

# The Double Plot in Aristophanes' *Knights*

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UNTIL RECENTLY scholars have tended—while welcoming Aristophanes' *Knights* as evidence for the poet's hostility to Cleon—to regard the dramatic structure of the play as unsatisfactory, and have criticised the ending in particular as tacked on arbitrarily.<sup>1</sup> Landfester's *Die Ritter des Aristophanes* represented a major advance, by tracing a coherent development throughout based on the thematic unity of the attempts of the sausage-seller, saviour of the *demos*, to oust the Paphlagonian, and on the need for Demos to recover his sovereignty and self-sufficiency.<sup>2</sup> Even Landfester, however, was forced to concede the existence of what he termed "paradox" in the play, particularly in the placing of hope of salvation for the knights in this "*ne plus ultra* of vulgarity" (44).<sup>3</sup> I propose to re-examine these elements of inconsistency and to argue that they arise not from the postponed resolution of a single dilemma and the dissimulation of an "irgendwie göttliches Wesen" (Landfester 93), but from the opera-

<sup>1</sup> M. LANDFESTER, *Die Ritter des Aristophanes* (Amsterdam 1967 [hereafter 'Landfester']) 10f, gives a summary of previous opinion; on the question of the ending see 83–89.

<sup>2</sup> Landfester argues that the action of the play centers on the sovereignty of the *demos*, its usurpation by demagogues, and the need for the *demos* to recover it (11). There is a tension between the authority of Demos—particularly in his rôle as *δεσπότης* of the household (23)—and his subjection to *ἐπίτροποι*, *δημαγωγοί* (21, 23–25), *ταμίαι* (57), and *προστάται* (71f), and his passivity as an *ἐρώμενος* (59). Throughout what Landfester terms the "oracle action" (lines 1–1263) Demos remains in the power of others, ready to hand over the reins of state to them (1109; Landfester 69), and this problem calls for resolution in the *exodos* (Landfester 78, 89), where Demos is restored to rule (96–98), recovers his sovereignty (97f), and is thus able to dispense with demagogues, for he is now active in his own right. This solution represents the outcome of the quest for *σωτηρία* that sets the action in motion (13, 18, 22; lines 12, 149, 458). The sausage-seller is the saviour who mysteriously appears (*ὥσπερ κατὰ θεόν*, 147; according to Landfester [36] *φανείς* at 149 and 458 denotes epiphany) and, concealing his true nature, saves the *demos* from the Paphlagonian, finally revealing himself only in the last scene (92–94).

<sup>3</sup> The sausage-seller, a low-born menial, is nevertheless regarded as a quasi-divine saviour (37) and enthusiastically received by the aristocratic knights, who praise his base qualities (44); this tension is emphasised by the *parabasis*, in which the knights assert their aristocratic ideology (44, 47). Similarly the sausage-seller aligns himself with the *καλοὶ κἀγαθοί* (54; lines 735, 738). The need to resolve this paradox is another justification for the *exodos* (91f), and the resolution lies, according to Landfester (92), in the fact that the sausage-seller has been feigning baseness until 1316.

tion in the play of a double plot structure. In the first, Demos' servants and the knights attempt to save themselves from the Paphlagonian by replacing him with an even baser and more consummate demagogue to favour their interests—an undertaking that reflects a thoroughly cynical view of Athenian politics. The second, idealistic plot aims at a complete reformation of politics based on the restoration and rejuvenation of Demos. These two actions overlap, producing elements of inconsistency and tension. I shall further suggest that the completion of the first of these plot lines brings the play to a false conclusion, which is superseded by the real ending; and I shall offer alternative reasons for the alliance between the sausage-seller and the knights.

The tone for the initial action is set by the oracle stolen from the Paphlagonian by Demosthenes and Nicias,<sup>4</sup> revealing that it is fated for the affairs of the city to pass through the hands of a series of retail traders (128ff): first a seller of flax, then a sheep-seller (identified by the scholiast as Eucrates and Lysicles respectively), and now the Paphlagonian, a leather-merchant. He in turn is fated to be succeeded by a sausage-seller (*εἰς ὑπερφυᾶ τέχνην ἔχων*, 141), implying that with him matters will reach their lowest ebb. The descending course of the sequence is further indicated by the oracle's description of the fate of the sheep-seller "to prevail until another man viler (*βδελυρότερος*, 134) than he appears" and by the Paphlagonian's later threat that if he is not allowed to manage affairs (*ἐπιτροπεύειν*), he will be replaced by a more villainous (*πανουργότερος*) successor (949f).

