

## COMIC TECHNIQUE AND THE FOURTH ACTOR

A recent article on 'The Number of Speaking Actors in Old Comedy' by D. M. MacDowell has argued that to perform the plays of Aristophanes required the use of four, but never five, speaking actors.<sup>1</sup> Systematically argued, MacDowell presents a cogent case against Henderson (xli–xliv), who has suggested that at times five actors were permitted. MacDowell also presents some very sensible observations on the nature of any prescription which might limit the number of actors. The final paragraphs, however, express considerable discomfort at the earliest work in the extant corpus: '*Akharnians*, however, remains problematic, since it has two scenes which may be thought to require five actors' (MacDowell, 335). A tentative solution is offered by MacDowell, which is that 'these scenes were actually performed without a fifth actor, by making very quick changes in the scene with *Amphitheos* and the Envoy, and by using dolls for the Megarian's Daughters' (MacDowell, 335). Unspeaking performers for the Megarian's Daughters are more likely than dolls, since they must follow orders for movement (*Akh.* 732, 740–5). Apart from this, I have no doubt that this is indeed how *Akharnians* was performed, and an examination of the specific comic techniques employed by Aristophanes in the two problematic scenes in *Akharnians* demonstrates not only the comic desirability of their use, but their applicability to other plays by Aristophanes.

In addition to the three speaking characters who are on stage at *Akharnians* 824–8 (Dikaiopolis, the Sycophant, and the Megarian), there are the Megarian's two Daughters who have said *πεπῶσθαι*, *πεπῶσθαι* (*Akh.* 735) and *κοῖ κοῖ* (*Akh.* 780, 800, 801, 802, and [803]). Their words, then, are limited to onomatopoeic squeals and a repeated infinitive, which itself provides the expected answer to a question by repeating one of the two alternatives presented. Neither a high degree of elocution from the performers nor a great amount of focused attention from the audience is required for the necessary information here to be conveyed. In fact, if the lines were spoken by either the Sycophant or the Megarian, both of whom are on stage, the audience would probably assume that the words had come from the Daughters, which is to say the characters dressed as piglets, and about whom porcine puns were being made. The performers playing the Daughters do not need to utter a sound to be thought of as speaking characters, if we allow for the possibility (as MacDowell does) that their voices were being 'dubbed' by other characters on stage. The scene then requires only three speaking actors to perform, and whether the Daughters were played by juveniles or dummies, the figures did not actually speak, and therefore would not be reckoned among the speaking actors of the play, about whom limitations may have been imposed by the state for the purposes of levelling the playing field in competition.<sup>2</sup>

This assumes that a form of 'ventriloquism', where one performer could provide the

<sup>1</sup> D. M. MacDowell, *CQ* 44 (1994), 325–35, cited hereafter as MacDowell. I also use the following abbreviations: *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). Henderson = J. Henderson, *Aristophanes: Lysistrata* (Oxford, 1987). Russo = C. F. Russo, *Aristophanes: An Author for the Stage* (London and New York, 1994), a translation of *Aristofane autore di teatro* (Florence, 1962; reprinted with addenda 1984).

<sup>2</sup> For the highly competitive Athenians, this seems the most plausible justification for the actor

voice for an otherwise silent performer to create the illusion of another speaking actor, was an accepted technique on the fifth-century stage. An instance of ventriloquism is generally accepted at *Lysistrata* 879, when Kinesias' baby cries *μαμμία μαμμία μαμμία* (Henderson, 177; MacDowell, 328). Ventriloquism is also suggested for Euripidean tragedy (earlier than Aristophanes), with Alkestis' Child at *Alkestis* 393–415 (sung by the actor playing Alkestis), and the supplementary chorus of boys in *Suppliant Women* (sung by the Chorus).<sup>3</sup> In both of these examples, sung lyric passages must be understood to be coming from the mask of a character other than the one actually producing the sound. With masks, ventriloquism is easily effected: the person producing the sound does not move, and the supposed source of the voice appropriately mimes accompaniment. An audience is willing to transfer the voice to the moving character, as it is for modern ventriloquists, who additionally must prevent their lips from moving while their voice is thrown. This of course is a subtlety not required on the ancient stage. Elsewhere, Aristophanes helpfully demonstrates that an audience is willing to accept different vocal registers being produced from the same mask. In *Thesmophoriazousai* 101–29, Agathon sings a lyric passage taking alternately the parts of a Priestess and the Chorus.<sup>4</sup>

