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The Shifting Gender Identity of Dionysus in Aristophanes' *Frogs*

Much work on *Frogs* since the second half of the 20th century has focussed on the ritual and initiatory patterns of the play,[1] and has discussed the growth of Dionysus' character, and the transition he undergoes from a comic buffoon and unsuccessful actor to a competent judge and proficient literary critic.[2] Likewise, Dionysus' final preference of Aeschylus over Euripides has generated much discussion among scholars from a dramatic and a political point of view.[3] There is, however, an important aspect of Dionysus' development which remains largely ignored:

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2 Many scholars trace the educational journey of Dionysus: he develops into a god of 'communal solidarity', who embodies the comic spirit and unifies the two halves of the play (Segal 1961); he discovers that his patronage of tragedy should aim at the education of the spectators to a heroic defence of their country (Epstein 1985); he acquires comic vitality (Reckford 1987); he becomes more truly Heraclean (Padilla 1992). The transformation of Dionysus is often bound up with mythical, ritual and initiatory patterns: Reckford 1987 contends that *Frogs* is about death in several ways (not the least being the death of Old Comedy), with the final procession serving as an inverted funeral rite; Moorton 1989 applies to the play the ideas of Arnold van Gennep's rites of passage; Bowie 1993 considers the Eleusinian mysteries and their relevance to Dionysus' journey to the underworld (p. 252 'the god regains his identity, as the *mystēs* underwent the process of the dissolution of his personality and the creation of a new one'). By contrast, Worman 2014 eschews the identification of the path to Hades with the road to Eleusis and associates it with known cultic elements of the Ilissos river region. Lada-Richards 1999 focuses on the 'rite of passage' as the operative paradigm and traces the development of Dionysus' character into a growing valuation of the *polis*-affirming sensibilities of Aeschylus.

3 For Halliwell (2011, 97) the reason why Dionysus picks Aeschylus over Euripides is 'far from transparent', and he also notes that Dionysus refrains from explaining his decision. By contrast, Dover (1993a, 455–8) believes that the decision is less of a surprise and Dionysus' uncertainly is only included because it is dramatically effective. He suggests that the play may have led the audience to believe 'that a revival of Aeschylus would cause a revival of the great days of old' (p. 460). Heiden 1991 argues that neither Aeschylus nor Euripides are truly endorsed in the play, as their poetic and political stances are opposed to the Old Comedy of Aristophanes; Rosen 2002 argues that it is not about Aeschylus winning, but that the contest puts in doubt the question of what, if anything, poetry can teach.

his shifting gender identity.[4] This chapter will discuss the gradual construction of Dionysus' masculine gender identity and his transformation from an effeminate and passive male figure to a masculine and virile one.[5] It will argue that Dionysus' growth into sexual maturity is intrinsically linked to his official recognition as the god of theatre, predominantly of comedy, and to the salvation of the city. It will also be shown that gender identity plays an important role in Dionysus' final decision: by rejecting the effeminate delicacy of the Euripidean stage and opting for the virile art of Aeschylus, Dionysus identifies with the male element in himself and emerges as a typical male Aristophanic hero who experiences sexual rejuvenation at the end of the play.[6] In this way, Dionysus at the end of *Frogs* is to be associated mostly with the world of comedy, which is virile and fundamentally masculine in its action,[7] in contrast to tragic mimesis, which allies

4 Gender identity is construed here as a learned performance of gendered behavior. As Judith Butler (1990 and 2004) has repeatedly argued, gender should be seen as a fluid variable which shifts and changes in different contexts and at different times, rather than as a fixed attribute in a person. In this sense there is no need for a distinction between sex as a biological category and gender as a historical category: one's entire sexuality is a product of social discourses. There should be no continuum between sex, gender, and desire. Yet in the context of fifth-century Athens, where binary oppositions are in place, for Dionysus to reach full adulthood, he eventually has to succumb to 'normative heterosexuality': he abandons his 'feminine' ways, performs 'masculine' acts, and exhibits sexual interest in women. 'Being' a certain gender means that one will desire in a certain way.

5 Whether one subscribes to the active/passive (Foucault 1985, Dover 1989) or excess/moderation (Davidson 2007) model of sexuality in ancient Greece, the deep-rooted association of phallic assertiveness and display with masculine status is widely acknowledged, as is hostility in relation to homosexual acts towards those who assume the passive role, especially in comedy. Young boys could be pursued as *erōmenoi* by men, but passive homosexuality for adults was, to say the least, less acceptable and relentlessly ridiculed in comedy. As Skinner (2005, 121) notes, accusations of passive homosexuality are the most frequent form of abuse in the comic plays. In this sense, Dionysus achieves sexual maturity only when he abandons his effeminate ways and his unhealthy fixation with Euripides and becomes the sexual pursuer and aggressor, and in a predominantly heterosexual context at that.

6 Zeitlin (1996, 366) notes that the contest develops into one between masculine and feminine sides, but she does not conclude that the predilection for the virile art of Aeschylus over the feminine one of Euripides reflects the generic conventions of Old Comedy.

7 As Skinner (2005, 123–4) notes, the basic orientation of Old Comedy is heterosexual, male, phallocentric, and aggressive. Sexual jokes are made at the expense of women and effeminate homosexuals; fantasies of sexual assault and objectification of women are recurrent motifs as brazen public articulations of male desire, while the aggressive pursuit of sex by male heroes often becomes synonymous with claiming and establishing power. See Robson 2015.

itself with the female.[8] This distinction will be further displayed by comparing *Frogs* with Euripides' *Bacchae*, produced around the same time or a little prior to *Frogs*.

