de la Lune et du Soleil (I, 12-21), opposant des centaines de milliers d'ennemis. Cette

[18] LAIRD 2003. Sur Lucien comme philosophe rieur, voir SETEMBRINI & FUSARO 2007, « Saggio introduttivo di Diego Fusaro », p. 5-96.

[19] L'une des premières études mettant explicitement en relation la sexualité dans les épisodes des Sélénites et des Femmes-vignes et la lecture (méta)fictionnelle comme parcours similaire à un voyage d'exploration est LARMOUR 1997. Les commentaires des *Histoires vraies* les plus complets, surtout sur les questions

d'intertextualité, sont GEORGIADOU & LARMOUR 1998 et MÖLLENDORF 2000, ce dernier prenant en compte une lecture lettrée, moins sensible à toutes les variétés de comique.

[20] Les traductions sont miennes, souvent inspirées de celles de Chambry, révisées par BILLAULT & MARQUIS 2015, et d'ÖZANAM 2009, qui reprend BOMPAIRE 1998.

[21] La traduction « arborigène » est une trouvaille de LACAZE 2003, p. 245.

forme de comique, comme la précédente, participe du caractère carnavalesque de l'utopie, fondée sur l'exagération d'un trait typique de la « réalité » dont on fait la satire.

- construction d'un monde possible à partir de jeux de langage, comme la physiologie sexuelle des Sélénites, tirée, par extension et associations d'idées, du terme anatomique non sexuel désignant le « mollet », ou *gastroknêmia*. D'où le fait que le jeu de mots est à peu près impossible à rendre en français et qu'il était plus directement comique pour le lecteur grec. Le caractère paradoxalement réaliste de la description est renforcé par le fait que le narrateur n'évoque pas la manière dont il a procédé, mais explique, dans une démonstration de type scientifique, la terminologie grecque par ce qui se passe sur la Lune, et non l'inverse. Cette procédure revient à parodier les explications étymologiques et étiologiques appliquées à l'anthropologie physique et culturelle et à suggérer que c'est le langage et la fiction qui construisent un monde, par le regard qui l'observe et en dénomme les éléments constitutifs.

- hybridation, surtout du rapport animal/végétal, pour les Dendrites ou « Arborigènes » : le testicule droit d'un Sélénite peut devenir une graine d'arbre et les humains qui en naissent, la chair de fruits à coque. L'öpχις est aussi une plante à bulbe [22] ou une espèce d'olive [23], et la taxinomie moderne a les orchidées du genre *orchis*. Le βάλανος est le « gland », fruit du chêne, mais aussi du palmier dattier, chez Hérodote. Il s'intègre dans des matrices métaphoriques dont Lucien exploite les connotations anatomiques, médicales, zoologiques : le « gland du pénis », comme en français [24] ; un « suppositoire » ou « pessaire », chez Hippocrate ; le « pêne » d'un verrou ; des animaux marins, mollusques ou crustacés, tels le « gland de mer » ou la balane, chez Aristote aussi. Enfin l'« arbre très haut » des Dendrites est « fait de chair », « comme un φαλλός », représentation du pénis en érection, par exemple en contexte cultuel dionysiaque. Dans les paragraphes précédents (I, 11-20, en particulier I, 13 et 16), les

forces guerrières en présence mettent en scène une hybridation de niveau cosmique, à l'intérieur de et entre les ordres de l'humain, de l'animal, du végétal, voire de l'élémentaire : ainsi pour les Hippogypes (« vautours – chevaux » ou « chevautours » [25]), Lachanoptères (« ailes de légume »), Anémodromes (« courreurs de vents »), Strouthobalanes (« glands de moineaux »), Aérocordaces (« bouffons aériens », fantassins frondeurs, lanceurs de raiforts géants enduits de mauve, à connotation sexuelle et scatologique) [26] et Cynobalanes (« glands chiens », hommes à visage de chien, montant des glands ailés), là aussi riches en connotations soutenant la force comique et la coloration sexuelle, à la fois génitale et anale, du passage.

- enfin, fragmentation, par exemple du corps comme intégrité organique, muni, pour les parties sexuelles, de prothèses artificielles, en ivoire ou bois. C'est aussi la distinction binaire corps naturel/artificiel qui est troublée, hybridée, comme dans l'ensemble du récit. Plus loin, par. 25, les Sélénites ont des « yeux amovibles », qu'on peut ranger quand on n'en a pas besoin : ici aussi, la perspective est intersectionnelle, certains, ayant perdu leurs yeux, doivent en emprunter, et les plus riches en ayant « de nombreux en réserve ».