No sooner is his rôle defined than the sausage-seller appears and is hailed as a saviour. His credentials prove to be more or less impeccable: he has no good deeds on his conscience, is satisfactorily base-born, and, though regrettably literate, is only just so—fortunately, since this would be a handicap, as Demosthenes explains: *ἡ δημαγωγία γὰρ οὐ πρὸς μουσικοῦ ἔτ' ἐστὶν ἀνδρὸς οὐδὲ χρηστοῦ τοὺς τρόπους, ἀλλ' εἰς ἀμαθῆ καὶ βδελυρόν* (191ff).

Throughout the opening scenes of the play Aristophanes stresses the low status from which the sausage-seller will rise to greatness (158f, 179ff) and which provides him with the essentials of his new

<sup>4</sup> That the two slaves are politicians follows from 40ff, since they stand in the same relation to Demos as Cleon/Paphlagon, but the point is made with greater force if they are taken as leading contemporary politicians; otherwise the stress tends to fall on the villainous Paphlagonian (and on Agoracritus, who is a free man, not a slave). For the identification see A. H. SOMMERSTEIN, ed., *Aristophanes. Knights* (Warminster 1981 [hereafter 'Sommerstein']) 3; for a note of caution cf. K. J. DOVER, *Aristophanic Comedy* (London 1972 [hereafter 'Dover']) 94f.

calling: δι' αὐτὸ γάρ τοι τοῦτο καὶ γίγναι μέγας, ὅτι πονηρὸς καὶ ἀγορᾶς εἶ καὶ θρασύς (180f); and later, τὰ δ' ἄλλα σοι πρόσσεστι δημαγωγικά, φωνὴ μαρὰ, γέγονας κακῶς, ἀγοραῖος εἶ (217f; cf. 333f, 336). Indeed, his ability to deny a theft when caught in the act has already been seen by an astute politician to indicate a future in politics (417–28). This background is never entirely forgotten: at the end of the agon, what finally convinces the Paphlagonian to concede defeat is the reiteration of the sausage-seller's low antecedents (1232–48), of which we are thus reminded just at the moment when he is becoming a true servant of the *demos*. The climax of the sausage-seller's triumph, as his identity is revealed, is the proud avowal of a past that includes a sideline in prostitution (1242).<sup>5</sup>

Although *σωτηρία* is a theme in the opening section of the play,<sup>6</sup> what is sought is simply salvation from the Paphlagonian, both by his fellow-slaves (12, 149) and, later, by the knights (458); and it is a natural exaggeration for them to equate this private safety with salvation for the city (πόλει, 149; πολίταις, 458; cf. the transformation into πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις . . . ὠφέλημα, 836); the divergence between the elevated language (σωτήρ . . . φανείς, 149) and its object is deliberately comic.<sup>7</sup>

Given the content of the oracle, the programme is clear: namely, to out-Paphlagon Paphlagon and so substitute a friendly demagogue for a hostile one. The sausage-seller is induced to enter the contest by the promise of all the perquisites now enjoyed by the Paphlagonian: he will be master of the city and the Pnyx, and will be able to mistreat the *boule* and generals as he pleases (164–68); further, the

<sup>5</sup> Of course passive homosexuality was conventionally alleged by the comic poets to be a necessary prelude to a political career: Ar. *Eq.* 428, 878–80, *Eccl.* 112f; cf. Aristophanes' remark at Pl. *Symp.* 192A. It might be argued that the sausage-seller only casts off his false πανουργία between 1263 and 1316; but though he changes his character, he does not disavow his past (*n.b.* 1397ff), cast off the cloak, and tell us who he really is: he remains the Agoracritus of the ἀναγνώρισις (1257, 1335), a revelation that one would expect to be definitive. Likewise 1251f does not mean that the sausage-seller has failed to outdo his rival in villainy (Landfester 75, 91); as a parody of Eur. *Alc.* 181f the lines are shaped by the form of the original (ἄλλος, λαβών, and κλέπτῃς are the only alterations) and are designed to insult Paphlagon: *no one* could be a bigger thief.

<sup>6</sup> Landfester 13; cf. 22: "Die dramatische Handlung, durch die Suche nach der *σωτηρία* (V 12) in Gang gebracht. . . ."

