

Stripping in the Parabasis of *Acharnians*

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THE PARABASIS of Aristophanes' *Acharnians* begins thus (626–27):

ἀνὴρ νικᾷ τοῖσι λόγοισιν, καὶ τὸν δῆμον μεταπείθει
περὶ τῶν σπονδῶν. ἀλλ' ἀποδύντες τοῖς ἀναπαίστοις ἐπίωμεν.

The man wins with his speech and wins over the people as regards the truce. But let's strip and attack the anapests.

These lines are followed by the 'anapests' (628–64) which address the subject of Aristophanes' quarrel with Cleon and his services to Athens. The subsequent song-speech pair of the parabasis begins with the invocation of the Acharnian Muse (665–75) and goes on to deplore Athens' mistreatment of her old veterans in the courts of law.

The participle ἀποδύντες at 627 has presented problems. Why should the chorus bother to strip off their cloaks? (They wear *tribones*: 184, 343.) A scholiast said that they stripped in order to dance vigorously (p.326 Rutherford). If this is the case, the action has a parallel. In the parabasis of *Lysistrata* (637, 662, 686) the choruses of old men and women remove clothes and set down objects in order to dance their quarrel. There, however, the motivation for stripping is clearly spelled out in the text.¹

Those who have felt that the parabasis constituted an original epilogue or prologue, or at least represents a kernel of early comedy, suggest that the chorus removed clothing in the parabasis in order

¹ At the beginning of the parabasis of *Pax* (729) the chorus gets rid of extraneous equipment, causing the scholiast to remark, γυμνὸν γὰρ ποιούσι τὸν χορὸν οἱ κωμικοὶ ἀεὶ, ἵνα ὀρχῆται, "the comic poets always make the chorus naked in order to dance" (p.90 Dindorf). While the situation in *Pax*—a ridding of inhibiting paraphernalia—seems to provide a rough parallel to the *Ach.* and *Lys.* passages, there is no indication that there was any stripping. The scholiast is probably making an inference based on passages such as those in *Ach.* and *Lys.*, and elsewhere (not in parabases) where the chorus strips to dance (*Vesp.* 408, *Thesm.* 656). See G. Sifakis, *Parabasis and Animal Choruses* (London 1971) 105–06 (hereafter 'Sifakis').

to divest itself of its dramatic persona.² Having removed its costume, it performed the parabasis simply as a group of Athenian citizens.

Others have preferred a metaphorical meaning for *ἀποδύντες*. On the one hand, it has been objected that the anapestic passage of a parabasis is an inappropriate place for the elaborate kicks and twirls that the scholiast suggests.³ The anapests contain a serious message and vigorous dancing might well distract the audience's attention.⁴ Moreover, the cloaks should not hinder dancing in the parabasis when they seem not to impede the bustling and rock throwing of the chorus in the parodos (204ff).⁵

It is even more unlikely that the dramatic persona of the chorus was dropped at line 627. If it were, this could be only for the duration of the anapests, for in the song-speech pair the chorus is still a group of old Acharnians, invoking their Acharnian Muse and arguing for the aged veterans who are their contemporaries (*οἱ γέροντες οἱ παλαιοὶ μεμφόμεσθα τῇ πόλει*, 676).⁶ Furthermore, as Dale has pointed out, it is the mask that confers persona, not the cloaks. Though the suggestion has been made that masks were removed,⁷ the verb *apoduein* applies to clothing, not masks.⁸ In any case, there is no need for such a shift in choral character. An aged Acharnian can perfectly well speak the words of the anapests. It is moreover appropriate that he should do so: the Acharnians by line 626 have been won over to Dikaiopolis' side, and Dikaiopolis has more than once identified himself with Aristophanes (377ff, 502ff). The chorus is thus to be thought of as allied both with the dramatic character and with the poet.

Consequently, adherents of the view that *ἀποδύντες* ought here to be taken metaphorically agree that it means something like

² See, for example, Th. Zieliński, *Die Gliederung der altattischen Komödie* (Leipzig 1885) 186; A. and M. Croiset, *Histoire de la littérature grecque*³ III (Paris 1914) 529 n.1. Sifakis 106ff reviews the question.

³ A. M. Dale, *Collected Papers* (Cambridge 1969) 289.

⁴ Sifakis 105.

⁵ Dale (*supra* n.3) 289.

⁶ A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy, Comedy*² (Oxford 1962) 142 n.5, and Dale (*supra* n.3) 290.

⁷ Sifakis 16–17 with notes 14 and 15 summarizes the theory, which was espoused by C. Kock, *De parabasi* (Anklam 1856), and by O. Navarre, *Le théâtre grec* (Paris 1925) 150 and *Les Cavaliers d'Aristophane* (Paris 1956) 30–31. Kock's theory that only the chorus leader was involved in stripping is not applicable to *Ach.* 627, as *ἀποδύντες* is plural (*cf. infra* n.14).

⁸ Dale (*supra* n.3) 290.

“roll up the sleeves and get down to it.”⁹ Stripping for action in athletics in this case takes on the extended meaning of readying oneself for activity of some verbal or mental kind. Such a meaning is found in late usages of the middle *ἀποδύομαι* (cf. LSJ *s.v.*), and it is possible that this metaphorical usage is to be understood here.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, the metaphorical meaning has been adopted for the reason that no convincing explanation for literal stripping can be found. But since the Acharnians are wearing *tribones*, it is more natural to suppose that *ἀποδύντες* means that those cloaks were removed if a reason can be found for removing them.¹⁰ I submit the following suggestion in support of a literal interpretation of the verb.

