

Poetics, Perversions, and Passing: Approaching the Transgender Narratives of *Thesmophoriazousai*

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Aristophanes's *Thesmophoriazousai* offers a complex engagement with transgender identity and practice. It explores up to seven different transgendered modes through a variety of motivations and audience response. While embracing fictional/dramatic performance, these modes are best understood within the larger social and cultural framework that the play directly and indirectly suggests. Perched, like much Old Comedy, on the horns of social conservatism and conceptual flexibility, but also acknowledging a broad transgender continuum, the play's creative tension allows for it to be recuperated and re-used by queer audiences and readers.

I tried to make it work
You in a cocktail skirt
And me in a suit
Well it just wasn't me. (Soft Cell, *Say Hello, Wave Goodbye*)

Aristophanes's speech in Plato's *Symposium* is justly celebrated for its articulation of sexual relationships in their emotional and physical complexity. That includes the sense of physical need, the mutuality that is sought in sexual relations, or even the quixotic nature of human relationships, as each looks for their other half, but it also provides a uniquely diverse account of human sexuality, which accounts for both female and male same-sex desire, as well as female-male desire. The grotesque, material, and absurd elements of this account, and its parody of myths of human development and of their use in cultural and political debate, all reveal Plato as an acute spectator of Old Comedy. The plight of these eight-limbed, two-faced, globular creatures, split in two by the vengeful gods and unable to find sexual fulfilment until the gods take pity on them and rearrange their physical characteristics to current human norms, is at once both ridiculous and touching. Not always as appreciated as its complex exploration of sexuality is the speech's gendered premise that there were originally *three* genders: male, female, and *androgynos*. It has, however, been the focus of one of the more striking instances of reception of this passage, in the film *Hedwig*

and the *Angry Inch*, where the travails of the eponymous transwoman heroine and her quest for both fully realizing her identity and finding love features an animated sequence which retells the Aristophanic narrative.¹

This reading, or co-option, of Plato's etiology provokes two interrelated questions, which are the topic of this paper: first, the status of the specifically multi-gender narrative as a reading of Aristophanic comedy, and, second, whether it is possible to read Aristophanes's comedies themselves from the perspective of a transgendered subjectivity. The focus of enquiry is *Thesmophoriazousai*, which is rampant with cross-dressing and other forms of transgressively gendered activity. Men play women who act like men; men play men who want to be women, who like to be women, who are forced to play women; men play women escaping from other women who take the role of men. And at the same time, Aristophanes sends up dithyramb and two modes of tragedy, naturalistic and melodramatic; and he appropriates an exponent of the latter and sends him as a character into a cross-dressing comic fantasy. As such, the play has attracted critics interested both in the comic engagement with other literary forms and the questions of parody, and the position of women in Aristophanic comedy.² But even so, one pressing issue has largely been ducked: exploration of the different modes of cross-dressing and transgendered behavior themselves. Discussion of these central elements also entail engagement with the ideological and metafictional narratives of the play: these issues are complementary and intertwined.

The paper undeniably takes a determinedly contemporary and, indeed, personal perspective. First, I am not claiming an analogous historical identity, although it is certainly clear, as has been extensively discussed in relation to (male) homosexuality, that there were a range of analogous *practices*.³ The

1. For *Hedwig* and Plato, see Sypniewski (2008). For the *Symposium* speech as a plausible extrapolation from Aristophanic comedy, see Ruffell (2011) 13–18. The Greek text of Aristophanes adopted here follows that of Henderson (1998–2000) with some modifications. All translations are my own. All comic fragments are cited from Kassel and Austin (1983–).

2. Key articles are by Muecke (1977, 1982a, 1982b); Bobrick (1997); Stehle (2002); and, above all, Zeitlin (1981), which remains the classic treatment. See also Bierl (1999); Bowie (1993) 205–27; Compton-Engle (2015); Farmer (2017); Moulton (1981) 108–43; Taaffe (1993); Whitman (1964) 216–28. Cross-dressing and comedy are most often seen in terms of ritual: see Bowie (1993); Lada-Richards (1998). Clements (2014) relates the different perspectives on sight and seeing to fifth-century epistemology and metaphysics.

3. For Athens, see Sen., *Controv.* 5.6 (cf. Aeschin. 1.19–30, 56; Dem. 22.30), an account of a gang rape and its aftermath; the so-called Anacreontic vases discussed notably by Frontisi-Ducroux and Lissarrague (1990); cf. Kurtz and Boardman (1986); Price (1990); Miller (1999; cf. 1997). For some discussion of the variety of practice in the ancient world, see Campanile, Carlà-Uhink, and Facella (2017). In terms of sexuality, the emphasis on practice (rather than identity) and on historical

modern category and subjectivity of transgender is itself evolving and contested: when the first draft of this paper was written, in 1998, both official and activist narratives were still largely characterized by typologies and rigid distinctions in behaviors and identities, and the idea of a continuum or spectrum of practice and identity, or the possibility of a radical queer position, was in its infancy.⁴ Since then, at least in the UK, there has been, to a significant extent, a recognition of the former and an embrace of the latter, as well as political and legal progress.⁵ This, in turn, has prompted a backlash from social conservatives, using transgender as a wedge issue to re-run the Section 28/Section 2A fight of the 1990s, and one (minority) strand within feminism that has always been hostile to transgender identity.⁶ These evolutions and debates are reflected in this reading of the play.

Second, the evolutions of this paper also bear witness to my evolving understanding of Aristophanes as a function of personal experience and changing subjectivity.⁷ The paper was first written in a period when I was out, but not minded to transition; was rewritten (with an extensive engagement with queer theory) in a sixteen-month period when I began to transition and was living full-time; and was then mothballed as I bailed out of that process (mainly because of a crisis of confidence), and was only desultorily looked at again for fifteen years—despite publishing various analyses of the play that draw on this underlying study. It had already become painfully clear that any reading of (or willingness to read) *Thesmophoriazousai* on my part was implicitly bound up with a willingness to deal with my own identity. More significantly, it was already quite clear that as my own subjectivity changed, my reading of these issues in the play also changed. I explore these changes in the final part of the paper.

contingency has been challenged by Davidson (2001) in a critique of Dover (1978) and Foucault (1979, 1986); Davidson's position is elaborated in his further study (2007); cf. also Davidson (1997).

4. See esp. Bornstein (1994), combining memoir and challenging analysis; similarly, Jacques (2016); Stone (1992), who engages explicitly with postmodern and queer theory. Literature from the trans community does tend towards memoir, of which the classic perhaps remains Jan Morris's *Conundrum* (1974).

5. Burns (2019) gives an account of legal and political progress in the UK. For the medicalization of sexuality and gender transgression, see Foucault (1979); "transvestism" is a term coined by Magnus Hirschfeld (1910), and "transsexualism" by Harry Benjamin (1966). For the decoupling of gender and sexuality, see e.g., Matlock (1993), with further bibliography.

6. The polemic by Raymond (1979) is foundational, and anticipates much of the current backlash. See Stone (1992) for a thoughtful reply.

7. For the personal voice in literary criticism, see Miller (1991). For its application to classical studies, see Hallett and van Nortwick (1997).

Even within queer theory or cultural studies, there has been a tendency to use cross-dressing, for example, touristically from the outside, or as a way into other issues with which it is implicated, such as class.⁸ Given, however, the intertwining of cross-dressing narratives in *Thesmophoriazousai* with parody, an instructive starting point is to read Aristophanes in the context of Judith Butler's radically constructed, anti-foundationalist view of gender as *performative* and *imitative*.⁹ Butler's (initial) account of gender was both grounded in and problematized this through the practice of drag and other cross-gender play, a practice that she links to parody.

Under this broad heading, she subsumes a range of practice from (straight) cross-dressing to the (gay and lesbian) butch-femme aesthetics, and, cursorily, transsexualism and intersex.¹⁰ All, for Butler, are 'parodic identities,' not in the sense of parody as satirical or degrading, but parody as drawing attention to stylization, in this case the 'imitative structures of gender itself.'¹¹ This approach, however, for all that it nods to material practice, nonetheless tends to universalize and dehistoricize, as (ironically) a generalized critique of foundationalist views of gender. One may doubt whether these practices *can* be assimilated and subsumed under the same mode of performance, even within the same cultural moment, let alone from a historical perspective where it is possible to see a range of multi-gender systems.¹²

And while the interpretation of drag as disclosing the nature of the gender system always raises the possibility of the transvestite and friends being subversive, or being read subversively, it hardly excludes, in itself, the prospect of repressive or containing narratives.¹³ It also elides more complex possibilities. In the current political, legal, and medical climate the question of whether physical bodily modification should be read in the context of sex or of gender is one aspect of contentious political disputes.

As something of an afterthought, Butler observes that parody is not in itself subversive, and while being understandably skeptical about the value of

8. See, e.g., Dollimore (1991) 284–306 and (1994); Garber (1993) esp. 20–41.

9. Butler (1990) 137. This is also broadly the line taken by Garber (1993) 10.

10. A rather specious account of transsexual desire (Butler [1990] 70–71). Intersex is dealt with at second hand, a reading of Foucault's interpretation of the autobiography of Herculine Barbin (1980).

11. For stylization and heroization, see Bakhtin (1981) 55–56, on ancient parody. For the complexity of parody, see Rose (1993), with further bibliography.

12. Butler's main source material, in fact, is Newton (1979), who examined the professional drag circuit in the United States in the 1960s, its culture and practitioners. For multi-gender systems, see Herdt (1996), and compare James (1997) on eunuchs in Byzantium.

