

## THE NUMBER OF SPEAKING ACTORS IN OLD COMEDY

The number of speaking actors in Old Comedy has been much discussed, but no consensus has been reached.<sup>1</sup> The old assumption that the number was three, as in tragedy, was shaken when it was realized that some scenes of Aristophanes have four characters on-stage at once, all taking part in the dialogue: for example, in *Lys.* 77–253 we have Lysistrata, Kalonike, Myrrhine, and Lampito, and in *Frogs* 1414–81 we have Dionysos, Aiskhylos, Euripides, and Plouton. Rees therefore argued that there was no fixed number,<sup>2</sup> but that view was not generally accepted. A more widely held view is that there were three principal actors with additional performers for small parts.<sup>3</sup> However, there is no evidence contemporary with Aristophanes which distinguishes three actors from the others in this way, and it is probable that writers of later periods who mention three actors are referring to their own times and did not have authentic information about the fifth century. The passage which *DFA*, p. 149, seems to regard as the most trustworthy is in a brief account of comedy attributed to Tzetzes: ἐπιγεγόμενος δὲ ὁ Κρατῖνος κατέστησε μὲν πρῶτον τὰ ἐν τῇ κωμῳδίᾳ πρόσωπα μεχρὶ τριῶν, στήσας τὴν ἀταξίαν.<sup>4</sup> *DFA* paraphrases this as ‘Cratinus reduced the disorderliness and, in some sense, fixed the number of regular actors at three’. But πρόσωπα means ‘masks’ or ‘characters’; it does not mean ‘actors’ (for which the Greek word is ὑποκριταί). What the writer meant by saying that Kratinos settled the masks or characters in comedy at ‘up to three’ is not clear, but his statement is useless as evidence for the number of actors.

A further objection to distinguishing principal actors from those playing small parts is that it is not clear how small the small parts would have to be. Lampito and Plouton, for example, are significant roles. Dover, *Comedy*, pp. 26–7, in a brief but effective discussion, points out that, when we distribute the parts of a play among four actors, we can if we wish give as little as possible to the fourth, but there is no evidence that this is what Aristophanes actually did. Dover accepts that there were four actors, but argues against any greater number, drawing attention to three passages (*Lys.* 85–92, *Clouds* 886–7, *Thesm.* 929–46) in which no more than four appear to be

<sup>1</sup> I use the following abbreviations for the principal recent discussions. *DFA* = A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, second edition revised by J. Gould and D. M. Lewis (Oxford, 1968; reprinted with addenda, 1988). Dover, *Clouds* = K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes: Clouds* (Oxford, 1968). Dover, *Comedy* = K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (London, 1972). Henderson, *Lys.* = J. Henderson, *Aristophanes: Lysistrata* (Oxford, 1987). Russo, *Aristofane* = C. F. Russo, *Aristofane autore di teatro* (Florence, 1962; reprinted with addenda, 1984). Thierry, *Aristophane* = P. Thierry, *Aristophane: fiction et dramaturgie* (Paris, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> K. Rees, *The So-called Rule of Three Actors in the Classical Greek Drama* (Chicago, 1908).

<sup>3</sup> Russo, *Aristofane*, pp. 150–5; *DFA*, pp. 149–53. This view is held in its most elaborate form by Thierry, *Aristophane*, pp. 40–67. He maintains that the three actors formed a hierarchy, with the Protagonist playing the most important parts, the Deuteragonist the next most important, and the Tritagonist the less important, and that a character who speaks much in one scene and little in another scene (such as Pheidippides in *Clouds*) will accordingly have been played by different actors in the different scenes. No evidence supports this.

<sup>4</sup> Now printed, without the attribution to Tzetzes, in *Scholia in Aristophanem, pars I fasc. 1A: Prolegomena de Comoedia* (ed. W. J. W. Koster; Groningen, 1975), p. 14. On this passage see also N. C. Hourmouziades, *GRBS* 14 (1973), 186–7.

available. His argument seems convincing, until he comes to *Akharnians*, where he allows the use of a fifth actor to play Pseudartabas. This concession weakens his case: if a fifth actor can speak two lines as Pseudartabas, why can he not also speak a couple of lines as the Boiotian woman in *Lys*, 85–9?

