LANDSCAPING THE BODY: ANATOMICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL BAWDY IN ARISTOPHANES AND SHAKESPEARE, AND POLITICALLY INCORRECT HUMOUR[1]

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In this article two bawdy passages are compared. In Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, Athenian and Spartan negotiators, driven to a state of desperation by their women's sex-strike, map out their respective sexo-territorial demands on the sexy body of the personified *Reconciliation*. In Shakespeare's *The comedy of errors*, again, Dromio of Syracuse is trying to escape from the rotund kitchen maid Nell, who believes that he is her husband, Dromio of Ephesus.

In both passages a woman's body is imagined as a geopolitical entity to be mapped out by men. Thus, geographical allusions occur which ostensibly denote real contemporary geopolitical entities in 411 BC or AD 1592, but often connote allusions, some of them obscene, to female body parts.

In taking issue with the interpretation that real women are debased by the depiction of fictional women in these passages, I base my arguments on (i) the underrated positive function of humour; (ii) the generic function of comedy; (iii) the illusionary nature of dramatic representation; (iv) the carnivalesque; and (v) the probable composition of the audience.

Introduction

When the romantic comedies of William Shakespeare made use of classical models, they reverted to the New Comedy inherited by Plautus rather than the Old Comedy of Aristophanes. Nevertheless, there is a passage in *The comedy of errors* that bears a remarkable resemblance to the exuberant spirit of Aristophanes. In this passage, Dromio of Syracuse, wandering about in Ephesus, is attempting to escape from the rotund kitchen maid Nell, who believes that he is her husband, Dromio of Ephesus. What makes this passage unusual is that Dromio describes Nell's body in geographical terms.

Vague parallels to the Nell passage are provided by John Lyly and by passages in *Wasps*, *Peace* and *Women at the Thesmophoria festival*, but one has to turn to Rabelais and *Lysistrata* for examples of fully-fledged 'anatomical-geographical' bawdy. In the latter passage, the mute figure of *Reconciliation*

[1] I wish to thank the anonymous referees of *Akroterion* for their helpful criticism.

(Diallagé) appears as a symbol of the cessation of hostilities not only between the Athenian women and their husbands, but also between Athenians and Peloponnesians. In the ensuing bawdy scene, Athenian and Spartan negotiators, sexually deprived on account of their women's sex-strike, map out their respective sexo-territorial demands on the sexy body of *Reconciliation*. To integrate these anatomical and geographical aspects, Aristophanes and Shakespeare both employ the strategy of obscuring obscene metaphors by the use of geographical allusions ostensibly denoting real contemporary geopolitical entities or inter-state relations of 411 BC or AD 1592, but punningly connoting obscene allusions to the female body.

If these two passages are approached from the paradigm of gender politics, it could be argued that the respective 'body-scapes' are commodified or objectified by male agents. Chapman mentions that all fifty female roles in Aristophanes are targets of sexual remarks; Zweig (1992:86) argues that this sexploitation of the female body constitutes pornography, and that there is a continuum between art and reality, i.e. 'by visually representing violence against women, it […] contributes to a climate in which acts of sexual hostility against women are […] ideologically encouraged'. In this article, however, I suggest that:

(i) the two passages should be read with humour. The positive interpretations of the function of humour proposed by Koestler and Dover are to be preferred to the negative theories one-sidedly gathered by Billig;

(ii) the genre of both passages is comedy, not tragedy, and the function of comedy is to effect a relaxation of our concern for the character 'suffering' on the stage, because the 'suffering' is not real;

(iii) Aristophanic comedy consists in part of illusion, in the sense of both ποίησις (fantasy) and μίμησις (representation as basis for dramatic illusion). Its illusionary component does not have sufficient ontological status to be taken seriously. Aristophanic comedy also reflects the real-life socio-political background of late fifth-century Athens, but Aristophanes' chronological specificity limits the lessons his political allusions may have for the modern spectator, as is confirmed by his limited *Nachleben*;

(iv) the liberating effects of the carnivalesque contribute to divorcing comedy from reality; and

(v) the discretion of a discerning audience should safeguard them against being 'ideologically encouraged' by scenes depicting make-believe 'sexual hostility'.

I conclude that there is no such thing as politically correct humour.

1. Shakespeare's use of classical sources

In 1623, Ben Jonson made the notorious claim that Shakespeare had 'small Latin and less Greek' (Highet 1967:199). While it is highly probable that the Latin to which Shakespeare was exposed at Stratford Grammar School would have enabled him to read accessible Roman authors in the original (Martindale 1990:11), it appears as if Jonson was correct in his assessment of the Bard's Greek. This implies that Shakespeare probably used Greek sources via translations — either Latin,[2] or English,[3] or other European languages.[4] But since Greek literature was, on the whole, neglected by Renaissance translators, Shakespeare's access to Greek was also limited on a secondary level.

John Velz (quoted by Baumbach 1985:77) points out that the ancient world supplies the setting for one third of the Shakespearean canon — 'two of the comedies, both narrative poems, four of the five romances, and six of the eleven tragedies' — quite apart from frequent allusions in passing to classical mythology, literature, history and philosophy in his non-classical plays.

For present purposes I restrict myself to his comedies. In common with most other post-Renaissance examples of what has come to be broadly called a 'comedy of manners', the romantic comedies of William Shakespeare are indebted to Republican Rome rather than to democratic Athens. His models were New rather than Old Comedy, Plautus rather than Aristophanes.

2. An Aristophanic passage in Shakespeare?

However, there is at least one passage in Shakespeare which bears a remarkable resemblance to the spirit of Aristophanes, and which seems to have escaped the attention of scholars until fairly recently.[5] This passage appears in *The comedy of errors* III.ii.71-154.

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2 E.g. Latin translations of Greek drama by Erasmus and Buchanan (Highet 1967:120).

3 For *Troilus and Cressida*, for instance, Shakespeare could have consulted Chapman's Homer (Highet 1967:197; cf. Granville-Barker & Harrison 1955:234).

4 Aristophanes' *Wealth*, for instance, was translated into French by *c*.1550 and into Spanish in 1577 (Highet 1967:121).

5 David Konstan 1993:431-444 was the first, to my knowledge, to point out this resemblance in an article.

2.1 Increasing confusion by doubling twins

Since the relevant passage occurs in an ambience of confusion of identity which is then clarified, let us have a brief look at the role of this device of causing confusion by introducing identical twins as characters in *The comedy of errors*. As the title of this early Shakespearean romance implies, the initiatives and responses of most personae are based, at least till the very dénouement, on mistaken assumptions about the identity of some of the other personae. The most important personae in the play are frequently confused with their twins, and thus blamed for the latters' misdemeanours or commended for their good behaviour, or bewildered when an assumed acquaintance fails to recognise them. Clearly, this can be comically effective only 'when the playwright gets the wrong persons together at exactly the right time to keep the confusions constantly increasing', as Baldwin puts it (in Tillyard 1966:68), and when he avoids having two look-alikes on stage simultaneously till the very *anagnorisis*. Thus, it invariably happens that 'the right servant is talking to the wrong master or the wrong servant to the right master' (Hudd 1985:216).