13. Bobrick (1997) 191 suggests that a reading of *Thesm.* as a patriarchal exercise in containment would be simplistic. I would agree that it is not *just* what is going on, but, equally, repression can work in complex ways and is far from always being simplistic.

typology she argues that subversion is dependent on context and reception. In a characteristic deployment of the trope of a series of (rhetorical?) questions, she asks:¹⁴

What performance where will invert the inner/outer distinction and compel a radical rethinking of the psychological presuppositions of gender identity and sexuality? What performance where will compel a reconsideration of the *place* and stability of the masculine and the feminine? And what kind of performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire?

These are good questions, even if they are not answered.¹⁵ And these, in relation to gender, parody, and *mimesis*, are the starting points for my inquiry. The performative questions of mode, context, and reception that Butler admits but does not develop all point toward a more historicist and, indeed, dialogic perspective than she elsewhere adopts in her analysis. Such a critique is not merely of literary or theoretical significance: it is unfortunate that the reductive terms in which Butler carries out her anti-foundationalist project tend to undermine her call for coalitional politics, a call with which I am entirely in sympathy.

This paper, then, seeks to restore the complexity of the engagement with transgender identity and practice in *Thesmophoriazousai*. Rather than reducing all cross-dressing to drag, as some critics (as well as theorists) are prone to do, I argue that the play presents up to seven different transgendered modes in which it explores a variety of motivations and audience response. Such a complex picture, certainly, includes modes of fictional/dramatic performance, but these are best understood within the larger social and cultural framework that the play directly and indirectly suggests. *Thesmophoriazousai*, I argue, like other plays of Old Comedy, is perched on the horns of a dilemma, as it seeks to embrace both social conservatism and conceptual flexibility. While seemingly closing down some of the more radical positions it canvasses, the play nonetheless flatters the audience for their performative and interpretative flexibility, and takes the more interesting step of acknowledging the broader transgender continuum as a social and performative phenomenon. Given the centrality of audience response, a radical queer reading of *Thesmophoriazousai* in historical context may be implausible, but the creative tension at the heart of the play affords the opportunity for the play to be recuperated and re-used by subsequent audiences and readers.

14. Butler (1990) 139.

15. See especially Butler (1990) 146–47.

Comic and Tragic Conventions

The first such mode to consider is that of men playing women as part of the fictional conventions of Attic drama. Lauren Taaffe has argued that on this basis Old Comedy can be defined as ‘drag theatre’.¹⁶

The paintings of male actors playing female parts show that neither the theatrical representation of women by men nor the visual representation of actors in women’s parts were unequivocally complete. Because of what the vase illustrations tell us, it is inappropriate to assume that the convention of male actors in female roles was accepted wholeheartedly and without further thought by ancient audiences and playwrights.

The question, however, is not so much whether these (or any other) fictional conventions are ever wholly forgotten, which applies also to the different conventions of Greek tragedy, but whether those conventions are explicitly foregrounded or implicitly suggested in a given performance. Taaffe suggests that there is a marked incongruity in the comic conventions, but it is very hard to support that from the visual evidence.¹⁷

We need to separate out the playing of women by men *in itself* from the problem of the comic grotesque. Comedy treats the bodies of men and women in equally grotesque, exaggerated terms, although this does not preclude differentiation in terms of age, class, or gender. If anything, however, the deliberate incongruities and artificiality that one associates with drag are more a feature of comic *men* than comic *women*.¹⁸ Thus, for example, on the Kheiron vase¹⁹ the nymphs who look on the scene are not particularly incongruous, apart perhaps from the shape of the mask. Rather more so is the woman at the doorway. Yet that is as nothing compared to the variety of differently-shaped plays on the comic male body in this scene. Across the so-called “phlyax” vases of South Italy and Sicily, there is a real difficulty in picking out female characters as *markedly* more incongruous or grotesque. Much the same story is evident in other material evidence, such as the earlier terracotta figurines. Over the course of the fourth century, a marked differentiation does occur, but not in terms of gender. As comedy becomes less grotesque, distortion is retained as a marker

16. Taaffe (1993) 10.

17. Similar views to Taaffe’s are offered by McLeish (1980) 153–56, without considering the evidence of vase-painting, and Stehle (2002); see also Compton-Engle (2015).

18. For common grotesquerie, see Revermann (2006). Foley (2000) even argues for a basic comic androgyny, but for qualifications, see Ruffell (2013) 257 and (2015) 53–55. For comic costume in general, see Stone (1984) and Pickard-Cambridge (1988) 210–31, both of whom have little to say about cross-dressing.

19. London, British Museum F151. Apulian bell-krater, c. 380. Taplin (1993) 61–62 and fig. 12.6.

of age and servile status. In the fifth century, the grotesque was a fictional and, indeed, physical baseline upon which there could be comic elaboration, including multiple forms of cross-dressing and other transgression of gender norms.²⁰

While not discounting this theatrical convention of male-to-female cross-dressing, to privilege that over the different modes of cross-dressing *within* the fiction may obscure the most significant points about the performance.

Agathon: Mimesis and Naturalism

The first and most noticeable act of gender deviation within the world of *Thesmophoriazousai* is the role of Agathon—the critics’ choice as best-dressed and certainly most-talked-about character in the play.²¹ Euripides has gone, with his elderly relation, whom I am going to call Mnesilochus,²² to Agathon’s house, to seek the younger dramatist’s help. He needs him to plead his case in front of Athens’ women, who are threatening to kill him for writing lies about them.

The Agathon scene is set up by an extended routine offering the standard comic equation between effeminacy and a passive sexuality. Anonymous sex and perhaps prostitution are implied.

Ευ. ἐνταῦθ’ Ἀγάθων ὁ κλεινὸς οἰκῶν τυγχάνει
ὁ τραγωιδιοποιός.

Μν. ποῖος οὗτος Ἀγάθων;

Ευ. ἔστιν τις Ἀγάθων—

Μν. μῶν ὁ μέλας, ὁ καρτερός;

Ευ. οὐκ, ἀλλ’ ἕτερός τις· οὐχ ἐόρακας πώποτε;

Μν. μῶν ὁ δασυπῶγων;

Ευ. οὐχ ἐόρακας πώποτε;

Μν. οὔτοι μὰ τὸν Δι’ ὥστε κάμει γ’ εἰδέναι.

Ευ. καὶ μὴν βεβήνηκας σύ γ’· ἀλλ’ οὐκ οἶσθ’ ἴσως. (Ar. *Thesm.* 29–35)

Eur. Here is where the famous man Agathon lives,
the tragic poet.

20. For a genre as relentlessly metatheatrical as Old Comedy, the lack of delving below the comic body is striking, even if it is possible to talk *about* the comic mask (on which see Wiles 2008) or (on one obscure occasion) the body-stocking, *somation*. Pelling (2000) 298n57 notes the lack of clear jokes about the male performers in female roles. For the development in representations of comic characters, see Green (1994).

21. The classic discussion remains Muecke (1982a); cf. also Zeitlin (1981); Bobrick (1997).

22. Thus, he appears in the *dramatis personae*, but he is never named in the play. Apart from Euripides’s mother, the only relative we hear of elsewhere in surviving comedy is one Mnesilochus (Teleclides, *inc. fab.* fr. 41), an intertextual link available both to the audience and Hellenistic critics, with their interest in *komoidoumenoi* (cf. Dover [1972] 165; Sommerstein [1994] 157 and Austin and Olson [2004] 76–77n74).

Mnes. What sort of man is this Agathon?

Eur. There is a certain Agathon . . .

Mnes. Not the dark and strong one?

Eur. No—another one. Have you never seen him?

Mnes. Not the one with the thick beard?

Eur. You’ve never seen him?

Mnes. Not, by Zeus, so I should know him.

Eur. Ah well, you’ll have *fucked* him—but you probably don’t know him.

Agathon himself is preceded by an exceedingly camp servant, whom Mnesilochus is keen to get to know in a much more thorough fashion.

When Agathon does emerge, to sing an aria in the latest musical vogue, it becomes clear that there is more going on here beyond a (mere) imputation of effeminacy or indeed of “passive” sexuality. He is effectively fully cross-dressed, or something pretty close. Mnesilochus, to start with, compares him to the *hetaira* Cyrene (97–98).

Κη. ἀλλ’ ἢ τυφλὸς μὲν εἰμι; ἐγὼ γὰρ οὐχ ὀρῶ
 ἄνδρ’ οὐδέν’ ἐνθάδ’ ὄντα, Κυρήνην δ’ ὀρῶ. (Ar. *Thesm.* 97–98)

Mnes. Am I blind?! I’m not looking at
 any man here—I’m looking at Cyrene.

Aside from the sexual connotations, Mnesilochus’s first reaction is to straightforwardly identify Agathon as female. As the scene progresses though, Mnesilochus finds counter-examples. Some of the attributes are ‘wrong’ for ‘woman,’ and, on closer inspection, the body too:

τίς ἢ τάραξις τοῦ βίου; τί βάρβιτος
 λαλεῖ κροκωτῶι; τί δὲ λύρα κεκρυφάλωι;
 τί λήκυθος καὶ στρόφιον; ὡς οὐ ζῦμφορα.
 τίς δαὶ κατόπτρου καὶ ξίφους κοινωνία;
 σὺ δ’ αὐτός, ὦ παῖ, πότερον ὡς ἀνήρ τρέφει;
 καὶ ποῦ πέος; ποῦ χλαῖνα; ποῦ Λακωνικάι;
 ἀλλ’ ὡς γυνὴ δῆτ’; εἶτα ποῦ τιτθία; (Ar. *Thesm.* 137–43)

What is this confusion of lifestyle? What does the *barbitos*
 say to the frock? The lyre to the hairnet?