More recently Henderson, *Lys*. pp. xlii–xliii, has not accepted the limit of four. He postulates a fifth actor to play unnamed women at three points in *Lysistrata* (136, 447–8, 760–1), but admits that it is hard to account for his presence: ‘Since the fifth actor’s role is so small and inessential, it may be that Ar. for some reason had to accommodate him or that he was a novice’. He seems to imply that Aristophanes would have preferred to use only four actors, but does not explain why that might be so.

It appears to me, rather, that a dramatist would naturally prefer to have a separate actor for each role in a play, if external constraints permitted, for two reasons: it would enable him to have as many characters as he wished on-stage at the same time, and it would enable him to cast in each role an actor who was suited to it in physical characteristics and in acting ability. If in fact Aristophanes restricted himself to four actors (or to any other specific number), why did he do so? In the modern theatre, in plays having a large number of characters, such as Shakespeare’s, parts are frequently doubled, and the motive is financial: the manager cannot afford, or does not wish, to pay more actors than are necessary. But this does not mean that the same number is used in every play; some managers are more lavish than others. If Aristophanes observes the same restrictive limit in every play, that cannot be because every khoregos was mean to exactly the same degree. It must be because there was some generally imposed constraint, by which no comedy was allowed to use more than a certain number of actors. The reason for such a rule may have been financial, if actors were paid by the state; but there is no evidence that actors were paid in Aristophanes’ time. The other possible reason, perhaps more probable, is that the use of more actors was thought to give a competitive advantage. If there had been no limit, ambitious poets and rival khoregoi might have recruited larger and larger casts to overwhelm the audience with diverse characters and spectacle. It was therefore desirable to have a fixed number of performers: just as there was a fixed number of choristers (fifty for a dithyrambic chorus, fifteen for a tragedy, twenty-four for a comedy), so also there was a fixed number of actors.

If it is right to conclude that the number of actors in a comedy was fixed by the rules of the contest, an important consequence follows: the rules must have been adhered to. One thing that we do know about the dramatic and choral competitions in Athens is that they were keenly contested. Aristophanes himself expresses his dismay at losing (*Clouds* 520–6, *Wasps* 1043–8). Rivalry was apparently so intense that a law laid down a specific procedure for accusing and removing a chorister who was suspected of being ineligible to perform.<sup>5</sup> If disputes could arise even over a single chorister smuggled in to improve a performance, all the more would they be likely if an additional solo actor was brought in contrary to the rules. Every rival khoregos would be ready to pounce.

Thus, if the number of actors was limited by the rules to four, it was limited to four; or if the limit was five, five could be used. What we must not accept is that the limit was four but a fifth actor was sometimes used. With this in mind I propose now to re-examine briefly the passages of Aristophanes which may have something to tell us about the number of actors, taking the plays in chronological order.

<sup>5</sup> Dem. 21.56–61. For discussion of the law see D. M. MacDowell, *Demosthenes: Against Meidias* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 276–7.

*Akharnians* 43–175

As it happens, the earliest play presents us with the most difficult problem. At the meeting of the *Ekklesia*, Dikaiopolis is on-stage throughout, and the Herald must also be on-stage continuously from his opening announcement (43) until he proclaims the adjournment (173). The Envoy who has recently returned from Persia is on-stage from 64 until Dikaiopolis orders him to leave in 110;<sup>6</sup> Pseudartabas, the King's Eye, is on-stage from 94 to 125; and Theoros is on-stage from 134 to 173.

Amphitheos makes more than one appearance. He first speaks in 45, and is arrested by the archers in 55. At that point the text does not make quite clear whether the archers take him off-stage or remain holding him on-stage. But it is more likely that he is taken off; for in 129, when Dikaiopolis calls for him and he answers, there is nothing to suggest that he tears himself away from the archers holding him. Presumably they are not still holding him but have simply ejected him, leaving him free to slip back into the meeting when they are not looking. After being on-stage from 129, he certainly exits after 132 and reappears at 175.

If only four speaking actors are available, some very quick changes are involved. The least difficult arrangement seems to be to have one actor playing Amphitheos and the Envoy, changing parts between 55 and 64 and again between 110 and 129, and one actor playing Pseudartabas and Theoros, changing parts between 125 and 134. Whether it was practicable to change within nine lines is something that we cannot know for certain, for two reasons: we do not know whether any stage business or other pauses occurred at those points, and we do not know how difficult the costumes were to put on and take off. If an actor had only to take off a mask, put on another mask, and either take off or put on a long cloak which covered the costume underneath, it may have been possible to complete a change within nine lines.

