

University of Massachusetts Boston

From the Selected Works of Kenneth S Rothwell, Jr.

1995

Aristophanes' Wasps and the Socio-politics of Aesop's Fables

Kenneth S Rothwell, Jr., *Boston College*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/kenneth_rothwell/6/

ARISTOPHANES' WASPS AND THE SOCIOPOLITICS OF AESOP'S FABLES

Best remembered as the old juror of the *Wasps*, Philocleon is also a tireless fabulist. Philocleon invokes Aesop and tells fables more often than does any other character in Aristophanic comedy—more often, in fact, than does any character in ancient literature. Indeed the only exception one could find is “Aesop” in the fictional *Life of Aesop*. I suggest that the full significance of this has been overlooked: because fables were commonly told by slaves and peasants in antiquity, Philocleon’s use of them reinforces his role as an Athenian of lower class or status. In this paper I would like to sketch out the traditions of the fable in antiquity, evaluate the social status of Philocleon, and then assess his use of the fables in the *Wasps*.

1. Aesop and the Fable in Antiquity

The survival of nearly six hundred fables from Greco-Roman antiquity attests to their accessibility and timeless appeal.¹ Fables originally functioned not only as entertaining anecdotes but also as *ainoi*, quick stories designed to teach a pointed lesson by indirect means.² Although these allegorical stories likening animals to human beings occasionally found their way into “high” literature, we should more properly consider them a sub-literary, popular form of entertainment. But they were “popular” in a literal sense as well: they

¹ Basic scholarship on the fable includes: Ben Edwin Perry, *Aesopica*. Vol. I (Urbana 1952); “Fable,” *Studium Generale* 12 (1959) 17–37; *Babrius and Phaedrus* (Cambridge MA–London 1965); Morten Nøjgaard, *La Fable antique*. 2 vols. (Copenhagen 1964 and 1967); Pack Carnes, *Fable Scholarship: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York 1985); Stevan Josifovic, “Aisopos,” *RE Suppl.* 14 (1974) 15–40; Karl Meuli, *Herkunft und Wesen der Fabel* (Basel 1954) [= *Schweizerische Archiv für Volkskunde* 50 (1954) 65 ff.]; E. Chambry, ed. *Ésope. Fables* (Paris 1960). Extremely valuable are the essays in *La Fable*. *Entretiens Hardt* 30, prepared by F. R. Adrados (Geneva 1984). Joseph Ewbank, “Fable and Proverb in Aristophanes” (diss. North Carolina 1980) is also useful.

² Eduard Fraenkel, “Zur Form der AINOI,” in *Kleine Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie* (Rome 1964) 235–39; Meuli (note 1 above); Perry, *Babrius* (note 1 above) xix–xxxiv; T. Karadagli, *Fabel und Ainos. Studien zur griechischen Fabel* (Königstein 1981); Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore 1979) 237–41.

frequently served as a mode of expression for peasants and slaves.³ Significantly, Aesop (sixth century B.C.) and the fable writers Phaedrus (first century A.D.) and Babrius (second century A.D.)⁴ were all said to have been ex-slaves. The most reliable evidence about Aesop is the report in Herodotus (2.134) that Aesop had been a slave of Iadmon of Samos in the sixth century and that he had been murdered at Delphi.⁵ Phaedrus apparently thought that fables were invented as a means of communication for slaves: "The slave, being liable to punishment for any offence, since he dared not say outright what he wished to say, projected his personal sentiments into fables and eluded censure under the guise of jesting with made-up stories. Where Aesop made a footpath, I have built a highway."⁶

Of course we cannot accept the claim that the fable was created in archaic Greece to be the voice of the oppressed—after all, animal fables can be traced back to ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt.⁷ It would be a mistake, too, to assert that the fable, in its very nature or essence,

³ On this aspect of fables see Otto Crusius, "Aus der Geschichte der Fabel," in E. H. Kleukens, ed., *Das Buch der Fabeln* (Leipzig 1920), esp. vii–xxi; David Daube, *Civil Disobedience in Antiquity* (Edinburgh 1972) 53–56, 130–38; K. R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire* (New York 1987) 150–53; M. T. W. Arnheim, "The World of the Fable," *Studies in Antiquity* (Univ. of Witwatersrand) 1 (1979–80) 1–11; Chambry (note 1 above) xl–xli. The issue has been taken up by Marxist scholarship: see Antonio La Penna, "La morale della favola esopica come morale delle classi subalterne nell' antichità," *Società* 17 (1961) 459–537; M. L. Gasparov, "Sjuzet i ideologija v ezopouskich basnjach," *Vestnik drevnei istorii* 105 (1968) 116–26, a précis of which may be found in Carnes (note 1 above) 101; G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (London 1981) 444–45.

⁴ No secure dates can be given for Babrius, but the second century seems most likely: consult M. J. Luzzatto and A. La Penna, edd. *Babrii Mythiambi Aesopei* (Leipzig 1986) x–xi.

⁵ Anton Wiechers, *Aesop in Delphi* (Meisenheim am Glan 1961) has shown that the ancient accounts of the murder of Aesop have been assimilated to (or fabricated from) myths of atonement in which a *pharmakos* was killed. Josifovic (note 1 above) 21–22 thinks Aesop was completely legendary. At the other extreme Johannes Sarkady, "Aesopus der Samier. Ein Beitrag zur archaischen Geschichte Samos," *Acta Classica Univ. Scient. Debrecen.* 4 (1968) 7–12, suggests that Aesop was active during the period when the aristocratic Geomoroi lost power to a popular government. Consult also F. R. Adrados, "Neue jambische Fragmente aus archaischer und klassischer Zeit," *Philologus* 126 (1982) 178–79. A collection of recent studies on Aesop in the *Life of Aesop* is to be found in N. Holzberg, ed. *Der Äsoproman. Motivgeschichte und Erzählstruktur* (Tübingen 1992).

⁶ Phaedrus 3 prol. 33–40, trans. Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus* (note 1 above) 254–55. Quintilian thought the fable was attractive to "rude and uneducated minds" (*rusticorum et imperitorum*, 5.11.19).

⁷ As much was suspected in antiquity: Babrius, Prologue 2, says that the fable was an invention of the Syrians; Perry, *Babrius* (note 1 above) 138–39.

somehow was the property of the lower classes.⁸ In practice, however, there was a recurrent tendency for fables to be used by them, and Phaedrus' claim that fables were a form of servile protest cannot be discounted altogether. At the very least, it is telling that there were those in antiquity who *thought* Aesop created fables for slaves. More importantly, fables teach lessons that reflect the viewpoint of the downtrodden.⁹ One category showed the law of nature as harsh and unchanging, a good example of which is Hesiod's fable of the hawk and nightingale, the earliest surviving fable from Greece: A hawk, holding a nightingale in his talons, reminds her that she is a captive of one much superior, one who has the power either to make dinner of her or to let her go. Only a fool, says the hawk, seeks to compete against the stronger (WD 202–14; *Aes. fab.* 4 Perry).¹⁰ The moral seems to be that the weak must resign themselves to overwhelming power. Divinities, and divine justice, are usually absent. Fables such as these, then, reflect the pragmatic world view of the peasant or slave who has been taught by bitter experience to accept his role in life.¹¹ It is a lesson the powerful would like the weak to learn.