Ce dernier point peut subsumer les précédents ; les procédés à l'œuvre dans cette création comique reviennent à faire dépendre la réalité observée du langage et du regard porté par l'observateur : l'objet observé est une construction, non pas un donné. C'est ainsi du nom des Dendrites que procèdent leurs traits évoqués ensuite ou du terme anatomique *gastroknêmia* que dérive le processus reproductif inventé par le narrateur anthropologue ou « enquêteur ». Tout se présente explicitement comme une fiction comique, mais dans le cadre d'un univers en fait similaire au nôtre, où tout est de toute façon fiction et feintise, comme le proclamait déjà la préface, sous l'égide notamment de l'Ulysse homérique et de ses multiples rencontres prodigieuses, telles qu'il les a lui-même racontées, comme Lucien ici (I, 3).

[22] Théophraste, *Histoire des plantes*, IX, 18, 3. Pour ces emplois techniques, on se réfère à CHANTRAIN 1999.

[23] Columelle ,V, 8.

[24] Aristote, *Histoire des animaux*, I, 13, 3.

[25] Selon la proposition de l'un des deux relecteurs anonymes de la revue.

[26] Les connotations du ράφανος ou ράφανίς « raifort », complétées par celles de la mauve, aux vertus réputées laxatives dans l'Antiquité, sont aussi sexuelles

que celles du gland, et plus violentes : la pénétration anale par un raifort est le châtiment des μοιχοί (« adultrices » ?) pris en flagrant délit, dans l'Athènes classique, selon Aristophane (*Nuées* 1079-1083, où les condamnés deviennent des εὐρύπρωκτοι « larges-culs »), repris, par Lucien, *Sur la mort de Peregrinos*, 9 (où le futur faux prophète, convaincu de μοιχεία, est « roué de coups, avant de s'enfuir en sautant d'un toit, un raifort enfoncé dans les fesses (ράφανιδι τὴν πυγὴν βεβυσμένος) ». Les Sélénites ont d'ailleurs une queue en raifort (par. 23).

## UNE INTERSECTIONNALITÉ FANTASTIQUE : ÂGE, CLASSE SOCIALE, ASPECT, ALIMENTATION (I, 23-25)

La suite de la description (I, 23-25) confirme cette posture constructionniste et en même temps spectaculairement comique, renforcée par le fait que ces textes faisaient d'abord l'objet de performances oratoires où la réception du public, plutôt que du lectorat, dépend de l'*actio* et de la diction du sophiste, d'autant que le récit est présenté à la première personne du singulier, comme un témoignage personnel. Les questions de genre et de sexualité sont mêlées, comme à la fin du par. 22, à d'autres considérations physiques aux importantes implications culturelles et économiques, ici réordonnées :

- « Ils n'urinent pas ni ne vont à la selle, car ils ne sont pas percés (*τέτρηνται*) comme nous, et pour les relations sexuelles les garçons n'offrent pas leur fondement mais le pli du genou au-dessus du mollet (*ούδε τὴν συνουσίαν οἱ παῖδες ἐν ταῖς ἔδραις παρέχουσιν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐν ταῖς ἰγνύσιν ὑπὲρ τὴν γαστροκνημίαν*) : c'est là qu'ils sont percés (*τετρημένοι*) » (23). Telle est l'ultime conséquence du sens littéral assigné au nom grec du « mollet », par un passage à la limite devenu expérience de pensée. Le parfait résultat de *τετραίνω* « percer, faire un trou » participe à la parodie des mythes de création des humains, parmi lesquels, dans le *Banquet* platonicien, celui des trois types de boules humaines doubles raconté par Aristophane, au caractère burlesque parfois sous-estimé [27].

- les allusions comiques, surtout quand elles ont une couleur obscène, peuvent être moins claires pour les modernes que pour les Grecs, de même que le lien entre rire et sexe. Un exemple en est un indice anatomique qui fait des Sélénites une société de *μοιχοί*, « dépravés » (« adultères », et « mérédants » en grec néo-testamentaire), que l'Athènes classique aurait condamnés au châtiment infâmant du raifort dans l'anus, selon Aristophane [28], alors que sur la Lune, non seulement les pratiques sexuelles décrites ne sont pas condamnables mais elles relèvent de la norme,

et « au-dessus des fesses (ύπερ δὲ τὰς πυγὰς), à chacun d'entre eux a poussé un long raifort [29], comme une queue (κράμβη ἐκπέψυκε μακρὰ ὅσπερ οὐρά), vert en permanence et qui, quand on tombe en arrière, ne se casse pas. » L'utopie s'oppose ici au modèle législatif classique, tout en riant d'elle-même.

