

DIDASKALIA 

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Didaskalia (διδασκαλία) is the term used since ancient times to describe the work a playwright did to teach his chorus and actors the play. The official records of the dramatic festivals in Athens were the διδασκαλία. *Didaskalia* now furthers the scholarship of the ancient performance.

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DIDASKALIA
VOLUME 10 (2013)
TABLE OF CONTENTS

10.01	Remembering Kate Bosher 1974-2013 John Given	1
10.02	Review: Seneca's <i>Thyestes</i> at Barnard/Columbia Timothy Hanford	3
10.03	Review: Seneca's <i>Thyestes</i> at Barnard/Columbia Michael Goyette	6
10.04	Review: Euripides's <i>Iphigenia at Aulis</i> at Trent and Trinity Timothy Wutrich	10
10.05	Review: Combat Veterans, Neuroscience, and the Tragic Mask: Euripides's <i>Herakles</i> Natasha Mercouri	19
10.06	Conversation: About the Aquila <i>Herakles</i> at the Brooklyn Academy of Music Amy R. Cohen and John H. Starks, Jr.	22
10.07	Review: <i>The Odyssey on Angel Island</i> Al Duncan	32
10.08	Review: 49th Season of Classical Plays at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse: Sophocles's <i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i> and <i>Antigone</i>, and Aristophanes's <i>The Ecclesiazusae</i> Caterina Barone	44
10.09	Review: Sophocles's <i>Trachiniae</i> at the Festival of Epidaurus Vicky Manteli	47
10.10	Review: Aristophanes's <i>Lysistrata</i> at the Intiman Theatre Brett M. Rogers	51
10.11	Review: <i>The Paper Cinema's Odyssey</i> at the Battersea Arts Centre and <i>The Odyssey</i>, Creation Theatre and The Factory Stephe Harrop	55
10.12	Why Didaskalia?: The Language of Production in (and its Many Meanings for) Greek Drama Brett M. Rogers	62
10.13	Men In Drag Are Funny: Metatheatricality and Gendered Humor in Aristophanes Reina Erin Callier	70
10.14	Review: <i>Antigonick</i>: A new version of Sophocles's <i>Antigone</i> Eric Dugdale	80

Note

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Men In Drag Are Funny: Metatheatricality and Gendered Humor in Aristophanes

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Modern drag shows, plays, and movies such as *Tootsie*, *The Birdcage*, *White Chicks*, and *To Wong Foo* exploit to great effect the fact that men in drag—by which I mean men who cross-dress in a way that makes their gender-switching “transparent” and does not seek “to convince the audience of their authenticity”¹—are funny. Such works play on the incongruity of the male body in female costume in order both to transgress and to confirm gender norms while making the audience laugh.² Modern media are undeniably different from ancient Greek theater; nevertheless, the potential for a similar brand of gender-related humor is present in Aristophanes’s works, for it is generally agreed that men played all of the female roles.³ Yet this potential is rarely fulfilled; indeed, the productions of Aristophanic plays that I have seen followed *modern* convention by casting female actresses as female characters. There is no reason to suggest that such adaptations are somehow lacking because they follow modern convention (for surely, men in drag must have at least a slightly different connotation for us than they had for the ancient audience). It is fair to say, however, that our conventions diminish the “many possible experiences and meanings” generated by the ancient convention of male actors in female roles,⁴ and that modern scholarship, which has devoted so much study to issues of gender in Aristophanic comedy, would benefit from more discussion of the issue of “drag” in these works.⁵ In this paper, therefore, I will explore a few moments from *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Acharnians* in which the incongruity of a male actor in female costume, the “gap between biology (male actor) and culture (female character),” might have been “opened up” onstage—to humorous effect.⁶