Dionysus' gender identity in comedy

The ambivalent gender identity of the god Dionysus is well known.[9] In theatre, ritual and art Dionysus traditionally appears to combine female and male characteristics and share in both sexes simultaneously. On the theatrical stage Dionysus often verges upon femininity and is taunted for his effeminate appearance. In Aeschylus' *Edoni* (fr. 61) he is scornfully called 'a woman-man' (γύννις),[10] while in *Theoroi* (frr. 67–8) he is accused of being a feeble, unwarlike, womanish man (γύννις δ' ἄναλκις), who is not to be classified among men. In Euripides' *Bacchae* he has a feminine appearance, with a pale complexion and locks that inspire desire (453–9). In comedy Dionysus' effeminate appearance and cowardly attitudes as well as his delight in the physical pleasures of life were often exploited for humour. In Eupolis' *Taxiarchoi* (fr. 256) Dionysus enlists himself to learn the arts of war under the general Phormion, and we get nothing less than the stereotypical comic Dionysus, effeminate and luxury-loving, cowardly, averse to hard work and discomfort:[11]

> ὅστις πύελον ἥκεις ἔχων καὶ χαλκίον,
> ὥσπερ λεχὼ στρατιῶτις ἐξ Ἰωνίας.

> whoever you are, who have come with a bathtub and a bronze cauldron, like a new mother from Ionia joining the ranks.

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8 Zeitlin (1985 and 1996) has argued that tragedy and the female are strongly related because both are mimetic. Tragedy is an inherently feminine genre as it 'plays the other', and displays a number of feminine characteristics such as preoccupation with the body, a paradoxical relationship with the dichotomy of inside/outside, and a propensity for deception and contrivances to advance the plot.
9 Jameson (1993, 44) speaks of the god's 'asexuality' or 'the coexistence of elements of both genders that may cancel each other out'. Otto 1965 explores the feminine aspect of the god at some length. See also Lada-Richards 1999, 23–6 for Dionysus' spanning of the male-female polarity.
10 Famously reproduced in Ar. *Thesm.* 136–45. See below.
11 Text and translation from Olson 2015.

The scorn at Dionysus' effeminate appearance is well conveyed by στρατιῶτις, while the allusion to Ionia recalls the traditional luxurious stereotype of the Ionians.

Dionysus also appears as a comic buffoon in Cratinus' mythological burlesque *Dionysalexandros*, where he takes the place of Paris. Even though it has been claimed that the play enacted Dionysus' heterosexual union with Helen,[12] it is hard to imagine Dionysus behaving as a manly lover.[13] Indeed, in the fragments he appears in his familiar comic role as the cowardly anti-hero, being the object of the satyrs' laughter, running for cover at the advent of the angry Greeks, and being handed over to them for humiliation and punishment at the end. His amorous adventures with Helen were probably cast in a comic and ironic light.

Since the standard representation of Dionysus in comedy is that of an effeminate buffoon, his first appearance on stage in *Frogs*, dressed in a saffron robe and *kothornoi*, would hardly be surprising for a fifth-century audience. Indeed, the first part of the play presents us with the familiar comic figure of Dionysus. What is surprising, however, and unique for the comic context, at least as far as the surviving evidence permits us to say, is that, as the play progresses, Dionysus is gradually transformed into a masculine and virile god. Let us trace this transformation.

Dionysus' shifting gender identity in *Frogs*

At the beginning of the play the comic incongruity of the Heraclean masculine overgarments that Dionysus enthusiastically sports in imitation of his half-brother's manly demeanor is made obvious by Heracles' reaction (42–8):[14]

> HP. οὔτοι μὰ τὴν Δήμητρα δύναμαι μὴ γελᾶν·
> καίτοι δάκνω γ' ἐμαυτόν· ἀλλ' ὅμως γελῶ.
> ΔΙ. ὦ δαιμόνιε, πρόσελθε· δέομαι γάρ τί σου.
> HP. ἀλλ' οὐχ οἷός τ' εἴμ' ἀποσοβῆσαι τὸν γέλων
> ὁρῶν λεοντῆν ἐπὶ κροκωτῷ κειμένην.
> τίς ὁ νοῦς; τί κόθορνος καὶ ῥόπαλον ξυνηλθέτην;
> ποῖ γῆς ἀπεδήμεις;

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12 See Bakola 2010, 94.
13 It has been suggested that Dionysus' character in the play is meant to satirise the supposedly philandering character of Pericles. See Schwarze 1971, 13–15; Rosen 1988, 52–3.
14 Transl. Henderson 2002.

> HER. By Demeter, I just can't stop laughing!
>   Even though I'm biting my lip, I can't help laughing.
> DI.   Come here, my man; I'd like a word with you.
> HER. I just can't get rid of this laughter.
>   It's the sight of that lionskin atop a yellow gown.
>   What's the idea? Why has a war club joined up with lady's boots?
>   Where on earth have you been?

The κροκωτός and κόθορνοι form part of Dionysus' regular attire with which the audience would be familiar. Thus laughter is caused by the inclusion of the lion skin[15] and the club in Dionysus' apparel, which are out of place since they do not match his otherwise effeminate appearance. Heracles' reaction to Dionysus' costume brings to mind the Relative's reaction in *Thesmophoriazusae* to Agathon's ludicrous appearance (both probably drawing on Aeschylus' *Edoni*). In *Thesmophoriazusae* the Relative, as the carrier of manhood in the scene, tries without success to discover a sign of Agathon's masculinity (141–2) and concludes that Agathon would enjoy being anally penetrated (157–8). Likewise, Dionysus' outfit in *Frogs* prompts mockery and the suggestion of sexual relations with the pathic Cleisthenes (48–51):

> HP.   ποῖ γῆς ἀπεδήμεις;
> ΔΙ.   ἐπεβάτευον Κλεισθένει.
> HP.   κἀναυμάχησας;
> ΔΙ.   καὶ κατεδύσαμέν γε ναῦς
>   τῶν πολεμίων ἢ δώδεκ' ἢ τρεῖς καὶ δέκα.
> HP.   σφώ;
> ΔΙ.   νὴ τὸν Ἀπόλλω.