- symétriquement au nourrisson, mort à la naissance et ramené à la vie par l'action du vent, le vieillard mort « comme une fumée se dissout et devient de l'air » (23). Les Sélénites se nourrissent de la fumée des grenouilles grillées et boivent de l'« air comprimé dans une coupe » (23). Leur morve est « un miel très âcre » et leur sueur du lait, dont ils se nourrissent aussi, et les vignes produisent de l'eau, tout en causant les chutes de grêle sur la Terre (24). « Le vêtement des riches est en verre souple, celui des pauvres en tissu de cuivre », humidifié et travaillé comme de la laine (25). Le mode d'alimentation aérien semble rendre inutiles les intestins : leur ventre est un sac, où on transporte ce qu'on veut ; son intérieur est velu, « de sorte que les nouveau-nés, quand ils ont froid, peuvent s'y glisser (24). »

- le relativisme de Lucien s'exprime à propos de la chevelure et des critères de beauté, variables selon le contexte, et inversés sur la Lune, par rapport à la Terre (23) : « On est considéré comme beau chez eux si l'on est chauve et sans cheveux (ἀκομός), et les chevelus (κομήτας) sont en horreur ». Inversement, « dans les comètes » (en grec, « les chevelues », ἐπὶ ... τῶν κομητῶν), « on juge les chevelus (κομήτας) beaux ». Mais le narrateur ne procède pas ici par observation directe, autopsie, mais d'après des témoignages de voyageurs. En matière de jugement esthétique, social et moral, tout est affaire d'opinion, dans le vaste monde.

Comme l'indique la préface, parmi de nombreux usages lucianiques du *spoudogeloion*, le but de cette fiction comique est sérieux : il s'agit, par le plaisir du divertissement même, de faire comprendre au lecteur, et apprécier, des vérités sur la culture grecque, historiographique, scientifique, littéraire, comme sur la notion même de fiction rhétorique et poétique, mais aussi historique ou philosophique, et

[27] Sur les références comiques de Lucien au *Banquet* de Platon, voir BOEHRINGER & BLONDELL 2014, ainsi que de nombreux travaux sur le *Banquet* ou *Les Lapithes* de Lucien, dernièrement SCOLAN 2017, en particulier « Le banquet au matin et au soir de la philosophie » (p. 111-145) et « Bas les masques : hypocrites et imposteurs au banquet » (p. 247-287), et la communication présentée au colloque *Dévorer/dépenser dans le monde hellénistique et romain* (Tours 30-31 mars 2017), BRIAND,

« Voracité et avidité dans *Le Banquet* ou *Les Lapithes* de Lucien : enjeux esthétiques et philosophiques », à paraître dans les *Actes*.

[28] Voir note 25.

[29] Le nom κράμβη désigne d'abord un « chou », aux feuilles recroquevillées typiques (κράμβος), mais aussi un « raifort », chez Aristote (*Histoire des animaux*, V, 19, 4) et Athénée (34d).

donc, finalement, sur ce qu'on considère, pour aller vite, comme la réalité de notre monde, éminemment digne de satire. C'est ce qui apparaît ensuite, à propos du « Miroir de la Lune » (I, 26), métonymie de l'ensemble des *Histoires vraies*.

## LE « MIROIR DE LA LUNE » : INVERSIONS, ÉCARTS, STRATES, SURPLOMBS

Le caractère métafictionnel et critique du dispositif est renforcé par l'image concluant cette enquête imaginaire, le miroir-puits qui permet d'entendre et voir ce qui se passe sur la Terre, dans une inversion jubilatoire, faussement modeste comme souvent chez Lucien, du rapport entre réalité et fiction, monde du lecteur et du narrateur, voire relation entre observateur et observé, puisqu'ici le narrateur a pu observer son lecteur, en miroir, par. 26 [30] :

[26] Et d'ailleurs il y a une autre merveille (θαῦμα) que j'ai observée dans le palais royal : un miroir (κάτοπτρον) très grand s'y trouve au-dessus d'un puits pas très profond. Si l'on descend dans le puits, on entend tout ce qui chez nous sur terre se dit, et si on regarde dans le miroir, ce sont toutes les cités et tous les peuples qu'on voit, comme si on se trouvait juste au-dessus d'eux : alors j'ai observé moi aussi mes parents et ma patrie entière, et si eux aussi me voyaient, je ne peux plus le dire avec certitude. Et celui qui ne croit pas qu'il en était ainsi, si un jour lui aussi se rend là-bas, il saura que je dis la vérité.