In a second category of fables, more optimistic though smaller in number, the lowly are able to outwit the mighty. Consider the eagle and the dungbeetle: A dungbeetle destroys the eggs of an eagle who had killed a hare. The eagle resorts to asking Zeus to protect her eggs by keeping them on his lap, but the beetle, not to be outdone, thwarts this by flying up to Olympus and dropping a ball of dung on Zeus, which causes Zeus to jump up and break the eggs (*Aes. fab.* 3 Perry; cf. Semonides fr. 13 West, *Ar. Wasps* 1446–49, *Peace* 129–34, and *Lys.* 694–95). One function of this fable is aetiological: it explains why eagles lay their eggs during a season when beetles are absent. But it is also an

⁸ Perry, "Fable" (note 1 above) 23 n. 28 rightly warns: "The tone or substance of a fable does not depend upon any sociological or other quality inherent in fable as a form (as Crusius seems to imagine), but only upon who uses it and the nature of the thought that he seeks to convey." I hope to show that it was precisely in its use—by accident if not design—that the fable came to be associated with lower classes.

⁹ Howard Needler, "The Animal Fable Among Other Medieval Literary Genres," *New Literary History* 22 (1991) 437: "Unlike larger literary genres, which create an order of their own through their poetic fictions, fable presupposes an order."

¹⁰ On this fable of the hawk and nightingale see Crusius (note 1 above) x–xi; Lloyd W. Daly, "Hesiod's Fable," *TAPA* 92 (1961) 45–51; M. L. West, ed. *Hesiod: Works and Days* (Oxford 1978) 204–212. The version in *Aes. fab.* 4 Perry turns it into a less brutal fable.

¹¹ La Penna (note 3 above) 505–22; similarly K. J. Reckford, *Aristophanes' Old-and-New Comedy* (Chapel Hill 1987) 76.

¹² On this view of the fable see Crusius (note 1 above) xiv–xv; Karadagli (note 2 above) 17–19.

obvious allegory for how the meek and humble can cast down the proud and mighty; it can be read as a coded expression of subversive intent.¹² Another arrogant eagle is humbled in the fable of the eagle and the fox, told in iambs by Archilochus: The eagle makes a meal of the fox's cubs, but when the eagle brings a burning entrail back to her nest, the nest catches fire and the nestlings fall to the ground, where the fox eats them (fr. 174 West; *Aes. fab.* 1 Perry).¹³ Thus the sly fox, the single most common animal in fables, was at home in iambs, an informal, anti-heroic genre.¹⁴

It makes sense, then, to see fables as a mode of expression for peasants and slaves. We must, however, be alert to the complexities that arise. Fables could, for example, be used for communication when only one of the parties was a commoner; the fable could be an *ainos* directed pointedly but tactfully to a social superior. For Hesiod the fable of the hawk and the nightingale was a "fable for lords" (αἶνον βασιλευσιν, *WD* 202), yet when Hesiod (who, after all, had cast himself as a poor farmer) had finished his fable, he directed the moral—that "violence is bad for a poor man, and not even a good man is easily able to carry it" (214–15)—not to "lords" but to his brother, Perses (see Karadagli [note 2 above] 11–13). It was thus aimed at a social superior, but told in terms meant to be understood by a social equal.¹⁵ Furthermore, fables or *ainoi* were occasionally told by respectable members of society and found their way into serious literature. In Sophocles' *Ajax* both Teucer and Menelaus exchange *ainoi* while trading barbs with one another: Menelaus compares Teucer to a cowardly man at sea, Teucer likens Menelaus to a foolish man (1142–58). This exchange, however, tends to prove the rule, for one of the effects of these fables is

¹³ On fr. 174 ff. see M. L. West, *Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus* (Berlin–New York 1975) 132–34 and I. Trenscényi-Waldapfel, "Eine aesopische Fabel und ihre orientalischen Parallelen," *Acta Antiqua* 7 (1959) 317–27.

¹⁴ Iambos is a fitting vehicle for fables because both genres are antithetical to the heroic and aristocratic world of the epic. Other fables seem to have appeared in iambs very early on, suggests Adrados (note 5 above). On the fox see Carlos García Gual, "El Prestigio del Zorro," *Emerita* 38 (1970) 417–31. A fable may lurk behind fr. 185 West, which appears to be about an ape and a fox. See also C. M. Bowra, "The Fox and the Hedgehog," in *On Greek Margins* (Oxford 1970) 59–66 for fr. 201 West; consult, too, Ralph Rosen, *Old Comedy and the Iambographic Tradition* (Atlanta 1988) 30–35.

¹⁵ M. L. West notes the effectiveness of a fable when there is a distance between the speaker and the addressee—especially when an audience other than the nominal addressee is present to understand the irony; see *Entretiens Hardt* (note 1 above) 99. For the etiquette involved here consult T. Cole, *The Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore 1991) 48–50.

to lower the level of discourse and measure how far the argument has degenerated.¹⁶ Two animal fables can be identified in Aeschylus, though they are limited to the eagle and lion, animals one would find in the similes of Homeric epic, and these fables are only alluded to, not told in full, which minimizes the impact of the unrefined genre.¹⁷ No animal fables appear in Homer, though Odysseus, disguised as a poor beggar, tells an *ainos* to the humble Eumaeus at Odyssey 14.457–522—precisely the social context that might allow for it. Although one might think that fables would be a useful tool for any poet, or that upper-class characters would resort to them as an indirect and sophisticated way of communicating, the fable remains strikingly rare in archaic or classical literature. In the more serious genres no Greek of the respectable classes tells a complete animal fable; instead, fables were relegated more to comedy and iambos than to epic and tragedy.

In other cultures, too, fables and fable-like literature are associated with the lower classes and the marginalized. Robert Darnton, historian of French popular culture, has collected fables from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that describe an immutable peasant world of ceaseless labor and poverty.¹⁸ That fables reflect a viewpoint of the disadvantaged is also the thesis of a recent monograph on Aesop's fables in England from the fourteenth until the eighteenth centuries. The exception again proves the rule: during Puritan rule fables were discovered by out-of-power Royalists, whose poets appropriated them as vehicles of political protest.¹⁹ A study of fable-like stories in the Congo describes the importance of the leopard, who is associated with political chiefs in society; the leopard in these stories is strong, but

¹⁶ On these *ainoi* see Fraenkel (note 2 above) 235–39 and K. Meuli (note 1 above) 13. For the lowering of tone see W. B. Stanford, ed. *Sophocles: Ajax* (London 1963) xlix and n. 64.

¹⁷ A fragment of the *Myrmidons* evidently invokes the fable of an eagle killed by an arrow that was made with its own feathers (139 Nauck). The lion cub at *Agamemnon* 727–28 seems inspired by a fable; see Eduard Fraenkel, ed., *Aeschylus: Agamemnon* Vol. 2 (Oxford 1952) 338–39. Both fables seem to emphasize the futility of attempts to change nature. Aeschylus can elevate the normally less-than-respectable tone of fable only by selective limitation, suggests M. Davies, "Aeschylus and the Fable," *Hermes* 109 (1981) 248–51. Cf. Ewbank (note 1 above) 133. M. L. West, in *Entretiens Hardt* (note 1 above) 100, discussing why Aeschylus used fables while Sophocles and Euripides did not, remarked that Aeschylus' language is generally more remote from popular language, "yet in some ways (in metre and prosody, for example) he is closer to the people. His use of fables can be seen as another manifestation of this quality."

¹⁸ *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York 1984) 9–103.

