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## THE COMIC SOUL: OR, THIS PHALLUS THAT IS NOT ONE



Martha C. Nussbaum

O I say these are not the parts and poems of the body only, but of the soul,  
O I say now these are the soul!

Walt Whitman, "I Sing the Body Electric"

What we need is not crowbars, but intelligence and good sense.

Lysistrata ("Disbander of the Troops") in Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*

Comedy (*trugōidia*) too knows what justice is.

Dicaeopolis ("Just City") in Aristophanes, *Acharnians*

### Crowbars and Intelligence

Why are the triumphs in Aristophanic comedy won sometimes by women, at other times by ithyphallic (erect) men? In his excellent book *The Death of Comedy*, Erich Segal argues that the energy of Aristophanic comedy (and, by extension, of all true comedy) is fundamentally phallic, by which he means instinctual and connected to a male release of libidinal energy that overthrows the puritanical inhibitions imposed by the civilizing process. For Segal, this energy is all about maleness and is fundamentally misogynistic. For this reason (as Glen Bowersock has observed in his excellent critical review), Segal slights those aspects of comedy that have to do with female triumph: the book is virtually silent about *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazousai*.

I shall argue, drawing on Charles Segal's article (1961) on Dionysus in the *Frogs*, that if we study the cultural conceptions of gender that are the background for Aristophanic humor, things look subtly different. The male with the large phallus is not the manly man. The manly man is a soldier, with a broad chest and a small penis, and with no time for the sensuous diversions of philosophical/poetical talk. His opposite number is an androgynous character with a soft body, long hair, a large penis, and a lot of talk. (Indeed, the tongue itself is a phallus: the larger it is, the worse for military virtue.) Sensuousness and phallic size are linked to bodily softness and code as feminine, by contrast to common norms of manly self-control and toughness. Focusing on *Acharnians* (425 B.C.E.) and *Lysistrata* (411 B.C.E.), I shall argue that Dicaeopolis and Lysistrata are far closer than modern conceptions might lead us to imagine, and that the energy of comedy is the energy of a soft, sneaky, talky humanity that situates the soul squarely in the faulty body and renounces enterprises of transcendence and military might that define many aspects of Greek (and not only Greek) politics.

Let us consider the crowbar. When we first encounter the crowbar in the *Lysistrata*, Lysistrata's antagonist from the Athenian pro-war establishment has just been using it to tear down the women's fortification on the Acropolis. The crowbar is a long metal rod used for uprooting and destroying, sometimes for bashing. In modern terms, we would almost certainly call it a phallic instrument; a modern feminist would very likely read it as a symbol of male projects of domination and subordination. A modern feminist of a certain type might also see Reason as another such phallic device, set over, perhaps, against feelings and the body. To such a feminist, Lysistrata's remark would be unintelligible, or at the very least naïve: to criticize one symbol of phallic masculinity, she invokes another. Still less intelligible would be Lysistrata's tendency to *contrast* the crowbar with the phallus: men who carry around huge erections, she claims, are men ready to make peace.

I suggest that in the Aristophanic way of seeing things, to carry around an erection is precisely not to carry around a crowbar. A crowbar is a proud symbol of power; an erection is a shameful symbol of need run rampant. Rather than being armed, the erect male is disarmed. He has lost the military man's determined focus on bashing; he has entered the female domain of pleasure and talk. At the same time, "intelligence and good sense" are not at all the attributes of military masculinity. Such characters do not like to discuss things; they prefer to sing "Pallas, Glorious Sacker of Cities" and "From Afar Came the Cry." Intelligence, a love of poetry, and the willingness to sit and deliberate about the city's problems code as soft, female, unwarlike. Dionysus, soft and fleshy, has a strange resemblance to the comic hero, and to the comic heroine.

### The Phallus Surprised by Life

Erich Segal has argued that Aristophanic comedy (and, by extension, all true comedy) is fundamentally concerned with the triumph of the phallus. It celebrates a release of libidinal energy that is often suppressed in daily life, a natural force that is closely linked to masculine pride and the celebration of manly power. Frequently, Segal notes, phallic triumph is linked to the theme of rejuvenation: elderly men recover their virility, their large erections a symbol of manly pride. This pride, in his view, involves a claim to control, one prominent aspect of which is aggression against women and the desire to control them, even to beat them.<sup>1</sup> The erect phallus is also, then, a sign of misogyny.

As Glen Bowersock observes, this account of the roots of Aristophanic comedy has great difficulty explaining why women play such a prominent, and indeed a victorious, role. While it is true that some plays, such as *Acharnians*, *Wasps*, and *Birds*, end with a celebration of the erect phallus, and thus, at least superficially, fit Erich Segal's description, there are other plays, equally prominent, in which women triumph. The triumphs in both *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazousai* are in no way misogynistic. These heroines are treated as admirable, intelligent, capable of fertile deliberation about the good of the city. Their proposals are linked to civic stability and renewal. Moreover, rather than being set over against the plays in which the phallus triumphs, these "female plays" have close thematic links to them. Just as Dicaeopolis in *Acharnians* celebrates the triumph of bodily enjoyment over a war-politics that is depicted as both futile and corrupt, feasting and making love while Lamachus suffers all the pains of battle, so too Lysistrata exposes the sham and corruption of Athenian war propaganda and promotes a reconciliation based on a female understanding of basic bodily needs (of children for parents, of women for husbands, etc.). Dicaeopolis and Lysistrata are treated very differently by the poet: he is much more buffoonish, she more dignified; nonetheless, they play analogous roles, as they call the politics of militarism into question.

Nor is the triumph of the female, in *Lysistrata*, opposed to the triumph of the erect phallus. It is by means of the erect phallus, indeed, that Lysistrata wins her famous triumph. How are men bent on war brought around to the female view of life with its emphasis on continuity, understanding, reconciliation, and negotiation? By means of the "sex strike," which produces large erections. A further sign of trouble with Erich Segal's thesis is that these military men are not at all proud of their erections, nor do they seem to consider them a sign of manly control and victory over the female. They walk around absurdly trying to conceal them, ashamed of them; and they clearly think that erections make them vulnerable to the female, even submissive to the female.

They are not victorious, but childlike, absurd, in their phallic desperation. "It's not a blanket I want!" Kinesias finally bursts out, "I want to get fucked!"<sup>2</sup> Instead of good manly names, signifying might and valor,<sup>3</sup> they are given silly names, signifying their obsession: Myrrhine's desperate husband is Kinesias of Paionidai (punning on *kinein* [fuck] and *paiein* [bang]), well rendered by Jeffrey Henderson as "Rodney Balling from Bangtown." Who would put someone with that name in charge of anything, much less an army?

Erich Segal's response to these difficulties with his thesis is basically to ignore the "female plays," neither of which gets any extended discussion in the 150 pages he devotes to Old Comedy.<sup>4</sup> That is already a defect, in a book that purports to develop a unitary thesis of comedy. Let me now suggest, however, that the defect goes deeper than is apparent, for in ignoring the female plays, Segal has actually failed to have an adequate understanding of the phallus itself and what a phallic triumph represents.<sup>5</sup>

Let us begin with the American understanding of the phallus that has played, I believe, too influential a part in Erich Segal's formulations. The American locker-room view of the phallus is that size is a sign of masculine competitive triumph and, by the same token, of triumph over women. Whether erect or not yet erect, big is power, and big is beautiful. In pornography made both for heterosexual men and for gay men,<sup>6</sup> when the phallus is displayed, it is very large. Film careers rise and fall on this point; in Harry Reems, the male-self-image celebrates itself. In this world, size and being erect are complementary: both are signs of control. To be big is a sign of mastery already; and mastery is further proven by the ability to get an erection at will and to maintain one.