The comedy of errors, first performed in *c*.1592/3, provides the only definite example of Shakespeare modelling a comedy on classical Greco-Roman sources.[6] It is indebted to two Plautine plays in particular: *Menaechmi* and *Amphitruo*. The former provides the theme of confusion of identity between twins (Menaechmus and Sosicles) plus some of the stock characters such as the comic courtesan, while the latter provides the creation of two pairs of identical appearance (Jupiter / Amphitruo and Mercury / Sosia), as well as the farcical situation of a *matrona* barring her husband from their house while she mistakenly dines with a look-alike.[7]

Shakespeare now complicates the Plautine plot, and heightens the atmosphere of misunderstandings, by the ploy of creating not only double masters

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[6] There are other speculative candidates: James T Svendsen 1983:129, noting 'the remarkable similarity between *The tempest* and *Rudens* in plot, setting, protagonists, themes and atmosphere', cautiously argues for *Rudens* as a possible source available to Shakespeare in writing *The tempest*; he further refers to a study by Percy Simpson in which similarities of episodes and motifs between *Rudens* and *Pericles* are listed (Svendsen 1983:131).

[7] Since it has been established that William Warner's translation of the *Menaechmi*, the first in English, appeared in 1595, it might be deduced that Warner probably consulted Shakespeare's text. In fact, there *are* verbal and other similarities between Shakespeare and Warner that make cross-pollination likely (Foakes 1962:xxv-xxvii). But by the same logic Warner could have circulated his manuscript before publication, giving Shakespeare the opportunity for 'borrowing' phrases from Warner. Of course, Shakespeare might simply have consulted the Latin original, probably Lambinus' edition of 1576 (Baldwin 1947:667).

(the twins Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse), but also double servants (the twins Dromio of Syracuse and Dromio of Ephesus)[8] and two Ephesian sisters (Adriana and Luciana).

2.2 The 'Nell' passage

In the passage in question, Dromio of Syracuse, wandering about in Ephesus, is at the end of his tether. Having already been confused with his Ephesian twin, he is now attempting to escape from the clutches of the kitchen wench Nell (elsewhere also called Dowsabell or Luce),[9] who lays marital claim to him in the belief that he is her husband, Dromio of Ephesus. Dromio's cowardice is understandable: first of all, he doesn't know Nell and, perhaps more importantly, he regards her as a 'mountain of mad flesh' (IV.iv.156-157), as abhorrent and vile.

Small wonder, then, that in the Plautine hypotext for the Shakespearian play, Menaechmus' meddling wife is described as a *portitor* ('customs official', 114) and that the play ends with her being auctioned off in a sexist way: *Venibit uxor quoque etiam, siquis emptor venerit* ('His wife will also be sold, should any purchaser turn up', 1160).

In the central part of the passage in question (vv.112-137) Dromio of Syracuse describes Nell in the following terms to his master, Antipholus of Syracuse:

Syr. Dro. [...] she is spherical, like a globe; I could find out countries in her.
Syr. Ant. In what part of her body stands Ireland?
Syr. Dro. Marry, sir, in her buttocks; I found it out by the bogs.
Syr. Ant. Where Scotland?
Syr. Dro. I found it by the barrenness, hard in the palm of the hand.
Syr. Ant. Where France?
Syr. Dro. In her forehead, armed and reverted, making war against her heir.
Syr. Ant. Where England?
Syr. Dro. I looked for the chalky cliffs, but I could find no

[8] Pandit 2006:108 mentions that the name Dromio comes from Erasmus' *Mother Bombie*; Segal 2001:287 points out that the Greek name Dromio (from δρομ-, 'to run') would be an apt name for these *servi currentes*.

[9] III.i.47.

whiteness in them. But I guess it stood in her chin, by the salt rheum that ran between France and it.
Syr. Ant. Where Spain?
Syr. Dro. Faith, I saw it not; but I felt it hot in her breath.
Syr. Ant. Where America, the Indies?
Syr. Dro. O, sir, upon her nose, all o'er-embellished with rubies, carbuncles, sapphires, declining their rich aspect to the hot breath of Spain, who sent whole armadoes of carracks to be ballast at her nose.
Syr. Ant. Where stood Belgia, the Netherlands?
Syr. Dro. O, sir, I did not look so low.[10]

3. Parallels

3.1 John Lyly?

Commentators have speculated whether Shakespeare perhaps borrowed this topos from a slightly earlier or contemporary source. In his commentary on vv.99-143, R A Foakes (1962:55) draws attention to a comparable passage in *The two gentlemen of Verona* **(**III.i.293ff.), where the qualities of Launce's mistress are catalogued, and then speculates that both Shakespearean passages are probably indebted to *Midas* **(**I.ii.19ff.) by John Lyly (1554-1606), where Licio unfolds 'every wrinkle of my mistress's disposition' in comic vein (Foakes 1962:55). Under scrutiny, however, neither the passage in *Two gentlemen of Verona* nor that in *Midas* (Bond 1902:120-121) yields a convincing parallel: although both of them share a measure of the sexist bawdy evident in the Nell passage, they lack an element indispensable to it, viz. geographical allusions which reflect contemporary geopolitical realities.[11]

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[10] Hudd 1985:218 says that 'the same gag was being used in Billy Bennett's monologue, *The road to Mandalay*, in 1920:

There's no maps for the soldiers
In this land of Gunga Din.
So they picked the toughest warrior out
And tattooed all over him.
On his back, he'd got Calcutta.
Lower down, he's got Bombay
And you'll find him sitting peacefully
On the road to Mandalay!'

[11] In his commentary on *The commentary of errors*, Foakes 1962:55 makes reference to a parallel for the Nell passage of Rabelais.

3.2 Aristophanes?

3.2.1 Aristophanes' limited *Nachleben*

Most subgenres of western comedy since the Renaissance are much more indebted to the Roman playwrights Plautus and Terence — and to their Greek 'New Comedy' models such as Menander — than to the hotch-potch genre called 'Old Comedy' and exemplified by Aristophanes in late fifth-century Athens. The Renaissance predilection for New Comedy models has proved to be so pervasive that Aristophanes has been only rarely imitated, adapted, satirised, or otherwise intertextually acknowledged.[12]

The reasons for Aristophanes' limited *Nachleben* are as diverse as his oeuvre is versatile. Only two need concern us here. In the first place, Old Comedy was a highly politicised genre in which prominent politicians were targeted, and contemporary political issues addressed, thus restricting the universality of its appeal in later ages. New Comedy, in contrast, had a quotidian and domestic field of reference, focusing on romantic relationships rather than politics, on the *oikos* rather than the *agora*. Secondly, Aristophanes' plays abound with obscene references.[13] In comparison, Plautus is merely naughty, while Terence appears positively moralising in his avoidance of obscenities.

Both these factors would contribute to throttling Old Comedy and its intertextual heritage, while reviving New Comedy from the Renaissance onwards in the guise of 'situation comedy', 'comedy of manners', modern television soapies, and the like.

3.2.2 Aristophanic parallels?

Despite Aristophanes' limited *Nachleben*, readers conversant with Aristophanes will be reminded of more than one Aristophanic passage that could be compared in terms of *topos* and tenor, if not exact verbal correspondence, to the Nell passage. In Aristophanes, a passage conforming to this type would normally be found in a celebration scene (*komos*) redolent with sexuality and literally 'em-bodied' in the appearance of voluptuous female figures whose unclad bodies are commented on in bawdy fashion. Since these passages should ideally also have a geographical component, I have coined the term 'anatomical-geographical bawdy' to do justice to both components of this topos.