Why a perfume-flask and breastband? It’s so bizarre.

Why the combination of mirror and sword?

And you yourself, boy, are you being raised as a man?

Where’s your dick then? Where’s your cloak? And your Spartan shoes?

As a woman then? Then where are your tits?

Despite the extent of the cross-dressing, then, Mnesilochus can still find incongruities, not least the dissonance, on closer inspection, between feminine clothing and lack of physical attributes. Agathon also combines the sword of his masculine characters with the (current) female impersonation; his array of musical instruments Mnesilochus also finds incongruous with the feminine appearance. The reasons for that may be the public profession of music being predominantly male, although female performers (and poets) are known, from Sappho to the ubiquitous comic *auletrides*, and the connotations of music are much more contested elsewhere in comedy.²³

All these incongruities suggest an interpretation of Agathon's performance in terms of drag, in the sense that that performance mode entails a display of incongruity, the obvious simultaneous conflation of masculine and feminine, whether by explicit signaling or self-conscious stylization. Further connotations (or sub-genres) of drag in the modern setting depend heavily on performance context, audience composition and the construction and interpretation of performance *intent*.²⁴ In the ancient setting, komastic performances seem to exploit similar incongruities.²⁵

That, however, is not Agathon's narrative. He makes the stronger claim of 'passing' as a woman, in psychological and bodily terms as well as purely sartorial. Agathon also seems to accept the allegation of sexual mimesis, though Mnesilochus's comparison with the *hetaira* Cyrene is hardly flattering, and implies, in addition to prostitution, that he is mutton dressed as lamb. Ignoring this, Agathon presents a case for his cross-dressing, a case which implicates comedy's two fellow Dionysiac genres: tragedy and dithyramb.

The first offers a mimetic theory of dramatic composition and, implicitly, representation, whereby external appearance and internal character are congruent:

Αγ. ἐγὼ δὲ τὴν ἐσθῆθ' ἅμα τῇ γνώμῃ φορῶ.
 χρῆ γὰρ ποιητὴν ἄνδρα πρὸς τὰ δράματα
 ἃ δεῖ ποιεῖν, πρὸς ταῦτα τοὺς τρόπους ἔχειν.
 αὐτίκα γυναικεῖ' ἦν ποιῆ τις δράματα,
 μετουσίαν δεῖ τῶν τρόπων τὸ σῶμ' ἔχειν. (Ar. *Thesm.* 148–52)

23. As, for example, in Ar. *Ra.* 1261–1364. Bobrick (1997) 180–81 stresses the professional angle, but does not note the tensions.

24. Newton (1979) 97–111 demonstrates that for the performances and the period that she studied it was essential for the performers' true gender to be known to the audience, that fully 'passing' was not at all the intent or practice (except accidentally). This pressure was particularly strong among straight audiences (Newton [1979] 64–67).

25. Thus the so-called Anacreontic vases; performances outside the ritual bounds of festivals (Skira for women, Oschophoria for men) were clearly more fraught (see above, n. 3).

Agathon: I wear clothing to complement my inspiration
 For a male poet should, for the dramas
 that he must write, have the appropriate character.
 Thus, if anyone composes dramas about women,
 it is necessary for his body to share their ways.

Agathon claims a full immersion into the *tropoi* of women, whereby external appearance accompanies the appropriate *gnomē*, a term which hovers here somewhere between ‘literary inspiration’ and ‘character’s psychology.’ Agathon’s notion of gender assimilation clearly goes beyond clothes and props.²⁶

Agathon’s strong assertion about the literary necessity of transgender practice is almost immediately supplemented and qualified by elements of choice and personal identity.

ἄλλως τ’ ἄμουσόν ἐστι ποιητὴν ἰδεῖν
 ἀγρεῖον ὄντα καὶ δασύν. (Ar. *Thesm.* 159–60)

Above all, it is unaesthetic to see a poet
 who is unkempt and shaggy.

This is not a point about drama or *mimesis*, but about *mousike*, about being a poet in general, and unquestionably re-emphasizes issues of sexuality and also of gender identity, especially when he proceeds to stress the impossibility of denying one’s nature (*physis*, 167). Agathon not only claims to be passing, he also questions whether a poet should be conventionally masculine *at all*.²⁷

Agathon’s *apologia* for his cross-dressing brings together music and drama in a striking and unusual way. Outside of *Frogs*, the musical dimension of tragedy is rarely discussed explicitly in comedy.²⁸ The combination of elements here demands explanation. Critics have speculated on a personal flamboyance,²⁹ but mostly focused on Agathon’s literary output, and how far his monody represents

26. Similarly, masculine qualities (*andreia*, 154) embrace both physical and other attributes. Whereas these are already possessed by embodiment (154–55), their feminine counterparts can also be acquired: *mimesis* “helps to track them down” (*synthereuetai*, 156).

27. In addition to earlier remarks about his non-shagginess (above), Agathon continues to align himself with the Anacreontic tradition in 160–63.

28. Not that there could not be musical parody, as of the tragedian Phrynichus’s peculiar and outdated music in *Wasps* (see esp. L. P. E. Parker [1996]). In Ar. *Nub.* 1361–68, Strepsiades’s reports requesting Pheidippides to play first Simonides and then Aeschylus (both rebuffed, but not so much on musical grounds). Some tragic poets may also have worked as lyric poets, notably Gnesippus (for debates on whether these were the same man, see Cratinus, *Boukoloi* fr. 17, with K-A 4.131). For comic lyric having an independent musical afterlife, see Ar. *Eq.* 529–30.

29. Cf. Dover (1972) 37–38; Sommerstein (1994) 7, 159.

his music, his fragments generally or both.³⁰ The much-canvassed association of Agathon (like Euripides) with musical innovation and the so-called ‘New Music’³¹ does not serve to explain the combination of dramatic and lyric elements here. The crux of that lies in a cluster of concepts around *mimesis* and identity. Agathon’s transgressions of gender and sexuality bring together two different but complementary notions of *mimesis* and/or realism—dramatic and lyric—against which comedy can normatively identify and evaluate itself.

In terms of dramatic *mimesis*, the play looks back to Aristophanes’s *Acharnians*, where similar themes were explored through the prism of class and disability rather than gender identity.³² There, mimetic tragic naturalism was associated with verbal facility and emotional impact, and exemplified by a roster of Euripidean cripples and beggars, culminating in Telephus.³³ Against claims imputed to tragedy, *Acharnians* not only exposes fictional conventions and demonstrates the ability to assume and drop a marginal role at will, but also demonstrates a model of fictionality (or, indeed, *mimesis*) that eschews illusion and co-opts audience make-believe and a much expanded notion of realism.³⁴ Euripidean beggars and cripples are flagged in *Thesmophoriazousai* as early as 23–24, and Euripides himself draws the backward-looking comparison with Agathon’s stance in which he is already placing the younger poet at a distance (καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ τοιοῦτος ἦ / ὦν τηλικούτος, ἠνίκ’ ἠρχόμην ποιεῖν [“I too used to be like this / when I was his age and beginning my career”]). To this emotional and naturalistic tragic *mimesis* is added a musical naturalism that (further) overcodes Agathon’s deviance.

Musical Deviance and the Defense of Attic Culture

Agathon’s monody, which is punctuated by a commentary from Mnesilochus, who is clearly so stirred by the emotional content of the music that even he, the arch-thruster, wants to get down and open wide:

ὡς ἡδὺ τὸ μέλος, ὃ πότνια Γενετυλλίδες,
καὶ θηλυδριῶδες καὶ κατελωτισμένον
καὶ μανδαλωτόν, ὥστ’ ἐμοῦ γ’ ἀκροωμένου
ὑπὸ τὴν ἔδραν αὐτὴν ὑπῆλθε γάργυλος. (Ar. *Thesm.* 130–33)

30. See especially Muecke (1982b) with further bibliography.

31. Cf. Arist. *Poet.* 1456a26–30 for Agathon’s practice of writing lyric unrelated to the plot.

32. Class considerations are not excluded from *Thesm.* either. The sympotic associations of komastic cross-dressing evoke elite luxury; Old Comedy can also frame male homosexuality in class terms, as notably in *Clouds* (esp. 961–83).

33. The association with *mimesis* is made at *Ach.* 410–17.

34. For comic manipulation of tragedy in the play, see esp. Foley (1988); for exposure of illusion, Slater (1993, 2002); for an anti-illusionistic model of fiction and non-naturalistic realism, see Ruffell (2011). For naturalism and realism, see in particular Lukacs (1970) 25–88; cf. Lukacs (1962).

How sweet the song—holy Genetyllides--
 womanly, moist and well kissed
 French-style, so that as I was listening
 a tingle crept right up my backside.