> HER. Where on earth have you been?
> DI.   I was mounting Cleisthenes.
> HER. And did you do … battle?
> DI.   Sank some enemy ships too, twelve or thirteen of them.
> HER. You two?
> DI.   So help me Apollo.

The double entendres are unmistakable in the above passage.[16] The suggestion that Dionysus is engaging in erotic liaisons with Cleisthenes is reiterated later on,

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15 Lada-Richards (1999, 21–3) claims that the Heraclean lion skin is supposed to remind us of the Dionysiac spanning of the 'man and beast' polarity. I find it difficult to see a trace of Dionysus' affinity with the world of beasts in this particular context.

16 On the obscene use of ἐπιβατεύειν and ναυμαχεῖν see Henderson 1991, 162–3. The humour of the scene is enhanced by Dionysus' obliviousness to the sexual implications. Heracles is the one

when Dionysus expresses his 'deep longing'. Heracles repeatedly attempts to guess the object of Dionysus' longing, and when all of his questions receive a negative response, he revisits the earlier hint at Dionysus' sexual encounter with Cleisthenes, articulating it clearly this time (58: ξυνεγένου τῷ Κλεισθένει; 'Did you do it with Cleisthenes'). Dionysus dismisses the idea as a joke (59: μὴ σκῶπτέ μ᾽, ὦδέλφ᾽· 'Don't tease me, brother'). The humorous implication may be that Cleisthenes, as an effeminate pathic, could not attract Dionysus' attention. Instead, Dionysus longs for Euripides, who will satisfy his need for an 'active' lover, while he will occupy the role of the passive *erōmenos* (66–70):[17]

ΔΙ.	τοιουτοσὶ τοίνυν με δαρδάπτει πόθος
	Εὐριπίδου.
HP.	καὶ ταῦτα τοῦ τεθνηκότος;
ΔΙ.	κοὐδείς γέ μ᾽ ἂν πείσειεν ἀνθρώπων τὸ μὴ οὐκ
	ἐλθεῖν ἐπ᾽ ἐκεῖνον.
HP.	πότερον εἰς Ἅιδου κάτω;
ΔΙ.	καὶ νὴ Δί᾽ εἴ τί γ᾽ ἔστιν ἔτι κατωτέρω.

DI.	Well, that's the kind of longing that's eating away at me for Euripides.
HER.	You mean, dead and all?
DI.	And nobody on earth can persuade me not to go after him.
HER.	Even down to Hades?
DI.	By heaven, even lower than that.

As Sfyroeras (2008) has noted, the feminine costume that the god wears upon his first entrance sets the tone for the rest of the play in which Dionysus primarily acts the female part, while Euripides is expected – but fails – to play the male hero. The word πόθος signifies a longing for someone who is absent, but, most importantly, it conforms to traditional gender roles: the person who feel the πόθος is portrayed as the helpless subject, reduced to immobile passivity, waiting for the object of their longing who may actively take the initiative to appear.[18] Thus, the choice of the word πόθος first denotes a sexual longing, but also the

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to suggest that Dionysus behaves as the active lover in this scenario but Dionysus does not even register the hint at vulgar insinuation (possibly because he cannot visualise himself as the 'mounter').

17 70: κατωτέρω may carry sexual connotations here.

18 For πόθος denoting a longing for a strong male presence and for further examples, see Sfyroeras 2008, 302–3. Funnily enough, though, here it is Dionysus who springs to action and descends to the underworld, like another Orpheus, in search for Euripides, for the sake of the advancement of the plot.

kind of desire that feminises those who have it. Dionysus also uses the word ἵμε-ρος (59), the kind of desire that requires immediate satisfaction.[19]

The sexual vocabulary persists further below (92–7):

ΔΙ. ἐπιφυλλίδες ταῦτ' ἐστὶ καὶ στωμύλματα,
χελιδόνων μουσεῖα, λωβηταὶ τέχνης,
ἃ φροῦδα θᾶττον, ἢν ἅπαξ χορὸν λάβῃ,
μόνον **προσουρήσαντα** τῇ τραγῳδίᾳ.
γόνιμον δὲ ποιητὴν ἂν οὐχ εὕροις ἔτι
ζητῶν ἄν, ὅστις ῥῆμα γενναῖον λάκοι.

DI. Those are cast-offs and empty chatter, choirs of swallows, wreckers of their art, who maybe get a chorus and are soon forgotten, after their single **piss** against Tragedy. But if you look for a **potent** poet, one who could utter a lordly phrase, you won't find any left.

In antiquity fertility was strongly bound up with potency.[20] Tragedy, here personi-fied, is in dire need of a 'potent' poet who will impregnate her and will produce a noble offspring. But, according to Dionysus, all contemporary tragic poets lack masculine generative power, so much so that on being granted a 'date' with trage-dy, they can only produce piss and not semen.[21] By extension, it is Dionysus, as the god of tragedy, who is in desperate need of a potent and fertile poet, a role that only Euripides can fulfil.