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[12] My list of 'generic Aristophanisers' (i.e. those who have attempted Aristophanes' genre) includes Racine, Shelley and T S Eliot, but none of their attempts met with any success. For details, see Pauw 1996:2n.3.

[13] For the full extent of Aristophanic obscenities, see Jeffrey Henderson, *The maculate muse*.

A number of lesser examples of 'anatomical' bawdy *do* occur in Aristophanic plays such as *Wasps*,[14] *Peace*,[15] *Women at the Thesmophoria festival* (twice)[16] and in the prologue of *Lysistrata*.[17] In these passages anatomical bawdy is connected with agricultural fertility, with food and drink and festivities and, of course, with male expectations of female sexual behaviour (the latter being reversed in the Mnesilochos passage). On occasion the humour of a passage is enhanced by the author parodying dialectal idiosyncrasies (e.g. those of the Scythian Archer or the Spartans) and thus indulging in ethnic humour. The personae whose anatomical details are savoured are almost invariably minor or mute characters; only in the case of Mnesilochos is the passage in question in any way pivotal to the plot of the play. Moreover, these passages evidently differ from the description of Nell in *The comedy of errors* in that the latter's body is seen as a globe or a map, whereas geographical allusions in the Aristophanic passages cited are so limited as to be negligible.[18]

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[14] *Bdelycleon* and *Philocleon* banter about the anatomy of a mute character, the flute-girl Dardanis, specifically commenting on her pubic region and her derrière (*Wasps* 1369-1376).

[15] Trygaios and his slave are in the process of presenting the *Boulé* and the *prutaneis* with a naked personified figure, the sexy *Theoria* (Showgirl); savouring the moment, they make lewd remarks about her body, culminating in a fanciful description of a mini-Kama Sutra clothed in metaphors derived from an athletic contest (*Peace* 868-904). While inspecting *Theoria*'s body, the Slave fantasises: εἰς Ἴσθμια / σκηνὴν ἐμαυτοῦ τῷ πέει καταλαμβάνω ('I'm staking a claim to pitch a tent with my phallus at the Isthmian Games!', 879-880).

[16] Mnesilochos, a relative of Euripides, has surreptitiously gained entrance into the exclusively female Thesmophoria festival by disguising himself as a woman. In this scene (*Thesm.* 638-651), his gender is exposed by Kleisthenes, notorious in Aristophanes for his effeminacy, and by an unnamed Athenian woman. The object of their *Schadenfreude* is his *phallos*, which, in his attempts to hide it, is described as 'a shuttle service across the Isthmus' (647-648); later, the Scythian Archer makes lewd remarks about the Dancing-girl's breasts and derrière (1185-1193), as a prelude to making a sexually harassing proposal to her.

[17] Lysistrata's Athenian accomplice, Kaloniké, inspects the breasts (τῶν τιτθῶν, *Lys.* 83) of the newly-arrived Lampito from Sparta, while another Athenian woman, Myrrhiné, appraisingly comments on the πεδίον ('lowland region', 88) of the newly-arrived Ismenia from Boiotia — a clear reference to the plains of Boiotia, the latter's heimat. This passage is unusual in that the personae mediating between the (semi-?)naked females and the audience (i.e. acting as bawds for voyeuristic males, according to a feminist reading) are themselves female. But Lauren Taaffe (1993:57) reminds us that play with Lampito's breasts and her muscles on stage would provide the incongruity necessary for the audience to recall that she is played by a male.

[18] The only example falling within the compass of 'anatomical-geographical bawdy', as in the Nell passage, is the reference to the prototypical Boiotian figure of Ismenia,

4. Diallagé *in* Lysistrata

Toward the end of *Lysistrata***,** the mute figure of *Diallagé* ('Reconciliation')[19] appears as a symbol[20] of the cessation of hostilities not only between the Athenian women and their husbands, but also between Athenians and Peloponnesians. In the ensuing bawdy scene, Athenian and Spartan negotiators, desperate because of the women's sex-strike, map out their respective sexo-territorial demands on the conciliatory body of *Diallagé.* It is surprising that the 'pimping', as it were, of *Diallagé* is performed not by a male agent, but by Lysistrata. This consideration weakens the case for sexist exploitation of a female figure made by feminist critics that will be addressed later (Section 7).

The dialogue (vv.1162-1170) reads as follows:

Λα. ἁμές γα λῶμες, αἴ τις ἁμιν τὤγκυκλον
λῇ τοῦτ' ἀποδόμεν.
Λυ. ποῖον, ὦ τᾶν;
Λα. τὰν Πύλον,
τᾶσπερ πάλαι δεόμεθα καὶ βλιμάδδομες.
Αθ^{α}. μὰ τὸν Ποσειδῶ, τοῦτο μέν γ' οὐ δράσετε.
Λυ. ἄφετ', ὦγάθ', αὐτοῖς.
Αθ^{α}. κᾆτα τίνα κινήσομεν;
Λυ. ἕτερόν γ' ἀπαιτεῖτ' ἀντὶ τούτου χωρίον.
Αθ^{α}. τὸ δεῖνα τοίνυν, παράδοθ' ἡμῖν τουτονὶ
πρώτιστα τὸν Ἐχινοῦντα καὶ τὸν Μηλιᾶ
κόλπον τὸν ὄπισθεν καὶ τὰ Μεγαρικὰ σκέλη.

Spartan: 'We for our part are willing, if they're prepared to give us back this Rotunda'.
Lysistrata: '*What* Rotunda, my man?'
Spartan: 'Pylos, which we've been longing for and probing around for a long time'.

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ambiguously anatomical and geographical, where the pun on *pedion* is functionally integrated into her geopolitical background.

[19] An Afrikaans version could be 'Mej. Ver-soen'. As Henderson 1987:1197 ad 1114 notes, the entry of *Diallagé* provides the source for an alternative title of the drama, *Diallagai* (cf. Σ^{R}).

[20] Stroup 2004:65n.62 mentions the following personifications of 'political' abstractions in Aristophanes' extant comedies: *Reconciliation* as a young bride in *Acharnians* 989ff.; *Spondai* personified in *Knights* 1390ff.; *Opora* and *Theoria* in *Peace* 525, cf. 847ff.; *Basileia* in *Birds* 1706ff.

1165	First Athenian:	‘By Poseidon, that you *shan’t* get!’
	Lysistrata:	‘My good sir, let them have it’.
	First Athenian:	‘But then who will we be able to stir up?’
	Lysistrata:	‘Well, ask for another place in return for that one’.
	First Athenian:	‘Well then — um, ah — you first of all hand over to us this
1170		Hedgehog location here, and the Malian inlet behind it, and the Legs of Megara’.