The gendered and penetrative quality of the song suggest that Agathon is conveying a deviant sexuality through the affect of the music. Mnesilochus makes clear that his is a mimetic account of audience response to the *melos* (144–45). The connotations of this deviance do, however, need some qualifications. For one thing, it is clearly *pleasurable*. Agathon’s suggestion that Mnesilochus’s aggression stems from *phthonos* (“envy,” 146) is also relevant. For another, one cannot assume that transgressive sexual acts cannot be exploited positively in comedy.³⁵

The play is drawing on a comic repertoire that frequently elaborated on the sexual associations of music. The most significant example is Pherekrates’s *Kheiron*, which presented (fr. 155) an anthropomorphic Music (*Mousike*) complaining (probably to Justice, *Dikaiosyne*)³⁶ that she has been suffering escalating abuse at the hands of lyric poets (Melanippides, Kinesias, Phrynis, and Timotheos),³⁷ where musical innovation is coded as sexual assault.³⁸ The word-play implicates sex, music, and torture:

Φρῦνις δ’ ἴδιον στρόβιλον ἐμβαλῶν τινα
 κάμπτων με καὶ στρέφων ὄλην διέφθορεν,
 ἐν πέντε χορδαῖς δῶδεχ’ ἄρμονίας ἔχων. (Pherekrates, *Kheiron* fr. 155.14–16)

Phrynis imparted a very personal twist
 bent me, twisted me and has completely ruined me
 with twelve harmonies on five strings.

35. Dicaeopolis’s invitation to Lamachus (Ar. *Ach.* 591–92) exploits something similarly shameless. For fluidity of sexual desire in *Thesmophoriazusae*, see Sissa (2012) 54–55.

36. See fr. 168.

37. See Borthwick (1968) 67–73, with further bibliography; also Zimmermann (1993), Dobrov and Urios-Aparisi (1995) 155–64. West (1992) 356–66 explores the historical implications. [Plut.] *De mus.* 30, 1141C also refers to the character as *Poiesis* (Poetry), perhaps reflecting the broader interest in poetry in the play, including elegy (fr. 162.10–12, with a sympotic crossover) and epic (fr. 159; cf. Hom. *Il.* 9.270–71). Either or both may be being set against the new music, but the latter passage, in particular, suggests a (characteristically) ambivalent stance towards the older canon.

38. Dobrov and Urios-Aparisi (1995) 157–58 make the extraordinary claim that Music is both a willing participant and complaining about inadequate lovers. The language of force is clearly evident in ἀπολώλεχ’ (“has destroyed,” 10), διέφθορεν (“has ruined,” 15), καζήμαρτεν (“harmed,” 18), κατορώρυχε καὶ διακέκναυκ’ αἴσχιστα (“has buried me and gouged me most shamefully,” 19–20), and the escalation from ἀποχρῶν (“[bad] enough,” 6) to ἀνεκτός (“intolerable,” 13) is clear (*contra* their rather clammy claim that she is not satisfied by their efforts).

Here, excessive and transgressive active, penetrative sexuality is being associated with musical innovation³⁹ and transgression, whereas in *Thesmophoriazousai* it is *mimesis* of women and of ‘passive’ sexuality. Phrynus himself is presented in similar terms, on a vase inspired by Eupolis’s *Demoi*. In this play, four elder statesmen are brought back to return Athens to the straight and narrow. Here, the central character Pyronides⁴⁰ violently confronts Phrynus with a lyre.⁴¹ There is a stark visual opposition between the solid, conservatively dressed Pyronides and the slighter, flamboyant, and extremely feminine Phrynus, whose (notionally masculine) short *khiton* emphasizes his breasts and hips—perhaps with additional padding⁴²—and mask with smooth cheeks (natural or artificial), together with a minimal *phallos*, and shoes that connote elite luxury.⁴³ The lack of facial hair, and the delicate phallus suggest Phrynus’s musical and sexual deviance in the play was coded as feminine and ‘passive.’⁴⁴

These are two sides of the same gendered coin. Sexual excess was something that was stereotypically associated with women no less than the act of being penetrated. Sexual excess thus could be coded as hyper-masculine but also lead to allegations of effeminacy.⁴⁵ The comic presentation of Alcibiades exploits this apparent paradox. In Eupolis’s *Kolakes*, an array of elite Athenians at Kallias’s mother of all symposia included Alcibiades, who was indulging in a spot of cross-dressing:

(A.) Ἀλκιβιάδης ἐκ τῶν γυναικῶν ἐξίτω. (B.) τί ληρεῖς;
οὐκ οἶκαδ’ ἐλθῶν τὴν σεαυτοῦ γυμνάσεις δάμαρτα; (Eup. fr. 171)

39. Cf. Dover (1993) 26n45. On dithyramb and innovation, cf. Ar. *Av.* 1376–77 with Dunbar (1995) 666–67.

40. See *Demoi* fr. 99, 100. For the debate over his identity, see K-A 5.360 and Storey (2003) 116–19.

41. Salerno, Museo Provinciale Pc 1812. Paestan bell-krater by Assteas. See Taplin (1993) 42 and fig. 16.16.

42. For padding in normal female roles, see Alexis fr. 103.13.

43. Apparently the *lakonikai* that Philocleon is induced to wear (Ar. *Vesp.* 1157–73) and apparently masculine attire (Ar. *Thesm.* 142; *Eccl.* 74, 269), although he assimilates luxury and passive sexuality.

44. Given the role of Solon in the play (test. i. K-A, cf. fr. 99.45–48) there may also have been an association, as often, between formal innovation and lack of semantic content, with Solon opposed to Phrynus on both counts. Solon had appeared earlier in Cratinus’s *Kheirones* (fr. 246), also apparently involved in a nostalgic take on Athens (fr. 256, cf. fr. 257) and the play’s treatment of *stasis* and tyranny (fr. 258) perhaps exploited his poetry’s handling of these themes; for music specifically in the play, see fr. 247, 248, 254; fr. 263 also refers to poetry; a bookseller is mentioned in fr. 267; fr. 338 may also belong to this play.

45. For sexual excess, see Davidson (1997) 164–66. But note how, for example, in *Acharnians* the hymn to Phales celebrates *moicheia* (263–79), while Cratinus is abused for much the same quality (849).

(A) Let Alcibiades leave the women. (B) What are you going on about?
Shouldn't you go home and exercise your wife?

Alcibiades's association with the women here may imply a shared nature or practices⁴⁶ or carnal pursuit of them; elsewhere he is omnivorously sexual.⁴⁷

The ambiguity also seems to have been exploited in Eupolis's *Baptai*, a play of noted shamelessness in which Alcibiades was heavily involved.⁴⁸ A central element was the male celebration of the women-only rites of Cotyto, in a sympotic context⁴⁹ and involving cross-dressing. In Juvenal (*Sat.* 2.87–92) it is cited as an instance of cross-dressing in an all-male sexual context, but he also (*Sat.* 2.86–87) assimilates it both to the Bona Dea cult, so memorably invaded by Clodius for sexual purposes,⁵⁰ and indeed the Thesmophoria (perhaps with an eye on Aristophanes's play too). For both Greek and Roman audiences, 'new' cults from the East, such as those of Cotyto were marked as feminine and transgressive in both personnel and performance.⁵¹ *Baptai* seems to have featured exotic musical performance.⁵² It is, accordingly, entirely appropriate that Mnesilochus's moment of overwhelming (anal) desire invokes just such a deity: (Aphrodite) Genetyllis.⁵³

46. In Eupolis, *inc. fab.* fr. 385, if rightly identified there, he prefers women to boys and aligns himself with them for their reputation for alcohol (here, drinking early in the morning).

47. An active penetrator: Pherecrates fr. 164 ("every woman's man"), Ar. *Banqueters* fr. 554; passively penetrated by men: Ar. *Ach.* 716. In Plato's *Symposium* (212c3–end) his pursuit of Socrates is shameless but hardly passive.

48. Lucian, *Ind.* 27. It gave rise (probably just from the title) to the story of Alcibiades drowning Eupolis (*Baptai* test. I, ii–v K.-A.).

49. Sympotic context: fr. 77, 95; rites: fr. 83, 88.

50. Cic. *Har. resp.* 64; Cic. *Sest.* 116.

51. Of these, Cybele is the most well-known (cf. Burkert [1985] 177–79). Catullus 63 elaborates upon the *galli*, eunuch priests of the cult. *Lysistrata* 388–98 implicates the cults of Adonis and Sabazios in gendered transgression. The former cult was particularly associated with women (Men. *Sam.* 38–46, cf. Burkert [1985] 176–77; R. C. T. Parker [1996] 194; Winkler [1990] 199–202); the latter with slaves (Ar. *Vesp.* 8–9) as well as women; in the fourth century there is evidence of both male participation (Dem. 18.259–60; Theophr. *Char.* 27.2) and a formal organization of *Sabaziastai* of unknown status (R. C. T. Parker [1996] 335). The rites of Cotyto seem to have been assimilated to both Bacchic and Sabaziastic rites in *Baptai* (fr. 94). As essentially private mysteries, there was also an easy assimilation to the sympotic. It is possible that *Baptai* alluded to or primed responses to the parody of the Mysteries in 415 B.C.E. (on which see Murray [1990]; cf. Lada-Richards [1998] 144–45).

52. Fr. 81 (from dialogue) explicitly refers to the music of the dithyramb; fr. 82 refers to someone "working against the song"; fr. 88 has song and dance in an explicitly exotic context (*tumpanoi*, *trigonoi*, *kokhonai*).

53. Cf. Ar. *Nub.* 49–52; Ar. *Lys.* 2 (with Henderson [1987] 67). The goddess was associated especially with childbirth (Hsch. γ 343).

Transvestism, then, stands at the intersection of two linked models of sexual transgression, both excess and deviance. The allegations about Alcibiades represent a combination of both poles. Much the same combination of connotations for transvestism and effeminacy in fact persists into modern Western culture.⁵⁴ The cultural implication of gender and sexuality in transvestism, further over-coded with other discourses such as ethnicity,⁵⁵ leads to complex, even at times contradictory forms of comic abuse.⁵⁶ The musical *mimesis* of Agathon and the audience response it engenders are exploiting this ideological field.

