

ARISTOPHANES' CLEON AND POST-PELOPONNESIAN WAR ATHENIANS: DENUNCIATIONS IN THUCYDIDES

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*Abstract:* This paper explores some important ways in which the assembly scenes in Book 4 of Thucydides (21–2 and 27.3–29) reactivate the themes and strategies of characterisation from Aristophanes' *Knights*. Scholars have often argued that the consistency between Thucydides' and Aristophanes' representations of Cleon and the assembly reflects a shared bias against Cleon. The paper suggests that we should review this opinion in the light of the fact that Thucydides' post-war readers were in the opposite situation from Aristophanes' triumphant post-Pylos audience of 424, and examines Thucydides' resuscitation of Aristophanic characterisations and themes in terms of his aims in respect to these post-war readers. As a particular example of Thucydides' re-use of Aristophanic modes, the paper examines Thucydides' close attention to depicting and explaining Cleon's denunciations of others. It goes on to mention other commonalities of theme and attitude between the two authors, and finally suggests that Thucydides' reactivation of Aristophanic themes links him to further developments in fourth-century historiography, for which comedy was an important source.

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The short chapters showing the workings of the Athenian democratic assembly at 4.21–2 and 27–8 are unique in Thucydides.<sup>1</sup> They also take place at a unique juncture in Thucydides' narrative of the war, after the Athenians have won a surprising victory over Sparta in south-western Greece, but before either side has suffered decisive losses. That is: the Athenians have captured and are blockading 420 Spartan prisoners on the island of Sphacteria after building and defending a fort at Pylos and

<sup>1</sup> On the unique character of these chapters, cf. e.g. Flower (1992) 40 and Westlake (1968) 70. On Cleon's status in Thucydides as the only fully painted demagogue, see Rusten (2006) 552–3. On Cleon as compared to Pericles, see Tsakmakis and Kostopoulos (2013) 171–3.

then defeating the Spartan navy in the adjacent bay (4.12–14.5). Some unknown number of soldiers died in the hard fighting (cf. 4.14.5, where the Athenians and Spartans give back each other's corpses), and the Spartan leader Brasidas has been wounded (4.12.1). However, Brasidas would recover fully to fight another day, and the men on the island are unscathed. After assessing the situation (4.15.1), the Spartans decide to send ambassadors to Athens. The narrative that follows is open to development in any direction.<sup>2</sup>

This narrative includes the speech of the Spartan ambassadors who come to Athens to try to reclaim their men (4.17–20) and the subsequent assembly scenes. The paper offered here will confine itself mostly to discussing the assembly scenes. It suggests that they build on Aristophanes' *Knights* (and other plays), and that they renewed Aristophanic themes—in particular Aristophanes' emphasis on Cleon's habits of denouncing and prosecuting his political enemies—for the post-war Athenian audience.<sup>3</sup>

It is hardly new to draw a relation between the historian and the comic poet in this regard.<sup>4</sup> In particular, it is common to argue that Aristophanes' and Thucydides' similarly negative representations of Cleon arise from resentment against a popular leader who is thought to have harmed each of them.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, scholars

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the Spartan references to the openness of the situation at 4.20.1 and 2.

<sup>3</sup> We cannot be certain when any part of Thucydides was first distributed, although it seems improbable that any part of it emerged before 410, and most likely that it was distributed on Thucydides' return to Athens in 403. For a discussion of the probable 'publication' dates of the text from 4.1–5.24, cf. Hornblower (1994) 120–2, with id. (2008) 1 and 659–60.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. e.g. de Romilly (1963) 186.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview of this idea, which begins with Marcellinus, and which the *OCD* article on Cleon still treats as factual, see Henderson (2017) 614. For a fully elaborated argument that both Aristophanes and Thucydides were prejudiced against Cleon, cf. Lafargue (2013), esp. 19–25, and id. (2015), esp. 132–5, 157. For another recent expression of the view that Thucydides' characterisation arises from prejudice, cf. Biles

consistently create a second relationship between *Knights* and Thucydides. Somewhat in contradiction to the tendency to consider Thucydides' account biased by his resentment of Cleon, Thucydides is also cited as a true report that explains what happened at Pylos and afterward, so that we can understand the comedy.<sup>6</sup>

Our use of Thucydides to explain Aristophanes reverses the ancient reality. It seems unlikely that any part of Thucydides was read before the late fifth century, so that Thucydides wrote for Athenians who already knew Aristophanes' plays, not the other way around. Thucydides seems to have reawakened a number of Aristophanic premises for this audience. Perhaps most centrally, Aristophanes made clear not just in *Knights*, but in several plays (*Acharnians*, *Wasps*, *Peace*, and even *Frogs*, which was produced in 405, eighteen years after Cleon's death) that Cleon should be condemned because of his political corruption.<sup>7</sup> Thucydides claims this attitude as the correct one (5.16.1, discussed in §II), and offers a portrait of Cleon that in his view (2.65.10) helps to explain how such men and such leadership contributed to Athens' defeat in the war.