<sup>7</sup> Cf. N. G. Wilson's review of Landfester (*CR* n.s. 19 [1969] 156f). Landfester implies that the sausage-seller undergoes an epiphany at 1316ff (92–94), but his rôle there is as acolyte in the real epiphany of Demos, which rather puts him in the shade (I can think of no parallels for two epiphanies side by side, and the sausage-seller has already been recognized once). φέγγος (1319) accords with the chorus' greeting of the sausage-seller as saviour in the past: light imagery is regularly used of salvation (cf. Fraenkel on Aesch. *Ag.* 522), and φέγγος in place of the more usual φῶς adds a typical note of hyperbole.

whole of the empire will be sold according to his wishes (176). So, too, in the second half of the play the chorus promises him sole control over the city and the empire and the opportunity to extort money, *σειών τε καὶ ταραττων* (838–40). Here, as earlier, it is assumed that the sausage-seller will be using the Paphlagonian's tactics, particularly the 'stirring-up' (*ταράττειν, κυκᾶν*) that is a key motif in the play. When Demosthenes is trying to persuade him to take on the contest, he points out that the sausage-seller need only continue his present culinary practice, mixing up everything and stirring it into a hash, with the addition of a few rhetorical sweeteners (214–16). In the initial encounter with the Paphlagonian one of the sausage-seller's counter-boasts is that he will "strangle the *rhetores* and throw Nicias into confusion" (*ταράξω*, 358). In all this there is no indication that he will be anything but a hyper-Cleon, albeit a friendly one.

Accordingly the sausage-seller's technique is initially to match his rival, trick for trick. The knights are expecting him to outdo Paphlagon in *ἀναιδεία* (277), and he begins by matching Cleon's famous shouting voice (285–87);<sup>8</sup> when Paphlagon attempts to face him down, he replies, "I was brought up in the agora, too" (293), and his claim to be as great a thief provokes Paphlagon to accusations of plagiarism (299).<sup>9</sup> The parallelism of charge and counter-charge in this section is particularly noteworthy when reinforced by rhyme and metrical correspondence in 294f:

*διαφορήσω σ', εἴ τι γρύξεις.  
κοπροφορήσω σ', εἰ λαλήσεις.*

At the end of the first bout, the chorus has no doubt that the Paphlagonian has met with his match: after speaking of his *ἀναιδεία* it continues with a paean of praise to his vileness (*πανουργία, θράσος*, and *κοβαλικεύματα*, 328–32). In the same way the sausage-seller reiterates his low birth (336) and his confidence in his ability to blind with rhetoric (343). The response of the chorus, *ἦν ἄρα πυρός γ' ἕτερα θερμότερα, καὶ λόγοι τῶν λόγων ἐν πόλει τῶν ἀναιδῶν ἀναιδέστεροι* (384f), emphasizes that he differs from his rival in degree, not kind. For his part the Paphlagonian, aware of what is going on, is defiant: *οὔτοι μ' ὑπερβαλεῖσθ' ἀναιδεία μὰ τὸν Ποσειδῶ* (409); and for the rest of the section they trade insult for insult, accusation for accusation, even metaphor for metaphor (464–70).

<sup>8</sup> Often alluded to by Aristophanes: *Ach.* 380, *Eq.* 137, *Vesp.* 596, 1228, *Pax* 314; for the vocabulary of the associated themes of shamelessness and shouting see Landfester 35.

<sup>9</sup> Assigning 298 to the sausage-seller and 299–302 to Paphlagon.

The Paphlagonian's treatment of Demos is described at the beginning of the play in derogatory terms of subservience: *θωπεύειν*, *κολακεύειν*, *ἐξαπατᾶν*, and *θεραπεύειν* (48, 59). Not only are these words echoed later in the action (*θωπεύειν* 788, 890, 1116; *θεραπεύειν* 799, 1261; *ἐξαπατᾶν* 809; cf. *εὖ ποιεῖν* 734, 741), but after the first encounter—which is essentially a competition in abuse, rhetoric, and *πονηρία*—the rivalry of the demagogues takes the form of a competition in attentiveness to Demos in the manner of servants and lovers.<sup>10</sup> In the reported agon before the *boule* the strategy has become essentially one of outbidding: here the bait is better news, bigger sacrifices, a tastier meal (642ff, esp. 681f); and the sausage-seller's success in this field, too, leads the chorus to reiterate its belief that the Paphlagonian has met his master in wickedness, trickery, and wheedling words (684–87).