The Compulsion Narrative and Comic Drag

Agathon refuses to help. In a further assimilation of gender and sexuality, he claims the women hate him too as he steals their men (Ar. *Thesm.* 195–207). At this point, Mnesilochus steps in and nobly, or foolishly, offers himself instead (Ar. *Thesm.* 209–12). Thus ensues one of the most notable cross-dressing scenes in Attic drama, which plays off his hitherto mainly aggressive sexuality. The first stage is the shaving of the cheeks and buttocks:

Eu. ἄγε νυν, ἐπειδὴ σαυτὸν ἐπιδίδως ἐμοί,
ἀπόδουθι τουτὶ θοιμάτιον.

Mv. καὶ δὴ χαμαί.
ἄταρ τί μέλλεις δρᾶν μ' ;

Eu. ἀποξυρεῖν ταδί,
τὰ κάτω δ' ἀφεύειν. (Ar. *Thesm.* 209–16)

Eur. Come now, since you're handing yourself over to
me, strip off this cloak.

Mnes. Right—it's on the ground.
But what are you going to do to me?

Eur. To shave off this lot
and to singe off the hair down below.

This episode is structured around *compulsion*. Mnesilochus's initial offer is prompted by Euripides's distress, and clearly he has no real notion of what might

54. As Garber (1993) 353–74 has amply demonstrated.

55. For Agathon and the Anacreontic tradition, see above n. 3; transvestism in Athens could be associated not only with Ionia but also further East (M. C. Miller [1997] 153–87). It may be relevant, too, that almost all well-known poets associated with musical developments, including the dithyramb, were non-Athenian except for Cinesias.

56. Thus, Davidson (1997) 159–82, (2001), and (2007) is right to point to sexual excess being one frame in which to view sexual transgression in Athens, but the penetration model of Dover (1978) and Foucault (1986), which he criticizes, certainly plays a major role, particularly if we consider the evidence of Old Comedy.

be involved, not least in the depilation, where the constraint is much more literal and physical. Constraint is a recurring feature of comic cross-dressing scenes: Blepypus in *Ekklesiazousai*, the Proboulos in *Lysistrata*, as well as in the darkly comic scene in the *Bacchae*, where Pentheus is induced by Dionysus (working, it seems, on the king's own desires).⁵⁷ But it is also a cross-cultural feature of cross-dressing narratives and fantasies. Examples abound in fiction⁵⁸ and mainstream Hollywood cinema, the latter mainly economically motivated,⁵⁹ although independent and queer-friendly cinema has moved away from such narratives.⁶⁰

The framing and performance, then, of Mnesilochus's cross-dressing is very different from that which has been experienced in the play thus far, for all that his outfit is inspired by tragedy: clothes by Agathon, styling and voice by Euripides.

Ευ. τὸν κροκωτὸν πρῶτον ἐνδύου λαβῶν.

Μν. νῆ τὴν Ἀφροδίτην, ἡδὺ γ' ὄζει ποσθίου.

σύζωσον ἀνύσας.

Ευ. αἶρέ νυν στρόφιον.

Αγ. ἰδοῦ.

Μν. ἴθι νυν, κατάστειλόν με τὰ περὶ τῷ σκέλει.

Ευ. κεκρυφάλου δεῖ καὶ μίτρας.

Αγ. ἡδὲ μὲν οὖν

κεφαλῇ περιθετός, ἦν ἐγὼ νύκτωρ φορῶ.

Ευ. νῆ τὸν Δί', ἀλλὰ κάπιτηδεῖα πάνυ.

Κη. ἄρ' ἀρμόσει μοι;

Ευ. νῆ Δί', ἀλλ' ἄριστ' ἔχει.

φέρ' ἔγκυκλον.

Αγ. τουτὶ λάβ' ἀπὸ τῆς κλινίδος.

Ευ. ὑποδημάτων δεῖ.

Αγ. τὰμὰ ταυτὶ λάμβανε.

...

Ευ. ἀνὴρ μὲν ἡμῖν οὐτοσί καὶ δὴ γυνὴ
τό γ' εἶδος. ἦν λαλιῆς δ', ὅπως τῷ φθέγματι
γυναικεῖς εὖ καὶ πιθανῶς. (Ar. *Thesm.* 253–68)

57. Ar. *Lys.* 531–37, *Eccl.* 344–75; Eur. *Bacch.* 912–44 (with 821–46). Humiliating laughter is one element of these scenes, but for the complexities of such scenes, see Ruffell (2013).

58. Bornstein (1994) 228–33 cites some hilarious examples from US fiction.

59. *Some Like It Hot*, dir. Billy Wilder (United Artists, 1959); *Tootsie*, dir. Sydney Pollack (Columbia Pictures, 1982); *Mrs. Doubtfire*, dir. Chris Columbus (20th Century Fox, 1993).

60. Thus, already, *The Crying Game*, dir. Neil Jordan (Channel Four Films, 1992); *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, dir. Stephan Elliott (Gramercy Pictures, 1994). An interesting precursor can be found in the trash oeuvre of Ed Wood, whose debut *Glen or Glenda* (Screen Classics Inc., 1953), however cheaply, dealt with some aspects of reality as well as fantasy.

Eur. First take the saffron gown and put it on.

Mnes. By Aphrodite, it smells sweetly—of cock.

Quickly belt it up.

Eur. Pick up a breastband.

Agath. Here.

Mnes. Come on, drape it properly around my legs.

Eur. We need a hair-net and a head-band.

Agath. So this here is a
head-piece which I wear at night.

Eur. By Zeus—that's just what we need.

Mnes. Will it fit me?

Eur. By Zeus, it's perfect.

Bring a mantle.

Agath. Take this one from the couch.

Eur. We need shoes.

Ag. Here, take mine.

Eur. This man certainly looks like a woman to us
in appearance at least, but if you speak, make sure
you speak in a proper, convincing female voice.⁶¹

Mnesilochus thus takes on some of the connotations of a tragically gendered character, but the motivation and performance is different from that of Agathon, although it shares elements with his own earlier interpretation of the tragedian. It is a disguise, but as so often in Old Comedy not a complete one. There no question of him passing for the audience: they will always read him as a comic male in drag. The underlying mask, hairstyle, and the after-effects of a comic depilation all maintain those bodily indicators, not to mention the *phallos*—already exposed and to be so once again. He is much more than Agathon the incongruous meeting of masculine-and-feminine. Despite the signals of tragic costume, and perhaps also a tragically female voice—his underlying masculinity comes through. Note, however, that it is masculinity according to comic costume convention.⁶²

61. For the voice in comic performance, see Halliwell (1990). On language and dialect, see Colvin (1998); Willi (2002).

62. Thus, on the well-known "Würzburg Telephus" vase (see below n. 71) there is the long khiton and headband, but still recognizably the hair of a comic male, and the lines on the face possibly indicate the after-effects of a none-too-subtle plucking and singing of the beard. Note also the absence of Phrynys-type padding (see above n. 39) and the comments by the women on the incongruous body (639–40).

Thus, the drag effect here derives much force from the collision of realism and grotesquerie, tragic and comic convention. For comic conventions, the *body* is the dominant sign, at the expense of costume, which in this play at least, is the province of tragedy. The rest of the play exploits this tension, and the different ways in which sex and gender are signaled, performed, and interpreted.⁶³

As Mnesilochus infiltrates the women's assembly, then, there is a dissonance between the audience, who know Mnesilochus's 'real' gender and the motivations for this cross-dressing. However, what they are watching is a narrative of passing. Mnesilochus manages to intervene in the assembly, successfully establishing his/her credentials because he apparently is privy to all the women's secrets—i.e., the comic stereotypes. Not that he is terribly successful in pleading for Euripides; nonetheless, the women are only upset by this bulky woman spilling the beans (544–52).

Thus, there are two different modes of audience reception and interpretation. The women, the internal audience, accept the gendered costume. For the external audience, the scene is full of delicious irony, with their superior knowledge of the doubled identity of Mnesilochus.⁶⁴ Threat of exposure is a key part of the joke-narrative here, a corollary of the compulsion scenario. Although the women threaten to attack this new arrival for her disclosures, which would resolve the dialogue between these narratives of cross-dressing, they never quite manage to do so.

Women as Men

Meanwhile, just as Mnesilochus is impersonating a woman, the women themselves are acting, in some respects, as men. They are, after all, performing the quintessential Athenian citizen male activity by holding an assembly. This is in itself a transgressive performance, but in a different mode to that of Mnesilochus or Agathon. It is a very female *ekklesia*—distinct in time and space: at the Thesmophoria, when no male assemblies were held, in the Thesmophorion, which was a women-only space distinct from, although perhaps close to, the male area of assembly.⁶⁵ For all the transplanted conventions and language

63. That is to say, the comic *idea of the body* (as visually encoded by the baseline grotesque comic body).

64. On irony, see Rosenmeyer (1996) and Lowe (1996). Disguise and differential knowledge is a common example of Rosenmeyer's 'structural irony' and which Lowe argues is characteristic of the tragic. Although strongly metatheatrical here, it falls short of Rosenmeyer's *Fiktionsironie*.

65. The location of the Thesmophorion is disputed, although it is commonly said to have been on the Pnyx. Even if this is accurate, the site would be *below* the Pnyx and not coextensive with the male area of assembly. See Thompson (1936); Clinton (1996).

(372–79), the women are not invading male space or attempting to supplant the masculine establishment.

By contrast, the women in *Ekklesiazousai* make a potentially much more threatening incursion into male space and the male political process; they also adopt masculine clothing, accessories, or mannerisms. Instead, *Thesmophoriazousai* presents, according to masculine democratic ideologies, not only how an assembly of women *might* act, but how they *had* to act.