Dionysus' effeminacy, coupled with discomfort and aversion to hard work, becomes more evident throughout the frogs' choral part. When forced by Charon to row, he proves unfit for the activity – hardly surprising for someone who has declared (127) he is not (even) the walking type (197–204):

ΧΑ. κάθιζ' ἐπὶ κώπην. εἴ τις ἔτι πλεῖ, σπευδέτω.
οὗτος, τί ποιεῖς;
ΔΙ.   ὅ τι ποιῶ; τί δ' ἄλλο γ' ἢ
ἵζω 'πὶ κώπην, οὗπερ ἐκέλευές με σύ;
ΧΑ. οὔκουν καθεδεῖ δῆτ' ἐνθαδί, γάστρων;
ΔΙ.   ἰδού.
ΧΑ. οὔκουν προβαλεῖ τὼ χεῖρε κἀκτενεῖς;
ΔΙ.   ἰδού.
ΧΑ. οὐ μὴ φλυαρήσεις ἔχων, ἀλλ' ἀντιβὰς
ἐλᾷς προθύμως.

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19 See Weiss 1988.

20 As Dover (1993b, 202) remarks, 'lacking the microscope, the Greeks did not know that infer-tility is compatible with high potency'.

21 Both Dover (1993b, 202) and Sommerstein (1996, 165) put forward this suggestion.

ΔΙ.   κᾆτα πῶς δυνήσομαι
ἄπειρος, ἀθαλάττωτος, ἀσαλαμίνιος
ὢν εἶτ᾽ ἐλαύνειν;

CH.   Sit to the oar. If anyone else is sailing, hurry it up.
         Hey you there, what do you think you're doing?
DI.   Who me? Just sitting on the oar, right where you told me.
CH.   No, sit over here, pot-belly.
DI.   All right.
CH.   Now put out those hands and stretch your arms.
DI.   All right.
CH.   Quit playing around! Put your feet against the stretcher and start rowing, pronto.
DI.   Now how will I manage that? I'm unexperienced, unseamanlike,
         no Salaminian, and I'm supposed to row?

Sailing and propelling a ship (ἐλαύνειν), being a passenger or mounting a ship (ἐπιβατεύειν), plying the sculls (ἐκτείνω) and fighting a sea battle (ναυμαχεῖν) are commonly used in this play and elsewhere in Aristophanes as metaphors for the sexual act.[22] I might not be widely off the mark to read the above nautical metaphors in this light too. Dionysus professes himself as inexperienced at sea: he does not know how to use his oar and where to ply it, he cannot occupy the right rowing position, and, in general, he is unable to ἐλαύνειν: if the oar alludes to the penis, and the act of sailing and oar-thrusting to occupying the active and dominant position in sex, the idea conveyed is that Dionysus cannot achieve an erection or be an 'active' lover. He is sitting *on* the oar like sitting on a dildo.[23] This also strengthens, in retrospect, our suspicion that Dionysus was a 'bottom' when he was 'fighting the sea battle' with Cleisthenes.

The idea of Dionysus' passivity is perhaps enhanced by the obscenities pronounced during the frogs' choral section, which are scatological and based on the motif of the babbling arse-hole. Dionysus, fat and unaccustomed to exertion, answers the frogs' refrain by breaking wind (221–2, 236–8, 254–5). Dionysus' arse opens in sympathetic relationship with the frogs' φάρυγξ; the sound emitted from both apertures has been viewed as a satire of inferior poets, to which I will turn shortly. Another layer of homosexual humour, however, can perhaps be detected πρωκτός, which is used here for Dionysus (237), is the *vox propria* for the anus in comedy and is very common in jokes against homosexuals. As Henderson (1991,

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22 *Av.* 1254–6; *Eccl.* 37–9, 1091; *Lys.* 674–5; *Ran.* 432–4.
23 This dramatisation can be seen in various modern performances (e.g. in Tsianos' 1998 production in Epidaurus).

201) notes, 'its low tone assured that even in the absence of a joke its mere mention could be counted on to raise a laugh'. Moreover, expressions of opening/gaping orifices (εὐρυπρωκτία, χάσκειν) are most commonly employed for the abuse of pathics, the idea being that the widened state of their πρωκτοί facilitates the emission of sounds and feces (cf. *Eq.* 639, 1381; *Nub.* 1088–94). By contrast, virile, masculine, heterosexual men have narrow or closed πρωκτοί, muscled well by exercise rather than buggery.[24]

The competition between Dionysus and the frogs is also important on a literary level. It has been suggested that the croaking of the frogs anticipates the tragic contest which takes place later in the play and may function as a parody of the music of the dithyrambic poets[25] and Euripides' 'new music'.[26] If this is the case, then by presenting Dionysus as the winner of the croaking contest, Aristophanes foreshadows Aeschylus' later victory over Euripides. This might be the first sign of Dionysus' link with Aeschylus: like the thunderous Aeschylus (814: ἐριβρεμέτας), Dionysus will 'vanquish' his enemies with his bellowing (266: ὑμῶν ἐπικρατήσω τῷ κοάξ). Moreover, if Aristophanes does indeed use this competition to refer to the contest between himself and Phrynichus at the Lenaea in 405 BCE, as has been suggested,[27] he is also likening the character of Dionysus to himself, as they are both the winners of their respective contests: the comic *agōn* in the world of the living, and the tragic *agōn*, of Euripides and Aeschylus, in the land of the dead. This is the first instance that the three figures, Dionysus, Aeschylus, and Aristophanes, are connected. This connection is intensified in the parodos of the chorus of the initiates: the chorus addresses Iacchus, the god that by Aristophanes' time was identified with Dionysus, with the adjective πολυτίμητος (324), which is also used later on by Dionysus to address Aeschylus (851).