An objection might be raised that the ancient audience would not have been sensitive to such incongruity, since the concept of male actors playing women was conventional. As Lauren Taaffe puts it, “the convention of male actors is usually dismissed as a practice accepted without further thought by audiences, actors, and playwrights alike.”⁷ On the other hand, she reminds us, “performance theorists...argue that any actor playing any role is recognized, remembered, and assessed by an audience; in addition, they claim that theatrical conventions are significantly recalled and manipulated in performance.”⁸ For Rabinowitz, this may have been especially the case with regard to gender, since “gender is especially prominent as an overt issue in the plays’ plots.”⁹ So the viewer of Euripides’s *Medea*, for example, may have sensed “the man in the woman,” on both the narrative and authorial levels, when *Medea* speaks and behaves in a surprisingly masculine fashion, so that both the masculine words spoken by the “female” character and the male actor’s body in the female costume in fact underline the fact that this is “no ordinary woman.”¹⁰

Though Rabinowitz’s discussion focuses on tragedy and the ramifications of transvestitism on the interpretation of gender issues,¹¹ it is surely fair to extend these points to comedy and the ramifications of drag on the interpretation of humor as well, especially given ancient comedy’s interest in exposing the unreality of theatrical conventions.

As Taaffe points out in her article on the *Ecclesiazusae*, for example, much of the extant artwork depicting theatrical performances suggests that comic costumes were distorted and exaggerated versions of their tragic counterparts, and that men in female costume still retained markers of their masculinity.¹² She concludes that “true-to-life representation seems not to have been the central aim of comic costumes and masks... A female mask worn by a padded actor in woman’s clothes emphasizes, in fact, the theatrical nature of the imitation.”¹³ The Apulian bell krater illustrating *Thesmophoriazusae* 750–755 (c. 370 BCE)

provides just one example of this phenomenon: the krater depicts Euripides's *Kinsman*, disguised as a woman, threatening the "child" (i.e., a bag full of wine) of one of the "real" women (Figure 1). The facial features on the mask of the "real" woman are distorted and remarkably similar to the facial features on the masks that we see in depictions of male characters in comedy, and the body padding that "she" wears exaggerates her shape. The iconographic tradition thus suggests that ancient comedy exposed and manipulated the theatrical conventions of costume. The extant texts support this argument, as they contain many convention-shattering references not only to costume but also to machinery, props, and theatrical personages.¹⁴



Figure 1: Apulian bell krater (c. 370 BC) illustrating *THESMOPHORIAZUSAE* 750–755. Martin von Wagner Museum der Universität Würzburg, Antiken-sammlung,

While this interest in exploiting convention is true of most—if not all—of Aristophanes's plays, I have chosen to investigate the *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazusae*, not the least because both contain *explicit* metatheatrical references to costume (*Ecclesiazusae* does, too, but Taaffe's work has already covered much of what I would say about cross-dressing in that work).¹⁵ When Dikaiopolis dresses as a beggar at *Acharnians* lines 410–480, he draws attention to the act of costuming while parodying a tragic performance (Euripides's *Telephos*):

δεῖ γὰρ με δόξαι πτωχὸν εἶναι τήμερον, εἶναι μὲν ὅσπερ εἰμι, φαίνεσθαι δὲ μῆ.
(Ach. 440–441)

"It is necessary for me to seem like a beggar today," he says, "to be who I am, but not to appear to be (who I am)." Dikaiopolis' beggar's guise only fools the internal audience until lines 593–595, and even before that, the illusion does not extend to the external audience, who know all along that he is not really a beggar. When the audience sees through the costume of Dikaiopolis-as-beggar, they are reminded of how transparent costuming can be. Scenes such as this one open the door for costume-related readings that take into account the actor's body in addition to the "character's body."¹⁶