(Sommerstein 1990:137)

4.1 No peace, no sex

As has been said, the demands of the Spartan and the Athenian in this passage are sexo-territorial. How should one account for this obsession with sex and, concurrently, with peace based on fair exchange of territory? Against the background of the Peloponnesian War (431-404), with Athens and Sparta as main adversaries, Aristophanes’ preoccupation with peace is understandable. Two of his extant comedies produced in the 420s BC dramatise the issue of peace: *Acharnians*, produced in 425, and *Peace*, produced on the eve of the Peace of Nikias in 421. In 411 BC followed his third and best-known ‘peace play’, viz. *Lysistrata*. In this desperate plea for a peace that was at that stage more easily attainable on the stage than in *realpolitik*, Aristophanes creates an eponymous protagonist whose name can be translated as ‘Disbander of Armies’.[21] Lysistrata’s grandiose scheme is that of organising a united Pan-Hellenic front of married women with the objective of forcing the men to end the war. To this end, they follow a two-pronged strategy, of which the most conspicuous part is a sex-strike by the younger women.

Ultimately, the men capitulate. The motto ‘no peace, no sex’ seems to work on the comic stage. Accordingly, the women are seemingly victorious. Their strategy obliquely reflects the literary tradition of sexually powerful and manipulative wives such as Helen and Penelope in the *Odyssey* and Clytemnestra and Helen on the dramatic stage. Hubbard (1991:184) calls the women’s strategy ‘a successful inversion of traditional social and sexual hierarchies’, and Bowie (1993:178) ‘the temporary imposition of a gynaecocracy on […] Athens’. However, it is important to realise that *Lysistrata* is no feminist pamphlet. According to Dillon (1987:101), ‘It is not so much a plea for women’s rights as an indictment of men’s incompetence’. The power the women gain is temporary; it is

[21] In Afrikaans: ‘Leërlooier’ or ‘Die magte se Moses’.

merely a means to achieving the end of peace. Once that objective has been achieved, Lysistrata and her accomplices are disempowered. It is men who celebrate at the end of the play;[22] the status quo of a male-dominated society has been reinstated. Stroup (2004:66) argues that '[...] the pornified pimping of the nude Diallagê [...] both reinstates male occupation of Greek topography and [...] resolves the gender balance in terms of the vocal, discriminating, and active male and the silent, accessible, and nearly passive female'.

5. Anatomical-geographical bawdy

Although it is not as sustained as the passage cited from *The comedy of errors*, the above passage constitutes an identifiable Aristophanic parallel to Shakespeare's Nell passage. We thus have identified two authors separated by almost two millennia[23] and employing a most unusual topos, a topos I have called 'anatomical-geographical bawdy'.[24]

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[22] Stroup 2004:68n.68 contends (contra Henderson 1987:204) that 'the final scenes of this sexual fantasy invite the audience to imagine any number of lascivious goings-on behind the closed gates of the propylaia', i.e. the *komos* is to be envisaged as taking place on the Akropolis, and it is for the benefit of the male characters. Moreover, as is customary in Aristophanic comedies, there is a continuation of the gastronomic and / or sexual *komos* at the end of the comedy in an 'after-party' for the spectators.

[23] Shakespeare's timing was quite serendipitous: the duomillennial anniversary of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* would have been celebrated in 1589, three years prior to the first staging of *The comedy of errors*.

[24] The 'influence' that Aristophanes may have had on Shakespeare (i.e. the question whether he served, in Genette's terms, as hypotext for Shakespeare's hypertext) will not be examined. It should be clear that an antecedent does not necessarily constitute an 'influence', i.e. *post hoc* does not necessarily imply *propter hoc*. But is intertextual adaptation only applicable when author B *consciously* decides to adapt text A? In his distinction between aleatory intertextuality and obligatory intertextuality Michael Riffaterre has argued that this is not the case. Worton and Still 1990:26 provide the following background: 'In recent articles Michael Riffaterre has made clear that we must distinguish between *aleatory* intertextuality (which is not unlike Barthes' notion of 'circular memory' and which allows the reader to read a text through the prism of all and any familiar texts) and *obligatory* intertextuality which demands that the reader take account of a hypogrammatic origin'. In view of Riffaterre's distinction, then, the similarities between plot devices in Aristophanes and Shakespeare can be accounted for by aleatory intertextuality.
A fanciful solution to the problem of 'influence' is suggested by Jorge Luis Borges 1970:37. In his famous short story *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* the narrator describes the literary practices of the fictional country Tlön: 'The concept of plagiarism does not exist: it has been established that all works are the creation of one author, who is atemporal and anonymous'.

What strategies do the respective authors employ to integrate these aspects of the topos *anatomical-geographical*? In the case of both passages, as mentioned before, obscene metaphors are sometimes obscured by the use of geographical allusions ostensibly denoting real contemporary geopolitical entities or inter-state relations of 411 BC or AD 1592, but punningly connoting obscene allusions to the female body.

Let us look at some instances where this occurs. In the Nell passage the allusion to France (vv.120-122) provides material for just such a ploy. After the death of Henri III of France in 1589, there was civil war in France between the Catholic League and the Huguenot Henri of Navarre, the heir to the throne; the seemingly obscure phrase 'making war against her heir' would then naturally be taken to refer to Henri of Navarre. After the cessation of the civil war in 1593, the latter was crowned Henri IV in 1594 (Highet 1967:624; Edmunds 1979:62).[25] But France was also the mythical home of 'the French disease'. Therefore syphilis is implied here, since France is punningly said to be in Nell's forehead, attacking her hair (i.e. causing venereal baldness: Colman 1974:26, 198). The 'salt rheum' in Nell's eyes, although it allegorically alludes to the English Channel, can probably, on an anatomical level, also be attributed to venereal disease (Colman 1974:211). The reference to Spain (vv.128-130) seems to lack obscene connotations, but is politically important. As Miller (quoted by Pandit 2006:100) points out, 'the enmity and discord' between Syracuse and Ephesus can legitimately be seen 'to correspond in their detail to the state of war that existed between England and Spain at the date of *The comedy of errors*'.

The *Diallagé* passage abounds with anatomical-geographical allusions that reflect the *realpolitik* of 411 BC Stroup (2004:67) calls this 'a bawdy and strangely colonial sexualisation of geographical territory'. On an anatomical level, the *engkuklon* (v.1162) must refer to *Reconciliation*'s derrière. But *engkuklon* can also mean 'fortification', variously translated as 'Rotunda', 'promontory' or 'abutment', in which case it is meant to be geopolitically applied to Pylos by the Spartan Negotiator. Ever since Kleon's unexpected military success at Pylos and Sphakteria in 425 BC (Thuc. 4.2-41) and his subsequent intransigence toward Sparta, Pylos had been *the* bone of contention between Athens and Sparta.

The allusions in vv.1167-1170 to *Echinous*, the Malian Gulf and 'the Megarian Legs' reflect a similar ambiguity. The village of *Echinous* can be located

[25] The oblique nature of such allusions can be compared to those in historical tragedy. Harrison 1966:110 mentions that 'the subjects of Queen Elizabeth in the 1590s found certain parallels between the political situation in the reign of Richard II and in their own times. It was never safe to make direct comment on current affairs, but historical plays [...] were usually popular. Somehow it was felt that Queen Elizabeth resembled Richard II [...]'.

in Phthiotis on the northwestern coast of the Malian Gulf. It was not without historical importance, for it had been controlled by the Spartans since 426 (Thuc. 3.92-93), and Athens was probably concerned about the subsequent weakening of the anti-Spartan forces in the north (Henderson 1987:205). On the other hand, *echinos* can refer to a hedgehog and thus, by association, to pubic hair, or even to a wide-mouthed jar and therefore, as Henderson (1987:205) quaintly puts it, to 'bodily cavities'.