¹⁹ Annabel Patterson, *Fables of Power. Aesopian Writing and Political History* (Durham, NC 1991) 81–109.

often tricked.²⁰ The fables of the Indian *Pancatantra* were ostensibly addressed to princes, but the lesson they teach is that the cheater always survives and they seem to have originated as popular literature of the "masses."²¹ The fable genre is fundamentally concerned with relationships between individuals or groups of unequal power and thus is frequently associated with the lower classes. Even where not an absolute indicator of class or status, a fable can be a relative measure in a relationship between a person with more money, prestige, or power and a person with less; it could therefore be spoken by or addressed to the aggrieved or disadvantaged party in any given context.

Fables were well known in classical Athens.²² Diogenes Laertius (5.80) tells of a written collection of fables compiled by Demetrius of Phaleron in the late fourth century, but we know that Aesopic fables were already circulating, quite possibly in book form, by the late fifth century.²³ In the *Birds* Peisetaerus scolds the chorus-leader for not having "studied" or "thumbed" (πεπότηκας, 471) his Aesop, and when Cebeas visits Socrates in the *Phaedo* he finds that Socrates has been versifying Aesop's fables, which were "at hand and which he knew" (προχείρους εἶχον μύθους καὶ ἠπιστάμην τοὺς Αἰσώπου, 60c-61b).²⁴ Two Attic red-figure vase-paintings attest to knowledge of Aesop and, perhaps significantly, both use the fox: one shows Aesop talking to a fox, the other illustrates the fox and the grapes (*Aes. fab.* 15 Perry).²⁵

²⁰ Josef Franz Thiel, "Das Verhältnis zwischen den Herrschenden und Beherrschten bei den Yansi (Congo) im Spiegel ihrer Fabel," *Anthropos* 66 (1971) 485-534.

²¹ G. U. Thite, "Indian Fable," in *Entretiens Hardt* (note 1 above) 51-53, 60.

²² On the popularity of the fable in Athens see Ewbank (note 1 above) 121-32; Nøjgaard (note 1 above) 553-55; M. L. West, "The Ascription of Fables to Aesop in Archaic and Classical Greece," in *Entretiens Hardt* (note 1 above) 105-36.

²³ We do not have conclusive evidence for a book before Demetrius, though the fables used in the *Wasps* may be functional equivalents to "oracles of Bakis" which are used by the demagogue Cleon in the *Knights* (109-43, 195-210, 960-1096; see J. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle* [Berkeley 1978] 152-65). There is no doubt that such oracles had been compiled in books by this time: cf. *Birds* 980, 986, 989. If it could be demonstrated that fables were circulating as books, and that Philocleon had read them there, we might have evidence for lower-class literacy (W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* [Cambridge, MA 1989] 74, 102, 114, thinks literacy did not extend much beyond the hoplite class), but the evidence for books of Aesop is shaky and, in any event, Aesopic stories could easily be transmitted orally.

²⁴ However notoriously aristocratic his students were, Socrates seems to have had lower-class parents: see Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates. Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca 1991) 251-53.

²⁵ Aesop and the fox: see J. Beazley, *Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painting* (Oxford 2nd ed. 1963) 916; the fox-and-grapes vase, privately owned, is reproduced on the frontispiece of L. W. Daly, *Aesop Without Morals* (New York 1961).

The *Wasps* (lines 566–67) indicates explicitly that fable-telling had its place in court. Of course it is in Aristophanes that we find the strongest evidence for widespread acquaintance with fables. Aristophanes invokes Aesop by name eight times and recounts fables whole or in part more often than any earlier or contemporary writer. Most of these are in the *Wasps* and this Aesopic outburst is what I hope to explain.

2. Fables and the Social Status of Aristophanic Characters

Obviously fable-telling alone cannot be an accurate litmus test for social status: witness Menelaus, Teucer, Odysseus and the seventeenth-century Royalists, and we will see below that there were further complexities and inversions at work in Aristophanes. Nevertheless, to ignore the class connotations of the fable is to overlook some significant nuances in Philocleon's characterization. In order to see these nuances more clearly, we need to set Philocleon in the context of other Aristophanic characters—upper-class and lower-class, those who tell fables and those who do not.

Some preliminary caveats are in order. I acknowledge that it is possible to over-emphasize the divisions between commons and elite. Many social attitudes were shared by all Athenians and served to unify them, especially when they needed to defend a privilege such as citizenship. In contrast to the Romans, the Athenians did not as a rule allow slaves to gain citizenship, and lower-class citizens would have identified with upper-class citizens rather than with slaves. As Stephen Todd remarks, ". . . from the peasant's point of view, he is the next thing down from a large landowner," and yet from the viewpoint of the large landowner "the peasant is the next thing up from a slave"²⁶ Whatever values the citizens shared, important differences did exist and it is those differences that the *Wasps* mines for comic effect. I should also acknowledge that in many respects Aristophanes was quick to sacrifice consistency of characterization in order to achieve other dramatic ends. Michael Silk has suggested that Aristophanes' characters belong in an "imagist" tradition which, unlike the "realist" tradition, works through discontinuity. Philocleon,

²⁶Stephen Todd, "Lady Chatterley's Lover and the Attic Orators: The Social Composition of the Athenian Jury," *JHS* 110 (1990) 164; Orlando Patterson, *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (New York 1991) 78; Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture* (Chicago 1956) 64–68. Cf. ps-Xenophon 1.10–12 on the pretensions of slaves in Athens.

in particular, has the capacity to reverse functions in the middle of the play, beginning as a "caricature of Athenian legalism" and ending as a "personification of the self-expressive life-force."²⁷ But this does not exclude other continuities of character-drawing such as class or status, especially when they are part of a system of unbroken, fundamental oppositions (young and old, rich and poor). In fact, as we will see, the telling of fables complements comic reversals.

Among the characters in the *Wasps*, Bdelycleon is an unmistakable social type, representative of the wealthy classes in Athens.²⁸ This is, after all, what the plot demands. The *Wasps* is about Bdelycleon's attempts to divert Philocleon from the law courts and part of Bdelycleon's strategy is to school his father in the ways of respectable society (1003–08, 1122–1263). In the end, of course, Philocleon proves to be ineducable. But the issues raised in the play are more than those of a father-son conflict; the differences between Bdelycleon and Philocleon correspond to real social and political fault lines in late fifth-century Athens. The lessons that Bdelycleon gives to Philocleon about feasting and proper behavior at a socially sophisticated symposium constitute some of the more detailed literary evidence we have for the lifestyles of the *kaloí te kagathoi*.²⁹ Bdelycleon heads what seems to be a prosperous household, with plenty of slaves.³⁰ The example he sets in attempting to win over his father seems modelled on patterns of aristocratic leadership that relied on moral persuasion.³¹ His very name proclaims his disgust with Cleon and the dog he tricks Philocleon into acquitting is a stand-in for Cleon's rival, Laches. The chorus suspects Bdelycleon of a conspiracy against the democracy (345) and accuses him of sympathy with Sparta (466–75). As they see it, he "hates the *dêmos*, loves monarchy, associates with Brasidas, wears woollen fringes, and wears his beard untrimmed" (474–76). He is anxious to

²⁷ Michael Silk, "The People of Aristophanes," in *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, ed. C. Pelling (Oxford 1990) 150–73; consult also K. J. Dover, "Linguaggio e caratteri aristofanei," *RCCM* 18 (1976) 357–71 [= "Language and Character in Aristophanes," in *Greek and the Greeks* (Oxford 1987) 237–48].