As a specifically gender-related example of such transparency, in *Thesmophoriazusae* the character Agathon, the playwright, arrives on stage dressed in feminine garb and composing verses for a "female" chorus. He states (at lines 154–156) that "if someone composes masculine poems, this is present in the body by nature; but the things which we have not gotten (by nature), mimesis helps hunt these things down."¹⁷ In other words, dressing like a woman helps him compose verses that apply to a female character. These lines emphasize the contrast between what his body is by nature and what about him—his feminine costume—is *mimesis*. After the *Kinsman*'s initial confusion has passed, nobody thinks that Agathon is actually a woman; the male body—which belongs to both the character and to the actor—supersedes the costume. When his "female" chorus gives voice to a "masculine shout" (ἄρσενι βοῶ, line 125),¹⁸ the tension between body and costume is highlighted. Even while composing for female characters, Agathon cannot avoid the reality of his own voice (or the voices of the actors who will eventually sing his script). For Rabinowitz, this is an important factor in determining whether Greek actors tried to "pass" as women: while the heavily padded costume and mask may have been enough to conceal the physical markers of gender, "the voice was irreducible, undisguisable, and keyed to gender."¹⁹ Thus Agathon's chorus is a pointed joke: "male actors as women always remain male actors as women."²⁰

This joke is continued through the disguise and exposure of Euripides's *Kinsman*. The scene in which the *Kinsman* is dressed up as a woman not only provides a great deal of immediate comic relief but also sets

up his later exposure by the “women” at the Thesmophoria. Since the Kinsman’s disguise is fashioned by two tragic playwrights, Agathon and Euripides, its lack of success has been interpreted as criticism of tragedy’s failure to make male actors believable as female characters, while turning “a blind eye to comedy’s own involvement in the same charade.”²¹ But a comic playwright might relish the opportunity to exploit comedy’s faults for humor. If a male *character* being unconvincingly costumed as a woman was funny, a male *actor* being unconvincingly costumed might be funny, as well.²²

Of course, it is easiest to make this point when the character is disguised *on stage*. In Gold’s article on Plautus’ *Casina*, for example, she argues that Chalinus’ onstage transformation from man to “Casina” and the constant reminder through “self-conscious gestures, props, costumes, and language that this ‘she’ (Casina) is a he” means that the character Casina “did not exist, even for a dramatic moment.”²³ Because this character was *never* a woman to the audience, it is easier to see—and laugh at—the man in the woman’s costume. Still, Plautus’ play points to a central dramatic issue in Roman drama (and Greek drama before it): men trying to “pass” as women are funny, especially when their attempts are unsuccessful. The fact that plays such as Aristophanes’s *Thesmophoriazusae* and, later, Plautus’ *Casina* are able to draw so much humor from an explicit exposure of the man-beneath-the-woman suggests that the seeds of this humor were present even when the “women” were costumed offstage.²⁴

Let me now turn to an analysis of scenes that make use of this humor. The first scene has already been touched upon by Taaffe,²⁵ but it serves as a jumping-off point for subsequent discussion. In *Thesmophoriazusae*, both the women of the Thesmophoria and Kleisthenes, who is *himself* confused for a woman upon his first entrance—Καὶ γὰρ γυνή τις ἡμῖν ἐσπουδακυῖα προστρέχει—“For indeed some woman is hurrying toward us” (*Thesm.* 571–572)—ultimately confirm that the Kinsman is a man by pointing out his phallus, which quickly becomes involved in a game of hide-and-seek and is described in various ways by Kleisthenes.²⁶ The attention drawn to this undeniable physical marker of masculinity humorously taps into the audience’s knowledge that even the “real” women of the Thesmophoria, being male actors, would have such a marker as well, though perhaps somewhat more skillfully hidden than the Kinsman’s. The commentary by Austin and Olson, while thorough, has nothing to say on this matter; moreover, it seems to miss one possible interpretation of the joke in line 656, when the women say that they are going to hike up their chitons “in a good manly fashion” (εὖ κἀνδρείως).²⁷ Here the “female” chorus alludes to its own hidden masculinity after “exposing” a man who was dressed as a woman and before searching for other such “impostors.” Like the ἄρσενι βοῶν of Agathon, who is *admittedly* a man in female clothing, the adverb ἀνδρείως provides an intentional (on Aristophanes’s part) gap in the façade of femininity, an admission of the reality of the male body. Thus Austin and Olson’s explanation of the adverbial phrase εὖ κἀνδρείως as being “humorously applied to women” feels somewhat insufficient, since in truth it is also an adverbial phrase that is humorously applied to men *dressed* as women. To top it all off, the “women” of the Thesmophoria, having just exposed the Kinsman’s male identity and slyly admitted their own, proceed to look – as Taaffe puts it – “everywhere except at themselves”²⁸ for other men who are posing as women.

