

What Wealth Has to Do with Dionysus: From Economy to Poetics in Aristophanes' *Plutus*

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WHEN NOT DISREGARDED as an inferior play or the product of a waning talent,¹ Aristophanes' *Plutus* is set off against his surviving fifth-century plays and viewed as a comedy from a different era. It lacks a formal parabasis, that earmark of Old Comedy, and the rôle of the chorus is minimal, all but reduced to dancing interludes. Further, it contains very little by way of breaks of dramatic illusion, topical references, or invective against individuals. The poet's last extant play is thus seen as the first specimen of that grey area, Middle Comedy, or even as a forerunner of many themes in New Comedy. Although comparison need not be disparaging, it tends to cast a heavy shadow on the play.² Recent studies have, it is true, set the stage for a re-evaluation of the comedy by stressing how it actively responds to the social and economic developments in the first decades of the fourth century.³ Even so, the prevailing tendency is still to look back to the fifth-century plays, to

¹ For a review of scholarship see E. David, *Aristophanes and Athenian Society of the Early Fourth Century B.C.* (= *Mnemosyne* Suppl. 81 [Leiden 1984]) 1 n.1; S. D. OLSON, "Economics and Ideology in Aristophanes' *Wealth*," *HSCP* 93 (1990: hereafter 'Olson') 223 n.1.

² One of the few scholars diverging from this consensus, M. Dillon, "Topicality in Aristophanes' *Ploutos*," *ClAnt* 6 (1987) 155-83, esp. 157, lauds Aristophanes as a conscious innovator and pioneer who creates a broader and more lasting appeal.

³ Recent studies stressing an active interaction between *Plutus* and its social and economic milieu include D. KONSTAN and M. DILLON, "The Ideology of Aristophanes' *Wealth*," *AJP* 102 (1981: hereafter 'Konstan and Dillon') 371-94; David (*supra* n.1); Dillon (*supra* n.2); Olson. In a somewhat different vein A. H. SOMMERSTEIN, "Aristophanes and the Demon of Poverty," *CQ* N.S. 34 (1984: 'Sommerstein') 314-33, argues that Aristophanes' social orientation undergoes a radical change in his fourth-century plays in response to social and economic developments.

probe gaps, and to stress discontinuities.⁴ Without denying the importance of ruptures, I intend to focus instead on some elements of continuity, hoping to restore some of the luster that goes with the radiant liveliness of Old Comedy. To be sure, the Athens of 388 may be worlds apart from the city of the 420s in terms of social and economic relations.⁵ Cultural history, however, is subject to different rhythms, and its continuities tend to be more persistent. The dramatic festival, for example, still functions in the early fourth century with much the same vigor, creating webs of meaning in which the plays have to situate themselves, and upon which they have to draw to engage their audience.⁶

In this vein I shall argue that, in his last surviving play, the poet paints a complex portrait of *Plutus* with features borrowed from Dionysus, the god of the dramatic festival; further, that Aristophanes highlights *Plutus*' affinities with the imagery and ideology of comedy, in particular with the explosive but sophisticated energy of Old Comedy. In drawing these parallels, the comic poet taps the sources of folk humor—not only as known from the earlier comedies, but also in its more general and enduring patterns that stretch beyond the confines of specific genres. I shall finally claim that, given the Dionysiac dimensions of *Plutus*, the triumph of the god of wealth has repercussions beyond the bounds of the dramatic action, as it provides the poet with a golden opportunity for reflection on theater and its festival. Such reflection ultimately validates the poetics of the comic genre in a manner familiar from the earlier Aristophanic plays.

⁴ An exception is K. J. RECKFORD, *Aristophanes' Old-and-New Comedy* (Chapel Hill 1987: hereafter 'Reckford') 358–63, who stresses the links between *Plutus* and the early plays; for some general aspects of continuity between Old and New Comedy see D. F. Sutton, *Self and Society in Aristophanes* (Washington 1980) 93–104.

⁵ But even the notion of a radical change and its relevance for the play has been contested: Dillon (*supra* n.2) esp. 157–63, 180f.

⁶ D. F. Sutton, *Ancient Comedy: The War of the Generations* (New York 1993) 1–17, esp. 14, ascribes the enduring features of the "festive comedy" to its context, *i.e.*, the dramatic festival and its continuities, on some of which see S. G. Cole, "Procession and Celebration at the Dionysia," in R. Scodel, ed., *Theater and Society in the Classical World* (Ann Arbor 1993) 25–38. For the *Plutus* and its audience, Dillon's view (*supra* n.2: esp. 156, 176–83) complements that presented here by stressing Aristophanes' effort, consistent throughout his career, to respond to the needs and tastes of a changing audience.

I

Let us begin with the central element of the Aristophanic plot. The problem that Chremylos and Blepsidemos have to overcome in their socio-economic reform is Plutus' blindness (114ff, 399ff). The prospect of Plutus' restored eyesight (400–14, 350f) dispels Chremylos' initial misgivings (e.g. 348) and allays Blepsidemos' suspicions (352–55, 367f, 372f). It further emerges as a panacea that guarantees not only a just distribution of wealth but also, ultimately, universal prosperity.⁷ Plutus' cure is necessary to elevate the first informal, even reluctant entrance of the god into Chremylos' house (229–44) to a ritually proper, grandiose installation (771–801). In short, in order to implement their envisioned redistribution of wealth, the comic heroes must cure the god of his blindness.

This is no simple matter, but a task of considerable magnitude. Chremylos and Blepsidemos have to overcome an obvious practical obstacle, which is on a par with the struggle mounted by the protagonist of earlier plays. On top of their need for nothing short of a miracle, they also have to reverse an entire tradition, for Plutus' blindness is well established in iambic poetry.⁸ In the skolia, as is well known, Plutus is predominantly portrayed as blind, therefore as prone to visiting the wrong people. This traditional theme of blame underlies Blepsidemos' reaction to the news that Plutus is blind (403f):

Βλ. τυφλὸς γὰρ ὄντως ἐστί; Χρ. νῆ τὸν οὐρανὸν
Βλ. οὐκ ἐπὸς ἄρ' ὡς ἐμ' ἦλθεν οὐδεπώποτε.

ὄντως ("really") is especially significant, for it presupposes the existence of a well-known tradition, already familiar to the comic hero. Blepsidemos realizes that the rumor about Plutus'

⁷ As Olson (231 n.29) puts it: "[i]n the second half of the play it is stated over and over again that it is specifically Plutus' renewed eyesight that brings about prosperity (791ff; cf. 769; 856–59; 864–68; 968f; 1113–16; 1173f)." On the interweaving of the two problems, the ethics of wealth and the availability of natural resources, see Konstan and Dillon 376, 379, 390f, who stress that Plutus' power is his sight.

⁸ The *locus classicus* for the debt of fifth-century comic poets to the iambic tradition: Arist. *Poet.* 1448b24–49b8; see R. M. Rosen, *Old Comedy and the Iambographic Tradition* (= *American Classical Studies* 19 [Atlanta 1988]); J. HENDERSON, *The Maculate Muse* (New York 1991: hereafter 'Henderson') 19. By "iambic" I refer to content and context rather than meter; see G. Nagy, *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past* (Baltimore 1990) 396 n.83.

blindness is now confirmed, after all; no wonder (οὐκ ἔτος), he gathers, that the god never visited him. Tzetzes (*ΣPlut.* 87) points to the source of this tradition: Aristophanes "appropriated" the idea of a blind Plutus from this well-known poem of Hipponax (36 West):

ἐμοὶ δὲ Πλοῦτος—ἔστι γὰρ λίην τυφλός—
 ἔς τῶικί' ἔλθων οὐδάμ' εἶπεν "Ἴππῶναξ,
 δίδωμί τοι μνέας ἀργύρου τριήκοντα
 καὶ πολλ' ἔτ' ἄλλα"· δέιλαιος γὰρ τὰς φρένας.

Hipponax's famous complaint may be the first but not the only attestation of the idea. In the fifth century the Rhodian Timocreon, for example, wishes in a skolion (in trochaic dimeters) that blind Plutus should disappear from sight and reside in Hades (731 *PMG*). The complaint of the comic poet Amphis against Plutus' blindness (23 K.-A.) resembles the Aristophanic treatment but is probably later. The charge of blindness can also be levelled against related personifications, such as *olbos* at Eur. *Phaethon* fr. 776 Nauck. *Olbos* is a notion that may not be limited to *ploutos*, i.e., to material wealth, but certainly includes it as an essential component.⁹

In light of this tradition of blame that portrays Plutus as blind, the recovery of his eyesight seems to come as a striking twist. Yet the substance of the comic heroes' undertaking, the restoration of Plutus' vision, is not pure Aristophanic invention. The image of a seeing and benevolent god draws on another traditional cluster of notions about Plutus that runs parallel to the poetry of blame. In this second tradition Plutus is mentioned as the son of Demeter (Hes. *Th.* 969-74; skolion 885 *PMG*).¹⁰ Alternatively, he is simply associated with her, alone or with Persephone, as the gift of the goddesses to mortals. The association seems to be particularly strong in the experience of the initiates in the Mysteries (*Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 486-89; Ar. *Thesm.* 295ff). It is even quite probable that Plutus is identified

⁹ Hesiod (*Op.* 637; *Th.* 974) treats *olbos* and *ploutos* as virtual synonyms; on their relationship see Nagy (*supra* n.8) 244f, 248 n.140. J. Diggle's discussion of the *Phaethon* fragment, *Euripides' Phaethon* (Cambridge 1970) 132f, collects later passages that attribute blindness to Plutus and related concepts.