Within this context, it is clear that *kolpos* does not merely allude to a geographically identifiable Gulf or Inlet. If the spectators were in any doubt about the implicit ambiguity, the actors representing the Negotiators would have deictically enlightened them. In the phrase *ta megarika skele* (v.1170) Reconciliation's legs become an allegory for the Long Walls of Megara. The audience of 411 would have recognised the allusion as pertaining to the famous 'Long Walls' connecting Spartan-held Megara with Athenian-held Nisaia.

Stroup (2004:67) succinctly summarises the function of the *Diallagé* passage: '[S]eemingly insoluble land disputes are peacefully resolved from the comic perspective of the *pornê*, 'dividable' precisely because she lacks both voice and sexual or social autonomy'.

6. Sexism

6.1 Commodification

It could be argued that the sexist bawdy in both passages is integral to the plot of the respective comedies. In the case of *The comedy of errors*, the non-relationship between Dromio of Syracuse and Nell acts as a foil to the relationship between Antipholus of Syracuse and Adriana. Antipholus is claimed by Adriana, and for her by Luciana, while Dromio is claimed by Nell (Foakes 1962:54n.76). Kehler (1987:229) argues that one of the main questions explored (but not answered) in *The comedy of errors* is whether romantic love and marriage can co-exist. She concludes that Shakespeare succeeds in creating 'a timeless vision of dissonance in the comedy of errors we call marriage' (Kehler 1987:236). To create such dissonance, mere bawdy, as in the Nell passage, is interspersed with the more serious theme of love. Likewise, by Aristophanic standards, the comments made about Reconciliation's body in *Lysistrata* could be seen as integral to the plot, in that Aristophanic plots invariably end with a *komos*[26] in which the victory of the comic hero or heroine is concretely embodied in rewards such as food, drink and

[26] The extant version of *Clouds* provides an exception in that its *exodos* is closer in tone to that of tragedy.

sex. As Bassi (1998:109) reminds us, 'erotic desire is predominantly male desire in classical Greek culture'.

What do the two passages under discussion have in common, and in what way do they differ in their depiction of women? If they are approached from the paradigm of gender politics, the following transpires: in both passages a woman's body is imagined as a geopolitical entity to be mapped out according to the rules, and the field of reference, of male power politics. The speakers localise actual contemporary place-names which are cleverly integrated into the respective 'body-scapes'. In both passages, it could be argued, the respective 'body-scapes' are thus commodified or objectified by male agents — one as an object of desire on account of her sexiness, the other as an undesirable reject on account of her obesity and lack of bodily hygiene.

Both women are mute;[27] one is not even present. Nell is necessarily passive; *Diallagé* is nearly passive, her only action being to grab the Negotiators by the penis (*Lys*. 1119). Since *Diallagé* and Nell are mere stereotypes, their views are not required. Only one of the two women is described or depicted as naked. Significantly, it is the persona of *Diallagé*, who happens to be, unlike Nell, not only visible but also sexy. The circumferentially challenged Nell can not only be subdivided into countries; as the em-bodi-ment of the globular, she *is* a globe.[28]

Both these female figures were created by male authors for the consumption of a predominantly, or exclusively, male audience,[29] and Old Comedy productions were judged by male officials. Thus Nell is implicitly, and *Diallagé* explicitly, subjected to the gaze, and especially to the male gaze, of the spectator. Voyeurism is mirrored by exhibitionism, spectator by spectacle. Was such subjection to the male gaze unusual in Aristophanes? With reference to personified female figures in Aristophanes, Zweig (1992:81) judges that 'the appearance of the mute and desired female personifications of the Treaties (*Knights* 1389), Abundance and Showtime (*Peace* 705, 842), and Reconciliation (*Lys*. 1114) provoke (sic) gross sexual responses from the male characters'. Geoffrey Chapman (1985:8-9) provides the following figures to contextualise the situation: 'There are approximately 50 female roles in the surviving plays of Aristophanes, and all but six are involved in

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[27] According to Bella Zweig 1992:77, a mute female character in Aristophanes may be cast either as an abstraction (e.g. 'Peace' in *Peace*) or as a specific character (e.g. Prokné, wife of Hoopoe, king of the birds in *Birds*).

[28] This reminds one semantically, if not contextually, of Flaubert's encounter with Kuchuk Hanem, a famous Egyptian dancer and courtesan ('less a woman than a display of impressive but verbally inexpressive femininity'), who could say, like the Queen of Sheba, 'Je ne suis pas une femme, je suis un monde' (Said 1979:186-187).

[29] The evidence is so ambiguous that the question whether there were female spectators at Athenian comedy performances has to remain unresolved. For the arguments, see Zweig 1992:76.

some sexual by-play, by word or deed, at one time or another. Nineteen of the 50 are silent characters, and all of them are targets of sexual remarks'.

All speaking parts in Greek tragedy and comedy were played by male actors; moreover, female roles in Shakespearian drama were played by boy actors. What was the situation with mute parts in Greek comedy? Would *Diallagé* somehow have had less of a sexist disadvantage if she was played by a padded male actor? In her thorough examination of the question 'whether these mute female characters were played by costumed male actors or by nude hetairai' (1992:78) Bella Zweig cautiously comes to an agnostic conclusion (1992:81). Her anti-sexist position would have stood much to gain by simply assuming that *Diallagé* was played by a nude *hetaira*, but the evidence does not allow such a clear-cut deduction.

6.2 The female body and 'the male gaze'

Both passages discussed could be critically approached from a feminist perspective. The male bias of Aristophanes and Shakespeare, of their societal codes and audiences, could thus be exposed, as well as the denigration of women in works of these authors.[30]

For the purpose of this article I want to respond to a publication by Bella Zweig (1992:73-89) titled 'The mute nude female characters in Aristophanes' plays'. Zweig, arguing from a feminist film theory perspective but probably also influenced by some of the critics mentioned, has gathered ample evidence to build up a well-reasoned argument about the sexploitation and denigration of the female body by men in Athenian society and theatre. Nevertheless, I cannot bring myself to agree with one of her arguments, namely that Aristophanes' manipulation of said bodies represents pornography. Referring to Reconciliation in *Lys*. 114ff., the Dancer in *Thesm*. 1172ff. and the Boiotian girls in *Ach*. 765ff., Zweig (1992:74) argues that pornography is present when 'a nude or partially dressed female is exposed to the gaze, commentary, and sexual manipulation of others, especially men who are all dressed; sexual and / or obscene jokes are made of her body which serves frequently as a metaphor for animals, food, geography, or abstractions; the female object of this visual, verbal, and physical activity mutely

[30] In Greek drama groundbreaking work on the male bias of Athenian society and literature has been done by Helen Foley, Froma Zeitlin, Nancy Rabinowitz, Lauren Taaffe, Laura McClure and others. Zeitlin 1996:346 has reminded us, for instance, that 'no Shakespearian tragedy has a woman as its main character, though sometimes she shares double billing'; when women seem to play a larger role in Greek tragedy, she argues, it should be borne in mind that they play the roles of 'catalysts, agents, instruments, blockers, spoilers, destroyers, and sometimes helpers and saviors for the male characters' (Zeitlin 1996:347).