Does this filmic evidence represent any social reality, and, if so, whose reality? Women's view of these matters is difficult to know, but there is at least some reason to think that attributes (bodily, kinetic, maybe even verbal) other than phallic size have at least some role to play in female sexual arousal. On the other hand, that males pride themselves on their size, worry about size, and so on, can be seen in countless ways, not least in the number of products marketed to address size problems. Every day my own email brings me at least twenty such solicitations, along with thirty more marketing Viagra and its competitors. This locker-room view has, I believe, excessively influenced Erich Segal.

Let us turn to the ancient Greek world. The first thing Americans might notice, considering Greek art that depicts male beauty (and this embraces what we might call pin-up art in its display of the male body of a young man as an attractive sex object), is that the erect phallus is more or less completely absent as a trait of the sex object. In all the paintings examined by Kenneth Dover for his *Greek Homosexuality*, including many scenes of erotic foreplay and even one-sided masturbation, there is only one, among hundreds, in which the

younger partner, the emblem of sexual attractiveness and beauty, is depicted as erect. There are many reasons to explain this phenomenon, such as a strong interest in depicting the younger partner as lacking strong sexual appetites (itself a phenomenon pertinent to my purpose), but one other reason seems to be that the erect phallus is not perceived as beautiful. Erections are most often associated with satyrs, sileni, and other bestial or animal-like figures who are depicted as nonadmirable and, certainly, nonsexy (to the "average man").

The even more surprising fact, from the point of view of modern America, is that the large penis, even in its flaccid state, is found neither beautiful nor admirable. Here is Dover, summarizing the evidence from visual art:

It would be surprising if the Greeks had no criteria for the aesthetic judgment of male genitals, and the visual arts show us what these criteria were. In vase-painting, the characteristic penis of a young male (human, heroic, or divine) is thin (sometimes notably thinner than a finger) and short (as measured from the base to the end of the glans), terminating in a long pointed foreskin, the axis of the penis and foreskin being almost always straight. . . . This small penis is combined as a rule with a scrotum of normal size, and the contrast is sometimes striking.<sup>7</sup> . . . In caricature and in the representation of satyrs a penis of great size, even of preposterous size, is very common, and it is a reasonable conclusion (though not, I admit, an inescapable conclusion) that if a big penis goes with a hideous face and a small penis with a handsome face, it is the small penis which was admired. . . . Just as it is possible to infer from the faces of satyrs, ugly old men, barbarian slaves and comic burlesque what was thought beautiful, and what ugly, in respect of hair, eyes, nose and mouth, we can use the same material to distinguish disapproved from approved genitals. The disapproved penis is thick and long, sometimes far exceeding anything to be seen in real life, and tending to a 'club' shape, with a comparatively narrow base and a bulging glans. (125–27)<sup>8</sup>

How should we understand this (to us) strange phenomenon? Granting Dover his plausible premise that ancient Greek size really is not significantly different from modern British (or American) size, let us ask what the symbolic value to Greeks might be in depicting the beautiful penis as small. Classical Greek male culture, as Michel Foucault has argued convincingly, was a culture whose central preoccupation, in the area of the bodily appetites, was with the idea of control, in the sense of disciplined management. Bodily desires are not inherently sinful; but they are potential tyrants, always liable to seize the reins of power. The manly man is one who has power over himself, rather than letting his appetites take charge of him. He disciplines his desires, budgeting their gratification in accordance with his plan. He eats, but not too much; he drinks,

but his wine is watered. In sexual matters, he has intercourse, but he is in control of that pleasure too. He is not obsessed with sex, nor does he devote excessive time or thought to it. He has outlets for his sexual desires, and he controls their availability—wife, male and female prostitutes, and, within complex and narrow limits, the body of a beautiful younger man.<sup>9</sup> In the sex act itself, he is active and controlling, rather than passive and womanized.<sup>10</sup>

Notice that this man does not have an erection for very long. He satisfies his desires in a businesslike way, without excessive searching or excessive longing. And he has managed his desires so that they themselves are not excessive. This is a good man to rely on in the enterprises of civic and military life. He is in control of himself, rather than being controlled by something or someone else.<sup>11</sup> The small penis, it seems, is the symbolic representation of this self-control and mastery.

Who, by contrast, is the man with the large (frequently both large and erect) phallus? He might be a man who has no sexual outlets or does not control access to them. This is itself a disgraceful situation to be in, indicating desperate poverty or lack of control over the women in one's life.<sup>12</sup> Or he might be the perpetually horny man, who has not managed to discipline his desires, so that they are perpetually running rampant. That is the situation of the satyrs and sileni who are routinely depicted with huge erections. Or he might be someone desperate for sex with a particular unavailable individual, which, again, is a disgraceful situation to be in, indicating lack of control over the important things of life. In short, he is a person passive and lacking in control with respect to important "external goods." A person surprised by life. Something like a woman.

The large erect phallus, therefore, is nothing like a sign of manly domination or aggression; it is almost its opposite. It is as different from the crowbar as flesh and blood are from metal. Paradoxical as it may seem, in virtue of its hardness the phallus is soft. There is all that messy blood that has gone to that place, rather than staying in the chest or the head.<sup>13</sup> A large, and especially a large erect, phallus is a sign of someone who is passive before his desires, and hence, before his life. Women are thought to be such creatures always: sexually rapacious, passive, utterly lacking in control. What is shameful is for a man to fall into that condition.

Consider this description of the approved body in Aristophanes' *Clouds*. The proponent of old-style military virtue promises the young man (1009–21):

If you do what I tell you,  
And pay attention,  
You'll always have  
A gleaming chest, glowing skin,

Big shoulders, a small tongue,  
Large buttocks, a small penis.

If you follow the customs of today,  
First of all, you will have  
Yellow skin, small shoulders,  
A thin delicate chest, a large tongue,  
Small buttocks, a large—piece of legislation.  
And he will persuade you to think that all that is shameful  
Is noble, and all that is noble is shameful.

Notice how the small penis is linked to other attributes of strength, health, and control: the powerful shoulders and buttocks, the glowing skin. The large penis, by contrast, is linked to ill health and lack of strength; immoderation in desire is linked to being out of shape, and both to moral laxity.<sup>14</sup>

We may at this point notice something more: the approved body does not talk much. Its tongue is as tiny as its penis. We shall soon see the reason why: this body prefers to solve things by bashing. The disapproved body, by contrast, is a talker. And the suggestion is that talk itself is a kind of softness, a willingness to be influenced rather than simply to exercise dominance. The large tongue goes with the small shoulders and the large penis. In short, crowbars, yes; intelligence and good sense, no.<sup>15</sup> It would not escape the notice of the audience for the *Clouds* that the body of the comic hero is a disapproved body: fleshy, large-phallused, garrulous.<sup>16</sup>

#### From Afar Came the Cry: The Military Body

The description of two bodies in the *Clouds* points the way to a tradition of thinking about virtue and the body, according to which military virtue is supported by sexual moderation, an unquestioning habit of mind, and a love of old military traditions. This nostalgic description in *Clouds* constructs a past that never really existed, no doubt, for was there ever a time when the young did not talk back to their parents? But for that very reason it is all the more revealing as an index of social norms whose demise is feared.