²⁸ See D. M. MacDowell, ed. *Aristophanes: Wasps* (Oxford 1971) 8–9; Lutz Lenz, "Komik und Kritik im Aristophanes' 'Wespen'," *Hermes* 108 (1980) 30–31; David Konstan, "The Politics of Aristophanes' *Wasps*," *TAPA* 115 (1985) 40; Ernst-Richard Schwinge, "Kritik und Komik. Gedanken zu Aristophanes' *Wespen*," in *Dialogos. Festschrift Harald Patzer*, ed. J. Cobet et al. (Wiesbaden 1975) 35–47.

²⁹ Walter Donlan, *The Aristocratic Ideal in Ancient Greece* (Lawrence, KS 1980) 159–60.

³⁰ We do not know how many slaves he had, but he would need twenty four if they are to fight off the chorus of wasps, suggests U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, "Über die Wespen des Aristophanes," in *Kleine Schriften I* (Berlin 1935) 303.

³¹ For this point I am indebted to a draft chapter by James Coulter, "Democratic Politics and the *Wasps*."

avoid trouble (*pragmata*) and lawsuits (1392); withdrawal from political activity (*apragmosynê*) was one response of the upper classes to the democratic rule at Athens.³²

Philocleon, on the other hand, plays the part of a much poorer Athenian. To be sure, it is utterly incongruous that a man claiming to be poor and plebeian would live with a prosperous and cosmopolitan son, especially since the son's status and social skills seem to be precisely those one acquires by birth. It might be said that Philocleon's claim is a pose: he used to order the household slaves around (449–50) and near the end of the play he admits that he does have property, although he doesn't happen to be in control of it (1354). But these two clues about his former status are introduced more for immediate comic impact than as an indication of his social status in the play; we should probably accept Philocleon's claim to be a poor juror at face value. Even if he had formerly been a wealthy gentleman, Aristophanes has effectively suppressed nearly all evidence for this and for the purposes of the *Wasps* he has become a much poorer Athenian citizen, who embraces the values, institutions, and leaders of the *dêmos* with unquestioning enthusiasm.³³ He is a living antithesis to his son. Philocleon's name advertizes his allegiance to Cleon. He views life through the lens of a juror: he is immersed in the rhetorical strategies of the court system and serves for pay there (itself probably an indication of social status, a point we will return to below). He is proud that the rich and grand (οἱ πλουτοῦντες καὶ πάνυ σεμνοί, 626–27) are afraid of him in court. Philocleon is an avowed enemy of Sparta, even refusing to wear λακωνικά on his feet (1159–60). He wears instead a humble cloak and shoes (τριβώνιον, 116, 1122 and 1131–55, and ἐμβάδες, 275 and 1157). Xanthias is quite sure that Philocleon is *not* a regular symposiast (80).³⁴ Another clue to his status is his statement that when he went on a state delegation to Paros he only earned two obols (1188–89); at that rate of pay he must have gone in the humblest capacity, probably as a rower.³⁵ Finally, Philocleon is intimately allied (at least in the first half of the play) with the chorus, and there can be little

³² L. Carter, *The Quiet Athenian* (Oxford 1986) 99–130.

³³ On the sleight of hand at work here see Konstan (note 28 above) 37, who regards Philocleon as the "retired head of a relatively opulent household." I suspect, however, that Aristophanes asks us to see him as a poor citizen. Consult also MacDowell (note 28 above) 8, 10.

³⁴ On the dress see Laura M. Stone, *Costume in Aristophanic Comedy* (New York 1981) 162–63 and 223–27; similarly John Vaio, "Aristophanes' *Wasps*: The Relevance of the Final Scenes," *GRBS* 12 (1971) 335–39.

³⁵ MacDowell (note 28 above) 285. Philocleon is therefore more likely to be a thete, from the lowest property class, than a zeugite, who would have served as a hoplite.

doubt about their status. They are poor Athenians (300–12) who are adherents of Cleon (242) and whose names have no social pretensions.³⁶ To the extent that Philocleon is assimilated to them, he will seem all the more a member of the *dêmos*.³⁷

Several major characters in Aristophanes belong to the lower class and make use of fables. Trygaeus is a farmer (*Peace* 190) who has no money at home (121) and must therefore be living at a subsistence level. As an underdog seeking peace, he fittingly models his flight to Olympus on the fable of the dungbeetle and eagle (*Peace* 129–34).³⁸ He later takes credit for having freed the common, peasant folk (τὸν δημότην καὶ τὸν γεωργικὸν λεών, 920–21). The Sausage-Seller of the *Knights* is decidedly not *kalos te kagathos* (he lacks *mousikê*, for example: 182–88). Although he tells no fables, the oracle he recites to Demos at 1067–77 seems to draw on the fable of the fox and the grapes (depicted on a fifth-century vase-painting, see note 25 above).³⁹

Several comic heroes have been thought to represent the “typical peasant,”⁴⁰ but they actually live in circumstances and reflect values

³⁶ For example, it is perhaps suggestive (but not conclusive) that none of the names of chorus members or their friends appears in J. K. Davies, *Athenian Proper-tied Families* (Oxford 1971): Κωμίας (230), Χαρινάδης (232), Στρυμόδωρος (233), Εὐεργίδης, Χάβης (234), Σμικυθίων, Τεισιάδης, Χρήμων, Φερέδειπνος (401). For other possible comic and legalistic connotations of these names see Alan Sommerstein, ed. *Aristophanes: Wasps* (Warminster 1983) and MacDowell (note 28 above), esp. on *Wasps* 401.

³⁷ Were they farmers or unskilled urban laborers? At 264–65 the chorus leader says the crops need rain, but MacDowell ad loc. warns that this “does not imply he has any crops himself.” It might therefore follow that he and the chorus are city-dwellers, but much work may have been seasonal and a strict distinction between rural and urban laborers (especially unskilled laborers) may not have applied in classical Athens. Farmers had slack times during the year when the supplemental income earned as jurors would have been quite welcome. Moreover, in 403 B.C. some three quarters of the citizenry still owned their own land (Xen. *Mem.* 2.8.1–3), which suggests that agriculture loomed large in the lives of Athenians: see Todd (note 26 above) 160 n. 119 and 163 n. 152; V. Rosivach, “Manning the Athenian Fleet, 433–426 B.C.,” *AJAH* 10 (1985) [1992] 41–66, esp. 53–54.

³⁸ The context here also calls attention to the iambic and Ionian origins of the fable, suggests Rosen (note 14 above) 30–35.

³⁹ The “name” given to the fox at *Knights* 1068—and in *Aes. fab.* 333 Perry—is κερδῶ (“the wily one”); see J. van Leeuwen, ed. *Equites* (Leiden 1900) ad loc. Ewbank (note 1 above) 174 observes that the Sausage-Seller’s oracles involve animals like the subservient dog and tricky fox, whereas Paphlagon prefers oracles which employ animals as symbols of power (the lion, hawk, and dog as guardian).