¹⁰ See M. L. West, *Hesiod's Theogony* (Oxford 1966) 422ff *ad* 969ff; on the two contradictory traditions see also J. Zwicker, "Plutos," *RE* 21.1 (1951) 1036f, 1040-44; F. HEBERLEIN, *Pluthygieia. Zur Gegenwart bei Aristophanes* (Frankfurt a.M. 1980: hereafter 'Heberlein') 131f.

as the divine child (ἱερός κούρος, Hippol. *Haer.* 5.8.40), whose birth, accompanied by a sudden light, is announced by the hierophant to the initiates. In fact, fourth-century art portrays Plutus as a child in the company of the Eleusinian deities.¹¹

But where is this *kouros*, the symbol of the initiates' current prosperity and future blessedness, in the comedy? How does the old beggar resemble the youthful god of the Mysteries? I suggest that we can find a reflection of the image of Plutus as a beneficent child in the following passage, where the aged god reminisces about his long lost youth (87–91):

ὁ Ζεὺς με ταῦτ' ἔδρασεν ἀνθρώποις φθονῶν.
 ἐγὼ γὰρ ὄν μειράκιον ἠπέιλησ' ὅτι
 ὡς τοὺς δικαίους καὶ σοφοὺς καὶ κοσμίους
 μόνους βαδιώμην· ὁ δέ μ' ἐποίησεν τυφλόν,
 ἵνα μὴ διαγινώσκοιμι τούτων μηδένα.

In this passage, Plutus, now in his old age (cf. πρεσβύτης, 265), evokes a blessed distant past when he was a young lad (μειράκιον) with sound eyesight, *before* Zeus blinded him out of envy towards humankind. Zeus' blinding of Plutus, not attested elsewhere, can be assumed to be Aristophanic invention, patterned (it has been argued) on other myths featuring Zeus' grudge against benefactors of humanity such as Prometheus and Asclepius.¹² As a result of Zeus' 'envious' action in these tales and in Plutus' account, a happy period for mortals ends and gives way to the present world of toil and hardship. But besides illustrating the present state of affairs, Zeus' blinding of Plutus serves a valuable function in the comedy. It is a brilliant mythological twist that first brings together the two unrelated and opposing traditions about the god of wealth.

¹¹ N. J. RICHARDSON, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford 1974: hereafter 'Richardson') ad 489 and pp.26–30; W. Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, tr. P. Bing (Berkeley 1983) 289 n.73; R. SEAFORD, "Sophokles and the Mysteries," *Hermes* 122 (1994: 'Seaford') 277.

¹² See H.-J. Newiger, *Metapher und Allegorie: Studien zu Aristophanes* (=Zetemata 16 [Munich 1957]) 167f, 176. Already the scholiast (ad *Plut.* 87) recognized that the consequences of Plutus' blindness resemble Zeus' reaction to Prometheus' deception: he concealed earth's bounty from the mortals (Hes. *Op.* 42ff). The blinding of Plutus is construed as Aristophanic variation on a theme in A. M. Bowie, *Aristophanes: Myth, Ritual, and Comedy* (Cambridge 1993) 271f, who further notes (281ff) the parallel between Plutus and Prometheus.

By inventing the blindness of Plutus by Zeus, therefore, Aristophanes integrates the two contradictory conceptions of Plutus into one overarching picture that implies a development over time: youth and sight give way to old age and blindness.¹³ The two pre-existing static images make up a new synthesis of mythical traditions. The restoration of Plutus' eyesight in the play, in order to redress the wrong done to the god's image by blame poetry, must effect a return to that blessed age when Plutus could see (πάλιν ... ὡσπερ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ, 95).¹⁴ In Aristophanic *mythopoeia*, that return can only make sense as an evocation of the Eleusinian portrayal of Plutus.

It is not necessary of course to point out that this comedy is not unique in alluding to the Mysteries. Aristophanes can skillfully draw on the repertory of Eleusinian imagery, the *Frogs* being the most obvious example. Hence it would not come as a surprise if this play also evoked the mythical and ritual atmosphere of Eleusis. In fact, the mystical background may illustrate another feature of Plutus' cure: as the epiphany of the divine child is said to be highlighted by—or even identified with—the appearance of the mystic light at night (νυκτὸς ... ὑπὸ πολλῶ πυρί, Hippol. *Haer.* 5.8.40), it may not be an accident that the moment of Plutus' cure after his incubation coincides with the brightness of dawn (ἕως διέλαμψεν ἡμέρα, 744).¹⁵ Similarly, his healed pupils give him a new brightness (ἐξωμμάτωται καὶ λελάμπρυνται κόρας, 635; cf. 144).¹⁶ Plutus returns to his previous condition, which reflects the manner of his epiphany in the Mysteries, as experienced by the initiates.

¹³ Heberlein (131f, 150) also remarks on the two opposing representations of Plutus and associates the seeing Plutus in the play with the child Plutus in the cult of Demeter.

¹⁴ This return to a blessed past (cf. 117, 126, 221, 460, 779, 866, 1192) is stressed by Heberlein 131f; cf. the emphatic ὡσπερ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ that is repeated at the end of every line in *Eccl.* 221–28, where the nostalgia is for a more recent past, not for a mythological Golden Age.

¹⁵ The standard phrase of the Asclepieion inscriptions (some examples in B. B. Rogers, *The Plutos of Aristophanes* [London 1907] xixf) that specifies the time of healing is simply "when day came" (ἡμέρας δὲ γενομένης), with no mention of brightness. Hence we can appreciate the force of διέλαμψεν (*Plut.* 744).

¹⁶ On the (torch)light that accompanies mystic revelation and on its identification with Plutus see Richardson 26ff; Seaford 276f, and his "Dionysiac Drama and the Dionysiac Mysteries," *CQ* n.s. 31 (1981) 255f. At *Plut.* 640 Asclepius is also called μέγα βροτοῖσι φέγγος.

In addition to the emphasis on light and brightness, the recovery of the god's eyesight has in itself important connotations that also point to the Mysteries, for vision frequently emerges as an essential part of the mystical experience. The highest degree of initiation, for instance, is termed *epopteia*, and the sources are consistent in using verbs of seeing (e.g. ἰδεῖν, ὁρᾶν, δέρκεσθαι) to describe the initiate's participation in the ceremonies (*Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 480ff; Pindar fr. 137a Snell-Maehler; Soph. fr. 837 Pearson-Radt; Eur. *HF* 613).¹⁷ Beyond the centrality of eyesight, the causal relationship that the comic plot establishes between vision (for the god) and wealth (for the mortals) echoes the experience of the initiates, which ultimately equates *seeing* the rites and being blessed with wealth (*Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 480-89).

Yet even more striking than these allusions—and crucial for the present argument—is that the divine child of the Mysteries, often construed as the god Plutus, is alternatively identified in antiquity with Persephone's son, Iacchus.¹⁸ But at least as early as the latter part of the fifth century, Iacchus is also imagined as the Eleusinian manifestation of Dionysus.¹⁹ The affinity of Iacchus—Dionysus with the rehabilitated Plutus is therefore established via their rôle as the divine child, which seems to be ingrained in the Eleusinian Mysteries.

The affinity between the two deities in the play derives precisely from their rôle in the Mysteries. It is crucial for the comedy, as we shall see, so it is corroborated by several allusions to mystical language and ceremonies interspersed throughout the play, in addition to the imagery of light already mentioned. An early hint at the atmosphere of the Mysteries comes in the exchange between Chremylos and the chorus, after Karion informs them of the old man's identity. Chremylos asks the chorus to assist him by becoming "truly saviors of the god" (σωτήρες ὄντως τοῦ θεοῦ, 327), and the first word in the old men's response is a reassuring "take courage" (θάραπει, 328). A virtually identical collocation of words is attested in a mystic

¹⁷ See L. DEUBNER, *Attische Feste* (Berlin 1932: hereafter 'Deubner') 78; Seaford (*supra* n.11) 275 with n.2, 277.

¹⁸ Richardson 27, 316-20; BURKERT (*supra* n.11) 289 with n.72, and *Greek Religion*, tr. J. Raffan (Cambridge [Mass.] 1985: hereafter 'Burkert, GR') 288; Seaford 276f.

¹⁹ On Iacchus and Dionysus see Richardson 26-30; Seaford 276, 278; Burkert (*supra* n.11: 279) notes Dionysus' increased presence at Eleusis in the fourth century.

context: a Christian polemicist describes how the pagan priest exhorts the initiands to take courage from the god's salvation (θαρρεῖτε μύσται τοῦ θεοῦ σεσωσμένου).²⁰ This exhortation follows the introduction of light, just as the salvation in *Plutus*' case is tantamount to the restoration of the 'light' in his eyes, as we saw.

More mystic terms turn up in the description of *Plutus*' therapy, when Karion relates how they took *Plutus* to the shrine of Asclepius (653–58):

ὡς γὰρ τάχιστ' ἀφικόμεθα πρὸς τὸν θεὸν
 ἄγοντες ἄνδρα τότε μὲν ἀθλιώτατον
 νῦν δ' εἴ τιν' ἄλλον μακάριον κευδαίμονα
 πρῶτον μὲν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ θάλατταν ἤγομεν,
 ἔπειτ' ἐλούμεν. Γυνή· νῆ Δί' εὐδαίμων ἄρ' ἦν
 ἀνὴρ γέρων ψυχρᾷ θαλάσση λούμενος.