(2016) who writes of the historians' 'obvious loathing for and prejudice against the demagogue' (127 n. 52). My argument largely agrees with Connor (1984): 'His [Thucydides'] account ... is shaped not so much by animosity as by an elaborate strategy of replicating some of the emotions and reactions experienced at the time of the events' (113).

<sup>6</sup> Essentially all commentaries adopt this mode, since without it we cannot understand the play's references. Even scholars who are sure that Thucydides was biased think his account was more or less accurate. Biles (2016), for instance, does not entirely doubt the veracity of the portrait represented: 'given the unlikelihood that the historian relied exclusively on the comedian as a source, the safest conclusion is probably that these two hostile witnesses arrived at closely similar estimations of the demagogue's politics and political style precisely because more than an iota of truth lies beneath the caricature and venom' (127 n. 52).

<sup>7</sup> For the tirade against Cleon in *Frogs*, see 549ff. For *Acharnians*, see especially the opening of the play, in which Cleon is immediately attacked. For the other plays, see subsequent notes.

As mentioned above, despite the importance of this theme for Thucydides' over-all explanation of the war, it has been usual (but not universal) to suggest that Thucydides' treatment of Cleon arose from resentment. Perhaps this is the case, but I suggest that we might also look for some ways in which Thucydides' portrait of Cleon responds to the situation of his late-war or post-war audience, which was very different from that of Aristophanes' initial audience. Aristophanes, praising his own bravery,<sup>8</sup> criticised Cleon after the People had proclaimed him the victor over the Spartans at Sphacteria and showered him with unprecedented honours.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, Thucydides wrote for an audience that had suffered much from demagogues such as Alcibiades and Theramenes in the waning period of the war. At the moment of their defeat in the war as a whole, the Athenians had remembered the crimes of Cleon's period of leadership, especially the destruction of the Aeginetans (4.57.3–4), Scione (4.122.5–6), and Torone (5.3.4), with bitter fear (Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.3).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Thucydides' readership was saddled with the consequences of Cleon's military defeat at Amphipolis in 423, since this important city had not been reclaimed. Thucydides' audience had therefore seen Cleon's single victory at Sphacteria buried in graver defeats of every kind. While the argument that Thucydides' portrait of Cleon mainly reflects the historian's resentment seems to imply that a biased Thucydides was trying to convince post-

<sup>8</sup> On Aristophanes' praises of his own bravery for attacking Cleon, see again Henderson (2017) 612–3, citing *Clouds* 545–62, *Wasps* 1029–37, *Peace* 748–61. Other comic poets also attacked Cleon (cf. e.g. Eupolis FF 308 and 456, Plato FF 166 and 170, with Connor (1971) 168–9) just as they of course attacked many other politicians.

<sup>9</sup> For an overview of these honours and other post-Pylos victory celebrations, see Lafargue (2015) 129–51. See, however, also Kallet (2003), who argues that support for Cleon was never unanimous, and that Cleon's popularity experienced highs and lows until his sudden death.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the aggressively imperialistic character of Cleon's leadership, particularly toward the allies, see Saldutti (2014), esp. 115–67, with Smarczyk (2016).

war Athenians that this democratic leader of the 420s was rotten, I suggest that there may have been little need.<sup>11</sup> On the contrary: in these drastically changed circumstances, Thucydides might renew Aristophanes' warnings and perhaps be heeded. Moreover, not only Thucydides, but the extant fourth-century sources are almost universally negative in their description of Cleon.<sup>12</sup> Rather than accusing Thucydides, Aristophanes, and the other writers who described Cleon of mere biased hostility, surely we might consider the possibility that Cleon really was problematic, and that some members of Thucydides' post-war audience were interested in understanding his role.

If this was the situation, Thucydides took the opportunity to base his account on familiar paradigms. Thucydides' references to *Knights* require no more of his Athenian audience than Aristophanes himself had required of it. For instance, Euripides' *Telephus* was already thirteen years old by the time Aristophanes imitated and quoted it in *Acharnians*, and it was twenty-seven years old by the time Aristophanes referenced it in *Thesmophoriazusae*.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, neither the historian nor the comic poet seems to have required that the audience always remember past literary works in specific linguistic detail. Foley (1988), referring to *Acharnians*, argues as follows: 'In my view, Aristophanes'