The appearance of Demos in person (728) does not bring about a change in the nature of the contest or the rivals' techniques: as in the agon before the *boule* they try to outbid each other in pampering Demos (esp. 788f, 1152–1220) and to outdo each other in flattery and servility. In general the sausage-seller, being not *ἐραστής* but *ἀντεραστής* of Demos (733), follows the Paphlagonian's lead. In the initial encounter before Demos he masters the art of winning him over with little treats (788f, 872, 881ff) quickly enough to pre-empt his rival, but when the Paphlagonian responds with sneers about “monkey tricks” (887) he points out that he is merely borrowing from his opponent (888f). This rouses the Paphlagonian to fresh defiance: *ἀλλ' οὐχ ὑπερβαλεῖ με θωπείαις* (890); but his attempted riposte with a leather coat almost chokes Demos (890–92), and the sausage-seller rubs in his victory with Cleonian accusations of conspiracy and the assurance that he is under divine command to outdo Paphlagon in *ἀλαζονεῖαι* (903).<sup>11</sup> At the end of this third round the Paphlagonian is more on the defensive, threatening the rise of one more villainous than himself if he is supplanted (950). The *coup de grâce* on this level comes when the sausage-seller steals the hare stew prepared by the Paphlagonian and offers it as his own creation (1192ff), a well-known reference to Cleon's claim to credit for the victory at Pylos; Paphlagon's response (*οἴμοι κακοδαίμων, ὑπεραναιδευθήσομαι*, 1206) all but concedes defeat.

<sup>10</sup> These rôles are linked, for in both cases the attentions paid to Demos can be described as *θεραπεία* (Landfester 58). In the *Gorgias* Plato picks up both the idea of the politician as lover (481D–2A) and the ambiguity of the idea of service (521A).

<sup>11</sup> This pre-empting technique allows some variation in the form of the action while maintaining the basic pattern of imitation.

With the appearance of Demos on stage, however, the sausage-seller also begins to take an increasingly critical and moral line in his attacks on the Paphlagonian: in the 'lovers' section he attacks the Paphlagonian for neglecting Demos and concentrating on his own interests, for warming himself on Demos' coals (780) and keeping Demos embroiled in war to prevent his recognising Paphlagon's crimes (a charge also made by Thucydides, 5.16.1). Similarly in the oracle contest he twists Paphlagon's prophecies to refer to bribery and corruption; and the contest in εὖ ποιεῖν concludes with his revelation of how much the Paphlagonian has been keeping for himself.

There is a similar inconsistency in the character of Demos. As we have already seen, he is both the authoritative master of the household and the passive ἐρώμενος.<sup>12</sup> Until his appearance on stage, and for much of the action thereafter, he is characterised as impenetrably dim (note in particular the verb χάσκω: 755, 804, 1119, 1263)—at least on the Pnyx, where the contests are taking place (752–55). Yet in the course of the first agon in his presence, his growing realisation of the wrong being done to him by the Paphlagonian's deceit (822) and fraud (859) leads him to demand the return of his ring (946ff). He also responds to hints of corruption in the oracle scene (1050, 1102f), though in both sections this growing awareness alternates with persistent stupidity.<sup>13</sup> When, however, the chorus openly reproaches Demos with his gullibility, he replies that he knows what is going on, it amuses and profits him (1111ff); he fattens up the demagogue of the moment like a sacrificial victim and then strikes him down when the moment is ripe, making him disgorge all his thefts. His subsequent return to the persona of the wayward beloved (1162f)<sup>14</sup> is modulated by this disclosure into shrewd self-interest, although the picture of the aging Demos as ἐρώμενος remains unflattering. Later the pendulum swings back again: the rejuvenated Demos is plainly unaware of his past character (1339, 1344, 1346, 1349, 1355), and the deception that has been practiced on him comes as a revelation.

There is further inconsistency in the paradoxical alliance between the sausage-seller and the knights, to which I alluded at the outset.

<sup>12</sup> *Supra* n.2; moreover, as an ἐρώμενος Demos resembles a παῖς, a link also suggested by the use of ἐπιτροπεύειν and of nouns in -γωγός and verbs in -γωγέω (cf. Landfester 66–68).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. on 997ff R. A. NEIL, *The Knights of Aristophanes* (Cambridge 1901 [hereafter 'Neil']).

<sup>14</sup> The implications for Demos' character are the same whether the passage is punctuated as a question (Neil) or a statement (Sommerstein).