Another example of gender-incongruous humor occurs at *Thesmophoriazusae* lines 298–379 when the chorus leader, initiating the women’s assembly, speaks a parody of the curse against traitors used to open meetings in Athens. Her curse begins with traditional imprecations against those who support tyranny. Shortly thereafter, however, the masculine formula gives way to a feminine parody, in which crimes related to women are privileged beside those related to men. The parodic element is emphasized by the constant repetition that the “people,” the “harm,” and, later, the “council” belong to women rather than men:

εἴ τις ἐπιβουλεύει τι τῷ δήμῳ κακὸν
τῷ τῶν γυναικῶν ἢ 'πικηρυκεύεται

Εὐριπίδη Μήδοις τ' ἐπὶ βλάβῃ τινὶ
 τῇ τῶν γυναικῶν...
 ἀλλ' ὃ παγκρατὲς
 Ζεῦ ταῦτα κυρώσειας, ὥσθ'
 ἡμῖν θεοὺς παραστατεῖν
 καίπερ γυναιξὶν οὔσαις.
 ἄκουε πᾶς. ἔδοξε τῇ βουλῇ τάδε
 τῇ τῶν γυναικῶν... (*Thesm.* 331–373)

“If anyone plots any evil against the people,
the people of the women, or communicates
 with Euripides and the Medes with an eye
 toward some injury, an injury against the women...
 but, all-powerful Zeus,
 may you decree that the gods protect us,
even though we are women.
 Listen, everyone. This is the decree approved by the council,
the one of the women...”

Keep in mind that the Kinsman has *just* been disguised as a woman, so that the male-in-female-costume theme is still fresh in the audience’s minds. Though the Chorus establishes itself as being composed of well-born women (εὐγενεῖς γυναῖκες, line 330), the characters are using language that is usually reserved for male speakers and thus—perhaps unwittingly—hinting at the male body beneath their costumes. The frequent repetition of “the one of the women” and, in line 370, “even though we are women,” overcompensates for what is lacking physically. The humor of the scene derives not only from the idea of women appropriating masculine language for a feminine issue, but also from the idea of men dressed as women who use masculine language while insisting on their femininity.²⁹

In another example, when Kleisthenes runs onstage to inform the women of the presence of an impostor, the Chorus Leader—having initially mistaken Kleisthenes for a woman (see p. 6 above)—asks, “and how did he escape our notice being a man among women? (καὶ πῶς λέληθεν ἐν γυναιξὶν ὄν ἀνῆρ;)” - *Thesm.* 589. The very people expressing disbelief about a man’s ability to be disguised convincingly as a woman are also, we might realize, men disguised as women.

My final example from *Thesmophoriazusae* occurs when the Chorus, having stripped off the Kinsman’s clothes to reveal that he is a man, exclaims, “By Zeus! He does not have tits like we do (καὶ νῆ Δία τιθοῦς γ’ ὥσπερ ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἔχει)” - *Thesm* 640. Of course, the “tits” that they say they have are not real body parts, and their falseness could easily be emphasized, by (for example) physical manipulation by the actors (though Beare argues against such obvious interpretation).³⁰

This sort of physical humor may also occur in scenes where characters appear nude. It is not necessarily a given that men would have played the roles of nude women: according to Zweig, “older scholars” tend to support the interpretation that *hetairai* would have played these roles, while more modern scholars support the claim that these roles, too, were given to men in women’s clothing.³¹ Whatever the case, the purpose of this paper is not to argue that ancient practice preferred definitively one over the other. Rather, my goal is to explore passages in which the phenomenon of a male actor in female clothing could *potentially* add another layer of humor. Let us look at these scenes, then, keeping in mind the lack of realism in the exaggerated padding that—according to Henderson and others—might have constituted the “naked woman” costume.³² Thus when the naked dancing girl seduces the Scythian bowman