<sup>11</sup> Note the emphasis on the fact that Cleon was trusted in the late 420s in Thucydides' two introductions to Cleon, as if to separate the *demos* of that time from the reader. Cf. 3.36.6: ὅσπερ καὶ τὴν προτέραν ἐνεκλήκει ὥστε ἀποκτείνειν, ὃν καὶ ἐς τὰ ἄλλα βιαιότατος τῶν πολιτῶν τῷ τε δήμῳ παρὰ πολὺ ἐν τῷ τότε πιθανώτατος, and 4.21.3: μάλιστα δὲ αὐτοὺς ἐνήγε Κλέων ὁ Κλεινέτου, ἀνὴρ δημαγωγὸς κατ' ἐκείνον τὸν χρόνον ὃν καὶ τῷ πλήθει πιθανώτατος.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Isoc. *Panath.* 12.63, in which he cites the destruction of Scione and Torone, along with the destruction of Melos, as being among the worst crimes with which the Greeks reproached Athens. For Cleon's negative subsequent reputation, cf. Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 28.3–4; Isoc. *Antid.* 15.314–9; Theopompus, *Philippica*, *FGrHist* 115 FF 92–4. See Lafargue (2013) 26–8 for further evidence and an argument that Cleon's negative reputation in the fourth century arose because the opponents of democracy needed an anti-hero.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Pelling (2000) 143.

audience would have needed to know little more than the major episodes of the plot of Euripides' *Telephus* and, preferably, the major points made in *Telephus*' speech before the Greeks in order to appreciate Aristophanes' parody/paratragedy'.<sup>14</sup> In short, while both authors were capable of citing or remembering the specific words of important past paradigms, they were equally adept at adopting the structures and themes of well-known literature.<sup>15</sup> As mentioned, this paper focusses on Thucydides' reawakening of Aristophanes' themes and strategies of characterisation. Although Thucydides may himself have attended the performance of *Knights*, we do not, as far as I can tell, find Thucydidean remembrances of specific Aristophanic jokes or figures of speech from *Knights* in the assembly scenes we will discuss here.<sup>16</sup> Before discussing Thucydides, it will be useful to review *Knights*.

### I. The *Knights*

By the time Aristophanes' *Knights* was produced and had won first prize at the Lenaea in 424 BCE, the fighting at Pylos was over. The Spartan embassy had failed to achieve peace or the return of the 420 Spartans on Sphacteria, hostilities had resumed, and Athens had won a decisive victory, killing 128 Spartans, but taking 292 back to Athens. The Spartans were desperate to retrieve these survivors and

<sup>14</sup> Foley (1988) 34 n. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Foster (2012), on Thucydides' use of Herodotus in the Pylos story, and Joho (2017).

<sup>16</sup> See n. 26 for a suggestion that verbal echoes between Aristophanes and Thucydides might be found if the texts were approached more for resemblances of linguistic strategy than for literal verbal echoes. A recent monograph argues for taking Aristophanes' readers in ancient Athens more seriously: cf. Wright (2012). However, I am thinking of an audience that includes not only (re-)readers, but also those who knew the play through (re-)telling, in addition to the surviving original spectators (who may have included Thucydides himself, still at Athens in 424 BCE).

renewed their peace offers, but the Athenians refused (Thuc. 4.41.3).

The Spartan prisoners were being held at Athens, therefore, when *Knights* was first performed, and the Athenian general Cleon, their putative captor, is the main butt of the play. In *Knights*, Cleon is figured as ‘the Paphlagonian’, a foreign, aggressive, and greedy slave of ‘Demos’, who personifies the Athenian democratic assembly. Two other slaves of Demos, who are eerily similar to Nicias and Demosthenes, the other important Athenian generals of the Pylos story, are also present; since they are abused by the Paphlagonian, they find a competitor for him, namely the ‘Sausage Seller’, a native Athenian ‘common man’ figure who will save Athens from the Paphlagonian. Most of the play is taken up by a contest of bribery, seduction, and trickery in which the Sausage Seller outcrasses the Paphlagonian and persistently offers Demos more of whatever the Paphlagonian offers. The offerings are very often food, and since the Sausage Seller is essentially a personified ‘down home’ food theme, he has an innate advantage.<sup>17</sup> He defeats the Paphlagonian and claims the position of Demos’ chief slave. From this height of power the Sausage Seller takes control of Demos, boils him, and returns him to the state of common sense and virtue he had enjoyed in the olden days of the Persian Wars. In the end, Demos sends the Paphlagonian out to the gates to sell sausages; meanwhile, the Sausage Seller, now ensconced in the Paphlagonian’s place, encourages Demos to make peace with the Spartans.

Before being boiled, Demos had been a two-sided character. On the one hand, he was a ragged, cantankerous, and apparently unintelligent old man who was vulnerable to every trivial bribe of a cushion or a salad; on the other, he possessed absolute power, and admitted

<sup>17</sup> On the Sausage Seller’s indigenous advantages, i.e. his Athenian, rather than foreign diet, and its similarity to the sacrificial regime of the city (where the Paphlagonian is distant in both respects), see Wilkins (2000) 179–201. For an examination of the use of flattery and seduction in this contest, see Scholz (2004).