Cette organisation spatiale ressemble, par mise en abyme, à celle de la lecture, en surplomb par rapport à ce que le narrateur raconte et décrit, comme dans le dialogue du *Charon* où le nocher des Enfers et Hermès observent, du haut de montagnes réaménagées en gradins de théâtre, le monde humain et que le dieu psychopompe demande à son acolyte, dans les tous premiers mots du texte (par. 1) : Τί γελᾶς, ω Χάρων ; « De quoi ris-tu, Charon ? ». La réponse est que ce dernier désire « voir en quoi consiste la vie humaine, leurs actions (ιδεῖν ὄποιωα ἔστι τὰ ἐν τῷ βίῳ καὶ ἡ πράττοθσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἐν αὐτῷ) et ce dont la privation les fait se lamenter, quand ils descendent chez nous ». Du haut de la Lune, la

« comédie humaine » lucianesque fait du lecteur - observateur un objet d'observation comique, à peu près comme les Sélénites, qu'observent le narrateur homodiégétique, pseudo-historien, et, par son intermédiaire, le lecteur de son livre, ou mieux, à l'époque, le spectateur-auditeur de sa performance sophistique [31]. Ainsi le lecteur humain devient-il paradoxalement et comiquement un sujet anthropologique comme d'autres, dans la *Wunderkammer* [32] spectaculaire des *Histoires vraies* qu'il croit d'abord dominer de son regard ethnocentré, comme le confirme ensuite la conclusion de l'épisode de l'île des Songes (II, 32-34) : « certains (songes) nous emmenaient aussi dans nos patries et nous montraient nos proches et nous ramenaient le jour-même ». Les humains sont « le rêve d'un songe » [33], plus comiques que pathétiques, ou d'autant plus pathétiques qu'ils sont ridicules, conformément au scepticisme typique de Lucien, souvent complété d'accents cyniques. Et tout cela concerne au plus haut point aussi les questions de genre et de sexualité, comme on le voit dans le reste des *Histoires vraies*.

## AILLEURS DANS LES *HISTOIRES VRAIES* : DIVERS JEUX DE GENRE ET SEXUALITÉ

L'épisode des Sélénites, en particulier ses aspects sexuels, fait sens en écho à de multiples autres passages du même récit de voyage. On peut relever :

- les îles de femmes dangereusement séductrices, en début et fin de l'ouvrage. D'une part (I, 8), les « femmes-vignes », une plante « prodigieuse » (τεράστιον) au tronc robuste surmonté d'un corps de belle femme, à partir de la ceinture : deux compagnons de Lucien, ayant répondu à leurs avances, « restèrent liés par leurs parties honteuses » (ἐκ τῶν αἰδοίων ἐδέδοντο), avant de se métamorphoser en végétaux porteurs de fruits ; un scholiaste rapproche l'épisode des Lotophages, *Odyssée*, IX, 91. D'autre part (II, 46), les Onoskélées, « aux jambes d'ânesses », qui, « parées tout à fait à la manière de courtisanes et toutes belles et jeunes, traînent derrière elles des tuniques qui vont jusqu'aux pieds »,

[30] Voir FUSILLO 1988 et NI MHEALLAIGH 2014, en particulier *Fiction and reality: the worlds of the Moon, the whale and the Island of Dreams*, p. 216-230.

[31] Sur le spectacle sophistique d'époque impériale, voir KORENJAK 2000 et SCHMITZ 1997.