Dionysus' links with the genre of comedy become progressively stronger: by touching on the themes of political and poetic debasement (353–71), the Mystae introduce into the play an element of seriousness that is consistent with the later high pronouncements of Aeschylus on the responsibilities of the poet regarding the city (1053–6). Furthermore, the chorus give their credentials and establish their identity: they are not just Dionysiac initiates, but initiates in the Dionysiac

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24 Cf. Aeschylus' complaint against Euripides that his vain chatter has emptied the wrestling schools and worn down the men's rumps by sitting, not rowing (1069–71). On this see further below.

25 Hubbard 1991, 202.

26 Slater 2002, 182; Worman 2014, 212–17, especially 216 on the vivacious elements of the frogs' song which connect it with 'new music'. For connections to Euripides and 'new music' see Campbell 1984, Moorton 1989, and D'Angour in this volume.

27 Demand 1970; Campbell 1984.

mysteries of comedy. They pronounce warnings against those who do not appreciate or offend the spirit of comedy (356–8, 366–8). χοροῖσιν (354), Μουσῶν (356) and ἐχόρευσεν (356) could refer to both tragedy and comedy, but the reference to Cratinus (357) points in the direction of comedy. Most importantly, the name of Dionysus is mentioned in connection with comedy: comic ridicule takes place in Dionysus' ancestral rites (368: κωμῳδηθεὶς ἐν ταῖς πατρίοις τελεταῖς ταῖς τοῦ Διονύσου), while Cratinus, the bull eater, (357: ταυροφάγος) is assimilated to Dionysus. Significantly, ταυροφάγος was one of Dionysus' cultic epithets.[28]

The proclamation of the chorus that clownish sayings (358: βωμολόχοις ἔπεσιν) should be avoided harks back to Dionysus' earlier complaint that vulgar, hackneyed jokes age him (16–18). In contrast, the chorus of initiates now sings of the rites' rejuvenating effect, which points to the rejuvenation of Dionysus himself as a character in the play (346–50: ἀποσείονται δὲ λύπας | χρονίους τ᾽ ἐτῶν παλαιῶν ἐνιαυτοὺς | ἱερᾶς ὑπὸ τιμῆς, 'And old men's knees are aleap as they shed their cares and the longdrawn seasons of ancient years, owing to your worship').[29] Thus, Dionysus' bonds with both Aeschylus and Aristophanic comedy are manifestly intensified and consolidated during this choral section.

Significantly, as his bonds with comedy and Aeschylus become more noticeable, Dionysus appears also to gain his sexual potency: he is aroused at the sight of an attractive female dancer (414–15);[30] and in lines 513–25, enthralled by the maid's promises of the young, 'freshly plucked' girl pipers and dancers at the dinner with Persephone, he rushes to assume the persona of Heracles once more. It is perhaps significant that the promise of female company is made to Xanthias/ Heracles and not Dionysus/Heracles: the implication may be that while Dionysus could pass as Heracles as far as his other deeds and misdemeanours are concerned (such as the dog-rustling in the scene with Aeacus, and his strong appetite in the scene with the innkeepers), he cannot yet give a convincing impression of Heracles when it comes to his manliness and sexual potency.[31] But it is suggestive that, even as part of a fantasy scenario, Dionysus visualises himself as a scopophiliac, stimulated by the sight of heterosexual sex (542–8).

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28 Cf. Soph. fr. 668, and Euripides' *Bacchae* where Dionysus is called a god with bull's horn (ταυρόκερων θεόν, 100). For Dionysus in the form of the bull see Dodds 1960, xxvii–xx, 79, 197.
29 Cf. in Eur. *Bacch.* 248–369 the rejuvenating effect of Dionysus on Cadmus and Teiresias, which Pentheus finds laughable. See Riu 1999, 66–7, 116.
30 Technically a male dancer in feminine attire, but in comedy attention is never drawn to the actor's body beneath the comic costume.
31 See Slater 2002, 188–90 on costume and its problematic relationship with the wearer in these scenes.

While Dionysus begins to discover his male potency, Euripides during the *agōn* proves unable to fulfil the task of the manly lover, as Dionysus initially envisaged. Euripides' style proves to lack virile force and his art exhibits feminine, sensual characteristics. The tension between male and female genders is acted out, more generally, on stage through the antagonism between the rival poets in the *agōn*.

The agōn

In the *agōn* Aeschylus claims to operate within the male domain of fighting and war. His plays have inspired the Athenians to competitive emulation of the warriors they depicted and have prepared them to meet military threats: they breathe spears, helmets and other armaments, and are endowed with a fighting spirit, prepared to defeat their opponents (1013–17, 1019–22, 1025–7). The Aristophanic Aeschylus may be associated with the military ethos of Homer in the *Iliad*. Rosen (2004), in his consideration of the relationship between the competition in *Frogs* and the contest of Homer and Hesiod, argues that Aeschylus is associated with Homer because of their preference for martial themes, while Euripides is a Hesiodic figure due to his interest in house economics. Although I do not share Rosen's belief in the existence of remarkably similar structures between the contests, the association of Aeschylus with Homer[32] is indeed invited by the character himself (1030–6):