that he was fattening his various flatterers in order to sacrifice them later on (1120, cf. 1141ff.).<sup>18</sup> However, his susceptibility to each new bribe had been by far his most conspicuous attribute, and before Demos was reformed, the aim of both the Sausage Seller and the Paphlagonian had been to instill greater and greater appetite into Demos in order to control him through satisfying his desires. In the final competition before Demos, they each offer him bigger and better food, with the Paphlagonian (i.e. Cleon the boastful victor) hawking his ‘cakes made of grain imported from Pylos’ (1167) and advertising the agency of ‘Athena, Warrior Goddess of Pylos’ (*Pallas Pylaimachos* 1172) in stirring soup. In the end, the Sausage Seller prevails by stealing a hare from the Paphlagonian before he can offer it to Demos. The Sausage Seller then himself offers the hare to Demos and wins the competition for Demos’ favour, just as Cleon had stolen the Pylos victory from Demosthenes and in that way won the competition for public favour, a fraud that had been emphasised during the play (e.g. 50–7, 391–2).

Thucydides’ reawakening of Aristophanes’ well-known portrait of Cleon will be the focus of this chapter’s analysis. In *Knights*, all good citizens wish to be rid of Cleon (225–9), who is depicted as an obnoxious bane to the whole state (e.g. 303–13). Aristophanes emphasises again and again that Cleon is a politician of limited skills who masks his corruption and greed by threatening to denounce and prosecute any opponent before the People (235–9, 278, 299–302, 435–6, 475–9, 773–7, where he boasts of his many prosecutions, 828). Cleon can claim only one service to the state, namely the (stolen) victory at Pylos, which he mentions repeatedly (353–5, 844–6, 1006, 1059, 1168, 1172).<sup>19</sup> His crimes against Athens are much greater than his

<sup>18</sup> Cf. esp. Balot (2001) 198–9, with Kallet (2003) 137–40 (who relates the representation of *dēmos tyrannos* in *Knights* and the Periclean funeral oration in Thucydides), and Major (2013) 77–82.

<sup>19</sup> Aristophanes’ Cleon is also a warmonger; as de Romilly (1963) 186 notes, Cleon’s stated reason for refusing the peace treaty with Sparta (*Knights* 796–801) is to allow Athens to continue on a path of unrestricted imperialism.



supposed service; in particular, he scuttled the peace with Sparta for the sake of personal profit (465–75; 792–6), and therefore causes the Athenians to continue to live in wartime poverty while he benefits.<sup>20</sup>

## II. Cleon and Denunciation in Thucydides

Thucydides' resuscitation of Aristophanes' characterisation of Cleon is found mostly in the assembly scenes of Book 4, since in these scenes, as in *Knights*, Cleon interacts directly with the Athenian assembly. The following section of this paper examines Thucydides' recasting of Aristophanes' frequent demonstrations that Cleon used denunciations to suppress competitors, gain advantages, and achieve political aims and prominence.<sup>21</sup>

Denunciations are an interestingly central aspect of Cleon's character in Thucydides.<sup>22</sup> The historian's focus on Cleon's denunciations is confirmed in his final comment on Cleon (5.16.1), where he says that he had not wanted peace, 'knowing that if there were a rest [from war] he would be more visible in his crimes and untrustworthy in his accusations'.<sup>23</sup> Thucydides argues that Cleon needed the

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Gomme (1956) *ad* Thuc. 2.17.2.

<sup>21</sup> While *Knights* is the main focus of this paper, these demonstrations continue in the plays produced after *Knights*. In *Wasps*, the practice of denunciation is taken over by Cleon's supporters, the jurors. See Biles and Olson (2015) 55; they summarise at 61: 'The text of *Wasps* itself makes clear that Cleon and others of his ideological stripe were in this period ready to accuse anyone who opposed their understanding of the proper conduct of Athens' internal and external affairs of being secretly determined to undermine the city's laws with an eye to instituting a pro-Spartan, oligarchical tyranny.' See also n. 23.

<sup>22</sup> Related are F 93 of Theopompus, which shows Cleon denouncing the Athenian knights (perhaps in reliance on Comedy; see conclusion, below), and Plut. *Alcib.* 14.4, which shows Alcibiades imitating Cleon's denunciation of Nicias as a coward, perhaps an echo of Thucydides.

<sup>23</sup> Note the close relation of Thucydides' statement to the sense of *Knights* 801–5: οὐχ ἵνα γ' ἄρξῃ μὰ Δί' Ἀρκαδίας προνοούμενος, ἀλλ' ἵνα μάλλον / σὺ μὲν ἀρπάξῃς καὶ δωροδοκῆς παρὰ τῶν πόλεων, ὁ δὲ δῆμος / ὑπὸ τοῦ πολέμου καὶ τῆς ὀμίχλης ἂ πανουργεῖς μὴ καθορᾶ σου, / ἀλλ' ὑπ'

war, since in calmer circumstances his actions and accusations might have been scrutinised more carefully. By making this observation into his last word on Cleon he essentially makes crimes and accusations into Cleon's legacy in the *History*.<sup>24</sup>