Aristophanic ventriloquism requires no unparalleled experience for the audience, but does allow an opportunity for comic surprise, for in this instance the audience may not be fully aware that the ventriloquism is occurring. The actor who played Dikaiopolis (is it Aristophanes himself?) is not on stage when the Megarian's Daughters squeal, and the possibility for a lingering doubt among the audience as to whether the actor playing Dikaiopolis might somehow have got into the Megarian's bag must remain. When Dikaiopolis does appear, the Megarian soon hurries away. By adapting what appears to be a Euripidean stage technique, Aristophanes presents a scene requiring three speaking actors, but with the appearance of requiring more. Compared to Euripides, Aristophanes' use of the technique of ventriloquism appears to be restrained, allowing only sounds and repeated words to be transferred to another mask.

This may recall a character earlier in the play, whose mumbled words need not be fully comprehensible. The two lines spoken by Pseudartabas (*Akh.* 100, 104) are ungrammatical, and that is the joke of them, and the cause of irony in the subsequent line from Dikaiopolis, *οἱμοι κακοδαίμων ὡς σαφῶς* (*Akh.* 105). Pseudartabas in fact shares the vocal characteristics of the Megarian's Daughters. It appears Aristophanes uses ventriloquism more than once in *Akharnians*. This then eliminates MacDowell's difficulties with *Akharnians*, 43–175. Excluding Pseudartabas, the scene requires three actors: one for Dikaiopolis, one for the Herald, and one to play Amphytheos (*Akh.* 44–55), the Envoy (*Akh.* 65–125), Amphytheos again (*Akh.* 129), Theoros (*Akh.* 134–66), and Amphytheos for a third time (*Akh.* 175–203). Walton implies that this is an improbable division.<sup>5</sup> Since it adds considerable potential for physical and

limit. I assume that a playwright violating the limit would be disqualified from the competition, though there is no indication that this ever happened.

<sup>3</sup> *Alkestis*: A. M. Dale, *Euripides: Alkestis* (Oxford, 1954), p. xx; T. B. L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London, 1967), p. 119; P. D. Arnott, *Public and Performance in the Greek Theatre* (London, 1989), p. 47. *Suppliant Women*: Webster, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>4</sup> Alan H. Sommerstein, *Thesmophoriazousae* (Warminster, 1994), p. 164, following the Ravenna Scholiast ὁ Ἀγάθων ὑποκριτικὰ μέλη τέως ποιεῖ, ἀμφότερα δὲ αὐτὸς ὑποκρίνεται. μονωδεῖ ὁ Ἀγάθων ὡς πρὸς χορόν, οὐχ ὡς ἀπὸ σκηνῆς, ἀλλ' ὡς ποιήματα συντιθεῖς· διὸ καὶ χορικὰ λέγει μέλη αὐτὸν, ὡς χορικὰ δέ.

<sup>5</sup> J. M. Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice* (Westport, CT and London, 1980), p. 141.

metatheatrical humour (let us even add the voice of Pseudartabas to the responsibilities for this third actor), the improbability seems overstated.

The audience is actively aware that roles are being shared, since one actor's performance (and not a particular character's) is being evaluated by the judges.<sup>6</sup> In *Akharnians*, once this third actor has played Amphytheos and the Envoy (involving a very quick change of costume and mask, which in itself is quite funny), the actor playing Dikaiopolis then casually asks ἀλλ' Ἀμφίθεός μοι ποῦ 'στιν; (*Akh.* 129). If the actor is not already off stage (he can start to exit as early as *Akh.* 110, but he more probably stays until *Akh.* 125), the extra-dramatic incongruity is evident for all to see: Dikaiopolis has just called for a character when it is clear to the audience the actor is on stage, playing another character. The Herald does not move. Dikaiopolis looks at the Envoy, who then picks up his Persian robes, runs off stage, drops the Persian costume, picks up the mask he had left at the end of the *eisodos*, and returns to complete the line as Amphytheos, οὔτοσ' ἴπαρα. A complete costume change is not required, and the comedy is enhanced if the mechanics of the costume change are at least partially visible to the audience.<sup>7</sup> Humour may also be present in the ensuing silence that this creates: whether it is fifteen seconds or thirty, an energetic actor could entertain an audience awaiting the completion of the line without needing to say a word.