in *Thesmophoriazusae*, she would not have been as sexy—and not as female—as the Bowman insists. The falseness of the “female” body is emphasized in line 1185, when the Bowman uses the adjective *στέριπτο* to describe the dancing girl’s breasts. This adjective, the “Scythian” version of *στέριφος*, denotes “firm” (and perhaps therefore small) breasts, and thus may not be an unusual adjective with which to describe that particular region of a woman’s anatomy. However, it is notable that this adjective is used one other time in *Thesmophoriazusae*: at line 641, the Kinsman, a male disguised as a female, exclaims *στέριφη γάρ εἰμι κούκ ἐκύησα πώποτε* (“For I am barren and I have never been pregnant”). Here the context of the adjective suggests a translation of “barren,” but we must keep in mind that he is using this adjective to try to explain why his (ostensibly) feminine breast is so “firm” (i.e., small). The very fact that the Kinsman uses this adjective to describe his *male* chest, which clearly has *no* breasts, has repercussions, I believe, for the later scene, for we might see a potential joke in the way that the same adjective is used to describe the Kinsman’s admittedly-masculine chest and the chest of the dancing “girl.”

The potential humor of men dressed as naked women occurs in many Aristophanic plays, including the other play that I am investigating, *Acharnians*.³³ But I will focus on a more nuanced gender-related joke in *Acharnians*: the infamous piglet scene (lines 729–817). Here a starving Megarian comes to Dikaiopolis’ marketplace to sell his daughters as sacrificial pigs. Some interpretations of this scene focus on the humor in Aristophanes’ punning use of a word (*χοῖρος*) that can mean both “piglet” and “pussy,”³⁴ while others express indignation at the sexual objectification and degradation of girls who are pimped out by their father for food.³⁵ But the scene takes on another shade of meaning if we remember that the “girls” were really men.³⁶ The “girls” have just been costumed (and not very successfully) as pigs, so that the audience has been reminded of the transparency of costume. Moreover, the scene already relies on ambiguities for its humor: as Olson explains, “the girl’s identity is confused on two counts: she is both a piglet and the Meg.’s daughter, and she is both a ‘piglet’ and a ‘pussy.’”³⁷ The ambiguity of gender adds a third layer to the joke. This gender ambiguity is reinforced by the different genders of the word *χοῖρος* when it means ‘piglet’ vs. ‘pussy’ (which are feminine and masculine, respectively). Though distinctions of word gender may not seem important, given the mechanisms of the Greek language,³⁸ Aristophanes seems to play with both meaning and gender at lines 781–782:

Με. αὐτὰ ἴστί χοῖρος;
Δι. νῦν γε χοῖρος φαίνεται·
 ἀτὰρ ἐκτραφεῖς γε κύσθος ἔσται.

Megarian: Isn’t she a piglet?

Dikaiopolis: Now at least she seems like a piglet;
 but once grown she will be a cunt.

Since *αὐτὰ* refers to his daughter, who happens to be disguised as a pig, the Megarian seems to be using the feminine meaning of *χοῖρος*, “piglet.” Dikaiopolis’ first line gives no indication that the gender should be changed, and so the feminine meaning must still be inferred. Thus the masculine participle *ἐκτραφεῖς* in the next line comes as a surprise. The character who just one line before was female—both as a girl and as a *χοῖρος*—is suddenly referred to with a masculine participle. The gender confusion is fixed two words later with *κύσθος*, which makes clear that the *χοῖρος* Dikaiopolis mentioned was meant in the masculine and obscene sense, but for a moment the masculine participle stands without any referent except the subject of *φαίνεται*: the Megarian’s daughter. This play with the genders of words and their referents—easily emphasized in the oral and aural context of performance—may also hint at the masculine body beneath the female costume beneath the piggy costume.

Such an interpretation imbues *Acharnians* lines 785–787 with a similar gender ambiguity:

Δι. κέρκον οὐκ ἔχει.
Με. νέα γὰρ ἐστίν. ἀλλὰ δελφακουμένα
 ἐξεῖ μεγάλην τε καὶ παχεῖαν κήρυθράν.