This final comment caps a presentation characterised by concrete demonstrations of how Cleon used accusations to reach his goals. The historian first represents this tactic in the Mytilenean debate, where Cleon first accuses his political opponents of having been bribed (3.38.2),<sup>25</sup> and then accuses the Mytileneans not merely of revolting from Athens' empire, but of actively plotting to destroy that empire, together with Athens' worst enemies (3.39.2, cf. 40.1). Famously, his aim in exaggerating the extent of Mytilenean ambitions is to restore the Athenians to their original harsh anger against the Mytileneans, so that they will maintain their decision to put all Mytilenean citizens to death.<sup>26</sup>

ἀνάγκης ἅμα καὶ χρείας καὶ μισθοῦ πρὸς σε κεχήνη. ('Not so that he can rule Arcadia, by Zeus, but so that you can pillage and take bribes from the cities; and so that Demos does not catch sight of your crimes beneath the mist of war, but rather hangs open mouthed upon you for pay, harassed by necessity and poverty.')

<sup>24</sup> Likewise, *Peace* 635–50 expatiates on the damage done to Athens and Greece by the demagogues' tactics of denunciation, announces that Cleon was the source of these ills, and prays that he may remain in hell.

<sup>25</sup> By contrast, in *Knights* (835), Cleon is himself accused of having been bribed by the Mytileneans.

<sup>26</sup> On the character of Cleon's speech, see especially Macleod (1978); on Cleon's harsh linguistic usages in this debate, see Tsakmakis and Kostopoulos (2013), who analyse Cleon's speech at 3.37–40 according to the standards of politeness theory. According to their analysis, Thucydides shows that Cleon frequently used the accusatory second person plural and the imperative mood. Moreover, he expounded offensive characterisations of his audience and offered few explanations. These characteristics are familiar from Aristophanes' *Knights*, as well, and investigations of possible commonalities between Thucydides and Aristophanes in terms of such linguistic strategies for characterising Cleon (rather than in terms of specific words), might profit from the methods of this study.

Diodotus succeeds in thwarting that kind of aim, for the time being;<sup>27</sup> on the other hand, the first assembly scene of Book 4 shows a denunciation that succeeded. This assembly scene occurs mid-way through Thucydides' Pylos story, and follows immediately upon the speech in which the Spartans present their case for a treaty and an alliance in return for the 420 men besieged on the island. The scene is interesting for many reasons, but also because it shows that Thucydides, unlike Aristophanes, was careful to show Cleon's strengths, as well as his weaknesses. Cleon, reintroduced as 'the demagogue at that time most persuasive to the People' (4.21.3, cf. 3.36.6), begins his response to the Spartans by defending Athens' interests: he persuades the assembly to require as a condition of negotiations that the Spartan prisoners surrender their arms and be brought to Athens, and moreover also to require that the Spartans give up the cities ceded to them in the thirty-year treaty of 446 'at a time when the Athenians had much greater need of a truce' (4.21.3; see 1.115.1 for the treaty). After this, the Athenians said, they would return the prisoners and negotiate a treaty 'at some time congenial to both parties' (4.21.3).

This answer prudently refuses to return the Spartan prisoners until Athens gains concrete concessions from her victories at Pylos. At the same time, it takes advantage of the Spartan ambassadors' argument that cities should make generous concessions to one another in the interests of peace. The Spartans had argued that their defeat was a disaster and that the Athenians should be generous with a view to creating good relations for the future (19.2–4). Moreover, they had said that treaties which forced unwilling parties to harsh agreements would not be firm ones (19.3). Cleon reminds the Spartans that these were hardly their views when they had the upper hand, and that

<sup>27</sup> At 4.122.6 Cleon succeeds in persuading the Athenians to put the Scionaeans to death, and to sell their wives and children into slavery. However, his speech is not represented.

Athens' defeats can just as easily be called 'disasters'.<sup>28</sup> He requires the Spartans to live up to the generosity their own speech has recommended by giving back the possessions they took under what the Athenians consider a harsh treaty agreement. Cleon's answer to the Spartan speech exposes its weaknesses and creates concrete benefits for Athens; considered, moreover, as a strategy to claim the People's goodwill, Cleon's position is genius.

However, Cleon is unwilling or unable to continue in this diplomatic manner. The Spartan ambassadors, who had believed that the Athenians were eager for peace (21.1), and perhaps still believe this, now ask to meet delegated representatives with whom they might discuss the Athenians' requirements point by point (22.1). In *Knights*, Cleon had used every opportunity to accuse others of political dishonesty. Thucydides now displays this same trait: 'Cleon then laid into them hard (πολύς ἐνέκειτο), saying that he had known even beforehand that they [the Spartans] had nothing right (δίκαιον) in mind, and that now it was clear, since they were refusing to speak to the many and wished to be representatives to a few men. And if they were thinking anything honest (ὄγιές), he told them to speak to all' (22.2).