The key words μακάριος and εὐδαίμων (655, 657) are often used to define the frame of mind of those initiated in mystical rites.²¹ More generally, the motif of the transition from a past misery (τότε μὲν ἀθλιώτατον, 654) to a present bliss (νῦν δ', 655) conforms to the mystic formula ἔφυγον κακὸν εὖρον ἄμεινον, which Demosthenes (*De Cor.* 259) associates with the rites of Sabazius. These expressions are not particular to the Eleusinian Mysteries, to be sure, and there is an intrinsic affinity between the rituals of therapy in Asclepius' shrine and the general pattern of mystical initiation, including initiation at Eleusis.²² But the Eleusinian atmosphere is specifically recalled when *Plutus* is made to bathe in the sea. Washing with water from a spring or well is part of the standard preparation for incubation, but *Plut.* 656f is the only evidence of a sea bath before therapy at Asclepius' shrine. The sea bath, which does not fail to shock Chremylos' wife (657f), is out of place in Asclepius' cult and

²⁰ Firm. Mat. *Err. prof. rel.* 22. Seaford (*supra* n.16: 258) argues that this exhortation, associated by Firm. Mat. with pagan mysteries in general, applies in particular to the liberation of Dionysus. On the mystical associations of θαρρεῖν see Seaford 258 with n.56.

²¹ On these terms, which also occur elsewhere in the play (629, 802), see e.g. Seaford (*supra* n.16) 253. We may add the stem θιασ- in Penia's abusive ξυνθιασῶτα τοῦ ληρεῖν καὶ παραπαίειν (508).

²² See Burkert, *GR*, 268 with n. 54 on therapy and the Eleusinian Mysteries; on connections between Asclepius and Eleusis see E. J. and L. Edelstein, *Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies* (Baltimore 1945) II 127ff, 246.

hence evokes the well-known prerequisite of Eleusinian initiation.²³

In addition to this more or less generic affinity between the therapy of Plutus and mystical experience, more explicit allusions to the Eleusinian Mysteries accumulate after the new rule of Plutus has been secured towards the end of the play. The atmosphere of the Mysteries is conjured up, for instance, when Karion giddily asks the Just Man whether he was initiated in the cloak that he is now about to dedicate to Plutus (845 with Σ). The filthy, tattered cloak cannot have been the pure white garment worn at the initiation, as Karion knows (see μῶν). Therefore, his rhetorical question seems rather to be intended as a reminder of the Mysteries.²⁴ A similar allusion is the old woman's account of the way she was wrongfully beaten by her former lover at the time of the Mysteries (1013f with Σ), which serves solely to keep the memory of Eleusis constantly in the background. Even the final jokes of the play (1197–1207), when Chremylos first commands the old woman to carry on her head the pots for the installation of the god and then makes fun of her, have been interpreted as a playful allusion to the Eleusinian ceremony of *kernophoria* or *liknophoria*.²⁵

All these Eleusinian allusions, sustained throughout the play, cannot but bring to mind the Eleusinian Plutus and his affinity with Dionysus. The restoration of Plutus' eyesight in the comedy transforms the blind, contemptible beggar into the benevolent, brilliant Plutus of the Mysteries, who is aligned

²³ For examples of washing before incubation see Ael. Aristid. 29.1–18; 39.14f; on the sea bath of the Eleusinian initiands see Burkert (*supra* n.11) 258; Deubner 72, 75.

²⁴ On the line see S. L. Radt, "Zu Aristophanes' *Plutos*," *Mnemosyne* SER. 4 29 (1976) 263f; Rogers (*supra* n.15) *ad loc.* Without reducing the force of the allusion to the Mysteries, K. Dover (*Aristophanes' Frogs* [Oxford 1993] 62f) adds a layer to the joke: "a frugal Athenian ... would be strongly tempted to wear old clothes for initiation, knowing that he was expected to sacrifice them by dedication."

²⁵ See C. Rolley, "Les marmites sur la tête (à propos de la fin du *Ploutos*)," *REG* 79 (1966) xivf; other possible Eleusinian allusion are: (i) the triple reference to Hekate (594–97, 764, 1070), on whose rôle at Eleusis see Deubner 74; Richardson 84, 155ff, 168f, 293ff; (ii) the rôle of Iaso (701): the cure that restores Plutus to his original healthy condition parallels thus his birth to Iasion, the consort of Demeter at Hes. *Th.* 969ff; cf. West (*supra* n.10) 422f; Richardson 316f. Health and wealth are also linked in a Dionysiac frame, as *plouthygieia* is a concern of the sympotic scolia; witness the sympotic context at *Vesp.* 677; cf. *Eq.* 1091; *Av.* 731.

with Iacchus.²⁶ The recovery of Plutus is thus coextensive with his transfiguration into a mystical deity that is the Eleusinian manifestation of Dionysus. This transfiguration is finally confirmed in the concluding procession (1190–96), which escorts Plutus off the stage, accompanied by the light of torches. The exodus offers a visual replication of the procession that escorts Iacchus to Eleusis.²⁷ But there is more to it than that, because it also recalls a ceremony, from a Dionysiac context this time, that brings Dionysus and Plutus together. During the procession at the Lenaea, at the instigation of the torch-bearer (*dadouchos*) to call on the god (κάλει θεόν), the worshipers invoke “Iacchus, son of Semele, giver of wealth” (Σεμελήι’ Ἰακχε πλουτοδότα).²⁸ Chremylos’ injunction τὸν Πλοῦτον ἔξω τις κάλει (1196), the torches (1193), the procession itself, all seem to point to the Lenaea. The allusion would acquire more weight if we could determine the festival of the *Plutus*. Although nothing in the play rules out the Lenaea, the present argument does not hinge on that.²⁹ The important thing is that, in addition to their links in the Eleusinian context, which serves as the background of the play, Plutus and Dionysus are close to each other in a Dionysiac festival.

II

These associations between the new Plutus and Dionysus are not explored in the play merely for their own sake. Rather, the comic poet uses them to touch upon questions of theater and its poetics, in particular the relations of different genres that co-exist in the context of the same festival. It is not only that Plutus, much like Dionysus, is acknowledged to be the recipi-

²⁶ Heberlein (132 n.50) even sees a rejuvenation of Plutus after his cure, similar to that of Demos in the *Knights*. This would reinforce the link of Plutus’ cure and birth (see *supra* n.25), but it is neither certain nor crucial to the argument. A new costume and mask, however, are virtually certain, as noted by L. STONE, *Costume in Aristophanic Poetry* (New York 1981: hereafter ‘Stone’) 402.

²⁷ Richardson 165–68; Burkert (*supra* n.11) 279f; for the importance of torches in the Mysteries see further Seaford 276 and (*supra* n.16) 256ff; Burkert, *GR* 267ff, 276 with n.7, 281 with n.34, 288.

²⁸ *ΣRan.* 479; on cultic affinities between the Eleusinia and the Lenaea see Deubner 125ff.

²⁹ C. F. Russo, *Aristophanes: An Author for the Stage*, tr. K. Wren (London 1994) 227, 237f.

ent and patron of musical contests (*Plut.* 1160–63), nor that Plutus' eyesight, so central in the comic plot, penetrates into the core of theater, for the very word θέατρον defines the theatrical phenomenon in terms of seeing. There is room for a more refined and better defined view of the relationship between Plutus and Dionysus.

We can take for a starting point the section of the play that analyzes the merits of Plutus more systematically, namely the debate between Plutus' proponents, Chremylos and Blepsidemos, and his opponent, Penia (425–626). This part has probably received the lion's share of scholarly attention, primarily because of the seeming inconsistencies in the characters' argumentation.³⁰ It is an important section indeed, and its structural position in the play underlines its centrality. It forms a digression framed by the two declarations of the comic characters' intention to take Plutus to Asclepius' shrine. Specific verbal echoes (τὸν θεὸν ἐγκατακλινοῦντ' ... ἐς Ἀσκληπιοῦ ... μὴ διατρίβωμεν, 620–23, harking back to κατακλίνειν αὐτὸν εἰς Ἀσκληπιοῦ ... μὴ διάτριβε, 411ff) underscore the frame around the debate: after Penia is driven away in defeat, the two comic characters pick up exactly where they left off before she stormed the stage. In this sense, the debate is more than an *agon*. Its digressive character makes it also into a quasi-parabasis, especially as a large part of it (487–597) is composed in the anapestic tetrameters that are very often used in the parabasis of other comedies. Furthermore, this long agonistic interlude acquires its parabolic flavor by providing, as we shall see, a fascinating reflection on comedy and on its tense but symbiotic relationship with its neighboring dramatic genre, tragedy.³¹

Amidst the arguments on the respective merits of Wealth and Poverty, we can, in light of Dionysus' presence, gain a new in-

³⁰ See e.g. Konstan and Dillon; Sommerstein 317ff, 327–30.

³¹ Anapestic tetrameters can also be used in the *agon* (e.g. *Nub.* 957–1008; *Vesp.* 546–620), offering thus a formal link between the *agon* and the parabasis. For the most complete recent study of the parabasis see T. K. HUBBARD, *The Mask of Comedy: Aristophanes and the Intertextual Parabasis* (Ithaca 1991: hereafter 'Hubbard') esp. 16–33, who views it as a "very dynamic and essential form ... continually evolving and changing in both structure and content" and as "central to the drama's cognitive self-realization as both a literary and a social event" (17). Although Hubbard focuses on the early plays and only discusses the *Eccl.* in an appendix (246–51), his case for a flexible parabasis has important implications for the 'parabolic' material in the *Plutus*. Also in line with his picture of a more integrated parabasis, I use the term "digressive" not in a negative, but in a purely descriptive sense.

sight into these figures. This additional perspective may have been immediately salient to the viewers of the performance through mask and costume. We cannot recover the precise visual impact of these figures on the audience, yet we still possess a clue in the words of Blepsidemos that describe Penia as some Erinyes from a tragedy with a "mad and tragic" sort of look (422–25):

Χρ· σὺ δ' εἶ τίς; ὄχρᾶ μὲν γὰρ εἶναί μοι δοκεῖς.
 Βλ· ἴσως Ἐρινύς ἐστὶν ἐκ τραγωδίας·
 βλέπει γέ τοι μανικόν τι καὶ τραγωδικόν.
 Χρ· ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔχει δῶδας. Βλ. οὐκοῦν κλαύσεται.