⁴⁰ Dikaiopolis is described as such by Victor Ehrenberg, *The People of Aristophanes* (New York 1962) 92; Thomas Gelzer, *Aristophanes der Komiker* (Stuttgart 1971) 1421 (“armer Bauer”); M. Croiset, *Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens*, trans. J. Loeb (London 1909) 55 (Dikaiopolis and chorus are “true peasants”); D. F. Sutton, *Self*

that betray an orientation more appropriate to a wealthier class. That they tell no fables comes as no surprise. No one explicitly speaks of Dikaiopolis as *kalos te kagathos*, but his assaults on the policies of Cleon set him at odds with the radical democrats on the most important litmus-test issues of the day. Long before the end of the play Dikaiopolis makes his separate peace—a move which calls to mind the *apragmosynê* of wealthier Athenians.⁴¹ The end of the play presents Dikaiopolis enjoying a private banquet (1085–1143) that seems contrived to summon up an aristocratic fantasy such as the symposium imagined by Bdelycleon in the *Wasps* (note *ξυμποτικός*, *Ach.* 1143, *Wasps* 1209): desiring a meal fit for Morychus (*Ach.* 887, *Wasps* 506 and 1142), singing scolia (*Ach.* 979–85, *Wasps* 1251) and bringing a prepared dinner (*Ach.* 1096, *Wasps* 1251).⁴² Whatever personal or poetic factors are at work in the characterization of Dikaiopolis, we cannot quite accept him as a representative of the lower classes. Likewise, Strepsiades, the hero of the *Clouds*, might seem at first glance to be an ignorant rustic, yet he owns what is evidently a sizeable farm, has several slaves, has had no trouble borrowing a considerable amount of money, and is married to a “niece of Megakles,” a woman from the highest ranks of Athenian society.⁴³

Upper-class characters tell fables in Aristophanes (as in tragedy), but they use them in ways that reinforce the notion that fables have a lower-class tone. The chorus of older women in the *Lysistrata*, who claim to be from respectable families and to have served in elite cults, allude to the fable of the dungbeetle and eagle in an angry, probably obscene, threat against the chorus of old men (694–95).⁴⁴ The fable coarsens their speech, as it had Menelaus' and Teucer's. But the power differential between men and women is relevant too; although the men are from a poorer class, they are on the offensive against the women,

and *Society in Aristophanes* (Lanham, MD 1980) 18 (“average peasant”); E. M. Wood, *Peasant-Citizen and Slave* (London–New York 1988) 173 (most major Aristophanic characters are “simple peasants”).

⁴¹ Croiset (note 40 above) 5 and Carter (note 32 above) 76–98 describe a category of peasant quietists, but much of the evidence (Carter 80–87) is drawn from Aristophanic characters like Dikaiopolis—creations of an upper-class poet, used as a platform for anti-war speeches. Perhaps the position taken in the initial scenes of the *Acharnians* by the men of Acharnae better reflects that of the rural small farmers.

⁴² He has been invited to a banquet by the priest of Dionysus on the occasion of the *Choes*; the entire scene is discussed in R. Hamilton, *Choes and Anthesteria* (Ann Arbor 1992) 10–15.

⁴³ See K. J. Dover, ed. *Aristophanes: Clouds* (Oxford 1968) xxvii–iii.

⁴⁴ On their status see *Lys.* 638–47 and J. Henderson, “Older Women in Attic Old Comedy,” *TAPA* 117 (1987) 105–29, esp. 116. The “eggs” of the fable seem to be testicles: J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse* (New Haven 1975; 2nd ed. 1991) 126.

who can legitimately be seen as underdogs and for whom the dung-beetle fable is therefore fitting. Peisetaerus tells two fables in the *Birds* (471–75, 651–53). Although he says nothing explicit about his actual social status, he hates the law courts (41) and has, like Strepsiades, been able to get into debt (115). His search for a τόπον ἀπράγμονα (44) resembles upper-class quietism and later he plays the role of an activist sophist who, like Alcibiades, angles to be an elite leader of the gullible avian *dêmos*.⁴⁵ Significantly, however, both fables were about birds (471–75: lark buries father in her crest, *Aes. fab.* 447 Perry; 651–53: eagle and fox, *Aes. fab.* 1 Perry), addressed to birds, and in a play about birds. The fables would serve the demands of the plot coming from the mouth of any character, but the fact that Peisetaerus tells them may be significant. If the fable is a natural form of communication for commoners, in telling the fable of the lark to the birds, who will be the commoners in Nephelococcygia, Peisetaerus is condescending to speak to them (almost literally) in their own language. He rebukes the birds for not having enough *polypragmosynê* (471, “inquisitiveness,” which was, among other things, a democratic virtue) to know their Aesop.⁴⁶ Matters are somewhat different when Peisetaerus brings up the eagle and the fox (651–53), because Peisetaerus suddenly realizes that he is at a disadvantage in not having wings and reminds Tereus of the fate of the eagle who tried to take advantage of the fox.

A correspondence thus exists between class and fable-telling. True, it is not rigid and, after all, a character’s class or status need not be the most important thing about him in Aristophanic comedy. Dikaiopolis and Strepsiades are certainly not meant to be seen simply as representatives of any one social class. All the same, fables are used in roughly the ways we would expect.

3. Philocleon and the Fables in the *Wasps*

Philocleon invokes fables or Aesop six times, far more than any other Aristophanic character. These fables have nothing to do with the insect specific to the chorus of the *Wasps* and are therefore determined not so much by the plot as by the demands of Philocleon’s characterization. Philocleon goes out of his way to show himself to be one of the more demotic characters in Aristophanes and, because the fable can be

⁴⁵ I am indebted to J. Henderson, “Peisetaerus and the Athenian Elite,” presented at the American Philological Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco, Dec. 29, 1990.

⁴⁶ See Alan Sommerstein, ed. *Aristophanes: Birds* (Warminster 1987) on 471; consult also V. Ehrenberg, “Polypragmosyne,” *JHS* 67 (1947), 46–67.

seen as a means of expression evocative primarily of the lower classes, the association of Philocleon with the fable is a natural one.

The fable world can fairly be said to affect Philocleon in a variety of ways. The *Wasps* is pervaded with animal imagery and Philocleon is repeatedly likened to animals: a wild creature (κνώδαλον, 4), a limpet (105), a bee (107, 366), a jackdaw (129), a mouse (140), a rodent (164), a sparrow (207), a ferret (363), a rooster (794), and an ass (1306, 1320).⁴⁷ Whitman noted that Philocleon's affinity tends to be with animals of "a small, canny, and busy kind,"⁴⁸ precisely what we would expect from an underdog. His shared interest with the chorus must inevitably mean that he participates in their waspishness (see 1071–90). Serving as a juror at the dog-trial reinforces this blurring of lines between animal and human. When he sings a song for Bdelycleon, he invokes the fox: "It's not possible to play the fox (ἀλωπεκίζειν) or to become a friend to both sides" (1241–42). I would like discuss the seven passages that explicitly mention Aesop or the fable, taking the passages as they occur. (A few fables are "Sybaritic," lacking animals but otherwise sharing the structure and meaning of Aesopic fables.⁴⁹)

The first instance is Philocleon's description of the techniques of defendants attempting to persuade the jury to acquit them (560–75). He mentions those who plead poverty, drag little children into court to inspire pity, and tell stories (566–67):⁵⁰

οἱ δὲ λέγουσιν μύθους ἡμῖν, οἱ δ' Αἰσώπου τι γέλοιοι·
οἱ δὲ σκώπτουσ', ἔν' ἐγὼ γελάσω καὶ τὸν θυμὸν καταθῶμαι.

Some tell us stories, and others tell something funny of Aesop's; still others tell jokes so I'll laugh and drop my anger.

That this reflects actual practice is partly confirmed by later theory. Aristotle recommended that a public speaker use fables and gave two examples, the one a fable about a horse who was tricked into becoming a slave, as told by Stesichorus when he urged the people of Himera not to grant a bodyguard to the tyrant Phalaris, the other the fable of the fox and hedgehog, as told by Aesop in a speech defending

⁴⁷ For these see especially Ewbank (note 1 above) 198–208 and A. M. Bowie, "Ritual Stereotype and Comic Reversal: Aristophanes' *Wasps*," *BICS* 34 (1987) 112–25 (= *Aristophanes. Myth, Ritual and Comedy* [Cambridge 1993] 78–101, esp. 83).