The suggestion of Cleon's previous requirements, namely that the Spartans were asking the Athenians to do something they hadn't been willing to do themselves, is overwhelmed by this harsh accusation that the Spartans intend to deceive the democracy together with a few. Cleon's quick and loud advertisement of his certainty that the Spartans are fundamentally untrustworthy, his argument that their actions (i.e. asking to speak privately with a few representatives) betray how right he was to think this, and his challenge to the Spartans, to speak before the People, if they are not in fact plotting something underhanded, is indeed reminiscent of Aristophanes' Cleon,

<sup>28</sup> I.e., instead of being named as what they really are, namely humiliating military defeats. Cf. *ξυμφορά* at 4.21.3; the euphemism *ξυμφορά* appeared four times during the Spartans' foregoing speech. Cf. 17.1, 18.1, 18.4, and 20.2.

who persistently advertised himself as sniffing out plots against the demos, regardless of the weakness of the evidence (see below).

As for Thucydides' Spartans, they are put in an impossible diplomatic position by Cleon's insistence that they negotiate in public. As Thucydides explains, if they negotiated in public they might easily come into the reputation of betraying their allies while at the same time failing to reach an agreement with the Athenians (22.3). The Spartans, therefore, go home and the truce that had been established for the duration of the negotiations comes to an end. Overall, the scene shows that Cleon's denunciation scuttles the peace agreement, including the advantageous agreement he himself had formulated and recommended.

The second assembly scene contains a further number of denunciations. It occurs after the competition between Athens and Sparta at Pylos has resumed. At the moment, things are going badly for the Athenian besiegers, who are unable to prevent the Spartans on the island from being provisioned. As winter approaches, it becomes apparent that stormy weather will offer the besieged Spartans a realistic chance of escaping their Athenian guards (27.1). Realising this, the Athenians begin to regret refusing the Spartan peace offer (27.3), particularly as they observe that the Spartans have stopped sending ambassadors, and this makes them think that the Spartans feel more certain of being able to resolve the situation in their own favour (27.2).

After describing these thoughts and feelings of the assembly, Thucydides reintroduces Cleon, reporting that he had become aware of the Athenians' 'suspicion toward him in respect to preventing the agreement' (4.27.3).<sup>29</sup> Thucydides does not explain what the People's suspicion of Cleon might have been, and it seems possible that this statement would have been comprehensible to his audience, as it is to us, because of Aristophanes' suggestions (e.g. *Knights* 461–71, 792–6) that Cleon had scuttled the peace for the sake of

<sup>29</sup> Κλέων δὲ γνοὺς αὐτῶν τὴν ἐς αὐτὸν ὑποψίαν περὶ τῆς καλύμης τῆς ξυμβάσεως ... (27.3).

personal profit. Alternatively, of course, Thucydides' readers may themselves have remembered or heard of the suspicions to which Thucydides refers.

Whether or not this was the case, Thucydides' Cleon reacts to the suspicions against him in the manner of Aristophanes' Cleon, namely by accusing the messengers from Pylos of lying about the precariousness of the siege. This time, however, his baseless accusation is not believed. Instead, the People delegate him, with Theagenes, to go out to Pylos and assess the situation on the ground (27.3).<sup>30</sup> Their action is a perfect response to an accusation that is unsupported by evidence.

Thus, it is as if the assembly has seen through Cleon's tactics. However, Cleon finds a way to save the situation. When he realises that he is now trapped into 'either saying the same thing as those he had slandered, or saying the opposite, to be revealed as a liar' (4.27.4), and since he also perceives that the People are leaning toward sending an expedition, he makes a new suggestion, namely that if things are really so bad, the Athenians should not waste time with fact finding, but should lead a force to Pylos immediately (27.4). Thucydides therefore shows how Cleon initially tries to distract attention from the suspicions against him by attacking the messengers. He is briefly trapped by his accusation when the assembly decides to send him out to Pylos, but is able to figure out what the People want, and to offer it to them, thus escaping—for the moment.

However, Cleon must now require a renewed expedition to Pylos, and in addition, he still must turn the blame for the deteriorating siege on someone other than himself. He therefore attacks Nicias, an established political enemy (27.5), 'rebuking him that it would be easy, if the generals were men, to sail with an armed force and to capture those on the island, and that if he himself were a general, he would have done this' (27.5). Another insult-laden denunciation, then: where the Spartans were plotters and

<sup>30</sup> The identity of the Theagenes referred to here is unclear. He may or may not be the same man who is named at 5.19.2 and 5.24.1. Moreover, the spelling of the name is disputed. Cf. Homblower (1996) ad loc.