When the task is accomplished (and the audience has cheered its success) Amphytheos is immediately sent to Sparta (*Akh.* 130–2). The audience laughs again, at all that energy spent for so little. Whereupon the Herald plays the same game: προσίτω Θέωρος ὁ παρὰ Σιτάλκους (*Akh.* 134), to which the third actor must do another quick costume change, and complete the line as Theoros, shouting (as he is adjusting his mask and costume, perhaps), ὀδί. This is demanding for an actor, without doubt. It is also very funny for an audience, and for Aristophanes the latter is more important. After another change, the actor returns as Amphytheos at 175 and says he has been hurrying (*Akh.* 179). This statement is perfectly true within the context of the narrative: the character has run to Sparta and back in just over forty lines. It also adopts a metatheatrical nuance, as the audience can see plainly that the character is out of breath because the actor, too, has been running. The humour lies in the very difficulty implied by the sharing of roles, and this fact could be acknowledged through gestures by the two actors who do not share roles in the prologue.

This of course is not the only way that the details of the scene could be staged with three actors (here I have assumed for simplicity that the actor only used one *eisodos* throughout). It does, however, suggest the type of physical humour latent in the scene, that is easily brought out in performance. What it implies is that there was an aesthetic in Greek theatre for 'lightning changes': an actor changing roles with a very brief time off stage. It is a device that seems to have been used by all the extant tragedians,<sup>8</sup> and can clearly be imported to the Aristophanic stage. Lightning changes break whatever

<sup>6</sup> This can be seen on analogy with the practice of tragedy. An actor in a tragic tetralogy will not play the same role in all four plays. Because the judges (and, by extension, the audience) must be aware of role-sharing between plays, the same critical awareness must be present within a given play. Since identification of actors playing multiple roles is required in the less overtly metatheatrical genre of tragedy (and satyr play), extension to comedy does not pose any methodological difficulties.

<sup>7</sup> If there was a curtain of sorts along the *eisodoi* (C. W. Dearden, *The Stage of Aristophanes* [London 1976], pp. 32–7), there are additional possibilities for physical humour as the actor changes mask and costume.

<sup>8</sup> C. W. Marshall, 'The rule of three actors in practice', *Text and Presentation* 15 (1994), 53–61, discusses the backstage movements and changes expected of actors in fifth-century tragedy,

illusion may exist, but do so for an enhanced comic effect. MacDowell's difficulties with the *Akharnians* are therefore not the obstacles he envisages. By allowing Aristophanes to import two dramatic techniques established for tragedy, the *Akharnians* does not require five actors, but only three. The result yields comic potential that is desirable, and clearly within the permitted parameters of comic performance. Ventriloquism and lightning changes are therefore established as part of Aristophanes' arsenal of humour in his earliest extant play.

To apply these techniques to the other plays of Aristophanes is to call into question MacDowell's original conclusion, that four actors were required to stage the other extant comedies. Only three were required for *Akharnians*, and *Wealth* can also be accomplished with three (as MacDowell 334 and n. 27 admits, though he still prefers to use four).<sup>9</sup> Among the twenty-four passages that MacDowell uses to establish that four actors were permitted,<sup>10</sup> two reasonably allow for ventriloquism. A further six can be discounted by using lightning changes, none of which are as physically demanding as those required to remove the five-actor difficulties from *Akharnians*. What this might mean is that only three actors were required to act Aristophanes, a number which would place the same limitation on Old Comedy as was evidently present in tragedy.