The explanation that Pseudartabas is played by an 'extra' because he 'speaks only two lines of gibberish'<sup>7</sup> should be rejected. An extra is an actor; if he speaks, he is a speaking actor. It is not credible that the rules of the contest stated 'Five speaking actors may be used, provided that one of them is hard to understand', or '... provided that one of them makes verbal mistakes'. Such a rule would be unenforceable. If a rival khoregos raised an objection, how would it be decided whether a character made enough mistakes, or was sufficiently unintelligible, for the performer to be called an 'extra' and not an actor? Anyway, Pseudartabas is not unintelligible, for in 104–7 Dikaiopolis finds that he can understand him only too well. The performer of Pseudartabas is, therefore, a speaking actor.

If Aristophanes and his director Kallistratos were free to use as many speaking actors as they wished, they would surely have found it more convenient to use five or six for this scene. But if only four were allowed, performance by four may have been possible.

*Akharnians* 824–8

A Megarian brings his two Daughters for sale to Dikaiopolis, and is denounced by a Sycophant. All five are on-stage from Dikaiopolis' reappearance at 824 until the Sycophant runs off at 828. Are five actors necessary here?

<sup>6</sup> On the question of when the Envoy exits, see K. J. Dover, *Maia* 15 (1963), 8–9, reprinted in his *Greek and the Greeks* (Oxford, 1987), p. 290.

<sup>7</sup> *DFA*, p. 150; cf. Dover, *Comedy*, p. 27 and *Maia* 15 (1963), 9 n. 8, reprinted in *Greek and the Greeks*, p. 290 n. 8.

It is commonly held that the roles of children were played by boys who were not counted in the number of actors.<sup>8</sup> *DFA*, p. 144, goes so far as to say that young children 'obviously cannot have been played by grown-up actors'. In fact this is not self-evident. An audience which accepted the convention of women played by male actors may have accepted the convention of children played by adult actors. However, I do not think it likely that the Megarian's Daughters were played by adults. They both get into a sack at 745 and remain there until one emerges at 765 and the other at 788. A sack containing two adults seems improbable.

The Daughters may have been played by small boys, but another possibility which should be considered is that they are very young children represented by dolls. An explanation of this kind is given for *Lys.* 879, where Kinesias' baby cries *μαμμία, μαμμία, μαμμία*: 'The infant was probably represented by a doll and its cries made by Kin.'<sup>9</sup> The Megarian's Daughters say nothing but *πεπράσθαι, πεπράσθαι* (735) and a few squeals of *κοῖ κοῖ*. Perhaps these were actually uttered by the actor playing the Megarian.

If the Daughters are dolls, only three actors are needed in this scene. If they are played by boys, five persons are needed, whether the boys are to be counted as actors or not. For the moment I leave this question open.

### *Knights* 234

It has been asserted that *Knights* can be performed by only three actors, though different scholars note possible problems about this in different places in the text.<sup>10</sup>

At line 234 the Sausage-seller and Demosthenes<sup>11</sup> are on-stage. Nikias, who has been off-stage, shouts a warning, and Paphlagon appears. The most obvious way to perform this is for Nikias to rush out of the house to warn Demosthenes and the Sausage-seller, and then run away in another direction as Paphlagon comes out; this requires four actors. The use of a fourth actor can be avoided only if Nikias shouts his line from off-stage, so that the same actor can immediately appear as Paphlagon. That would indeed be possible; but had Aristophanes any reason to make the same actor play Paphlagon and Nikias?

### *Knights* 1203–5

ΑΛΛΑΝΤΟΠΩΛΗΣ. τὸ μὲν νόημα τῆς θεοῦ, τὸ δὲ κλέμμ' ἐμόν.  
ΔΗΜΟΣΘΕΝΗΣ. ἐγὼ δ' ἐκινδύνευσ'.  
ΠΑΦΛΑΓΩΝ. ἐγὼ δ' ὤπησά γε.  
ΔΗΜΟΣ. ἄπιθ'· οὐ γὰρ ἀλλὰ τοῦ παραθέντος ἡ χάρις.

This assignment of lines to speakers is due to Rogers,<sup>12</sup> and I believe it to be right. The Sausage-seller has just filched a dish of hare's meat brought by Paphlagon, and

<sup>8</sup> Russo, *Aristofane*, pp. 226–7, suggests that the roles of children were taken by boys who were specialists in singing. But the Megarian's Daughters do no singing.