I'll tell you what education of children was like in the old days,  
When I flourished, saying what is right, and moderation [*sōphrosunē*] was in  
fashion.  
First of all, it was the rule that the voice of a child complaining should never  
be heard.

Then, that the young men, naked, all in a group, should walk to the lyre-teacher  
 In good rank order down the road, even if it was snowing a blizzard.  
 Then, that they should recite the songs they'd learned before, without rubbing their thighs together,  
 Songs like "Athena, Fearful Sacker of Cities," or "From Afar Came the Shout"—  
 Singing them to the good old tunes that our fathers handed down.  
 And if anyone did anything silly, or introduced any new notes,  
 The way they do it now, those contorted difficult melodies of the Phrynis school,  
 He would get a sound beating on the grounds that he had dishonored the Muses.  
 Then, when they went to the trainer, the young men would have to sit with one thigh crossed  
 In front of the other, so as not to torment their lovers by a sight of anything.  
 Then, when they stood up again, they would smooth out the sand and plan carefully  
 So as not to leave any impress of their manhood behind for their lovers.  
 And no young man in those days used to oil himself beneath the navel,  
 So that the dew and fluff would flower on his genitals. . . .  
 These were the customs  
 From which my education brought up the men who fought at Marathon. . . .  
 For these reasons, O youth, confidently choose me as the better argument  
 And you will learn to hate the marketplace and to stay away from the baths,  
 And to be ashamed at what is shameful, and to blush if someone makes a crude joke,  
 And to give up your seat to your elders when they enter the room,  
 And not to make fun of your grandparents. . . .  
 And not to go out to dancing girls, so that you don't, gaping at them,  
 And struck by an apple she throws to you, get severed from your good fame,  
 And not to talk back to your father ever, and not to call him an old Iapetos,  
 And not to malign the old age that raised you when you were a young chick.  
 (961–99)

The speaker depicts, albeit with comic nostalgia and exaggeration, a set of social norms that really do seem to have prevailed in the early and mid-fifth century. This code prizes the type of manly virtue that won the battle of Marathon and involves bodily strength and fitness, moderation in desire, and not much interest in the cultivation of the intellect. Its taste in poetry is clunky—old war

songs, sung in unison. The sensuous pleasures of poetry and music are just as much to be avoided as the baths, dancing girls, and masturbation. All these are signs of desire run rampant, and they are likely to lead down the road to disobedience to the voice of command, whether paternal or military.

As Dover points out, this old-time character has sexual desires of his own, but they take a particular form: desire for virtuous young men who themselves are not animated by desire. And what does this character desire to do? Presumably, so far as this portrait of norms is concerned at any rate, his desires too are carefully governed by the norms of *sōphrosunē*. These norms (whether or not they represent reality) dictate that a virtuous citizen youth should not be penetrated, but should be approached for the one-sided form of "intercrural intercourse" (intercourse between the thighs) that is so often depicted in vase paintings. Thus, a fragment of Aeschylus's *Myrmidons*, often cited as a typical expression of old-style militaristic pederasty, has Achilles lamenting the death of Patroclus by mentioning not only "so many kisses" but also "god-fearing converse with your thighs." Dedication to temperance is expressed precisely by withholding oneself from penetration of the young citizen: one manifests, in this way, that virtue, not desire, is in control. Once again, the visible symbol that one is such a person is the small penis, which thus becomes eroticized in the young man as well as an emblem of virtue in bud.

Where are women in all this, one might ask? Well, they are at home producing children. Wives are "ploughed,"<sup>17</sup> but they are not, again in terms of norms, the object of any very strong erotic desire. The presence of such a desire indicates that imbalance and danger are in the offing.<sup>18</sup> The military man's primary relation to women is one of control: his women obey him and do not get out of hand. But apart from reproduction, a real man does not take much of an interest in women. Pausanias, in Plato's *Symposium*, represents broadly disseminated popular beliefs (at least in a certain social class) when he disparages those who actually choose sex with women:

The Vulger [*pandēmos*] Aphrodite is truly vulgar, and she does it in any chance manner. And this is the way that base people love [*erōsin*]. For people like that, in the first place, love and desire [*erōsi*] women no less than young men; and then they love and desire the bodies more than the souls, and then they love and desire people who are as stupid as possible, thinking only of getting what they want, and forgetting about whether it is done nobly or not. (181A–B)

The speaker links virtue with an interest in a virtuous partner, and both with a preference (of course!) for the male over the female. Preference for women, or even indifference between women and men, is taken to be a sign

of bodily pleasure run rampant, and a deficient interest in virtue. All that such men want is sex (since one cannot get anything else from a woman), and this is taken to be a sign of more general indiscriminateness and unreliability.<sup>19</sup>

What are women to make of all this? Our only evidence from a woman's voice is that of Sappho, who notoriously prizes the goods of love over the goods of military conquest (frag. 16), and who describes sexual pleasure in a way that breaks its link to domination and the assertion of control.<sup>20</sup> We can also see something about real-life women by considering the affiliation between women and the cult of Dionysus. Dionysus in some ways (though not all) is the antitype of the military man. Soft, long-haired, sybaritic, he has an affinity for wine and sexual pleasure and an affinity for poetry. Do women prefer Dionysus to the military man? Lucian imagines that they do. This passage, though late, is continuous with earlier depictions of Dionysus as attractive to women (e.g., Euripides, *Bacch.* 453–59):

EROS What's the big harm I've done you?

ZEUS Look here, you rascal: is it small stuff, when you make so much fun of me that there's nothing you haven't made of me: satyr, bull, gold, swan, eagle? What you haven't made is any woman to fall in love [*erasthēnai*] with me. I've never become pleasing to a woman thanks to you, so far as I'm aware; no, I always have to play tricks on them and disguise myself. What they love is the swan or bull; if they catch sight of me, they die of fear.

[A discussion of some mythological examples follows.]

EROS If you want to be loved [*eperastos einai*], stop brandishing the aegis and carrying the thunderbolt and make yourself really pleasing and soft to look at; let your curls grow and tie them in a ribbon, wear a purple gown, strap on gold sandals, walk to the beat of a flute and tambourines, and you'll see, more of them will tail you than Dionysus' maenads.

ZEUS Get out of here! I don't want to be loved [*eperastos einai*] by becoming that sort.

EROS Okay, Zeus, then stop falling in love [*mēde eran thele*]. It's easier that way.

ZEUS No. I want to love [*eran*], but catch them with less trouble. On these terms I release you.<sup>21</sup>

In the women's world, the approved body is not the military body (of which the lightning bolt, Zeus's true form, is the extreme form). That body is not lovable. It is dangerous and not very nice to touch. The lovable body has long hair, is soft and pleasing. It knows how to dance. In its train march satyrs

and sileni, with their large phalluses.<sup>22</sup> The comic hero can be located somewhere in this company.

The comic hero's body is not the American locker-room body. Neither is the body of the military man. Greek oppositions are subtly different, involving different polarities, responding to different anxieties. Both have a basic concern with control and domination. But whereas the Greek concern is that a man might not be in full control over his own appetites—they might lord it over him, turning him into a woman—the American concern is characteristically that a man might not be taken over sufficiently by his appetites. One is worried about sexuality uncontrolled, the other about impotence.