and passively endures whatever use is made of her [...]'. Later, she comes to the following conclusion: 'Along with other forms of violent representation, pornography aims primarily at enforcing male social dominance. The particular form by which pornography achieves this aim is the representation of unequal societal power dynamics through the narrative of sexual activity. [...] Objectification, humiliation, and abuse of women are the lessons of pornography, which ever tries to render women and the female as passive, mute, nude, obedient, and available for sex at the whim of the male' (Zweig 1992:87).[31]

While questioning the rather ideologically extreme nature of Zweig's conclusion, I do not wish to take issue with her within the paradigm of the sociology of gender.[32] However, from the perspective of a literary critic in a genre that is partly based on fantasy, I would rather approach the problem from a number of different perspectives, first from the perspective of humour, which, I think, has proved to be an aspect of 'the male gaze' that has been subjected to serious neglect in gender studies.[33]

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[31] Pornography and obscenity can have many different definitions, depending on the eye of the beholder. Linda Nead 1992:217-218 gives a fairly standard definition of 'the obscene': 'The etymology of 'obscenity' is disputed but it may be a modification of the Latin 'scena', so meaning literally what is off, or to the side of the stage, beyond presentation. Within this context, the art / obscenity pairing represents the distinction between that which *can* be seen and that which is just beyond presentation. The female nude marks both the internal limit of art and the external limit of obscenity'.

[32] Many critics in gender studies regard gender as something that is constructed rather than as a biological datum (see n.34). Social constructivism views gender as 'a cultural construct, the product of specific historical, social, political relations imposed upon the body, which in and of itself has no significance' (Lindheim 1998:46), whereas biological essentialism seeks to discover 'the transhistorical, transcultural, unchanging or 'real' nature of women, predicated on firm biological facts' (Lindheim 1998:45-46). I find myself ill at ease with both an essentialist and a constructivist tag: the debate about nature versus nurture, as manifested in education, psychology, and criminology, is too complex to be reduced to either-or choices.

[33] My perspective, like that of Zweig, is not neutral. In terms of Jauss' *Rezeptions-ästhetik*, my response to Aristophanes, Shakespeare, and Zweig should be influenced by (i) my *Erwartungshorizont* of the genre as predominantly humorous; (ii) my *Erwartungshorizont* as, for instance, a seriously middle-aged pale male academic of Huguenot-Dutch-German extraction with a concomitant culturally conditioned view of what constitutes 'humour'. Such a response is necessarily subjective. Let me be more explicit:
(i) I do not share in humour that denigrates real people, unless irony is involved; I primarily experience humour as uplifting (see n.47), but
(ii) I have been known to laugh at jokes that belittle me or my 'tribe' — as long as they are funny.
(iii) I am deeply concerned about the abuse of real women by men.

7. Evaluation

7.1 Humour

As Sutton (1980:71) reminds us, there are different kinds of laughter, for instance 'the honest belly-laugh, the nervous titter, the derisive guffaw [...]'. Amongst ancient theorists of humour, Aristotle (*Poetics* 1449a34-37) defines 'the comic' as 'a mistaking and something ugly that does not give pain nor result in destruction, much as the comic mask is ugly and distorted but lacking in pain'. It appears as if most modern theorists also focus on negative theories of laughter. In his book on theories of humour, the object of Michael Billig, for instance, is explicitly to counter positive theories of humour (Billig 2005:11).

In like vein, John Morreall (quoted by Le Goff 1997:47) distinguishes three main theories of laughter, all of which spring from negative impulses: the theory of superiority, according to which the person laughing tries to dominate or ridicule[34] somebody facing him by his laughter and thus experiences Schadenfreude; the theory of incongruity, according to which laughter originates from the perception of an absurdity (cf. Billig 2005:51); and the relief theory, according to which those who laugh are spared the customary restrictions of social empathy (cf. Billig 2005:120).[35]

But more importantly, for the purpose of my argument, my views of humour and comedy have led me to different conclusions than Zweig when she regards the *Diallagé* scene as pornography and when she sees a continuum between the denigration of women in comic fantasy and in real life (see Sections 7.3 and 7.5).

Finally, it is possible that men and women may generally have different reactions to humour involving women: 'One man's joke is another woman's slander', to adapt Henderson 1990:301. Billig 2005:158 mentions that there is evidence that women prefer jokes that mock men, whereas men prefer jokes that have women as their targets. He cites Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (1998) in support of the view that both sexes will prefer to tell sexually tendentious jokes to members of their own sex.

[34] With reference to Aristophanic comedy, Sutton 1980:71 defines ridicule as 'a special form of imitation whereby the object imitated is not represented faithfully but rather in a grotesque, distorted, or debased manner in such a way that derisive laughter is produced'.

[35] Billig 2005:50 cites John Hobbes as representative of the superiority theory: 'Hobbes proposed that human laughter is elicited by a feeling of superiority. We see the deformed or the weak; we feel superior to them; and so we laugh'. Henri Bergson is taken as representative of the incongruity theory: 'Bergson argued that laughter was provoked by rigid or mechanical behaviour. [...] Bergson's 'law' suggests that we are laughing at the incongruity of the human appearing as a non-human object' (Billig 2005:127). Billig 2005:128 proceeds to explain that '[w]ithout laughter, social life would fall prey to rigidity; it would ossify. That is why the cruelty of laughter is necessary'.

The theories mentioned above, however, all have a basis (as Billig acknowledges) in the baseness of mankind. Surely laughter is also stimulated by, and contributes to, a positive atmosphere? Bremmer and Roodenburg (1997:2) mention that 'ethologists have suggested that laughter originated in an aggressive display of teeth. On the other hand, humour and its corresponding laughter can also be highly liberating'.[36]

In *The act of creation*, his polymath work on the interrelation between humour, scientific discovery and artistic creativity, Koestler (1969:29) reminds us that laughter constitutes a reflex action, since spontaneous laughter is produced by 'the co-ordinated contraction of fifteen facial muscles in a stereotyped pattern'. Unlike other motor reflexes, however, laughter requires the intervention of higher mental processes; moreover, it has no survival value (Koestler 1969:31). It prevents the satisfaction of biological drives, Koestler argues, since 'it makes a man equally incapable of killing or copulating' (Koestler 1969:51). Laughter could thus indeed be called a luxury reflex, with the proviso that it is indispensable on a psychological level: it helps one retain (or: regain) one's sanity in a mad world. It is in this role that humour and laughter have a positive contribution to make when we respond to different life situations, including, of course, to comedy.

On this topic, Sir Kenneth Dover (1987:194) remarks: 'Contemplation of the cold and arrogant savageries which our own world perpetrates makes us turn with something like relief to Aristophanes' lechery'. In Bakhtinian terms such an escape has become known as the carnivalesque, where the comic offers an escape from everyday pressures and strictures (see Section 7.4).

In the *Republic* (388e-389a) the Platonic Socrates states that the guardians of the ideal state are forbidden to indulge in laughter because excessive laughter is usually followed by a violent reaction. It is in keeping with Plato's opposition to laughter that in his school, the Academy, laughter was forbidden (Bremmer 1997:19). A more salubrious solution is proposed by Müller-Strübing, quoted by Forrest (1986:232): '[…] zu lachen muss man freilich verstehen wenn man Aristophanes geniessen will'.