At *Birds* 1565–1693, Peisetairos, Poseidon, Herakles, and the Triballian are on stage. MacDowell (331) is right to chastise those who would argue that a character who speaks only a few lines should not count as a speaking actor. Here, apparently, there are four speaking characters.<sup>11</sup> But the Triballian, both as a character and in the words he uses, has his closest Aristophanic parallel in Pseudartabas from *Akharnians*, who can have been dubbed with another actor's voice. If we allow ventriloquism here, only three speaking actors are required. A metatheatrical preference for the Herakles actor to provide the voice is perhaps indicated, since he interprets the enigmatic words every time the Triballian speaks (*Birds* 1615–16, 1628–9, 1678–9) and stands to gain materially by the interpretation. As long as the Triballian gestured appropriately while his words were being spoken, the illusion could be created.

Similarly, at *Frogs* 549–78, 'four actors are required to play Dionysos, Xanthias, the Innkeeper, and Plathane' (MacDowell, 334). Yet if in the abusive harangue against Dionysus (who has once again donned the Heraklean mantle) the lines from both the

including lightning changes at p. 55. For lightning changes in New Comedy, cf. W. G. Arnott, 'Gorgias' Exit at Menander, *Dyskolos* 381–92', *ZPE* 76 (1989), 3–5.

<sup>9</sup> Good efforts have been made to suggest that Greek New Comedy only used three actors. For the *Dyskolos*, see G. P. Goold, 'First Thoughts on the *Dyskolos*', *Phoenix* 13 (1959), 139–60, esp. pp. 144–50; J. G. Griffith, 'The Distribution of Parts in Menander's *Dyskolos*', *CQ* 10 (1960), 113–17; E. W. Handley, *The Dyskolos of Menander* (Cambridge, MA, 1965), pp. 25–30; and the important discussion of F. H. Sandbach, 'Menander and the Three-Actor Rule', in J. Bingen *et al.* (edd.) *Le Monde Grec: Hommages à Claire Préaux* (Brussels, 1978), 197–204. Undue caution is urged by N. C. Hourmouziades, 'Menander's Actors', *GRBS* 14 (1973), 179–88.

<sup>10</sup> MacDowell's passages are as follows: *Akharnians* 43–175, 824–8, *Knights* 234, 1203–5, 1254–6, *Clouds* 886–1104, 1493–1509, *Wasps* 230–414, 1412–16, *Peace* 1264–7, *Birds* 84–92, 837–47, 1565–1693, *Lysistrata* 77–92, 128–36, 424–49, 727–61, *Thesmophoriazousai* 457–8, 929–46, *Frogs* 164–80, 549–78, 830–1481, *Ekklesiazousai* 1111–12, *Wealth* 624–6.

<sup>11</sup> N. Dunbar, *Aristophanes: Birds* (Oxford, 1995), p. 15, lists the Triballian as a *παρὰχορήγημα* (= 'extra expense'? cf. Kelley Rees, 'The Meaning of Parachoregema', *CP* 2 [1907], 387–400) but still a speaking part. MacDowell's objection holds. A possibility perhaps not considered by MacDowell is that the regulation which set the limit on speaking performers may have stipulated that the State would pay only for three actors, and anything extra would be the responsibility of the *choregos* (however, see next note). Were this the case, more necessary violation of the three actor limit might be expected.

Innkeeper and Plathane in fact came from the same mask, it is unlikely that the audience would have any means to tell the difference. It would legitimately feel it was seeing four speaking actors, an intriguing effect in a theatre where there was a limit of three actors. While these lines are fully scripted (unlike the previous examples of ventriloquism in Aristophanes, but like the tragic parallels), their impact is in tone, not in verbal felicity. What is centrally important for the audience is that the anger from the characters be apparent. If the Innkeeper and Plathane become indistinguishable in this attack, the comic purpose of the scene is only enhanced.

Having allowed for lightning changes in Aristophanes' repertoire of comic techniques, MacDowell's requirement of four actors in the following scenes is no longer absolute: at *Wasps* 1412–16, the Bread-seller becomes the Accuser; at *Peace* 1264–7, the Arms-dealer becomes the Second Boy; at *Birds* 84–92, the Servant-bird becomes Tereus; at *Lysistrata* 727–61, the First Woman becomes the Third Woman, and does not remain on stage as MacDowell (333) envisages; at *Frogs* 164–80, Herakles becomes the Corpse who becomes Kharon; and at *Ekklesiazousai* 1111–12, any actor can become the Maid with a lightning change. MacDowell (334) is right that Bergk's hypothesized lost choral song at *Ekklesiazousai* 1111 need not be posited; lightning changes provide a solution.