On this issue Erich Segal is decidedly American. What he values in comedy is the celebration of male rejuvenation, symbolized by the triumph of the phallus. He thinks of this phallus as strong, dominant, manly in the American sense. The ancient Greek world viewed this phallus very differently. Its bearer is the sort of man who is womanized and who does well in the world of women. This man is not a reliable soldier. In "real life," this man and his phallus are strongly denigrated. In comedy, the values of military virtue are joyfully inverted.

Now, it should seem less odd that the triumph of a phallic male should be closely linked to a triumph for women and to the women's world. Let us turn, then, to the spirit of the comic triumph.

### The Comic Body and the Comic Soul

We now move from Erich Segal to Charles Segal. In his masterful article, "The Character of Dionysus and the Unity of the *Frogs*," Charles Segal explores the link between Dionysus and the spirit of comedy, arguing that Dionysus's search for his own proper identity in the *Frogs* is at the same time a search, on the part of the spirit of comedy, for a proper understanding of its own relation to the city, and the proper balance, within itself, between serious concerns and the spirit of amusement. The article is, above all, a detailed exploration of Dionysus's role in the *Frogs*. Much in this late play is peculiar to it and its time, including the preoccupation with death, as well as to the death of comedy itself, to which Segal rightly devotes much emphasis. Nonetheless, a number of points that emerge in his analysis of the comic Dionysus are well worth stressing as we approach *Acharnians* and *Lysistrata*.

The *Frogs*, Segal argues, shows a progressive reconciliation between Dionysus's effeminacy and his dignity as god. Without ceasing to be the spirit of comedy, the god attains unquestionable stature by the play's end. In the pro-

cess, “comedy as entertainment” is reunified with “comedy as a potentially didactic medium” (Segal 1961, 212). Indeed, Dionysus represents values of civic solidarity and harmony, which are at the heart of comedy and deeply serious. Segal draws particular attention to the way in which the comic Dionysus’s concern with harmony and solidarity is implicitly contrasted with the dangerous “individualism” of the tragic Dionysus: “mutual trust and cohesion” is the aspect of Dionysian cult that comes to prominence, in a way that is closely linked to an emphasis on the god’s effeminate side.

The ideal of cohesion is achieved, indeed, on a terrain that in terms of my analysis belongs to the women’s world, namely, the recognition of the flawed body and its limits. Segal writes, convincingly, of an implicit contrast in the play “between social man’s joyful acceptance of his limitations and individual man’s struggling and discontent with them” (ibid., 229). At the same time, he shows that the comic spirit is closely linked (hardly surprisingly, since Aristophanes is a poet of superlative ability) to a high valuation of poetic art. This aspect of Segal’s argument is closely linked to my own argument concerning the link between military valor and a refusal of poetic pleasure, between the tongue and the phallic body. Segal stresses that some types of talk are not validated; the talk connected to Socrates, for example, is contrasted with true *mousikē* and held to be idle chatter. The kind of talk that is validated is closely connected to goals of civic harmony and reintegration. (The suggestion is, perhaps, that Socratic talk is dangerously unmoored from the fabric of civic values.)

The comic spirit, as both Segal and I in related ways argue, is altogether different from the spirit of the military virtue of the (somewhat imaginary) good-old days. Comedy celebrates the human being as a limited bodily being, in need of “external goods” and of other human beings. This human being is phallic rather than militaristic, sensuous rather than given to bashing. He does well in the woman’s world. In terms of the old-time values, he is dangerously passive and soft. Indeed, in one of the oddest and boldest moments in Old Comedy, toward the end of the *agōn* in the *Clouds* (1080ff), the comic audience is depicted as sexually passive, a bunch of wide-assholes. What is more, the military man of the good-old days turns out to be one of them too, and deserts to their side:

WRONG To bring my argument around to Zeus,

He too was weaker than love [*erōtos*] and women.

And after all: how could you, being mortal, be more powerful than a god?

RIGHT And what if he followed your advice and ended up with the radish shoved up his ass and all his pubic hair plucked out?<sup>23</sup>

WRONG And if he is a wide-asshole [*euruprōktos*], what harm will that do him?

RIGHT What greater harm could he ever suffer than that?

WRONG What will you say, if I defeat you on this point?

WRONG Come now, tell me,

Where do they get the prosecutors from?

RIGHT From the wide-assholes.

WRONG I agree.

What now? Where do the tragic poets come from? [The verb *tragōideō* or “to do a tragedy” may include actors as well.]

RIGHT From the wide-assholes.

WRONG Well then,

Don’t you see that you’ve been talking nonsense?

Now look out at the audience: what are most of them?

RIGHT I’m looking.

WRONG So, what do you see?

RIGHT By the gods, most of them, by a long way,

Are wide-assholes. I recognize this one here,

And that one over there,

And this long-haired one here.

WRONG So, what do you say?

RIGHT I’m done for. Oh you people-who-get-fucked [*kinoumenoi*],

By the gods, take this cloak of mine, for

I’m deserting to your side.<sup>24</sup>

To laugh at a comedy of Aristophanes, then, is to get fucked; it is to react with surprise and pleasure to the incongruities of life, and to include oneself among those to whom accidents may happen. The person who gets fucked is not opposed to the phallic person; that is Erich Segal’s error. To be erect, to have a large phallus, is already to be in the process of getting fucked—by one’s own appetites, by the control of women’s (or young men’s) allure, by life itself. Anyone could experience that—painfully, by violence. But to *enjoy* it—that is nothing other than to be a *euruprōktos*.

Comedy deals with painful matters: the limits of the body, its subjection to indignities, its closeness to death. But the spirit of comedy turns these gloomy matters into sources of delight, even triumph. This, and nothing else, is the soul. (And what else might you have thought it was? A crowbar? An immortal and indivisible substance?) But how much fun it is to celebrate this indignity, to own it, to proclaim it. The triumph of the comic hero is the triumph of all that is flawed, material, nonhard: of this phallus, that is not one.

What is more, as Charles Segal suggests, comedy finds in this very assertion of the limited a healing for painful social divisions: not crowbars, but good

sense. Like my analysis, Segal's emphasizes the connection between the bodily focus of the comic spirit and its interest in talk; both aspects play their part in comic reconciliation.

One qualification, much stressed by Segal, is in order at this point. The talk that comedy loves is Dionysian talk, the poetic talk of the tragic and comic festivals. Segal argues, plausibly, that Aristophanes connects this sort of talk with tradition, with civic harmony, and with reconciliation. Socratic talk, by contrast, is imagined in the *Frogs* as hostile to poetry, subversive of the insights of poetry and thus of the wisdom of tradition. If the comic spirit situates itself in the world of women, sex, and talk, it does not validate any and every sort of talk.<sup>25</sup>

Turning to our two plays, *Acharnians* and *Lysistrata*, let us see whether these intuitions are corroborated. Because the relevant oppositions are developed most extensively in *Lysistrata*, I begin with the later of the two plays.

#### Erections and Social Harmony

The *Lysistrata*, one of Aristophanes' most wonderful and famous comedies, receives barely a mention in Erich Segal's book. No wonder, for it is obstinately recalcitrant to his thesis. The play's pivotal contrast is between a woman's world, characterized by both bodily indulgence and talk, and the male world of war politics. Fatally for Erich Segal, the male world does not like erections, is embarrassed, and ultimately defeated, by them. What these men like is not being erect; indeed, they like to get rid of their erections as soon as possible, showing that they are fully in control of outlets for pleasure. Then, having mastered bodily need, they can get on with what they really prefer, which is waving shields and swords around (554ff), or prying up things with crowbars (432).