[32] Cette assimilation est empruntée à NI MHEALLAIGH 2014, en lien avec la notion de « hyperreality » et les

cabinets de curiosités et spectacles d'illusion, par exemple d'automates, dans la Rome impériale, « Conclusion. Fiction and the wonder-culture of the Roman empire », p. 261-277

[33] Selon l'idée mélancolique attestée de Pindare (*Pythique*, VIII, 95) à Rilke (p. ex. *Requiem. Für eine Freudin*).

offrent aux voyageurs de passage l'hospitalité, pour les dévorer, comme les Sirènes évoquées aussi dans la préface. Le féminin est hybride et menaçant, comme la sexualité même, suivant une tradition culturelle grecque remontant à la figure de Pandora et au *Monologue du misogynie* (Sémonide fr. 7) [34].

- la figure d'Hélène (II, 8 et 25-27), sur l'île des Bienheureux, pour qui un procès oppose Thésée et Ménélas, avant que le fils d'un compagnon de Lucien, Kinyras, amoureux d'elle, ne l'enlève, avec son accord, pour s'enfuir à l'île de Phellô (« De-Liège », II, 4) ou Tyroessa (« Fromagère », II, 3), provoquant, non une autre guerre de Troie, mais un jugement du roi Rhadamanthe, qui le condamne à la façon des *moiχoi* de l'Athènes classique, évoqués chez les Sélénites : II, 26, ἐκ τῶν αἰδοίων δήσας ἀπωεπεμψεν ἐς τὸν τῶν ἀσεβῶν χῶρον μαλάχη πρότερον μαστιγωθέντας, « par les parties honteuses, il les fit attacher et les envoya au pays des impies, après les avoir fait fouetter de mauves ». Un détournement de la tradition homérique se retrouve, moins brutal, dans l'anecdote du courrier qu'Ulysse, déçu par Pénélope, fait parvenir à Calypso, qu'il aime encore (II, 35-36). La parodie des scènes amoureuses ou sexuelles des textes anciens, ici l'*Iliade* et l'*Odyssée*, utilise surtout le burlesque d'inversion.

- les mœurs sexuelles dans l'île des Bienheureux (II, 19), physiologiquement plus humaines que chez les Sélénites, mais de même issues de références culturelles, mythologiques, philosophiques. Selon Lucien, ces pratiques sont affaire d'opinion et représentation, relatives, qu'elles soient risibles ou non : Περὶ δὲ συνουσίας καὶ ἀφροδισίων οὕτω φρονοῦσιν « et sur l'accouplement et les questions érotiques, voici ce qu'ils pensent. » La référence à l'impudeur des Cyniques est claire [35], ainsi que l'allusion à Hérodote sur les Indiens [36] : « ils s'unissent ouvertement aux yeux de tous à la fois aux femmes et aux mâles (καὶ γυναιξὶ καὶ ἄρρεσι), et en aucune façon n'en conçoivent de honte ». De même pour l'allusion à la *République*, V, 457 sqq., étendue à toute la société : « Et les femmes sont communes à tous et personne n'envie son prochain : ils sont sur ce point tout à fait platoniciens ; et les garçons s'offrent à ceux qui veulent. » Ce dernier ajout est une pointe provocatrice, en référence aussi à l'*Assemblée des femmes* d'Aristophane et son utopie sexuelle. Cependant la cible est surtout l'ambiguïté de l'amour dit plus tard platonique, dont Socrate, chez Lucien, prétend sauvegarder la chasteté toute philosophique, contrairement à son évident

comportement réel : « Socrate jurait certes que c'est en toute pureté qu'il avait commerce avec les jeunes gens, mais tous l'accusaient de parjure, et souvent, en tout cas, Hyacinthe et Narcisse avouaient, alors que lui niait. »

- l'équipage extraordinaire (καὶνῷ τῷ τρόπῳ) des hommes qui sont « à la fois marins et navires », rencontrés juste avant l'île des femmes aux pieds d'ânesse (II, 45) : « couchés sur le dos dans l'eau ils dressaient leur sexe (αἰδοῖα) - ils en portent un grand, auquel ils attachent la voile et, tenant en main la boulane, suivant le souffle du vent, ils naviguaient. »

Ces passages évoquant sexe, genre et sexualité utilisent les procédés comiques à l'œuvre pour les Sélénites, et montrent aussi comment les *Histoires vraies* renvoient à trois mondes, à la fois distincts et comparables : la « réalité » (surtout du lecteur) ; la fiction fantastique imaginée par Lucien comme un spectacle intense, carnavalesque ; enfin l'univers que construit la lecture cultivée du lettré ou *pepai-deumenos*, voire d'un public élargi, étant donné la trivialité de nombreuses références ici détournées [37]. Le comique, en particulier à propos du sexe, se fonde sur la cohabitation et parfois la confusion de ces trois mondes, par exemple quand le grand Socrate devient un dissimulateur honteux de comédie, l'utopie platonicienne une norme réalisée, ou l'obscénité monumentale un effet parfaitement naturel.