Dikaiopolis: But she doesn't have a tail/penis.

Megarian: For she is young. But once she grows up she will have a big, thick, red one.

In these lines, Dikaiopolis complains that the “little piggy” doesn't have a tail, κέρκον, which is a word that has the additional meaning of “penis.” The Megarian explains it is because she is young, but when she grows up she will “have a big, thick, red one.” Olson explains this line by using “hold, accommodate” as a meaning for ἐξεῖ; i.e., when the young girl grows up, she will be able to accommodate a penis inside of her.³⁹ But the use of ἐξεῖ as “to have continuously” (as part of one's anatomy) would work, as well. Saying that this girl will grow up to have a large penis may be a nod towards the body of the actor. He may look like a girl now in his costume, but eventually he will return to a more masculine state.⁴⁰

It is likely that there are situations in which the female costume is meant to be convincing, where Aristophanes provides a more realistic depiction of women.⁴¹ How else can we explain, for example, the evenhanded characterization of Lysistrata and *Ecclesiazusae's* Praxagora? Taaffe, in fact, denies that characters such as Lysistrata and Praxagora are meant to be realistic women: “As twentieth-century readers, we should interpret *Ecclesiazusae* as a play which represents a comic stereotype of woman that reaffirmed the male power base of Athenian society.” She therefore claims that these roles must be played by men, and men who do not attempt to “pass” as women, at that.⁴² But as John Gibert suggests in his review of Taaffe's book (1995), there are certainly situations in which “Aristophanes's comic purposes are...sometimes better achieved if the illusion of ‘men playing women’ remains intact.” We might, then, concede that “a distinction must be made between non-illusionary and illusionary cross-dressers, those who call attention to their performance as women and those who do not.”⁴³ Plays with plots that explicitly bring issues of gender and costume to the fore—such as *Ecclesiazusae*, *Thesmophoriazusae*, and, to a lesser extent, *Acharnians*—might be seen as particularly appropriate venues for “non-illusionary” cross-dressing. Nevertheless, the potential for “men in drag” humor is everywhere, and a good director could easily utilize costume, gesture, voice, and blocking to emphasize this humor in performance.⁴⁴

notes

¹ Gold (1998) p. 19 n. 1.

² See Garber (1992) on the movie *Tootsie* for a discussion of the different ways in which we can interpret drag (pp. 6–9), and Robson on the role of incongruity in Aristophanic humor (2009: pp. 50–54).

³ There does seem to be some controversy regarding the role of mute, nude female characters, who may have been played by *hetairai* (Zweig 1992). I will return to this point in more detail later.

⁴ Rabinowitz (1998) p. 17.

⁵ For examples of scholarship that discuss gender in Aristophanic plays without reference to “drag,” see, for example, McClure 1999 and, specifically in reference to *Thesmophoriazusae*, Zeitlin 1996.

⁶ Rabinowitz (1998) p. 17.

⁷ Taaffe (1991) p. 91.

⁸ Taaffe (1991) p. 91.

⁹ Rabinowitz (1998) p. 4: “We could, of course, hold that, since in the theater every actor is pretending to be someone s/he is not, the phenomenon of cross-gendered performance was not significant, that the convention was invisible and without effect. That seems at least worthy of question since the ancient Greeks took gender differences as a framing dichotomy through which to interpret the world, and gender is especially prominent as an overt issue in the plays' plots.”

¹⁰ Rabinowitz (1998) p. 14.

¹¹ Rabinowitz is certainly not alone in being interested in the effect of transvestitism on gender issues. Bassi, for example, notes that “In general then, and again in contrast to male nudity, female clothing is traditionally a marker of the contradictory relationship between a woman’s inner being and her outer appearance” (1995: 6). For Rabinowitz and others, cross-dressing was (and still is) a way for men to maintain control over femininity by replacing women (1998: 9) and representing them by means of a masculine stereotype (Taaffe 1991: 107). See also Dolan (1992), Zeitlin (1996), and Bassi (1998).

¹² Taaffe (1991) pp. 94–97.