Cleisthenes the TransAthenian?

As the assembly descends into chaos, and as the women (real or pretend) are about to come to blows, Mnesilochus is still hanging onto his role—until Cleisthenes turns up.

φίλοι γυναῖκες, ξυγγενεῖς τοῦμοῦ τρόπου,
 ὅτι μὲν φίλος εἶμι ὑμῖν, ἐπίδηλον ταῖς γνώθοις·
 γυναικομανῶ γάρ προξενῶ θ' ὑμῶν αἰεὶ·
 καὶ νῦν ἀκούσας πρᾶγμα περὶ ὑμῶν μέγα
 ὀλίγω τι πρότερον κατ' ἀγορὰν λαλούμενον,
 ἤκω φράσων τοῦτ' ἀγγελῶν θ' ὑμῖν, ἵνα
 σκοπῆτε καὶ τηρῆτε, μὴ καὶ προσπέση
 ὑμῖν ἀφάρκτοις πρᾶγμα δεινὸν καὶ μέγα. (Ar. *Thesm.* 541–81)

Dear women, sharers in my lifestyle,
 that I am your friend is clear from my jaw-line:
 for I am mad for women and always represent your interests.
 And now, because I heard a serious issue concerning you
 a little earlier being discussed throughout the public square,
 I am here to tell you this and report to you, so that
 you can take care and keep watch, in case something comes
 upon you while you are off-guard—to great and terrible effect.

The characterization of Cleisthenes here follows the usual pattern in Aristophanes and elsewhere. He is primarily seen as being beardless (575), and deliberately so. As an adult male, this leads to connotations of playing the *eromenos* against age conventions (the “passive” role), of effeminacy, and of being willingly penetrated.⁶⁶

66. Cf. Ar. *Eq.* 1373–75; Ar. *Thesm.* 234–35 (Mnesilochus’s response to his new beardlessness). Connotations of both effeminacy and deviant sexuality are embodied in the comparison of the Persian eunuchs in *Acharnians* to Cleisthenes and Straton (115–22). For deliberate depilation, see especially Ar. *Ran.* 422–24, where Cleisthenes’s son continues the family tradition. Dover (1970) 148n355, is charmingly confident that Cleisthenes suffered from a medical condition, apparently unwilling to

The characterization of Cleisthenes, then, shares some elements with that of Agathon, although only one marker is explicitly flagged as deviant, namely his beardlessness, the mark, according to Critylla of being a boy (*pais*, 582–83). However strongly the other, primarily sexual, connotations are felt here, it is the element of gender deviance that is elaborated. In particular his claim to share the women’s *tropos* (574) suggests a transgendered lifestyle in the narrow sense. The women, too, identify him at a distance as a woman (571–73). As such, as a man identifying with and living in a feminine *tropos* (even if not necessarily the full sartorial make-over), he describes himself as their *proxenos*—as their representative within the Other.

Cleisthenes demonstrates how a binary-gendered ideology handles transgressions. In contrast to the various blurrings (successful or unsuccessful) of Agathon or Mnesilochus, Cleisthenes’s apparently minor transgressions lead him to be viewed as woman in all but name—or at least an honorary woman: as a committed practitioner, he is deemed to have crossed over.⁶⁷ Similarly, in Pherekrates’s *Petale* the female bird that conveys a character to search for Aphrodite (the women having apparently withdrawn sexual favors) is likened to Cleisthenes (ὄμοιον Κλεισθέει, fr. 143.1).⁶⁸

As a transgendered person accommodated in such a way within a binary set-up, Cleisthenes becomes the agent of restoring gender equilibrium to the fictional world of the play, of discovering Mnesilochus’s identity and making a man of him once again. This construction and use of Cleisthenes demonstrates the gender binary coping with transgression, not so much (or not only) policing gender roles but reinforcing and reasserting the requirement for gender difference. More prosaically, his role here perhaps also suggests that one gender non-conforming person can more easily spot another (which might not even be anecdotally implausible).

Cleisthenes and the women publicly discover and display the incompatibility of gendered clothing and bodily sex. Given the significance of the body in Old Comedy, the presence or absence of the *phallos*, once displayed, becomes a rigid designator of sex *and* gender.

contemplate transgression of gendered norms, whether that is as part of the performance of sexuality (as alleged in comedy) or not: “It appears . . . that (no doubt through an endocrine disorder) he found it hard to grow a beard.” Certainly, the restrictions of conventional *erastes-eromenos* relationships are challenged in some places (not least in Plato’s *Symposium*).

67. Cf. Ar. *Nub.* 355, Ar. *Lys.* 620–25.

68. It is unlikely that the substantial body of plays about women by Pherekrates (whose career began in early to mid-430s) should post-date 411 B.C.E. *Petale* may thus pre-date *Thesm.* On Pherekrates’s plays, which apparently focused on *hetairai* and old women, see Henderson (2000).

Κλ. χάλα ταχέως τὸ στρόφιον, ὧναίσχυντε σύ.
 Κρ. ὡς καὶ στιβαρά τις φαίνεται καὶ καρτερά·
 καὶ νῆ Δία τιθούς γ' ὥσπερ ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἔχει.
 Μν. στερίφη γάρ εἰμι κοῦκ ἐκύησα πώποτε.
 Κρ. νυνδὴ δὲ μήτηρ ἦσθα παίδων ἐννέα.
 Κλ. ἀνίστασ' ὀρθός. ποῖ τὸ πέος ὠθεῖς κάτω;
 Μι. τοδὶ διέκυψε καὶ μάλ' εὐχρῶν, ὃ τάλαν. (Ar. *Thesm.* 638–44)

Cl. Quick. Undo your breastband. Have you no shame?
 Crit. How chunky and strong she seems;
 And by Zeus she doesn't have tits like us.
 Mnes. It's because I'm barren, and have never conceived.
 Crit. Just now you were a mother of nine children.
 Cl. Stand up straight! Where are you pushing your dick to down there?
 Mica. It's peeped through here! And a glorious color too,

Mnesilochus is certainly humiliated, but more crucially, by subjecting his *phallos* to the public gaze, his gender identity no longer becomes a problem for the dramatic characters any more than it has ever been for the audience.⁶⁹ At this point, the internal audience and the external audience's reception becomes as one. When you have seen *that*, how could you refer to Mnesilochus as anything other than 'man'?

Escape to Victory? Mimesis and Make-Believe

The rest of the play grapples with this problem. A series of escape attempts by Mnesilochus follow, all parodying Euripides, with the tragedian or his relative playing the parts and (to some extent) taking the costume of the characters. The first two are solo attempts and build up the repeating joke. Mnesilochus initially (688–764) attempts the notorious baby-snatching scene from Euripides' *Telephus*, repeating the joke from *Acharnians* fourteen years previously.⁷⁰ Reprising the eponymous hero's hostage-maneuver, he seizes the baby of one of the women, an analogue to the baby Orestes. This version, memorably illustrated in the so-called Würzburg Telephus vase,⁷¹ is particularly incongruous:

69. There is clearly a sense of escalation, and so while the type of breasts are suggestive, they are not decisive. Mnesilochus's response exploits the tensions in a gender system that strongly privileges fertility, in which women who are barren or beyond child-bearing age are not *prototypically* female. For older women in comedy, see Henderson (1987a).

70. Ar. *Ach.* 325–51. Whether *Telephus* (438 B.C.E.) had any ongoing performance history (e.g. in deme theatres) is unknown; this scene may indicate that elements had become self-sustaining parodies within comedy.

71. Würzburg, H 5697. Apulian bell krater, c. 370. Taplin (1993) 36–40, fig. 11.4.

Mnesilochus, the comic male, in tragic female costume, plays a male tragic character (who is supposed to have been disguised as a beggar), seizing one of the key markers for an essentialist view of gender—namely babies and the ability to have them. Aristophanes pushes the visual and mimetic play one stage further: the baby turns out to be a wineskin (complete with booties in the vase-painting). The visual gags depend on, and in turn reinforce, the incongruities of the visual markers of gender.

After the failure of this escape attempt, Mnesilochus turns to more recent Euripidean tragedy, adopting first a *mekhane* from his *Palamedes* of 416/5 B.C.E.: throwing oar-blades/votive tablets out in a bid for a rescue. When that fails he turns to the recent plays *Helen* and *Andromeda* (both 413/2 B.C.E.). These are much more fitted to his task, as they represented a new turn in Euripidean drama: light, melodramatic, with escapes and happy endings; indeed, they might be seen as rather comic. Mnesilochus proceeds to try each escape-narrative—he is, after all, in the right costume this time (851)—aided by Euripides as fellow actor. The introduction of the ‘new *Helen*’ clearly indicates that *mimesis* will be a central concern (τὴν καινὴν Ἑλένην μιμήσομαι, 850) and that we are entering into a play within a play centered on cross-gender performance which recalls the themes of the prologue.

Eu. Ἑλένηι σ' ὁμοίαν δὴ μάλιστ' εἶδον, γύναι.
 Mn. ἐγὼ δὲ Μενελάωι σ' ὅσα γ' ἐκ τῶν ἱφύων
 Eu. ἔγνωσ ἄρ' ὀρθῶς ἄνδρα δυστυχέστατον.
 Mn. ὦ χρόνιος ἐλθὼν σῆς δάμαρτος ἐσχάρας,
 λαβέ με λαβέ με, πόσι, περίβαλε δὲ χέρας.
 φέρε σε κύσω. (Ar. *Thesm.* 909–15)

Eur. Lady, you look to me the image of Helen.
 Mnes. And you that of Menelaus, at least from your <??>
 Eur. You knew then a man most unfortunate.
 Mnes. O come at last to your wife's hearth,
 Take me! Take me, husband! Throw your arms around me!
 Let me kiss you!