Clearly Penia is perceived not only as an Erinyes in general, but more specifically as a tragic Erinyes and hence a representative of tragedy.³² The paratragic elements in the context are not enough to point to a particular tragic representation of the Erinyes.³³ But even though one cannot connect the Erinyes-like Penia with a specific tragedy, it may be fruitful to compare her with the chorus of the *Eumenides*, a production that had made a deep impression on the Athenians.³⁴ Like the Aeschylean Erinyes (*Eum.* 34–38), Poverty looks grim and terrifying enough to put people to flight (*Plut.* 417, 438–44). She is pale like them (*Eum.* 416), and "manic" (*Eum.* 67, 500). Further, her appearance on stage is odd enough to make Chremylos and Blepsidemos wonder about her identity (*Plut.* 422), very much like the appearance of Erinyes, which confuses the Delphic

³² Heberlein (166 n.172) interprets ὄχρᾶ (422) as a reference to philosophy, rhetoric, and their practitioners' contempt of wealth; cf. *Nub.* 103, 1017, 1111f; on the sophistic traits of Penia in general see Heberlein 170–74. Penia has also been described as the "reality principle": Olson 235; see below. For a discussion of the allegorized personification of wealth and poverty see Newiger (*supra* n.12) 155–78.

³³ The dialogue after Penia's entrance (415ff) is one of the few paratragic passages in the play and may echo Eur. *Med.* 1121f; cf. P. Rau, *Paratragoidia* (= *Zetemata* 45 [Munich 1967]) 208. One might add Penia's complaint (ζητοῦντες ἐκ πάσης με χάρας ἐκβαλεῖν, 430), which seems to echo Medea's predicament (πρὶν ἂν σε γαίας τερμόνων ἔξω βάλω, *Med.* 276). Also in Chremylos' first words (422) after Penia's arrival, the use of γὰρ to explain an implied but not expressed thought ("who are you? <your arrival cannot forebode anything good> for you seem livid") is a feature frequent in tragedy; cf. Radt (*supra* n.24) 256f.

³⁴ J. Taillardat, *Les images d'Aristophane* (Paris 1962) 212f. Some of the following parallels are noted by R. Cantarella, "Aristoph., *Plut.* 422–25 e la riprese eschilee," *AttiLinc* 8.20 (1965) 363–81, esp. 363–66 for Penia's pallor and madness.

Pythia and Athena (*Eum.* 48–59, 406–14, esp. 408: τίνες ποτ' ἔστέ;). In fact, the seeds of the analogy between Poverty and the Erinyes seem to be inherent in their Aeschylean portrayal: they threaten to impair the fertility of the land (*Eum.* 478f, 782–87; cf. 800–03), just as Penia here advocates an austere and meagre living. In any case, the present argument does not depend on a paratragic allusion specifically to Aeschylus' tragedy.³⁵ The crucial point remains that Penia is perceived as a figure from the tragic stage, thus evoking the atmosphere of tragedy.

If Penia can be construed as a representative of tragedy, it is then reasonable that her polar opponents should stand on the side of comedy. As a matter of fact, Penia later addresses Chremylus and Blepsidemus in very pointed terms, which explore the opposition between tragedy and comedy (557–61):

σκώπτειν πειρᾶ καὶ κωμῶδειν τοῦ σπουδάζειν ἀμελήσας,
οὐ γινώσκων ὅτι τοῦ Πλούτου παρέχω βελτίονας ἄνδρας
καὶ τὴν γνώμην καὶ τὴν ιδέαν· παρὰ τῷ μὲν γὰρ ποδαγρῶντες
καὶ γαστρώδεις καὶ παχύκνημοὶ καὶ πιονές εἰσιν ἀσελγῶς,
παρ' ἐμοὶ δ' ἰσχυροὶ καὶ σφηκῶδεις καὶ τοῖς ἐχθροῖς ἀνιαιοί.

Elsewhere in Aristophanes σκώπτειν describes the main function of comedy.³⁶ Here it is explicitly paired with κωμῶδειν. By contrast, the stem of σπουδάζειν, the activity that the two comic characters are accused of neglecting, is part of the famous Aristotelian definition of tragedy (μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας, *Poet.* 1449b24f). Its weight can be gauged on the basis of its exclusiveness: σπουδαῖον is the sole term in the definition that refers to the contents of the tragic genre. In addition, Aristotle (1448a2–5) describes the characters of tragedy as σπουδαῖοι and βελτίονες, both used by Penia in

³⁵ Cantarella (*supra* n.34) even suggests that the poet's idea of assimilating Penia to a tragic Erinyes may have been inspired by a revival of the *Oresteia* in the years immediately before the *Plutus*, but his discussion is vitiated by his insistence that the Aeschylean Erinyes did not carry torches; see Olson's criticism: 233 n.36. Further, although it is true that the memory of Aeschylus' tragedy is alive at the time of the *Frogs*, at least partly, no doubt, due to the Athenian decree that permitted the reproduction of his plays after his death (*Ran.* 867; cf. A. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*² [Oxford 1968] 86, 99f), Aeschylean allusion in the *Plutus* is far from necessary. *SPlut.* 423 mentions, for instance, also the possibility of Eur. *Or.*

³⁶ For an excellent discussion of the generic dimensions of σκώπτειν see A. T. Edwards, "Aristophanes' Comic Poetics: τρύξις, Scatology, σκῶμμα," *TAPA* 121 (1991) 168–78, who does not comment, however, on the contrast between comic and tragic poetics.

similar fashion (557f). In fact, Penia's claim that she produces better men (βελτίονας, 558) coincides with Euripides' admission (*Ran.* 1009f) that tragic poets are to be revered because they make men better (βελτίους). Further, Aristotle explicitly contrasts τὰ σπουδαῖα with the forms of comedy (τὰ τῆς κωμῳδίας σχήματα, 1448b34–39). The exception that proves the rule of the contrast between σπουδαῖον and comedy is the song of the Initiates (*Ran.* 389–93), where the comic chorus prays to be able to speak both γέλοια and σπουδαῖα. This must be a striking innovation on a tradition that associates tragedy with the σπουδαῖον and comedy with the γελοῖον and φαῦλον like the Athenian at *Pl. Leg.* 816D–17A; cf. 814E. Therefore, the claim of the chorus in *Frogs* is meant to have a calculated shock value: the comic poet aspires to present a comedy that appropriates the serious functions of tragedy. But despite such occasional attempts to undermine the dichotomy, Penia's concern with σπουδάξεν places her squarely in the sphere of noble righteousness that is associated with tragedy.³⁷

To follow Penia's charges further, the men that *Plutus* produces are pot-bellied (γαστρώδεις, 560) and wantonly, obscenely fat (πίονες ... ἀσελγῶς, 560), with gouty feet (ποδαγρῶντες, 559) and thick calves (παχύκνημοι, 560). This description is strikingly similar to the attributes of the comic Dionysus in the *Frogs*: he is unable to walk for very long (μὴ βαδιστικοῦ, 128) and has a potbelly (γάστρων, 200 with Σ; cf. 663).³⁸ The resem-

³⁷ On the passage in *Laws* see R. Patterson, "The Platonic Art of Comedy and Tragedy," *Philosophy and Literature* (1982) 76–93, esp. 78–81, who also describes how Plato subtly subverts this traditional association. The dichotomy is further confirmed in the comparison of the definition of tragedy in the *Poetics* with the definition of comedy as imitation of γελοῖα πράξις in *Tractatus Coislinianus* IV, on which see R. Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy: Towards a Reconstruction of Poetics* II (Berkeley 1984), esp. 153f. Edwards (*supra* n.36: 171f) sees the contrast between σπουδάξεν, which he glosses as "seriousness," and laughter, but without reference to tragedy. He further notes that σκώπτειν from the subject's viewpoint becomes ὑβρις from the object's viewpoint. This squares well with the derided Penia's attribution of ὑβρίζειν to *Plutus*; her own feature is κοσμώτης (564). Besides *Ran.* 389–93, Aristophanes also appropriates the functions of tragedy in the *Acharnians*: the coined name of the comic genre (τρυγῳδία, 499f, 628), meant to recall its rival genre, reinforces the claim that comedy knows justice (500, 645) and makes men better (βελτίους, 649ff).

³⁸ Further, the root ἀσελγ- of ἀσελγῶς seems to be at home in comedy. The word is first attested at Eupolis fr. 261 K.-A. (σκῶμμα ἀσελγῶς); cf. 172.15 K.-A. Except for orators complaining of abusive behavior, the root is not found outside comedy until later (see LSJ *s.v.*). Interestingly, ἀσελγαίνειν is used at *Pl. Symp.* 190c by none other than Aristophanes.

blance to the comic Dionysus points in an interesting direction: Penia's charges are more than a mere description of men fattened by wealth. They also evoke the padded figures that represent comic actors on vase paintings.³⁹ Compared to these plump incarnations of joyful fertility and exuberance, Penia cuts a very different figure, as it is very likely that her costume has no padding.⁴⁰ The lack of padding, along with her pallor, emphasizes her penury; conspicuous as it is in the company of corpulent comic actors, it also suggests that she is rather out of place on the comic stage.