The *tribon* which the chorus wears was a short variety of himation worn originally by Spartans but adopted in Attica after the Persian wars. Of rough wool, it was commonly worn by the poor, by those with Spartan sympathies, and by ascetics.¹¹ The cloak hung short but was wrapped about the upper torso and shoulders, obscuring the arms. No chiton was worn underneath it as was sometimes the case with the himation. The type is perhaps illustrated by a terracotta figurine in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.¹² Such a short garment leaves the legs free: it would not obstruct the entering dance, which was anyway none too rapid, for the old men complain that they cannot run as they used to (210ff). The cloak presumably allows enough freedom to throw the rocks (280ff).¹³ It would, however, obscure for the audience any precise movement of the arms and hands. If the chorus were intending to emphasize the words of the anapests with gestures of the arms, they might well want to be rid of the *tribones*.¹⁴

⁹ Dale, *ibid.*

¹⁰ My thanks to the anonymous reader who suggested this way of approaching the argument. Sifakis 108 expresses similar uneasiness with the metaphorical interpretation.

¹¹ See W. K. Pritchett, *Hesperia* 25 (1956) 207–08, for description and bibliography; M. Brillant, *Dar.-Sag.* V 414–16 *s.v.* “Tribôn”; E. Schuppe, *RE*² VI (1937) 2415–19 *s.v.* “Tribon.”

¹² See C. W. Dearden, *The Stage of Aristophanes* (London 1976) 189 n.5. The figurine is Museum no. 01.7758; T. B. L. Webster, *Monuments Illustrating Old and Middle Comedy*² (*BICS* suppl. 23 [1969]) 32, illustrated in M. Bieber, *History of the Greek and Roman Theater*² (Princeton 1961) 39 fig. 137.

¹³ One arm might be freed from the cloak: with Brillant (*supra* n.11) fig. 7043 compare Arr. *Epict. Diss.* 4.8.34, *καθεῖκε τὴν κόμην, ἀνείληψε τρίβωνα, γυμνὸν δεικνύει τὸν ὄμων*, “he lets his hair flow loose, assumes a *tribon*, and shows a bare shoulder.”

¹⁴ It has generally been assumed that the chorus leader chanted the anapests by himself: Croiset (*supra* n.2) 526; Pickard-Cambridge, *Dram. Fest.*² 245; Dale (*supra* n.3) 289.

Ancient dance did involve extensive use of gesture of the arms and hands.¹⁵ Athenaeus (21F) says that the dithyrambist Telestes (fifth century B.C.) illustrated completely the spoken text by means of his hands, ἄκρως ταῖς χερσὶ τὰ λεγόμενα δεικνύς. This use of gesture for expression and emphasis was shared with the rhetoricians of the day. Since anapests are rhetorical in style,¹⁶ it would be very appropriate for the chorus to dance in accompaniment to them, not with violent kicks and twirls, but with expressive gestures used by the actors and orators. For that they would want to remove their *tribones* in order for those gestures to be seen clearly by the audience. Since nothing was worn beneath a *tribon*, the verb *apoduein*, ‘to strip off the clothing’, is appropriate.

This suggests that there was a complicated visual joke involved: the audience is shown the incongruous sight of orators, who are really old farmers in shoddy cloaks, stripping like young athletes to get ready for rhetorical action.

This solution to the problem posed by ἀποδύντες at 627 has several advantages. (1) It relieves us of the necessity of falling back on the extended meaning of *apoduein* not otherwise attested in the comic poets. (2) The Acharnians thus get rid of their cloaks for the same reason that choruses in other parabases (*Lys.*, *Pax*) rid themselves of clothing or objects, that is, because they are impediments to action that the chorus must perform. (3) The dance thus performed would not distract from the message of the anapests, but would serve precisely to point it up. (4) A reason for stripping off the *tribones* is thereby suggested which takes its motivation from the text of the play: the Acharnians stripped because the choreog-

Whether or not this was the case does not affect our argument here. The injunction at *Ach.* 627 is in the plural and so is addressed to the chorus as a whole; the entire chorus is somehow participating during the anapests. See M. Kaimio, *The Greek Chorus within the Light of Person and Number Used* (Helsinki 1970) 147, 195, for the use of first person plural in the parabasis, who confirms that the whole chorus is addressed; I cannot agree with his statements about the shift in dramatic character of the chorus here.

¹⁵ See Pickard-Cambridge (*supra* n.14) 248–49.

¹⁶ It has, for example, a proem (an apology seeking the audience’s good will and Aristophanes’ proposition that he has done the city good service), a narration (how the Athenians are used to flattery), proofs (that Aristophanes combats flattery and so serves Athens), and an epilogue (summarizing the points made, abusing Cleon, and proclaiming his own just cause). In this ‘oration’ Aristophanes uses the typical rhetorical technique and devices. He claims he has been slandered, argues for audience sympathy, says that he has given just advice (τὰ δίκαια) and has suggested what is advantageous (τὸ σύμφερον). He links his personal interest with that of the city.

raphy required rhetorical gesture to match the rhetorical content and purpose of the anapestic section of the parabasis. (5) This stripping may have also created a visual joke, while disencumbering the chorus for technical reasons.

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