<sup>9</sup> Henderson, *Lys.* p. 177.

<sup>10</sup> Russo, *Aristofane*, pp. 139–40, and *DFA*, p. 150 n. 1, comment on lines 1254–6; Dover, *Comedy*, p. 94, comments on line 234; Thierry, *Aristophane*, p. 43, comments on both those passages.

<sup>11</sup> Here for convenience I use the names Demosthenes and Nikias for the two slaves who appear at the beginning of the play, without entering into discussion of the question how far they are to be identified with the generals of those names. At any rate 54–7 implies some degree of identification of one of them with Demosthenes.

<sup>12</sup> B. B. Rogers, *The Knights of Aristophanes* (London, 1910), p. 168.

has presented it to Demos. The joke is that he gets the better of Paphlagon by doing what Paphlagon (Kleon) himself does: throughout *Knights* it is alleged that Kleon filched from Demosthenes the credit for the victory at Pylos, and one of the principal themes of the play is that the Sausage-seller defeats Paphlagon by using the same dirty tricks by which Paphlagon (Kleon) defeated the other slaves (politicians). Here the sequence is: Demosthenes hunted the hare (fought the campaign at Pylos), Paphlagon (Kleon) cooked the hare (completed the campaign), but then the Sausage-seller served it up.

Other editors assign ἐγὼ δ' ἐκινδύνευσ' to Paphlagon or to the Sausage-seller, but neither alternative suits the wording. ἐγὼ δ' should mark a change of subject in each case, contrasted with the preceding words. Therefore, since the Sausage-seller speaks 1203, he cannot say ἐγὼ δ' ἐκινδύνευσ', and if Paphlagon says ἐγὼ δ' ἐκινδύνευσ', he cannot say ἐγὼ δ' ὥπτησά γε: yet Paphlagon must say ἐγὼ δ' ὥπτησά γε, because Demos' retort to it is ἀπιθ', which must be addressed to Paphlagon.

I conclude that Demosthenes is on-stage in this scene. The text does not show when he appears, but most probably he comes out of the house with Demos at 728. It was usual for a prosperous citizen to be accompanied by a slave when he went out, and such a slave would not necessarily be spoken to or commented on: so it need not surprise us that there is no reference to Demosthenes between 728 and 1204. Four actors, then, are required here.

#### *Knights* 1254–6

Demos has ordered Paphlagon to hand over his garland to the Sausage-seller, the Sausage-seller is triumphant, and someone else then hails him as the victor and says 'Remember that you've become a man because of me!' and asks for a job as his secretary. Manuscripts and editors are divided: some assign 1254–6 to Demosthenes (or First Slave), others to the chorus. The attribution to Demosthenes must surely be right, for two reasons: a well-to-do cavalryman of the chorus would not want a job as a secretary writing out indictments; and it was Demosthenes who earlier in the play persuaded the Sausage-seller to challenge Paphlagon and told him that he would become a man (177–8).

Russo's objection to having Demosthenes speak 1254–6 is that Aristophanes would not bring a character on-stage merely for this one speech.<sup>13</sup> But if Demosthenes speaks also in 1204, that objection falls, or at least is weakened.

If Aristophanes was allowed to use four speaking actors in *Knights*, there is no evident reason why he should have made efforts to avoid doing so. I conclude that he probably did. Nikias and Demos could conveniently be played by the same actor, with a separate actor for each of the Sausage-seller, Paphlagon, and Demosthenes.

#### *Clouds* 886–1104

As is well-known, our text of *Clouds* is not the one originally performed; it has been partly revised, but the revision seems to be incomplete, and it is unlikely that it was performed as we now have it. Thus we cannot be sure that it conforms to the requirements for performance. Still, as it stands, it is clear that four actors are needed from 889 to 1104 for Strepsiades, Pheidippides, and the Better and Worse Arguments.