The debate on the respective merits of Plutus and Penia thus invites a reading that considers a distinction of genres. The generic interpretation of Plutus and Penia advanced here finds indirect confirmation from a seemingly unlikely source, the near-contemporary *Symposium*. Plato's dialogue, it has been plausibly argued, must have been composed between 385 and 379, i.e., only a few years after *Plutus* was performed.⁴¹ Here two pairs of opposites, Poros and Penia, comedy and tragedy, are related in a way reminiscent of their association in *Plutus*. The two antithetical pairs are not paralleled in the *Symposium* as explicitly as in *Plutus*: only by implication do they interlock in the central figure of the dialogue, Socrates, who, being the philosophical *daimon* that he is, mediates between a number of contrasting terms. His Dionysiac character, insinuated by Alcibiades (esp. 215A-16C), means that he encompasses both Dionysiac genres, comedy and tragedy, for the unity of which he

³⁹ On the padding of comic actors see Stone 127-43, 446-52, who discusses both the literary indications (e.g. Dionysus' description as γάστρων) and the archaeological evidence, including Attic vases, statuettes, and the so-called phlyax-vases; on the value of the latter as evidence for Attic comedy see O. TAPLIN, *Comic Angels and Other Approaches to Greek Drama through Vase-Paintings* (Oxford 1993: hereafter "Taplin") esp. 30-54, 89-99. Problems of terminology aside, it is interesting that φλύαξ, the South Italian word for "comic-dancer" (Ath. 14.621D-22D) is cognate with φλέω ("to teem with abundance") from the semantic field of agricultural wealth (e.g. Aesch. Ag. 377) and with Dionysus' epithets φλέως and φλεύς. On the fat comic characters and their possible ritual antecedents see W. Fauth, "Kulinarisches und Utopisches in der griechischen Komödie," *WS* 7 (1973) 39-62, esp. 53f.

⁴⁰ Stone 365. On possible representatives of tragedy, painted without comic features such as padding and comic mask on South Italian comic vases, see the compelling treatment of Taplin (55-63), who also discusses (63-66) comedies—not the *Plutus*—that enact a generic conflict between comic figures and a stand-in for tragedy.

⁴¹ K. J. Dover, "The Date of Plato's *Symposium*," *Phronesis* 10 (1965) 1-20. I owe the comparison with the *Symposium* to the referee of this journal.

also argues (223D). On the other hand, his erotic nature implies that he embodies both Poros and Penia, the parents of Eros in Diotima's speech (203B–04A). Just as Poros and Penia produce a synthesis in their offspring, Eros, the unity of comedy and tragedy is demonstrated and exemplified by the erotic philosopher, Socrates.⁴² In other words, Socrates' nature, erotic and Dionysiac at the same time, embodies Poros and Penia, comedy and tragedy. This means that the two oppositions converge to form an overarching antithesis, but also that the contrasting terms of each pair of opposites are amalgamated into one whole, the quintessential philosopher. Such a synthesis of seemingly irreconcilable opposites will also emerge in subsequent discussion of *Plutus*. But for now, it is sufficient to point out the alignment between economic and poetic terms that is effected, albeit in different ways and for different purposes, in both *Plutus* and *Symposium*.⁴³

To return to *Plutus*, diction, imagery, and costume in the portrayal of Plutus and Penia combine to pit comedy against tragedy. The joyful material abundance of the playful comic characters is contrasted to the stern grimness of raging tragic characters.⁴⁴ But the nature of the analogy between genres and personified financial states needs to be clarified further. What exactly is the point of aligning Plutus with comedy, Penia with tragedy? One could not simply claim, of course, that comedy is the genre of the rich, tragedy the genre of the poor: after all Chremylos is a poor man (πένης, 29; cf. 437). Rather, the generic interpretation of wealth and poverty becomes intelligible if we consider Penia's agenda. Penia champions the maintainance of the status quo, in which the rich and the poor are distinctly defined and should remain so. In her ideal scenario, the dividing line between the privileged and the hard-working laborers

⁴² For comedy and tragedy in the *Symposium* see D. Clay, "The Tragic and Comic Poet of the *Symposium*," *Arion* n.s. 2 (1975) 238–61; Patterson (*supra* n.37) 76–93; for the erotic and Dionysiac character of Socrates see e.g. D. E. Anderson, *The Masks of Dionysos: A Commentary of Plato's Symposium* (Albany [N.Y.] 1993).

⁴³ Although the two antitheses, Plutus vs Penia and Poros vs Penia, are not identical, the former being more concrete and material and the latter more abstract, we may note that words deriving from πόρος recur in the debate on the merits of Plutus and Penia, where both sides claim πόρος for themselves (461, 531f, 535, 562).

⁴⁴ It is thus very appropriate that, as Sommerstein (319) notes, "[Chremylos'] main weapons of argument are emotionalism, cursing, and sarcasm." Are these not the very weapons of comedy?

would always be in place. The comic heroes, on the other hand, seek to destroy those class divisions in their present form, hence to overthrow the status quo (e.g. 415–21, 433f, 473ff). In her determination to maintain the present order, Penia is the opponent of the reform-minded comic heroes and of their “intolerable daring deed” (τόλμημα ... τολμᾶτον οὐκ ἀνασχετόν, 419; cf. 416, 454, 593). Consequently, Penia’s agenda means that she adopts the point of view of the well-to-do, in whose interest it is to maintain the present boundaries, the social and economic status quo.

Given that Penia is a representative of the status quo, we can discern why she is aligned with tragedy. As a genre, tragedy tends to focus on the disastrous results of transgression. By illustrating the punishment of *hybris*, tragedy seems to be intent on affirming a status quo very broadly defined as the sum of the conditions and boundaries that make up the human universe. Tragedy demonstrates the impossibility of going beyond the established boundaries, however deeply it may question them and test their endurance. The desire “I wish I could fly” may be uttered in tragedy, but cannot be granted in a world where fantasies are curtailed and dreams are shattered. Comedy, on the other hand, gives free reign to fantasy and promises the unlimited fulfillment of all wishes in a world where, quite literally, the sky is the limit.⁴⁵

We can now explain why Penia accuses the comic heroes of committing *hybris* and wants to punish it (*Plut.* 563f; cf. 433f). Her denunciation of the comic heroes’ plan as *hybris* and her insistence to teach them *sophrosyne* indicate her eagerness to impose the ideology of tragedy onto the utopia of the comic heroes. She seeks, in other words, to turn their search for a new world of just and abundant wealth into a tragic script of transgression and punishment.⁴⁶ It is then no surprise that she appears as an Erinys, the figure that instills fear and punishes trans-

⁴⁵ From the bibliography on the importance of fantasy and utopia in comedy, the approach of Sutton (*supra* n.4: 55–67, 82–92) is most congenial to the thoughts presented here. See also J.-C. CARRIÈRE, *Le carnaval et la politique* (= *Annales littéraires de l’Université de Besançon* 212 [Paris 1979: hereafter ‘Carrière’]); Heberlein; Reckford 312–63. On the beneficial fear and the function of tragedy see e.g. E. Belfiore, *Tragic Pleasures* (Princeton 1992) esp. 19–30.

⁴⁶ K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford 1974) 109–12, outlines how the contrast between *sophrosyne* and *hybris* is related to the contrast between wealth and poverty.

gressions, as is most obvious in the function of the Furies in *Eumenides*.⁴⁷ Such a transgression is precisely the attempt of the comic heroes to cure Plutus of his blindness. In doing so, they both overstep their boundaries and undermine the very foundations of the present order. It is at this very point that Penia-Erinyes appears and seeks to stop the enterprise, which would threaten the order of Zeus, not unlike the transgressions of the other mythical benefactors of humanity. Contrary to the threatening and curtailing Penia, Plutus gives free reign to an unencumbered comic utopia. As portrayed in the play, Plutus stands for the gratification of all human desires, which is also the thrust of comedy. We can understand then why the Aristophanic Plutus is aligned with the comic Dionysus: both gods can ideally be accessible to all, both gods possess powers that, however different in nature, can inspire in their devotees fantasies of omnipotence.

III

Once we recognize that the struggle of the characters in this play unfolds, partly at least, as a conflict of dramatic genres, we can probe even further into the nature of Plutus. The god of wealth is portrayed with characteristics that recall comedy in general, but some of his traits seem to be more specific and to look back to an earlier phase of the genre. To begin with, the utopian abundance that Plutus stands for has been described as a salient feature of Old Comedy. The dream of unlimited means of subsistence may even reach back, perhaps, to the origins of a genre that emphasizes growth and fertility.⁴⁸ But on more secure ground, this image of a free flow of goods allows for a fruitful comparison with later comedy. In outlining the development of the alimentary theme from Old to New Comedy, Fauth remarks that the culinary element in later comedy is more elaborate and technical, but at the same time becomes

⁴⁷ This view is compatible with Olson's description (235) of Penia as the reality principle, "the bogey Reality, doing her best to break the magical world of the stage" and to demolish the comic fantasy. In both readings she is an adversary of the playfulness and gratification represented by comedy. On the antagonism between a laughing, pleasure-loving god or hero and his dead serious opponents as an important aspect of the Dionysiac comic plot, see Sutton (*supra* n.6) 6-17 and (*supra* n.4) 9-12.