> AI.   ταῦτα γὰρ ἄνδρας χρὴ ποιητὰς ἀσκεῖν. σκέψαι γὰρ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς
>   ὡς ὠφέλιμοι τῶν ποιητῶν οἱ γενναῖοι γεγένηνται.
>   Ὀρφεὺς μὲν γὰρ τελετάς θ' ἡμῖν κατέδειξε φόνων τ' ἀπέχεσθαι,
>   Μουσαῖος δ' ἐξακέσεις τε νόσων καὶ χρησμούς, Ἡσίοδος δὲ
>   γῆς ἐργασίας, καρπῶν ὥρας, ἀρότους· ὁ δὲ θεῖος Ὅμηρος
>   ἀπὸ τοῦ τιμὴν καὶ κλέος ἔσχεν πλὴν τοῦδ', ὅτι χρήστ' ἐδίδαξεν,
>   τάξεις, ἀρετάς, ὁπλίσεις ἀνδρῶν;

> AES.   That's the sort of thing that poets should practice. Just consider how beneficial the noble poets have been from the earliest times. Orpheus revealed mystic rites to us, and taught us to abstain from killings; Musaeus instructed us on oracles and cures for diseases; Hesiod on agriculture, the seasons for crops, and ploughing. And where did the godlike

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32 Not unknown in antiquity; Ath. 8.347e: ... τὸ τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ λαμπροῦ Αἰσχύλου, ὃς τὰς αὐτοῦ τραγῳδίας τεμάχη εἶναι ἔλεγεν τῶν Ὁμήρου μεγάλων δείπνων ('... the comment by the noble and distinguished Aeschylus, who used to claim that his own tragedies were steaks cut from Homer's great banquets', transl. Olson 2008).

Homer get respect and renown if not by giving good instruction in the tactics, virtues, and weaponry of men?

In this passage Aeschylus explicitly aligns his poetic agenda with Homer: the educative value of his plays consists in the promotion of military arts and virtues.

Particular attention should be paid to the recurrent theme of anger in the representation of Aeschylus throughout the competition: Aeschylus constantly displays an angry disposition while the warriors in his creations are also full of anger (856–7, 922, 928, 992–9, 1007, 1020). The portrayal of Aeschylus as angry and loud has been thought by one scholar to evoke the comic stereotype of demagogues, as exemplified by the Paphlagonian in *Knights*.[33] I would be more inclined, though, to place the anger of Aeschylus in a Homeric context: anger is the central theme of the *Iliad*, with the first line of the epic famously announcing the μῆνις of Achilles as its subject. Many other heroes in the *Iliad* experience attacks of anger, such as Agamemnon, Diomedes, Priam and Paris. Anger permeates the divine sphere as well. As Harris (2001, 136–7) notes, the gods' frequent outbursts of anger in the epic reflects the way that very powerful beings were expected to behave. In an honour-conscious world it seems entirely natural that the heroes should be irascible, and that the greatest hero should be the most irascible. Aeschylus' anger in *Frogs* associates him with the heroic world of Homer and places him firmly in the manly sphere of warfare. He steadfastly denies any links with the world of women and romantic themes (1044).

By contrast, Euripides seems to operate in the domestic sphere which is considered the domain of women. If Aeschylus opts for mighty warriors and fights in the battlefield, in Euripides' plays, as represented by Aristophanes, the only fights to take place are situated within the household and involve lost pieces of crockery, broken plates, and half-eaten food (971–88).[34] His idle chatter leads young men away from the gymnasia and makes them soft chatterboxes (1069–71), all womanlike qualities.

Euripides suffers further emasculation by the reference to his wife's infidelity, who followed the example of many of his tragic heroines. Aeschylus and Dionysus are quick to point out the irony (1045–9). According to Lada-Richards (1999, 261–4), Euripides is symbolically transformed into a woman, as cuckoldry has a feminising effect in the eyes of the community, where male honour depends

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33 Scharffenberger 2007; hinted at also by Heiden 1991.
34 Dionysus (980–8) trivialises Euripides' statement that he taught the Athenians good house management by taking it down to the level of the housekeeper, and not the householder, thus associating Euripides even more strongly with the female domain.

upon the behaviour of the women. Brandes (1982, 230) notes that 'in the Mediterranean code of sexual honour a wife's infidelity can deprive her husband of his masculinity and even go so far as to convert him symbolically into a member of her own sex'. This may be rather a stretch; but, by being implicated in the feminine discourse of the household Euripides verges upon femininity.

Euripides' most spectacular failure in exhibiting male potency occurs in the ληκύθιον-scene. Many interpretations have been put forward about the 'little oil flask' of Euripides,[35] but I would like to focus on the sexual implications it may carry. By means of the double entendre in ληκύθιον, Aeschylus succeeds in emasculating, one by one, Euripides' male heroes and, by extension, the tragedian himself. The words λήκυθος and ληκύθιον suggest ληκᾶν, a slang word for sexual intercourse, while ληκώ denotes the sexual organ.[36] According to Dover's rather graphic description, one common type of λήκυθος looks remarkably like a penis, and the use to which a λήκυθος was normally put meant that it dispensed small quantities of thick fluid. Thus Euripides' loss of his little oil flask may imply his inability to sustain an erection. This joke, as Whitman (1969, 111–12) notes, should be connected with Dionysus' preference for a γόνιμος poet, and therefore suggests that Euripides is to be demoted to the ranks of the young poets who have lost their potency.

Dionysus seems to be particularly annoyed with the reference to his name in connection with the ληκύθιον-joke (1211–14). Indeed, during the *agōn*, while it becomes clear that Euripides cannot perform the role of the manly lover, Dionysus directs his mockery against people who are reminiscent of his earlier effeminacy and passivity. In lines 1036–8 he is making fun of the clumsy Pantacles who is not able to fasten his helmet properly, while in lines 1089–97 his object of ridicule is a runner whose puffing, panting, and breaking wind remind us of Dionysus' earlier toil while rowing. Thus Dionysus takes a distance from his earlier behaviour and draws closer to Aeschylus.