However, there are differences. Euripides and Mnesilochus are not playing to (ideologically, at least) an audience of male citizens,⁷² and these fictions are not happening in an immediately theatrical context (of Agathon's fictional compositional practice) but seeking to introduce a secondary fictional world to take over their baseline fictional world. The key difference, though, is that the

72. For the idea of the audience, see especially Goldhill (1994).

internal audiences, Critylla and the Scythian archer who is guarding the prisoner, refuse to accept the fictional narratives that Mnesilochus and Euripides conjure up between them. Critylla is, for the most part, just confused by the language and impersonation of Euripides as Menelaus.

Ευ. ξένη, τίς ἡ γραῦς ἡ κακορροθοῦσά σε;

Μν. αὕτη Θεονόη Πρωτέως.

Κρ. μὰ τῷ θεῷ,

εἰ μὴ Κρίτυλλά γ' Ἀντιθέου Γαργηττόθεν· (Ar. *Thesm.* 896–98)

Eur. Lady, who is this hag who abuses you?

Mnes. She is Theonoe daughter of Proteus.

Crit. By the two gods, no,

I am *Critylla* daughter of Antitheos from Gargettos.

The Scythian, despite some extremely elaborate stunt-flying by Euripides on the crane,⁷³ totally fails to buy into any of the fictional conventions they are working with. As for Mnesilochus, for both internal audiences, any fictional persona is problematic: his nature has been fully and literally exposed.

Ευ. ὃ παρθέν', οἰκτίρω σε κρεμαμένην ὀρών.

Το. οὐ παρτέν' ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ἁμαρτωλὴ γέρων
καὶ κλέπτο καὶ πανοῦργο.

Ευ. ληρεῖς, ὃ Σκύθα·

αὕτη γὰρ ἐστὶν Ἀνδρομέδα παῖς Κηφέως.

Το. σκέψαι τὸ σῦκο· μὴ τι μικρὸ παίνεται; (Ar. *Thesm.* 1110–14)

Eur. Maiden, I pity you, seeing you hanging there.

Arch. Not maidn. Old fillen.
theef and skum.

Eur. Nonsense, archer.

She is Andromeda daughter of Kepheus.

Arch. Look at his fig! Not liddle ugh?

The way that Mnesilochus's various audiences—men, women, and slaves—have had experience of him are central to their modes of response, but there is an explicit attention focused on the mechanics of fictional response. For in addition to this simple refusal to believe on the part of the internal audience, the external audience are also invited to set their own reception of the fictional worlds of *Andromeda* and *Helen* against the internal audiences's refusal either to accept the

73. The crane, *mekhane*, thus represents the physical embodiment of the contrivances that are held to typify Euripides throughout this play (16, 87, 765, 927, 1132).

fictions of Mnesilochus and Euripides, or to adopt roles themselves. There are, I think, two important considerations that this comparison raises. Firstly, there is a shift away from *deception* toward *make-believe*. The women and the Scythian treat fictionality in terms of deception; what Euripides, Mnesilochus, and, indeed, the audience are engaged in is a process of make-believe.⁷⁴ The external audience are implicitly flattered by their ability to engage co-operatively, when the internal audiences cannot. The suggestion is most explicit when Euripides exploits tropes of both poetic sophistication and cultural superiority in deploring the Scythian's lack of conceptual flexibility:

αἰαῖ, τί δράσω; πρὸς τίνας στρεφθῶ λόγους;
 ἀλλ' οὐκ ἂν ἐνδέξαιτο βάρβαρος φύσις·
 σκαιοῖσι γάρ τοι καινὰ προσφέρων σόφα
 μάτην ἀναλίσκοις ἄν. ἀλλ' ἄλλην τιὰ
 τούτῳι πρέπουσαν μηχανὴν προσοιστέον. (Ar. *Thesm.* 1128–32)

Alas! What am I to do! What words can I turn to?
 His barbarian nature would not understand them.
 You might use subtle novelties on his dense mind,
 and waste them in vain. I need to bring some other
 scheme to bear, one that fits the man.

Secondly, the doubling of audiences and responses mirrors and foregrounds the doubling structure of parody itself, drawing attention to the collision of two fictional worlds which is involved in parody, and making the incongruities involved in parody explicit. And yet all this foregrounding provides another level of incongruity to the scene. Whereas before there was a level of superiority in the external audience's ability to 'see through' the disguise of Mnesilochus, here their position is much more ambivalent. Although in a sense the women and the Scythian 'ought' to make-believe, to join in the game of interpreting Mnesilochus as Helen and Andromeda, in another they are absolutely right *not* to. Thus, if anything, the external audience should be laughing at themselves when confronted with the consequences of the tragic conventions that under normal circumstances they would adopt.

Euripides the Sex-Worker

Despite all their efforts, the Euripidean escape dramas fail. If anything, the situation is worse: Mnesilochus is tied to his board under the watchful eye of the Scythian, and Euripides is still under sentence of death from the women. Euripides

74. For the explanation of fictionality in terms of audience make-believe, see Walton (1990).

then comes up with the last, most daring of his schemes: he makes peace with the women. But how to rescue his relation? The solution that he comes up with again involves cross-dressing. This time, though, there are no obvious fictional overtones. It is naked deception, appealing to the crudest bodily functions. Euripides dresses up as a bawd bringing on a slave-girl to tempt away the Scythian:

ὄνομα δέ σοι τί ἐστίν;
 Ευ. Ἀρτεμισία.
 Το. μεμνήσι τοίνυν τοῦνομ' Ἄρταμουζία.
 Ευ. Ἑρμῆ δόλιε, ταυτί μὲν ἔτι καλῶς ποιεῖς,
 σὺ μὲν οὖν ἀπότρεχε, παιδάριον, ταυτί λαβῶν·
 ἐγὼ δὲ λύσω τόνδε. σὺ δ' ὅπως ἀνδρικῶς,
 ὅταν λυθῆς τάχιστα, φεύξει καὶ τενεῖς
 ὡς τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ τὰ παιδί' οἴκαδε. (Ar. *Thesm.* 1200–6)

Archer. What's your name?

Eur. Artemisia.

Arch. 'kay, I remembers the name: Artamouxia.

Eur. Hermes trickster, you're managing *that* well!

Now you run off child, with these,
 and I'll release him. As for you, make like a man
 when you're freed and run, leg it
 home to your wife and children.

Euripides the tragedian adopts a drag role and abandons tragic *mimesis*: indeed, the bawd is very much a comic character in terms of both style and class.⁷⁵ More than that, though, the play ends on a reassertion of norms of sex and gender. For the Scythian, this is crude and, ultimately, frustrated, as Mnesilochus goes back to his wife, to live masculinely ever afterwards.

If the play ends on a note of restoration of norms of gender and sexuality, this still begs the question of how to assess the role of *mimesis* and cross-dressing within the play as a whole. A key assumption often made here is that *all* cross-dressing is metatheatrical, and that it immediately draws attention to the fictional context, to fictional pretense and the dramatic illusion.⁷⁶ The fact that all female roles are crossdressed male actors serves to reinforce this point. From a postmodernist perspective, it can then become easy, too easy, to deconstruct the fiction. However, this is highly reductive and misses the interesting points of that fiction.

75. Pherekrates's *hetaira*-comedy (see above, n. 68) would be a particularly obvious connection.

76. So Muecke (1982a); Bobrick (1997); and, for that matter, Taplin (1986).

As we have seen, there is a link between different forms of *mimesis* and fictional performance on the one hand and different forms of transgendered practice and performance on the other. Primarily it is an opposition between ‘passing’ (successful carrying off of the opposite gender role) and the incongruity that is the essence of drag. The first of these in turn is partly linked to the Cleisthenic model—a transgendered lifestyle—but whereas Cleisthenes is held to be full-time, Agathon is represented as blurring gender categories as well as being more sartorially committed. Mnesilochus on the other hand is partially successful, in that he initially convinces the women, but ultimately he is a paradigmatic example of the drag model.

Agathon’s model is associated explicitly with a theory of tragic *mimesis*, but more importantly with a theory of naturalism. If ‘passing’ and tragic fiction are being equated, what of Mnesilochus? Despite his adoption of tragic elements, he is at root a comic character, in appearance (as in the Würzburg Telephus), manner, and, indeed, class. The mode of cross-dressing associated with him is the analogue for the comic form of fictionality: an anti-mimetic (or multi-mimetic) mode rather than a mimetic one. This mode depends upon the foregrounding of conventions, a doubling of audience response, and the structure of the joke.

The handling of the tragic playlets demonstrates the two modes, tragic and comic, alongside each other, in terms of fictionality, narrative, and reception. In a reprise of the themes of the Agathon scene, tragic *mimesis*, or rather tragic claims to realism, are set against the structures of fictionality and make-believe, of parody and of comedy itself.

Euripidean melodrama offers more than a topical point of contrast. These are precisely those tragedies in which critics have been keenest to find comic elements.⁷⁷ And structurally, there is a strong overlap between comedy and melodrama. The happy ending, for example, has often been seen as a key marker of both genres. Indeed, for critics of twentieth-century film, where generic distinctions are much less firm, there are great difficulties separating the two:⁷⁸

... narrative comedy is, if anything, more compatible with contemporary melodrama. ... under Vidor’s direction, the two forms become indistinguishable. This is not just because they can share and endorse the same values, but also because they share the same kind of narrative structure, and, often, the same kind of ending.

