Architecture of a Kiss: 
The Vocabulary of καταγλωττίσματα 
in Attic Old Comedy

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In the exodus of Aristophanes’ Acharnians Dicæopolis, enjoying the fruits of his private peace, enters between two courtesans, whom he bids (1200ff)

φιλήσατόν με μαλθακώς, ὁ χρυσίω,
tὸ περιπεταστὸν κάπιμανδαλοτόν.

The scholiast says that line 1201 describes εἴδη φιλημάτων ἑρωτικών, ἐν οἷς δεῖ τὴν γλώτταν τοὺς φιλοῦντας λείχειν. In similar words at Thesm. 130ff Mnesilochus describes a lascivious song as a μέλος ... καταγλωττισμένον καὶ μανδαλωτόν. As a μάνδαλος (more commonly called a βάλανος, Ar. Vesp. 155, 200) is the bolt-pin of a door (Zeno Med. ap. Erotianus s.v. ἀμβήν; Artem 2.10 [=p.116 Pack]), scholars have compared (ἐπι)μανδαλωτός with Teleclides’ image of a γιγάλυμωτόν φίλημα (fr.14 PCG; cf. Hesychius s.v. γιγάλυμος), which is formed from γίγαλυμος, the pivot or gudgeon on which a door turns (also called the θαρός, περόνη, or στροφίγξ).1 The line from Thesm. quoted above and the scholiast’s comment on the passage from Acharnians have led scholars most plausibly to conclude that the kisses described metaphorically as “spread,” “with the door-bolt pinned,” and “pivot-like” are what are literally called καταγλωττίσματα (Ar. Nub. 51, Them. 1192). Ancient descriptions (Automedon, Anth. Pal. 5.129 [128].7; Philodemus, Anth. Pal. 5.132 [131].6; Achilles Tatius 2.37.8) show that these are what English speakers call “French kisses,”2 in which one inserts the tongue in another’s mouth. Except in the case of Philocleon, who allows his daughter to fish his three-obol

2 W. Young, Eros Denied: Sex in Western Society (New York 1964) 321.
Juror’s pay out of his mouth with her tongue (Ar. Vesp. 609), such kisses occur only in sexual contexts.\(^3\)

Taillardat (\textit{supra} n.1: 17.9) characterizes γίγαλμος as “une manière de ‘synonyme’” for μάνδαλος, but a brief consideration of the mechanics of ancient doors will show that we are hardly dealing with synonyms. The μάνδαλος is part of the mechanism of a Spartan lock (Ar. \textit{Thesm.} 423; Aristophon fr. 7.4 \textit{PCG}; Men. \textit{Mis.} fr. 10 Koert=8 Sandbach; Plaut. \textit{Mostell.} 404; other kinds of locks were known).\(^4\) This consisted of a bolt (μόχλος, ἀχές, or κλεῖθρον) on the inside of the door sliding freely in brackets (ἐμφόλια) attached to the door and, when the door is closed, into a socket in the doorpost. Above this bar sat a box (βαλλανδόκη) containing a number of pins. When the bolt was shot into the locked position, these pins fell by gravity into corresponding holes (τρυπῆματα) in the bolt, thus locking the door. The door could be unlocked only by a thin plank fitted at right angles with dowels (γομφίδια) in the same pattern as the box and bolt. There was a transverse slot in the bolt directly under the pin-holes and a corresponding, although longer, slot in the door directly under the box of pins. The ‘key’, when slid into place through these two slots and lifted straight up, dislodged the pins so that the bolt could be pulled back by means of a rope or leather strap (τέμαξ) that passed through a separate slot and hung outside the door. The γίγαλμοι, by contrast, were part of the hinging mechanism of the door, being dowels fitted into the cross-braces (ζυγά) at the top and bottom of the door and playing freely in sockets (στροφεῖς or σύριγγες) in the lintel and threshold. It is clear from this account that (ἐπι)μανδάλωτος and γίγαλμωτος are words related not by synonymity but by participation in the vocabulary proper to doors.\(^5\) When the matter is considered in this light, we see

\(^{3}\) This may not be an exception if K. J. Dover, \textit{Aristophanic Comedy} (Berkeley 1972) 127, correctly suggests that “the passage is the only one in comedy which dares to hint at the enjoyment of incestuous contacts.”


\(^{5}\) They are further similar in that they, like the teeth of the key, are treenails or dowels (τύλοι). This may be the link that connects the door metaphor to the other image of the tongue as instrument, for Aristophanes thinks of song and speech as being bored with an auger (τόρεω πάον φόην, \textit{Thesm.} 986; τετορήσῃς ταῦτα [= τὸ κτήριον], \textit{Pax} 381) and joined with dowels (ῥήματα γομφοπαγαῖ), \textit{Ran.} 824; cf. σωκρατογύψωμος, Teleclides fr. 2 \textit{PCG}). See E. Vermeule, \textit{Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry} (Berkeley 1979) 198.
immediately that περιπεταστός, which keeps close company
with ἐπιμανδαλωτός at Aeh. 1201 and which effectively
describes the parting of the lips involved in French kissing (cf.
ἀνοίγων τὰ φιλήματα, Achilles Tatius 2.37.8) is also a door
metaphor,6 (Ἀνα)πετάνυμι, like Latin pateo, is so often said of
opening doors (II. 12.122, etc.) that it can be used alone, with the
word for door in ellipse (Theoc. Id. 16.6).