In 886–7 Sokrates, after telling Strepsiades and Pheidippides that the Better and Worse Arguments will appear before them, says abruptly 'I shan't be here'. It is hard

<sup>13</sup> Russo, *Aristofane*, pp. 139–40.

to see any reason for him to exit so suddenly, except that the actor is needed to play one of the Arguments because no more actors are available; and Dover has convincingly argued that there should be a choral song at this point, allowing him time to change his costume and mask.<sup>14</sup> This suggests that Aristophanes did not expect to be able to use more than four speaking actors.<sup>15</sup>

*Clouds* 1493–1509

As the text stands (though here too we cannot be certain that the revised text was performed or performable) four actors are needed to play Strepsiades, Sokrates, and two Students (whether we call one of the Students Khairephon or not).<sup>16</sup>

*Wasps* 230–414

Besides Philokleon, Bdelykleon, and Xanthias there is a Boy who arrives with the chorus at 230 and departs with the other (non-speaking) boys at 414. Nothing shows whether the performer was a boy or an adult; in either case there is no obvious reason why he should not be regarded as a fourth speaking actor.

*Wasps* 1412–16

Philokleon and Bdelykleon are on-stage; as the Bread-seller departs, an unnamed Accuser immediately arrives. Clearly four actors are necessary.

*Peace* 1264–7

It is now generally agreed that only one Arms-dealer converses with Trygaios, while the Helmet-maker and Spear-maker are silent.<sup>17</sup> As the Arms-dealer leaves, some boys appear, of whom two, Lamakhos' son and Kleonymos' son, sing and speak. If the performers of those two roles are counted as actors, four actors are needed here.

*Birds* 84–92

Peisthetairos and Euelpides are on-stage. The Servant-bird exits at 84 and Tereus the hoopoe appears at 92. If the same actor played these two roles, he would have to make a very quick change. It would be more convenient if different actors played them, making a total of four actors in this scene.

*Birds* 837–47

In the first half of the play Peisthetairos and Euelpides are inseparable companions, but in 837–47 Peisthetairos sends Euelpides off 'to the air' to perform various tasks; and, although he tells him to return when he has done them, Euelpides never in fact reappears. The absence of this major character from the second half of the play is hard to explain except by the hypothesis that the number of actors was limited, and the actor of this part was wanted to play other parts later.

<sup>14</sup> Dover, *Clouds*, pp. lxxvii, xcii–xciii, 208, and *Comedy*, pp. 26–7.

<sup>15</sup> Thiery, *Aristophane*, p. 45, suggests that Strepsiades exits at 888 and reappears at 1105, enabling this actor to play the other Argument; this means postulating the loss of another choral song between 1104 and 1105. The partly-revised state of *Clouds* makes it impossible to rule out this suggestion, but the text as we have it does not indicate that Strepsiades exits here.

<sup>16</sup> Dover, *Clouds*, pp. lxxvii, 266–7.

<sup>17</sup> See the commentaries of M. Platnauer (Oxford, 1964) and A. H. Sommerstein (Warminster, 1985) at line 1210.

*Birds* 1565–1693

Peisthetairos, Poseidon, Herakles, and the Triballian god require four actors. The Triballian utters only three very short speeches in bad Greek, but the last of them at least is quite intelligible (1678–9),<sup>18</sup> and there is no good reason why the actor who speaks them should not be regarded as a speaking actor.

*Lysistrate* 77–92

Lysistrate, Kalonike, Myrrhine, and Lampito are on-stage, so that four actors are needed. Lampito has brought a Boiotian and a Corinthian woman with her. When Lysistrate asks who they are, the answers come from Lampito, not from themselves. The other women comment on their physique and even look inside their dresses, but they utter not a word of protest (contrast Lampito's reaction in 79–84), presumably because no more speaking actors were available to play these parts.

*Lysistrate* 128–36

Lysistrate, Kalonike, Myrrhine, and Lampito are still all on-stage. Lysistrate has just revealed her plan for a sex-strike, but the others are reluctant. 'Why do you hesitate?' she asks. Kalonike and Myrrhine each in turn say that they will not do it, 'but let the war go on'. Lysistrate's retort 'Is that what you say, flounder? And just now you said you would even cut yourself in half!' (131–2) must be addressed to the woman who said that she was willing to cut herself in half like a flounder (115–16), assumed by editors to be Myrrhine. It is therefore most natural that it should be Myrrhine, rather than Kalonike as editors assume, who replies in 133–5, saying 'Anything else you wish! I'm willing to walk through fire if necessary...' Then Lysistrate turns away from Myrrhine to someone else: 136 *τὶ δαὶ σύ;*, 'What will *you* do?' The reply is 'I'm willing to walk through fire too'. There is no reason why this should not be spoken by Kalonike; indeed the balance of the dialogue makes it desirable that she and Myrrhine should each offer a positive alternative, just as in 113–16 they each made an offer, and in 129–30 they each gave a negative reaction to Lysistrate's proposal. Henderson attributes the response in 136 to another woman who is otherwise silent throughout the scene; but that gives a less satisfactory balance to the dialogue, and would be a less probable arrangement even if enough actors were available for it. So there is no good reason to postulate a fifth actor here.