⁴⁸ See e.g. Carrière 29-32, 87f; Fauth (*supra* n.39).

confined to the expertise of the cook (μάγειρος) and his assistants. Old Comedy, by contrast, uses food in ways that emphasize abundant quantity rather than refined gastronomic elaboration and that pervade, literally or by construction of metaphorical systems, all aspects of public life.⁴⁹

If the emphasis on unlimited material abundance is perceived as a trademark of Old Comedy, several features in *Plutus* acquire a temporal dimension and may reveal a self-reflexive awareness of a development in the comic genre. One may perhaps discern here a nostalgia for the Dionysiac roots of comedy, but it must be stressed that, be that as it may, the very presence of such metatheatrical reflection would be sufficient to grant *Plutus* a place within a genre intent on exploring its own character in the context of the dramatic festival.

Let us therefore recall these 'backward-looking' features of the god of wealth. When Karion describes Plutus to the chorus, he adds, almost as an afterthought, that the old man is also ψωλός (265–69):

Κα. ἔχων ἀφίκται δεῦρο πρεσβύτην τιν' ὃ πόνηροι
 ρυπῶντα κυφὸν ἄθλιον ῥυσὸν μαδῶντα νωδόν·
 οἶμαι δὲ νῆ τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ψωλὸν αὐτὸν εἶναι
 Χο. ὃ χρυσὸν ἀγγείλας ἐπῶν πῶς φῆς; πάλιν φράσον μοι.
 δηλοῖς γὰρ αὐτὸν σωρὸν ἤκειν χρημάτων ἔχοντα.

All of Plutus' attributes are visible, all are clearly linked to his destitute old age, save for the last, ψωλόν ("with the foreskin retracted"). The slave cannot see Plutus' penis, hidden perhaps in his rags, but only infers its shape (see οἶμαι, 267; cf. Σ *ad loc.*). What is the basis for his inference? The context would suggest old age, but then Karion's inference of an erection seems rather unrealistic, if considered on purely physiological grounds (see Henderson 105). Therefore, I would rather submit that ψωλός refers to a part of the theatrical costume, namely the phallus that, whether coiled, hanging, or erect, was worn by comic actors. The connection of phallus with old age in Karion's remark can only mean one thing: Plutus is assimilated to a figure from an older phase of comedy, when the phallus was a visible and frequently mentioned accessory, especially in the costume

⁴⁹ Fauth (*supra* n.39) esp. 47ff. On the shift in the symbolism of food and cooking in later comedy see also R. Scodel, "Tragic Sacrifice and Menandrian Cooking," in Scodel, ed. (*supra* n.6), 161–76, esp. 162f.

of older men.⁵⁰ It is sufficient to recall Dicaeopolis and Philocleon in the last scenes of *Acharnians* (1216–20) and *Wasps* (1341–80) respectively. The vital sexual energy, emblemized by the phallus, may be Dionysiac in general, but it is more prominent in comedy with its repertory of pleasure-seeking figures.

If the god Plutus partakes of the Dionysiac element in Old Comedy, we can place in a wider context the immediate effect that the mere mention of Plutus' presence has upon the old men of the chorus, especially in comparison with their former state. When Karion (253–56) urges them to hurry, they reply that they walk as eagerly (προθύμως) as their invalid old age allows, although their speed may not be sufficient for Karion (258f). They are slow, ill-tempered, grumpy, reluctant, perhaps even deaf. Their deafness would at least explain their seemingly incongruous response to Karion's description of the as yet anonymous old man (265ff). Their reference to gold (268) is probably accidental and due to a mistake, as they seem to mishear two of the slave's words: they take ῥυσόν for χρυσόν and ψωλόν for σωρόν.⁵¹

Yet the appearance of senility will not last for long, as the mere mention of Plutus' name seems to energize them. I shall discuss their sudden invigoration presently, but I must comment first on the slave's assurance that they will become Midases (284–87). The phrasing of Karion's promise is significant, for the god traditionally responsible for Midas' wealth is Dionysus. The legendary king provided shelter for the satyr Silenus and was therefore rewarded by Dionysus, who enabled Midas to transform whatever he touched into gold. The full story is only attested in later sources (e.g. *Ov. Met.* 11.85–145; *Ael. VH* 3.18; *Hyg. Fab.* 191), but already Herodotus (8.138) alludes to the sojourn of the satyr Silenus in Midas' garden. We also know from Aristotle (*Pol.* 1257b14–17) that the story of

⁵⁰ On the comic phallus see Henderson 110f; in more detail, Stone 72–126. Contrary to the earlier plays, the texts of the two surviving plays that precede *Plutus*, i.e., *Frogs* and *Ecclesiazousae*, contain no indications of a visible phallus, although this does not mean that it was not there; cf. Stone 90ff. But this evidence, however limited, parallels the tendency attested by Aristotle's remarks (*Eth. Nic.* 4.1128a22f) that the comedy of his own day has abandoned the αἰσχρολογία of earlier comedy.

⁵¹ See also Radt's summary (*supra* n.24: 255f) of the various views, including Rogers (*supra* n.15: *ad loc.*), who understands the chorus' reply as a reference to an old miser.

Midas' "golden touch" had a wide circulation, and it is therefore not improbable that it reached at least as far back as the production of the *Plutus*.⁵² Midas' donkey-ears, for instance, are alluded to in the play (287) and also figure on vases from the fifth century. Another indirect indication may be, as several scholars have pointed out, Karion's description of how everyday objects in the household were transformed by Plutus into gold, silver, and ivory (808-17).⁵³ It is then highly probable that the very mention of Midas contributes to building up a Dionysiac atmosphere, as it evokes Dionysus' powers.

Regardless of the Dionysiac elements in Midas' story, the regenerating power of Dionysus becomes manifest in the vigorous response of the old men of the chorus. As soon as they hear Karion's promise, their ill-temper gives way to a blithe mood (288f):

ὄς ἡδομαι καὶ τέρπομαι καὶ βούλομαι χορεῦσαι
ὑφ' ἡδονῆς εἶπερ λέγεις ὄντως σὺ ταῦτ' ἀληθῆ.

The tired old men now express not only joy but also a desire to dance, which they immediately do, as if they were suddenly filled with Dionysiac energy. The following duet between them and Karion, triggered by the announcement of the presence of Plutus, stands out in the play (see Henderson 105). It appears to be a lively mimetic dance (cf. μιμούμενος, 291; μιμήσομαι, 306; μιμούμενοι, 312), which draws attention to its movement and hence to the performance. In this and other ways, it recalls features of Old Comedy. As the scholiast states, it is a parody of Philoxenus' dithyramb *Cyclops* or *Galatea*. Such 'parasitic' incorporation of other genres is of course in the tradition of Old Comedy.⁵⁴ Even more to the point, the duet has been described as a retreat to a "low lyric base," in which "the old Dionysian chorus of comedy or satyr play returns for an instant" (Reckford 359 with n.101). First of all, the old men experience a momentary rejuvenation (recalling Teiresias and Cadmus in the

⁵² See L. E. Roller, "The Legend of Midas," *CLAnt* 2 (1983) 299-313, esp. 310; Sommerstein 319 n.35. Midas' wealth is first mentioned in Tyrtaeus 12 West.

⁵³ On Midas' ears see Roller (*supra* n.52) 305. The transformation of the household objects is discussed by Heberlein 178ff; Sommerstein 323f; for the touch of gold as an old folktale motif see Heberlein 178 n.217.

⁵⁴ On Philoxenus' poem, its politics, and its use in this and other comedies see T. B. L. Webster, *Studies in Later Greek Comedy* (Manchester 1953) 20-26.

Bacchae and Philocleon in the *Wasps*), which at the same time leads to the revival of an assertive chorus that comes to its own and stands up forcefully to a dramatic character. The Dionysiac energy of the chorus no doubt derives in part from the dithyrambic context of Philoxenus' poem. Secondly, Karion turns the old men, in words alone of course and perhaps in gesture but not literally, into an animal chorus (into goats, sheep, and pigs consecutively), such as we find in Old Comedy. Thirdly, the chorus and Karion tap the sources of folk humor with its wit and obscenity, when they indulge in unabashed derision both of each other and of others. This kind of mockery, of course, is much closer to Old Comedy than to anything else. In fact, when they are about to get the better of Karion, their adversary asks them to abandon their mockery and to turn to another style (ἐπ' ἄλλ' εἶδος):⁵⁵

ἄλλ' εἶα νῦν τῶν σκωμμάτων ἀπαλλαγέντες ἤδη
 ὑμεῖς ἐπ' ἄλλ' εἶδος τρέπεσθε (316f).

The old-style σκώματα are appropriate up to a point; then the chorus has to revert to a more restrained style. But it is noteworthy that the promise of wealth brings about the parodos of a chorus that makes a unique foray into the repositories of folk humor and of Dionysiac energy and that resuscitates vigorously albeit momentarily the old poetics.

In the same spirit, the very presence of the god continues to excite the chorus and to determine their dance throughout the play. After Karion announces the miraculous healing of the god, he goes on to describe Plutus' enthusiastic reception by the righteous people (757–61):

οἱ δ' ἠκολούθουν κατόπιν ἐστεφανωμένοι
 γελῶντες εὐφημοῦντες· ἐκτυπεῖτο δὲ
 ἐμβᾶς γερόντων εὐρύθοις προβήμασιν.
 ἄλλ' εἰ' ἀπαξάπαντες ἐξ ἑνὸς λόγου
 ὀρχεῖσθε καὶ σκιρτᾶτε καὶ χορεύετε.