It is no accident that Old Comedy described kisses involving
the tongue using door vocabulary, for Greeks since Homer
have viewed the tongue as a door.7 I have argued elsewhere that
Homer’s phrase στρεπτὴ δὲ γλώσσ’ εστὶ βροτῶν (II. 20.248)
pictures the tongue as the door to the cage of the teeth (ἔρκος
ὀδοντῶν, II. 4.350, etc.) capable of pivoting noisily on its hinge
to allow the winged words (ἐπέα περόντα, II. 1.201, etc.)
within to escape.8 Subsequent Greek authors, and in particular
Aristophanes, elaborated upon this idea. The mouth ought to
have a door or gate (cf. ἀθύρωτον στόμα, Ran. 838 RM86 with
schol. vet. A K; ἀποκλ., Ran. 838 V, Gel. NA 1.15.19, Eust. II.
2.619.7),9 namely the tongue. The tongue pivots (Nub. 792, Ran.
892) and has a key (Aesch. fr. 316 TrGF; Soph. OC 1052) where­
by to lock the mouth (κλέισιν στόμα, Eq. 1316, Thesm. 40).

When not locked with a key, the tongue, like a door (cf. Thesm.
421–27),10 may be sealed (Critias fr. 5.3 West; Timotheus 791.148
PMG; Lucian, Anth. Pal. 10.42.1). The basis for the equation of
tongue and door is apparently the noisiness of the pivot-and­
socket mechanism (Thesm. 487f). The vox propria for this noise
is ψόφος (cf. ψοφέω with LSJ s.v. II); someone sneaking into a

6 A. H. Sommerstein, Aristophanes, Acharnians (Warminster 1980) 213 ad
1201: “broad: lit. ‘spread,’ i.e., with spread lips.”
7 Door imagery depicts other aspects of sexual congress beside kissing. The
door is used metaphorically of the vagina (Ar. Vesp. 768, Thesm. 424, Eccl.
962, 990; Eupolis fr. 236 PCG) and anus (Semon. fr. 17 West; Hipponax fr.
92.14 West; Ar. Eccl. 316–71; Eur. Cyc. 502), and penis and vagina may be
depicted respectively by βάλανος (Ar. Lys. 407–13, with a surface meaning of
“jewelry-clasp” rather than, as elsewhere, “door bolt”) and τρύπημα (Eccl.
624). Timoecles describes intercourse as bolting the tongue box, with reference
to the box in which oboe reeds (literally “tongues”) were kept (καὶ τὸ γλω­
tόκομον βαλλανεύσατε, fr. 2 PCG).
8 “A Homeric Metaphor Cluster Describing Words, Tongue and Teeth,”
9 As the mouth has a door in Hebrew thought: Job 41:14, Qoheleth 12:4,
Micah 7:5.
10 For a seal on the door see J. Diggle, Euripides: Phaethon (Cambridge
1970) 145f ad 223.
house seeks to do so ἀνωφητί (Lucian Dial. Meret. 12.3 [314]).

Metaphorically, the bombastic Aeschylus is ψόφος πλέον (Nub. 1367) and Pluto’s doorkeeper, Aeacus, terrifies callers with ὁ ψόφος τῶν ῥημάτων (Ran. 492). Knocking is another kind of door noise and it is a cliché of comic doorway scenes that knocking, however timid, is always too loud (Nub. 136, Av. 53–56, Ran. 39, Plut. 1097–1102). In Aristophanic parlance, the door, when knocked on by an unseen person, is “speaking” for itself (φθέγγεσθαι, Plut. 1097).

The equation of tongue and door is actualized in courting ritual. According to custom, the exclusus amator passes the night on the doorstep of his beloved, singing παρακλαυσθε,14 as the young man does at Eccl. 962ff.15 The lover accompanies his song with various gestures, which include kissing his beloved’s door, doorpost, or doorstep (Callim. Epigr. 43.5f; Theoc. Id. 23.16; Lucr. 4.1179; Prop. 1.16.42).16 It


16 Doorposts are also traditionally kissed in farewell (Ap. Rhod. 4.26f; Verg. Aen. 2.490; Valerius Flaccus 2.168f). There is a similar ambiguity with kisses that are said to suck forth the soul, an expression used either of passionate sexual kisses (Plato, Anth. Pal. 5.78 [=D.L. 3.32]; Achilles Tatius 2.8.2; cf. Marlowe, Faustus V.i.100) or of the last kiss to the dying (Cic. Verr. 5.118; Verg. Aen. 4.684).
consoles him that the door barring him from the object of his desire nonetheless, if only metaphorically, affords the kisses that he hopes to encounter within. In the passage from *Ecclesiazusae* the impediment is not the door but the old woman who opens it. This is one impediment, however, to which the youth refuses to προσάγειν το στόμα (993f).\(^{17}\)

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