*Lysistrate* 424–49

The Proboulos is on-stage, and in 424 he calls for crowbars to lever open the gates of the Akropolis. At this point he addresses one slave only (*φέρε*); in 426 he turns to a second (*ποῖ δ' αὖ σὺ βλέπεις;*). In 428–30 he orders the slaves to lever under the gates on one side (*ἐντεῦθεν*), while he himself will help by levering on the other side (*ἐνθενδὲ*); no doubt this means that the slaves are to lever under one leaf of the double gate while the Proboulos levers under the other leaf. This division of labour makes sense only if the total number of men is three, so that having two on one side and one on the other is the most equal division possible; there cannot be more than two slaves on one side while the Proboulos works alone on the other. Furthermore the Proboulos, one of the most senior officials in Athens, presented in this play as a rather self-important character, would not allow other slaves to stand by idle while he

<sup>18</sup> *DFA*, p. 151, is wrong to call them 'nonsense'.

himself performed this labour. It follows that there are no Skythian archers or any other slaves on-stage doing nothing;<sup>19</sup> the Skythian archers addressed a few lines later are themselves the slaves who are to do the levering – and there are only two of them.

The realization that there are only two archers makes it easier to understand what happens next. No levering of the gates is actually done, because Lysistrate opens them herself from inside and comes out. The Proboulos is determined to arrest her, and calls for an archer: 433 *ποῦ 'στι τοξότης*;<sup>20</sup> She protests (435–6), and he orders the second archer to assist the first (438 *καὶ σὺ μετὰ τούτου*). Thus at the end of 438 both archers are taking hold of Lysistrate, intending to tie her hands behind her back, when another woman appears and speaks 439–40; I assume that this is Kalonike.<sup>21</sup> The Proboulos calls for another archer (441), and tells him (442 *ξύνδησον* is singular) to bind Kalonike first. What is the point of *προτέραν* (442)? All commentators seem to have overlooked the significance of this word. It can only be that this archer is one of the two who had been about to bind Lysistrate. If it were a different archer, as editors generally assume, there would be no reason for him to be told to bind Kalonike before binding Lysistrate.

A third woman, whom I assume to be Myrrhine, then appears and speaks (443–4), and again the Proboulos calls for an archer and orders him to take hold of her (445). This will be the other archer who had been holding Lysistrate. So now one archer holds Kalonike and one holds Myrrhine, and Lysistrate is left free. Thus Lysistrate, not another woman newly appearing, speaks 447–8, and the Proboulos finds that he has no archer available to hold her: 449 *ἐπιλέλοιψ' ὁ τοξότης*. He has only two archers to arrest three women, and the farcical element of the passage is that the two archers rush to and fro but inevitably always leave one woman free to threaten them. Thus the passage uses a total of four speaking actors (the Proboulos, Lysistrate, Kalonike, Myrrhine) and two silent ones (Skythian archers), not, as Henderson would have it,<sup>22</sup> five speaking and six or more silent.

### *Lysistrate 727–61*

Lysistrate is on-stage deploring the women's unwillingness to stay in the Akropolis, and three women in succession emerge with various excuses for going home: the First Woman says that she wants to spread out some fleeces on the bed (727–34), the Second that she wants to scutch some flax (735–41), and the Third that she is pregnant

<sup>19</sup> An anonymous referee for *CQ* objects that Skythian archers could not do this work because they would be carrying weapons: bows and arrows, and possibly whips and swords (cf. *Thesm.* 933, 1125–7). But this is unconvincing; they can easily lay their weapons down, and it is much more likely that they do so than that the Proboulos labours to save them the trouble.

<sup>20</sup> This expression, almost exactly repeated in 441 and 445, does not mean that he does not know where the archers are. *ποῦ* is used with a person in the nominative as an order, meaning 'Come here!', e.g. *Lys.* 184, 1114, *Clouds* 633, *Wasps* 935, 976, *Peace* 1295, *Birds* 353, 863, *Frogs* 1305, *Ekk.* 734. With a thing it means 'Bring –!', e.g. *Wasps* 995, *Peace* 1059.