I would therefore plead for reinstating the ability to laugh — at all our foibles, failures, frailties and fallacies, including the comedy of errors that is human sexuality.

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[36] That laughter in a certain context has a positive function is confirmed by my own experience: I tend to celebrate with a smile or laughter when I see a winning tennis shot, a rugby player scoring a try with a Campese step or a cricket player beating his opponents with bat or ball. In such cases, I normally share in the joy of the victor rather than experience *Schadenfreude* at the expense of the victim.

7.2 Genre: comedy, not tragedy

From the preceding it follows that, in view of the genre of the two plays under discussion, they would mostly elicit laughter rather than its opposite; the latter would be the province of tragedy. As comedies, they will create their particular generic expectations from and have their particular influence on the spectator.

In *Poetics* 1449b27-28, Aristotle vaguely states that a *katharsis*[37] of the spectators' emotions or intellects is brought about through tragedy. Since Aristotle's promised sequel on comedy is lost, we know even less about the process at work on the spectator in comedy. But Elder Olson has constructed a hypothetical definition of comedy so as to provide a parallel to Aristotle's extant definition of tragedy. The parallel to Aristotle's '*katharsis* clause' reads as follows: 'Comedy removes concern by showing that it was absurd to think that there was ground for it [i.e., for concern]' (Olson 1968:36). Comedy brings this about through a process Olson calls *katastasis* ('relaxation').[38]

The validity of Olson's *katastasis* hypothesis might be tested by applying it to violence on the comic stage. According to Barish (1991:113), stage violence includes 'beatings, drubbings, fisticuffs, and other non-lethal forms of aggression, from which its victims promptly recover, or […] for whom we never feel any concern in the first place'. It thus appears that, owing to the make-believe, illusionary nature of both stage violence and bawdy sexuality on stage, it is not to be taken seriously; it has a different ontological status than real violence or real sexuality, and there should thus not be any concern about its results. When, for instance, Aristophanes 'cheerfully exploits the commonplace derogatory descriptions of women as bibulous, sensual, thieving […]' (Konstan 1993:435), the spectators need not, therefore, be concerned about a misrepresentation of *actual* women, because they are acquainted with the comic convention that enables them to laugh at hyperbole or make-believe on the comic stage. Writing about *aischrologia* at Dionysian festivals, Reckford (1987:479) comes to a comparable conclusion: 'It was a time when one could [...] enjoy, at least vicariously, the expression of aggressive and obscene sentiments, without being really hurt by the insults that came one's own way — for festive mockery *did not count* in the ordinary world. And this immunity from pain was carried into the theater, into organized 'comedy'.'

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[37] This is usually interpreted as either 'purged' or 'purified' (psychologically), or 'clarified', 'illuminated' (intellectually).

[38] In the hypothetical reconstruction of the definition of comedy by Richard Janko 1987:49, the term *catharsis* is taken over from tragedy. In the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, the rather lame entry under *catharsis* reads: 'There wishes to be a due proportion of terror in tragedies and of the laughable in comedies' (Janko 1987:45).

If Olson's *katastasis* hypothesis is correct, it means that Zweig, Taaffe and others can relax: there was no reason to be concerned for *Diallagé* or Nell or any other persona, whether male-dressed-as-female or male-dressed-as-female-dressed-as-male,[39] either in 411 BC or in AD 1592. The persona in question is as safe as any fictional entity can ever be against reality. Zweig and Taaffe may well expend their solicitous energy on *real* women who are belittled or insulted, but personae on the comic stage are there to be laughed at, not to be concerned for. Moreover, if Shakespeare is to be believed, all's well that ends well, because at the end of *The comedy of errors* (V.i.414-416) Dromio of Syracuse explains to his Ephesian twin: 'There is a fat friend at your master's house, / That kitchen'd me for you to-day at dinner: / She now shall be my sister, not my wife'.

7.3 Reality and illusion

Northrop Frye (1957:65-66) has observed that every comic plot contains within itself a potential tragic plot, i.e. a set of negative expectations and fears which ultimately disappear. Both *The comedy of errors* and *Lysistrata* have serious undertones; Pandit (2006:102) argues that *The comedy of errors* approaches the structure of tragedy.[40]

How seriously should one take the *Diallagé* passage in *Lysistrata*? After all, as was customary for Athenian playwrights, Aristophanes was revered as a *didaskalos* (teacher): the audience expected him to give them serious political advice. Obvious examples are provided by Aristophanes' vitriolic anti-Kleon plays of the 420s, where considerations such as thematic consistency, parabatic stance and autobiographical intertext betray Aristophanes' position.

Old Comedy, however, does not only deal with 'reality', but also with 'illusion' or 'fantasy'. I use the term 'illusion' in two senses. In the first place, I use it as loosely synonymous with Aristotelian ποίησις. When Aristotle (*Poetics* 1451b5-6) makes a distinction between what he calls ποίησις ('poetry') and ἱστορία ('history'), he is not referring to metrical schemes and historiography; rather, he is identifying two poles of any literature: fact and fiction, reality and illusion, 'truth' and make-believe. 'Illusion' in this sense refers to the inventiveness of an author in any fiction genre. Moreover, such fantasy can be applied specifically to Aristophanic comedy, where 'by means of a daring,

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39 Five of Shakespeare's comedies feature women dressed as men (Taaffe 1993:153n.32).

40 It could be argued that the play *does* deal with very dark and serious themes, notably the insanity of Antipholus of Syracuse. He attempts to 'tear out' the eyes of his wife as well as to 'scorch' her face and 'disfigure' her. He also beats many of Adriana's friends, sets Dr Pinch on fire, frequently beats his servant and sleeps with a prostitute. Hudd 1985:222 regards the scene where the exorcist Dr Pinch enters to drive his demons out, as 'absolutely on the brink of comedy and terror'.

fantastic, and unorthodox scheme a hero(ine) […] manages to evade or alter the situation of which (s)he initially complains and proceeds to effect a triumph of wish-fulfilment over reality' (Henderson 1987:xxix). All Aristophanic comedies thus betray a dichotomy: they reflect the realities of Aristophanes' time, but their plots are fantastic.[41]

Shakespearian comedy also owes allegiance to fantasy, as is attested by the fanciful descriptions of Illyria and Bohemia, the appearance of elves, and magic always lurking close to the surface.

Secondly, I use the term 'illusion' within the paradigm of μίμησις. In *Poetics* 1448a19-24 Aristotle makes a distinction between three different 'manners' of μίμησις ('representation').[42] In the terminology of Golden and Hardison (1968:87), these are:

(i) the authorial voice (narrative-lyric), as in dithyramb, where the poet speaks in his own person;

(ii) the dramatic manner, as in tragedy and comedy, where the poet cedes the turn of speech (i.e. the dialogue and the choral parts) to the *dramatis personae*, and the authorial voice does not intrude;

(iii) the mixed manner, as in epic poetry, where manners (i) and (ii) are combined.[43]

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41 In New Comedy and its generic heirs, not only the plots were mostly fictional, but also the characters. This is true of the comedies both of Plautus and of Shakespeare. In extant Aristophanic Old Comedy, on the other hand, only the plots were unqualifiedly fictional: the founding of Cloudcuckooland in *Birds*, The Dung Beetle's ascent to the gods in *Peace*, Dionysos' *katabasis* in *Frogs*. For the most part, the same holds true for the characters of Old Comedy. Such characters were often fictional, or their names were etymologised (Dikaiopolis, Trygaios, Lysistrata), but occasionally historical figures of late fifth-century Athens, semi-fictionalised, of course, such as Kleon (barely disguised as the Paphlagonian in *Knights*), Sokrates (in *Clouds*) and Euripides (in *Acharnians*, *Thesmophoriazousai* and *Frogs*) occupy the Aristophanic stage.