## EFFETS ET USAGES MODERNES ET CONTEMPORAINS : ENTRE AUTOCENSURE ET LECTURES INTÉRESSÉES

On finira brièvement ce parcours par deux exemples significatifs de la réception moderne, en domaine francophone, de la description des mœurs sélénites, propre à montrer encore la relation complexe du sexe et du rire, surtout dans un dispositif aussi stratifié, contradictoire et ambivalent qu'une littérature de l'imaginaire à visée à la fois comique et sérieuse [38]. Le premier cas sera celui

[34] BRIAND 1998.

[35] Cf. chez Lucien, *Le banquet ou les Lapithes*, 16 et 46.

[36] Référence que signale la scholie à Lucien, cf. Hérodote III, 101.

[37] Cette tripartition souple est inspirée de BOULOGNE 1996.

[38] Voir BOST-FIEVET & PROVINI 2014.

du traducteur du XVII<sup>e</sup> s., Nicolas Perrot d'Abancourt, réputé pour ses « belles infidèles », selon la formule de Voltaire. Les passages qui nous occupent sont de ceux qu'il commente le plus pour justifier ce qu'on peut voir comme une autocensure : le contexte religieux, moral, social et donc littéraire n'est certes pas celui des *Histoires vraies*, dont sa traduction paraît en 1654, et l'idée de décence a évolué. Sur les Sélénites, épouses avant vingt-cinq ans, époux après, Perrot précise : « Je ne dis pas qu'ils sont hommes après cela, pour ne pas insister sur des saletés, outre que cela s'entend assez. » Les Dendrites naissent simplement d'« un grand arbre charnu » et la comparaison « semblable à un phallus » est supprimée. Pour leurs organes génitaux postiches, il supprime aussi le syntagme que nous avons traduit par : « c'est avec cela qu'ils font leurs saillies et s'accouplent avec leurs conjoints. » Pour les mœurs des Bienheureux, l'amour en public disparaît (« Je n'ai pas voulu mettre qu'ils les caressent devant tout le monde, ce qui est trop déshonnête ») et l'honneur de Socrate est sauvegardé (« Je n'ai pas voulu insister davantage sur cette saleté »). À l'inverse, pour la lettre d'Ulysse à Calypso, il invente une explication au fait que « Lucien » déchache la missive, « de peur que ce fourbe ne nous eût fait quelque supercherie » : « J'ai ajouté cela pour colorer cette action qui est indécente ». Enfin les navigateurs au phallus - mât se voient pourvus d'« un bâton entre les jambes, qui leur servait de mât » (« ce qui est plus honnête que ce qui est et fait le même effet »). Cette dernière remarque prête à discussion, puisque ces infidélités au texte grec lui font perdre tout effet carnavalesque, tout « bas corporel » bakhtinien, sexualités différentes, ou encore l'ambivalence constitutive d'une fiction volontairement paradoxale. C'est le lien entre sexe et rire qui disparaît ici, au profit d'une euphémisation allégorisante que Perrot déploie d'ailleurs dans la suite qu'il a composée pour ces deux livres des *Histoires vraies* [39]. À la fin, par. 47, le narrateur formule une promesse (« ce qui s'est passé sur la

terre de l'autre côté, je le raconterai dans les livres suivants ») que le scholiaste lui reproche de ne pas avoir tenue, et Perrot se charge d'un récit de voyage uniment sérieux et symbolique, où ni sexe ni rire ne sont en fait présents. Il est vrai que la réception de Lucien du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> s. est un processus complexe et contradictoire, bien étudié par ailleurs, de la condamnation par l'Église à la reconnaissance des Humanistes ou des Lumières, selon que ses accents sceptiques, voire cyniques, provoquent le rire ou l'horreur [40].