⁴⁸ Cedric Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero* (Cambridge, MA 1964) 163.

⁴⁹ The "Sybaritic" fables seem to have been a sub-genre about humans instead of animals, but in surviving collections the distinctions between Sybaritic and Aesopic fables are inconsequential: see Chambry (note 1 above) xxiv–v.

⁵⁰ The Greek text is MacDowell's (note 28 above); translations are mine.

a demagogue (*Rhet.* 2.20 1393b12–1394a4). In neither case can we accept as historical fact the assertions that Stesichorus or Aesop ever gave these speeches,⁵¹ and it may be that Aristotle (or his source) was making these speakers conform to established oratorical practice as he knew it.⁵² Aristotle also thought that the fable was suitable for public speaking (εἰσὶ δ' οἱ λόγοι δημηγορικοί, 1394a4). It is appropriate, therefore, that when the old women in the *Lysistrata* threaten the men, alluding to the fable of the eagle and dungbeetle, they do so after casting the men as jurors.⁵³

Philocleon's service in the jury and his familiarity with rhetorical techniques highlight his class and political outlook. Despite scholarly dispute concerning the status and class of jurors in the fourth century,⁵⁴ it is generally agreed that fifth-century jurors were men of humbler station. Philocleon and the chorus of jurors in the *Wasps* are themselves good evidence for this, but it can be confirmed independently.⁵⁵ Todd has suggested that the bulk of the jury consisted of farmers—largely peasants—who would have had the leisure to attend trials at certain times of the agricultural year (see note 37 above).

Why do no surviving speeches have Aesopic fables? The presence of fables would handily confirm Philocleon's description of defendants' strategies. Of course nearly all speeches are from the fourth century and there is the theoretical possibility that the practice of telling fables did not survive beyond the fifth century. "Published" versions may have also deleted arguments used in court.⁵⁶ Moreover, these speeches were written for those who could afford them and this would exclude the poorer class.⁵⁷ An elite speaker, though surely anxious to avoid

⁵¹ For Stesichorus see Mary R. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (Baltimore 1981) 34.

⁵² Meuli (note 1 above) 27–28, for this and further references to ancient rhetorical theory. Quintilian recommended that the orator study and use fables (1.9.1, 5.11.19).

⁵³ J. Henderson, ed., *Aristophanes: Lysistrata* (Oxford 1987) on 693: the men are told they won't eat beans any more; it is implicit in *Knights* 41 that bean-chewing was typical of old men in court.

⁵⁴ A. H. M. Jones, *Athenian Democracy* (Oxford 1957) 35–37 thought fourth-century juries were drawn more from well-to-do propertied citizens; this has been challenged by M. M. Markle, "Jury Pay and Assembly Pay at Athens," in *Crux. Essays in Greek History Presented to G. E. M. de Ste. Croix on his 75th Birthday* (London 1985) 265–97, Todd (note 26 above), and M. H. Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes* (Oxford 1991) 184–86.

⁵⁵ The *Athenaion Politeia* (27.4–5) attributed to Pericles' institution of jury pay the fact that "respectable" citizens were less likely to be found serving as jurors than ordinary citizens; cf. ps.-Xenophon 1.16–18.

⁵⁶ K. J. Dover, *Lysias and the Corpus Lysiacum* (Berkeley 1968) 150–54, 168–74.

⁵⁷ Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens* (Princeton 1989) 112–18.

incurring resentment for his wealth and willing to depict himself as a friend of the *dêmos*, would probably not feign to be a commoner⁵⁸ and was unlikely to feel a need to tell fables. This may explain two anecdotes included in our collections of fables: the orator Demades was making a speech at Athens and, noting that his audience was not very attentive, asked permission to tell an Aesopic fable. They assented, and he began a story about Demeter. But Demades suddenly broke off and said that Demeter "is angry with you who neglect the affairs of the state and yet have time to listen to an Aesopic fable" (*Aes. fab.* 63 Perry). Demosthenes also told a fable, about an ass and two men, in order to chide the people (*Aes. fab.* 460 Perry). Meuli (note 1 above, 28) took these two incidents to mean that Demades and Demosthenes avoided fables in their speeches. The larger point, however, may be that there were other orators who *did* patronize the *dêmos* by telling fables but that for high-status orators to do so was a conscious departure from their usual level of discourse. (It is in this light that we can see Peisetaerus: he resembles an upper-class orator rebuking the *dêmos*, telling fables though aware that to do so is beneath his usual level of discourse.) We have no way of knowing if these anecdotes have any historical validity, but their truth is perhaps confirmed by a passage elsewhere in Demosthenes: "You, Athenians, acquit men who have done the greatest injustices and who have been clearly proven guilty if a few advocates (σύνδικοι) picked from their tribe ask you to or if they tell you one or two witticisms" (ἁστεία, 23.206). Demosthenes himself avoids "witticisms" and is irritated that other speakers stooped to tell them. It seems safe to conclude, therefore, that the practice Philocleon describes reflects the realities of speeches delivered to the *dikastai* at Athens.

Later in the *Wasps*, after Bdelycleon has begun to tutor Philocleon in the niceties of proper behavior at a social gathering, he encourages his father to tell respectable stories (1174–75):

ἄγε νυν, ἐπιστήσει λόγους σεμνοὺς λέγειν
ἀνδρῶν παρόντων πολυμαθῶν καὶ δεξιῶν;

Come on now, will you know how to tell respectable stories when learned and clever men are present?

Philocleon responds by beginning to tell crude stories about Lamia and Cardopion, who are apparently undignified mythical figures.

⁵⁸ Meuli (note 1 above) 27–8; Ober (note 57 above) 306–11.

Bdelycleon objects, asking for something human (ἀνθρωπίνων). Philocleon now starts to tell what seems to be a fable (1182): οὕτω ποτ' ἦν μῦς καὶ γαλῆ . . . ("There once was a mouse and a ferret . . .") But Bdelycleon interrupts (1183–85):

ὦ σκαῖε κάπαίδευτε—Θεογένης ἔφη
τῷ κοπρολόγῳ, καὶ ταῦτα λοιδορούμενος·
μῦς καὶ γαλᾶς μέλλεις λέγειν ἐν ἀνδράσιν;

You ignorant knave!—said Theogenes to the dung-collector, and in a quarrel at that. Are you going to talk about mice and ferrets in the company of men?

We cannot know what fable Philocleon was about to tell, but two possibilities suggest themselves. In a fable of Phaedrus a crafty ferret enfeebled by old age rolls in flour in order to disguise himself and to lure the agile mice to him; all the mice are caught, save for an equally old and crafty mouse who sees the trap (4.2.9–19, cf. *Aes. fab.* 511 Perry). But there is also the fable of the war of mice and ferrets (*Aes. fab.* 165 Perry) in which the leaders of the mice, disastrously, fitted themselves out with horns. Because Bdelycleon asks, "Are you going to tell about mice and ferrets . . . ?" (1185)—referring to the animals in the plural—perhaps this second fable is the one he expected to hear. The moral of that fable, of course, was that one should accept one's natural lot. The fable would be meaningful to the downtrodden and reinforce the dominance of the powerful. In the fable that Philocleon actually began to tell, on the other hand, he spoke of the animals in the singular (1182). Was he thinking of the fable of the old ferret and old mouse? That fable nicely portrays, on several levels, the victory of the weak over the strong. The old ferret outwits the agile mice, yet he in turn is unable to capture the even weaker creature—an old mouse. The reversals and ambiguities of age and youth, weak and strong, make it especially suitable for Philocleon's position in the *Wasps*. It may be, then, that each has in mind a fable to fit his own expectations.