In building his case, MacDowell established that the number of speaking actors was neither more nor less than four. Two of his instances used to establish that five speaking actors were not required are scenes which only require three actors. His comments on *Birds* 837–47 (MacDowell, 330) rightly recognize that a limit does exist, since Euelpides does not return. At *Thesmophoriazousai* 926–49 (MacDowell, 333), only three (not five) actors are required, with the actor playing Euripides returning as the Prytanis. More than half of the passages MacDowell analyses to demonstrate that Old Comedy used four actors can, without special pleading, also be shown to be performed with three. There is no way to prove that they were done with three speaking actors, but the fact that these scenes easily accommodate a three-actor structure, with the concomitant addition of physical and metatheatrical humour, is suggestive.

Of MacDowell's remaining examples, six are explained plausibly by Russo to require only three actors. Russo's solution is not always the only one, but it does at least demonstrate that a rationale can be provided. In adducing Russo, it is necessary to distance myself from his notion of 'amateur actors' who could perform in addition to the three actors paid by the state.<sup>12</sup> MacDowell is right in saying 'what we must not accept is that the limit was four but a fifth was sometimes used' (326), or that, *mutatis mutandis*, the limit was three but sometimes four were used. For 'an extra is an actor; if he speaks, he is a speaking actor' (MacDowell, 327). With this in mind, Russo nevertheless does provide viable role divisions requiring only three actors at *Knights* 234 (Russo 86, 88–9), *Knights* 1254–6 (Russo 86–7), *Clouds* 1493–509 (Russo, 118–20), *Thesmophoriazousai* 457–8 (Russo, 197),<sup>13</sup> and, though this is not specifically

<sup>12</sup> To demonstrate that all actors were paid by the State goes beyond the scope of this paper. It is known that the *didaskalos* was paid by the State, and that the *choregos* paid the Chorus, as well as all production costs. I assume that at least the lead actor, which is to say the one that was competing for the prize, was paid by the State on analogy with the *didaskalos*. Whether the other actors were paid by the State, by the lead actor, or by the *choregos* cannot be determined on the available evidence; cf. *DFA*, pp. 90, 93–5.

<sup>13</sup> I find Russo more persuasive on *Thesmophoriazousai* than J. A. Dane, 'Aristophanic Parody: *Thesmophoriazousae* and the Three-Actor Rule', *TJ* 36 (1986), 75–84. Nevertheless, alternatives exist.

addressed by MacDowell, at *Ekklesiazousai* 1042–65 (Russo, 225). For *Clouds* 886–1104, Russo (92–109) argues that three actors were intended, and the text as it was performed is not what has survived in the manuscript tradition.<sup>14</sup>

A few passages remain. At *Knights* 1204, MacDowell (328–9) argues that Demosthenes says ἐγὼ δ' ἐκινδύνευσ' to which Paphlagon responds ἐγὼ δ' ὠπτησά γε, completing the line. This supposed combination of *antilabe* and elision is not exceptional,<sup>15</sup> and where one stands on this passage depends on where one stands on *Knights* 1254–6, where MacDowell disagrees with Russo. Sommerstein attributes the whole of *Knights* 1204 to Paphlagon, and translates, 'But it was me that ran the risks—I mean, it was me that roasted the meat.'<sup>16</sup> This makes perfectly adequate sense in context, and implies that only three actors are required in *Knights*. Using four is possible, but not necessary as long as variant attributions remain possible at line 1204.