The appearance of Euripides' Muse may be suggestive in this respect. The meaning of Dionysus' exclamation αὕτη ποθ' ἡ Μοῦσ' οὐκ ἐλεσβίαζεν, οὔ (1308: 'This Muse once, well, she never gave throat to a Lesbian tune!') has been debated. It may suggest that the Muse cannot form part of the Lesbian tradition of great lyric poetry, as her music is not elegant and dignified.[37] But there is a second layer to the joke: λεσβιάζω also means to perform fellatio,[38] which indicates that

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35 For a summary of the debate see Sommerstein 1996, 263–5.

36 Dover 1993b, 338–9.

37 Dover 1993b, 351–2; Sommerstein 1996, 274.

38 Henderson 1991, 183–4.

the Muse is so ugly that any man would refuse to have sex with her.[39] Another interpretation has been proposed by Borthwick (1994): the allusion to the 'songs of prostitutes and dance music' (1301: πορνῳδιῶν, 1302: Καρικῶν αὐλημάτων, 1303: χορειῶν), followed by a joke about Cyrene (1328), a notorious and versatile prostitute, may lead us to infer that Aristophanes' Muse was the ancient equivalent of a 'go-go girl', one of the dancers we see depicted on Athenian vases. In this light, Dionysus' comment should be interpreted as 'that muse is surely no lesbian'.[40] The πούς which Dionysus is invited to contemplate at the end of the Muse's dance[41] could refer both to a metrical foot, but also the Muse's foot, which she salaciously displays onstage. No matter which interpretation we choose to follow – the Muse is an attractive but extravagant young woman or an old, ugly one – the fact remains that Dionysus is invited to take a sexual interest in her, even if just to deride her for not being 'fit for the job'.

The *agōn* progresses to the weighing scales and then to the final round, which shifts the theme of the contest to politics, as the salvation of the city is now bound up with the continuation of the dramatic festivals (1417–21). It is not just tragedy anymore that is in need of a potent poet, but the city as well is in difficult labour (1423: ἡ πόλις γὰρ δυστοκεῖ) and yearns for a competent politician, like Alcibiades (1425: ποθεῖ μέν, ἐχθαίρει δέ, βούλεται δ᾽ ἔχειν, 'She yearns for him, detests him, and wants to have him'). Significantly, Aeschylus appears to endorse Alcibiades (1431–2) – an individual, let us not forget, notorious for his hyper-sexual activity.[42] In many ways Alcibiades comes very close to the persona of an Aristophanic hero, like Dicaeopolis in *Acharnians*, the Paphlagonian in *Knights*, and Peisetaerus in *Birds*.[43] He is hubristic and extravagant, commits a number of private and public crimes,[44] and yet he acts as the people's champion and calls others enemies of the *dēmos*. Aeschylus' (reluctant) endorsement of Alcibiades may

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39 Sommerstein (1996, 274) believes the Muse is supposed to be an old and decrepit woman. Dover (1993b, 351) leaves room for an ugly younger woman.

40 For this meaning of λεσβιάζειν cf. Anacr. fr. 358 *PMG* with Marcovich 1983.

41 *Ran.* 1323–4: – ὁρᾷς τὸν πόδα τοῦτον; – ὁρῶ. / – τί δαί; τοῦτον ὁρᾷς; – ὁρῶ (– 'Notice that foot? – I do. / – And what about that one? – I do.'). Dover 1993b and Wilson 2007 give the first ὁρῶ to Euripides and the second to Dionysus, while Sommerstein 1996 believes that both questions, asked by Aeschylus, are addressed to Dionysus. Henderson 2002 gives the two replies to Euripides.

42 For Alcibiades' transgression of sexual norms and the desire he inspired in the *dēmos* see Wohl 2002, 124–70.

43 This may be one of the reasons why Alcibiades was rarely satirised in comedy.

44 Cf. the perplexity about the *dēmos*' attitude to Alcidiabes' transgressions expressed in [Andocides], *Against Alcibiades*.

be another indication of how Dionysus should vote: tragedy's needs should be aligned with those of the city. Dionysus turns from the effeminate model of Euripides to the masculine one of Aeschylus, while he is able to identify the male element in himself: a virile, lion-like man is the answer.

Dionysus *vs* Pentheus

In the last part of my chapter, I will attempt a brief comparative reading between *Frogs* and *Bacchae*. Most studies have focussed on the relationship between the tragic and the comic Dionysus in these plays,[45] but the comparison I wish to pursue is that of Dionysus and Pentheus.

A psychoanalytic reading of *Bacchae* shows that the play presents a son's fantasy-solution to his Oedipal rivalry with his father, which ends with the affirmation of the reality principle, the impossibility of the infantile fantasies of a union with the mother.[46] Pentheus strives – and fails – to reach sexual maturity. In the absence of the biological father Echion, the grandfather Cadmus functions as the paternal figure, but a gentle and rather subdued one, whom Pentheus mistreats and verbally abuses (253–4, 343–6).[47] His hostility towards the maenads, who, led by Agave and her sisters, are surrogates for the desired mother, is mingled with sexual fascination. More accurately, his resentment of the women is based on his conviction that they perform lewd acts in the mountains with men (221–5), or with the stranger himself (236–8), who is a wrecker of marriage (354); rites in darkness surely indicate 'funny business' (487); the women are nesting like birds in the grip of love (957– 8). And yet the messenger reports that the women's rites are chaste (686: σωφρόνως) and have nothing to do with Aphrodite (687–8), and stresses the invalidity of Pentheus' statements (686: οὐχ ὡς σὺ φῄς, 'Not, as you maintain').[48] Pentheus, however, cannot tolerate being disrespected by women (785–6: οὐ γὰρ ἀλλ' ὑπερβάλλει τάδε, | εἰ πρὸς γυναικῶν πεισόμεσθ᾽ ἃ πάσχομεν, 'No, it's beyond all bearing if we endure what these women are doing to us!'; cf. 842); he threatens to sacrifice them (796) and calls for his armour (809), only to don a feminine dress in

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45 See, for instance, Foley 1980.