To such men, women are disgracefully passive, a *katapugōn genos* (137), that is, they are shamefully passive in pleasure, out of control because they like drinking and sex, and do not master these pleasures in order to get on with aggression. Of a piece with this hedonistic passivity is the women's love of talk, indeed their preference for talk over bashing. *Lysistrata* complains that men do not like to hear alternative viewpoints or to listen to arguments. When they ask a question about the war, they are told to shut up or be given a smack (510–16). If they ask another question, expressing skepticism about the war plans, they are told, "Go, do your spinning or you'll get a sound beating. War is men's business" (519–20). Threats of force take the place of good counterarguments.

Notice that the men's world contains neither tragic pity nor humor. It lacks a sense of the tragic, because it lacks a sense of its own weakness and vulnerability. It lacks a sense of humor for related reasons: men are unable to see any-

thing ridiculous or even slightly odd about themselves. They want to be heroes without flaw, and they cannot recognize the body as a site of funny events, illustrative of human frailty.

Let us now turn to the women's world. In many ways, the women are as the men depict them: they love drinking and sex, they prefer talk to aggression. From the women's point of view, however, it is the men who are out of control, both mad and comic: they are like wild Corybantes, walking around in the marketplace with their weapons, and is it not quite ridiculous (*geloion*) to buy fish while carrying a shield with a Gorgon head (557–60)? The women's own devotion to the bodily arts, to Eros and Aphrodite (551), is part of their sanity. They know what is at stake in war: the home deprived of its men (101ff); deaths in battle (524), in particular deaths of the children they have labored so to bear and bring up (588–89); women growing old in solitude, unable to marry again, wasting the short space during which a woman can find a husband (591–97). Peace, by contrast, is imagined, as always in Aristophanes, as a time of sensory delight: food, drink, sex, religious and poetic celebration.

Not surprisingly, these women love to get together and talk. The play begins with a convocation of women from all Greek cities, undivided by the ongoing war. It is easy for women from Sparta and Athens to diagnose the pettiness behind the male conflict, as they meet on the common ground of their love of sex and gossip. Indeed, in the exchange with the Athenian Proboulos that forms the centerpiece of her argument, *Lysistrata* proposes that women's arts are good models for the type of good sense that is badly needed in this conflict: first washing and combing, as women remove dirt and parasites from the wool, then weaving, as all the separate strands the city contains—migrant workers, foreign friends, metics—are all carded together into a basket of good will (*eunoia*) and woven together into a new outfit for the city (574–86). Weaving is an image of constructive political talk, aimed at the common good, rather than at bashing: each strand has to be taken into account, and all have to be brought together into a coherent whole. Far from being mad, women are wise managers of the household treasury (true historically), and, in general, prudent, diplomacy-oriented people committed to the common good.

Erections are the device through which the female world wins its triumph. By denying men the control they have come to expect over women's bodies, erections put them in a ridiculous and humiliated position. The men try to cover their deformities, but they cannot. (Think of waking up to find a large pimple in the middle of your forehead, and you will see the attitude that these men have toward their satyrlike state.) The desperation of Myrrhine's husband Kinesias is the antitype of male virtue: desire runs wild, and he is willing to do anything for a fuck. All at once, together, both comedy and tragedy enter the

men's world. The phallic Kinesias is ridiculous, but he is also tragic, as he sings the wonderful mock-tragic ode to his penis, addressing it as an orphan child and exclaiming in spasms of pain that would befit Philoctetes, if they were not the result of the man's own overweening ridiculousness.

As *Lysistrata* remarks, it is easy to get men to make peace—if you catch them while they are erect, rather than when they are competing aggressively with one another (1112–13).<sup>26</sup> Reconciliation (*diallagē*), not surprisingly, has the form of a beautiful woman, and she joins the men together by grabbing hold of any part that happens to be sticking out: if they won't extend their hands, she can grasp their cocks (1119). The phallus, first an emblem of male humiliation and submission, now becomes the emblem of reconciliation, hope, and Greek peace. "Even though I'm a woman," *Lysistrata* remarks at this point, as Spartans join Athenians in phallic connectedness, "I have some good sense [*nous*], and I don't do badly for judgment [*gnōmē*]" (1124–25).

The triumph in *Lysistrata* is in this sense a phallic triumph. But how different its meaning is from the meaning that Erich Segal ascribes to it. Womanized and phallicized, Athenian and Spartan men join their wives and dance, calling on the Graces, Apollo the healer, Dionysus, and the other gods. In an invocation suggestive of old-time traditions, the Athenians summon Hēsuchia (Equanimity) of kindly intent, associated with "civic tranquility and freedom of action without constraint" (Henderson 1988 ad 1289). And, in the final defeat of male shield-waving, the Spartans first praise Dionysus and the maenads, and then, dancing, sing in praise of an unnamed goddess who would seem to be the patron of their former enemies, Athena.<sup>27</sup> The strands have been interwoven so effectively that differences break down. On both sides, dance and the name of Dionysus are powerful in the reconciliation.

#### *Trugōidia* and the Good Citizen

I have discussed the later *Lysistrata* first, since it develops very fully and systematically the themes in which I am interested. But Aristophanes' concern with peace is of long standing, as is his association of peace with bodily indulgence and with the sort of talk that calls boastful military arrogance into question. At first glance, Dicaeopolis of *Acharnians* might seem to confirm Erich Segal's thesis, for he does triumph at the end in a celebration of phallic enjoyment, and with an erection (*stuomai*, 1220), as his sexual and sensual delight contrast with the misery and pain of the battle-weary general Lamachus (1174–234). Let us look more closely at this triumph, however, to see whether it is really depicted as the triumph of a manly man.

Dicaeopolis tells us a good deal about himself in his opening speech. It is plain that he is a rural man of low class and civic status. What does he love? Good politics, good poetry (Aeschylus), peace, the countryside. He always arrives first at the Assembly, because he likes to talk, and he likes to talk about peace, not to engage in competitive games that distract from the talk of peace (25–28). When he arrives early at the assembly, he spends his time in a variety of ways: "I sigh, I yawn, I stretch, I fart, I wonder, I write, I pluck out hairs, I calculate" (30–31). Undignified physical activities like farting and hair-plucking (the latter cited by Aristotle as a disgusting example of "bestial vice") mark him as low, not a respectable he-man but a body-focused man. Dressed in his padded comic-actor costume, moreover, Dicaeopolis does not look like a he-man, but like a man who is both lower-class and, in his bodily softness, somewhat effeminate. And these traits, which abase him, are closely linked to some others that augur well for the city: wondering, writing, calculating (*logizomai*).

*Lysistrata* is a character of considerable nobility; Dicaeopolis is not. She is of good class, she apparently looks attractive, and she speaks with poise, intelligence, and dignity; none of this is true of him. So, as I attempt to bring them together, I need to explain this difference. I think we can say that in Athenian cultural terms, a woman is equivalent to a declassed man. In other words, the only way to represent a male *Lysistrata* is to represent maleness in a lower-class fat, soft, rural body. For good measure, one can add to this body the female traits of fondness for talk, poetry, food, drink, sex, peace. And one can represent this man as happy with his erection, identified with it and not ashamed of it. That is a kind of shamelessness that takes a man right out of the men's world and into the world of women.