The supposed off-stage dance of old men escorting Plutus towards the stage (757ff) merges with the actual dance of the chorus (760f), who will presently welcome the god by performing a choral interlude (between lines 770 and 771). Not only does the presence of Plutus affect the performance of the

⁵⁵ On *eidōs* as a type of song or genre see Pl. *Leg.* 698B–700A; cf. Nagy (*supra* n.8) 87, 109.

chorus, but also the god will himself dictate the kind of ritual to be performed at his installation (790–99): he forestalls the traditional throw of *καταχύσματα* in the open because it would not be appropriate (*πρεπῶδες*, 793) to waste the household goods. But he appends an additional reason (796–99):

ἔπειτα καὶ τὸν φόρτον ἐκφύγοιμεν ἄν.
οὐ γὰρ πρεπῶδες ἐστὶ τῷ διδασκάλῳ
ἰσχάδια καὶ τρωγάλια τοῖς θεωμένοις
προβαλόντ' ἐπὶ τούτοις εἶτ' ἀναγκάζειν γελᾶν.

According to the god, it does not befit the comic poet (οὐ γὰρ πρεπῶδες ἐστὶ τῷ διδασκάλῳ) to elicit the spectator's laughter by throwing munchies to them, a lowbrow device (*φόρτος*, 796). The double invocation of *πρεπῶδες* (793, 797) implies a correlation between the rules of managing the wealth of the household and the rules of stage-managing the play. The injunction of the god of wealth is in keeping with his dramatic character, of course, but it has also a theatrical aspect, especially because Plutus' rejection of a lowbrow device recalls the poetic precepts of Dionysus to Xanthias in the beginning of *Frogs*.⁵⁶ Whether or not the comedy is aware of its development over time, whether or not it feels a pinch of nostalgia for the old days, the crucial thing is that the figure of Plutus, invested in Dionysiac and especially comic attributes, becomes the focal point for reflection on comic poetics. This reflection interweaves the concerns of the poet with those of the audience in the context of the comic performance,⁵⁷ and this very reflection, as I shall show below, justifies putting *Plutus* in the company of the earlier Aristophanic plays.

⁵⁶ The noun *φόρτος* does not occur at *Ran.* 1–32, but the discussion of lowbrow phrases in comedy is punctuated with ten forms of *φέρω*. The metaphorical *φόρτος* slides thus playfully into the literal meaning with the question: who is carrying the baggages? For further Aristophanic disclaimers of *φόρτος* see *Nub.* 537–44, *Vesp.* 57–66, *Pax* 739–50; cf. *Arist. Eth. Nic.* 4.1128a4–8. The poet's appropriation of a divinity that puts forward a theory of comedy recalls *Nub.* 340–55, the Socratic deities that illustrate, and thus are subtly co-opted into, comic poetics.

⁵⁷ For the parabasis of the early plays as the meeting point of poet, chorus, and audience, see Hubbard 17–33 and *passim*, with 251 n.20 on the parabolic nature of *Plut.* 760–64.

IV

To sum up so far, by dint of his affinity with the Eleusinian Iacchus, his contrast to the Erinys-like Penia, his ability to stir up the dance of the chorus, and his readiness to dictate comic poetics, the Aristophanic Plutus can be described, in some respects, as an alternative epiphany of Dionysus, especially in his comic guise. Wealth's gravitation towards comedy becomes especially pointed in the confrontation between Chremylos and Penia, who has to be expelled, not only because poverty has no place in the reign of abundance, but also because a figure from tragedy that would claim permanent possession of the comic stage could bring about in the breaking of genre boundaries.

Yet the conclusion of the *agon* is worthy of comment, for the debate does not end in a clear-cut victory for Chremylos. Penia is expelled, of course, but this outcome appears to be precarious, as her opponents are far from carrying the day.⁵⁸ Chremylos' words to her provide the best illustration: "You will not convince me, not even if you do" (οὐ γὰρ πείσεις, οὐδ' ἦν πείσης, 600). If the *agon* remains essentially open-ended, it is because Plutus as Dionysus entails a duality that cannot be disentangled. For the same reason Plutus cannot participate directly in the debate against Poverty. Although his silent presence inspires and encourages Chremylos (452f), the brunt of the struggle falls on Plutus' mortal proponents, who are decisively stock comic characters.⁵⁹ Plutus cannot be cast in the rôle of an opponent because he stands for Dionysus and, as I shall elaborate presently, Dionysus comprises ultimately both tragedy and comedy.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ We may compare the difficulty of the comic heroes to the ritual ejection of hunger (βουλιμὸς) and the welcoming of wealth and health at Plut. *Mor.* 693F. As Reckford (361) notes: "the beggarly Penia is there to be cast out in the spirit of old folk ritual." On Penia's argument see Konstan and Dillon.

⁵⁹ Another reason is that Plutus' absence, as Konstan and Dillon (386 with n.20) remark, "keeps Penia on a level distinctly below that of the divine Plutus."

⁶⁰ This overarching Dionysus squares well with the virtually identical capacities attributed to Plutus and Penia despite their differences. Chremylos' view that creativity springs from the desire to acquire wealth (160–86) is the comic inversion of Penia's theory that inventiveness derives from the eagerness to escape poverty (507–34); Plutus and Penia share even the power to effect a moral reform (496f, 576–78); cf. Heberlein 174ff; Newiger (*supra* n.12) 173, 176; Konstan and Dillon 386f.

The ambivalence and elusiveness of Dionysus, fundamental to his nature, is well known and requires no further elaboration.⁶¹ But it would perhaps be apt to stress that comedy, at least the comedy of Aristophanes, recognizes the many and seemingly contradictory facets of the god and attempts to integrate them into one whole.⁶² *Frogs*, for instance, offers a marvelous illustration of the ways in which the comic poet explores precisely the multifarious aspects of Dionysus. In terms of plot, this comedy unfolds as a diptych consisting of a journey and an *agon*; but it can also be construed, in conceptual terms, as a series of dichotomies, in which the god of theater plays a mediating rôle. In other words, whereas the opposites in each dichotomy open up to reveal within them a new antagonism, the whole structure is glued together by the overarching presence of Dionysus, dominant at every turn.⁶³ To begin with, the god bridges his own Dionysiac festivals with the Eleusinian Mysteries, where he participates as Iacchus, the divinity invoked by the Initiates. In fact, the interweaving of the Dionysiac celebration with the rituals of Demeter seems to foreshadow the integration of mystical terminology in *Plutus*. Second, the festive Dionysus of *Frogs* encompasses both the Anthesteria, which forms the background for the song of the amphibians, and the dramatic festival with the formal contest between the two playwrights. Further, within the dramatic festival, Dionysus seems to be torn between tragedy and comedy, but encompasses both genres. The god's explicit preoccupation with the fate of tragedy after the demise of Euripides is coupled with an equally important interest, not proclaimed but visually conspicuous, in the comic spirit and its appropriate expression. But within each genre there are contrasting trends that lay claim on the god's poetic concerns. Within tragedy we witness the tug-of-war between the lofty conceptions of Aeschylus and the realistic, even trivial, poetry of Euripides. We find two competing modes also within the genre of comedy: Dionysus and, with him, the comic poet

⁶¹ On the multiplicity of Dionysus in general see e.g. Burkert, *GR* 161–67, 222–25.

⁶² These remarks on *Frogs* draw on C. P. Segal, "The Character and Cults of Dionysus and the Unity of the *Frogs*," *HSCP* 65 (1961) 207–42; A. R. Keller, *The Comic Dionysos: Frogs, Swans, and Aristophanes*, forthcoming.

⁶³ For an analysis of another Aristophanic play that focuses also on the interplay of dichotomies, see F. I. Zeitlin, "Travesties of Gender and Genre in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousae*," in H. Foley, ed., *Reflections of Women in Antiquity* (London 1982) 169–217, esp. 170f.

endeavor to weld entertainment with civic instruction, low-brow humor with literary criticism, in short, laughter with seriousness, the γελοῖα with the σπουδαῖα. To use the imagery of the play, although in each successive dichotomy there are two trends pulling in different directions, ultimately the effeminate saffron robe and the club form an inextricable unity. The Dionysus of *Frogs* is thus depicted as presiding over a number of dichotomies, in much the same way as Plutus emerges, partly because of his Dionysiac character, as the embodiment of a number of seemingly disparate elements, which are ultimately integrated, as we shall see, in a reflection on theatrical poetics.

Before exploring further the poetic dimensions of Plutus' Dionysiac and hence ambivalent nature, let us consider briefly the ambivalence of another wealth-giving deity, Demeter. Her associations with wealth are obvious and well documented (see above), but her other, darker aspect is manifested in e.g. the famine that the angry goddess causes at *Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 305–13. We can glean this dark aspect even in *Plutus*, in the debate between Penia and the comic heroes. Penia's praise of the moderate life of the poor as opposed to that of the beggar (550–54) provokes Chremylos' intriguing response (555f):

ὡς μακαρίτην, ὦ Δάματερ, τὸν βίον αὐτοῦ κατέλεξας
εἰ φεισάμενος καὶ μοχθήσας καταλείπει μηδὲ ταφῆναι.