While the sausage-seller is the sort who can outdo even the Paphlagonian in baseness, the knights are *ἄνδρες ἀγαθοί* (225) and *καλοὶ κἀγαθοί* (735, 738); the parabasis, with its invocation of Poseidon,<sup>15</sup> eulogy of their ancestors, defence of their personal appearance, and praise of their horses, is imbued with their aristocratic ideals.<sup>16</sup> But the sausage-seller aligns himself with the social elite (734f), and the chorus of knights assures him of its support and applauds his tactics (328–32, 384f [*supra* 18]; *cf.* 611, 622–24, 684ff). Nowhere is there any sign of dissent between the partners in this marriage of convenience, even when the sausage-seller threatens to attack the conservative Nicias (358); the two parties are held together by the single bond of their opposition to the Paphlagonian<sup>17</sup> and their quest for salvation from him.<sup>18</sup>

In 225ff Demosthenes announces the grand alliance against the Paphlagonian in these terms: *ἀλλ' εἰσὶν ἱππῆς ἄνδρες ἀγαθοὶ χίλιοι μισοῦντες αὐτόν, οἱ βοηθήσουσί σοι, καὶ τῶν πολιτῶν οἱ καλοὶ τε κἀγαθοί, καὶ τῶν θεατῶν ὅστις ἐστὶ δεξιός*. The underlying reason for this paradoxical alliance is doubtless Aristophanes' wish to retain his natural allies. If the reference at the beginning of *Acharnians* to *τοῖς πέντε ταλάντοις οἷς Κλέων ἐξήμεσεν* (of which Dicaeopolis says *φιλῶ τοὺς ἱππέας διὰ τοῦτο τοῦργον*, *Ach.* 6–8) is an allusion to Aristophanes' *Babylonians*,<sup>19</sup> then the poet may already have associated himself with the knights; certainly they shared common ground in their hatred of Cleon, and in *Acharnians* Aristophanes was already promising, through his chorus, to cut him up into *καττύματα* for the knights (301).<sup>20</sup> The same motive is suggested by *τῶν θεατῶν ὅστις ἐστὶ δεξιός* (228): *δεξιός* is Aristophanes' favourite word of commen-

<sup>15</sup> On Poseidon's aristocratic associations *cf.* Neil on 551, qualified by Landfester 41 n.114; his association with horses is obviously to the fore here, though references to naval power, the hallmark of democracy, save the hymn from being overtly partisan.

<sup>16</sup> Landfester 40–44. This ethos will have been reinforced if the knights appeared on stage on hobby-horses like those on the Berlin amphora (Staatl.Mus. 1697=ABV 197.17) reproduced by G. M. Sifakis, *Parabasis and Animal Choruses* (London 1971) pl. 1.

<sup>17</sup> In retaliation Cleon attempts to make capital of this association with charges of conspiracy (730f with Neil *ad loc.*; 912–18).

<sup>18</sup> Even if the sausage-seller were a saviour in disguise, this would not explain the knights' enthusiasm for him; their willingness to subject themselves and the city to a new demagogue, even if this is the only available course, can only be taken to reflect badly on them (A. W. Gomme, *More Essays in Greek History and Literature* [Oxford 1962] 86 n.21).

<sup>19</sup> This is taken for granted by Van Daele in the Budé text *ad loc.*: Sommerstein (on *Ach.* 6) is rightly more cautious.

<sup>20</sup> C. Fornara, *CQ* N.s. 23 (1973) 24, suggests that the knights' hostility to Cleon was due to his violent opposition to the payment of their equipment money.

ation,<sup>21</sup> and the intelligent spectators are the constituency to which he appeals and to whom he complains of the failure of *Clouds*, his "most intelligent comedy" (*Nub.* 521, 527). The implication is that they and all right-thinking people (τῶν πολιτῶν οἱ καλοὶ τε καὶ γαθοὶ) will share the desire of the poet and the knights to be rid of Cleon. The alliance is thus based less on political realities than on the poet's dreams of a grand union against his *bête noire* (cf. Dover 99).

As for inconsistency in the character of the sausage-seller, dramatic convenience is an important consideration: although his ability to out-Cleon Cleon will work for some ploys, exposing Cleon as a thief requires a greater degree of honesty, as well as intelligence on the part of Demos sufficient to perceive it.

Both these factors—Aristophanes' political sympathies and dramatic logic—are at least partially subsumed in what I have described as the operation of two plots in *Knights*. The primary action is the quest for σωτηρία, in which Cleon is to be replaced by a hyper-Cleon; in Aristophanes' highly cynical view this is the only way to replace him, given the current political system. At this stage Demos does not enter into the question at all; the only objective is to get rid of the Paphlagonian—though, as we shall see, there are hints of benefits attendant on the change of *prostates*. Once, however, the *demos* becomes a factor (suggested by the contest before the *boule* and then personified at 710 as the court of appeal) and the object of attention of rival politicians, the poet is forced to moderate his lack of respect for Demos, first conceding that he is sensible enough at home but a dimwit in politics, then gradually attributing greater awareness to him, culminating in the exchange with the chorus at 1111ff. What Demos says there does not square with his condition in the finale, but it will not do to claim, with Landfester (68–73), that Demos is deceiving himself and remains in the power of demagogues; his claim to awareness must be taken at face value. Rather, the passage is one answer to the charges made against Demos in the earlier part of the play: Demos insists that he is no fool, is not deceived, and not, in the long run, robbed.