Although Philocleon sees animal stories as perfectly entertaining, in Bdelycleon's view they are inappropriate in polite society, "in the company of men" (1185, men who are surely the "clever and learned men" of line 1175). This squares with the evidence we have seen: when gentlemen of the upper class addressed fables to one another (such as Menelaus and Teucer in the *Ajax*), the result was to coarsen their speech. Elsewhere fable-tellers are either condescending to address their social inferiors (such as Peisetaerus and the orators) or consciously casting themselves as underdogs (cf. the women in the *Lysistrata*). But when company is restricted to gentlemen, says Bdelycleon, avoid

fables and tell respectable stories. He suggests anecdotes about past exploits such as diplomatic service or Olympic games (1187–92), subject matter more appropriate to “high” literature!

Bdelycleon, having taught Philocleon how to behave properly at a dinner party, is ready to send him off. Philocleon knows that if he gets drunk he will probably break down doors, beat people up, stone them—and then wind up paying for damage done. Bdelycleon, however, explains that he can get off by telling funny stories (1256–61):

οὐκ, ἦν ξυνῆς γ' ἀνδράσι καλοῖς τε κάγαθοῖς.
 ἦ γὰρ παρητήσαντο τὸν πεπονθότα,
 ἦ λόγον ἔλεξας αὐτὸς ἀστεῖόν τινα,
 Αἰσωπικὸν γέλοιον ἢ Συβαριτικόν,
 ὃν ἔμαθες ἐν τῷ συμποσίῳ· κῆρ' ἐς γέλων
 τὸ πρᾶγμ' ἔτρεψας, ὥστ' ἀφείξῃς σ' ἀποίχεται.

No, not if you're with gentlemen. For either they intercede with the victim or you yourself tell him some witty story, some funny Aesopic or Sybaritic fable, one of those you'll have learnt at the party, and then you turn the matter into a joke so he forgives you and leaves.

At first glance this seems to contradict Bdelycleon's earlier instructions that he wanted “respectable stories” (λόγοι σεμνοί, 1174) told for entertainment at the symposium; a fable ought to be precisely the *wrong* thing to tell among gentlemen. A closer look at the guest list, however, shows that these men are not quite the gentlemen to whom Bdelycleon's instructions apply. At 1219 ff. Bdelycleon asks Philocleon to imagine the party is underway and that his drinking companions include “Theorus, Aeschines, Phanus, Cleon and some other foreigner, Acestor's son, at your head.”⁵⁹ None of these are *kaloι te kagathoi*. Although Cleon was quite well-off (both his father and son performed liturgies), in the world of Aristophanic comedy this counted for nothing. After all, the source of his wealth was a tannery (Davies [note 36 above] 318–20). For this and his populist appeals to the *dēmos* he was repeatedly attacked and we may surmise that he did not by birth meet the criteria for entrée into aristocratic social circles. Theorus and Phanus were democrats associated with Cleon and Aeschines was evidently a man who boasted of non-existent wealth.⁶⁰ To imagine them

⁵⁹ Or, “a second foreigner placed above Acestor's head” (tr. Sommerstein, note 36 above).

⁶⁰ None of these three associates have a place in Davies (note 36 above): Theorus (PA 7223) was repeatedly attacked for his support of Cleon; see *Wasps* 42, 418–19, 599, 1236–42. Phanus (PA 14078) seems to have instituted prosecutions for Cleon (thus

at a high-class party is comically incongruous, but it would be appropriate to learn or tell fables in their company. From Philocleon's perspective, Cleon and his cronies are men of stature.⁶¹ Of course none of them are at the symposium that Philocleon actually goes to: the host is Philoctemon and the guests include Hippiyllus, Antiphon, Lycon, Lysistratus, Thouphrastus, and Phrynichus (1250, 1301–02)—all men of extremely high, even snobbish, social status.⁶² Furthermore, the victims in question are quite unlikely to be the gentlemen at the symposium; in the episodes near the play's end we find that on his way home Philocleon has attacked—and told fables to—fairly simple people: Myrtia the breadseller (1389–1412) and an accuser who is evidently just an ordinary citizen (1417–41). The use of fables that Bdelycleon had been recommending more resembles the way Demosthenes and Demades patronized the *dêmos* by telling them stories. We recall that the “witty stories” (ἄστεϊα, 1259) here are not necessarily “urbane” or “cultivated”; ἄστεϊα were also the crowd-pleasing tales that Demosthenes complained about (23.206).

Thus the fables are not really told for refined, convivial entertainment, as many mistakenly suppose.⁶³ Bdelycleon recommends fables for the special purpose of soothing hurt feelings in the wake of drunken violence. It appears, therefore, that it is acceptable for upper-class people to tell fables—but precisely at the moment when a gentleman has already violated social protocols. We recall Teucer and Menelaus. Telling fables cannot be taken to be a mark of social refinement; the teller, after all, would have been breaking down doors and beating people up. I suggest that it was consciously un-aristocratic

Knights 1256). Aeschines (*PA* 337) boasted of non-existent wealth (so *Birds* 823); although he is called σοφὸς καὶ μουσικὸς (a “wise and cultivated man,” *Wasps* 1243–44)—the sort of epithet one expects of an aristocrat—this must be taken ironically, suggests Sommerstein (note 36 above) 229. The scholia that these men sing also have a democratic ring to them, suggests M. Vetta, “Un capitolo di storia di poesia simposiale (per l'esegesi di Aristofane, ‘Vespe’ 1222–1248,” in *Poesia e simposio nella Grecia antica* (Rome–Bari 1983) 119–31.

⁶¹ The single fragment that has survived of Alexis' *Aesop* (9 K–A) might be indirect evidence for the view that fables were not actually told by *kaloî te kagathoi* at symposia. In this fragment Solon carefully explains to the surprised Aesop that Greeks drink mixed wine. Aesop is evidently not familiar with the customary practices of the Attic symposium and, like Philocleon, needs to be initiated. Could this suggest that Aesopic fables, like Aesop, were thought to be foreign to the symposium?

⁶² Ian C. Storey, “The Symposium at *Wasps* 1299 ff.,” *Phoenix* 39 (1985) 317–33, who reviews earlier views and concludes that these men are chosen for their social status, not for any political associations.

⁶³ Nøjgaard (note 1 above) 553; Chambry (note 1 above) xxviii.

for *kaloi te kagathoi* to tell a fable—yet, paradoxically, to tell a fable was the gentlemanly thing to do in these special circumstances.

Four fables follow in quick succession. After drunkenly disgracing himself at the symposium, Philocleon attacked the breadseller Myrtia. He remembers the advice Bdelycleon gave about how to treat someone you've insulted and promises to tell clever and amusing stories (λόγοι . . . δεξιοί, 1394; λόγον . . . χαρίεντα, 1399–1400). But the story he tells is hardly calculated to amuse (1401–05):

(#1) Αἴσωπον ἀπὸ δείπνου βαδίζονθ' ἐσπέρας
θρασεῖα καὶ μεθύση τις ὑλάκτει κύων.
κᾶπειτ' ἐκεῖνος εἶπεν· “ὦ κύον κύον,
εἰ νῆ Δί' ἀντὶ τῆς κακῆς γλώττης ποθὲν
πυροῦς πρίαυ, σωφρονεῖν ἂν μοι δοκεῖς.”

Some impudent, drunken dog barked at Aesop when he was walking back from dinner one evening. And then he said, 'Bitch, bitch, I think you'd be wiser if you sold your evil tongue somewhere for wheat.'