We must also remember that *Lysistrata*, enacted by a male actor, is not so much a "real-life woman" (whatever that is) as a constructed woman. What is important about her is not her biological sex but her attributes and general orientation to life. Aristophanes finds more than one way of representing the subversion of Athenian militarism. But both Dicaeopolis and *Lysistrata* depart from, and call into question, cultural norms of dominant masculinity.

Dicaeopolis has a strong erotic desire for peace, for reasons not unconnected with those of *Lysistrata*. In peace he can enjoy the bodily pleasures, and he can also enjoy the wholeness of his family and its religious celebrations. The celebration of the Rural Dionysia that forms a centerpiece of the comedy (245ff) shows that he understands Dionysus to be a god closely connected with the same traditional goods *Lysistrata* also prizes: the togetherness of family, health, pleasure. The phallus, carried in the family procession, is sacred to the long-haired, poetry-loving, peace-loving god; indeed, Phales, lover of sex

with both women and young men, is Dionysus's comrade and fellow party-drinker (263–65). Dionysus is also associated with bean soup (246), and the daughter who ladles it out is known, not surprisingly, for farting in the morning (256). All the bodily indignities are celebrated together—erectons, farting, drinking. If Phales happens to get a hangover, well then, Dicaeopolis is prepared to offer him a nice cup of peace to drink the following morning, as the master of the house puts his shield in storage (277–79). All this celebration, however, is possible only when one is “set free from troubles and battles and Lamachuses” (*machōn kai Lamachōn*, 270).

On the other side, then, as the play presents things from Dicaeopolis's viewpoint, is a war-establishment that is kept going by empty swagger and boasting and by the desire for financial gain. Both in the early scene in the Assembly and when he makes his speech on behalf of peace with his head on the chopping block (367ff, 497ff), assuming the persona of the poet Aristophanes himself,<sup>28</sup> Dicaeopolis insists that the war has resulted from a combination of pride and profit. Petty causes (the whores stolen from Aspasia) jostle against good but possibly insufficient causes (the vines cut down), and Athenians themselves have stirred up aggression with their boycott of Megarian goods. All in all, leading politicians simply enjoy making a threatening show (530–31), and there is more than a suspicion that money is changing hands somewhere (374).

Dicaeopolis is the antitype of this world of male aggressiveness. When he sees Lamachus's armor, he gets dizzy “out of fear of the weapons” (581), and the helmet and its feather are, to him, simply a vomitorium and a stimulus to vomit (584–86) “since your crests make me sick.” “Well, who are you then?” asks the exasperated general. “Who? A good citizen [*politēs chrēstos*],” replies Dicaeopolis, whose name, “Just City,” has marked him as that from the start.

Like *Lysistrata*, Dicaeopolis draws attention to the close kinship between comic and tragic poetry. Before making his speech to the Acharnians, he has to costume himself as someone piteous, demonstrating his own need and vulnerability. So where does he go? Straight off to Euripides, who gives him a beggar's costume from his *Telephus*. And Dicaeopolis/Aristophanes then coins a name for his combined tragic-comic chorus: “Don't be annoyed with me, spectators, if, though a beggar, I speak about the affairs of the city before the Athenians, making a *trugōidia*” (499).<sup>29</sup> *Trugōidia* has metamorphosed into a “song of the wine-lees,” carrying in its name a reminder of its closeness to tragedy, but reminding us, at the same time, of comedy's connection with bodily enjoyment and indulgence. Later on, when Dicaeopolis spots some eels, he addresses their leader in mock-tragic language: “Oh dearest one, I've longed for you for a long time, / and now you are here, the deep desire of the *trugikoi*

*khoroī*.” So comedy is not tragedy; it has different longings, different satisfactions. And yet, “*Trugōidia* too knows what justice is,” asserts the comic poet/comic hero (500).

What is this close relationship? In discussing *Lysistrata*, I suggested that it is a relationship in vulnerability, in the possibility of being surprised by life as Lamachean military types do not permit themselves to be. Turn this vulnerability one way, and it becomes the comic drama of farting and unwanted erections. Rotate it just a little and it becomes deep sadness and tragic loss.

If I may be permitted a personal memory, I associate this underlying closeness with Charles Segal himself. When I think of Charlie, I see him running around the track in Palo Alto one day in 1997—one of the last times I saw him—looking rather comic in his round soft squatness, arms pumping awkwardly, enjoying life a lot—like Dicaeopolis gearing up for his big performance. Then, rotate it just a few degrees and that vulnerability becomes the tragedy of premature death and lamentation. And the tragi-comedy of our present attempt to connect with his unique spirit, which I can best manage in the trugic, rather than the tragic, mode.

How is it that the trugic soul knows justice? Like *Lysistrata*, Dicaeopolis suggests that the connection runs through persuasion and deliberation. He “wins a victory by arguments” (*nikai toisi logois*, 626), and “persuades the people to change their mind about the truce” (626–27). He is “a man of practical wisdom and exceedingly clever” (*phronimon, hupersophon*, 971). His victory is that of “good deliberation” (*euboulia*). The trouble with the political-military leadership is that it is not interested in asking what is really in the interests of the common welfare or in deliberating about the war with that end in view. Like *Lysistrata*, Dicaeopolis is capable of a kind of calm good sense about war, rather than the sort of I'll-frighten-you-to-show-you-I-can-saber-rattling that his leaders and the generals prefer. Here, too, talk codes as feminine, soft, cowardly, déclassé. The Dionysian body is shamefully hedonistic, unmanly.

But how great is its enjoyment of life. The ending of the drama is an extended confrontation between two styles of manliness, as Lamachus, the manly man, comes back from battle torn and suffering, crying out in pain, and Dicaeopolis, enjoying the fruits of his own deliberations, contentedly celebrates the pleasures of eating, drinking, and imminent sex. His large erection is a sign not of macho triumph but of its successful refusal. And by representing Lamachus as distressed by his fate, the play reminds us of what we should have known already: war hurts. The tough-soldier personality can be inculcated very deeply in men, but it does not really survive the confrontation with one's own blood and guts. Lamachus at this point wishes he were Dicaeopolis.

He is not, but at least he has become the tragic hero, crying out like a veritable Philoctetes in the spasms of his pain.

- LAMACHUS Hold my legs, hold them, *papai*,<sup>30</sup> hold them tightly, comrades  
[*philoi*].
- DICAEOPOLIS And as for me, hold my prick, both hold the middle, hold it  
tightly, you dear girls [*philai*].
- LAMACHUS My head is reeling, I feel like a rock hit my head, and I am about  
to pass into darkness [*skotodiniō*].
- DICAEOPOLIS As for me, I feel like going to bed. I have a big hard-on, and I  
want to fuck in the darkness [*skotobiniō*]. (1215–20)<sup>31</sup>

At each point, the very excess and shamefulness of the comic hero looks like a kind of healing: normal life, and the pleasures that all human beings love, rather than the cruel and, from the play's point of view, unnecessary depradations of war. Lamachus has not succeeded on his own terms because, as it turns out, the comic body is also the soldier's body, only he does not know it until he is in pain.