At *Wasps* 230, the Chorus enters accompanied by one or more boys carrying lamps. The Chorus (or just the Chorus Leader) sings in dialogue with at least one Boy, and MacDowell (330) concludes that the Boy was played by a fourth speaking actor, since the others are Xanthias, Bdelykleon and Philokleon. Again, this is not the only solution. There are twenty-four Chorus members, and there is no reason to think that the boys who appear are not from the Chorus. That would explain why the character of the Boy interacts only with the Chorus, and why the persona is discarded at *Knights* 414. Once the Chorus had made its spectacular entry, and sung its *parodos*, the impact of the double chorus has been achieved. Whether one, four, or twelve members of the Chorus adopted the role of boys, Aristophanes has them abandon that character, when it becomes no longer dramatically useful. Certainly, a Chorus can be split to represent the two different groups. This is clear from the Semi-Chorus of Men and the Semi-Chorus of Women in *Lysistrata*, or from the (much earlier) black figure amphora which shows a Chorus of horses and riders.<sup>17</sup> Whatever type of production this vase represents, we cannot think that the piggy-back arrangement lasted throughout the performance: mobility would be so restricted that full synchronized dancing would be impossible. Much more likely is that this is how the dancers initially appeared, and having made their entrance, the awkward position was abandoned, along with the equine *persona*. Ventriloquism is also a possibility at *Wasps* 230, with a Chorus member (or, on analogy with *Alkestis*, the actor playing the 'sleeping' Xanthias or the 'sleeping' Bdelykleon) providing the voice for the silent actor who will mime to accompany the Boy's song (a technical feat paralleled by Euripides' *Suppliant Women*). What is clear is that it need not be a fourth actor, and that resources are available to the comic poet wanting to achieve the effect indicated in the text without resorting to a fourth actor.

Of the twenty-four scenes MacDowell uses to demonstrate four speaking actors were required to act Aristophanes, then, twenty have been shown to allow for the

<sup>14</sup> MacDowell (329–30) recognizes this, and provides a fuller discussion in Douglas M. MacDowell, *Aristophanes and Athens* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 134–44.

<sup>15</sup> For such combinations in Aristophanes, cf. *Knights* 139, 1218, 1257, *Wasps* 1504, *Peace* 41, *Birds* 90, 150, 1015, 1224. A. W. Gomme and F. H. Sandbach, *Menander: A Commentary* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 304–5, discuss *Epitrepontes* 219, and J. R. Porter, *Studies in Euripides' Orestes* (Leiden, 1994), p. 342, notes *Orestes* 1345.

<sup>16</sup> A. H. Sommerstein, *Aristophanes: Knights* (Warminster, 1981), pp. 122–3.

<sup>17</sup> Berlin 1697, dating to c. 550. A. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*<sup>2</sup>, rev. T. B. L. Webster (Oxford, 1962), fig. 23; M. Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theatre*<sup>2</sup> (Princeton, 1961), fig. 126.

possibility that the scenes were performed with only three speaking actors. This assumes the use of ventriloquism and lightning changes, two techniques found in tragedy that can potentially produce considerable comic results if adopted by Aristophanes, beginning with his first extant play. Of the four remaining instances, one is the role of Plouton at the end of *Frogs*. There are certainly problems with his presence, which have met various solutions: Dover believes that a silent figure is on stage from *Frogs* 830 and that the passage is a conflation of two versions, in a parody of the so-called Aeschylean silence; MacDowell in an earlier article postulated a lacuna at 1410; Russo argues that *Frogs* 1411–1533 constitute an addition made immediately before performance, as a result of the death of Sophocles.<sup>18</sup> The common factor in all these interpretations is that there are textual problems at this point of the play, and that the reproduction somehow did affect the manuscript tradition's recording of the *exodos*. Whatever the answer, it is not certain that Aristophanes produced a scene that required four speaking performers when the play was presented in competition.

Only three of MacDowell's texts remain. As it happens, all come from *Lysistrata*. This cannot be a coincidence. The play that apparently encouraged MacDowell to argue against Henderson, that four speaking actors were required and not five, proves to be the stumbling block against there only needing to be three speaking actors. *Lysistrata* 77–92, 128–36, and 424–49, each do indeed seem to require four speaking actors. It is possible to imagine that the Semi-Chorus of Women were among the crowd in the prologue (that is certainly how the scene is often played today). This would mean that Kalonike or Myrrhine could be played by the Chorus Leader, but such a degree of individuation of the Chorus Leader is not paralleled elsewhere. Even if it were, that would not explain *Lysistrata* 424–49, where the Proboulos, Lysistrata, and the two women whom MacDowell (332) assumes are Myrrhine and Kalonike are all on stage with the Chorus Leader. To assume that the text of *Lysistrata* is not the script which was performed, without any external corroborating evidence such as that which exists for *Clouds* or *Frogs*, or to assume that the Chorus was fragmented into individuals to an unprecedented degree, truly is not very desirable.