<sup>21</sup> There is no strong reason why the speakers of 439–40 and 443–4 should not be respectively Kalonike and Myrrhine, the same speaking characters who entered the Akropolis with Lysistrate at 253. It is no real objection that one of them is later addressed as an old woman (506 *ὦ γράβη*), since the Proboulos there is being rude to her. We can, if we wish, imagine Kalonike as being in her forties; she still enjoys sex and smart dressing (51, 133–5, etc.), but she is probably older than Lysistrate, whom she addresses affectionately as 'child' (7). So I assume that the speakers of 439–40 and 443–4 are Kalonike and Myrrhine, as do Rogers and Coulon in their editions. But it makes no difference to the rest of my argument if any reader prefers to assume, with Henderson and Sommerstein in their editions, that they are two other women.

<sup>22</sup> Henderson, *Lys.* pp. xlii, 117, 123. On p. 126, and earlier in *ZPE* 34 (1979), 31, Henderson even envisages the presence of a 'troop'; but that is incompatible with the Proboulos' complaint in 449 that he has run out of archers.



and must leave the Akropolis to give birth (742–57). The first two are told by Lysistrata to ‘come back’ (731) or ‘come back here’ (738), and evidently obey, but it is not quite clear whether each immediately returns into the Akropolis, going off-stage at the end of 734 and 741 respectively, or remains on-stage beside Lysistrata; ‘here’ (738 δεῦρ) may possibly imply the latter.

The Third Woman does not go off-stage immediately after 757, for she must speak 758–9, ‘But I can’t even sleep (*or* But also I can’t sleep) in the Akropolis, ever since I once saw the guardian snake’. The particles ἀλλ’...οὐδὲ... show that this is not another woman newly appearing, but the same woman producing a second excuse. Her first excuse refers to an activity (giving birth) which needs to take place elsewhere; her second excuse refers to a difficulty arising in the Akropolis.

Then some other woman chimes in with a similar excuse: ‘And I’m dying of insomnia – poor me! – because of the owls calling all the time’ (760–1). The words ἐγὼ δ’ mark a change of speaker; so this is not the Third Woman continuing. If the First Woman goes off-stage at the end of 734, the same actor could reappear before 760 with a different mask. However, δ’ in 760 implies that the speaker is adding to a conversation to which she has been listening, not making a fresh start. It therefore seems more likely that the First and Second Women have remained on-stage, and one of them now adds a second excuse to her earlier one. Henderson says, in his note on 760–1, ‘There is no reason why Wife A or Wife B should add this final excuse to the ones they have already given’. On the contrary, since the Third Woman gives two excuses, there is no reason why the First or Second Woman should not do so too. As in the Third Woman’s case, her first excuse refers to an activity (spreading out fleeces or scutching flax) which needs to take place elsewhere, and her second excuse refers to a difficulty arising in the Akropolis.

So this passage too is best explained as using a total of four speaking actors (Lysistrata and three other women), not five.

#### *Thesmophoriazousai* 457–8

At the women’s meeting Euripides’ Relative (‘Mnesilokhos’) is present, one woman acts as herald, and two other women make speeches (380–432, 443–58).; thus four actors are on-stage.<sup>23</sup> The woman who makes the second speech concludes by saying unexpectedly that she must now go to the Agora to make some garlands (457–8). One would expect all the women to stay for the whole meeting, and there seems to be no dramatic reason for Aristophanes to make this woman leave – except that Kleisthenes is going to arrive presently (at 571) to address the meeting. The obvious inference is that the actor playing the garland-maker has to play Kleisthenes too, and thus that no fifth actor is available.

#### *Thesmophoriazousai* 929–46

Euripides’ Relative and a woman (Kritylla) are on-stage, Euripides exits at the end of 927, and the Prytanis and a Skythian archer enter at 929. However, it is not essential to use five speaking actors, because the archer says nothing in this scene. He can be played by a silent actor here; he exits at 946 (cf. 930 εἰσάγων), and when he reappears at 1001 he can be played by the actor who was previously the Prytanis.<sup>24</sup> The fact that he says nothing in 929–46 is another indication that a fifth speaking actor was not available.

<sup>23</sup> Dover, *Comedy*, p. 167, rightly rejects the possibility that the herald is the leader of the chorus.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Russo, *Aristofane*, pp. 153–4; *DFA*, p. 152; Dover, *Comedy*, p. 27.