This is the most optimistic solution the poet can reach on the premise of the first plot,<sup>22</sup> inasmuch as it saves Demos' face and authority, but Landfester is right to point out its unsatisfactory nature (72f). It is in fact both wasteful and immoral, since Demos gains at

<sup>21</sup> Cf. on *Nub.* 148 K. J. Dover, ed., *Aristophanes. Clouds* (Oxford 1968).

<sup>22</sup> In a sense the action is tripartite (cynicism-compromise-optimism), but I would prefer to see the middle stage as resulting from the overlap of two separate movements.



the expense of all those who have suffered at the hands of the demagogues, and simply restores the status quo after each *prostates*; it offers no scope for improvement and does not solve the problem of Demos' rejection of the *kaloi k'agathoi*. The ideal solution—forming the secondary action of the play—is to restore Demos himself, rejuvenate him, and send him back to an age of conservative democracy before the rise of the demagogues (1323, 1325, 1327, 1331 with Neil *ad loc.*). Of course this is a fantasy, based on the equally fantastic revelation of the sausage-seller's heart of gold, but it serves to point up the partial nature of the first solution. The inconsistency is not resolved; instead, the two solutions are juxtaposed.

The happy ending is, in fact, a nice dramatic stroke. With the assertion of Demos' self-awareness at 1111ff, and the revelation of the identity of the sausage-seller that completes the Paphlagonian's downfall, the plot appears to have been resolved: the chorus and Demosthenes have their *σωτηρία*, and Demos has turned out to be less a fool than he had appeared to be. The audience is led to expect only punishment for the defeated villain and perhaps the installation of Agoracritus in his place, but in fact gets more—and better—than this<sup>23</sup> in the rehabilitation of Demos, although in retrospect the growing element of rectitude in the sausage-seller's character has helped prepare for this development. This dramatic effect may usefully be compared with false endings in Sophocles. In *Oedipus Coloneus* the choral ode at 1447ff, with its meditative air of summing up the action, seems to indicate a conclusion, until the thunderclap at 1456. Earlier predictions of Oedipus' death (44–46, 87–95) have been overshadowed by subsequent events; by lulling the audience into further forgetfulness the false ending increases the effect of the sudden divine signal. As in *Knights*, the audience is presented with a possible resolution; this is then superseded by a more satisfying and complete resolution which, with hindsight, can be seen to have been anticipated. Similarly in *Philoctetes*, Neoptolemus and Philoctetes are on the point of departing (*εἰ δοκεῖ, στείχωμεν* 1402; *στείχε* 1408) when Heracles intervenes. Here the divine epiphany is needed to bring the plot into conformity with the myth, so that the lack of resolution<sup>24</sup> is more strongly felt

<sup>23</sup> As suggested by M. Pohlenz, *NAkG* (1952) 122 (= *Kleine Schriften* [Hildesheim 1965] 538), and Wilson (*supra* n.7) 157f.

<sup>24</sup> Though in fact the reconciliation between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes provides an entirely satisfactory resolution on one level, which is not negated by Philoctetes' submission to the divine command; his complete change of heart emphasizes his respect for Heracles, and his affection for the hero (1445–47) provides a counterpoint to his friendship with Neoptolemus.

than in *Knights*, though here, too, an element of tension is generated by the shortcomings of the first solution, to be released in the second by the transformation of Demos.<sup>25</sup>

An intriguing episode near the end of the play lends weight to the postulation of a double plot. At 1254–56, after an absence of some 750 lines, *οἰκέτης α'* (“Demosthenes”)<sup>26</sup> reappears to bid farewell to the sausage-seller, remind him that it is to him that he owes his political success, and ask him for the favour of being allowed to be the signer of his writs, as Phanos was to Paphlagon. Apart from the oddity of the sudden reappearance, this is the only passage in the play that requires four speaking actors.<sup>27</sup> It is noteworthy that the request receives no answer,<sup>28</sup> and that when the rejuvenated Demos appears, the courts are closed (1316f, 1332). I suggest that this is the last stirring of the first plot: Demosthenes has previously raised the only objection to any of the sausage-seller’s plans, namely his threat to swallow all the gravy (*ζωμόν*) himself (359f), an objection that Sommerstein plausibly attributes to a desire for his own share. Now here, too, he attempts to capitalise on his protégé’s advancement. But his request is undercut by Demos’ interruption with the more mundane demand, *ἐμοὶ δέ γ’ ὅ τι σοι τοῦνομ’ εἶπ’* (1257). The world of the fantasy solution has no need either of courts or of any political machine, and the rejection of both is a symbol of Demos’ rehabilitation.