46 For this interpretation I rely heavily on Segal 1978a, 1978b and 1997, 159–214.

47 Perhaps physically too: Pentheus' outbursts (253–4: οὐκ ἀποτινάξεις κισσόν; οὐκ ἐλευθέραν | θύρσου μεθήσεις χεῖρ᾽, ἐμῆς μητρὸς πάτερ, 'Shake off that ivy, grandfather, and free your hand of that wand!'; and 343: οὐ μὴ προσοίσεις χεῖρα, 'Keep your hands to yourself') are probably accompanied by the relevant gestures.

48 Transl. Kovacs 2003.

the end. He is eager to spy on the women, but prefers them immobilised (816: σιγῇ δ᾽ ὑπ᾽ ἐλάταις καθημένας, 'sitting quietly under the fir trees').

Pentheus thus oscillates between an unhealthy interest in the maenads and attraction for the wonderful stranger. His fascination with Dionysus' looks (453–60) is heavily loaded with sexual tension and jealousy: he visualises the stranger's blonde, scented locks (235), then threatens to put a stop to the tossing of the locks by cutting off the stranger's head (235–41), while the first punishment he inflicts on him is to cut off his 'delicate locks' (493: ἁβρόν βόστρυχον). Eventually, the homosexual eroticism progresses to effeminacy: his initial reluctance to don a female dress gives way to persistent questioning about the attire (828–34), and later on a fussy concern with his costume and hair (925–38), and, in general, enthrallment with his feminine appearance. In Segal's words, there is an unresolved tension 'between delusions of phallic potency on the one hand and rejection of his masculinity in submission to the mother (dressing as a maenad) on the other hand'.[49] Pentheus' inability to confront and accept his full male sexuality takes the form of the regressive mode of voyeurism, through his fascination with spying on the maenads. This movement can be compared to the voyeurism of Dionysus in *Frogs*, when he spies on the chorus of the initiates.

Yet the end of the heroes' quest is very different: in Pentheus' case the tension between sexual repression (which manifests itself in feminisation, concealment, and submission) and delusions of phallic potency is 'resolved' with his symbolical castration and actual dismemberment by his mother. Pentheus fails to reach sexual maturity and retreats back to a state of infancy, as he longs to be held in his mother's arms (968–70). When his fantasies of reunion with the mother figure are acted out, he is led to his death.[50] Conversely, Dionysus completes a successful transition to masculinity, experiences a symbolical rebirth, and leads the city to its revival.[51] Both Pentheus in *Bacchae* and Dionysus in *Frogs* strive to reach sexual maturity, and the success or failure of this quest determines the fate of their respective cities: Dionysus' identification with the male element in himself leads to the choice of the manly Aeschylus over the effeminate Euripides, and to the salvation of Athens (1418–21). By contrast, Pentheus' failure to make the initiatory crossing to full maturity leads to the demise both of the royal house and

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49 Segal 1978a, 140.

50 Segal 1978a, 140–1; 1997, 205.

51 Kay 1985 suggests that *Frogs* echoes the myth of the god's descent to Hades to rescue his mother Semele: 'If Dionysus cannot achieve sexual maturity as the masculine element, his attempted union with her will end in his own death' (184). However, the mother figure does not seem to play any role in *Frogs*, so I would be reluctant to stretch the comparison here between Pentheus and Dionysus.

the city. While in *Frogs* Athens' barrenness and difficult childbirth seem to be resolved at the end of the play, the closing image of *Bacchae* reeks of sterility: the two survivors, both past the age of childbirth, cannot regenerate new life. They can only commemorate a death as they put together Pentheus' body for the last rites (1298–1300).

In this respect, Dionysus may be considered as an inverted (and more successful) model of Pentheus, who is progressively deprived of every aspect of his masculine identity and, by failing miserably to reach sexual maturity, leads the city to its demise.

<div align="center">⋆</div>

Dionysus' growth into sexual maturity in *Frogs* is intrinsically linked to the salvation of the city and his recognition as the god of comedy primarily. Dionysus gradually divests himself of his effeminate ways and identifies with the masculine art of Aeschylus. Eventually he emerges as the typical male Aristophanic hero, who experiences sexual rejuvenation at the end of the play. As he exhibits signs of male potency, his bonds with comedy – a genre heavily prejudiced against effeminacy and homosexuals – are consolidated. Thus it becomes obvious that the resolution of *Frogs* must be achieved not only in literary-critical and political terms but also in sexual ones. It has been suggested that comedy is strangely absent from the *agōn* in this play. It is very much present, however, at the resolution of the play. If tragedy is to be associated with the feminine, as Zeitlin (1985 and 1996) has famously suggested, we could perhaps argue, in the light of our findings in *Frogs* and the contrast between the tragic model of Pentheus and the comic model of Dionysus, that comedy is a mimesis fundamentally masculine in its action.

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