Le second exemple sera des plus actuels. Lucien peut être un garant reconnu, car antique, dans l'histoire d'un genre littéraire en quête de légitimité, à savoir la science-fiction, et ce alors que cette affiliation générique est au moins à débattre [41]. De même, la description des mœurs sexuelles et reproductrices des Sélénites est fréquemment utilisée, dans le cadre d'une « lecture intéressée » que nous avons qualifiée de queer en préambule, pour montrer que déjà dans l'Antiquité le mariage entre personnes de même sexe, voire la gestation pour autrui et la procréation médicalement assistée, semblaient possibles, au moins dans un monde lointain, et en tout cas n'étaient pas condamnées moralement puisqu'elles constituent la norme dans l'utopie lunaire. Un blog militant titrait même en 2009 : « le premier roman de science fiction de l'histoire de la littérature proposait déjà le mariage gay » [42]. À l'inverse, dans les mêmes années, pour les milieux réactionnaires, traditionnalistes et/ou d'extrême droite engagés en France contre le « mariage pour tous », les *Histoires vraies*, et notamment ce passage, serait emblématique de la « promotion de la débauche », issue de la « théorie du genre », à laquelle des « lobbies » voudraient faire succomber la « civilisation occidentale » [43]. On peut renvoyer à des plaintes de parents dénonçant le complot ourdi par l'Éducation nationale, quand notre ouvrage fut mis au programme des classes de Terminale littéraire, en grec, qui plus est avec en latin la *Vie des douze Césars* de Suétone

[39] Voir PERROT D'ABLACOURT 1977 (1787) et 1988 (1654). On ne trouve plus ces omissions assumées dans la philologie moderne, même si les traductions y ont encore une vision très classique des questions de genre et sexualité, cf. GRIMAL 1958.

[40] Pour un tableau général de la réception de Lucien, voir en dernier lieu BARTLEY 2009, et pour une analyse précise du rapport entre les *Histoires vraies* et Rabelais, CORREARD 2012.

[41] Voir RABAU 2014. *Contra*, par exemple, SWANSON 1976 et LARMOUR 1997. C'est aussi à RABAU 2015 que

j'emprunte la notion de « lecture intéressée », appliquée notamment à des textes où les questions de genre et sexualité jouent un rôle important.

[42] Voir <http://luclebelge.skynetblogs.be/tag/lucien+de+samosate>. Suit, sur cette page internet, la référence aux *Dialogues des courtisanes*, pour l'homosexualité féminine.

[43] Voir [http://lesalonbeige.blogs.com/my\\_weblog/2014/05/promotion-de-la-débauche-à-l'école-bompard-interroge-hamon.html](http://lesalonbeige.blogs.com/my_weblog/2014/05/promotion-de-la-débauche-à-l'école-bompard-interroge-hamon.html)

et en français *Les Mains libres* d'Éluard [44]. Pour revenir à notre sujet, on remarquera que le lien entre rire (et fiction comique) et sexualité est ici totalement incompris, en particulier quand on ne voit pas que décrire des pratiques, surtout imaginaires, voire fantastiques, n'implique pas d'en faire l'éloge, mais plutôt d'opérer, en retour, une satire, d'abord divertissante, puis critique, relativiste et constructionniste, des pratiques et représentations culturelles les plus répandues, voire dominantes. On n'omettra pas non plus, plus souvent évoqué pour Aristophane que pour Lucien, le caractère d'ailleurs souvent possiblement réactionnaire du comique, ou au moins ambivalent sur le plan éthique et idéologique. Voilà donc le terme anachronique mais, espérons-le, maîtrisé [45], d'une expérience de décentrement, un détour par une œuvre et un auteur parmi les plus spectaculaires, séduisants et complexes de l'Antiquité grecque. On ne donnera

pas plus que Lucien une réponse documentaire, historique, unique et complète à des questions que les *Histoires vraies*, affirmant que la « réalité » peut être une fiction et un jeu, une construction dynamique et toujours à contextualiser culturellement, n'essaient pas de traiter thématiquement, mais pragmatiquement, en faisant à la fois rire et penser, qu'il s'agisse des mœurs des Anciens, de leurs fictions et de ce que les modernes et contemporains tentent d'en faire. ■

[44] Voir à titre d'exemple une alerte aux parents catholiques, dont une citation suffira : « Le jeune bachelier qui a subi tout cela risque bien d'en sortir abîmé, sali, voire perverti dans sa mémoire, son imagination, sa sensibilité, son cœur, son intelligence, toute son âme » ([http://coursprivecefop.org/images/2/22/Alerte\\_aux\\_parents.pdf](http://coursprivecefop.org/images/2/22/Alerte_aux_parents.pdf)).

[45] Encore en référence à LORAUX 2005 (1993).

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