Aristophanes’ plays are generally regarded as loosely, even tenuously plotted, but the narrow focus of attack in *Knights* allows a remarkably tight organisation. In essence, the play is an agon or series of agons running from 235 to 1263, with a series of three falls

<sup>25</sup> The degree to which this is felt will depend on the acuity of the individual spectator. These are, of course, not the only possible effects of false endings: in Euripides’ *Supplices* a resolution in human terms is subverted by the epiphany of Athena with her insistence on a concrete *quid pro quo* and promises of further bloodshed by the Epigonoι. The apparent resolution in *Heracles* (621–36) is transparently false: not only is it too early, the ensuing stasimon indicates to the audience that further developments are in store.

<sup>26</sup> The attribution of 1254–56 is disputed, with some MSS. giving it to the chorus leader, but the chorus—which has provided little more than vocal support—can hardly claim *ἀνὴρ γεγένησαι δι’ ἐμέ*, a phrase that echoes Demosthenes’ promise in 177f (*ἀνὴρ* = “a real man,” i.e., politician, as in 392 and *Ach.* 77), and rightly reflects his invention of the plan to raise the sausage-seller to the Paphlagonian’s position. Moreover, the appointment is more appropriate for an individual, and the demand, as I suggest below, is in character for Demosthenes.

<sup>27</sup> ΠΑ. 1252, ΑΛ. 1253, ΟΙ. Α' 1254–56, ΔΗ. 1257; *Knights* is otherwise economical in terms of actors and characters (one may compare the second half of *Frogs*, where again a face-off between two rivals replaces the usual succession of vignettes).

<sup>28</sup> At least verbally, and one would expect so striking a reappearance to be acknowledged by more than a gesture.

in the manner of a wrestling match: the Paphlagonian and the sausage-seller engage three times, first in the presence of Demosthenes and the knights (235–497: “ein Agon des Schreiens” [Landfester 30]), then before the *boule* (624–82), and finally before Demos; this last round is in turn subdivided into three falls (763–959, 960–1110, 1151–1263). This structure is overlaid with the double plot movement described above. Although *Knights* is unusual in its degree of formal organisation, similar but less pronounced shifts of focus can be detected in the plots of other plays. In *Frogs*, the search for a poet who is *δεξιός* (71) and *γόνιμος* (96) turns into a search for a saviour of the city (1419ff), with the criteria for the choice shifting from aesthetic to moral and political standards.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, what begins in *Birds* as a search for personal safety, as in *Knights*, develops into something on a larger scale.<sup>30</sup>

The unsatisfactory solution of 1111ff is strikingly similar to the cynical thesis of the Old Oligarch, that democracy may be a bad form of government, and that the Athenians may deliberately embrace bad politicians and bad policy, but that this is simply a means of skilfully preserving their preferred form of government, a pardonable concern for their own interests ([Xen.] *Ath.Pol.* 1.1, 6–9). Since there are good arguments for dating that work to about 424,<sup>31</sup> Aristophanes may well be criticising a contemporary view.<sup>32</sup> While presumably he would have considered even the false solution preferable to the domination of a Cleon, the argument of the play is that a true solution must be founded on a reformation of and by Demos himself. That the position of the *demos* in the democracy,<sup>33</sup> as well as its

<sup>29</sup> Aeschylus is given no defence against the charge of tedious and bombastic composition, but Euripides is perhaps the more natural victim, being open to his own sophistries.

<sup>30</sup> Cf., most recently, R. Hamilton, *GRBS* 26 (1985) 235–39.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. W. G. Forrest, *Klio* 52 (1970) 107–16, whose arguments I find persuasive; for alternative dates see G. W. Bowersock, *HSCP* 71 (1966) 33–38.

<sup>32</sup> *P.Heid.* I 182 is a fragmentary political discussion that may belong to the same period. It is unclear whether it is a fragment of comedy (it is included as fr.362 [dub.] in Austin's *CGF* [Berlin 1973]) or part of a treatise such as [Xen.] *Ath.Pol.*, as is argued by M. Gigante (*Maia* n.s. 9 [1957] 68–74). Significant echoes of Ps.-Xen. are θ]αλάσση πιστ[ (line 3 in Austin's numeration), δημ]αγωγός (4), δ]ῆμος πονηρῶν (5), and ἀ]πόλλυσιν πολίτας (9).