And what of the audience? The ending of *Acharnians* plays itself out before a group of people who are, most of them, heavily invested in the war effort. But the comedy recruits them for the side of peace. No sane member of the audience will identify with or choose the lot of Lamachus. All will recognize their own longing for the good things in life symbolized by Dicaeopolis. As Erich Segal writes, they will identify with and celebrate the triumph of his erection—but with the difference that has been my business all through this argument, for their identification with Dicaeopolis is a way of going over to what one might not implausibly call the “soft” side of things, to the side that loves pleasure, is scared of dying, and has much skepticism about bashing. In Dicaeopolis's triumph, even the most militaristic members of the audience are to recognize a part of their own souls.

Dicaeopolis's truce is in one way very different from the peace achieved by Lysistrata. As he repeatedly emphasizes, it is a private truce, followed by the opening of a private market. Far from reconciling the two warring forces, as Lysistrata and Reconciliation manage to do, Dicaeopolis simply carves out for himself a little space for personal pleasure, and he is remarkably unaffected by evidence of misery all around him. When the Megarian farmer is so hard up for food that he prostitutes his daughters, dressed in pig costumes, Dicaeopolis, far from giving him relief, takes advantage of his plight. When a poor farmer comes in, announcing that he is a “man beset by misery” (1019), Dicaeopolis immediately replies, “Keep it to yourself.” Nor will he give a share of

his peace, that delicious drink, to anyone else. The solipsism and lack of compassion in his triumph contrast strikingly with Lysistrata's concern for the entire city. What does my argument say about this discrepancy?

First, we should make a formal point. The entire humor of *Acharnians* depends on the final contrast between Dicaeopolis and Lamachus; for that reason, the dramatist needs to isolate his hero, rather than portraying him as part of a larger company. Perhaps, too, the young Aristophanes was simply less daring than the older, not willing to envisage a resolution that radically changes the whole city's war politics.

There may be a larger issue at work, however. *Acharnians*, produced in 425, takes place very near the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, when sentiments in favor of peace are only beginning to swell, and there is little general pessimism about the city's long-term prospects. By the time of *Lysistrata* (winter of 411), though, things are very different. The war and the plague have sapped the strength and hopefulness of the city. The disastrous Sicilian Expedition launched in 415 has been wiped out, and Athens is on the brink of disaster, surrounded by a Spartan army, finances in disarray. Many subject allies have revolted. Internally, democracy is increasingly threatened by oligarchic agitation.

It is not surprising that Aristophanes would take a graver tone at this grave time and portray a real reconciliation as requiring the united support of the entire city. It is not surprising that he would place great emphasis on traditional customs and practices, now increasingly under threat. Nor, I think, is it surprising that he would need to represent the proponent of reconciliation as a woman, totally outside the contemporary political struggle. As Jeffrey Henderson has repeatedly observed, Lysistrata is likely to be a character drawn to some extent from life, in that a real-life priestess of the cult of Athena Polias, Athena Guardian of the City, named Lysimache,<sup>32</sup> was a prominent figure in civic religion who may well have suggested the central portrait.<sup>33</sup> So the more serious ending of the *Lysistrata* is of a piece with the bleakness of the times. Although its tone remains hopeful—and in that way is quite unlike *Frogs* in 405, preoccupied as it is with images of the death of both comedy and democracy—it plausibly suggests that what the city needs is a radical and total ending of the conflict, not a mere personal diversion from it.

#### The Serious in the Comic

Is there a serious political position in these plays? As Charles Segal emphasizes, Aristophanes himself repeatedly draws attention to the capacity of comedy to say “many ridiculous things, but also many serious things” (*Ran.* 89–90). In *Acharnians* similarly, Dicaeopolis and the poet are conflated, and the mixed

persona insists that "*trugōidia* too knows what justice is" (500). Segal argues plausibly that a major theme in Aristophanes is the quest to integrate the serious with the comic in comedy; in *Frogs* this quest takes the form of Dionysus's search for his own identity and wholeness (1961, 12).

About the serious content in Aristophanes, commentators have taken a wide range of positions. Jeffrey Henderson insists that comedy frequently, indeed usually, comments on issues of the day, offering serious specific advice in comic form. Malcolm Heath, to cite just one example of this position, suggests that comedy never gives serious advice: even the pose of seriousness is itself frivolous. A third group of interpreters, which includes Michael Silk and which would appear to include both Erich Segal and Charles Segal in their very different ways, holds that there are indeed serious issues treated in the comedies, but that we can appreciate them only if we engage with the plays at a more general level than that of specific policy-prescriptions.

Henderson makes a strong case for some specific policy significance for at least some of the plays, and yet their larger significance, I believe, is more general in spirit, as the third group rightly assert. My understanding of this significance is generally in harmony with that of Charles Segal: comedy reinforces certain traditional values having to do with family, bodily need, and communal solidarity, which were thought to be under threat at this time. What I want to add to Charles Segal's account is the fact that these values are under threat not simply because of the Peloponnesian War or any particular struggle between oligarchs and democrats at Athens. They are under threat, then and always, because of a tendency in the human personality toward grandiosity and the denial of bodily vulnerability.

Little boys who wave their shields around in the marketplace—this, to Lysistrata, is a picture of communal insanity. But it is also, obviously enough, a picture of how many people think and behave, at many times and in many places. As historian Omer Bartov wrote on the eve of the second Gulf War with Iraq in his commentary on how twentieth-century mass culture, in both the United States and Europe, tends to glorify the machinery of war, "Displays of killing machines tend to exhilarate young men rather than repel them."<sup>34</sup> Some of these "young men" are male, some are female. Aristophanes, and Bartov, are commenting on approaches to life, not so much on real men and women. The approach to life that is exhilarated by the machinery of aggression is a common part of many personalities, in Aristophanes' world and in our own. It is likely to be coupled with a refusal to admit to the imperfections and vulnerabilities that link all human beings with the comic hero.

What do Aristophanes' comedies do to, and in, such a personality? As with tragedy, so with comedy: some will be impervious to the artist's blandish-

ments. If the sight of women raped and children led off to slaughter does not move you to pity under any circumstances, Euripides' *The Trojan Women* will not prompt critical reflection about Athenian policy toward the rebellious colony of Melos.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, we can easily imagine a personality that just does not find Aristophanes funny. To laugh at the comedies of Aristophanes, a person has to have one part that is soft, ready for surprises, just a little bit ready to own up to its own porousness. Another type of personality—one that comedy prominently depicts and skewers—is so rigid that it cannot acknowledge a common link between itself and Dicaeopolis/Lysistrata.<sup>36</sup>

Politics contains many of the rigid personalities. Indeed, one of the most alarming aspects of the contemporary world situation, for me, is the thought that there may be not one leading member of the current (at the time of my writing) Bush administration who would laugh at these plays.<sup>37</sup> And might this humorlessness not be a little bit connected to a rigid posture of macho/military control? And might this, in turn, not be connected to an impatience with talk, with deliberation that listens, and takes different sides seriously? Aristophanes would surely ask, Might all these traits not also be connected, at a deeper level, to a certain rigid contemptuousness about, refusal to identify with, the body and its functions?<sup>38</sup>

There are, then, many then and now for whom these plays do nothing at all, because their personality is beyond Aristophanes' reach. But his expectation clearly is that most personalities contain more complexity and less rigidity than that. In the safe context of the civic festival (and would that we had such a context for shared art-mediated deliberation), they will be willing to laugh, and to laugh in a way that links them to the comic hero. What this laughter does is to affirm and, in the moment at least, to strengthen a part of the personality that is indulgent, needy, capable of being surprised by life. It is Aristophanes' profound hunch that this will in turn strengthen, again in the moment at least, an interest in deliberation, talk, and even reconciliation, an interest in a politics that focuses on standing needs rather than the symbolism of domination. This is in its own way a conservative politics, as Charles Segal stresses; one might even call it "compassionate conservatism," if that name had not already been appropriated for other purposes.