¹³ Taaffe (1991) p. 98; Beare (1954) represents an opposing viewpoint: he claims that none of the evidence regarding ancient costume is quite compelling enough to *prove* that the actors did not wear anything but “the dress of ordinary life” (74). However, this seems to be the minority viewpoint.

¹⁴ As at *Peace* lines 173–176, where “the actor playing Trygaeus addresses the crane operator not in character, but *in propria persona* as an actor in a play” (Robson 39) by complaining about the jerkiness of the *mēchanē*, or *Acharnians* 408 and *Thesmophoriazousae* 96 and 265, where reference is made to the *ekkyklēma*. Or when there is reference to playwrights (such as Euripides in *Thesmophoriazousae* and Aristophanes himself at *Acharnians* lines 377–382 and 628), judges (as at the end of the *Acharnians*), and choregoi (as at *Acharnians* lines 1154–1155). Taaffe notes, too, that in *Ecclesiazusae* the women “rehearse” their roles in the assembly using theatrical language, thus drawing attention to the idea of the play as a play (1991: 100).

¹⁵ Indeed, Rabinowitz cites both of these plays as evidence that tragic playwrights were thought to “get in character” (1998: 6).

¹⁶ As Compton–Engle terms the padding that actors wore (2003: 507–508).

¹⁷ ἀνδρεῖα δ’ ἦν ποῆι τις, ἐν τῷ σώματι/ἔνεσθ’ ὑπάρχον τοῦθ’. ἃ δ’ οὐ κεκτῆμεθα, / μίμησις ἦδ’ αὐτὰ συνθηρέθεται (*Thesm.* 154–156).

¹⁸ σέβομαι Λατώ τ’ ἄνασσαν/κίθαρίν τε ματέρ’ ὕμνων/ἄρσενι βοᾷ δοκίμων (*Thesm.* 123–125): “I honor both mistress Leto and the cithara, mother of esteemed songs, with a masculine shout.”

¹⁹ Rabinowitz (1998) p. 7.

²⁰ Taaffe (1993) p. 100.

²¹ Compton–Engle (2003) p. 523.

²² As Taaffe (1993) puts it, each of the intentional impersonations of women is unsuccessful, so that “we are reminded of the play as play and the representation of ‘real’ women is undermined” (94), so that neither “male characters who borrow the female figure or female language” nor “the ‘real’ women of the Thesmophoria” are successful (100).

²³ Gold (1998) 21–24.

²⁴ We might take as another Plautine example the figure of Alcmena in the *Amphitryo*. Her appearance onstage as a heavily pregnant woman is (as far as we know) unique in both Greek and Roman comedy. Interpretation of this unique situation has suffered from critics’ sentimentality, as a result of which she is often read as a highly serious and sympathetic character. Yet knowing that she was being played by a man in a mask and exaggerated body padding, and imagining “the male actor embracing this unusual role with gusto,” as the continual jokes about her condition suggest may have happened, makes her appear laughable (Christenson 2000: 37–39). The fact that such a joke is present in a play that identifies itself as tragicomedy (Christenson 2000: 24) may seem to support the interpretation of men-in-drag jokes as being somehow reliant on issues of genre. However, the explicit men-in-drag humor in *Casina* shows that transvestitism is not merely an issue present in paratragedy. At the very least, Alcmena in the *Amphitryo* shows that more implicit men-in-drag humor (so implicit that many modern scholars miss it entirely!) can potentially be emphasized through the actors’ performances.

²⁵ If I seem to draw rather heavily on Taaffe, it is because she is one of the few scholars who have conducted a systematic study of these issues.

²⁶ As Taaffe somewhat humorously puts it, “his phallus has been the center of attention from the moment when it was hidden to the moment when it was revealed” (1993: 93). Whether the “phallus” is a stage prop that is manipulated before the audience’s eyes or a hidden marker that is simply alluded to (as Bear 1954 contests) matters little to this interpretation; in fact, a hidden phallus would be quite effective as well, since it would make it impossible to distinguish the actor–playing–a–man who is disguised as a woman from the actors–playing–women who are disguised as women.