<sup>33</sup> Theoretically *δῆμος*, as the term for the citizen body, includes every individual Athenian. In fact, by the late fifth century the *demos* had become only one element in politics. First, the identity of the *demos* as sovereign people with the assembly would tend to separate the *demos* from its advisers who, in view of emotionally unstable or wilfully headstrong behaviour (as in the two Mytilene debates and the Arginusae trial), could be regarded as a necessary check on it (for this view cf. Thuc. 2.65.8–10). The concept of a monolithic sovereign *demos* perhaps fostered a measure of alienation in individual citizens, enabling them to see themselves apart from it, as is implied by

character, was also being debated at the time of *Knights* is suggested by the echo of Demos' restored sovereignty (1330) in Euripides' *Supplices*, dated between 423 and 421,<sup>34</sup> where Theseus says *καὶ γὰρ κατέστησ' αὐτὸν (sc. τὸν δῆμον) ἐς μοναρχίαν* (352, *cf. δῆμος δ' ἀνάσσει διαδοχαῖσιν ἐν μέρει ἐνιαυσίαισιν*, 406f). In Euripides, Theseus is a Periclean figure who dominates the *demos* by his personal authority,<sup>35</sup> restraining it from the excesses to which Adrastus has fallen victim (160, 232–45) and which the herald criticises (410–20, 479–85); the demotion of the sausage-seller to a subordinate rôle in the finale suggests that Aristophanes is aware of (though not really addressing) the question of the relationship between *demos* and *prostates*. Thus the move towards a more comprehensive and morally satisfying resolution may not be entirely due to consideration for the feelings of his audience, personified on stage; indeed, his criticism of the *demos* is quite severe. Despite Agoracritus' comforting assurance that Demos is not responsible for the decline of standards in Athenian politics (1356f), Aristophanes makes it clear earlier in the play that Demos *is* in fact partly to blame.<sup>36</sup> This even-handedness in criticism is similar to his attitude in *Clouds*, in which Strepsiades is as much a butt as Socrates; indeed, it seems at least a possibility that Aristophanes was encouraged by the dramatic, if not political, success of his serious comedy in 424 to present his most morally outspoken play at the Dionysia of the following year.

The presentation in the same play of two conflicting outlooks on politics—and of two solutions to the same problem, one overlaid on the other—called for an experiment in dramatic structure: the play's form serves its ideas, so that its unity is thematic rather than narra-

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Demos' appearance as only one of several characters in *Knights*. At the same time, the use of *δῆμος* to mean 'democracy' (Thuc. 8.92.11, LSJ s.v. III.2) and to denote the democratic party (Thuc. 3.27.2f, 5.82.2, 8.73.2) encouraged opposition to the *demos*' claim to act for all; oligarchs identified the *demos* with the poor ([Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 1.2, 4; Xen. *Mem.* 4.2.37) and by the early fourth century had arrived at the idea of the *δῆμος τύραννος* (Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.40ff, *Symp.* 4.45; Pl. *Gorg.* 513A with E. R. Dodds, ed., *Plato. Gorgias* [Oxford 1959] *ad loc.*, *Polit.* 292A).

<sup>34</sup> C. Collard, *Euripides. Supplices* (Groningen 1975) 8–14, reviews the arguments and decides in favour of 423.

<sup>35</sup> Collard on 350b–51; *cf.* V. di Benedetto, *Euripide: teatro e società* (Torino 1971) 179ff.

<sup>36</sup> In addition to his obtuseness and gullibility, and his tendency to act as a wayward beloved—qualities already noted—the whole premise of *Knights* reflects badly on Demos: the charge of pandering to the people implies a willingness to be pandered to. Aristophanes' charge of oracle-mania appears also in Thucydides (2.8, 21). The other comic fragments in which Demos is personified on stage (Plato *Com.* fr.185, *Eupol.* fr.321 Edmonds) represent him as hostile to the politicians he employs, which suggests a less satirical portrait.

tive. Although *Knights* may, to modern taste, continue to appeal more as a historical source than as a play for pleasure, it deserves to be regarded as among Aristophanes' most sophisticated works.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> There may be a relation between the endings of *Knights*, the two versions of *Clouds*, and *Wasps*: see Dover's introduction to *Clouds* (*supra* n.21) xciiif.

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