42 For Plato's tripartite division, see *Resp*. 3.392-394.

43 According to this distinction, dramatic poetry is the most illusionary of the three manners. This would certainly hold true for tragedy, where it is problematic to identify the authorial voice. For the most part it would be valid for the heirs of New Comedy (Plautus) where, however, the dramatic illusion is frequently breached by the intrusion of metadramatic games by the author. But in Old Comedy, the persona of the poet intrudes even more often — especially in the *parabasis* and in pseudo-parabatic speeches such as that of Dikaiopolis in *Acharnians* and Hermes in *Peace*. Political reality thus intrudes on dramatic illusion. This consideration makes it difficult to distinguish between playful buffoonery (or make-believe) and a serious message in Aristophanes.

Aristotle thus reserves the 'dramatic' manner of representation for tragedy and comedy, the two genres necessitating dramatic illusion (for instance, the illusion that, for the duration of a role, actor X 'becomes' persona A). The fact that such dramatic illusion could be breached in Old Comedy or in Plautus confirms the default datum, i.e. that there was dramatic illusion to begin with. Halliwell (1991:53) reminds us that most satirical ridicule in comedy is placed in the mouth of fictional characters. It would thus be difficult to sustain a charge of slander against a comic poet, 'both because of the dramatic context of the characters' utterances, and because of the special festival setting of the performance'. By the same token, it would be difficult to accuse a comic poet of pornography or obscenity. Ontology would safeguard him against that.

Now in the *Diallagé* passage (as in the Nell passage), the tone is clearly that of comic fantasy, of illusion in both senses, rather than of reality. McLeish (1980:95) argues that, in real life, such bawdy might produce 'embarrassment or anger rather than mirth'. A stage performance, however, I would argue — contra Zweig — could very well elicit laughter; moreover, the illusory nature of a stage performance would have been augmented if female personae were portrayed, as was possibly the case, by male actors in padded costume, and thus any implicit sexism would have been defused by this absurdity. Moreover, as has been mentioned (Section 4), the 'pimping' of *Diallagé* is performed not by a male agent, but by Lysistrata. This consideration would weaken the case for sexist exploitation of a female made by feminist critics.

7.4 The carnivalesque[44] and release

There is a further consideration for not taking the *Diallagé* scene seriously. At the root of comedy lies the αἰσχρολογία (ritual mockery or hurling of obscenities and insults) originally reserved for rites of Demeter and Dionysos and flourishing in an atmosphere of παρρησία (freedom of speech). In spite of her feminist reading of the *Diallagé* scene, Zweig (1992:82) concedes that '[a]busive language provides psychological release from social tensions, and sexual language and play accentuate the positive and pleasurable aspects of sexuality for the life of the community; the ritual context both sanctions these behaviours (sic) and provides a safe, nonthreatening environment for their expression'. Another outlet for such a celebration of sexuality, fertility and vitality was the comic theatre of fifth-century Athens. Open portrayals of nudity, obscenity, and sexual play on the comic stage thus have a celebratory dimension. Against the backdrop of ancient ritual practice,

[44] Although the term 'carnivalesque' has come to be associated with Mikhael Bakhtin, I am not going to make use of Bakhtin's terminology or arguments, because Bakhtin minimises Aristophanes' role in his history of laughter.

comedy's open displays of sexuality and of sexual or obscene language clearly function as life-affirming expressions (Zweig 1992:82).[45]

The audience of *Lysistrata* would thus have been in a celebratory mood, coupled with expectations of sexual frivolity, before the start of the play. Against this background, the *Diallagé* scene could hardly be taken seriously; it should be read or viewed as frivolous entertainment in a carnivalesque ambience.

7.5 Audience response

Zweig (1992:86) argues that 'by visually representing violence against women, it in turn contributes to a climate in which acts of sexual hostility directed against women are not only tolerated but ideologically encouraged'. I have already argued (Section 7.3) that the illusionary nature of such 'violence' could result in a different audience response than would be the case with real-life violence. I shall now argue that, even in Zweig's terms, her argument is invalidated by the probable composition of a modern audience of *Lysistrata* (or *The comedy of errors*): one does not need acquaintance with Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* to realise that it is more than likely that the level of education and emotional maturity of the audience would safeguard them against the potentially pernicious influence that Zweig fears.

The very premise of Senecan tragedy, for instance, is homeopathic: exposure to blood and gore makes one immune or averse to it rather than that it increases one's bloodlust.

In the preceding sections I have argued that, while Zweig's conclusions may find favour within the sociology of gender, I have grave reservations about applying them to the genre of comedy. Making use of reader response theory, I have argued that the two bawdy passages being compared should not be taken seriously for a number of reasons, the most important being generic (comedy tends to generate not only censure, but also and especially laughter) and ontological (comedy tends either to depict fictional rather than real situations, or to fictionalise real situations).

8. Conclusion

In this article, two passages have been compared in which the topic of anatomical-geographical bawdy has been identified. In both passages, female characters are subjected to sexual innuendo by male characters and thus belittled.

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[45] For similar arguments, see Sutton 1980:4-5, 7, 64; Goldhill 1991:181. Edwards 1993:91 and Halliwell 1991:48, 69 emphasise the antinomian function of αἰσχρολογία to flout authority; Reckford 1987:461, importantly, argues that αἰσχρολογία can have a sense of magic that can reconcile the sexes.

In *The comedy of errors*, Dromio of Syracuse is metamorphosed into an ass, a beast and a dog consecutively. In *Acharnians*, Lamachos gets his just deserts as a loser. Mnesilochos' attempt to hide his phallus at *Thesm*. 643-648 happens at the expense of male sexuality. It should be remembered that erect phalluses in *Lysistrata* could not only be read as symbols of aggression, but also, implicitly, of male vulnerability and weakness.[46] The Chorus of Old Men in *Lysistrata* is repeatedly insulted and belittled by their female counterparts. Humour often thrives on sexism, ageism, sizeism.

We cannot change the way fifth-century Athenians or Elizabethan males treated women. However, banning or bowdlerising Aristophanes or Shakespeare will not provide a solution. Stereotyping in real life is frequently dehumanising; comic stereotyping, if effective, is usually just funny.

Albert Camus has been quoted as saying: 'I love my country too much to be a patriot'. Within the context of my argument, I would adapt this to: 'Comedy should be enjoyed too much to be taken seriously'. Surely, a twinkle in the eye is more appropriate to the genre of comedy than the stony stare of the gelastically challenged.

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[46] Karen Bassi 1998:139 makes the sobering observation that 'while Priapus, satyrs, and the ithyphallic comic actors evoke laughter, the hyperbolic exposure of the *phallos* as costume is the overt concealment of the real thing, an overdetermined apotropaic gesture against emasculation'.

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