The sarcasm of the lines is not lost on Penia, who denounces it as a manifestation of her opponents' comic poetics (557–61; see above). The irony is unmistakable in the use of μακαρίτης. The word denotes the dead person but also conjures up images of mystical salvation, of Eleusinian rites, which echo in the following ὦ Δάματερ. The scholia treat this vocative as a mere invocation of the goddess Demeter, in keeping with Chremylos' concern with agricultural bounty, and explain it as an attempt to counteract the presence and influence of poverty. This reading, however, besides missing the irony, also ignores that the vocative and the verb in the second person singular (κατέλεξας) require the same addressee. Rather, the use of the invocation suggests something else: Chremylos' irony reaches a peak in the paradoxical equation of the addressee, Penia, with her opposite, Demeter. But the ironical paradox reveals an important point, namely that Penia and Demeter are two sides of the same coin. We can recall here the angry Demeter who makes the earth barren (*Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 305–13; cf. also Σ *Plut.* 431) Another indirect link is suggested when Penia is

introduced. As shown, she is dubbed an Erinyes (423), a cult epithet of Demeter.⁶⁴ On the other hand, although Demeter as Erinyes comes close to the figure of Penia, the Erinyes are not without their benign aspects that approach the attributes of Demeter. In the exodus at *Eum.* 938–47, 996 the Σεμναὶ θεαὶ promise fertility for the land and wealth for its inhabitants. Demeter is then, like Dionysus, a divinity with two faces.

Plutus and Penia can thus be seen as opposite poles of the same ambivalent image, just as comedy and tragedy form essential components of the profoundly ambivalent Dionysus. The co-existence of the polar opposites, abundance and vitality versus death and decay, which form complementary sides of the same ambivalent whole, reaches far beyond the confines of *Plutus*. This same ambivalence is a defining and enduring aspect of the “popular grotesque,” the expression of folk humor outlined in the work of Bakhtin. The grotesque encompasses “a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life. Negation and destruction (death of the old) are intended as an essential phase, inseparable from affirmation from the birth of something new and better.” The positive aspect is victorious, “for the final result is always abundance, increase.”⁶⁵ In exactly the same way the tense ambivalence in *Plutus* is resolved in favor of vitality and material abundance. But this ambivalence, inherent in the perception of such divinities as Dionysus, Demeter, even Plutus, is explored brilliantly by Aristophanes to illustrate the poetics of theater.

At first sight, one might read the complexities of the play's central figure and of the *agon* as signs that Aristophanes is unsure of the value of comedy. Yet these manifestations of ambivalence do not mean that the poet undermines in any way the comic genre. On the contrary, the dual identity of Plutus as Dionysus and as comedy points to a constant of Aristophanes' art, namely the validation of comic poetics, which has become the focus of several recent studies. In *Thesmophoriazousai*, for in-

⁶⁴ See e.g. ΣLyc. *Alex.* 766; Paus. 8.25, who describes the temple of Demeter Erinyes at the Arcadian Oncion; further bibliography at Richardson 140.

⁶⁵ See M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, tr. H. Iswolsky (Cambridge [Mass.] 1968) esp. 53, 62 (whence the quotations), 82, 121ff, 149f. The presence of Bakhtin's “popular grotesque” in Old Comedy has been recognized by Carrière and Reckford among others, but its political uses and implications are more controversial, as argued by A. T. Edwards, “Historicizing the Popular Grotesque: Bakhtin's *Rabelais* and Attic Old Comedy,” in Scodel, ed. (*supra* n.6), 89–117.

stance, the Aristophanic stage incorporates a sequence of comically distorted tragic scenes in order to comment on the art of theatrical representation, but also to highlight the superiority of the comic mode.⁶⁶ The tug-of-war between the genres that Aristophanes orchestrates is ultimately resolved in comedy's favor.

Like the ambivalence of the central figure in *Plutus*, the juxtaposition of different genres within comedy can also be, and has been, profitably viewed in Bakhtinian terms. Platter described comedy as a "dialogic genre" that, like the novel in Bakhtin's discussion, admits a polyphonic variety of discourses, including tragedy.⁶⁷ It is evident, of course, that this juxtaposition of different voices, far from being entirely balanced, is subject to a hierarchy of genres that is constructed by comedy. Platter points out (209–12) that comedy undermines the foundations of the incorporated genres and their claim to absolute authority, that, as a result of this process of incorporation, comedy and not tragedy is the more comprehensive genre.

This comprehensiveness of comedy is also borne out in this play. Although *Plutus* does not feature the re-enactment of tragic scenes or extensive tragic diction, we have seen that the Erinyes-like Penia, a tragic intruder on the comic stage, stands for tragedy as a whole.⁶⁸ Her relationship to the intricately ambivalent figure of Plutus brings out in relief her subordination to the comic Dionysus. As Plutus oscillates in the play between a marked and an unmarked 'meaning', between comedy and Dionysus, these two terms are in turn joined; comedy and Dionysus converge subtly into one image, excluding the tragic Penia. This duality of Plutus thus means that comedy expands to squeeze out tragedy and to appropriate the whole of Dionysiac theater, as its more worthy representative. By virtue of the complex figure of Plutus, comedy asserts itself and emerges as the 'master genre'.

Through his web of allusions, therefore, Aristophanes concedes first a tragic aspect of Dionysus beside the comic, like the

⁶⁶ See Zeitlin (*supra* n.63) 169–217; for some other examples, not all from Aristophanes, see Taplin 55–66.

⁶⁷ C. Platter, "The Uninvited Guest: Aristophanes in Bakhtin's 'History of Laughter'," *Arethusa* 26 (1993) 201–16.

⁶⁸ In this light, therefore, I would add *Plutus* to Taplin's (55–66) convincing account of comic plots, some from the early fourth century, that enact a generic contest between comedy and a representative of tragedy. On parody in *Plutus* in general see Rau (*supra* n.33) 160ff, 207ff.

dark, angry Demeter who co-exists with the goddess of fertility and bounty; second, that the tragic and the comic Dionysus, represented by the two genres, co-exist in the dramatic festival. He also implies, however, that the conflict played out on stage must be resolved in favor of Plutus or, on a poetic level, in favor of the comic Dionysus, although this does not mean annihilation of Penia or of the tragic Dionysus. Simply, as the scales turn in favor of Plutus in the comic plot, so they turn in favor of the comic Dionysus in the larger context of the festival. The concessions to Poverty's argument that Aristophanes allows his comic heroes to make can thus be seen as a recognition of Penia as the representative of the tragic genre. Aristophanes pays tragedy its due. At the same time, he cannot help but stand firmly on the side of comic poets.

V

This affinity between Plutus and the comic Dionysus carries a further implication. The comic utopia brought about by the triumph of Plutus has long been a matter of controversy. The play culminates in a renewed Golden Age, with the abundant prosperity, the abolition of Promethean sacrifice, and the surrender of Zeus. Perceived as totally improbable by realistic standards, this utopian resolution has led to a host of ironic interpretations. In light of this denouement, any inconsistencies in the plot or in the characters' argumentation are retroactively construed as signs that Aristophanes seeks consciously or unconsciously to undercut his own comic construction, which then becomes a wild escapist fantasy, not meant to be taken seriously.⁶⁹

Yet there is no foundation for the assumption that realistic improbability reveals the irony of a comic poet undermining his own plot. As several scholars have done, one may counter such an assumption by simply invoking the very presence of the utopian element in *Plutus* and by comparing it to the utopias of some of the earlier comedies.⁷⁰ *Plutus* is as typical as other

⁶⁹ For the phrase "wild escapist fantasy" see Olson 225. Cracks in the fabric of the plot include Chremylos' flippant denial (600) and Karion's account (802-22); on the ironic interpretation of these lines see Sommerstein 319, 323f.

⁷⁰ Konstan and Dillon (378f with n.10) offer an overview of ironic readings and a succinct refutation; see also Reckford 358-63. For a different reaction to the ironists see Sommerstein esp. 323f.

plays, in which the weight falls on utopian abundance, on the fantasy of unrestricted bounty.⁷¹ Konstan and Dillon (379) note "comedy's instinctual attraction to a Golden Age," as "the true comic hero ... embodies the positive values of fertility, abundance and physical gratification." In addition, they have shown how the play effects a transition from a moral and social problem, that of the just distribution of wealth, to a different question, that of the natural resources, of a renewed abundance. The comic poet offers the nostalgia for the utopian Golden Age as an answer to a moral and social question. That is undoubtedly true, but I would rather say that the substitution of a 'natural' for a 'moral' problem is possible, credible, and acceptable precisely because of the portrayal of Plutus as Dionysus. Through the Dionysiac metamorphosis of Wealth, the question of economy gives way to a problem that can be solved within the frame of comedy by the traditional means of the genre: the comic utopia.

These last remarks do not pose as a full discussion of the controversy nor as an attempt to iron out the bulges on the surface of the play. I hope to have shown, however, that such exciting features should also be read and appreciated on the level of poetics. The triumphant struggle of the comic actors for the installation of the cult of Plutus thus does double duty: besides providing a fitting conclusion for a comic plot, it achieves at the same time a re-affirmation of the comic poetics. If this re-affirmation is not entirely smooth but rather admits of contradictory discourses, for this very reason its message emerges as all the more credible and realistic. The reign of Plutus becomes also a mirror-image of the Dionysiac festival with all its tensions, which are implicitly recognized by the comedy, as it grapples with the claims of other genres, but also with its own norms and traditions. The traces of a later era in the play cannot obscure how much Aristophanes' *Plutus* is still,

⁷¹ On comic utopias in general, their features and their function, see Carrière esp. 87-91; Fauth (*supra* n.39); Sutton (*supra* n.4) 55-67, 83-92; Reckford 312-63.

not unlike those early plays, a comedy that talks about the comic genre with its potential and limitations, in quest for a poetic voice of its own.⁷²

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