*Frogs* 164–80

Dionysos and Xanthias are on-stage. Herakles disappears at 164; the Corpse arrives at 170 and departs at 177; Kharon arrives at 180. Even if Dionysos and Xanthias spend some time between lines plodding around the orchestra, it seems unlikely that one actor could change quickly enough to play all three of the other parts. So four actors are probably needed here; five would be more convenient, but are not absolutely essential.

*Frogs* 549–78

Four actors are required to play Dionysos, Xanthias, the Innkeeper, and Plathane.

*Frogs* 830–1481

Four actors are required to play Dionysos, Aiskhylos, Euripides, and Plouton.<sup>25</sup> It may seem surprising that Xanthias is not on-stage. In the first half of the play he accompanies Dionysos and is a major character; in the second half one might expect Dionysos still to have his slave with him, but in fact Xanthias never appears after 813. Presumably the actor of Xanthias plays one of the other characters afterwards, and this is another indication that a fifth actor was not available.

*Ekklesiazousai* 1111–12

The Young Man is dragged off-stage by the Second and Third Old Women, and immediately Praxagora's Slave appears; four actors are therefore necessary at this point.<sup>26</sup> One may wonder why the Young Woman, who successfully saw off the First Old Woman (1037–48), does not try to argue with the Second and Third Old Women too. She seems to disappear after 1055 for no explicit reason. Presumably Aristophanes has no fifth actor available, so that the actor of the Young Woman has to change into the Slave.

*Wealth* 624–6

Khremylos and Blepsidemos are on-stage, and Khremylos calls to his slave Karion to come out of the house bringing Wealth with him. It is true that Karion and Wealth say nothing at this point, and so could be played by non-speaking actors for this appearance; but it seems more likely that four speaking actors were used.<sup>27</sup>

In later scenes of this play the number of actors required is difficult to ascertain, because of doubt about when the choral interludes occur. Without a choral interlude, five actors would be needed at 1094–7 and four at 1168–72. But editors are probably right to insert *XOPOY*, at least in the first of those two places, giving actors time to change costumes and masks.

<sup>25</sup> Plouton must appear by 1414 at the latest. In *CQ* 9 (1959), 261–2, I postulated the loss of about three lines including an announcement of his arrival at that point, but Dover, *Aristophanes: Frogs* (Oxford, 1993), p. 295, argues that he is present from 830 onwards.

<sup>26</sup> Thierry, *Aristophane*, p. 49, accepts Bergk's conjecture that a choral interlude has been lost from the text after 1111, enabling one of the actors who exit at that point to change into the Slave. But there is no manuscript evidence for this, and it should probably be rejected; cf. M. Vetta, *Aristofane: Le Donne all'assemblea* (Milan, 1989), p. 267.

<sup>27</sup> *DFA*, p. 153, attempts a distribution of all the parts in this play to only three actors, assuming that the part of Wealth was divided between two actors, but admits that a four-actor distribution is more likely.

## CONCLUSION

If we leave aside *Akharnians*, it appears that every extant play of Aristophanes certainly or probably needs four speaking actors, but none needs more than four. In six plays (*Clouds*, *Birds*, *Lys.*, *Thesm.*, *Frogs*, *Ekkkl.*) there is some indication that Aristophanes is manipulating the action or dialogue to avoid using a fifth actor, either by making one character exit before another appears or by keeping silent a character who might be expected to speak. This evidence seems sufficient to establish that the number of speaking actors in a comedy at this period was fixed at four by the rules of the contest. There is no adequate reason to believe that exceptions were made for barbarians, children, or small parts.

*Akharnians*, however, remains problematic, since it has two scenes which may be thought to require five actors. It seems that we have to accept one (or more) of the following possibilities.

(1) These scenes were actually performed without a fifth actor, by making very quick changes in the scene with Amphytheos and the Envoy, and by using dolls for the Megarian's Daughters.

(2) The rules of the contest were worded so as to permit boys and actors playing barbarians to speak in addition to the fixed number of four speaking actors.

(3) The rules of the contest were changed in 425 B.C.; the number of speaking actors allowed in a comedy was five until that year, and four thereafter.

(4) The text of *Akharnians* which we have is not exactly the script which was performed.

None of these possibilities is really attractive. My own preference is to plump for (1) and to suppose that the number of speaking actors in Old Comedy was always four; but on the evidence which we have the other possibilities cannot be definitely excluded.

*University of Glasgow*

DOUGLAS M. MACDOWELL