Yet MacDowell's conclusion, 'that every extant play of Aristophanes certainly or probably needs four speaking actors, but none needs more than four' (335), is not self-evidently true. Ten of the eleven plays of Aristophanes can reasonably be performed with three actors. This conclusion assumes that Aristophanes will make difficult demands of his actors in order to achieve a comic effect, and it admits that there are some instances where the text of the plays is not certain enough to determine whether three or four actors were necessary. Certainly, in *Lysistrata* four do seem to be required. But this single necessary exception might also be explained in a number of other ways. It might represent a short-term variation on whatever guideline regulated actor limits (though *Thesmophoriazousai* from the same year can be done with three). It is possible different rules were established for the different festivals: in such a case plays presented at the Lenaia might permit a different number of actors than those at

<sup>18</sup> K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes: Frogs* (Oxford 1993), p. 295, 373–6; D. M. MacDowell, 'Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1407–67', *CQ* 9 (1959), 261–8, at pp. 261–2; Russo 198–202 (cf. also C. F. Russo, *Storia delle Rane di Aristofane* [Padova, 1961], and 'The revision of Aristophanes' *Frogs*', *G&R* 13 [1966], 1–13). Corruption is also suggested by, e.g., F. Salviat, 'La deuxième représentation des Grenouilles: la faute d' Adeimantos, Cléophon et le deuil de l'hirondelle', in R. Étienne et al. (edd.), *Architecture et Poésie dans le monde grec: Hommage à Georges Roux* (CMO 19 Arch 10; Lyon and Paris, 1989), 171–83.

the City Dionysia.<sup>19</sup> It is also possible that the play as it survives was modified to a 'touring script', which would not then need to follow festival regulations for competition: the stage life of scripts after their initial performance is something of which exceptionally little can be said with certainty.

Nevertheless, the doubt remains.<sup>20</sup> Certain plays of Aristophanes are very comfortable with a three-actor structure. One consequence of three-actor comedies is that it decreases the numbers of capable comic actors required for a given festival. The City Dionysia would require nine tragic actors to perform the three tetralogies, but (according to MacDowell) twenty comic actors to perform in the five comedies. Three-actor comedies would diminish this demand on resources considerably, requiring only fifteen comic actors. This, at least, seems grounds enough to leave the possibility open. It may be that MacDowell is right. If so, Aristophanes seems to have missed a number of comic possibilities latent in his text. If a three-actor limit was observed, there are several clear indications of what was expected of a comic actor at the end of the fifth century, and it is possible to see another reason why it was that actors came to dominate the production process in the centuries that followed.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Other differences between the festivals are attested: for example, at the Lenaia, 'aliens might sing in the choruses and resident aliens could be choregoi' (*DFA*, p. 41.)

<sup>20</sup> Of the fragments of Old Comedy, none can be shown to require more than three speaking actors in a given episode. Eupolis' *Demoi* has been reconstructed to require various numbers of actors, but not even the lengthy fr. 99 needs more than three. If the play contains a necromancy instead of a katabasis, as I. C. Storey believes, then the leaders from the past who are summoned need not all appear at once, and more than one could be played by the same actor. Leaders could return in pairs, only one of whom would speak (fr. 104). There need be only three speaking characters on stage at a time: Pyronides, a companion (perhaps), and the speaking leader. Later in the play, the actors can give voice to the other leaders: it is known that Aristeides (fr. 105), Miltiades (fr. 106), and Perikles (fr. 110) all speak at some point in the play. Similarly, Eupolis' *Marikas* fr. 192 seems to require only three: Marikas, a *δεσπότης*, and another.

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