the messengers from Pylos were liars, Nicias is an effeminate coward. However, for the second time in one assembly meeting Cleon's words bite himself rather than his opponent. The Assembly begins to grumble 'that he should sail right now, if it seems to him easy' and Nicias tells him the same thing, namely that he should lead a campaign to Sphacteria, taking whatever forces he likes (28.1). Once again, then, Cleon is trapped by his own words, and this time there will be no escape. At first, Cleon thinks Nicias is not speaking in earnest, but he is ultimately compelled to realise that Nicias intends his offer seriously. Thucydides then affords the reader the satisfaction of seeing this aggressive abuser of others afraid (*δεδιώσας*, 28.2) and making excuses ('He said that not he himself, but that one [Nicias], was general'), all in vain.<sup>31</sup>

As the scene draws to its close Thucydides continues to emphasise that Cleon ended up with the command at Pylos because he failed to extricate himself from his accusations against others: Nicias called the Athenians to witness that he would withdraw in Cleon's favour, and 'the more Cleon tried to escape and *to take back what he had said*, the more the crowd shouted for Nicias to hand over his office, and for him [Cleon] to sail' (4.28.3). Finally, when Cleon saw that there was '*no longer any backing out of his words*', he denied being afraid (but Thucydides has instructed us), and took his great oath not only to go to Pylos, but to take no further troops from Athens itself, and to kill or bring back the Spartans within twenty days (28.4).<sup>32</sup>

Overall, the second assembly scene offers a portrait of a slanderous demagogue whose (habitual) denunciations

<sup>31</sup> Connor (1984) 114 argues that the scene is 'delicious' because of Cleon's violent character in the Mytilenaeon debate. I regret that the further connections to the Mytilenaeon debate, not to mention to Thucydides' description of Cleon's subsequent campaigns, cannot here be discussed. See Rusten (2006) 552–3 with n. 15, on Thucydides' depiction of Cleon's cowardice in battle.

<sup>32</sup> On Cleon's claim that he is not afraid, after Thucydides has told us that he is, see above all Babut (1986) 72. On oaths and their status in Thucydides (this is a rare fulfilled oath), cf. Lateiner (2012).

misfire twice in one assembly meeting.<sup>33</sup> The vividness of this account arises partly from the detailed portrait of Cleon's psychology.<sup>34</sup> Schneider attributes Thucydides' treatment of Cleon to 'calculated malice'.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps, but is it not possible that Thucydides' late war or post-war audience, which faced the consequences of Cleon's rhetoric and politics, was receptive to a detailed retelling of how such a man first came to command Athenian armies, with one analyst's view of why this complex moment worked out the way it did?

I further suggest that it makes sense to expect that Thucydides would have predicted and perhaps relied on his audience to associate the denunciations he represents here with the lengthy contests of denunciation and accusation typical of *Knights* and other Aristophanic plays. As mentioned, Aristophanes had made denunciations into a central element of his characterisation of Cleon. The Paphlagonian's first words in *Knights* (235–9) fiercely attack Nicias and Demosthenes for plotting to revolt Athens' Chalcidean subordinates. In this scene, the Paphlagonian sees a Chalcidean cup that was in fact stolen from himself, and threatens to advertise it as a sign that his fellow slaves have been bribed into collusion. Aristophanes thus began *Knight's* attack on Cleon by showing that Cleon deflected suspicion from himself by creating baseless accusations against others, just as we have seen also in Thucydides.

As listed above, this initial accusation is followed by many similar ones;<sup>36</sup> they culminate in the Paphlagonian's threat to denounce the Sausage Seller and the Knights to

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Westlake (1968) 71–2.

<sup>34</sup> Schneider (1974) 46–52 offers a useful review of Thucydides' many references to Cleon's changing perception of his situation.

<sup>35</sup> Schneider (1974) 49: 'kalkulierte Bosheit'.

<sup>36</sup> For example: the Paphlagonian accuses the Sausage Seller of helping the Spartan fleet (278); he threatens to denounce the Sausage Seller for religious offenses (299); he accuses him of plotting (in general, apparently) (314), and of stealing from Athens (345); he threatens prosecution (442); he calls the Knights conspirators (453), and accuses them of plotting against him (462); etc.



the Athenian *boulé* for plotting against Athens with Persia (475–9). This threat is made in direct response to the Sausage Seller's suggestion (465–74) that Cleon is deriving personal profit from private negotiations with the Spartans over the prisoners captured at Pylos, the suspicion against Cleon to which Thucydides seems to have referred at 27.3 in the expectation that he would be understood.

Many other similarities between the play and the historical narrative might be mentioned: Cleon's angry character in both writers, for instance;<sup>37</sup> the fact that in both the play and the history Cleon is trapped by his own devices; or the fact that both the play and the historian show that Cleon stole the credit for the victory at Pylos from the general Demosthenes.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, Thucydides takes up Aristophanes' characterisation of the assembly itself with his examination of Athenian greed. His important and repeated image of the assembly 'stretching out for more' (4.17.4, 21.2, 41.4, 92.2), reconfigures the greed that was a main characteristic of the corrupt demos of *Knights*. It is precisely these and other such similarities that have led to the 'theory of common resentment', a biographical hypothesis, which argues that the similarities between the two depictions of Cleon represent shared personal biases. But power hungry demagogues and impetuous leaders do exist. Thucydides might have suspected that his post-war audience would derive some satisfaction from a vivid description of how Cleon's denunciations to the assembly trapped him into the command at Pylos, and perhaps also satisfaction from the renewal of Aristophanic themes. Aristophanes was still alive and producing plays among them during the post-war period, but it was hardly going to

<sup>37</sup> See Biles (2016) 130–1 for the continuing prominence of anger in Aristophanes' characterisation of Cleon and his followers in *Wasps*.