So, at the end, Reconciliation takes the men by their erections, leading them along, humbled but happy, to the Dionysian dance. Spartans and Athenians alike, they join in the praise of Dionysus.

The end of the war was not such, however. The two sides persisted, and Athens was ruined. Comedy itself died too, as Charles Segal stresses<sup>39</sup>—killed off, it would seem, by a combination of diminished freedom of speech, high anxiety, and the sheer eclipse of the values that comedy affirms, in favor of the

defensive, controlling, self-protective values. But in a brief pause in the flow of events, which repeats itself in many times and places when people laugh at these comedies and others akin to them, this dark history is rewritten and different possibilities are at least contemplated, in and through laughter. This, as Aristophanes says, is serious business.

#### NOTES

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1. See E. Segal 2001, esp. 28–32.
2. *Lys.* 934. Here I follow Jeffrey Henderson's (1988) excellent translation, which captures better than others the sexual humor of the play. Translations that are unacknowledged are mine.
3. For example, Lamachus has the word for "battle" (*machē*) in it.
4. Moreover, in his treatment of *Thesmophoriazousai*, another play in which females play a prominent and sympathetic role, the issue of Aristophanes' female sympathies is not explored.
5. Erich Segal's book (2001) is full of insight, and so no argument that focuses on problems with its central thesis can adequately convey the riches the book offers.
6. Since garden-variety phallic porn is not made for or primarily addressed to women. This is not to deny that there is erotically explicit material addressed to women, whether lesbian or "straight." But the sort I am describing is not.
7. Dover (1989) argues that there is evidence that this greatly distorts reality, where actual penis size of European males is concerned!
8. Dover's (ibid.) plates contain many pertinent examples. Erich Segal (2001) at one point recognizes these facts (75), but he never integrates them into his overall argument.
9. See Dover's (1989) account of the complex protocols of sex in this area, which I believe to be largely correct, at least as an account of social norms: see Nussbaum 1994 and a shorter version of this in 1999.
10. See Halperin 1989a and 1996.
11. Readers will recognize the language of the speech of Lysias and the first speech of Socrates in Plato's *Phaedrus*; I discuss these speeches and their relation to cultural norms in Nussbaum 2002.
12. See Halperin 1989a, 88–112, "The Democratic Body," which discusses the stories that Solon made sure that every citizen could afford to purchase the services of a prostitute, on the understanding that control over pleasure is an essential part of manly citizenship. Note also the exceedingly pejorative evaluation of masturbation, and its linkage with poverty and low class: if you have to resort to masturbation, you just do not have control over your sexual outlets.
13. See Aristotle, *Gen. An.* 783b9–84a12 and [Pr.] 10.37 (written in Aristotle's school), where it is theorized that baldness is caused by sexual arousal: the blood goes into the penis, when it might have stayed in the head. Therefore eunuchs never go bald, and castrated bulls have larger horns. People "plentiful in semen" go bald in front of the head, where the brain is.

14. Compare the discussion of education in Plato's *Republic*, where exercise promotes good health, but through that, moderation in desire.
15. Compare the representation of Heracles in Dover 1989, plate R328: he has a large club and a very small penis. And of course we know that he does not do very well with talk.
16. Comic actors typically wore a padded costume and a large phallus. The chest looked sunken and underdeveloped, the stomach flabby.
17. The language of the Athenian marriage contract stipulated that the father was to give his daughter to the husband "for the plowing of legitimate children."
18. On Candaules' erotic love for his wife in Herodotus, see Halperin 1989b.
19. See also Plato *Symp.* 208e, where those pregnant in body (rather than in soul) show a preference for women and seek to reproduce children.
20. See Winkler 1989.
21. Lucian *Dial. D.* 2 (trans. Konstan 2002); see the discussion in Konstan 2002.
22. Of the phallus of Dionysus, little can be said with confidence. Prior to the 430s, visual art depicts him as robed; after that date he is sometimes represented as a naked beardless youth, with the undersized genitalia typical of that type. However, these depictions of the youthful Dionysus contrast strongly with the Dionysus the audience would have known in the theater, especially the comic theater. In *Frogs*, for example, he wears a yellow gown and soft boots (45–48), both signs of effeminacy, and is clearly fat (padded?) (200). For discussion on this point, I am grateful to Tom Carpenter. Even in his youthful form, Dionysus is portrayed as effeminate, because he is beardless: see Dover 1989, 72, who mentions a shift in norms of male attractiveness in the direction of effeminacy, which he believes occurred in the fourth century.
23. These are traditional punishments for adultery.
24. Dover suggests that Right gives his cloak to the other characters on stage and exits into the audience.
25. Walt Whitman's idea of a public poetry, rooted in a love of the body and of poetic language itself, is not a bad modern parallel.
26. See Henderson's (1988) commentary ad loc. on the sense of *orgōntas*.
27. Line 1321. Athena is named in a gloss in one of the manuscripts, and is a logical way of interpreting the periphrasis *tan pammachon sian*.
28. See 377–78, where Dicaeopolis acknowledges authorship of *Knights* and speaks of Cleon's consequent hostility.
29. This speech is closely modeled on a speech from Euripides' *Telephus*.
30. *Papai* is the exclamation later made central to the expression of pain in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, where one entire hexameter line is filled with that interjection.
31. Cf. also 1085ff, where Dicaeopolis prepares for a feast while Lamachus prepares for battle.
32. The names have similar semantic content: Lysistrata means "disbanding the troops," and Lysimache means "disbanding the battle."
33. See Henderson 1988 and 1990. Henderson suggests that in this time of faction and political degeneration no male would plausibly have been able to stand for the interests of the city as a whole.
34. Bartov (2003) notes that this is especially likely to be the case after a devastating reminder of communal vulnerability, such as World War I.
35. On this example, see Nussbaum 2003.
36. Think of the difference between the Robert De Niro character in the film *Analyze This* and his nemesis Primo Sidone: De Niro reveals an inner core of need, and the struggle between that

Aristophanean core and the macho exterior is the source of the movie's best humor. Primo Sidone is the rigid one, for whom the question "What is this 'closure'?" is not a real question prompted by curiosity and desire, but an impatient, even violent attempt to rid himself of something that challenges his macho control.

37. Least of all Condoleezza Rice, to continue our contention that we are talking about personality types, not about the "nature" of males and females.

38. For if Clinton has and had many faults, surely he is the Aristophanean president par excellence, and the hatred of Clinton is at least in part a hatred of the in-your-face indulgent bodily persona that links him to Dicaeopolis. You can see Clinton acting the role, and you can even see, imagining that, that the sexuality on display would not be the locker-room fantasy of domination that Erich Segal exalts, but more the Dionysian excessiveness and childish delight of which I have been speaking. To say this is not to undermine the contrast I have drawn between Greek and (dominant) American values. American militarism still values the large and erect phallus. (Recall Robert Dole's commercials for Viagra.) Clinton's sexuality, however, is different: not the Erich Segal norm, but something more Dionysian, subversive of that norm.

39. See his excellent discussion of motifs of death in his analysis of *Frogs*.

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### III

## THE ORDINARY HORRORS OF THE FEMININE