²⁷ Even Taaffe only calls this phrase “somewhat ironic,” which is a dramatic understatement, in my opinion.

²⁸ Taaffe p. 94. They also, she points out, do not look at the (probably all–male) audience.

²⁹ We might compare Taaffe's interpretation of the play on gender disguise that appears throughout the *Ecclesiazusae* (1991), which notes that the play ironically refers to the "women's" *chitons* in its sustained metatheatrical sporting (104).

³⁰ Beare 1954.

³¹ Nor does simply arguing that a man in woman's clothing would have been more *humorous* help us solve the issue. As Zweig suggests: "If the purpose of Old Comedy is to hold up for ridicule the topics it treats, we might prefer to opt for the padded male actor. But surely every subject and character of Old Comedy is not presented as being equal in kind or degree, and the role of these mute female characters differs significantly from that of most other characters. The characters that represent desirable abstractions, such as Treaties, Peace, or Reconciliation, would hardly be subject to the ridicule that a costumed male actor would naturally evoke" (79).

³² Henderson (1987: 195) describes the false-looking quality of female body padding. He continues: "false breasts and genitalia were as much a part of the fun as false phalloi."

³³ At *Acharnians* line 1198, for example, Dikaiopolis enters with a couple of naked prostitutes "most likely played by elaborately costumed men" (Olson 2002: 359), and possibly fondles their (false) breasts. We might also compare the Lampito scene in *Lysistrata*, in which the women ooh and aah while they feel Lampito's various firm and attractive body parts. If we imagine the scene being played by men dressed as women, we might see it as intended to rouse laughter rather than sexual desire.

³⁴ As Olson's commentary does.

³⁵ As Fisher p. 39: "[Dikaiopolis'] trade with the Megarian is grossly exploitative (though I cannot myself find much sympathy in the scene for the suffering Megarian forced to sell his daughters into slavery and sexual abuse for a bit of salt and garlic, rather than the idea that it is fun to laugh at those even worse off than yourselves)."

³⁶ Strangely, Taaffe ignores this aspect of the scene, despite her insistence (at the beginning of the chapter containing the discussion of *Acharnians*) that she's going to consider "any evidence in the text that points to the male actor playing the role of a female figure" (23).

³⁷ Olson p. 267.

³⁸ Nonetheless, O'Higgins suggests that the genders of words were often explicitly sexualized (thus the different biological functions of differently gendered abstract nouns in Hesiod), especially in comedy (2003: 119).

³⁹ Olson (2002) p. 271.

⁴⁰ A joke that may have additional meaning depending on the age of the actor playing the role of the piglet/girl.

⁴¹ Yet "It is perfectly possible for the audience of an 'illusionist' play to be at the same time emotionally involved in the action and in possession of its critical faculties" (Bain 1997, p. 6). In addition, as John Gibert suggests in his review of Taaffe's book (1995), there are certainly situations in which "Aristophanes's comic purposes are...sometimes better achieved if the illusion of 'men playing women' remains intact."

⁴² Taaffe (1991) p. 107.

⁴³ Gold (1998) p. 20. Although Gold is speaking about Roman comedy rather than Greek comedy, the same conventions are present, and—as Gold shows convincingly in her article—the same interest in exploiting these conventions for humor.

⁴⁴ It is fascinating—and indeed, somewhat puzzling—that this sort of humor translates so well into the sensibilities of our own time, especially since the root of such humor has been attributed not just to simple incongruity but to a kind of social aggression, an attempt of sorts to put women "in their place." The most famous proponent of this view is Henri Bergson, in *Le rire* (1899), but similar explanations are given by Mulkey (*On Humor*, 1988). For Halliwell (*Greek Laughter*, 2008), Aristophanic comedy converts shame into laughter, "institutionalising and in a sense ritualising this conversion of a potentially negative force into the celebrations of communal enjoyment" (247–248), and this phenomenon is especially salient with regard to issues of sex (253). It would be interesting and perhaps revealing to explore what the similarity between modern and ancient responses to this type of humor means for our modern sense of gender-related shame.

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