77. Winnington-Ingram (1969); Knox (1979); Zeitlin (1980); Seidensticker (1982); Segal (1997); Jendza (2020).

78. See, in general, Neale and Krutnik (1990), esp. 10–15, 22–5.

What Aristophanes does here is point to some key underlying differences in *technique*. In comedy there is stress on doubling, on incongruity, on the gag—on drag. There is, moreover, the suggestion that such doubling is more faithful, more honest with the act of make-believe, but above all more *realistic* than tragic melodrama. With its emphasis on the bodily markers of gender, comedy is always sure who or what everyone is, despite the playful elements.

This brings us neatly back to Agathon. The whole scene depends upon the principle that he is fooling himself, with his *mimesis* and claims to realism, as well as his transgendered practice. The audience are not, or should not be, fooled. Agathon is set up as not merely naive, in fictional or gendered terms, but as deviant. Agathon stands as the exemplum of cultural anxiety provoked by the blurring of gender, and the accompanying implications with regard to class and sexuality. His lifestyle, both the practice and the stated intent, are set up as counter to the social and biological norms espoused by comedy, norms that are re-affirmed by Mnesilochus's failure to follow Agathon's lead.

Through the cross-dressing narratives of the play, then, comedy is defending and defining its own techniques at the encroachments of music and tragedy, and *at the same time* setting itself up as a defender of Athenian culture. Comedy firmly resists the blurring of the gender binary. In the case of Cleisthenes, he is associated with the feminine, thus recuperating the binary; in the case of Agathon, any claims are set up as delusional. Comedy offers itself instead as a more honest model of fiction and cross-dressing. Any trans-gender play is play—let no one forget the *phallos* underneath. It is this parallelism between the *techniques* and the *ideology* of comedy that makes it particularly difficult to reinterpret against the grain.

Is *Thesmophoriazousai* then just a narrative of repression—or multiple repressions? In cultural materialist terms, is it a drama of containment rather than subversion? To some extent, yes, and this should not, *pace* Bobrick and others, be downplayed. To do otherwise is to engage in what Dollimore has described as “wishful theory.”⁷⁹ Aristophanes is exploring the range of cross-dressing modes, only to close them down once more. By associating different modes of transgender play with modes of tragedy and dithyramb, Aristophanes is at least acknowledging them as social Realien, or at least as social possibilities; that he then dismisses them as ridiculous and naive should not be forgotten for a moment. Indeed, in the repeated and co-operative working through of gendered norms, *Thesmophoriazousai* is a demonstration of hegemony in action:⁸⁰

79. Dollimore (1996).

80. Williams (1977) 113.

In this active process the hegemonic has to be seen as more than the simple transmission of an (unchanging) dominance. On the contrary, any hegemonic process must be especially alert and responsive to the alternatives and oppositions which question or threaten its dominance. The reality of cultural process must then always include the efforts and contributions of those who are in one way or another outside or at the edge of the terms of the specific hegemony.

This may serve well as the basis of a historicizing critique of the play, and at times that has been enough (more than enough) for me, but it is not why I now keep going back to *Thesmophoriazousai* over the decades, as one of those on the outside or on the edge of that specific (and ongoing) hegemony. *Thesmophoriazousai*, I argue, makes four critical points that are of contemporary and personal resonance. As fascinating as it would be to uncover a historical subculture of which Cleisthenes might have been a representative, the evidence does not sustain it; rather, these are one set of readings by one twenty-first century transwoman, with no claims to being representative or paradigmatic, but ones that nonetheless arise out of and are shaped by a set of shared experiences.⁸¹

First, the plurality of performances of cross-gender action in the play repeatedly emphasize the performativity, not only of gender but of transgender. The idea that gender is performance has, following Butler, become an utter cliché, but often reduces to no more than that gender is constructed. Rather, Aristophanes's play emphasizes the full dimensions of the performance process, where it matters not only how gender is performed, but to whom, by whom, in what context and with what (inferred or ascribed) motivation; so too does it matter for the range of transgendered positions. It is, in fact, the failure to appreciate this that causes problems for Butler, as over the course of two books she ascribes the subversion of gender first to drag in general, and then to gay drag specifically. But her analysis of the film *Paris is Burning* finds her confronted by the same problem as we have encountered in this critique of *Thesmophoriazousai*: that the exploration of drag is used (there) to reinforce social norms, not explode them. By the end of this process, drag is no longer subverting gender roles but 'disclosing' them. Despite being forced to narrow the hunt for subversion to one particular mode, there still proves to be no *essential* reading of transgender, outside of context.

81. Sinfield (1992) 29–51 argues that the possibility of dissident consciousness and dissident reading arises from group identity and shared experience (a milieu or subculture). See also Dolimore (1991).

Related is the second feature to be recuperated from *Thesmophoriazousai*, namely the very plurality of different practices, and it is characteristic of comedy that these are embodied and played out in front of the audience. Drag (in various forms) is only one mode that is being presented, far less the master signifier, as Butler would have it.⁸² Whether our preferred model is a transgendered spectrum, as has become increasingly dominant, or a series of distinct positions (some of which have medical or legal implications), or some mixture of the two, this plurality of modes speaks acutely to the trans experience.

Without rowing back on the account of *Thesmophoriazousai* given earlier, it is also the case that the performance of (trans)gender in the play offers some scope for more than abstract pluralism. The joke of Agathon depends on a *degree* of plausibility: that this might be something a tragic poet *would* do (and not unattractively so); that Cleisthenes *could* live in this manner and that the women *would* accept him as, if not one of them, at least on their side; that creating cross-gender roles and working with them *is more reasonable* than having an essentialist view of gender. These are certainly jokes that have particular resonance for a trans audience.⁸³

Third, *Thesmophoriazousai* also demonstrates the impossibility of isolating transgender from other discourses, whether class, ethnicity, sexuality—or fictionality or parody. Finding a place for transgender in relation to these is a prime political as well as theoretical goal. To be sure, Aristophanes's version of these intersections is hardly to be affirmed (any more than the imperial drag-parody-subversion line), but the critique of this play reaffirms the importance of an intersectional queer and feminist politics.

Finally, a repeated emphasis in *Thesmophoriazousai* is the figure of the poet or playwright creating and directing the transgendered narratives. In other words, the play does not (just) reflect or reinterpret ideology or reality, but presents the construction of transgendered narratives by a controlling (male) figure, whether the notional comic author Aristophanes or the tragic authors Euripides and Agathon. Such controlling figures are ever-present in the transgender experience. This may include sociologists, media commentators, philosophers, or cultural

82. Although she chides Raymond for failing to distinguish between straight and gay drag, and for lumping drag in with cross-dressing and transsexualism (Butler [1993] 126–27), Butler's own account collapses categories or subordinates them to the master narrative of drag: for example, she describes the figure of the drag queen Venus Xtravaganza in *Paris is Burning* as “Latina/preoperative transsexual, cross-dresser” (Butler [1993] 125), which appears to display the same category confusion.

83. Compare similar problems in the interpretation of modern comedy, from *Monty Python to The League of Gentlemen*, where performances can similarly highlight the pluralities of transgender, even as they subordinate them to repressive interpretation.

theorists seeking to define the problem, but most of all the author figure approximates to the constructive, yet controlling and limiting action of the medical practitioner. More than any other of the transgressive categories of gender, sex, or sexuality that have been catalogued, classified, and described since the late-nineteenth century, transsexualism has been subject to the authority of medical establishments. Indeed, for obvious reasons, transsexuals have been forced to collude with these establishments and their authorizing narratives.⁸⁴ For all that current medical thinking is moving away from simple etiologies and towards 'quality of life' judgements, the power dynamics in the doctor-patient relationship continue to be significantly skewed, symbolized by the self-representation of psychiatrists as gatekeepers of resources and treatment.⁸⁵ Resistance to this figure of the author in *Thesmophoriazousai* can be read as a warning against the hegemonic tendencies of theory of all kinds and no matter how anti-foundationalist the stance.

I return to questions that I raised at the beginning of the paper. Why should I bother to read or to watch *Thesmophoriazousai*? What is any interpretation of the play *for*? It is something of a truism of contemporary thought that literary critics must always bear in mind their own situatedness. The criticism or teaching of texts such as these has inevitable political implications, for all that we are living in a context some two and a half millenia later. A focus on the transgendered narratives of *Thesmophoriazousai* is essential for a complete understanding of both its metafictional and ideological force. Moreover, it is only through an acknowledgement of the range of possible performances, performers, contexts, and audiences that we can fully analyze its repressive cultural force. Through both its dramatization of these *and* in its apparent conclusion, *Thesmophoriazousai* offers a clear challenge to both the transgendered and the broader queer community, a challenge which is to think through the range of identities and, in combating narratives of repression, to work towards a truly pluralist political praxis. That is why, for a twenty-first-century audience, *Thesmophoriazousai* is good to think with.⁸⁶

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84. For a persuasive account of this, see Stone (1992).

85. This paragraph really dates from the late 1990s, and the mood music is very different now. But the fundamental structure is still in place, notwithstanding current debates over further extension of the Gender Recognition Act, which would lower legal but not medical hurdles.

86. My thanks to James Davidson, Gideon Nisbet, Robin Osborne, Chloe Stewart, and Natalia Tsoumpra for comments on various incarnations of this paper, and audiences in Oxford (postgraduate work-in-progress seminar) and Liverpool (Classical Association AGM, 1999).

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