<sup>38</sup> Subsequent chapters of Thucydides' account lengthily confirm Aristophanes' accusation that Cleon stole the credit for the victory at Pylos from Demosthenes, whom Thucydides represents as the careful and only planner of the battle in which the Spartans were captured (see esp. 4.29–30).

be possible for the playwright himself to claim that he had been right, and the People wrong, about Cleon.

### III. Conclusion

Thucydides' second assembly scene ends with Cleon's great oath to bring the Spartans back to Athens within twenty days, and with laughter. Thucydides reports that Cleon's foolish talk (*κουφολογία*) is amusing to the Athenians, and that 'laughter falls upon them' (28.5). The Athenians can still laugh at this point in the war. However, laughter in Thucydides is not comic.<sup>39</sup> Cleon will fulfill his oath and consolidate his position at Athens—no laughing matter for Thucydides' post-war audience.

The status of laughter in Thucydides is only one of a number of sharp differences between comedy and historiography. As we have just seen, Thucydidean scenes can be highly ironic, with many unexpected reversals. However, the decorum of Thucydidean historiography seems to forbid outright jokes, and certainly expels any kind of fabulosity, such as is familiar from nearly every Aristophanic play.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, the obvious and declared partisanship of the comic poets is not suitable for historiography. As has been noted, Thucydides recorded Cleon's political capacities in a long direct speech and in accounts of his political behaviour, whereas Aristophanes will give Cleon no credit for anything. Finally, Thucydidean

<sup>39</sup> Cf. 3.83.1, where the destructive effects of stasis include ridicule of honesty. On laughter and its use in the historians, cf. de Romilly (1966), Lateiner (1977). Assemblies laugh twice in Thucydides (here and at 6.35.1), and both times the predictions they laugh at, rather than being risible, come true.

<sup>40</sup> Other ironic or lighter scenes in Thucydides can be found, for instance, at 1.91 or 4.3–4. On Thucydides' close control over mythology cf. Munson (2017).

historiography differs from comedy in another important aspect, namely in its willingness fundamentally to criticise the People. In *Knights* Aristophanes had critiqued, but ultimately exonerated the demos (1326).<sup>41</sup> By contrast, Thucydides showed that the Athenian Assembly of its own fault allowed Cleon to lead it to violent decisions and significant defeats; by the time he wrote, these were, as mentioned above, a matter of fearful memory, symbolic of the excesses that had caused Athens to lose its leading position in the Greek world. The suggestion of this paper is that Thucydides' vivid resuscitation of Aristophanes' warnings about the assembly's willfulness and the character of the leader who promoted this willfulness responded to the prominence of the consequences of Cleon's leadership in the late-war and post-war period.

Thucydides thus revived Aristophanes' political analysis of Cleon and the assembly, and historians after Thucydides continued to use comedy as a source for historiographical proofs and analyses. As has been recently discussed by Parmeggiani, fourth-century historians both quoted comedy directly and also used comedy as a source when describing the fifth century.<sup>42</sup> It is tempting to speculate that in doing so they were in fact elaborating on a relationship already visible in Thucydides, even if Thucydides' relationship to comedy had taken a different form. Thucydides does not 'quote' Aristophanes, who was, as mentioned, alive and well at Athens during this period.<sup>43</sup> He nevertheless reawakens his views for an audience that

<sup>41</sup> Henderson (2017) 608–9: 'Aristophanes is careful never to portray the demos as intrinsically unfit for sovereignty but puts all the blame on its demagogic, that is, deceptive leaders: all would be well (again) if the demos turned once more to "the best" as its advisors, as in the good old days ...'

<sup>42</sup> Parmeggiani (2014) 115–32, and Baron in this volume.

<sup>43</sup> See also Tordoff in this volume.

was looking, possibly, not only for answers to questions about the war, but also for a connection to its own past.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Hanink (2014) and (2015). I owe a deep debt of thanks to Emily Baragwanath, a fearless organiser of panels and indispensable editor. In addition, I must thank Donald Lateiner, Daniel Tompkins, †Geoffrey Hawthorn, Frances Pownall, as well as the invaluable anonymous reviewers of *Histos*, for advice, corrections, and encouragement. Finally, I owe thanks to CAMWS, which in 2013 generously hosted the panel ‘Clio and Thalia: Reconsidering the Relation of Attic Old Comedy and Historiography’ at which a version of this paper was first read.

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