A second man accuses Philocleon of assault. Philocleon tells another story (1427–32):

(#2) ἀνὴρ Συβαρίτης ἐξέπεσεν ἐξ ἄρματος,
καὶ πως κατεάγη τῆς κεφαλῆς μέγα σφόδρα·
ἐτύγχανεν γὰρ οὐ τρίβων ὦν ἱππικῆς.
κᾶπειτ' ἐπιστάς εἰπ' ἀνὴρ αὐτῷ φίλος·
“ἔρδοι τις ἦν ἕκαστος εἰδεῖν τέχνην.”
οὕτω δὲ καὶ σὺ παράτρεχ' εἰς τὰ Πιττάλου.

A man of Sybaris fell out of a chariot, and somehow hurt his head very badly; he didn't in fact have any experience driving. Then a friend of his stood over him and said to him: 'Let each man do the trade he knows.' And it goes for you too: you run along to Pittalus' place.

He then tells him yet another (1435–40):

(#3) ἄκουε, μὴ φοῦγ'. ἐν Συβάρει γυνή ποτε
κατέαξ' ἐχῖνον . . .
οὐχῖνος οὖν ἔχων τιν' ἐπεμαρτύρατο.
εἰθ' ἡ Συβαρίτις εἶπεν· “εἰ ναὶ τὰν Κόραν
τὴν μαρτυρίαν ταύτην ἔασας ἐν τάχει
ἐπίδεσμον ἐπρίω, νοῦν ἂν εἶχες πλείονα.”

Listen, don't go. Once upon a time in Sybaris there was a woman who broke a jar . . . So the jar called as witness someone who was with him. Then the woman of Sybaris said: 'By the maiden, you'd have more sense if you'd forgotten this calling people to witness and hurried up to buy a bandage.'

Finally, when Bdelycleon is about to haul him back inside, Philocleon invokes the fable of the dungbeetle and the eagle (1446–48):

(#4) Αἴσωπον οἱ Δελφοί ποτ'—
 φιάλην ἐπρητιῶντο κλέψαι τοῦ θεοῦ.
 ὁ δ' ἔλεξεν αὐτοῖς ὥς ὁ κάνθαρός ποτε—

The Delphians once accused Aesop of stealing a libation-bowl of the god's; and he told them how once upon a time the beetle . . .

We can examine these incidents in order. (#1) The anecdote about Aesop and the barking dog is a pointed lesson directed at Myrtia; it functions as a genuine *ainos*. By repeating Aesop's words Philocleon callously tries to silence her: it is futile for the dog to think that its yapping will affect him. This rebuke is typical of crude, vulgar humor. This is not quite the hawk and nightingale, but claims of justice are ignored. (#2 and #3) These are similar; the fable about the man who broke his head and the story about the woman from Sybaris who broke a jar counsel resignation and reinforce the view that there is a static world order. No sympathy can be spared for the man, who, after all, tried to exceed what skills had been given to him. The jar, too, apparently thinks it is human and tries to sue the woman. Mind your own business, it is told, and do not try to transcend your lot in life.

All three fables, then, share a peasant's world view, in which change is futile (the first of the two categories I discussed at the beginning of the paper). For this reason these fables are directly related to one of the central themes of the *Wasps*: the immutability of human nature.⁶⁴ Philocleon's assaults on these innocent victims reinforce the vulgar profile that Aristophanes had already established for him. Philocleon seems proud of his past thievery (354–58, 635, 1200)⁶⁵ and had enjoyed jury-duty because it was an opportunity to harm people (322, 340, 990). His behavior at the party was disastrously crude and it has become glaringly apparent that Bdelycleon's attempt to reeducate his father has failed. Philocleon is ineducable; his nature is immutable (cf. φύσις, 1458).⁶⁶ Bdelycleon did not even succeed in driving home the lesson that one should use fables not to insult but to soothe the feelings

⁶⁴ Kenneth J. Reckford, "Catharsis and Dream Interpretation in Aristophanes' *Wasps*," *TAPA* 107 (1977) 301 and Ewbank (note 1 above) 137 and 208. Whitman (note 48 above) 160 remarks, "The futility of education and the incorrigibility of nature is the principle theme. . . ." For the view that fables teach the futility of education see also La Penna (note 3 above) 508.

⁶⁵ Konstan (note 28 above) 33 counts some twenty references in the play to thieving.

⁶⁶ Whitman (note 48 above) 160; Lenz (note 28 above) 33, 36–42.

of a victim. If Philocleon's application of these fables is aristocratic, it is in its resemblance to the insults of Menelaus and Teucer; yet the differences between Philocleon and those two characters in the *Ajax* are substantial. The crudity and number of Philocleon's fables indicates that they are his natural, uninhibited mode of expression. It is natural, too, that the coarse Philocleon would resort to fables in dealing with Myrtia, also a lower-class character. But the sort of fables Philocleon chooses to tell are, as we have seen, those that expound a view the powerful would like to teach the weak: don't resist.

In the penultimate scene of the play, we witness a reversal of dramatic function when the tables are turned and Philocleon becomes the underdog. As soon as the accusing citizen has left, Bdelycleon picks Philocleon up and hauls him inside (1442–49). Philocleon protests, likening himself to Aesop at Delphi (#4), who had in turn likened himself to the lowly dungbeetle that outwitted the eagle and Zeus. That this fable—a clear instance of the little subverting the mighty—should come last is dramatically appropriate and prophetic, because in a moment's time Philocleon will escape to dance in competition with the sons of Karkinos.

4. Conclusion

In Greek literature fables were a common mode of expression for the lower classes or the disadvantaged, and when upper-class characters told them it was frequently in an undignified or condescending manner. We have also seen that fables could highlight power relations because, however much fables embody the outlook of the disadvantaged, a person in power could use them to reinforce that position. Philocleon's burst of fable-telling at the end of the *Wasps* is the culmination of these and other factors. The fables certainly accentuate his social status and class, the immutability of which are at the heart of his comic persona. Precisely at the point in the play when we discover how ineducable he is—that is, when he reverts to his old vulgar ways, insults the *aristoi* at the party, and then pummels people on his way home—Philocleon reverts to fables to express himself. This burst of fable-telling should be seen as a mark of self-affirmation by a devotee of the democratic jury system and as a signature of a simple member of the Athenian *dêmos*.

If these fables do reflect his social status or class, we have found what may be an apparent exception to the evidence Dover has collected (see note 27) to show that a character's language is a function of his momentary relationships, not of his temperament, interests, and

cultural level. Dover's concern was more with the nuances of diction, but Philocleon's temperament and class do make him more predisposed to tell fables. Moreover, Philocleon's recourse to these fables to defend himself in the *Wasps* may give us an indirect glimpse into the culture of the law courts. In what may have been a common topos, Aeschines (1.141) attacked his opponents for being superior and condescending; quoting poetry gave them away (see Ober [note 57 above] 177–81). (Aeschines promptly goes on to quote the *Iliad*.) But telling a fable would be a natural way to illustrate a point without sounding like a snob. Philocleon's repeated use of these fables might be seen as a kind of crude parody of court-room practice, a triumph of popular, non-aristocratic rhetoric.⁶⁷

KENNETH S. ROTHWELL, JR.

Boston College

⁶⁷ An earlier version of this paper was read at the 1991 Annual Meeting of the Classical Association of New England; my thanks for helpful guidance to Jeffrey Henderson, Charles F. Ahern Jr., and the anonymous readers.